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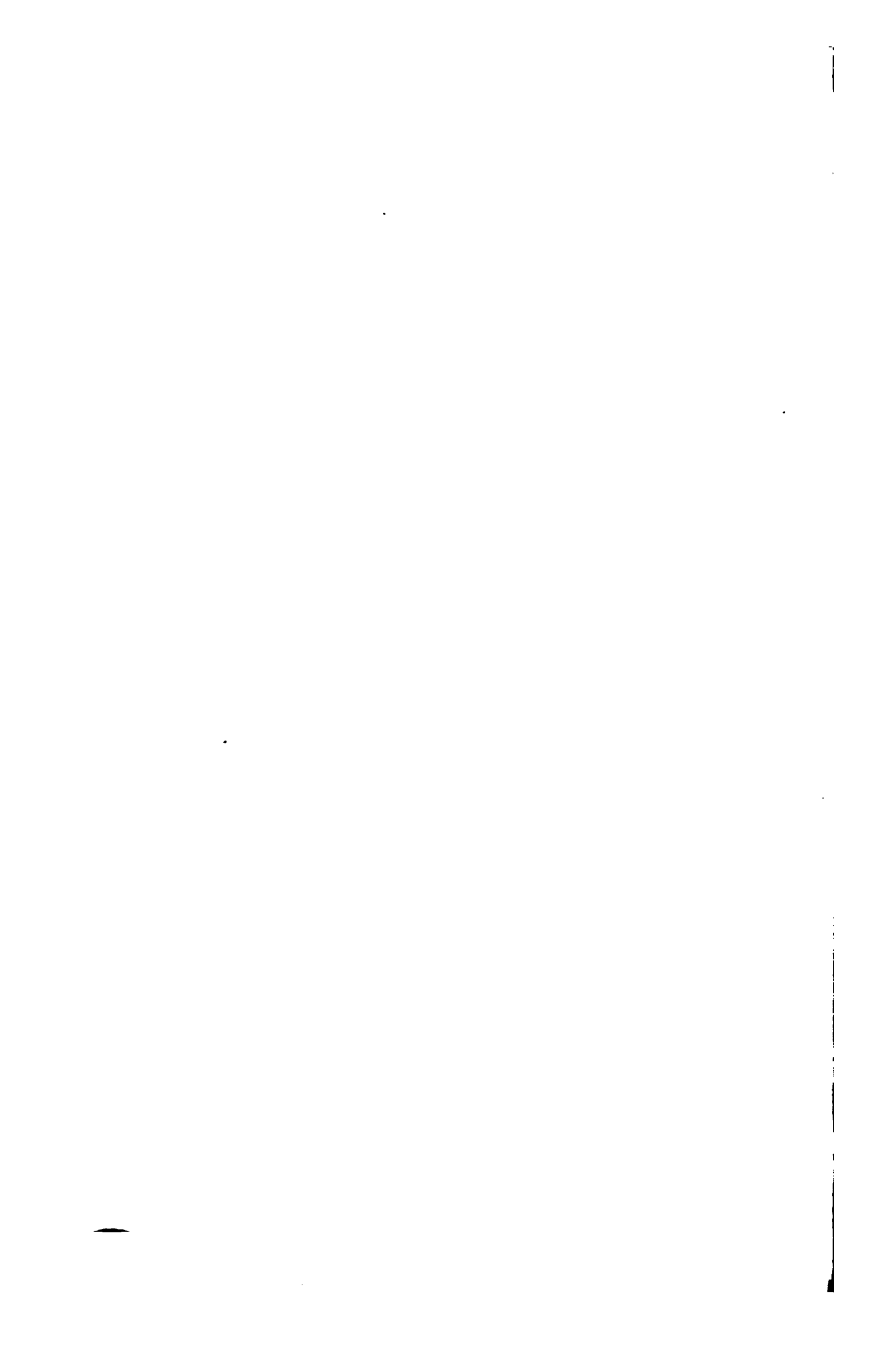
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**The Arthur and Elizabeth
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on the History of Women
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A
Philosophical, Historical, and Moral
E S S A Y
ON
O L D M A I D S.

BY
A FRIEND TO THE SISTERHOOD.

William Hayley

IN THREE VOLUMES.

V O L. II.

THE THIRD EDITION,
WITH CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS.

*To unfold the sage
And serious Doctrine of Virginity.* MILTON'S COMUS.

Περὶ τῶνδε κορων ἐν τοῖς θαλαμοῖς ὑπρασπιστῶν ἀνιμίαι.
ARISTOPHANES.

Nemo apud nos, qui idem tentaverit; nemo apud Græcos, qui unus omnia ea tractaverit.—Res ardua, vetustis novitatem dare, novis autoritatem, obsoletis nitorem, obscuris lucem, fastiditis gratiam, dubiis fidem, omnibus vero naturam, et naturæ suæ omnia. Itaque, etiam non assecutis, voluisse, abundè pulchrum atque magnificum est.

PLINII Hist. Nat. Præfatio.

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AN
E S S A Y
ON
O L D M A I D S.

BOOK III.

ON THE OLD MAIDS OF THE ANCIENT
WORLD.

CHAP. I.

Introductory Chapter.

THE admirable Fielding has happily remarked, "that an author ought
"to consider himself not as a gentleman,
"who gives a private, or eleemoynary
"treat, but rather as one who keeps a pub-
"lic ordinary, at which all persons are wel-
"come for their money."

VOL. II.

B

On

On this idea he formed for himself a very pleasant and profitable rule, "to prefix not only a general bill of fare to his whole entertainment, but to give the reader particular bills to every course, as he served it up in his successive volumes."

From an incautious neglect of this enlivening regulation, the too careless provider of the present ordinary undesignedly disgusted some of his more dainty customers: who, from the want of an explanatory bill of fare to this his second course, concluded, because it differed entirely from the first, that it was composed of articles unfit for the refined luxury of a modern table; though, in truth, the well-meaning *Traiteur* had pleased himself with a hope of surprising and delighting his guests, by a curious selection of delicacies from different parts of the world.

To change a culinary metaphor for one of a lighter and more tractable kind: some friendly fellow travellers, who attended me with great satisfaction through the short stage

stage of my first volume, where we advanced amicably together, upon a wide, though unbeaten English road, complained that they grew dizzy and confused, upon being precipitately hurried into a variety of scenes, entirely unexpected, which they could have enjoyed, had they been properly prepared for so extensive an excursion.

To thee therefore, gentle reader, who art now, for the first time, on the point of embarking with me on an airy expedition, that may favour of philosophical temerity, I give this friendly notice, that I am now going to ascend in the balloon of conjecture to the antediluvian world. From thence we shall visit Egypt and Rome; taking a cursory, but I hope a pleasant and instructive survey of the ancient world.

It is an honest and literal truth, that esteem and affection for some living old maids, and a compassionate concern for others, led me first to meditate on this interesting community, until the subject of my meditation gained so powerful an influence

over my mind, that I could not rest without tracing its history through all the ancient and modern vicissitudes of life and manners. In this wide field of enquiry I was deeply engaged, and highly amused by those eloquent eulogists and promoters of virginity—the primitive fathers of the church. I should have deemed my work incomplete, if it had failed to exhibit a sketch of the most eminent among them, and also of those singular compositions by which they marvellously augmented the multitude of Old Maids. Yet these holy advocates for a maiden life, were so free in their anecdotes and expressions, and so diffuse in their repeated exhortations to virginity; that in giving the most careful and guarded account of their discourses, I am not without fear of sometimes alarming the scrupulous by the mere phantom of indecency, and of depressing the volatile by the more substantial vapour of dulness. If that misfortune should happen to be my lot, I earnestly conjure them to let their censure fall, not
on

on the humble undignified author of this essay; but on those high and hallowed prelates, whose compositions on this interesting topic I thought myself obliged to review. I would not willingly admit into this work a single expression that could force even prudes to blush: but if those ladies of nice imagination should ever find me betrayed into such an offence, I intreat them, instead of censuring me, to congratulate themselves on the happy refinement of the times, in which it is impossible to transcribe even the composition of saints, without incurring the charge of indelicacy.

CHAP. II.

Conjectures concerning the Existence of Old Maids before the Deluge.

A DUTCH author, distinguished by his erudition and his misfortunes, has endeavoured to prove, in a dissertation of more learning than modesty, that, when our progenitors were first created, it was the intention of Heaven, that Eve herself should become an Old Maid; and that original sin was introduced into the world by the disobedience of our frail mother, not literally in eating a mysterious fruit, but in wandering from the path of virgin purity. This fanciful hypothesis did not arise in the heavy air of Holland—the idea was entertained by some illustrious fathers of the church; and the great living historian of the Roman empire, in those sarcastic remarks on Christianity, which are the principal blemishes in his exquisite composition,

position, has observed, "it was their favourite opinion, that if Adam had preserved his obedience to the Creator, he would have lived and died in a state of virgin purity, and that some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise with a race of innocent and immortal beings." In a note to this passage, the great historian informs us, that "Justin, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustin, &c. strongly inclined to this opinion;" yet he has not attended, with his usual accuracy, to the idea entertained by the last of these fathers on this curious point. Augustin, in the 14th book of his City of God, enters into a long and rather indelicate discussion of it.

He does not affirm, that Paradise would have been peopled by *a harmless mode of vegetation*, but the good father, and his learned commentator Lodovicus Vives, alledge the most whimsical and ludicrous occurrences that were ever recorded by a serious pen. The curious reader may find these extraordinary anecdotes related in

very coarse but explicit language, at the 498th page of the English translation of St. Augustin, printed in 1620. I ought, perhaps, like the holy father himself, when speaking of matters much more indecent, to ask the pardon of chaste eyes, for pointing out to them such indelicate wonders; but, I flatter myself, the kind sisterhood will forgive the coarseness of the story, for the sake of my zealous sollicitude to indulge their curiosity. I trust I may afford them both amusement and instruction, by shewing them how strangely men of the most reverend character have been betrayed, by frivolous speculation, into the grossest absurdity.

Perhaps, without the sanctity of Augustin, I am now exposing myself to a similar censure; but if an enquiry into antediluvian virginity should be considered by any morose or sceptical readers as a frivolous speculation, let them remember, that I am professedly following the example of those great antiquarians, who have aston-

ished

nished the present enlightened age by the profundity of their researches. The elaborate works of these gentlemen evidently prove, that they have two considerable and separate points to pursue; the first and most important, to display their own extensive erudition; the second and inferior, to inform or to amuse their reader, which, like all other secondary aims, must be frequently sacrificed to the more important. After the marvellous intimate acquaintance which the learned Mr. Bryant has shewn with the family of Chus, the grandson of Noah, every author who professes to treat of an ancient institution, may be reasonably expected to give some account of whatever relates to it, either immediately after, or long before the deluge; and the respect which I bear to the sisterhood makes me ambitious of shewing them, that I have diligently ransacked such memorials of past ages, both genuine and fictitious, as I thought likely to elucidate the history of their long-neglected though venerable order:

der : yet, as it is an established privilege of authors to point out their own particular merits, and the particular failings of their brethren, let me here modestly boast of my own candour, in not endeavouring to raise the antiquity of the interesting order to which my pen is devoted, at the expence of truth ; a failing that almost all my brother antiquarians may be said, I fear, to have learned from each other. For my own part, I wish the chaste sifterhood, in all points that concern both themselves and others, to distinguish rumour from fact.

On these principles I shall proceed to tell them, that Eve herself has been said to have instituted a religious order of certain young women, who were to continue virgins, and to preserve unextinguished the fire, which had fallen from heaven on the sacrifice of Abel *. This chaste institution is reported to have arisen in the ninety-ninth year of the world. An advocate for

* St. Romuald Abrégé du Tresor Chronologique.

the existence of antediluvian chastity may appeal to an evidence of respectable authority, to no less a personage than the prophet Enoch, the seventh in a direct line from Adam. In certain fragments, still preserved, of this most early writer, we are told, that some women, in the age of this ingenious patriarch, had devoted themselves to a life of virginity: but it is proper to add, that although the composition of Enoch is mentioned in the Epistle of St. Jude, the authenticity of these fragments has been forcibly called in question, and, though quoted and defended by some of the fathers, yet most modern authors of eminence, and particularly the learned Sir Walter Rawleigh, in the first book of his History of the World, seem inclined to consider them as a fiction.

The very concise narration which Moses has given us of events before the flood, has tempted the fanciful rabbies of the Jews, and other writers on sacred history, to amuse themselves with the composition of various antediluvian

antediluvian romances: among the most remarkable and amusing of these, we may reckon the fable of an amorous connection between the apostate angels and the daughters of men; a fable so fascinating to a lively imagination, that our divine poet has introduced it, in the most serious manner, as a part of Satan's answer to Belial, in the 2d book of Paradise Regained.

*Before the flood, thou, with thy lusty crew,
False titled Sons of God, roaming the earth,
Cast wanton eyes on the daughters of men.*

Ver. 179, &c.

We may observe also, that in his greater poem, this sublimest of bards alludes more than once to this illicit commerce

Betwixt th' angelical and human kind.

As the idea was founded on a misconstruction of the following passage in the sixth chapter of Genesis, "The sons of God saw
" the daughters of men, that they were fair,
" and

“and they took them wives of all which they chose,” this strange story has been sometimes an object of the most serious credit; and a very learned modern divine * has annexed, to his elaborate History of the Patriarchs, a dissertation to prove, from scripture, from reason, and from the nature of angels, that these ætherial spirits, whatever shape they might assume, were utterly incapable of begetting children.

If we might venture to consider this fable as genuine history, we might certainly draw from it a very strong argument against the existence of antediluvian Old Maids; for, if the evil spirits were permitted to exercise such power over the females of the infant world, what fair individual could be supposed to have preserved her chastity, when both men and demons were personally engaged in its destruction?

But, rejecting this fabulous interference of these licentious angels, and adhering to the more just interpretation of the Mosaic

* Heidegger.

history,

history, let us now examine what we may fairly conclude on the point in question. The family of Seth are represented as orderly and devout; but, as the state of the world seem'd to require a hasty increase of its inhabitants, it is not probable that any female, even in that sober race, should have proved so unreasonable as to decline concurring in the important work of peopling the wide wilderness of the earth. If any peculiar sanctity or self-denial may be supposed to have existed, for a short time, among this more innocent division of the human race, it was soon overpowered by the influence of the most licentious examples. The purity of the Sethites was corrupted by the temptations they found among the children of Cain; and the state of female manners at this period is very forcibly described in the following lines of Milton:

*For that fair female troop thou saw'st, that
 seem'd
 Of Goddesses so blithe, so smooth, so gay,
 Yet*

*Yet empty of all good, wherein consists
 Woman's domestic honour and chief praise;
 Bred only and completed to the taste
 Of lustful appetite, to sing, to dance,
 To dress, and troll the tongue, and roll the eye;
 To these that sober race of men, whose lives
 Religious titled them the sons of God,
 Shall yield up all their virtue, all their fame,
 Ignobly, to the trains and to the smiles
 Of these fair atheists, and now swim in joy,
 Ere long to swim at large; and laugh, for
 which
 The world, ere long, a world of tears must
 weep.*

Paradise Lost, Book xi. ver. 614.

These verses, compared with the former quotation from Paradise Regained, afford a striking proof how ingeniously the great poet adopted the most opposite interpretations of scripture, as they happened to suit his poetical purposes.

I cannot help remarking, that although some lines in the passage just quoted are
 4 supremely

supremely beautiful, yet, in the close of it, both the genius and the justice of this incomparable poet appear to have deserted him: the puerility of expression in the two last lines is particularly unhappy; and the assertion, that *female wantonnefs* was the chief cause of the deluge, appears rather uncandid and cruel. Let us, however, apologise for the noblest of bards, on this occasion, by observing, that he was probably misled by his reverence for a learned and holy character, as his description seems to be borrowed from the annals of Euty chius, the patriarch of Alexandria.

Though I cannot subscribe to this severity on the first female inhabitants of the world, yet, after what I have alledged, I may venture, I think, to terminate this chapter, by asserting, that from every thing which a diligent enquiry can collect on this very deep and delicate question, we have the strongest reason to suppose, there never existed such a being as an antediluvian Old Maid.

Into

Into what blind and unjust conjectures are we poor mortals betrayed, when we attempt to estimate the constitution and character of our remote predecessors!—I had just closed the preceding speculation against the existence of an antediluvian Old Maid, when I was agreeably surpris'd by the arrival of a packet from a learned friend, who had promised to collect for me, in his travels over Europe and Asia, every scrap of antiquity that could afford me any light in my maiden researches. Although the favour which I have now received from him abundantly proves, that I was grossly mistaken in my conjectural account of antediluvian virginity, I shall suffer what I had written to stand, as a warning to future antiquarians, not to indulge themselves in such hasty decisions.

I cannot more strongly express my zeal for the sisterhood, than by presenting to them, with a sincere delight, this very choice morsel of antediluvian history, which destroys my hypothesis, and by thus as-

serting their primæval honour, at the expence of my own historical sagacity.— My friend, the learned traveller, writes me word from Spain, which he is now visiting on his return, that as soon as he reaches England, he shall correct for the press a journal of his tour; that in a supplement to his travels, he intends to insert some other ancient tracts, which he has fortunately rescued from oblivion; that he will there recount the incidents which led to their discovery, and clearly prove that the fragment, with which he has favoured me, must have proceeded from the pen of Enoch himself. He assures me, that he has sent a most faithful translation; and that he can demonstrate, by unanswerable arguments, that this fragment was contained among those very writings of Enoch which the pious Tertullian declared he had perused, and from which the celebrated Postellus confessed he had borrowed very freely, in his elaborate treatise on the origin of things.

But

But I shall wave all farther preface, that I may no longer detain the reader from a precious and interesting moral tale of the most eminent author that existed before the deluge.

“ And among the ninety and three
 “ daughters of Enoch, there was none like
 “ * Kunaza: she was beautiful, but de-
 “ spised her beauty; she was nimble as the
 “ deer, yet delighted not in the dance.

“ She looked with pity on those who
 “ trusted in the fleeting pleasures of the
 “ earth.

“ She saw that love was poisoned with
 “ jealousy, and that marriage was embittered
 “ by strife.

• NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

I am inclined to suppose, that the name of this interesting personage, Kunaza, has been mis-spelt, in the haste of transcription, and that it ought to be written *Kanaza*, which signifies, in the Arabic language, to *deposit as a treasure*; a signification that the word might naturally acquire, from the singular history of the maiden, whose name it originally was—as we use the verb *to bestor*, from the old Trojan hero.

“ Her soul was enamoured of heavenly
“ contemplation, and she said to her father,
“ O my father, permit me to live and to
“ die a virgin! Conduct me through life by
“ the light of thy spirit, and teach me to
“ walk with thee in the way of our Cre-
“ ator!

“ And her father rejoiced in the purity
“ of his child; but the kindred of Kunaza
“ held her continence in derision.

“ They said to her, There is no plant
“ that beareth not seed, and no creature
“ that doth not produce young:

“ Thou wilt be the only fruitless thing
“ upon the face of the earth; and when
“ thou departest, there will be none to la-
“ ment thee.

“ But Kunaza disregarded their scoffs;
“ and in the two hundred and ninety-first
“ year of her age, she rejected the last offer
“ that was made to her of marriage.

“ Now it happened at this time, that the
“ angels appointed to watch the earth for-
“ got their duty:

“ They

“ They saw that women were beautiful ;
 “ and they burned with impure desires for
 “ the daughters of men :

“ They prospered in their career of un-
 “ cleanness: they made the earth a scene
 “ of abomination :

“ They begot a multitude of giants ;
 “ and they boasted of their enormities.

“ For Semiexas, the prince of the licen-
 “ tious angels, commanded twenty of their
 “ chiefs to appear before him :

“ And they bound themselves by an
 “ oath to assemble together on the ninth
 “ night of every new year, and to recount,
 “ in order, the feats of their impurity.

“ And they assembled on the summit of
 “ a mountain, which was called Hermo-
 “ niim, or the Mountain of the Oath.

“ But the moon hid her head, and the
 “ stars refused to witness the vaunts of
 “ their uncleanness.

“ And they rejoiced in the darkness
 “ which their discourse engendered, because
 “ their deeds had been evil.

“ And Semiexas, their prince, first related the evil which he had done :

“ And Atarkuph related the evil which he had done :

“ And Arakiel related the evil which he had done :

“ And Chababiel related the evil which he had done :

“ And Sapsick related the evil which he had done.

“ And of the twenty impure spirits, one only continued silent, and the silent one was Pharmarus.

“ And their prince Semiexas was offended by his silence, and commanded him to speak.

“ And Pharmarus looked up with a look of indignant derision, and he said :

“ Ye are spirits of low ambition ; ye are contented with the shadow of victory, where there is no resistance.

“ But I rejoice to contend with reluctant caprice : I delight to triumph over the coy maiden, over the maiden of much delay, and of many excuses.

“ And as he spake, there arose from
“ the assembly of angels a noisy burst of
“ insurmountable laughter.

“ The mountain was shaken to its base
“ by the shout of their derision.

“ And Semiexas their prince exclaimed:
“ O Pharmarus, inventor of magic ! O
“ thou dealer in dark things ! Is there
“ verily such a maiden upon the face of the
“ earth ?

“ And Pharmarus answered, and said : O
“ thou prince of the impassioned angels, I
“ wonder not that thou art slow to believe
“ me :

“ For thou hast met with no female, that
“ could resist thy perfection. The beauty
“ of woman has yielded unto thee, as the
“ soft air yieldeth to the imperious wing of
“ the eagle.

“ But attend, and I will impart to you
“ the wonderful things I have discovered
“ among the daughters of men.

“ As we ourselves have parted for the
“ pleasures of earth, as we have burnt for
“ the enjoyments of corporeal existence ;

“ So has woman also had the ambition to
“ exchange her nature, and to cloath her-
“ self in the perfection of spirit.

“ I sought the embraces of Kunaza, the
“ maiden daughter of Enoch ; but though
“ the prime of her youth is departed, she
“ disdainfully turned from my intreaty.

“ She has renounced the delights of her
“ nature ; she has determined to give her
“ virginity to the grave. Yet in time she
“ shall accede to my wishes ; for I have
“ studied the weakneses of woman.

“ Her principal weakneses are four ;
“ and I will make an experiment on the in-
“ fluence of each.

“ I will awaken her pride ; and that
“ alone may tempt her to unite with Phar-
“ marus.

“ I will excite her avarice ; and she may
“ then be eager to give her beauty in ex-
“ change for the glittering spoils of the
“ earth.

“ I will stimulate her desire ; and her
“ powers of resistance will melt away.

“ I will

“ I will inflame her curiosity ; and what
 “ is there, which the maiden who thirsts for
 “ a secret, will not give to obtain it ?

“ I swear, by the subtlety of the serpent,
 “ she shall not escape from my passion.

“ I will triumph over the coy perversity
 “ of the virgin, or I will shake this round
 “ earth to its centre.

“ And the prince Semiexas answered, and
 “ said ; Well hast thou spoken, Pharmarus,
 “ thou inventor of magic ! thy speech is
 “ worthy of thyself, thou dealer in occult
 “ machinations !

“ Go ! and prosper in thy devices ! and
 “ when we next assemble, divert us with
 “ the relation of thy success.

“ He spoke ; he dissolved the assembly ;
 “ and Pharmarus departed from his fel-
 “ lows.

“ He departed to employ himself alone
 “ in the evil, of which he intended to
 “ vaunt in their next meeting ; but he was
 “ doomed to meet them no more.

“ And now he pondered in solitude on
 “ various

“ various wiles : he exerted all the subtlety
“ of his spirit to circumvent the virgin.

“ He approached her under the guise of
“ a friend ; he became familiar with the
“ maiden in the shape of an instructor.

“ She listened with avidity to his know-
“ ledge ; her understanding feasted on the
“ wonders he revealed : and it happened
“ on a certain day, while he conversed with
“ her on the art of divination, that Phar-
“ marus suddenly exclaimed :

“ O, Kunaza, thou art yet to learn, that
“ on this day thy sister Kezia has brought
“ a young Anack (or giant) into the
“ world.

“ The wonders of nature are worth the
“ attention of the wise : let us hasten to the
“ tent of thy sister ; let us examine how
“ she has improved, by her travail, the little
“ race of the earth.

“ And Kunaza arose with Pharmarus,
“ and she hastened to the tent of her sister :

“ And behold all things had happened
“ as Pharmarus had foretold to Kunaza.

“ For

“ For Kezia, the seventieth daughter of
“ Enoch, had conceived by Semiezas, the
“ prince of the licentious angels. She had
“ brought him a male child; and this was
“ the first Anack that was born upon the
“ earth.

“ And Kunaza beheld the infant, and
“ she was astonished in surveying its stature.

“ She embraced the babe with amaze-
“ ment, and she delighted in the magnitude
“ of its limbs!

“ And she delivered the babe to its mo-
“ ther Kezia, and she observed the proud
“ transport of the mother, in contemplating
“ the dimensions of the child.

“ And the first temptation of Pharmarus
“ began to work in the bosom of Kunaza;
“ and her heart said in secret to itself, How
“ pleasant a thing it must be, to look with
“ the eyes of a mother on the smiling face of
“ a young giant!

“ And Pharmarus read all her inmost
“ thoughts; he exulted, and burned to be
“ alone with the virgin.

“ And

“ And he prevailed on Kunaza to walk
“ abroad from the tent of her sister, that he
“ might shew her some latent wonders of
“ the creation.

“ And as he walked by the side of the
“ maiden, he strove to fan the rising wish
“ she had felt, to experience the proud de-
“ lights of a parent.

“ But the mind of the maiden had ar-
“ gued with itself; and these were the dic-
“ tates of her mind:

“ O Kunaza, make use of thy reason!
“ and resist the temptation of pride, which
“ is founded upon folly!

“ Of the ninety and three daughters of
“ thy father, there is not one who may not
“ bring forth a young Anack.

“ Couldst thou be proud of what the
“ most foolish of thy sex may accomplish?
“ of a work in which fools may excel?

“ O Kunaza, if thou wert destined by thy
“ nature to feel the weakness of pride, let
“ thy pride at least be confined to a venial
“ exultation in the excellence of thy spirit!

“ And

“ And Pharmarus read these unuttered
 “ words in her soul ; and he saw that she
 “ would not fall by the influence of pride.

“ And he now laboured to tempt her
 “ with treasures, and to bribe her into
 “ compliance with his desire.

“ He offered her a metal, whose po-
 “ lished splendor should emulate the sun ;
 “ and a stone, whose lustre should contend
 “ with the brilliancy of her eyes.

“ He exclaimed, O Kunaza, give thyself
 “ to Pharmarus, and he will make thee to
 “ be called the richest among women.

“ But the subtle angel could not raise for
 “ a moment the base passion of avarice in
 “ the noble heart of Kunaza.

“ The maiden answered, and said, The
 “ true wealth of a woman is peace of spirit,
 “ and her brightest ornaments are modesty
 “ and meekness.

“ And Pharmarus marvelled at her dis-
 “ cretion ; and he was inwardly vexed with
 “ a great vexation.

“ But he suppressed the murmur of dis-
 “ appointment,

“ appointment, and hastily engaged in new
“ stratagems against the maiden.

“ And as he still walked in converse
“ with Kunaza, he stopped beneath the in-
“ viting shade of a majestic palm.

“ And he said, Thou intelligent maiden,
“ who delightest in the history of the earth,
“ attend, and I will instruct thee in myste-
“ rious wonders, that relate to this tree.

“ But observe its goodly growth; and
“ observe the happy creatures that sport
“ within the ample space of its long-ex-
“ tended shadow!

“ And Kunaza surveyed the tree; she
“ saw that it was supreme in beauty.

“ The ground beneath it was flowery, and
“ fragrant as Paradise: the most tender and
“ lovely animals of the creation were af-
“ sembled in its shade, and every animal
“ was happy with its mate.

“ O Kunaza, said the false and artful
“ Pharmarus, I will now tell thee the blef-
“ sings that belong to this spot.

“ Thou beholdest the first nuptial couch
“ of

“ of thy parents ; it was here that Eve first
“ reclined, when the envy of the guardian
“ spirits had expelled her from Eden.

“ It was here that she became first ac-
“ quainted with connubial endearment ; and
“ felt herself repaid for the paradise she had
“ lost.

“ And the angel of union gave a bless-
“ ing to the tree, under which the first mo-
“ ther reclined :

“ He blessed the tree, and all the ground
“ that extendeth under the shadow thereof.

“ He blessed all the creatures that sport
“ around it : he ordained that every daugh-
“ ter of woman, who reclines beneath its
“ shade, shall experience unutterable joy,
“ beyond the common joy of her sex.

“ But this blessing has been long for-
“ gotten by the heedless offspring of man :
“ it is a joyous secret reserved for me to
“ impart to my beloved.

“ So spake the subtle Pharmarus ; and as
“ he spake, he infused into the wondering
“ virgin the thrilling flame of desire.

“ The

“ The bosom of Kunaza began to heave,
“ and her breath on a sudden grew short.

“ And Pharmarus exulted in his subtlety,
“ and was preparing to complete his
“ triumph.

“ And a piercing cry was heard from
“ afar; and Kunaza started up at the
“ sound.

“ She listened, and the cry redoubled;
“ and Kunaza exclaimed, As sure as we
“ have life, it is the cry of a woman in
“ travail!

“ And she heard the sound a third time;
“ and she said, Verily it is the expression of
“ that pain, which was inflicted upon wo-
“ man for listening to a subtle tempter:

“ It is a warning to the weak Kunaza.
“ I thank thee, my good angel: I feel that
“ thou hast saved me from the subtlety of
“ Pharmarus.

“ And as the virgin spoke, she sprung
“ forward, and hastened towards the place
“ from whence the cry had proceeded.

“ And Pharmarus began to pursue her;
“ but

“ but he stopped in his pursuit, and re-
 “ flected, that the influence of his temp-
 “ tation was vanished from her frame.

“ He roamed in discontent about the
 “ earth; and employed himself in darker
 “ devices to ensnare the maiden.

“ And he sent curious gifts, which he
 “ had collected from the extremities of the
 “ earth, to entice the virgin again from
 “ the tent of her father.

“ He promised to entertain her with all
 “ the latent wonders of the creation; and
 “ he drew her by magical illusion into the
 “ inmost recesses of a gloomy grove.

“ He appeared to her in all his false
 “ grandeur, as the prince of magic, whom
 “ the elements obey as their lord, and to
 “ whom light and darkness are one :

“ Whose word can render what existeth
 “ invisible, and make the thing which is
 “ not, appear as the thing which is.

“ And Kunaza marvelled at his powers :
 “ and he took her by the hand, and said ;

“ O thou maiden of angelical spirit !
 Vol. II. D “ who

“ who hast a passion to dive into the myster-
“ teries of the universe,

“ Listen to me ! Give me thy love, and
“ I will fill thy capacious mind with that
“ mysterious knowledge for which thy heart
“ panteth !

“ Thou hast upbraided me, that I seek
“ to deceive thee ; and thou hast mentioned
“ the example of thy parent Eve :

“ But I will shew thee thou deceivest
“ thyself, if thou hast courage to learn the
“ real truth from the dead.

“ Tell me, thou most angelic among the
“ daughters of men, shall I set the appar-
“ tion of thy first parent before thee ? Shall
“ I call up the departed Eve from the
“ grave, to tell thee what it truly becometh
“ all her daughters to do ?

“ And Kūnaza pondered, and said, Vērily
“ it would please me to see and hear the de-
“ parted spirit of the first woman.

“ And Pharmarus exulted, and said, My
“ soul delights in thy fellowship, O thou
“ most magnanimous of mortals !

“ And





I. Stothard del.

I. Parker sculp.

Pub. according to Act of Parliament Jan. 1. 1793 by T. Cadell in the Strand.

“ And he struck the earth with his foot :
 “ the ground trembled, and was rent asun-
 “ der :

“ From the opening thereof there issued
 “ a thick smoke, and after the smoke, there
 “ arose a venerable phantom :

“ And the phantom had the visage of
 “ Eve ; and it bowed the head and spake :

“ Deceive not thyself with false pride,
 “ O my daughter ! Let me warn thee
 “ not to live and die in a foolish ignorance
 “ of delights, which thy frame has been
 “ fashioned to enjoy !

“ Such were the words of the phantom ;
 “ and it waited not for reply, but sunk
 “ again into the earth.

“ And the face of Kunaza was covered
 “ with confusion ; and she was almost a-
 “ shamed that she was yet a virgin.

“ And Pharmarus read her inmost
 “ thoughts, and exulted :

“ He saw that his illusions began to pre-
 “ vail over her senses ; and he continued
 “ to tempt her still farther.

“ He pressed her trembling hand, and
“ he exclaimed, Thou alone art worthy
“ amongst women to participate in the
“ deep discoveries of my spirit.

“ O bless me with thy beauty, Kunaza !
“ and I will enrich thee with a wonderful
“ power, which no mortal but thyself shall
“ possess.

“ I will enable thee to elude the ravage
“ of time ; and, when seven centuries have
“ rolled over thy head, to appear still as
“ lovely as thou art in this moment.

“ I will teach thee to make thyself invi-
“ sible with the rapidity of thought, and,
“ by passing unseen at thy pleasure, to pe-
“ netrate every secret thou canst wish to
“ discover.

“ Thus spake the insidious Pharmarus ;
“ and the curiosity of the maiden was in-
“ flamed :

“ There were many things that she
“ panted to know, and in her heart she co-
“ veted supernatural power.

“ And Pharmarus saw that his tempta-
“ tion

“tion had entered into her soul; and he
 “exulted in the success of his devices.

“He continued to solicit the maiden;
 “and her bosom was convulsed with a
 “doubtful conflict.

“Her cheek became red as the crimson
 “rose; but she threw back her head upon
 “her shoulder, to avoid the flaming eyes
 “of Pharmarus.

“And as the pine bendeth beneath the
 “passing wind, so was the reason of Kunaza
 “bowed down by the sudden gust of de-
 “fire.

“She trembled in the struggle of pas-
 “sions; but her virtuous spirit arose with
 “new vigour, as the tree ariseth from a tran-
 “sient pressure, and points directly to the
 “heaven, by whose influence it prospers.

“And the soul of the maiden now com-
 “muned with itself, and said :

“O Kunaza, suppress the evil ambition
 “that subtlety is kindling in thy bosom.

“Pharmarus may enable thee indeed to
 “clude every mortal eye; but from the

“ fight of God and his angels, there is none
“ who can teach thee to escape.

“ Then wish not to purchase superna-
“ tural power by the sacrifice of a greater
“ good; by losing the inestimable peace of
“ an innocent spirit.

“ And while her soul was thus commun-
“ ing with itself, every evil desire departed
“ from the purified heart of the virgin.

“ She turned her face to Pharmarus :
“ she looked on him with a look of disdain,
“ and said :

“ Away from me, thou unworthy spirit !
“ The soul of Kunaza is impowered to ab-
“ hor and deride thy insidious machina-
“ tions.

“ Thou seekest to rob me of a treasure,
“ which if I should weakly suffer thee to
“ take, all the potent spells of thy magic
“ can never restore it to the repentant
“ mourner.

“ And the frenzy of rage and disap-
“ pointment began to swell in the soul of
“ Pharmarus.

“ He

“ He cast a furious glance upon the virgin, and said :

“ By the powers of darkness, thou art as subtle as the serpent himself. Had thy parent Eve been possessed of thy cunning, she had made the prince of temp- ters a fool.

“ But I swear, by the flames that burn within me, thou shalt not escape from my embrace: I will make thee the proud mother of a young giant.

“ And he grasped the virgin with the vehement grasp of outrageous desire : and she shrieked aloud in the agonies of terror.

“ And at the sound of her shriek, the angel Gabriel alighted upon the earth : Phymarus saw him, and was abashed for a moment.

“ Then all his evil passions rekindled with double fury ; and he prepared to contend with Gabriel for the possession of Kunaza.

“ But his powers of resistance were wi-
 D 4 thered

“thered by the glance of rebuke that
“flashed from the radiant visage of the pro-
“tecting spirit.

“And Gabriel seized him with the arm
“of justice and power; and exclaimed with
“mild dignity to the maiden :

“O Kunaza ! thou hast fought a good
“fight ; and all the faithful spirits of
“heaven are thy friends.

“Know that the seraph Uriel and I are
“sent from the throne of God to punish the
“false and licentious angels, who have de-
“based their nature with the impurities of
“the earth,

“And in honour of thy virtue, it is or-
“dained by thy Maker, Kunaza, that thy
“enemy, Pharmarus, shall fall the first
“victim to the just vengeance of heaven.

“Open, earth ! and imprison in thy ca-
“verns the treacherous guardian, who has
“attempted to violate the purest of thy
“daughters !

“The earth opened to her centre, at the
“command

“ command of the avenging angel, and
 “ there, with a chain of penal fire, * * * ”

It is with great concern I inform my reader, that this invaluable fragment does not extend beyond the preceding imperfect sentence. I am persuaded, that every person of feeling, every true friend to virginity, must lament, that we are not made fully acquainted with the final destiny of the interesting Kunaza. We may, however, safely affirm, that after she had resisted so successfully all the base machinations and power of the prince of magic, she could never fall by the strength or artifice of man. I trust, therefore, that her name and character will now obtain the honour they deserve, from all the nations of the modern world : and that the sisterhood, in particular, will never fail to revere her, as the original president of Old Maids,

C H A P. I I I.

*Conjectures concerning Old Maids among the
Tocus, Egyptians, and some other Nations
of Antiquity.*

IN the first centuries after the deluge, it seems to have been the wish of every individual to assist in the great business of re-peopling the desolated world. At a time when a numerous progeny was considered as real opulence, and a peculiar mark of the divine favour; it is not probable that any female should have willingly precluded herself from the most envied distinction. Indeed, the Hebrew women appear to have been actuated by the most lively desire of increasing the number of their respective families. Children were regarded as such a treasure, that several wives of the patriarchs, whom nature had disappointed in this expectation, very chearfully corrected the

the unkindness of their own constitution, by presenting a handmaid to their husbands. Among all the Mosaic institutions, there is no trace of any order of men or women devoted to a single life; and, though some of the fathers, who have studied, in their writings, to raise the honour of monastic virginity, have affected to derive it from Miriam the sister of Moses, by asserting that she died a virgin, at the age of an hundred and thirty-three years, it is said with more probability, that this musical sister of the Jewish legislator was herself married to Hur, a man of eminence in the tribe of Judah. St. Jerome, whose zeal for chastity has sometimes transported him beyond the limits of sober reason, expresses an inclination to believe, that several women, before the Christian æra, received the gift of prophecy from God, as a reward for their leading a life of virginity:—but it is remarkable, that the celebrated Hebrew prophetesses were married women. Deborah was the wife of Lapidoth; and Huldah, whose

whose prophecy is recorded in the 22d chapter of the second book of Kings, is not only mentioned as the wife of Shallum, but is said to have dwelt in the college of Jerusalem; a sufficient proof that virginity was not required in those females, who made a part of that hallowed institution. The heroine as well as the prophets might contribute to the glory of her nation, without any claim to this chaste perfection. Jael, who is celebrated in a song of triumph for the slaughter of Sisera, was the wife of Heber the Kenite; and the more noble Judith, immortalised for delivering her country, by the destruction of Holofernes, was, at the time of her exploit, a young widow. Throughout the history of the Jews, from their father Abraham to their utter dispersion, I cannot recollect the existence of any one distinguished Old Maid; nor is it probable, that many ancient virgins were ever to be discovered, in a nation where every man was at liberty to marry as many wives as he thought himself able to support;

port; and where the wisest of their princes was so weak as to encumber himself with a domestic establishment of many hundred concubines.

As the Ægyptians were distinguished by a melancholy cast of temper, and a passion for gloomy retirement, we might be led to imagine, that the women of that country were the first who devoted themselves to the mortifications of religious celibacy; but there is a remarkable assertion in Herodotus, which seems to preclude us from such a conjecture. In speaking of Ægypt, he expressly says, “* no woman is ever consecrated to any Divinity, male or female, the holy office belonging solely to men;” yet the same great historian informs us, that women acted a principal part in the hallowed mysteries of this artful people; not, indeed, as we may fairly conjecture, for the purposes of chastity, as he

* *Ἰσατά, γυνή μιν ουδὲμιη οὔτε ἱερεὺς θείη, ὡς θηλειῆς αἰδρεῖς δὲ πάντων τε καὶ πασίων.* Herodotus, p. 120. edit. Wessel.

says,

says, that in the temple of the Ægyptian Jupiter at Thebes, as in that of Belus at Babylon, a virgin was secluded for the God, and supposed to sleep with the Divinity himself, in a magnificent bed prepared for that purpose, in the highest apartment of the building. From this ceremony, and from other circumstances, we may conclude, that Ægypt was not very fertile in the production of Old Maids. Parents of the poorer sort sold their female children to procure subsistence for themselves; and we cannot reasonably suppose, that many ancient virgins existed in such a country, where two of its sovereigns, according to the historian I have quoted, prostituted their own daughters in the most public manner; the first, to supply his exhausted treasury; and the second, to detect a very artful thief*.

If we must not expect to find an Old Maid in Ægypt, we have still less chance of

* See the amusing story of Rhampinitus and his daughter, in the second book of Herodotus.

meeting with this rarity among the Babylonians. This ingenious people had devised a very happy expedient, which is highly approved by Herodotus, to prevent their women's being exposed to the mortifications of a single life, by the want of personal attractions. It was their annual custom to produce all their virgins, who had attained the marriageable age, in a kind of public auction; the most beautiful were sold for considerable sums, and this purchase money was distributed in such a manner, among the homely damsels, as to procure for each of them a husband. Such a civil institution is in itself almost sufficient to have prevented the existence of an Old Maid among them.

In Phœnicia, where Venus and Adonis were particularly worshipped, the commerce between the sexes was extremely licentious. We may, indeed, observe, that among several nations of antiquity, the sacrifice of female chastity was considered as a religious duty. Persons of the highest rank among
 the

the Armenians, as we are told by Strabo, devoted their virgin daughters to the unchaste goddess Anaitis*.

The pagan mythology was calculated to promote the most corrupt state of manners; and in some of the voluptuous nations of antiquity, the virtue of continence seems to have been utterly unknown. In Lydia, says Herodotus, every girl plays the harlot.— Yet, in the luxurious region of Asia, some religious institutions were established for the protection of chastity. The famous temple of Diana, at Ephesus, had a train of holy virgins; and, for their perfect security, the priests, to whose guardianship they were entrusted, were all eunuchs. Yet we cannot venture to affirm, that this sanctuary produced a number of Old Maids; for it is probable, that these young votaries of Diana, like the Vestals of Rome, whose

* Τας θυγατέρας οι επιφανιστατοι εν εθνεσσι ανιερτασσι παρθενικησιν, αις νομος εστι, κατακορμιθεισασιν πολυν χρονον παρα τη θηη, μετα ταυτα διδοσθαι προς γαμον· ουκ απαξιντες τη τριωτη συνεικειν ουδενος. Strabo, lib. xi.

history I shall consider hereafter, had the privilege of marrying towards the middle season of life. This we may also conjecture to have been the case with the religious virgins in Persia; who seem to have been guarded with peculiar sanctity, from an anecdote related by Justin:—Darius, the son of Artaxerxes, not satisfied with those imperial honours to which his father had raised him, demanded of that monarch his favourite mistress Aspasia. The aged sovereign, unwilling to grant, and afraid, perhaps, to refuse, the passionate request of his son, was reduced to a mortifying expedient for securing the lady from so dangerous a rival: he made her for that purpose, a priestess of the Sun*. Plutarch relates this incident with some variations, but in a manner which equally shews, that chastity among the Persians was very strictly guarded in a religious asylum; yet virginity, as the story sufficiently proves, was

* Justin.

not a necessary qualification for the character of a priestess.—Among all the kingdoms of antiquity, none, perhaps, contributed less than Persia to the sisterhood of Old Maids, as the Persians are distinguished by a peculiar ceremony, which strongly proves, that both sexes considered celibacy as an object of abhorrence, not only as an enemy to human enjoyment, but as precluding them from the happiness they expected in a future life. From this idea arose their extraordinary custom of marrying the dead; which consisted of hiring either a husband or a wife, for every person who happened to die single, at an early period of life. This strange kind of marriage is said to have been generally solemnised, in such cases, soon after the burial of the deceased, being regarded as a necessary passport to the regions of bliss.

In Scythia, perhaps, some good Old Maids may have existed; whose single life was the consequence of their possessing a delicate frame or a tender heart; for we
are

are told by historians, that no female, in that martial country, was permitted to marry, till she had slain, with her own hand, an enemy in battle.

Among the warlike Amazons, a very different cause might produce the same effect. As these formidable ladies made it a point of national honour to support their empire with the least possible assistance from the other sex; we may reasonably suppose, that she was considered as the truest Amazonian patriot, who united virginity with valour. I must, indeed, confess, that the amorous adventures of some Amazonian queens are not very favourable to this hypothesis; but, if Quintus Curtius informs us, that Thalestris requested an embrace from Alexander, and discovered more * eagerness for amorous pleasure than the young and voluptuous hero himself, let us remember the more chaste deportment of her predecessor on the Amazonian throne,

* *Acrior ad Venerem fœminæ cupido quam regis.*
 Quint. Curt. lib. vi. cap. 5.

the celebrated Penthesilea, who lived and died a virgin, in the licentious court and army of Priam, during the siege of Troy. She was slain, as Quintus Calaber relates, by the inflexible Achilles; who wished, however, as the pœt says, that he had married his lovely antagonist instead of killing her*. From the example of this virtuous heroine, I am persuaded, that if a considerable number of Old Maids existed among any of those ancient people, whom the Greeks regarded as barbarians, it must have been in the nation of Amazons. I am aware, that in the profound researches of Mr. Bryant, the very existence of this nation is disputed; but, as the champion of the sisterhood in all ages, I cannot assent to this opinion of a most learned writer, nor permit the daring antiquarian to annihilate so illustrious a community.

* Και δ' Αχιλλεύς αδιαστόν εἰς ἐντεῖρετό θυμῷ

οὐνεκά μιν κατέπεφνε, καὶ οὐκ ἄγε διὰν ἀνοστήν.

Quintus Calaber, lib. 1. ver. 670.

While

While I contend for the existence, and the chastity, of these female warriors, who are described in the most lively and circumstantial manner by the poets and historians of antiquity, I must not forget their rivals, both in courage and continence, the Gorgons. These also were a nation of women, according to Diodorus Siculus; who informs us, that, bordering on the Amazons in Libya, and looking with envy on their neighbours, they frequently infested their country, till the more powerful Amazons, armed in the immense skins of African serpents, and led to battle by their queen Merina, subdued the Gorgons in a severe engagement, in which they took three thousand prisoners*.

I must own, that many contradictory opinions have been held concerning these more doubtful heroines, the Gorgons. Some critics have considered them as lovely

* Diodorus Siculus, lib. iii. cap. 4.

young women, whose beauty was so powerful as to fix every beholder in motionless amazement; others have supposed them to have been frightful old hags, whose deformity was so hideous, that no one could look at them without shuddering; and some late writers, with a sceptical refinement, have denied their existence: But, to support the ancient dignity of the sisterhood, I shall adhere to the evidence of that very respectable old Grecian, Palæphatus, who wrote a treatise expressly to explain the poetical riddles of his country; in which he explicitly declares, that the three princely Gorgon sisters, Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa, were three voluntary Old Maids*.

* Κορας τρεις Σθενω, Ευρυαλην, και Μιδουσαν. Αυται
 μη γαμωσθαι ουδενι εβουληθησαν. Palæphatus.

C H A P. IV.

On the Old Maids of Greece.

IN those ages which are honoured with the name of heroic, virgins seem to have been treated with very little respect. Every hero appears to have thought himself entitled to the careffes of the maiden captives, whom his own prowess, or the chance of war, had placed within his power; and the venerable Nestor, at the age of fourscore and five, does not retire to sleep without that agreeable reward of ancient heroism, a fair and affectionate damsel. The warm and enthusiastic admiration with which critics of the most liberal spirit have contemplated the genius of Homer, has led some of them to assert, that his poems are so wonderfully comprehensive, as to include every character which human life can exhibit.

But this praise may be considered as hyperbolic; since it is certain, that we cannot discover, either in the Iliad or the Odyssæy, a portrait, or even a sketch, of a single Old Maid. Perhaps, as this immortal bard is so minutely faithful in his delineation of manners and customs, we might infer, that no such character existed in his time; and indeed, the more we reflect on the religious and political institutions of Greece, the more reason shall we find to believe, that the number of Grecian Old Maids must have been at all periods very inconsiderable.

It was the ruling passion of the Greeks to aggrandize their country; and, as they justly considered citizens as the real wealth of every state, they thought it the first of patriotic duties, equally incumbent on both the sexes, to enrich the republic by increasing its numbers. Plato carries this point so far as to say, that “all persons, in the article of marriage, ought to consult the service of the public, in preference to
“ their

" their own private enjoyment*." The
 same illustrious philosophic statesman pro-
 poses a heavy tax upon those who conti-
 nued single beyond the age of thirty-three.
 Such a tax is said to have existed at Sparta,
 where every public institution had a pecu-
 liar tendency to encourage population.
 " Their public dances" (says Plutarch)
 " and other exercises of the young maidens
 " naked, in sight of the young men, were in-
 " centives to marriage; and, to use Plato's
 " expression, drew them almost as neces-
 " sarily by the attractions of love, as a ge-
 " ometrical conclusion follows from the
 " premises. To encourage it still more,
 " some marks of infamy were set upon
 " those that continued bachelors; for they
 " were not permitted to see these exercises
 " of the naked virgins, and the magistrates
 " commanded them to march naked round
 " the market-place in the winter, and to

* Κατά παντος εις εστω μυθος λαμου: τον γαρ τη πο-
 λει θεει συμφεροντα μισηστιν εις γαμου εκαστοι, ου τον ηδιστον
 αυτων. Plato. de Legibus, lib. vi.

" sing

Such is the natural and pathetic lamentation with which the interesting Antigone of Sophocles prepares for death.—This great and judicious poet has given exactly the same sentiment to his more fiery Electra; who, at the time she is mourning for her murdered father, and meditating the most tremendous vengeance against her imperious and guilty mother, cannot refrain from lamenting that she is herself.

Hopeless of children, and of nuptial rites,*

So prevalent was this idea in the mind of every Grecian female.—Euripides carries it still farther, and assigns similar language to *his* Electra; though he represents her as

Μερος λαχυσαν, ἕτε παιδεῖν ἀροφης,
 Ἀλλ' ὠδ' ἐρημος πρὸς φίλων ἢ δυσμορος,
 Ζῶσ' εἰς θανόντων ἐρχομαι κατασκαφαῖς.

Ver. 928.

* Ἀτεκνος

Ταλαιν', ἀτυμφευτος αἰεν οἰχυνω.

Sophoclis Electra, ver. 166.

actually

actually married, by the tyranny of her parents, to an honest labourer, who generously abstains from her bed in deference to her rank.

From these examples we may conclude, that a Grecian female hardly ever expressed an inclination to become an Old Maid; and indeed, whatever her own private wishes might be, the iniquitous laws of her country made her so much the slave of her relations, that she had little or no power of fixing her own situation in life. “ Nothing (says the accomplished Sir William Jones, in speaking of Grecian laws that relate to women) “ nothing can be conceived more cruel “ than the state of vassalage, in which wo- “ men were kept by the polished Athe- “ nians; who might have boasted of their “ tutelar goddess, Minerva, but had cer- “ tainly no pretensions, on any account, to “ the patronage of Venus. All unneces- “ sary restraints upon love (which contri- “ butes so largely to relieve the anxieties “ of a laborious life) and upon marriage “ (which

“ (which conduces so eminently to the peace
“ and good order of society) are odious in
“ the highest degree ; yet at Athens, whence
“ arts, laws, humanity, learning, and reli-
“ gion, are said to have sprung, a girl
“ could not be legally united with the ob-
“ ject of her affection, except by the con-
“ sent of the *Kypios* or controller, who was
“ either her father or her grandfire, her
“ brother or her guardian : their domination
“ over her was transferred to the husband,
“ by whom she was usually confined to the
“ minute details of domestic œconomy ;
“ and from whom she might in some in-
“ stances be torn, for the sake of her fortune,
“ by a second cousin, whom probably she
“ detested. Nor was her dependence likely
“ to cease ; for we may collect from the
“ speech on the estate of Philoctemon, that
“ even a widow was at the disposal of her
“ nearest kinsman ; either to be married by
“ him, or to be given in marriage, accord-
“ ing to his inclination or caprice. Yet
“ more ; a husband might bequeath his
“ wife,

" wife, like part of his estate, to any man
 " whom he chose for his successor : and the
 " mother of Demosthenes was actually left
 " by will to Aphobus, with a portion of
 " eighty minas. The form of such a be-
 " quest is preserved in the first speech
 " against Stephanus; and runs thus: " This
 " is the last will of Pasio the Acharnean.
 " I give my wife Archippe to Phormio, with
 " a fortune of one talent in Peparrhetus, one
 " talent in Attica, a house worth a hundred
 " minas, together with the female slaves,
 " the ornaments of gold, and whatever else
 " may be in it."—For all these hardships
 " which the Athenian women endured, a
 " very poor compensation was made by
 " the law of Solon, which ordered their
 " husbands to sleep with them three times
 " a month *."

In a country where women, at every pe-
 riod of their life, were so miserably depen-
 dent as to be disposed of like inanimate pro-

* Jones's Commentary on *Isæus*, page 177.

perty, we have reason to apprehend their having suffered every species of cruelty and oppression. If Greece did not abound in voluntary Old Maids, we may believe that some lovely females of that celebrated region were kept in a wretched state of celibacy, by the iniquity of a tyrannical parent or guardian. If a superstitious and cowardly old father happened to dream that a grand-child would prove fatal to his peace, he probably imitated the absurd precaution of Acrisius, and attempted to confine his daughter, like Danae, in a *subterranean chamber on a bed of brass* *; since cowardice and superstition are not to be corrected by the instructive history of that beautiful captive, and old men are even yet to learn, that female chastity is more endangered than protected by a rigorous confinement.

However frequent such examples of parental persecution may have been among the

* Καταγαιοι οικοδομημα, επ' αυτο δι η ο χαλκουι βα-
δαμος. Pausanias, p. 164.

Greeks,

Greeks, we do not find many traces of them in the history of that interesting, capricious people. There is indeed an amusing anecdote in Herodotus, which may serve to shew, that parents used to threaten their children with the dreaded continuance of a virgin life. Polycrates of Samos, being angry with his daughter for opposing his visit to the Persian noble, Orætes, because she had been alarmed by a terrific vision, threatens the affectionate but teasing girl, that if he returns in safety, she shall for a long time remain a virgin; to which she replies with great filial tenderness, by praying that his threat may be accomplished, since she would rather remain a virgin * *some time longer*, than be utterly deprived of her father.

We may, however, believe that parental tyranny was not so often exercised in attempts to keep a daughter single, as in those of marrying her to a person she abhorred. Perhaps in the latter case there was the greater

* Πλεν χρόνον. Herodotus, lib. iii.

probability of her becoming an Old Maid ; not from the spirit of contradiction, but because an unhappy girl, so persecuted, had no resource to shield her from a detested marriage, but the sacred altar of some maidenly power, who offered an asylum to virgins in distress.

That such places of refuge existed, we have a very striking proof in a passage of that singular poem, the Cassandra of Lycophon. The prophetess, in the midst of her misfortunes, breaks forth into the following declaration of her future glory :

*Nor among mortals shall my name become
 Extinct, and in Lethean darkness lost :
 To me the Daunian chiefs, and those who dwell
 Within the walls of marshy Dardanus,
 Shall build a temple upon Salpe's banks ;
 There shall the virgins, whensoever they wish
 To fly the marriage yoke, averse to join
 With suitors, vain of their Hecorean locks *,
 Or*

* It is worthy of observation, that Cassandra considers personal vanity in a man, as a blemish not inferior

*Or mark'd with some defect of form or birth,
There shall they fold my image in their arms,
Their firmest guard from nuptial tyranny *.*

I think it proper to add, that Cassandra, in promising this asylum to persecuted virgins, mentions a circumstance, which might lessen, perhaps, the influence of her protection: she declares, that her chaste votaries

ferior to deformity. As to Hecstean locks, the learned are not perfectly agreed on the manner in which the hair of Hecstor was dressed: but the ingenious editor of Lycophron seems to have fairly proved, that the Trojan hero set the fashion of wearing a *toupee*.

* Ου μὴν εἶμιον νηπιμιον ἀνδρωποῖς σεβας
 Ἔσται, μαρανθεν αὐτὴ ληθαίω σκοτῶ
 Ναιον δὲ μοι τευξῆσι Δαυλιων αἰκροί
 Σαλπῆς παρ' οὐχθαις, οἱ τε Δαρδανοὶ πῶλι
 Ναισι, λιμνῆς ἀγγχτεριμονες ποτῶν.
 Κηραι δὲ παρθενικῶν ἐκφυγεῖν ζυγοῦ
 Οταν θελωσι, νυμφίους ἀρονομενω
 Τες Ἐκτορεῖαις ηἰλαισμενες κομαις,
 Μορφῆς εχοντας σιφῶν, ἢ μομαρ γενες,
 Ἐμῶν περιπλῆξῃσιν ὠλαυαις, βρεταις,
 Ἀλλὰ καὶ μεγίστων πτωμενων νυμφευματων.

Lycophron, ver. 1126.

must disfigure their faces with a medicinal lotion, and dress themselves in the habit of the Furies. Whether, after annexing this condition to her patronage, she was likely or not to have many virgins in her sanctuary, is a point that I submit to the judgment of the ladies: observing, however, that none of my fair readers are proper judges of the question, except those, who have been persecuted by the addresses of a very odious suitor.

From the preceding part of this chapter, some readers of a sceptical cast may be inclined to doubt, if Greece ever produced an Old Maid. But if the testimony of a poet may be admitted, the question is explicitly decided. That the character really existed at Athens, we are expressly informed by Aristophanes, in a verse which I have adopted as a motto to this Essay; and which, for the sake of my curious fair readers, I shall now translate: endeavouring, at the same time, to collect as much light as I can from its comic author, concerning

cerning the real condition of Attic Old Maids.

In the comedy, which bears the name of *Lyfistrata*, that lady conceives the lively project of instructing her own sex to obtain an absolute dominion over the men; and to force them into a conclusion of those wars, by which Greece was perpetually distracted. As she proposes her pacific expedient with more wit than modesty, my fair readers will undoubtedly approve my delicacy in not giving them a minute account of it; and the more so, as it is sufficient for our present purpose to observe, that *Lyfistrata*, after touching on the vexations that war produces to married women, proceeds to the following sentiment of disinterested compassion:

*But let us wave OUR GRIEVANCES:— I
grieve
For virgins in their chambers waxing old*.*

* ————— Καθ' ημετερον μεν εστι.

Περι τωνδε κορων εν τοις θαλαμοις ητρασκων ανιωμαι.

It is very remarkable, that although Lyfistrata thus mentions the Old Maids as objects of her solicitude, the poet does not venture to introduce upon the stage a single elderly virgin; either in this play, or in a drama, where he had, I think, a still fairer occasion to display the character with all his licentious vivacity: I mean his comedy of the *Female Orators* *. A very short account of this witty, but indecent composition, will be sufficient to shew, that an Old Maid might have appeared among the persons of the drama with a very comic effect. Aristophanes undoubtedly intended, in this comedy, to ridicule the political whimsies of Plato, who contends, in his Republic, that property and women should be possessed in common. The poet exhibits, with infinite humour, the ludicrous evils arising from such a system. The women of Athens usurp the government; and Praxagora, the heroine of the comedy, adopting

* ΕΚΚΑΘΕΙΑΖΟΥΣΑΙ,

the ideas of Plato, establishes a new set of laws. I shall speak only of that which relates to my subject. By one of her statutes, "it is enacted, that no young man shall receive the favours of a young woman, till he has first gratified the inclinations of an old one." The modern reader might expect the poet to introduce, after this incident, even a *chorus of Old Maids*; but, licentious as he was, Aristophanes had more respect for the sisterhood. It is true, indeed, that he brings some elderly ladies on the stage, and represents them not a little solicitous to take advantage of a law so express in their favour; but they are very far from appearing in the character of Old Maids, as one of them gives us clearly to understand, that she has no claim to that title.

I would by no means insinuate, that the remarkable conduct of Aristophanes, in not exhibiting an Old Maid, might tempt us to suspect, that no such character existed in his time. The only inference I would draw from it is this: that the Old Maids of

Athens were either entirely sequestered from society, or guarded with such a religious veneration, as the most licentious of comic poets presumed not to violate. That such personages really existed, I not only think the speech of *Lysistrata* a sufficient proof; but I apprehend their condition, as she intimates, was owing to the frequency of war among the Grecian republics.

How far the women of this martial country considered themselves as neglected and aggrieved by that contentious spirit, which detained their warriors in distant fields of battle, we have a memorable example in the following very singular anecdote recorded by *Strabo*.

“ To revenge the death of their king,
“ *Teleclus*, who was slain as he went to sa-
“ crifice at *Messena*, the *Lacedæmonians*
“ engaged in a war against the *Messenians*,
“ and took an oath, either that they would
“ not return home till they had taken
“ *Messena*, or that they would all die in the
“ attempt.

“ In

“ In marching forth to this enterprize,
 “ they left only their very young and very
 “ old citizens to guard their own city. After
 “ the tenth year of the war, the women of
 “ Lacedæmon assembled, and sent a depu-
 “ tation of their own sex to the army, to
 “ reprove the men, as not engaging on
 “ equal terms with the Messenians; since
 “ these, remaining in their own country,
 “ were still producing children; while they,
 “ who had left their women desolate, were
 “ encamped in a state of hostility, at the
 “ risk of letting their own country decay
 “ by a deficiency of men. The Lacedæ-
 “ monians still respecting their oath, inge-
 “ niously contrived to pursue their remote
 “ military object, and at the same time pro-
 “ vide for the population of their coun-
 “ try *.”

In

* Προσιταξαν δε συγγινοσθαι ταις παρθενοις ἀπασαις
 απαντας ηγουμενοι πολυτικησιν μαλλον. Strabo, lib. vi.

I have followed Strabo in this singular history :
 but as it is related also by Justin, with some varia-
 tions, I shall insert his account of it in this note,
 for

In a state, where the women could present so tender, so patriotic, and so successful a remonstrance to their absent heroes, we

for the satisfaction of the curious reader. “ His
 “ igitur moribus ita brevi civitas (*Lacedæmon*) con-
 “ valuit, ut cum Messeniis, propter stupratas virgines
 “ suas, in solenni Messeniorum sacrificio bellum in-
 “ tulissent, gravissima se execratione obstrinxerint,
 “ non, prius quam Messenam expugnassent, reversu-
 “ ros; tantum sibi vel de viribus suis, vel de for-
 “ tuna, spondentes. Quæ res initium dissentionis
 “ Græciæ, et intestini belli causa et origo fuit. Ita-
 “ que cum, contra præsumptionem suam, annis decem
 “ in obsidione urbis tenerentur, et querelis uxorum
 “ post tam longam viduitatem revocarentur; veriti
 “ ne hac perseverantia belli gravius sibi quam Messe-
 “ niis nocerent — quippe illis quantum juventutis
 “ bello intercidat, mulierum fecunditate suppleri;
 “ sibi et belli damna assidua, et fecunditatem uxo-
 “ rum, absentibus viris, nullam esse — itaque legant
 “ juvenes ex eo genere militum qui post jusjurandum
 “ in supplementum venerant, quibus, Spartam re-
 “ missis, promiscuos omnium feminarum concubitus
 “ permisere; maturiorem futuram conceptionem rati,
 “ si eam singulæ per plures viros experirentur. Ex
 “ his nati, ob notam materni pudoris, Partheniæ
 “ vocati.”

Justin. lib. iii. c. 4.
 cannot,

cannot, I think, reasonably suppose that the number of Old Maids was very considerable. Perhaps in this point, as in all others of delicacy and refinement, Sparta was confessedly inferior to Athens. As the latter was more eminently distinguished by the patronage of the virgin goddess Minerva, we may justly believe her to have furnished to her guardian deity the more numerous train of elderly and immaculate votaries.

The mythological descriptions of the Grecian poets are generally founded on some historical fact; and the poem of Nonnus contains a very remarkable passage, which almost persuades me, that the women of Greece, at some early and obscure period of their history, were so vehemently devoted to the arts of Minerva, that they neglected or renounced the more interesting rites of Venus, and almost endangered the continuance of the world. As the passage, to which I allude, has the advantage of exhibiting Venus in a new point of view, it may amuse the reader to see it at full length. The poet
having

having informed us that his hero, Bacchus, gave a banquet to his attendants, proceeds thus :

** To this gay audience, as the goblet pass'd,
Leucus the self-taught Lesbian fram'd the song
Of Titans arm'd 'gainst Heaven: joyous he sung
The triumph of bigg-judging Jove; and how
In the dark caves of Tartarus he pent
Old Saturn, stealing his avenging fire,
And vainly cas'd in winter's watery helm.*

*But mild Lapethus, earth's pacific son,
Sat near the skilful bard; and from the feast
Gave him the choicest dainty: then requir'd
The sweet and favourite song, that well describes
The Cyprian Goddess at the loom employ'd,
And vying with the blue-eyed Queen of Arts.*

*He with sweet prelude sung, how Venus,
touch'd*

*With passion for the works of manual skill,
Held in unpractis'd bands Minerva's web,
And the light cestus of the Loves exchang'd
For the laborious shuttle. Coarse the thread*

* Τοιοῦ δι τρεπομεινοῖσι, &c. Nonni Dionys. lib. 24.

The Paphian Goddess spun—scarce of less size
Than the gross cordage, which of willow
fram'd

With some rude art, the old mechanic us'd
To splice the timber of his new-built bark.
She thro' the day, and thro' the night, intent
Hung o'er the loom of Pallas, and rejoic'd
In the new labour, foreign to her hand.

Frequent she smooth'd the vest; and having
pois'd

The dangling weights, her growing web she
plied,

Solicitous to play Minerva's part.

Nor trifling was her toil: but in her work

The massive thread projected: of itself

The woof of her enormous texture broke.

And of her double labour now she made

The sun a witness, and the conscious moon.

Part of her sportive train around her danc'd

Amusive: with a gay and rapid band

Pasiphae turn'd the wheel; while Pirho's care

Smooth'd the rough wool; and sweet Aglaia's

zeal

Gave to their common Queen the ready thread.

Now

*Now mortal life declin'd, and harmony,
Once the glad harbinger of bridal joy,
Mourn'd the neglect of marriage — hopeleſs
Love*

*Loos'd from his bow his ineffectual ſtring,
Viewing the barren unplough'd field of life.
No dulcet flute then ſounded, no ſtrill pipe
Uſher'd with feſtive glee the Nuptial God;
But earthly being waſted, and the chain
Of wedlock, that ſuſtains the world, diſſolv'd.*

*Minerva now her buſy rival ſaw;
In anger mix'd with tenderneſs ſhe view'd
The thick rough threads of the unſkilful fair:
Now ſhe inform'd the Gods, and ſpoke in ſcorn
Accuſing Venus, and her father Jove:—*

*“ Thy ordinance is chang'd, Celeſtial Sire!
“ Nor can I keep what all the Fates conſpir'd
“ To make my portion: tempted by my loom,
“ Thy daughter Venus now invades my right.
“ 'Tis not the ſiſter and the wife of Jove,
“ 'Tis not our ſovereign Juno, that uſurps
“ Minerva's province: no; this wrong is
“ done*

“ To the immortal Patroneſs of Arms

“ By

“ *By the soft Queen of Dalliance. For thy*
 “ *Heaven*

“ *When did th’ unwarlike Cythera fight ?*

“ *Where are the Titans by her cestus slain,*

“ *That she insults thy warrior ?—Dian ! say,*

“ *When in the centre of thy sacred grove*

“ *Hast thou beheld Minerva lead the chase ?*

“ *Or who in child-birth calls the Blue-eyed*
 “ *Queen ?”*

She spoke, and th’ inhabitants of Heaven
Assembled, eager for the wondrous fight
Of Venus at the loom.—Soon as they saw
The produce of her hand, unus’d to toil,
Scornful they roll’d the spurious work aside,
And with a smile sarcastic Hermes said :

“ *Thine is the distaff : to Minerva leave*

“ *Thy useless cestus ! — Since thy arm has*
 “ *strength*

“ *Nimble to dart the flying shuttle, take*

“ *The spear and ægis of the Martial Maid !*

“ *I know why Venus plies th’ applauded loom :*

“ *Thy wiles escape not me—thy bridegroom*

“ *Mars*

“ *Quick*

- " Quick from thy hand with amorous haste
 " requires
 " A vest of nuptial elegance : —for Mars
 " Form the rich robe ; but in thy recent work
 " Weave not the lance, for what are arms to
 " thee ?
 " No ! let thy variegated tints display
 " The Light-dispersing God, whose beams re-
 " veal'd
 " Thy latent paramour : or, if thou wilt,
 " Frame thy old chains, and let thy modest hand
 " Paint in thy glowing web thy spurious lord !
 " And thou too, Love, a distaff for thy arms,
 " For thy laborious mother twist the yarn,
 " That I may see the light-wing'd boy at work,
 " His bow a spindle, and his dart a thread !
 " With golden Venus 'broider Mars in gold ;
 " And let him bear a shuttle for his shield,
 " Weaving himself with Beauty's busy Queen !
 " But rather, Venus, from thy lovely hand
 " Toss to the wind thy threads !— thy cestus
 " take,
 " And o'er th' enjoyments of the earth again
 " Preside !

“ *Preside! for nature suffers, and the world
Wanders forlorn, while thou art at the loom.*”

*Thus as he spoke th’ Olympian synod smil’d;
And, casting far aside th’ unfinish’d web
In reverence to Pallas, Beauty’s Queen,
Kind cherisher of man’s increase, retir’d
To her own Cyprus—from her cestus Love
Bestow’d new charms on nature’s varying form,
And richly sow’d the well-plough’d waste of life.*

*Such was the carol of the Lesbian bard
On Cytherea, in the loom unskill’d,
Vying with Pallas, patroness of arts.*

I rejoice in being able to enliven and illustrate this philosophical Essay, by so apposite a passage from the very poet, however obscure, from whom Mr. Bryant has struck so much light in his profounder researches. I have given almost a literal translation of the preceding song; and I flatter myself that my candid readers, who are familiar with the decisive style of our antiquarians, will allow me to consider it as a *striking proof*, that a confederacy of very beautiful ancient spinsters was once formed in Greece, who

resolutely devoted themselves to the quiet labour of the loom, instead of assisting in the more important business of forming new citizens to support their country. Evident as this point must appear from these remarkable verses, it might puzzle, perhaps, even the very learned gentleman just mentioned, to decide at what period of the Grecian history these spinsters lived, and how long they persisted in their dangerous resolution. From the conclusion of the song I am inclined to believe, that they resembled a certain society of modern ladies, under the guidance of a seraphic president, intitled Madonella; a lady whose adventures are related with infinite humour in the first volume of the Tatler, and who, having devoted herself and her associates to a life of virgin purity and retirement, was rapidly and ingeniously induced to take an active part in the necessary increase of the world.

My desire to do all possible honour to the sisterhood, has made me extremely solicitous to discover every Attic Old Maid,

Maid, whose name might reflect a lustre on the community : but in my historical enquiries for this purpose, I have not been so successful as I expected to be. Many Grecian ladies have been celebrated for an attachment to philosophical studies : and I concluded that, in the list of these, I should find several individuals, who in chastity as well as learning were the faithful votaries of Minerva. Monsieur Menage has compiled, with extensive erudition, a little history of all the female philosophers, of whom any traces can be found in the writings of the ancients. Their number amounts to sixty-five ; but it is very remarkable, that if we except St. Catherine, there is only one lady in this long catalogue, who is celebrated for her virginity ; and how far that might be either real or meritorious may still be a question, as this lady did not live single, but was the wife of the philosopher Isidorus.

Thus disappointed among the ancient female professors of philosophy, I reflected with singular pleasure, that those more

venerable poetical old ladies, the Sibyls, would supply this defect; and of all the Old Maids that antiquity could furnish, I considered them as best entitled to the honourable distinction of being classed at the head of the sisterhood. I imagined their title to this high rank to be fully confirmed by the sentence of St. Jerome; who, speaking of them, in the first part of his eloquent invective against Jovinian, expressly says, that “virginity was their characteristic, and divination the reward of their virginity*.” But, examining the history of these reverend ladies with that attention which it deserves, I soon perceived that the fervent and generous saint had given them credit for a quality, which they were very far from possessing. The learned Servatius Gallæus, who has obliged the world with a thick quarto volume on those interesting

* *Quid referam Sibyllas Erithræam et Cumanam, et octo reliquas, nam Varro decem fuisse autumat, Quarum insigne virginitas est, et virginitatis præmium divinatio. Sanct. Hieron. adversus Jov. p. 185.*

females, completely exposes the mistake of St. Jerome, and laughs at him as a ridiculous champion, contending for the chastity of a harlot. Nor can we wonder that the credulity of the candid saint should be treated with derision, since one of the Sibyls, for whose continence he contends, very freely acknowledges, in a remarkable verse of her own *, that she had formerly indulged herself in all the criminal excesses of licentious passion.

After all my laborious endeavours to investigate the history of Old Maids in Greece, I must close this chapter upon them, with the modest ignorance of a Grecian philosopher, confessing all I know is that I know nothing: to the virginity of these ancient and perhaps ideal ladies, I may apply the following ingenious simile of a great modern poet:

*Like following life in creatures we dissect,
We lose it in the moment we detect.*

* Μυρία μιν μοι λικτρα, γαμος δ' υδεις ημεληθη.

C H A P. V.

*On the Vestals, and other Old Maids, of Rome
before the Christian Æra.*

AS the Roman empire was founded on a rape, and no less than six hundred and eighty-three Sabine virgins were forcibly converted into wives, according to the account of that accurate antiquarian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, we cannot expect to meet with many Old Maids in the early periods of the Roman history. Indeed, in the first ages of the republic, the patriotic ambition of the Romans, and the express letter of their law, operated with equal force against a life of celibacy. Cicero, in the opening of his third book, *De Legibus*, has given us the very words of the statute, by which the censors were directed, not only to examine and enroll the children of every Roman family, but to take care that
that

that no citizens should lead a single life* ; and we learn from a valuable fragment preserved in Aulus Gellius, that the most eminent senators of Rome considered marriage, not as a state of private enjoyment, but as a public indispensable burthen, which every man was bound to support for the good of the community. As the subject is curious and interesting, I shall present to my reader not only the fragment to which I allude, but a considerable passage from the author who has given it a place in his miscellaneous and amusing work.

The sixth chapter, in the first book of Aulus Gellius, begins in the following manner :

“ The oration which Metellus Numidicus, a man of dignity and eloquence, delivered, in his censorship, to exhort the people to matrimony, was read to a large and learned audience. In this oration it was thus written : ‘ If, Romans, we had

* Equitum peditumque prolem describunto: cœlibes esse prohibento.

“ the power of living without a wife, we
“ should all be free from that trouble ; but
“ since nature has so disposed it, that we
“ can neither live very commodiously with
“ them, nor without them exist at all, we
“ must provide rather for perpetual security,
“ than for transient pleasure.’ It appeared
“ to some, that the censor Metellus, whose
“ intention was to exhort the people to
“ marry, ought not to have made such a
“ confession concerning the trouble and
“ perpetual vexations of the married life,
“ since, instead of exhorting, he seemed ra-
“ ther to dissuade and deter. His oration,
“ they said, ought rather to have taken a
“ contrary turn ; he should have asserted,
“ that marriage in general was attended
“ with no vexations ; and if at any time it
“ appeared to produce some, these, he
“ should have said, were light and trifling,
“ very easily endured, and obliterated by a
“ superior portion of emolument and de-
“ light ; nay, that these very vexations
“ were neither common to all, nor owing
“ to

“ to the nature of the connection, but oc-
 “ casioned by the failings and injustice of
 “ particular husbands. But Titus Cas-
 “ tricius maintained, that Metellus had
 “ spoken both with truth and propriety.
 “ It is one thing, said he, to speak as a
 “ censor, and another to speak as a rheto-
 “ rician. We allow the latter to use ex-
 “ pressions fraudulent and bold, subtle and
 “ captious, if they have but a certain air of
 “ truth, and the power of exciting, by any
 “ artifice, the passions of the audience.
 “ He observed, moreover, that it is dis-
 “ graceful to a rhetorician, even in a bad
 “ cause, to leave any part of his ground de-
 “ serted and unfought; but for Metellus,
 “ he said, who spoke to the Roman people
 “ with that sanctity of character, as a man
 “ whose life had been distinguished by ac-
 “ cumulated honours, it became him to
 “ utter nothing but what he himself, and
 “ his whole audience, might esteem strictly
 “ true; and the more so, as he spoke upon
 “ a subject, of which the experience of
 “ every

“ every day enabled every man to judge.
 “ Confessing, therefore, those vexations
 “ which were notorious to all men, and de-
 “ serving, by that confession, the confi-
 “ dence of his auditors, he at last, with
 “ ease and rapidity, persuaded them of that
 “ important and essential point, that the
 “ preservation of the state depended on
 “ the prevalence of marriage.”

Without stopping to make any farther
 remarks on the eloquence of Metellus—
 from whose honest confession we might in-
 fer, that the most spirited of the old Ro-
 mans were not perfectly able to manage
 their wives—I shall only observe, that in the
 first ages of the republic, the censors seem
 to have attended very minutely to this part
 of their office, which had so strong a ten-
 dency to prevent the existence of Old
 Maids. Valerius Maximus informs us,
 that the censors Camillus and Posthumius
 levied a fine on those citizens who had
 grown old in a single life, and brought it to
 the public treasury. Plutarch also, in his
 Life

Life of Camillus, relates, that “ as the wars
“ had made many widows, he obliged such
“ of the men as lived single, partly by per-
“ suasion, and partly by threatening them
“ with fines, to marry those widows.”—

From the latter circumstance we may infer, that virgins of a marriageable age were at this period very scarce in Rome; and, indeed, we may believe, that, in the active patriotic days of the republic, there would not have existed a single Roman Old Maid, had not the singular religious establishment of the vestal virgins formed a kind of nursery for that respectable sisterhood to whom this work is devoted.

As I presume that my fair readers have but a slight acquaintance with these most interesting nuns of antiquity, although their name, surviving that fire for whose eternity they prayed, is still applied in poetical language to modern ladies of distinguished purity, I shall here insert the curious account of the Vestals, which is preserved in the above-mentioned most excellent anti-
quarian,

quarian, Dionysius, and I shall insert it in the words of his accurate and elegant translator, Mr. Spelman.

“ The virgins, who serve the Goddess,
“ were originally four, and elected by the
“ kings, according to the laws established
“ by Numa; but, afterwards, from the
“ multiplicity of their functions, their
“ number was increased to six, and has so
“ remained to this day. They live in the
“ temple of the Goddess, into which none
“ are hindered from entering in the day-
“ time; but it is not lawful for any man to
“ remain there in the night. They are
“ under a necessity of continuing unmar-
“ ried during the space of thirty years;
“ which time they employ in offering sa-
“ crifices, and performing other rites or-
“ dained by the law. During the first
“ ten years, their duty was to learn their
“ functions; in the second ten, to perform
“ them; and, during the remainder of their
“ time, to teach others. After the expiration
“ of the term of thirty years, nothing hin-
“ dered

“ dered such as desired it from marrying,
 “ upon their quitting their veils *, and the
 “ other ensigns of their priesthood; and
 “ some, though very few, have done this,
 “ the end of whose lives has not been so
 “ very happy as to tempt others to imitate
 “ them; so that the rest, looking upon their
 “ calamities as ominous, remain virgins in
 “ the temple of the Goddess till their death,
 “ and then the pontiffs again chuse another
 “ to supply the vacancy. They receive
 “ many distinguishing honours from their
 “ country, by which the desire of children

* Gellius quotes Antistius Labeo, a man of great learning in the time of Augustus, for many particulars relating to the Vestals; among the rest, that they could not be admitted under six, nor above ten years of age. I imagine, because it was necessary they should be virgins.—The election was performed in the following manner:—The Pontifex Maximus chose twenty virgins, who, in an assembly of the people, drew lots which of them should succeed the deceased Vestal; and the virgin upon whom the lot fell was taken by the Pontifex Maximus.

SPELMAN'S Note.
 “ and

“ and of marriage is taken away. They are
“ also subject to great punishment in case
“ of delinquency; which, by the law, the
“ pontiffs are appointed both to enquire
“ into and punish. Those Vestals who
“ commit lesser crimes, they whip with
“ rods; but if they suffer themselves to be
“ debauched, they are delivered up by the
“ pontiffs to the most shameful and the
“ most miserable death; for, while they
“ are yet alive, they are carried upon a
“ bier, with all the formality of a funeral,
“ their friends and relations attending
“ them with lamentations; being arrived
“ at the gate Collina, they are placed in a
“ subterraneous cell, prepared within the
“ walls, in their funeral attire, without any
“ sepulchral column, funeral rites, or other
“ customary solemnities. There seem to
“ be many indications of the priestesses who
“ does not perform the holy functions
“ with purity; but the principal is the ex-
“ tinction of the fire, which the Romans
“ dread above all misfortunes, looking
“ upon

“ upon it, from whatever cause it proceeds,
“ as an omen that portends the destruction
“ of their city; and they bring fire again
“ into the temple, with many expiatory
“ rites.—It is also well worth relating, in
“ what manner this Goddess has manifested
“ herself in favour of those virgins who
“ have been falsely accused.—It is said, that
“ once the fire being extinguished, through
“ some carelessness of Æmilia, who had
“ then the care of it, and had intrusted it
“ to another virgin, who was newly chosen
“ into their number, and then learning her
“ duty, the whole city was in great disorder,
“ and an enquiry made by the pontiffs,
“ whether some defilement of the
“ priestesses might not have occasioned the
“ extinction of the fire. Upon this they
“ say, that Æmilia, who was innocent,
“ but distracted at what had happened,
“ stretched out her hands to the altar, and,
“ in the presence of the priests and the rest
“ of the virgins, said, ‘Q Vesta, tutelary
“ Goddess of this city, if, during the space
“ of

“ of near thirty years, I have performed
“ the holy functions to thee with holiness
“ and justice, and have preserved a pure
“ mind and a chaste body, appear in my
“ defence, and assist me, and do not suffer
“ your priestess to die the most miserable of
“ all deaths; but if I have been guilty of
“ any impiety, let my punishment expiate
“ the guilt of the city.’—Having said this,
“ she tore off a piece of the linen garment
“ she had on, and threw it upon the altar.
“ After this prayer, they say, that from the
“ ashes, which had been long cold, and
“ retained no spark of fire, a great flame
“ shone forth through the linen; so that the
“ city did not stand in need, either of expi-
“ ations or of a new fire.—But what I am
“ going to relate is still more wonderful,
“ and more like a fable.—They say, that
“ somebody having falsely accused one of
“ the virgins, whose name was Tucia, and,
“ being unable to object to her the extinc-
“ tion of the fire, he supported his accusa-
“ tion by false inductions drawn from
“ probable

“ probable conjectures and testimonies;
“ and that the virgin, being ordered to
“ make her defence, said only this—that she
“ would clear herself from the accusation
“ by her actions; and, having said this,
“ and called upon the Goddess to be her
“ guide, she proceeded to the Tiber, the
“ pontiffs consenting, and all the citizens
“ attending her: when she came to the
“ river, she was so hardy as to under-
“ take a thing, which, of all others, is
“ looked upon as impossible, even to a
“ proverb; and, having taken water out of
“ the river in an empty sieve, and carried
“ it as far as the Forum, she poured it out
“ at the feet of the pontiffs; after which,
“ they say, her accuser, though great en-
“ quiry was made after him, could never
“ be found, either alive or dead *.”

If some of these calumniated Vestals were thus marvellously preserved, others seem to have been destroyed with the most

* Spelman's Dionysius, vol. i. p. 345.

savage barbarity, in spite of favourable occurrences that might have been humanely construed into a supernatural assertion of their innocence. In the rhetorical fragments of Seneca, a fair delinquent is mentioned, who, being convicted of impurity, was brought to suffer death, by being thrown from the summit of so high a rock; that it was terrific even to those who looked down from it in a state of security*. In the moment preceding her punishment, she appealed to Vesta in vindication of her purity; and, being flung from the precipice, descended without injury to the ground; when a set of inhuman orators maintained, that she ought to be brought back, and thrown a second time from the rock, alledging, that her wonderful escape rather indicated the anger than the protection of the Gods, since it was their design, not to save the life of this convicted criminal, but

* *Erat altitudo montis etiam securè despicientibus horrenda.*

to lengthen her punishment. Seneca does not inform us, that she perished in consequence of this cruel argument; and, indeed, I am tempted to hope, for the honour of human nature, that the whole story was nothing more than the fiction of a fanciful declaimer.

However this may be, the anecdote affords us a striking proof of the extreme severity with which the Romans regarded the frailty of a Vestal. Indeed, the same author furnishes us with a proof of this point yet more extraordinary; for he gives us part of a criminal oration against a Vestal, who was accused of incest, not for any evident act of incontinence, but merely for having written a verse, which forcibly expressed her sense of those pleasures, which the married fair ones enjoy. This curious morsel of heart-inspired poetry is happily preserved, and I must gratify my female reader with a translation of it, though I may injure the spirit of this feeling poetess

by converting her single *Latin* verse into the following *English* couplet :

*Happy the nymphs who gain the nuptial bed !
O let me die, if 'tis not sweet to wed * !*

We find, in the austere rhetorician, the most bitter invective against these natural sentiments of a tender female. "How expressive," cries the declaimer, "is her language ! how apparently flowing from the inmost soul, not only of an experienced, but of an enraptured woman !— She is guilty of incest, though not actually violated, who wishes for violation †."

Let me add, however, in justice to Seneca, that he gives us also the opposite side of the question. "We confess," replies the defender of this poetical virgin, "we confess to you, she is guilty of one crime : she is

* *Felices nuptæ ! moriar nisi nubere dulces est.*

† Quam expressa vox, quam ex imis visceribus emissa, non expertæ tantum, sed delectatæ. Incesta est etiam sine stupro, quæ cupit stuprum.

possessed

possessed of genius: how then could she fail to envy Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, or that happy parent who gave birth to Cato *?" — We are not told what was the fate of this ingenious Vestal; and she also, like her sister, who is mentioned in the preceding anecdote of the rock, might be a mere creature of fancy, and her offence invented for the exercise of declamation.

If our humanity is gratified by this supposition, yet other ancient writers afford us a melancholy assurance, that several unhappy Vestals actually suffered the savage fate of being buried alive. For my own part, when I read of such events, I feel that all the splendor of Roman glory is entirely eclipsed by these infernal acts of barbarous superstition. Let me remark, however, for the credit of the republic, that this punishment was introduced by the elder Tarquin.

* Unum crimen vobis confiteor: ingenium habet. Quidni invidet Corneliæ, matri Gracchorum? Quidni illi quæ Catonem peperit?

It was first inflicted in his reign, upon a hapless victim, whose name was Pinaria. I shall not enumerate all the unfortunate females, who shared this inhuman destiny, but content myself with observing, that, according to the calculation of the Abbè Nadal (who has given a copious history of the Vestals, in the Memoirs of the French Academy) from the establishment of these virgins under Numa, to their suppression in the reign of Theodosius, a period of about a thousand years, we cannot assign more to each century than a single victim. As to the number of honest and unsuspected Old Maids, which this religious society might produce in the same space of time, this is a point requiring so much nice calculation, that I shall leave it to be settled by our own indefatigable antiquarians.

We may fairly suppose, that, in spite of those unpromising omens, by which many of the elder Vestals were deterred from wedlock, according to the above-mentioned account of Dionysius, some of these superannuated

nuated priestesses were eager to assert their privilege, and ventured to marry. Indeed we have a singular proof that this sometimes happened, in a few remarkable verses of the Christian poet Prudentius, who has exhibited a picture of the Vestals, which is certainly painted with more zeal than politeness. As the passage is curious, and has not been fully quoted by the modern historian of these interesting ladies, I shall endeavour to amuse my fair readers by a poetical translation of it.

*Now let me search into the Vestal's fame!
To modesty's bright crown what seals her
claim?*

*The little slaves in childhood are immur'd,
Before the judgment of the mind matur'd
Can grow of virgin fame devoutly fond,
And spurn the weight of the connubial bond.
On joyless altars, which her heart must hate,
The captive virgin is condemn'd to wait;
Not scorning pleasure, but from bliss confin'd,
Untouch'd her body, not untouch'd her mind:*

*Restless the bed, on which unlov'd she lies,
 And for the loss of bridal rapture sighs :
 Hope fans this fire : for her the torch may flare,
 And nuptial fillets bind her hoary hair ;
 Since, when thro' stated years her vows are
 paid,*

*Vesta rejects the antiquated maid :
 While fit for nuptial joys, no nuptial kiss
 Enrich'd her bosom with a mother's bliss ;
 A veteran Vestal, now her priesthood ends,
 She quits the altar, on which youth attends,
 To Hymen's rites, a wrinkled bride ! she's
 led,
 And learns to wanton in an icy bed*.*

Though

- *Quæ nunc vestalis sit virginitatis honestas
 Discutiam, qua lege regat decus omne pudoris.
 Ac primum parvæ teneris capiuntur in annis,
 Ante voluntatis propriæ quam libera sceta,
 Laude pudicitiaæ fervens et amore decorum,
 Justa maritandæ condemnet vincula fexus.
 Captivus pudor ingratis addicitur aris,
 Nec contempta perit miseris, sed adempta voluptas
 Corpori intacti ; non mens intacta tenetur.
 Nec requies datur ulla toris, quibus inuiba cæcum*

Falsus,

Though the picture, which this pious poet has given us, may be considered as a piece of coarse painting, it was undoubtedly drawn from the life. In one point I fear he judged but too well; I mean, in the general unhappiness which he attributes to the younger Vestals. From the time and mode of their introduction into this religious servitude, we cannot suppose that they felt themselves very easy under it, when they grew old enough to acquire a knowledge of social life, and to experience the full force

*Vulnus, et amissas suspirat fœmina tœdas.
 Tum quia non totum spes salva interficit ignem :
 Nam refides quandoque faces adolere licebit,
 Festaque decrepitis obtendere flammea canis.
 Tempore præscripto membra intemerata requirens,
 Tandem virgineam fastidit Vesta senectam.
 Dum thalamis habilis tumuit vigor, irrita nullus
 Fœcundavit amor materno viscera partu.
 Nubit anus veterana, sacro perfuncta labore,
 Desertisque focis, quibus est famulata juventus,
 Transfert emeritas ad fulcra jugalia rugas,
 Discit et in gelido nova nupta tepescere lecto.*

Prudentius in Symmachum, ver. 583.

of all the natural passions. The Romans seem to have been sensible of the many mortifications, which must have attended the life of these lovely captives: and they endeavoured to compensate the evils of their condition, by frequently increasing the various honours that were paid to every individual of this holy order. Even the cold-blooded Augustus bestowed upon them some marks of his favour; and, as the historian Dion Cassius asserts, admitted these sequestered virgins to the enjoyment of all those civic rights, which the policy of Rome had confined to mothers. Among the many privileges that belonged to the Vestal, there was one that must have been peculiarly delightful to a feeling heart; I mean the privilege of saving the condemned. The Romans attached such an idea of sanctity to the person of a Vestal, that if a criminal, in his way to execution, was fortunate enough to meet one of these virgins, the bare sight of so pure a personage was sufficient to expiate his offences, and the happy incident immediately

diately restored him to life and liberty. On these occasions, however, it was necessary for the priestess to affirm, that such meeting was the mere effect of chance. Yet in the most turbulent and sanguinary days of the republic, the lives of some political delinquents have been saved by the supplication of the Vestals. The vindictive Sylla himself is said to have granted the life of Cæsar to the intercession of these compassionate virgins, highly provoked as he was by the resistance of that spirited and ambitious youth. Perhaps the extreme eagerness, which Cæsar afterwards shewed to obtain the office of supreme pontiff, was partly owing to his generous desire of displaying his gratitude to these holy virgins, to whose tenderness he was indebted for his life: for it was the duty of the supreme pontiff to superintend this female society; to retire into a place of privacy with every young Vestal, who had committed any trivial offence, and, having stripped the fair delinquent, to scourge her in proportion to her demerit.

demerit. It was perhaps in this high office that the celebrated humanity of this merciful tyrant was most uniformly exerted; and, however the Roman empire might justly murmur at his usurped authority, when we consider the characteristics of this great man, we may reasonably conclude, that no tender Vestal ever thought herself much aggrieved by falling under the rod of Cæsar. It had indeed been happy for this tender sisterhood, if the succeeding emperors had superintended them with that gentle spirit, which on such occasions displayed itself in this the most liberal and most accomplished of tyrants. But among the many monsters, who succeeded this extraordinary usurper in the government of the Roman world, there were some, who appear to have delighted in the horrible enormity of burying even an innocent Vestal alive. The younger Pliny has related a transaction of this kind, in which the spirit of the lovely victim appears in so interesting a light, that I shall insert the story in the words of Mr. Melmoth,

moth, that amiable translator, whose delicacy of sentiment, and elegance of language, have placed him on a level with his engaging original.

“ Domitian’s vengeance generally raged
“ with the greatest fury, where his evidence
“ failed him most. That emperor had de-
“ termined, that Cornelia Maximilla, one
“ of the Vestal virgins, should be buried
“ alive, from an extravagant notion, that
“ those kind of exemplary severities did
“ honour to his reign. Accordingly, in
“ the character of high-priest, or rather in-
“ deed in that of a lawless and cruel tyrant,
“ he convened the sacred college, not in the
“ pontifical court where they usually as-
“ semble, but at his villa near Alba; and
“ there (by a sentence no less wicked, as it
“ was passed when she was not present to de-
“ fend herself, than as it was the effect of pas-
“ sion and revenge) he condemned her of
“ having violated her Vestal vow. Yet he
“ himself had been guilty, not only of de-
“ bauching his brother’s daughter, but was
“ also necessary to her death: for that lady
“ being

“ being a widow, in order to conceal her
 “ shame, endeavoured to procure an abor-
 “ tion, and by that means lost her life.
 “ However, the priests were directed to see
 “ the sentence immediately performed upon
 “ Cornelia. As they were leading her to
 “ the place of execution, she called upon
 “ Vesta, and the rest of the Gods, to attest
 “ her virtue; and, amongst other exclama-
 “ tions, frequently cried out, *Is it possible*
 “ *that Caesar can think me polluted, under the*
 “ *influence of whose sacred functions he has*
 “ *conquered and triumphed?* Whether she
 “ said this in flattery or derision; whether
 “ it proceeded from a consciousness of her
 “ innocence, or contempt of the emperor;
 “ is not certain*; but she continued ex-
 “ claiming in this manner, till she came to
 “ the place of execution; to which she
 “ was led at least like a criminal, though
 “ perhaps not really one. As she was go-
 “ ing down into the subterraneous cavern,
 “ her gown hung upon something in the way;

* It was usual with Domitian to triumph, not only without a victory, but even after a defeat.

“ upon

“ upon which, turning back to disengage
 “ it, the executioner offered her his hand,
 “ which she refused with some horror, as
 “ if she could not touch it without impurity.
 “ Thus she preserved the appearance of
 “ a consummate chastity to the concluding
 “ scene of her life ;

“ *And her last care was decently to fall *.*”

“ Celer, likewise, a Roman knight, who
 “ was accused of being her gallant, during
 “ the whole time his sentence was executing
 “ upon him, in the square near the senate-
 “ house, persisted in saying, *What crime*
 “ *have I been guilty of ? I have been guilty of*
 “ *none †.*”

If the personal security of these unhappy virgins was thus wantonly invaded by the barbarity of the Pagan emperors, the chaste reputation of the sisterhood has been treated with equal cruelty and injustice by the out-

* Euripides, in his Tragedy of Hecuba.

† Melmoth's Pliny: the eleventh Letter of the fourth Book.

rageous zeal of some Christian authors. I shall not at present stop to comment on these, as I intend, in the subsequent part of my work, to speak of many holy writers, whose pious labours have been particularly directed to that most attractive subject, virginity.

It is not surprising, that some of them should, in the heat of their zeal, make very free with the reputation both of the young and old maids among the Pagans. We may forgive the excesses of mistaken piety; but when a critic of modern times—when an author, writing in a country that piques itself on delicacy and politeness—when a Frenchman, in the courteous age of Lewis the Fourteenth, rashly attempts to dishonour all the virgins of the heathen world, I esteem it my duty, as the voluntary champion of the insulted sisterhood, to expose and chastise this very arrogant and licentious delinquent. The person who has been guilty of this high misdemeanor, is Monsieur Morin; who, in the year 1713, produced, in the French Academy of Belles Lettres, a composition
8 entitl'd,

entitled, "A critical History of Celibacy." In the close of it, this presumptuous author not only traduces the poor mortal virgins of antiquity, but attempts to dishonour even the virgin Goddeses themselves.

That the sifterhood may be judges of his offence against them, I shall translate some passages of the treatise, in which their purity is so grievously insulted. I shall begin with the instances he produces, of that high esteem for chastity, which the heathens professed.

" Virginity passed amongst them for
 " something divine and sacred. The
 " Greeks called those who professed it
 " *Ἡθεοὺς*, *Demigods*, or equal to Gods; and
 " the Latin etymologists derive the word
 " *cœlebs* from *cælum*—*cœlebs* quasi *cœlestis*—
 " implying, that those who live in ce-
 " libacy are celestial beings. They re-
 " garded this virtue as a supernatural
 " grace,

" *Et plusquam fœminâ virgo!*

" *Virgin! a title bigger far than wife!*

“ It was a universal principle of Paganism,
 “ that the Gods were pleased with chastity :

“ *Casta placent Superis.*

“ Their sacrifices were not thought com-
 “ plet, without the assistance of a virgin.
 “ They might, indeed, begin them with-
 “ out this necessary minister, or make the
 “ libation (*libare*) ; but they could not
 “ complete the ceremony, which was ex-
 “ pressed by the Latin word *litare*. They
 “ were persuaded, that this virtue is what
 “ advances us nearest to Divinity.

“ They said, that as God is alone suffi-
 “ cient to himself, and finds in his own
 “ essence all that is necessary to him for
 “ soveraign beatitude, so also virgins, in-
 “ stead of foolishly seeking their happiness
 “ in the possession of other creatures, find
 “ it without wandering from themselves, in
 “ their purity, in their innocence, in their
 “ integrity*.

* Plotinus, lib. v. cap. 1.

“ Let

" Let us hear a Platonician * unfold
 " the sentiments of his sect on this system
 " of life: — ' It reflects honour on a
 " maiden to preserve with solicitude the
 " purity of her body and of her soul.
 " This condition gives her a great supe-
 " riority over all persons of her own sex.
 " Disengaged from the cares of the world,
 " she has the eyes of her mind continually
 " fixed upon a spiritual life, from whence
 " she derives all the delights of true
 " wedlock, in filling her heart with such
 " divine

* Naumachius.—The French authors are very apt to quote the ancients in such a manner as to perplex, instead of informing, their readers. Mr. Morin had only annexed the name Naumachius to this singular translation from a Greek author, whom he calls a Platonician. I was for some time unable to discover this obscure advocate of virginity; but at length have found, that he is one of the many poets but little known, whose fragments are preserved in the collection of Stobæus. The best critics are of opinion, says the intelligent Fabricius, that Naumachius was a Christian. Indeed, this appears highly probable from the passage in question; which I shall here insert,

“divine words, as enable her to conceive
 “and to produce the most luminous me-
 “ditations.’

“Here, indeed, we have magnificent
 “language, sublime ideas, and specula-
 “tions of singular beauty; but unluckily,

with a poetical version of it, to do all the justice in
 my power to this neglected encomiast of Old Maids.

Καλον μεν δεμας αγνον εχειν, αδιμητα τε μιμνει
 Παρθενικην καθαροισι τ' αιει μελεδημασι χαιρειν,
 Μητε βαρυτλητων λαγωνων περι φορτον αγουσαν,
 Μητε πονον τρομεροσαν αγαστονον ειλειθυης,
 Αλλ' ηδου βασιλειαν αφαιρων θηλυτερων,
 Ψυχης ομμα φαεινον υπερ βιοτοιο χερσαν
 Ενθα γαμοι κεδνοι και αληθεες ενθα μυγισα
 Θεσπεσιους επεεσσι νοηματα φαειναι τικτει.

Stobæus, p. 420. edit. 1609.

'Tis lovely, as a spotless maid to live,
 Blest in that joy which pure ideas give,
 Free from that load the pregnant form sustains,
 Nor trembling at Lucina's fearful pains;
 But o'er frail females rais'd in triumph high,
 Darting o'er life the mind's unclouded eye:

True wedlock thus in heavenly terms is taught,
 And the rapt virgin teems with radiant thought.

“ when

“ when compared with practice and reality,
 “ we shall find them empty words, and no-
 “ thing more. These fine declaimers were
 “ not destitute of light; but, as they knew
 “ God, and did not honour him as God, we
 “ may also say, that if they perceived the
 “ excellence of virgin purity, they suc-
 “ ceeded no better in the observation of
 “ its laws. Whoever is disposed to search
 “ into the secret history of such persons
 “ among them, as lived in celibacy, and
 “ affected the most scrupulous continence,
 “ may discover, if not gross debauchery, at
 “ least many absurdities, and an absolute
 “ farce. To begin with their Goddesses :
 “ —Vesta, the most ancient of all, was she
 “ not represented in her temple with an in-
 “ fant in her arms? Whence had she taken
 “ it?—Minerva had her Erichthonius, who
 “ was almost continually at her side. Her
 “ adventure with Vulcan is well known,
 “ and enables us to declare, that if she
 “ could on any ground pretend to the cha-
 “ racter of a virgin, she certainly had no
 “ claim to the title of *Intacta*, her com-

“ mon appellation. She had even some
“ temples consecrated to her honour in the
“ character of a mother.—Diana had also
“ her gallant Verbius, or Hippolytus, and,
“ still worse, her Endymion. The only
“ pleasure she took, in indulging her eyes
“ with the contemplation of his sleeping
“ form, tells us enough, and, indeed, too
“ much for a virgin.—The Muses, in their
“ time, passed for very liberal coquettes.
“ Myrtilus, who is quoted by Arnobius,
“ boldly affirmed, that they were the in-
“ dulgent intimates of a certain Megaleon,
“ who had a taste for music and poetry :
“ he even assigns children to all of them,
“ and mentions all their several names.
“ —Their Vestals, whose chastity they so
“ highly extolled, were only obliged to re-
“ main single to the age of thirty, when
“ they were restored to all their natural
“ rights : they did not fail to exercise these
“ rights before that period ; and we must
“ not believe that the Romans buried
“ alive all the Vestals, who indulged them-
“ selves

†

“ selves in that liberty ; no, only those in-
 “ discreet virgins, who had not learned the
 “ secret art of conducting themselves ac-
 “ cording to that useful maxim, Si non
 “ caste, saltem caute—if not with chastity,
 “ at least with caution *.”

Such are the unwarrantable liberties which Monsieur Morin has taken with Pagan virginity. — In answer to the attack which this petulant Frenchman has made on all the Old Maids of antiquity, both mortal and divine, I shall only observe, that the inference he draws from the Pagan sentiments he produces, is diametrically opposite to what it ought to be, not only according to the rules of delicacy and candour, but according to the laws of sound reasoning. Having shewn us very copiously, and very fairly, that the heathen ladies set the highest value on virginity, he ought undoubtedly to have said, that although the personal history of some ancient

* *Memoires de l'Academie; &c. tome quatrieme, p, 308.*

nymphs and goddeffes might induce us to believe that incontinence was prevalent in the days of Heathenism, yet, when we consider the forcible and graceful terms, in which some of these frail nymphs lament their own weakness, we ought certainly to conclude, that many honest virgins, though their names have not reached us, existed in the Pagan world, and maintained, in the midst of its tempting licentiousness, a very happy and honourable agreement between their principles and their practice.

Some of the Pagan Goddeffes should undoubtedly have been excepted from this general censure; three in particular, whose virginity (though it will not, I fear, reflect much honour on the sisterhood) was so unquestionable as to become a kind of proverb; I mean the Furies, whose maiden purity is asserted in a striking fragment of Sophocles*,

* *Αἱ παρθένοι Ερινυες.*

Sophocles apud Suidam.

It may perhaps extenuate the offence of Monsieur Morin against the sisterhood, to remark, that he was led into this wanton cruelty towards the virgins of Paganism, by his desire of paying an oblique compliment to those more numerous Old Maids, the Roman Catholic Nuns; of whom I shall speak at large in the subsequent part of this work. At present, I have a few more observations to make on the ladies of ancient Rome.—These ladies may be said, like the heroes of their country, to have reached the extremes both of virtue and of vice. There are two anecdotes in the Roman History, which particularly discover the variation of female manners: the first is beautifully recorded by Livy, in a few words; which must lose, I fear, a great part of their graceful energy by the following translation.

“ The Patrician matrons had expelled
 “ from their religious assembly Virginia,
 “ the daughter of Aulus, for violating the
 “ dignity of their order by her marriage
 “ with Volumnius, the Plebeian consul. A
 “ short altercation, arising from female
 “ resentment,

“ resentment, blazed forth in a general contest of indignant spirits; when Virginia justly boasted, that she had entered the temple of Patrician Modesty, in the character of a modest Patrician, the wife only of one man, to whom she was led a virgin; and that she could neither repent of that husband, nor of his honours and exploits. She enhanced, by a very noble deed, the magnanimity of her speech:—she set apart a sufficient space in the house where she resided for a moderate sanctuary; she placed in it an altar; and, having assembled the Plebeian matrons, and lamented to them the injustice of the Patricians; ‘ This altar,’ she said, ‘ I dedicate to Plebeian Modesty; and I exhort you, that, as there exists among the men of this city a rivalry in valour, there may be such also in modesty among its matrons. Let it be your endeavour, that this altar may be, if possible, more sanctified than theirs, and acquire the reputation of being attended by chaster votaries!’ ”

To this pleasing picture of spirited modesty, we find a striking and melancholy contrast in the conduct of those Roman ladies, who, in the consulship of Acilius Balbus and Porcius Cato, were so extravagantly licentious, that the senate thought proper to consult the Sibylline oracle for some method of averting the public evils, arising from female depravity: they were directed to supplicate the Divinity who presided over the tender affections; and accordingly built a new temple to Venus, under the title of Verticordia—The Corrector of the Heart.

This extraordinary fact is related by Valerius Maximus, and clearly alluded to in the following verses of Ovid.

* *Propitiate Venus!—on that heavenly friend
Your charms, your manners, and your fame
depend:*

* *Supplicibus verbis illam placate: sub illa
Et forma et mores et bona fama manent.
Romæ pudicitia proavorum tempore lapsa est:
Cumæam, vetores, consulistis animum;
Templa jubet Veneri fieri: quibus ordine factis,
Inde Venus verso nomina corde tenet.*

Ovid. Fast. Lib. iv. v. 154.

*In Rome of old weak Chastity decay'd :
 Our fires consulted the Cumæan Maid :
 She cried—To Venus a new temple frame !
 Hence the kind Goddess holds her moral name.*

Ovid seems to have been as partial to the fair sex as any individual of the poetical choir; yet we cannot say that his poetry, taken altogether, leads us to think very highly of Roman chastity, in the celebrated age of Augustus. If the state of manners could be fairly estimated from the suspicious testimony of a satirical poet, we might suppose the condition of this tender virtue still more deplorable in the succeeding reigns; and we might absolutely despair of finding a single Roman Old Maid after the days of Juvenal. This outrageous declaimer, in that most gross and virulent libel against the fair sex, his sixth Satire, considers the man as perfectly insane, who expects to meet with a chaste woman in Rome. But such indelicate sarcasms are disgraceful only to their author; and I doubt not but many good wives, and virgins (for such surely existed,

isted, even in the days of Juvenal) despised the gross invective of this frantic moralist, as much as those of modern times have despised the less indecent sarcasm of Pope, that

“ Every woman is at heart a rake.”

It is very remarkable, that the three satirists, who have written against the lovely part of the creation with the most acrimonious hostility, were three old bachelors: at least we have never heard that Juvenal had a wife; and of Boileau and Pope we know, not only that they were never married, but in all probability never flattered by the endearments of any amiable woman. I have made this remark, because it will naturally lead me to what reflects the highest honour on the sisterhood—a comparison between old bachelors and Old Maids in an important point, which very forcibly expresses the different characters of each community.

We find that these three poetical and
moral

moral old batchelors, in those raging fits of sour spleen, which they falsely supposed the enthusiasm of genuine virtue, calumniated woman, though a gentle being, from whom they had received no injury, and with whom they could never form a perfect acquaintance. Now observe the contrast; among all the Old Maids who have written either verse or prose—and their number is infinite—I never heard of one, who had vented her ill-humour in such bitter and contemptuous invectives against the stronger and more injurious sex. No; the ancient virgin has that natural tenderness and generosity of heart, that, whatever her ignorance of man may be, whatever ground she may have to complain of his neglect, she still considers him, to use the words of Shakespeare, as the paragon of animals. The excess of virtue has been known, in many male moralists, to degenerate into a sullen and preposterous contempt and hatred towards the whole human race; but, for the honour of the fair sex in general, and
of

of my candid friends the Old Maids in particular, I beg it may be for ever remembered, that they are perfectly free from that most disgusting and most wretched of all mental infirmities, misanthropy.

But to return to the main subject of my present chapter, the Old Maids of ancient Rome.—I cannot indeed exhibit such a list of these ladies as I could wish; but the deficiency, without doubt, arises not from the rarity of the character, but from the inexcusable inaccuracy, which I have before lamented in the ancient historians and biographers, who have failed to commemorate the merits of the sisterhood. I am happy, however, in being able to conclude, and to embellish this chapter with the name of one illustrious Old Maid, who may be regarded as a peculiar favourite of Minerva, since she was not only eminent for her chastity, but excelled in one of the most elegant among the arts. I mean the celebrated Lala, who, though not a native of Rome, exercised the profession of painting in that city, during

during the youth of Marcus Varro. He probably gave a full description of this amiable person, in one of those 490 volumes, which he is said to have written. Though the works of this most learned Roman have unfortunately perished, the name and merits of Lala have happily survived. We are told, that she painted with great rapidity; that she excelled in the portraits of women; and that her pictures bore a price superior to what was given to the most skilful painters of her time. Her claim to honourable distinction in this volume, is grounded on the unquestionable evidence of that profound naturalist, antiquarian, and connoisseur, the elder Pliny; who certainly could not be deceived in such a point of natural history; and who asserts, in the most positive language, that Lala was a perpetual virgin.

With this lady I must close my very imperfect account of the Pagan virgins; and, when I reflect how many good but unknown Old Maids existed before the chaste

Lala, I cannot help breathing a sigh of regret, similar to that which Horace expresses in reflecting on the many brave, but uncelebrated warriors who lived before Agamemnon;

*Chaste was their fame, yet now in darkness
drown'd,
Their hapless virtue no kind herald found.*

But let us hasten to console ourselves with a view of the more fortunate ancient virgins of the Christian sisterhood; these, instead of wanting an encomiast, have perhaps been sometimes extolled in too lavish panegyrics: as this, however, is a question of great delicacy, we will proceed to a candid and ample discussion of it, in our subsequent chapters.—I shall begin with considering the infinite increase of Old Maids after the establishment of the Christian æra.

END OF THE THIRD BOOK.

B O O K I V.

**ON OLD MAIDS, AFTER THE
CHRISTIAN ÆRA.**

C H A P. I.

*On the infinite Increase of Old Maids after
the Christian Æra.*

I Am now arrived at the most hazardous part of this important Essay; and I feel that the future conduct of it must be attended with many difficulties. To do full justice to my maiden subject, I hold it necessary to dwell on several of those ancient fathers of the church, who considered virginity as the darling object of their pious lucubrations: but, as I wish to render these volumes attractive to every class of readers, let me here declare, that I shall zealously endeavour

endeavour to speak of all the saints, who have touched on this interesting topic before me, in such a manner, that I may hope not to tire the volatile, or offend the pious.

By the pious, I mean only the good people of our reformed religion, being aware that I must expect little or no mercy from a Catholic reader; for although I declare myself the friend and champion of the honest Protestant Old Maid, I am very far from being an advocate for monastic virginity. Indeed, it is with pity and indignation, that I consider how many thousand of the most lovely females have been immured, to languish in a cloister, by parental tyranny; or have been led, by the insinuating arts of superstition, to enter on a voluntary seclusion from all the most amiable duties and delights of human life. Though I am willing to believe, that sincere purity has often resided in a convent, I cannot but consider the Protestant Old Maid, who supports with chearful content a virginity, which is the consequence rather of accident and neces-

sity, than of choice, as a more exemplary and interesting personage than the Romish nun, who, in her zeal for chastity, renounces mankind for ever. I am convinced, that the former character, neglected and depreciated as it may have been, is more truly consonant to the genuine spirit of Christianity, that simple and sublime religion, which is a friend to social happiness, and an enemy to every selfish principle.

Since nature, reason, and faith may all incline us to co-operate in the preservation of our species, it is astonishing, that any powers could be found sufficient to counteract their united influence, and to make a number of human beings persist in renouncing the most precious privilege of their existence, the privilege of communicating their own enjoyments, both transient and eternal, to new beings, more dear to them than their own personal advantage. The severe pains of child-birth are graciously compensated by such a profusion of tender delight, that the most selfish timidity could

could not decline the burthen, after thinking on its reward. The more we reflect on the generous energy of the maternal feelings, the more shall we be surpris'd at the multitudes of women; who, in the first ages of Christianity, devoted themselves to a single life. The whole sex appears to have been inflam'd with a passion for virginity; and a respectable author, who has lately given us an amusing history of women, informs us, that in the fourth century, a single city contained no less than twenty thousand virgins, who had taken a vow of perpetual chastity*. Notwithstanding the extreme humility which they profess'd, I am afraid there was a strong mixture of secret pride in this unreasonable conduct. All the primitive Christian maidens seem to have coveted such a sepulchral panegyric as the following couplet bestows on our queen Elizabeth:

* Alexander's History of Women, Oct. edit. p. 415, vol. II.—This book would be more valuable, if the ingenious writer had quoted his authorities.

*She was and is (what can there more be said?)
On earth the chief, in heaven the second
maid*.*

Perhaps the nuns of the ancient church had pretensions to this ideal sanctity less equivocal than those of our virgin queen, However this may be, it is a curious and interesting speculation to search into the immediate causes of such wonderful facts; and to examine the particular source of those ideas, that could so forcibly counteract the tender bias of nature in the female character of those times. The ardent zeal with which the early Christians embraced a life of celibacy, may be ascribed to two causes: first, to the advice of St. Paul, who strongly dissuades them from marriage; and secondly, to those flaming pieces of ecclesiastical eloquence, in which the fathers of the church were pleased to magnify virginity, and to pour into the heated imagination of their

* Camden's Remains, p. 524.

female

female disciples an unquenchable love for this imaginary virtue. As I advance in this Essay, I shall give a particular account of these remarkable orations. In the present chapter, I shall confine myself to consider the advice of St. Paul, and the immediate consequences which it seems to have produced.

I trust that I shall not be thought to fail in that respect, which every sincere Christian owes to this eloquent and admirable apostle, by declaring that I have frequently read his strong exhortation to a life of celibacy with surprise and concern. His Epistle to the Corinthians, in which he affirms, that it is better not to marry, instead of making me a convert to his opinion, induces me to exclaim with Milton,

*Our Maker bids increase ; who bids abstain
But our destroyer, foe to God and Man ?*

It is true indeed that St. Paul is very far from uttering such a prohibition ; and in his first Epistle to Timothy he foretels,

K 4. that

that this prohibitory doctrine shall arise from seducing spirits *. In the second chapter of the same Epistle, he appears to be so far from an advocate for celibacy, that he almost seems to intimate, that women must work out their salvation by the production of children:— yet his address to the Corinthians is so pointed in favour of a single life, his sarcastic expression, “It is better to marry than to burn,” might, to many weak, or prudish, or enthusiastic females, exhibit wedlock in such a degrading point of view, that perhaps his strong exhortation to a life of virginity might influence many of his maiden disciples, more forcibly than an absolute prohibition of marriage could have done. At all events, when we consider the extensive veneration which was justly paid to this apostle, we may fairly conclude, that the multitude of primitive Old Maids was infinitely increased by his First Epistle to the Corinthians. As St. Paul expressly tells

* 1 Tim. iv,

† 1 Tim. ii. 14.

us, in this Epistle, that, “concerning virgins, “he had no commandment of the Lord *;” we may question, without a shadow of impiety, the utility of his advice.—I confess, that at the first view, it appeared to my understanding not consistent with that benevolent and temperate wisdom, which certainly adorned the character of St. Paul. But the excellent Mr. Locke, in a note to his Paraphrase of this Epistle, suggests an idea that may justify the apostle’s dissuasion from marriage, not as a general precept, but as a temporary counsel. It is supposed by our great Christian philosopher, that St. Paul might speak, in this Epistle, “*out of a prophetic foresight of the approaching persecution under Nero,*” On this supposition he might dissuade his disciples from marriage, not as an enemy to connubial enjoyments, but as fearing they would more sensibly feel the misery of their impending oppression, if they were torn from all the delightful comforts of a married life,

* Chap. vii. ver. 25.

However

However wise and well-timed the apostle's advice might be, we have reason to apprehend, that the extravagant attachment to virginity, which some of his female disciples conceived, was the occasion of many domestic quarrels, and much private distress. At least we have one memorable example of this effect, if we may give any credit to the marvellous adventures of his follower Thecla, who is celebrated by several fathers of the church as the first and most illustrious of the virgin martyrs. As the anecdotes of this lady are very remarkable, I shall extract a little sketch of her life from Jacobus Philippus Bergomensis, who published, in 1497, a Latin folio *on illustrious Women*, addressed to Beatrice queen of Bohemia.

“ Thecla was a native of Iconium, a city
 “ of Asia; she was born in an elevated
 “ rank of life, and possessed, with the advan-
 “ tages of birth, the superior attractions of
 “ beauty. Her mother Theoclia was pre-
 “ paring for the delight of marrying her
 § “ daughter

“ daughter to a noble and comely youth,
 “ whose name was Thamirus, when St.
 “ Paul arriving in their city, happened to
 “ lodge in the house adjoining to that in
 “ which Thecla resided. The virgin was
 “ so fascinated by the eloquence of the
 “ apostle, that no intreaties could prevail
 “ on her to quit the window, where she had
 “ placed herself to hear him, and where she
 “ sat for three days without tasting any
 “ food *. Theoclia lamented, to the des-
 “ tined husband of her daughter, this won-
 “ derful fascination. But the lover and the
 “ parent were equally unsuccessful in their
 “ attempts, to divert the maiden from her
 “ attachment to the preacher. The morti-
 “ fied Thamirus departed in anger, to en-
 “ quire into the character and doctrine of
 “ this new prophet, whose discourse had

* In fenestra itaque domus suæ per triduum quasi
 fui oblita, ad audiendum hominem pellecta, sine ullo
 prorsus cibo confedit, ut inde a nemine amoveri potu-
 erit.

Jac. Bergomensis, page 61.

“ produced

“ produced so marvellous an effect on his
“ alienated mistress. Having learned that
“ he was a Christian, who, by his exhorta-
“ tions, deterred virgins from wedlock, the
“ indignant lover gave full scope to his re-
“ sentment, and delivered the preacher in
“ bonds to the magistrate Sextilius, by
“ whose order he was committed to prison.
“ The devout Thecla, having bribed the
“ gaoler, contrived still to feast on the elo-
“ quence of the imprisoned apostle. Being
“ detected in her secret visits, she was car-
“ ried before the proconsul; where, being
“ solicited to fulfil her engagement with
“ Thamirus, she disdained to reply. The
“ enraged proconsul, ordering the apostle to
“ be scourged, and driven from the city,
“ condemned the obstinate virgin to perish
“ in the flames. But Thecla, being already
“ fortified by the instructions of Paul, and
“ arming herself with the sign of the cross,
“ escaped unhurt and triumphant from the
“ fire into which she was thrown; and,
“ quitting her native city, went to Antioch
“ with

“ with Paul. The præfect of Antioch be-
 “ came enamoured of her beauty, and at-
 “ tempted to violate her chastity ; but the
 “ resolute virgin so vigorously resisted the
 “ princely ravisher, that she beat his crown
 “ from his head, tore his mantle asunder,
 “ and threw him into a state of idiotism, or
 “ frenzy. She was now accused of for-
 “ cery, and condemned to be devoured by
 “ wild beasts. She marched, however, un-
 “ daunted to her punishment ; and happily
 “ found in her purity a preservative against
 “ the fury of bears and lions. The heart
 “ of the proconsul was softened by her mi-
 “ raculous preservation ; and she obtained
 “ her freedom.—After these adventures, she
 “ had a joyful meeting with her preceptor
 “ Paul at Smyrna ; and, having received
 “ from him every instruction that could ren-
 “ der her innocence more perfect, she retired
 “ to Seleucia ; where, having communicated
 “ her own virtues to many virgin compa-
 “ nions, she closed a life of sanctity, il-
 “ lustrated by many miracles, in the month
 “ of

“ of October, and in the sixty-ninth year
“ of our Lord.”

Such is the history which a reverend encomiast of the fair sex has given of this illustrious virgin; and it corresponds with the account of other pious biographers, who have expatiated on the merits of the chaste Thecla, in their various Lives of the Saints. The enlightened readers of our country will, perhaps, consider with an equal degree of incredulity the different adventures of this wonderful maiden. It is hardly more probable that St. Paul should instigate a young damsel to disobey her parent, and to violate a nuptial promise, than that the hungry and enraged beasts of the forest should be rendered harmless and gentle by the influence of virginity. But in whatever light these asserted facts may appear to the intelligent readers of our age and country, it is certain they were received, during many centuries, with implicit belief and veneration. The extraordinary merits of Thecla were a favourite topic

pic with many holy preachers, and St. Ambrose in particular descants upon them in so high a strain, that his discourse must have had great effect upon his virgin disciples. “ * Let Thecla,” exclaims the holy father, in the second division of his Treatise upon Virgins, “ let Thecla teach you to
 “ suffer martyrdom ; who, flying from the
 “ bonds of matrimony, and condemned
 “ by the fury of her betrothed husband,
 “ changed even the nature of savage beasts,
 “ by inspiring them with reverence for vir-
 “ ginity. When she was exposed to be
 “ devoured,

* Thecla doceat immolari, quæ copulam fugiens nuptialem, et sponsi furore damnata, naturam etiam bestiarum virginitatis veneratione mutavit. Namque parata ad feras, cum aspectus quoque declinaret virorum, ac vitalia ipsa sæpe offerret leoni, fecit ut qui impudicos detulerant. oculos, pudicos referrent. Cernere erat lingentem pedes bestiam, cubitare humi, muto testificantem sono, quod sacrum virginis corpus violare non posset. Ergo adorabat prædam suam bestia ; et propriæ oblita naturæ, naturam induerat quam homines amiserant. Videres, quadam naturæ transfusione, homines feritate indutos sævitiam imperare

“ devoured, when she shrunk from the
 “ sight of men, and offered her vitals to
 “ the lion, she converted the cruel wan-
 “ tonness of the spectators into a respect
 “ for modesty: then might you have seen
 “ a wild beast fawning at her feet, and tes-
 “ tifying, by a gentle murmur, that he had
 “ not power to violate the sacred body of
 “ a virgin. The savage adored his prey,
 “ and, forgetting his own natural qualities,
 “ assumed that nature which man had
 “ thrown off. You might see, by this in-

rare bestię; bestiam exosculantem pedes virginis,
 docere quid homines facere deberent. Tantum ha-
 bet virginitas admirationis, ut eam etiam leones mi-
 rentur. Non impios cibis flexit, non citatos impe-
 tus rapuit, non stimulos ira exasperavit, non usus
 decepit assuetos, non feros natura possedit; docuerunt
 religionem, dum adorant martyrem; docuerunt etiam
 castitatem, dum virgini nihil aliud nisi plantas exos-
 culantur, demersis in terram oculis, tanquam verecun-
 dantibus, *ne mas aliquis vel bestia virginem nudam*
videret.

Divi Ambrosii de Virginibus,

lib. ii. p. 80.

“ terchange

“terchange of nature, man assuming fero-
 “city, and commanding a beast to be
 “cruel; and a beast instructing man in his
 “duty, by kissing the feet of a virgin. So
 “truly admirable is virginity, that even,
 “lions revere it! The sight of their prey
 “did not allure them, though exasperated
 “by hunger; anger did not provoke
 “them, though stimulated by the rage of
 “the people; their custom of devouring
 “criminals did not deceive them; their
 “natural qualities ceased to operate upon
 “them! They taught us religion, by adoring
 “the martyr; they taught us even chastity,
 “by confining their kisses to the feet of the
 “maiden, declining their eyes to the earth,
 “as if ashamed that any male creature,
 “though only a savage beast, should look
 “upon a naked virgin.”

When the merits of Thecla were thus
 celebrated by one of the most popular and
 eloquent of the episcopal saints, we may
 reasonably imagine that female ambition
 was universally awakened: the warm ima-

gination of pious maidens was heated to such a pitch of enthusiasm, that a passion for the glory of martyrdom extinguished all their natural affections; instead of wishing to become the mothers of well-educated children, they desired only the purity and the renown of Thecla, to be adored by lions, and extolled by saints. How far the most eminent fathers of the church conspired to inflame and perpetuate this supernatural ambition in the tender sex, I shall endeavour to shew in some succeeding chapters, concluding the present with a few remarks on the illustrious Thecla.—This holy maiden, being celebrated as the familiar friend and disciple of an apostle, was generally considered as a model for every well-disposed virgin; and, perhaps, in the very long list of female saints, it is impossible to pitch on any individual, whose miraculous adventures had so powerful an effect in diffusing an universal ardour for the honours of virginity, and increasing the multitude of Old Maids. Nor is it in the dark
ages

ages alone that we meet with panegyrics on the immaculate Thecla. In the sixteenth century, she inspired a Doctor of the Sorbonne with Poetry. Claude d'Espence, who is styled by his biographer the most judicious and moderate doctor of his time, composed, in Latin verse, an heroic epistle from Thecla to St. Paul*.

* Printed at Paris, 1619, in a folio, containing all the Latin works of D'Espence.

CHAPTER II.

*On some of the most early Christian Authors,
who have written on Virginitv—Tertullian
—St. Cyprian.—On the Canonical Virgins.*

SOME ages elapsed before the Christian virgins were settled in regular communities; it was not till the close of the fourth century, that the first nunnery was erected, in Verona, by Zeno, the bishop of that city*. But the Christian writers of a
much

* See Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, translated by Maclaine, vol. i. p. 307.—The origin of nunneries is a point involved in considerable obscurity, and has given birth to many pious and dull disputes. St. Syncretica, of Alexandria, has been celebrated as the mother of Nuns, as St. Antony has been revered as the father of Monks; but the history of this holy parent of religious Old Maids is not very clearly established. The curious reader, who wishes to consult the various opinions concerning her, may find them collected

much earlier date abundantly prove, that multitudes of pious maidens had devoted themselves to a single life, before any convents were raised for their reception.

Tertullian, who wrote in the second and third century, composed a very curious treatise, to persuade these holy virgins to cover their faces with a veil; and one argument that he urges for this practice is so singular, that I cannot forbear to insert it:—He tells them, it is highly proper to shade a countenance of such dangerous power as to occasion the fall of angels from heaven (alluding to the text of Genesis, in which the sons of God are said to have been connected with the daughters of men); “who can presume,” says Tertullian, “that such angels would chuse to cohabit with the relics of mortal impurity, and not rather burn for virginity, that flower,

lected in the preliminary dissertation to an elaborate work, intituled, *Histoire des Ordres Monastiques, Religieux & Militaires*, printed at Paris, in eight quarto volumes.

“ which even excuses the incontinence of
“ man * ? ”

The next eminent Christian writer, who treats expressly of virgins, is St. Cyprian; who has addressed to them a discourse of admonition on their conduct and apparel. The good bishop of Carthage declaims against ear-rings, paint, and false hair, as inventions of the devil, inconsistent with that simplicity of habit by which virgins should be distinguished. He exhorts them to avoid public baths and nuptial feasts; he felicitates them on their escaping the curse of child-birth; and encourages them to persevere in their chastity, by an assurance, that their rank is glorious, and that the purity of a virgin approaches very near to the perseverance of a martyr †.

* *Quis præsumere potest, tales angelos maculata jam corpora et humanæ libidinis reliquias desiderasse, ut non ad virgines potius exarferint, quarum flos etiam humanam libidinem excusat.*

Tertull. de Virgin. Veland. p. 222.

† *Quarum ad gloriam merces secunda est, fit et virtus ad tolerantiam proxima.* Sanct. Cyprian.

de Habitu Virg. p. 102.

Such

Such is the general tenor of St. Cyprian's address to the pious sifterhood ; but I cannot collect any light, either from Cyprian or Tertullian, concerning the number of Christian females, who had in their times made a public profession of virginity. There are, however, two circumstances, which may induce us to believe, that these holy maidens amounted, even at this period, to an immense multitude.—In the first place, a veneration for celibacy was carried to such excesses in the second century, that many preachers declaimed against marriage as the suggestion of the devil. This gloomy doctrine is said to have been first taught by Saturninus of Antioch. The learned Bingham, in his *Christian Antiquities*, has enumerated many sects who were addicted to this, perhaps the most absurd of all superstitions ; which yet prevailed to such a degree, and was so forcibly supported by Eustathius, a preacher of the fourth century, that, to use the words of Bingham, “ many women forsook their

L 4 “ husbands,

“ husbands, and husbands their wives, from
“ the persuasion, that no one who lived in a
“ married state could have any hope in
“ God.”

The prevalence of such an idea had certainly a strong tendency to increase the number of those religious maidens, who, still residing under the roof of their parents, yet made a public profession of virginity, by enrolling their names in the book or canon of the church, and thence acquired the title of Canonical Virgins.

But there was a second circumstance, peculiar to this early period, which had, perhaps, an effect equally powerful and extensive in augmenting this maiden community; I mean a very extraordinary custom, which crept into the primitive church, to the scandal of the good, and the entertainment of the licentious, the custom (condemned indeed by saints and councils, yet sometimes avowed and vindicated by its adherents) which permitted the canonical virgins to attach themselves to a favourite preceptor,

preceptor, and even to share his bed, without ceasing to make a public profession of their virginity.

This fact is so singular, that the modern sceptical reader may incline, perhaps, to question the truth of it. Many witnesses concur in its support; and, as the consideration of so strange a custom may instruct us in the state of ancient manners, I doubt not but the more discreet virgins of the present age will thank me for exhibiting to their view the very dangerous temerity of their primitive sisters.

Among the Epistles of St. Cyprian, there is one addressed to Pomponius, which shews us, in very explicit language, the good bishop's opinion of these resolute, or rather rash virgins, who, confessing that they slept with men, still asserted their integrity*. The saint very forcibly con-

* *Quæ se cum viris dormisse confessæ sint, asseverare se integras esse. Sanct. Cyp. Epist. iv.*

demns their conduct; and justly observes, that, however innocent they may be, no one can long be safe, who approaches so near to danger. Saint Cyprian proceeds to censure the boldness of those more determined virgins, who attempted to justify their perseverance in so perilous a practice:—"Let not any one," says the wary saint, "consider herself as sufficiently excused or defended, by offering her person to the test of inspection, since the professional judges of virginity are frequently deceived *." From these singular expressions, we may conceive how strenuously the canonical virgins contended for the maintenance of this tempting, though dangerous custom, which, to use the metaphor of Dodwell, "had taken deep root in the church."—This earned commentator on St. Cyprian has il-

* *Nec aliqua putet se hac excusatione defendi, quod inspici et probari possit, an virgo sit: cum et manus obstetricum et oculus sæpè fallatur.*

Sanct. Cyp. Epist. iv.

lustrated

lustrated the custom, that I am now speaking of, in a Latin dissertation. He affirms it was first introduced into the Christian church by Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, who was perpetually attended by two of these fair and faithful virgin disciples. The practice became so common, that the canonical virgins, who thus cohabited with their pastors, were distinguished by a particular Greek appellation*. Many of the fathers declaimed with great energy against this class of virgins; and the eloquent St. Chrysostom, in particular, has left us an animated discourse on this unorthodox cohabitation, divided into two parts; the first addressed to females, and the second, to his own sex. From this division, it seems probable, that the more wealthy pious maidens admitted indigent preachers to reside under their roof; while, on the other hand, the wealthy priest afforded a similar refuge to the poor canonical virgin. This friendly

* ΣΥΜΙΟΧΗΤΟΙ.

and

and tender intercourse was often perhaps very innocent; but, as it afforded much room for licentious surmises against the clergy, it was expressly prohibited by the council of Nice. The warm and eloquent Chrysofom begins his address to these inconsiderate virgins with the most pathetic lamentation:—"Virginity (says the indignant saint) the most honourable of all conditions, has now incurred the most humiliating disgrace; and it suffers, not from its enemies, but from those who still presume to profess themselves its faithful votaries.—There were a few individuals among the Greeks, who, by the aid of philosophy, were enabled to triumph over avarice and anger; but the flower of virginity never flourished among them. In this point they have always acknowledged our manifest superiority; confessing that such purity was above the reach of nature, and did not belong to our species*.

* Οὐκ ἀνθρώπινοι.

“ Gentiles

“ Gentiles have marvelled at our perfec-
 “ tion—but they can admire it no longer ;
 “ and their admiration is turned into
 “ laughter and derision. The devil at-
 “ tacked us in this band, because he per-
 “ ceived that our virgins were the most ef-
 “ fulgent phalanx in all the host of Chris-
 “ tians ; but he has so confounded this
 “ phalanx, that it *would be better for us in*
 “ *future to have no virgins at all, if they can*
 “ *thus be driven to neglect their duty* *. The
 “ cause of all these evils is this, that virgin
 “ purity exists only in name, while the ef-
 “ fence of it is supposed to be confined to
 “ the body, which is the least part of vir-
 “ ginity : the more essential parts, and
 “ those which chiefly denote it, are dis-
 “ regarded ; they have ceased to distin-
 “ guish themselves by decency of habit, by
 “ the silence which becomes a virgin, by
 “ compunction, and other marks of a reli-
 “ gious spirit.”

* Ως βελτιον είναι λοιπον μηδε παρθενος είναι τας ητω
 το πραγμα μετιναι επιχειρουσας.

Such

Such is the language, in which St. Chry-
sostom begins his exhortation to those pro-
fessed virgins, who permitted men to dwell
under their roof: in the course of it, the
saint grows so vehement in his anger, as
even to hint at burying the fair offenders
alive; but, since that privilege is not al-
lowed him, he contents himself with indig-
nant lamentation. He mentions one cir-
cumstance, which exhibits, in a most striking
point of view, the gross indelicacy of ancient
manners:—"Every day," says he, "the
" midwives are running to the houses of
" virgins, as if hastening to a labour; yet
" not to assist one in the pangs of child-
" birth (though even this indeed has hap-
" pened to some of them) but that they
" may be examined, like young female
" slaves, when they are purchased, to dis-
" cover which has been violated and which
" is pure. One has readily acquiesced in
" this probation—another has refused it;
" and by this refusal is reduced to shame,
" even if she is still uncorrupted. One has
" suffered,

“ suffered, another has not suffered; yet
“ the latter is put to shame not less than the
“ former, as being unable to obtain credit
“ for her purity, and wanting the evidence
“ of such an inquisition.”

What a disgusting idea of the fourth century (the age of Chrysoſtom) does this anecdote present to us!—I have translated this singular passage from the ſaint very faithfully, for my maiden readers, at the extreme hazard of offending their delicacy—I have ventured to incur this painful hazard, in the hope of thus guarding them againſt an infirmity, which is ſometimes objected to Old Maids; I mean the infirmity of railing againſt their own time, and preferring paſt ages to the preſent. The good ſpinſter, who juſtly conſiders the point of view in which St. Chryſoſtom exhibits the virgins of his century, will bleſs her ſtars that ſhe was born in our happier days, when the dignity of the virgin character is ſupported with more eaſe and grace, and when the calumniated maiden can gain
I credit

credit for her innocence, without being reduced to such a shameful test of her integrity. The severe St. Chrysoftom would not allow the opulent virgin to retain even a male servant under her roof. He laughs, at those who made the infirmity of their health a plea for this indulgence; and he draws a very ludicrous picture of those nocturnal occurrences, which his warm imagination suggested to him as arising in the houses, where the virgin mistress was attended by a male domestic. Having endeavoured to prove, that women only ought to wait upon women, he closes his address to his female disciples, by displaying, in the most magnificent imagery, those high honours, to which immaculate virgins are entitled.

“ Remember,” says the eloquent enthusiast, “ in what quarter of the battle you are stationed—it is yours to stand and combat round the leader of the conflict, round the person of the king himself.— As in every war the whole army cannot
“ occupy

“ occupy the same ground, but some are
 “ posted in the wings, some in the cent-
 “ tre, some in the rear, and some in the
 “ front of the array; while others, wher-
 “ ever the king appears, appear also, and
 “ co-operate on every side with him; thus
 “ to the chosen band of virgins is this post
 “ of honour allotted:—nor is it more the
 “ office of those attendants who are decked
 “ with habiliments of gold, who ride on
 “ horses adorned with golden trappings,
 “ who carry the golden armour and the re-
 “ gal gems, to denote the presence of their
 “ king, than it is the office of a virgin to
 “ shew the presence of her lord: these at-
 “ tendants, indeed, appear round the regal
 “ chariot of their sovereign; but the virgin
 “ may, if she is willing, be like the cheru-
 “ bim, and herself become the chariot of
 “ her king.”

Such are the dazzling and extravagant flights of saintly eloquence, by which the females of the primitive church were allured to a life of celibacy. Nature very

wisely made the mutual attraction of the two sexes so very strong, that the most vehement efforts of superstition often failed in attempting to keep them asunder, though the most brilliant and seducing rhetorick was assiduously employed for this purpose.

Saint Chrysoftom, in the second part of his discourse, where he addressess himself to the priests who kept canonical virgins under their roof, very candidly acknowledges, that it is pleasant to reside with women, exclusive of any matrimonial or licentious enjoyment; but he endeavours to convince the clergy, who indulged themselves in this temperate pleasure, and asserted its innocence, that their condition was little better than that of Tantalus. He enumerates the many evils that may arise to man from residing with a female, even without a violation of their mutual chastity; and he compares a priest, who has enervated his mind by such a gratification, to a poor lion, whose mane has been cut off, whose teeth and talons have
been

been taken from him, and who is metamorphosed from the tremendous lord of the forest into a wretched animal weak and ridiculous.

Vigilant and solicitous as the fathers were to prevent this domestic connection between the priests and virgins, there were many obstinate offenders, who resisted and despised their public exhortations, and their private advice. The authority of the great St. Basil himself was not sufficient to prevail on an aged priest, whose name was Paregorius, to dismiss a canonical virgin residing in his house : it appears, from a letter still extant, addressed by St. Basil to this old delinquent, that he pleaded the age of seventy as his excuse, and resolutely opposed the severity of his malicious superior, who had attempted to rob his declining life of so innocent a comfort. St. Basil, however, is very far from admitting this apology ; and closes his letter with a vehement threat of excommunication, if the aged Paregorius still

fondly persisted in his attachment to his fair attendant.

Love and religion are often found together; and are never, perhaps, so warm and vehement, as when they are united. The priest, who attached himself to a canonical virgin, with the endearing appellation of sister, was gradually, and perhaps insensibly, led to the highest pitch of disinterested passion. The writings of Athanasius have incidentally preserved to us a very memorable example of the strange excesses that may arise from this ardent affection:—The archbishop of Alexandria, declaiming against the wickedness and impudence of his antagonists the Arians, in his first apology, asserts that, instead of being ashamed of the crimes imputed to them, they persevered, without a blush, in their offences. “Leontius,” continues the primate, “being censured on account of a young woman called Eustolia, and forbid to cohabit with her, *sacrificed his manhood*
“ for

"for her sake", that he might continue to "dwell with her in security." In his epistle to the Monks, Athanasius speaks again of this disinterested lover; and he there expressly affirms, that "Leontius had made this voluntary sacrifice of himself for the liberty of sleeping with Eustolia, his wife, according to his own account," (says the angry Saint) "though still called a virgin." — The good-natured reader, who will consider the generous frailty of Leontius with less severity than Athanasius did, may rejoice, perhaps, to be informed, that the loss of manhood did not prevent this affectionate enthusiast from rising to a mitre. The same austere saint, who has indignantly recorded his marvellous and unorthodox attachment to his Eustolia, has told us, with equal indignation, that he was made a bishop.

Of all the tender martyrs of love, Leontius has, perhaps, the strongest title to our

* Δι' αὐτῆς αὐτοῦ ἀπίκοψιν.

compassionate admiration; and I am induced to recommend his history to our poets, from a persuasion that, in the hands of some impassioned genius, his Eustolia might form a pleasing companion, and a potent rival, to the pathetic and enchanting Eloise of Pope.—Before I close this short account of the prohibited domestic connection between priests and professed virgins, it may be proper to observe, that Dodwell supposes this custom to have descended to the primitive clergy from the most illustrious of the Pagan sages*. This learned critic imagines, that many an honest heathen Old Maid attached herself to some eminent philosopher of her time, and was contented with his doctrine, without aspiring to his caresses: he mentions the intimacy of Cicero and Cerellia as a case in

* Erant enim apud Ethnicos etiam sceminæ, quæ philosophiæ prætextu virorum familiaritati, assuefcerent.—Inde *συνησαστων* ecclesiasticorum proflexerit exemplum a viris etiam magnis philosophicisque commendatum.
Diff. Cyp. iii.

point. That such an innocent but dangerous attachment has existed, even in modern days, we have a memorable and a mournful instance in the history of Swift and Stella. That singular genius had the talent and the inclination to sport very cruelly with the passions of women; but, as his ingenious and more manly godson and biographer very candidly confesses, without the power to indulge them*. This ingenuous confession is, perhaps, the best of all possible apologies for the misanthropical spirit imputed to Swift; for they must be imperfect and uncandid judges of human infirmities, who do not expect to find, and who cannot readily pardon, a large portion of misanthropy in a great but unhappy character, immaturely deprived, or never perhaps possessed, of so common yet so invaluable a faculty.—But peace to the ashes of this admirable writer! and peace to those of that fairer object of our compassion, his un-

* See Mr. Sheridan's Life of Swift.

fortunate Stella, who had the strange misfortune of uniting those discordant titles, Wife, and Old Maid! May her severe and unmerited fate be an eternal lesson to every sensible and warm-hearted spinster, not to contemplate with too tender an admiration, either the wisdom or the wit of any cold philosopher!

C H A P. III.

*Op Methodius, Bishop of Olympus, and his
Banquet of Virgins.*

A SPIRIT of pious gallantry so inflamed the first writers of the church, that their pens were incessantly employed in the praise of consecrated virgins. Among the early episcopal champions of the sisterhood, Methodius was particularly distinguished by the purity of his zeal, and the Platonic form of his composition. We have but few personal circumstances transmitted to us concerning this elegant encomiast of virginity; who being first bishop of Olympus, and afterwards of Tyre, closed his scene of religious glory by acquiring the palm of martyrdom in the persecution of Dioclesian. Of the many writings which he is said to have left, one alone has escaped the ravages of time, and this, although its
title

title was sufficient to awaken curiosity and regard, did not find an editor till about the middle of the last century: it is entitled, "The Banquet of Virgins," and bears an evident resemblance to the celebrated Banquet of Plato. Love had formed the great theme of panegyric in the dialogue of the Pagan philosopher, and virginity is treated in a similar manner in the chafter composition of the Christian bishop. I trust, that my fair readers will eagerly receive an account of this curious performance, and the more so, if I first relate to them an anecdote from which it will appear, that the Banquet of Virgins, even before its publication, attracted the attention of a queen, a famous and learned queen, who had the ambition, like our Elizabeth, to rank herself in the order of Old Maids, though on a very dubious and disputed title.

In the Paris edition of Methodius by Pierre Poussines, a French Jesuit, who resided at Rome, there is a letter from the editor to his friend Henri de Valois, which gives

gives an amusing account of a literary morning, that he passed in the Vatican library with several men of letters, and their royal patroness Christina of Sweden. Among the curious volumes that Holsten, the librarian, presented to the company, there was a copy of Methodius: on the sight of it, the queen of Sweden said immediately to Poussines, "Here is the book that we eagerly expect from you," alluding to his translation of the Greek text, which he had just completed, at the request of his friend the librarian. Before the Jesuit could reply to this flattering compliment, a man of distinguished learning, he tells us, interposed in this mortifying manner: "From me, most illustrious queen, is the Banquet of Methodius to be expected; I have occupied this ground, nor shall I yield it to any one."—"I was struck dumb," says the unlucky Jesuit, "I confess; for how could I oppose a person, my superior in age, connected with me in friendship, a favourite
" at

“ at Rome, and honoured, indeed, in all
“ countries for his singular merit. While
“ I was inwardly lamenting my own fruit-
“ less labour,” continues Poussines, “ the
“ queen took me aside, and said, “ What
“ can we do in this business? have you
“ no expedient to propose?” — “ None,”
replied the modest though mortified Jesuit,
“ but to withdraw, as becomes my time of
“ life and my profession.”

With the letter thus relating his disappointment, and dated in 1656, Poussines sent a copy of his *Methodius* to his learned friend at Paris, and in the following year it was handsomely printed in folio, at the royal press of that city. Though Poussines does not mention the name of his successful rival on this occasion, yet we know, from the octavo edition of *Methodius*, published at Rome in the preceding year by the celebrated Leo Allatius, that he was the learned person alluded to in the letter of the Jesuit. — But let us turn from the Editors to the work itself.

The

The Banquet of Methodius contains a series of orations, pronounced by eleven virgins, in honour of virginity. To the eloquence of these fair and chaste orators we are introduced by a conversation, between Gregorium, a female attendant of the virgins, and Eubulius, supposed to be a borrowed name for the pious author of the dialogue.

“ E U B U L I U S.

“ You are come very seasonably, Gregorium; for I was lately in quest of you, from a desire to learn some particulars concerning the assembly of Marcella, Theopatra, and the other virgins collected at the banquet, and chiefly concerning their discourses on chastity; for it is said, they contended on that topic with such spirit and energy, that they omitted nothing which could illustrate their subject: if, therefore, you are come on any other business, wave it at present, and do not hesitate to give me the circumstantial narrative I request of you.

“ G R E G O R I U M.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ I will attempt it.—But first answer me,
 “ Do you know Arete, the daughter of
 “ Philosophy?

“ EUBULIUS.

“ Affuredly.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ Being invited into her garden, I mean
 “ that towards the east, we proceeded to
 “ feasts on the fruits in season; ‘ And I (said
 “ Theopatra to me, for I collected all the
 “ particulars from her *) I, and Procilla,
 “ and Tyfiana, walked over a very rough,
 “ difficult, and arduous road; but when
 “ we approached,’ continued Theopatra,
 “ ‘ to the spot, a majestic and comely wo-
 “ man, advancing with gentle grace, and
 “ clad in a garment of snowy splendor,
 “ received us. She was, in truth, all celef-

* This in an awkward parenthesis; it would have been better if Gregorium had begun by saying, she spoke only in the character of Theopatra, and was not herself present at the banquet.

“ tial,

“ tial, inimitable beauty; a modest fanc-
“ tity adorned her countenance; her look
“ expressed both austerity and mildness,
“ united in such a pleasing manner, as I
“ never saw before; in all points she ap-
“ peared negligent of her charms, and wore
“ no foreign ornament. This personage,
“ advancing with much joy, caressed each
“ of us with the endearments of a long ab-
“ sent mother: ‘O my daughters,’ she
“ exclaimed, ‘you have with difficulty
“ reached me, eager to conduct you into
“ the field of perfection, after a journey in
“ which you have been alarmed by a va-
“ riety of reptiles; for I surveyed you
“ from this eminence, often staggered in
“ your approach, and I was afraid lest ye
“ might perish by a fall from the preci-
“ pice; but thanks to that bridegroom, to
“ whom I have united you, my children,
“ and who has accomplished all things ac-
“ cording to our prayers.’ Having said
“ this, ‘Let us advance,’ she cried, ‘within
“ the

" the boundary, as the gates are yet open."
 " On our entrance, we found Thecla,
 " Agatha, and Marcella, prepared for the
 " banquet. She told me, that Arete im-
 " mediately said, ' You also take your
 " places here by these your companions ;
 " for we now happily amounted to the
 " number ten. The scene was superna-
 " tural in beauty, and full of perfect tran-
 " quillity ; the air which pervaded it was
 " blended with the purest light, and was of
 " the softest temperature. In the centre, a
 " stream as smooth as oil afforded the
 " sweetest beverage ; its water, limpid and
 " pure, formed itself into fountains, which,
 " spreading like a river, supplied all the
 " garden with many copious rills. The
 " trees were of various kinds, and rich in
 " their recent burthens. Great was the
 " beauty of their fruit, that *hung amiable* *.
 " The ground was decorated with never-

* The Greek expression here has a singular resem-
 blance to the words of Milton, *καρπων απευρουμινων*
ιλαρως.

" fading

“ fading and variegated flowers, that dif-
 “ fused the sweetest fragrance. Near us
 “ was a lofty agnus castus *, under which we
 “ rested, because it was extensive and shady.

“ EUBULIUS.

“ Happy woman! you appear to me to
 “ be describing a second Paradise.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ Your remark is just.—As soon, there-
 “ fore, as we had partaken of every dainty
 “ refreshment and various recreation, so
 “ that no delight was wanting, she said
 “ that Arete thus introduced the subject:
 “ —‘ O my young damsels, the boast and
 “ pride of my aspiring spirit! O ye lovely
 “ maidens, who cultivate the unploughed
 “ fields of Christ with your virgin hands †,
 “ enough of food and feasting, for with us
 “ all things are in perfect plenty. What
 “ therefore remains for me to wish or to

* A tree so called, and sacred to chastity.

† Ω καλλιπαρθινοι τας απροτους Χριστου γεωγουσαι
 λιμνας ανυμφευτοις χειρι. Methodii, p. 5. edit. Par.

“ require? That each of you would favour
 “ me with a speech upon virginity. Let
 “ Marcella begin, since she is first in place,
 “ and also the senior; and when she has
 “ well exercised her talents, I will take
 “ shame to myself if I do not render her an
 “ object of envy, by fixing on her brow the
 “ spotless foliage of wisdom.’ On this, * she
 “ said, Marcella immediately began.”

As I fear the majority of modern readers would not relish the pious prolixity of these rhetorical virgins, I omit even a little summary of their respective orations.

Arete closes the conversation, by remarking, that purity of mind and body are equally essential to constitute the perfect virgin. She proceeds to commend and to crown the ten maiden orators; and the entertainment concludes with religious singing, Thecla taking the principal part, and the rest of the assembly joining in the fol-

* Theopatra, in whose words Gregorium describes the scene.

lowing chorus, which is frequently repeated:

“ For thee I am chaste ; and, possessing
 “ a resplendent lamp, O bridegroom, I rise
 “ to meet thee.”

Upon Gregorium’s finishing her account of the banquet, Eubulius starts this curious and delicate question : “ Which are the
 “ better virgins, they who are chaste from
 “ a quiet purity of constitution, or they
 “ who in practising this virtue are obliged
 “ to struggle with desire ?”

Gregorium hastily decides in favour of the first ; but Eubulius arguing the point with her, much in the manner of Plato, at last convinces her, by allusions to the physician who subdues a fever, and to the pilot who passes through a storm, that the palm of honour is certainly due to those maidens who have laboured through a fiery trial, and successfully contended with an imperious passion.

Such is the Banquet of Methodius ; which, though certainly the production of a pious

and elegant mind, is so little adapted to modern taste and manners, that I dared not venture on a more ample description of it. The preceding abridgment may, I think, be amusing to many readers, as it will render them acquainted with a singular composition but little known, and as it forcibly shews, that, among the early pastors of the church, one of the favourite points that piety and learning pursued, was to increase the multitude of Old Maids.

CHAP. IV.

On St. Athanasius, and his Panegyric on Virginity.

AS many most eminent fathers of the church appear to have contended for the palm of eloquence on this tempting ground, and successively exerted all their powers of persuasion in magnifying the merits of virginity, I intend to give a little sketch of their respective compositions, in chronological order.—The next holy encomiast, who seems to have honoured the canonical virgins with an express panegyric, is the celebrated Athanasius, who became bishop of Alexandria in the year 326. Though we find, in the printed works of this illustrious saint, a little treatise in praise of virginity, it is proper to remark, that the most judicious of the Catholic critics will not allow this to be the genuine production

N 3 of

of Athanasius. It consists of good advice to the pious virgin on the articles of dress and prayer.

In speaking of holy meditation, Athanasius, or whoever the author may be, has a passage that strikes me as sublime: "Remember," says he, "the twelfth hour; for in that our Saviour descended into hell; hell shuddered in beholding him, and cried aloud, Who is he that cometh with great power? who is he that tram-
pleth on the brazen portals of hell, and unbindeth the chain of my captives?"

In the close of this treatise, after delivering many precepts in a very clear and simple style, the author breaks forth into a fervid and magnificent panegyric on virginity, which he calls a precious pearl, not visible to the multitude, and found only by few*. He concludes with the following remarkable expression: "These things have I written to thee, my dear sister, thou *dancing girl*

* Ω παρθενία μαργαριτα τιμια, ωρα πολλοις αφανης, ολιγοις δε μοις ερεσκομενος!

"of *Christ* *." The learned Dupin considers this indecent metaphor as a proof that the treatise in question is not the genuine work of Athanasius.

But if such an argument were sufficient to prove a saint not the author of productions ascribed to him, the whole band of faintly writers might be almost reduced to nothing, since the zeal of the Catholic fathers, even when they are praising continence, is very apt to hurry them into the use of an indelicate or voluptuous image.

If the treatise in question is not, in truth, a work of Athanasius, it contains, however, such sentiments on the subject as he is known to have professed. In one unquestioned production of this illustrious saint, there is a passage which not only shews his unbounded respect for virginity, but explains to us, in some degree, the reason of that extraordinary and indefatigable ardour with which the fathers in general allured

* Χρηστία Χριστου.

the young females of their time into an eternal abstinence from wedlock.

In the close of his apology to the emperor Constantius, the spirited Athanasius inveighs with great indignation against the gross injuries which the religious virgins had suffered from their Arian persecutors; and he introduces his animated invective against the brutality of these ruffians, by a short but significant encomium on the virginity which they insulted. "The Catholic church," says the indignant saint, "is accustomed to call the females, who possess this virtue, the spouses of Christ; and even the Gentiles look upon them with wonder, as the temple of the *Word*; for in no other sect is the venerable and heavenly profession justly supported, but among us Christians alone; and this, therefore, is a great and particular evidence, that with us there is assuredly the true religion *."

* Μαλιστα γαρ και τυτο μεγα τεκμηριον εστι, τυ παρ ημιν ειναίτην οτως και αληθη θειοσειαν.

Sanct. Athanas.

Vol. i. p. 698. edit. Colon. 1686.

W^e

We can no longer wonder at the eagerness of the fathers to increase the multitude of monastic virgins, when we find they could thus produce them as an argument to confirm the truth of Christianity. History, perhaps, can hardly shew us a more lamentable abuse of reason than this, by which an institution, certainly inconsistent with the general good of mankind, and of course inconsistent with the genuine spirit and principles of our benevolent religion, is unworthily called a strong evidence of its truth.

It is plain, from this passage, that Athanasius gave little or no credit to professions of virginity among the heathen; and his assertion, to consider it in a more ludicrous light, is certainly uncandid towards the Pagan Old Maids. Some succeeding saints, in their encomiums on virginity, have treated these ancient ladies with a more liberal respect, as we shall see in the course of our enquiries. I will close this chapter by observing, that a saint of Alexandria, who
wrote

wrote many years before Athanasius, allows that a female society existed among the Indians, "who continued virgins, were called *Venerable*, and seemed, by studying the stars, to acquire the powers of divination *."

* St. Clement of Alexandria, in the 3d book of his *Stromata*, or *Miscellanies*, page 539 of the Oxford edition.

CHAP. V.

*On Saint Basil, and his Panegyric on Vir-
ginity.*

AMONG the many ecclesiastical writers of the fourth century, there is no character more eminent than St. Basil, who succeeded to the bishopric of Cæsarea in 369. He has been distinguished by the appellation of *Great*, and has received, perhaps, a still higher title, in being called the Christian Demosthenes.

In the works of this eloquent saint, we have a long and elaborate discourse on *the incorruptible perfection of virginity*. He professes, in the opening of this discourse, which is addressed to an episcopal brother, to draw a large and complete picture of true virginity at full length; and this picture I shall now attempt to copy, but in the size of a miniature.

Saint

Saint Basil begins, by asserting the great excellence of virginity: and, to explain this consummate excellence, as he says, in a single sentence, he affirms, it is by this virtue alone that a human being can resemble God. As this is the prime idea, on which almost all the fathers have grounded their excessive praises of monastic celibacy, I shall digress into one observation concerning it.—Although this idea had certainly a very dazzling effect, when embellished by faintly eloquence; yet, if justly examined, it exhibits, to a mind not tinctured with superstition, a very ludicrous absurdity; for in truth it is saying, that a human being can only resemble the great Author of all things, by producing nothing. Surely it would be more consistent, both with reason and piety, to say, that if human weakness may in any degree aspire to an humble resemblance of the Divine nature, it must be in the tender and faithful discharge of those duties which belong to the parental character.—But I return to St. Basil.

Having

Having asserted the infinite value of virginity, he copiously enumerates the many dangers, to which so precious and delicate a treasure is exposed. He fully explains to the pious virgin how an insidious enemy may encroach on her unsuspecting innocence, through the avenues of her five senses. He dwells on the peculiar perils that belong to each; and explains how the gratification of her palate, though apparently innocent, may insensibly lead her to the loss of her chastity. He observes, that our nature consists of a rational and irrational part; that the Creator has made man like a centaur*, giving him a manly form from the head to the breast, and assigning to his lower half the nature of a beast. St. Basil proceeds to shew the necessity of keeping this inferior division of the human frame in perfect subjection to the superior and more noble part; and this, he says, is chiefly to be effected by

* Ωςπερ τινα κενταυρον συνθεις • δημιουργος ολον τον ανθρωπον, &c. Sanct. Basil. de vera Virginitate,

tom. i. p. 615.

refusing

refusing to indulge the palate with any favourable viands.—Having expatiated on the dangers arising from the sense of tasting, he proceeds to the most perilous of all, the sense of feeling: and on this point he seems to think it impossible to arm the virgin with too great a degree of caution.—“ Since,” exclaims the saint, “ there is a fire in all
 “ our limbs, those who wish to preserve the
 “ body entirely free from burning, must
 “ avoid the touch of every limb, lest the
 “ energy of this fire, residing in parts,
 “ should be thus communicated, not only
 “ to the part which has been touched, but
 “ to the whole body, and to the very soul
 “ itself. As the throwing of a stone into a
 “ reservoir does not only agitate that part
 “ of the water on which the stone fell, but,
 “ raising circles one after another, drives
 “ them with a continual agitation to the
 “ very margin—so an amorous glance or a
 “ speech, containing the sweets of licen-
 “ tious pleasure, being vehemently thrown,
 “ as it were, into the soul of a virgin, as

§

“ into

“into clear water, awakening other amorous ideas, as in the deep, agitates her whole frame, which is struck according to the fancy of the striker.”

I have translated this figurative passage, not only as a specimen of St. Basil's eloquence, but because it contains a remarkable simile, which occurs no less than three times, as Dr. Wharton has observed, in the writings of Pope. Whether he borrowed it from St. Basil, or not, I shall leave to the decision of the critics, only transcribing those lines of the poet which have the strongest appearance of being copied from the expressions of the saint.

*As on the smooth expanse of crystal lakes
The sinking stone at first a circle makes,
The trembling surface, by the motion stirr'd,
Spreads in a second circle, then a third;
Wide and more wide the floating rings advance,
Fill all the watery plain, and to the margin
dance.*

Temple of Fame, ver. 436.

To

To proceed with St. Basil.—His discourse is full of metaphorical ornaments—he calls the senses the windows of the soul, “which,” says he, “either opens these windows, like
“ a chaste woman, with care and moderation, to admit useful light, or looks out
“ of them, like a harlot, to gaze on every
“ licentious spectacle, and display her own
“ wanton vivacity.” —Having shewn the necessity of securing these windows with many bolts, he points out to the pious virgin the dangers that may attend her in scenes of nuptial festivity, and unreserved conversation. He tells her, that the discourse of a virgin should not only be extremely pure, it should also be moderate; she should rather incline to hear others than to speak herself; and, to prove the justice of this maxim, the saint observes, that nature has given her two ears, and only one tongue. He excites her to the contemplation and the love of her celestial spouse, with a magnificence of language highly calculated to dazzle and to inflame every female enthusiast. He
expatiates

expatiates on the enormous sin of corrupting a canonical virgin. He considers even the touch of a fraternal hand, and the salute of friendship, as dangerous familiarities.

The saint, having expatiated on all the rigid duties of monastic virginity, addresses the bishop, to whom his discourse is inscribed; and concludes by observing, that continence is the only effectual caustic to fear and destroy the multiplying hydra of licentious desire.

CHAPTER VI.

On St. Gregory Nazianzen, and his Poem in Praise of Virginity.—On some Latin Poets of the dark Ages, who have written on the same Subject.

THE next holy encomiast of virginity may undoubtedly be considered as the most extraordinary person that ever reflected lustre on the annals of the church; for he united two characters in himself, which some morose critics of modern times have supposed incompatible, and was both a saint and a poet. I mean the illustrious Gregory Nazianzen, the friend of the great St. Basil; whose epitaph he has written, in some of the most affectionate and pathetic verses that friendship ever inspired; a composition that does the more honour to this canonized poet, as Basil had mortified his ingenuous pride, by placing him in the
wretched

wretched and obscure bishopric of Sasima; which he afterwards exchanged for the episcopal throne of Constantinople, an irksome though splendid elevation; from whence he retired, in the year 381, to poetical solitude in the wilds of Cappadocia, where he closed his remarkable life, in 389, at the age of sixty-two.

Among the various productions of this fainted bard, we have a panegyric on virginity, containing about seven hundred verses. A slight sketch of this poem will, I trust, be amusing to my fair and curious readers. It opens with an air of triumph;

“ * Our palms, Virginity! shall bind thy brow”

“ From the pure heart flow with melodious
“ joy,

“ Ye songs of purity!—The heavenly zeal

“ Of continence is life’s most precious gift,

“ Out-shining amber, ivory, and gold;

“ ’Tis this that bursts the bondage of the
“ world;

* Παρθενία στεφανίς ἀνδρισμός ἡμετέρων», &c.

“ And lifts the high-aspiring soul to Heaven.

“ Assist, ye chaste ones, as the hymn begins :

“ The virtuous all have part in Virtue’s praise.

“ All hail, Virginity ! from God deriv’d,

“ Giver thyself of good ! of Innocence

“ The lovely parent, and associate fit

“ For the unfetter’d sanctities of Heaven !”

The poet proceeds to descant on the heavenly powers, and to celebrate the virginity of the angels. He then touches on the evils that arise from the flesh, giving a short account of the first formation of man, and the incarnation of Christ ; he considers our Saviour as coming to instruct the world in the principles and practice of true virginity, “ a condition,” says the poetical saint, “ as much superior to marriage as heaven is to earth, and a Divinity to a mortal.”

After thus magnifying the merits of continence, the poet indulges himself in bold and spirited personification. He introduces Marriage and Celibacy pleading in opposition

sition to each other;—Marriage speaks first, and the poet seems to act fairly, by throwing into this harangue many forcible arguments in its favour; but, as I am unwilling to trespass on the patience of my readers, and apprehend that some of them may not relish a very prolix specimen from the poetry of a saint, I shall only translate the verses in which Virginité is introduced as replying to Marriage, and a few of the most striking passages in her speech.

“ * *Thus Marriage.—Then, with mild and*
“ modest brow,

“ *In tatter’d garments, and with naked feet,*

“ *With eyes to earth declin’d, with parting lips*

“ *Half open held by diffidence, and cheeks*

“ *Where the pure blood diffus’d a pious glow,*

“ *Virginité within her loosen’d veil*

“ *Hid her meek countenance, and mute re-*

“ *main’d.*

“ *Her let me thus encourage with due praise!—*

* Τοια γαμος, &c.

- " *Offspring of Heaven! and fit in heavenly
power,*
 " *Mix'd with the choir of angels, though on
" earth*
 " *Oft deigning to appear, in earthly shape—*
 " *Speak here in thy defence! while by thy side*
 " *I stand thy guard; for, Heaven-descended*
 " *queen!*
 " *To me thou com'st, and ever may'st thou come,*
 " *Kindly attentive to thy servant's prayer!"*
 " *Who summons me reluctant to this scene?*
 " *Me, ever bent to serve my heavenly Lord*
 " *In daily labour, and with nightly song,*
 " *With purifying prayer, and tears that flow*
 " *To wash out my offences? who presumes*
 " *To call me from these pure and pious tasks,*
 " *To idle contest, and a war of words?"*

With this vindication of her own hal-
lowed dignity, Virginitv begins her reply;
professing to disregard the opinions of men,
she declares that she would not conde-
scend to answer her antagonist, did she not
tremble

————— " *Last*

* ————“ *Left some one rais'd,
 “ And fluttering in mid air, on the new plumes
 “ Of callow maidenhood, should quickly sink
 “ To earth, the victim of this artful lure.”*

On this consideration she enters on a long attempt to refute all the arguments which had been alledged by Marriage, her persuasive opponent. She begins, by a subtle distinction, to invalidate the plea of utility and delight arising from the production of children: she affirms, that parents are parents only of the *bodies*, not the *minds*, of their offspring; and, as a proof of this, she asserts, that they only lament the bodily infirmities, and not the mental disorders, of their progeny.

This satirical reflection on parental folly hardly affords sufficient ground for the inference which the fair pleader wishes to draw from it; but Virginity begins to argue with

* Μη τις αερθεις

Παρθενις νεοπηκτου ενι πτερον αιθερι νυμνων

Τοις δε λογοις επι γαιαν ολισθησει ταχιστα.

more sound reason, and with more poetical spirit also, when she exclaims,

" *What mortal can depend on giving birth*
 " *To such an offspring as his heart desires !*
 " *For who can tell the secret, how to plant*
 " *The child of happy or unhappy growth ?—*
 " *The painter draws the image he beholds*
 " *In his just portraiture ; the sculptor's hand*
 " *Fully commands similitude of form,*
 " *And ductile gold obeys his plastic will ;*
 " *From perfect seed the happy farmer rears*
 " *The perfect grain, that answers to his hope :*
 " *But the vain mortal, who would leave on*
 " *earth*

" *A copy of himself (however great*
 " *His own integrity), cannot decide*
 " *Whether his genial efforts may produce*
 " *A Judas or a Paul.*

" *No—infants are not moulded to the wish*
 " *Of a fond parent ; but, as one who seeks*
 " *Amusement in the turning of the dice,*
 " *Throws them, uncertain whether he may*
 " *throw*

" *An*

- “ *An odd or even number ; not his hand,*
 “ *But the vague movements of the dice decide :*
 “ *So marriage gives not birth to good or bad*
 “ *At the bare option of its votaries,*
 “ *But as the secret laws, or the caprice*
 “ *Of nature may determine.”*

Having thus shewn the uncertainty of those parental delights, on which Marriage appeared to pride itself, Virginitv proceeds to a magnificent encomium on her own superior pleasures, her own beauty and excellence as the chaste spouse of Christ. She then enumerates all the miseries that can arise from the various incidents of married life. She concludes her oration by exhorting all who regard her to persevere in a single state, and to place themselves in Paradise by the merits of chastity.

The poet declares, that those who heard the two pleaders, bestowed the palm on Virginitv. He concludes his poem, however, in a manner much more candid than we might have expected from one passage
of

break through the chronological line which I intended to observe, for the sake of exhibiting, in one point of view, the little group of poets who successively celebrated this maidenly perfection,

Be not alarmed, my good reader; I mean not to trouble thee with a long history of all the woeful verse, which the idle monks have scribbled on the continence of every sainted abbess; for though their fictions are often bold, their poetry is seldom entertaining.

Allow me, however, to terminate this volume with a brief account of the most remarkable characters in the monastic quire of chaste and pious bards, who re-echoed, through the dark ages, the incessant praise of virginity:

The first of these, both in personal rank and in point of time, is Sextus Alcimus Avitus, nephew to the unfortunate emperor of that name. The poet became archbishop of Vienna, and, after acting a very busy and important part in the Christian world,

world, died, with a great reputation for sanctity, in the year 525. This venerable bard has addressed to his sister Fuscina a poetical exhortation to monastic virginity; a state to which, he tells us, many females of his family had been devoted. He excites the young Fuscina to the virtues, that may become her religious character, by various examples; and, to teach her a brave contempt for unmerited calumny, he relates the following very singular anecdote; which I have selected, as the only amusing passage in his long composition.

** The world has echoed with Eugenia's fame;
Who nobly perish'd for her Saviour's name;
But, ere she gloried in a martyr's fate,
Brave was her heart, and her achievements
great.*

Her

** Eugeniæ dudum toto celeberrima mundo
Fama fuit, Christi quæ cum pro nomine vitam
Fuderit, ante tamen fortes processit in actus;
Namque habitum mentita viri, non proinde virile
Pectus præficitur sanctis a fratribus abbas.*

Tum

*Her sex disguising with a manly air,
She liv'd an Abbot in a house of prayer ;
To reverend Monks she taught the words of
truth,*

*O'er age presiding in the bloom of youth.
The fiend against her fram'd an bellish plot,
Her life to threaten, and her fame to blot ;
But by her innocence and modest care,
The latent virgin triumph'd o'er the snare.
Beneath the habit of a man conceal'd,
The sad she comforted, the sick she heal'd ;*

But

*Tum patris officium complens, ac veste virili
Fæmineum occultans sexum, muliebria sprevit,
Et meritis annisque graves, longâque verendos
Religione senes juvenili rexit in ævo.*

*Tunc recti impatiens, omni qui tempore serpens
Mille dolos, damnique artes ter mille volutat,
Invidet Eugeniæ, et sanctum crebrescere frendens
Nomen, ad assuetas redit undiqus callidus artes,
Eugeniam quærens vulgo traducere ; verum
Quo famam violare cupit, petit inde coronam,
Quæ sexum mentita pie, cum munia patris
Sanctæ exerceret, morbisque levaret ademptis
Quotquot subsidium sancta pietate rogarent,
Jamdudum confecta gravis matrona, bonique*

Nominis,

But soon, deluded by her manly form,
 A matron, with licentious passion warm,
 Tried, tho' in age, with her decaying charms
 To lure the youthful Abbot to her arms.
 When foil'd (how love will hazard each re-
 source !)

The old and desperate dame resolv'd on force.
 On her lone bed, in feign'd disorder laid,
 She begs the fancied holy father's aid ;
 And as he comes, with charitable pace,
 She springs to seize him in a loath'd embrace.

The

Nominis, insano quæ mox accenditur igne
 Virginis, heu specie infelix decepta virili,
 Cumque pudicitiam sanctam, donisque dolisque
 Non semel invasam, frustra captare, nihilque
 Profere se nosset (quid non amor impius ausit ?)
 Addere vim verbis statuit ; longeque remotis
 Arbitris, morbum simulans, morbique leuandi
 Eugeniam causa appollans, vi nititur illam
 Opprimere, inque suos inuitam adducere nexu ;
 Illa autem valido stuprum clamore repellens,
 Auxiliumque petens magna virtutis resistit ;
 Ergo luxuriaque suæ matrona paranda
 Complendique expos mulier male perdita voti,
 A patre Eugenio (qualem decepta putabat

*The unknown virgin in the Abbot's shape
 For succour cries, and struggles to escape.
 The guilty matron, frantic with despair,
 Frames for the fancied priest an impious snare ;
 Father Eugenius (she proclaims aloud,
 To the attentive slander-loving croud),
 Father Eugenius, with a brutal aim,
 Has tried to violate her spotless frame.
 To public justice she now makes appeal :
 The elders meet : and all, with curious zeal,
 All flock impatient to th' amazing cause,
 Whose novelty a numerous audience draws.
 Eugenius now (for, still in garb the same,
 The secret virgin bears that manly name)*

Appears

*Ob mutatum habitum longa assuetudine plebes)
 Interpellatum supri sese impia fingit ;
 Inque forum vocat innocuam, quo protinus omnis
 Turba senum turbata coit, quo denique cuncti
 Attoniti novitate rei matresque virique
 Currunt. Interea Eugenius (sic nescia sanctam
 Matrem turba vocat) populo spectante tribunal,
 Causam dicturus, tam diri criminis, intrat ;
 Et jam jamque reum secreti ignara tenebat
 Publica vis, odio tantum inflammata sinistro ;*

Conscia

*Appears against the horrid charge to plead,
Believ'd by Envy guilty of the deed.
When, with that pride which innocence allows,
The fancied criminal her fraud avows :
Aside she throws her well-sustain'd disguise,
Confest a maiden by admiring eyes.
Th' applauding populace with transport see
The devil defeated, and the virgin free.
Thus ever safe true Chastity shall dwell,
Secure to triumph o'er the snares of hell.*

*Conscia cum sexus proprii, cordisque pudici,
Vincitur ut vincat jam virgo innoxia fraudem
Et sexum ostendit, dudum mentita virilem,
Fæmineum, ac fraudes populo applaudente retexit
Dæmonis.—Usque adeo casti custodia voti
Semper tuta manet, multis licet acta procellis.*

Alcimus Avitus

ad Fuscina Sororem.

The copy of Avitus, which I have followed, is printed in a collection of the old ecclesiastical poets, by George Fabricius. Basil. quarto. I mention this circumstance, because the story of Eugenia contains many more verses in the edition of Fabricius, than Mattaire has printed in his *Corpus Poetarum Latinorum*.

The singular adventure of this female abbot will, I think, induce my reader to wish for a few more particulars relating to so interesting a personage; and, by the aid of that pious and gallant historian of holy virgins, Arthur du Monstier, I am enabled to add, that Eugenia was the daughter of Philip, a Roman of high rank, who was præfect of Alexandria in the reign of Commodus. She was distinguished by her personal beauty, and adorned with every mental accomplishment: her application to literature was great; her memory uncommonly retentive; and she was equally eloquent in the Greek and Latin language. With these attractions, at the age of fifteen she was demanded in marriage by Aquilius, the son of Aquilius the consul; but the young Eugenia, being converted to Christianity, made her escape privately from her heathen parents, and, disguising herself in the habit of a man, took refuge in a religious house, not far from Alexandria. Here she met with the remarkable occurrences recorded

in the poetry of Avitus. It is said that she converted both her parents to her new religion; that her father suffered martyrdom; and that Eugenia herself, returning to Rome with her mother, whose name was Claudia, experienced the same fate, in the reign of Gallienus.—Such is the account given of Eugenia in the curious work of Du Monstier, intitled, *Sacrum Gynecæum*, a pious biographical treasure, containing all the sanctified females of the Christian world. Her merits are celebrated by almost every writer who has touched upon the Catholic virgins; and her name is mentioned with honour by two succeeding Latin poets, of whom I am now to speak.

The first of these is Venantius Fortunatus, a poet on whose history I enter the more willingly, as it is connected with that of a fair lady, who, if she were an Old Maid, as some of her biographers have asserted, was undoubtedly among the most remarkable of the sisterhood, being at once a queen and a saint, a virgin and a wife.

This singular personage was the lovely princess Radegunda; who, being taken prisoner in her infancy by Clotaire, king of the Franks, was married in Soissons, at the age of fifteen, and in the year 538, to that savage hero, the destroyer of her father's kingdom, and the assassin of her brother. This unfortunate princess is universally described as a model of beauty; but her personal charms were surpassed by her piety. She wore an under vest of hair-cloth, and loaded her delicate body with a chain of iron. Du Monstier affirms, that although she lived a few years with the king her husband, she obtained from that amorous monarch the privilege of remaining a virgin. The more modern author of that amusing book, intitled "Anecdotes of the Queens of France*," is inclined to prove the falshood of this problematical fact, by the expressions of her first biographers, who describe

* Anecdotes des Reines et Regentes de France, 6 tom. 1776.

her

her as rising early from the bed of the king. But without venturing to decide on so nice a question, I shall proceed in the more certain history of Radegunda.—After residing three years with Clotaire, she obtained his permission to retire; and, founding an abbey at Poitiers, she enjoyed in it all the tranquil pleasures of religious retirement. She possessed an affection for literature; and she was happy in the society of two the most eminent authors of that age, Gregory bishop of Tours, the historian, and Fortunatus the poet, who had the honour of being secretary to the pious Radegunda, and was promoted to the bishopric of Poitiers.

Fortunatus was an Italian, of an elegant mind and insinuating manners: it was probably to flatter the chaste fancy of his royal mistress, that he composed his singular poem “On a celestial Synod, and the Virtue of Virginity*.” This performance opens

* De Senatu Curie cælestis, et Virtute Virginitatis.
Fortunati Poem. Lib. 7.

with a full convocation of all the eminent heavenly virgins and martyrs; when they are assembled before the throne of God, the voice of the Divinity announces his design of rewarding the pious and chaste passion of an earthly maiden, and describes the holy tenderness and ardour with which she panted for a celestial spouse. The verses that include this description are remarkably spirited and elegant, for the age in which they were composed:—the maiden is represented as thus venting the fond enthusiasm of her soul:

* *Tell me, where art thou, whom I die to see!
Where is the latent road that leads to thee?
How would I haste my soul's desire to meet,
Could starry paths support my pendent feet!*

Now

* *Dic ubi sis quem expecto gemens, quæ te urbe requiram,
Quæve sequar, nullis semita nota locis:
Ipsa venire velim properans, si posset in astris
Pendula hydream planta tenere viam.
Nunc sine te fuscis graviter nox incubat alis,
Ipsaque sole micans est mihi cæca dies.*

Lilia,

*Now without thee I feel oppressive night,
And dark to me the sun's meridian light.
In vain the richest flowers their fragrance
shed;*

*For all the sweets of earth to me are dead.
Each passing cloud to see thee I pursue,
For love directs to heaven my wandering
view:*

*I bless the storm on which thy feet have trod,
And ask the winds where I may find my God.*

Having proclaimed the merits of this chaste and fervent devotee, the sacred voice declares, that she shall possess the sanctity she desires; and her name is inrolled in the eternal register *. The poet proceeds to tell, how the newly-consecrated virgin is de-

*Lilia, narcissus, violæ, rosa, nardus, amomum,
Oblectant animos germina nulla meos.*

*Ut te conspiciam per singula nubila pendo,
Et vaga per nebulas lumina ducit amor.*

*Ecce procellosos suspecta interrogo ventos,
Quid mihi de Domino nunciet aura meo.*

* Nomen perpetuo scribitur inde libro.

corated with all the jewels of heaven; he affirms, however, that the chaste and humble virtues are her best ornaments; he magnifies the excellence of virginity compared to the miseries of a married life; and he concludes with a prayer, addressing the whole poem to the chaste and pious Agnes, whom his royal mistress Radegunda had raised to the dignity of abbess, in the religious house which she herself had founded. Perhaps it may be a groundless conjecture, but I am inclined to believe that Fortunatus composed this poem with infinite art, intending an oblique and concealed compliment to the problematical virginity of Radegunda herself, though in the close he addresses himself to Agnes as the virgin, who had thus made a kind of holiday in heaven. My conjecture arises from the following remarkable circumstances:—In the long description of this celestial ceremony, the name of this virgin, so interesting to all the powers of heaven, is not once mentioned, although it is said to be inscribed in the eternal volume,

This

This singular omission persuades me, that the poet wished to compliment some lady as a virgin of uncommon sanctity, whom he did not think it prudent to name. His cold manner of addressing the poem to Agnes, appears to me as a kind of mask to his real intention. Besides, there are some passages, in his enthusiastic description of the chaste female so highly honoured by Heaven, which do not agree with the condition of Agnes, and may be applied with an elegant propriety to his royal mistress Radegunda. After describing this anonymous virgin as decorated with a long catalogue of celestial jewels, the poet exclaims :

* *Deck'd with these gems a heavenly queen
 she'll reign,
 And rule, a virgin, o'er the angelic train.*

There is also another poem of Fortunatus, expressly on the virtues of Radegunda,

* *His cumulata bonis thalamo regina sedebit,
 Atque poli sobolem sub pede virgo premet.*

in which, after having compared her to the most celebrated of the holy virgins, for charity and abstinence, for devotion and fortitude, he adds,

** To speak thy farther merits I refrain,
Which from thy conscious God full glory gain.*

Such are the grounds of my conjecture: whether Radeunda was in truth an Old Maid, and whether her ingenious secretary intended to pay her an oblique compliment for the peculiar delicacy with which she has been supposed to acquire and support that venerable character, are points which I must now leave to the discussion of the curious. However great the chastity of this pious queen might be, it has not escaped detraction; and our poet himself has been suspected of possessing too lively an interest in her heart. Some late biographers of the fair royal saint have confi-

** Cætera nunc taceam melius, quia teste Tonante,
Judicioque Dei, glorificata manent.*

dered

dered this calumny as the immediate suggestion of the devil, provoked by the peculiar purity of Radegunda; but it appears to have arisen rather from the carelessness of some early writers, who, finding in the poems of Fortunatus, that he had been accused of being a little too fond of the abovementioned Agnes, made a mistake in their account of this matter, and transferred his supposed affection from the abbess to the queen. The truth seems to be, that Fortunatus lived in a very pleasing and innocent familiarity with these two pious ladies. They amused themselves in sending little presents of sweetmeats, and other monastic delicacies, to their ingenious friend. He acknowledged their favours with poetical gallantry. The extempore verses which he composed on such occasions are printed with his poems; they do honour to the tenderness of his heart, and the elegance of his genius; but though they often breathe the warm spirit of affection, they are far from throwing any stain on the purity of his morals.

als. His royal mistress is said, by the authors of the Literary History of France, to have ended her life in 587: our poet died in 609, and his festival is yet celebrated at Poitiers, on the 14th of December.

The following pious herald of chastity in the dark ages was an illustrious character of our own country. I mean the great Aldhelm, bishop of Shireburn in Dorsetshire, during the Saxon heptarchy. This canonized bard was not only distinguished by peculiar sanctity, but excelled in the sister arts of poetry and music, and has been celebrated as the person who introduced Latin verse into England.

His poetical talents were great indeed, for the period in which he flourished; and he exerted them in a composition of heroic verse, extolling the most eminent votaries of virginity, both male and female. In the latter catalogue the following are his heroines—the Virgin Mary, and the Saints Cæcilia, Agatha, Lucia, Justina, Eugenia, Agnes, Thecla, Eulalia, Scholastica, Constantina,

stantina, Eustochium, Demetrius, Anastasia, Rufina Secunda, Anatolia, Victoria.

As a specimen of Aldhelm's poetry, I shall select his verses on Cæcilia, whose talents have rendered her the most interesting of female saints.

** What happy page with lively praise may frame
A just memorial to Cecilia's name,
Who led her bridegroom's soul, by lessons pure,
To spurn corporeal joy's luxurious lure!
Tho' fam'd for music's melting powers, the fair
Escap'd from worldly pomp, and pleasure's
snare.*

*Thus she began, when, on her bridal night,
Her glowing consort claim'd his blissful right:*
" For

** Porro Cæcilie vivacem condere laudem
Quæ valeat digne metrorum pagina versu?
Quæ sponsum proprium convertit dogmate sancto,
Mellea carnalis contemnens ludicra luxus.
Basia dum potius dilexit dulcia Christi,
Candida præpulbris complectens colla lacertis,
Quamvis harmoniis præfultent organa multis
Musica pierio resonent et carmina cantu,*

Non

" For me behold ! for me," the virgin cries,
 " A tutelary spirit quits the skies :
 " He, my blest patron ! by a kind decree
 " Is bound from sensual love to keep me free :
 " No mortal, burning with impure desire,
 " May dare to touch me with licentious fire :
 " My heavenly champion, with angelic sway,
 " Would force the rash invader from his prey."
 The pious bride converted thus her lord ;
 His ancient error he with scorn abhorr'd,

In

Non tamen inflexit fallax præcordia mentis
 Pompa profanorum, quæ nescit retia sanctis,
 Ne forte properet paradisi ad gaudia miles.
 Talibus intorea compellens vocibus inquit,
 Dum secreta petunt concessa lege tororum :
 " Angelus en," inquit, " superis tranavit ab astris !
 " Hic me patronus cælesti fundere fulcit,
 " Ut nequeam prorsus quidquam carnalis amare :
 " Namque meum jugiter conservat corpus in ævum,
 " Ut nullus valeat, spurco succensus amore,
 " Contrectare mea probroso crimine membra ;
 " Sed mox angelicis ulciscens vindicat armis,
 " Qui me pollutis nituntur prendere palmis."
 Sic devota Deo convertit femina sponsum :

Nec

*In union chaste the martyr's crown they gain,
And Heaven repays them for their mortal pain.*

Such is Aldhelm's panegyric on the celebrated St. Cæcilia; and, as it may amuse the curious to compare this mitred bard with our old poet Chaucer, who has told the same marvellous story, I shall insert in a note a few lines from the latter*.

The

*Nec non et levirum solvens errore vetusto,
Donec credentes sumpfissent dona lavacri;
Facti municipes in summis arcibus ambo
Martyres effecti carnis tormenta luentes.*

Sanct. Althelmus de Laude Virginum.

In Canisii Thesauro, tom. i. p. 742.

The learned reader will readily pardon some omissions in the translation of these verses.

- * *The night came, and to bedde must she gon
With hire husband, as it is the manere;
And prively she said to him anon—
O swete and wel beloved spouse dere,
Ther is a conseil, and ye wol it here,
Which that right fayne I wold unto you sais,
So that ye fewere ye wol it not bewraie.*

Valerian

The poem of the Saxon bishop is to be considered only as a kind of supplement to his elaborate treatise in prose on the same interesting topic. The author of Aldhelm's Life in the Biographia Britannica has, by trusting to the authority of Bede, committed a mistake in his account of these separate performances, which he represents as a single work of verse and prose intermixed.

They

*Valerian gan fast unto hire swere,
That for no cas, ne thing that mighte be
He shulde never to non bewraien here;
And then at erst thus to him saide she—
I have an Angel, which that loveth me,
That with gret love, wher so I waks, or sleps,
Is redy ay my body for to kepe;*

*And if that be may felen out of drede,
That ye me touch or love in wilanie,
He right anon wol seen you with the dede,
And in your youthe thus ye shulden die:
And if that ye in clene love me gie,
He wol you love as me, for your clenenesse,
And shew to you his joye and his brightnesse.*

This

They are not only distinct productions, but have been published apart. It appears that the profaic essay was first written, as in the close of it the author intimates his design of handling the same delicate subject once more, in verse.

*This Valerian, corrected as God wold,
Answered again—If I shal trusten thee
Let me that Angel seen, and him behold;
And if that it a veray Angel be
Than wol I don as thou hast prayed me.*

The second Nonne's Tale.

Tyrwhitt's Chaucer, vol. iii. p. 70.

It is justly observed by this excellent editor, that Chaucer originally composed his story of Cæcilia as a separate work, and afterwards united it to the Canterbury Tales—that he closely copied the Life of Saint Cæcilia in the Golden Legend of Jacobus Janensis—and that he mentions his own performance in the list of his laudable and pious works.

*And for to speke of othir holinesse,
He hath in prose translated Boece,
And made the Life also of Saint Cecile.*

Legende of good Women.

VOL. II.

Q

As

As this chapter is already longer than I intended, I shall only select one passage from his profane treatise, exhibiting a most singular scale of virtue (if I may use such an expression) by which human merit was measured in the age of this accomplished faint. “* It is recorded,” says Aldhelm, “in a certain volume, from the narration of an angel, how virginity, chastity, and wedlock, differ from each other, and mark, in three degrees, the quality or worthiness of life; how, according to the

* In quodam volumine angelicâ relatione refertur, quomodo virginitas, castitas, jugalitas, tripertitis gradibus separatim differant; quæ, sicut trifariâ disparis vitæ qualitate, sigillatim sequestrantur; ita discretis meritorum ordinibus tripliciter dirimuntur, angelo hoc modo alternatim distinguente: ut sit virginitas aurum, castitas argentum, jugalitas ærumentum; ut sit virginitas divitiæ, castitas mediocritas, jugalitas captivitas; ut sit virginitas sol, castitas luna, jugalitas tenebræ; ut sit virginitas dies, castitas aurora, jugalitas nox.—P. Aldhelmi Liber de Laudibus Virginitatis, cap. xix. edit. Wharton. 4to. London, 1692.

“ angel’s

“ angel’s discrimination, virginity is gold,
 “ chastity silver, and wedlock brass; how
 “ virginity is wealth, chastity a competence,
 “ and wedlock poverty; how virginity is
 “ peace, chastity redemption, and wedlock
 “ captivity; how virginity is the sun, chaf-
 “ tity the moon, and wedlock darkness;
 “ how virginity is day, chastity the dawn,
 “ and wedlock night.”

The ingenious prelate continues to illustrate this angelical division of human merits by many more metaphors of equal force, and then tells us the precise meaning of these three significant terms—a necessary explanation, as, without it, a modern reader would be little able to understand the anonymous angel thus quoted by Aldhelm!

“ Virginity,” says the good bishop, “ is a
 “ voluntary attachment to a single life;
 “ chastity is that state of purity observed
 “ by those who, after the ceremony of
 “ marriage, separate, and abstain from ma-
 “ trimonial intercourse, for the sake of
 “ heaven, despising that ordinary wed-
 “ lock

“lock by which children are lawfully produced.”

This very curious triple estimate of human merit occurs also in the poem on virginity; and, as that poem is extremely scarce, I shall transcribe the verses.

*Humani generis triplex distantia fertur,
Quæ modo per mundum triquadro cardine degit,
Et studet in terris mercari regna Tonantis.
Denique nonnullos sortitur vita jugalis,
Qui rectè vivunt concessa lege tororum,
Et præcepta Dei toto conamine mentis
Conseruare student, thalami sub jure manentes.*

Posthæc castrorum gradus alter, et ordo secundus

*Subsequitur, nupti, qui jam connubia spernunt,
Ac indulta sibi scindunt retinacula luxûs.
Lurida linquentes spurcæ consortia carnis,
Ut castis proprium conseruent moribus æuam,
Dum connexa prius thalamorum vincula rumpunt.*

*Tertia virgineis fulgescit vita lucernis,
Cujus præcellit præfatos infula ritus.
Mundani luxûs calcans ludibria falsa,*

*Virginitas summo virtutum vertice floret,
Dum soror angelicæ constet castissima vitæ.*

Sanct. Althelmus, ut supra.

Such was the doctrine of the famous Aldhelm, which throws a considerable light on the practices of the times in which he lived, when the great purpose of marriage was often defeated, as in the case of King Edward the Confessor, by a vain pretension to superior sanctity. This poetical prelate was so passionate an admirer of pure virginity, that he put his own continence to many singular and dangerous trials. It is related by his elegant and affectionate biographer, William of Malmesbury, that Aldhelm did not, like other priests, avoid the company of women, but often detained some virgin by his side, both sitting and lying, and, while he held her in his embraces, repeated his whole psalter, to the confusion of the devil*.

However

* Vel affidens vel cubitans aliquam detinebat, quoad carnis tepescente lubrico, quieto et immoto

However this conduct might encrease the veneration which was paid to this extraordinary saint, I cannot help condemning it as an instance of cruelty and injustice.

Great as his exultation and triumph might be, on thus deriding the devil, as his biographer expresses it, by a marvellous display of his own subdued desires, he had certainly no right to sport so wantonly with the passions of those religious Old Maids (for they could hardly be young ones) whom he thus made the uneasy instruments of his own chaste reputation.

In speaking of the most eminent poets, who amused the dark ages by celebrating the wonderful virgins of that period, I ought not to omit the venerable Bede. He has enlivened his ecclesiastical history,

discederet animo. Derideri se videtur diabolus, cernens adhærentem fœminam virumque aliàs avvocato animo infistentem cantando psalterio.

Wil. Malmf. de Vita Aldhelmi,
Anglia Sacra, vol. ii. p. 13.

by inserting a poetical panegyric on the chaste Ædilhryda, a lady who chose to fly from the bed and throne of her husband Ecfrid, king of Northumberland, for the sake of preserving her virginity in a cloister. For this pious exploit she is extolled in the highest terms by the holy bard; who, in singing her praises, seems to felicitate himself, with a gallant complacency, that he is superior to Virgil in the happy choice of his subject*. It is, however, remarkable, that the greatest poet of our country has mentioned this obstinate royal virgin in terms of indignation and reproach. Milton, in his History of England, has condescended to relate the adventure of this pious fugitive, in the following language:—
 “ Another adversity befel Ecfrid in his fa-
 “ mily, by means of Ethildrith his wife,

* *Bella Maro resonet, nos pacis dona canamus :*

— — — — —
 — — — — —

Luxus erit lubricis, carmina casta mihi.

Bedæ Hymnus de Ædilhryda.

“ king Anna’s daughter, who, having taken
 “ him for her husband, and professing to
 “ love him above all other men, persisted
 “ twelve years in the obstinate refusal of
 “ his bed, thereby thinking to live the
 “ purer life; so perversely then was chastity
 “ instructed against the apostle’s rule: at
 “ length obtaining of him, with much im-
 “ portunity, her departure, she veiled her-
 “ self a nun, then, made abbess of Ely, died
 “ seven years after the pestilence; and might
 “ with better warrant have kept faithfully
 “ her undertaken wedlock, though now
 “ canonized St. Audrey of Ely*.”

Milton has not deigned to enter into a
 very whimsical part of this lady’s history;
 but a monastic historian informs us, that
 her husband, repenting of the indulgence
 he had granted to her, and inflamed with
 new desire, determined to force her from
 her religious retreat, and to consummate his

* Milton’s History of England, page 76, Birch’s edition.

marriage:

marriage: she escaped both from his love and his resentment, by a series of the most extraordinary miracles, which the curious reader may find very circumstantially related in the first volume of Dugdale's *Monasticon*. After sustaining great hardships, she is said to have expired a perfect virgin, in the year 679; and the miracles displayed at her tomb were not inferior to those by which her life was distinguished.

I cannot close the chapter without lamenting the sufferings of the fair sex in the ages of ignorance and superstition. When all the saints of the time most zealously asserted, that it was meritorious in a married woman to remain a virgin, domestic life must have been frequently embittered by tragi-comical contention; and, perhaps, the mind of many a well-meaning woman has been half-distracted by the struggle, which such doctrine may have produced, between tenderness and devotion. It may, however, afford us some consolation to reflect, that whenever these good ladies were misled by the priesthood

hood into a painful sacrifice of innocent delight, their pride was incessantly gratified by the pious honours that were lavished upon their rigid virginity: yet their passion for such honours was sometimes repressed by the stronger feelings of personal vanity, as we may collect from a ludicrous miracle related by Gregory of Tours. That historian gives us a circumstantial account of a noble and pious pair, who, being married in their youth, passed through life together with this extraordinary continence, at the particular request of the lady. She happened to die first, and, as her good man attended her funeral, he exclaimed, while the body was sinking into the grave, "I thank thee, eternal God, that as I received this treasure from thee, so I return it immaculate to thy goodness." Upon this the dead lady said with a smile, "Why do you mention matters on which you are not interrogated *?"—The sequel of the miracle

* Multos postea in uno strato recumbentes annos vixerunt cum castitate laudabili, quod postea in eorum transitu

racle is not less striking. The husband died soon afterwards, and though he was buried in a tomb not contiguous to that of his wife, it was observed, the next day, that their sepulchres were united. The devout historian seems to consider these incidents as proofs of the most signal chastity; but they may with as much reason be alledged as proofs, that the spotless lady, who had so strongly petitioned her husband to release her from the duties of a wife, did not relish his public declaration that she died an Old Maid.

transitu declaratum est. Nam cum impleto certamine puella migraret ad Christum, peracto vir funeris officio, cum puellam in sepulchrum deponeret, ait, "Gratias tibi ago, æterne Domine noster, quia hunc thesaurum, sicut a te commendatum accepi, ita immaculatum pietati tuæ restituo." Ad hæc illa subridens, "Quid," inquit, "loqueris quod non interrogaris?" Greg. Turonensis Hist. Francorum, lib. i. cap. 42.

C H A P. V I I.

*On Saint Gregory of Nyssa, and his Panegyric
on Virginity.*

I RETURN from the chaste and pious poets to the prosaic encomiasts of virginity. On examining the ecclesiastical writers who have merited this title, I find they are such a host, that I fear the attention of my reader would desert me, if I attempted to enumerate and describe them. I shall now, therefore, confine myself to four succeeding fathers of the church, who are entitled to our regard by the highest reputation for sanctity and eloquence; and from these I shall only select, as briefly as I can, such passages as seem to throw a particular light on the sisterhood, and are at the same time remarkable for strength and originality either of thought or expression.

The

The first of the four is St. Gregory of Nyssa, a younger brother of the great St. Basil, and a friend and correspondent of the poetical St. Gregory, who formed the principal subject of our last chapter. The St. Gregory of whom I am now to speak, was ordained bishop of Nyssa, in Cappadocia, by his brother St. Basil, in 372; in 385 he preached the funeral sermon of the empress Placilla; and by a late writer he is said to have died in 396, with the venerable title of Father of the Fathers.

The panegyric which this saint composed on virginity is the more remarkable, as we have positive evidence that he was himself a married man. This circumstance, however, is very far from having rendered him a languid advocate for the excellence of a single life; on the contrary, having asserted the dignity of this celestial excellence, he laments his own grovelling condition, in being precluded by marriage from a share of this glory. "A knowledge of the charms that belong to celibacy, is to me," says St. Gregory,

Gregory, "what food is to the ox, when, " turned to a full rack, he is prevented " from reaching it by his harness."— Having forcibly described his own mortifications by this striking image, he enlarges on the various evils that arise from matrimony, which he considers as a great source, not only of unhappiness, but of guilt.— " Look," says he, "at the passing scene— " marriage is the general prologue to all " the tragedies of life."—After painting the conjugal state in the most gloomy colours, he delineates, with a brilliant pencil, the pure delights of virginity, which he represents as a certain art and power of eluding all the vexations of earth, and attaining, even on this side the grave, the beatitude of heaven.

Having declaimed against wedlock with much freedom, or rather contempt and scorn, the saint seems to apprehend that his zeal for chastity has carried him too far, and he makes the following remarkable apology.

" Let

“ Let no one,” says he, “ imagine that I
 “ intend to censure the establishment of
 “ marriage ; for I am aware that it has not
 “ wanted the approbation of God : but, since
 “ nature sufficiently instigates mankind to
 “ people the world by this connection, it
 “ would be superfluous labour to compose
 “ an encomium on marriage, which finds,
 “ in the alluring voice of pleasure, an eter-
 “ nal advocate and patron ; while virginity
 “ is in some measure the antagonist of na-
 “ ture *. My sentiments on matrimony,”
 continues the faint, “ are these : — we ought
 “ to prefer to it the care of our celestial in-
 “ terest, and yet not to despise the person
 “ who makes a wise and temperate use of
 “ this institution.”

Though the faint, in the preceding sen-
 tence, has consulted his own personal credit
 as a married man, he very candidly proceeds
 to declare, that “ although marriage may

* *Απίθανοι δε πως η παρθενια τη φουσει.*

S. Greg. Nyss. p. 568.

“ be

“ be regarded as a kind of safe port against
“ the tempests of licentious passion, yet vir-
“ ginity affords a securer refuge, and a
“ more tranquil harbour.”

He contends, that man, as originally created, was perfectly free from all animal desires; and, instead of receiving pleasure from the gratification of sensual appetite, delighted only in the contemplation of his Maker. He alleges, it is evident from scripture*, that Adam had no connubial intercourse with Eve till after their expulsion from Paradise, when woman was condemned to the pains of child-birth, as a punishment for disobedience. “Therefore,” continues the saint, “as we lost Paradise by
“ the sensual offence of our first parents, it
“ is in our own power to regain it by a vo-
“ luntary sacrifice of all sensual pleasures.
“ As the persons who have wandered from
“ their own country, and wish to return to
“ it, begin by quitting the place to which

* See Genesis chap. iv.

“ they

“ they have strayed ; in the same manner,
 “ since marriage was the last step which
 “ completed our separation from Paradise, I
 “ would advise those who are ambitious of
 “ returning thither, to begin by relinquish-
 “ ing marriage, the *last stage* *, as it were, in
 “ the road between earth and heaven.”

St. Gregory proceeds to prove the do-
 minion of virginity over death, which he
 accomplishes by a singular mode of reason-
 ing :—“ The production of children,” says
 he, “ does not minister so much to life as to
 “ death, since their birth only leads to their
 “ dissolution ; but they who devote their
 “ persons to virginity, place themselves as a
 “ kind of isthmus between life and death, to
 “ stop the fury of the latter. The devasta-
 “ tion of death is thus prevented ; for, as
 “ the power of fire cannot subsist without
 “ fuel, so the force of death cannot prevail,
 “ unless marriage supplies him with his
 “ prey.”

* *Ὡςτις τὴν ἑσθλὴν ἐσχάτην.*

The saint now enters on a more minute description of virginity; which does not, he says, consist merely in personal purity, but in discharging all the duties of a tranquil and spotless mind. He borrows, on this occasion, from his brother St. Basil the remarkable simile, which I have already mentioned, of the successive circles produced in water by the impulse of a single stone; an image which he uses to illustrate the agitation produced in a peaceful mind by the admission of any one inordinate desire.—“Let virginity,” says the saint, “be the foundation on which the works of virtue are raised; for, excellent and honourable as it is, if this purity of person is not united to integrity of mind—if the whole life of a virgin does not correspond to this professed excellence—if she is blackened by incontinence of spirit—her virginity is but an earring in the nose of a sow, or a pearl trodden under the feet of swine*.”

* ΤὸΤΟ ΕἶΜΑ Τῆ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΥ ΕΚΛΕΙΟ ΤΟ ΕΙ Τῆ ΕΒΛΙ ΤΗΣ ΟΥΟΙ, ἢ
 ὁ ΜΑΡΓΑΡΙΤΗΣ ὁ ΕΙ ΤΟΙΣ ΠΟΟΙ Τῆ ΧΟΙΡῆΝ ΚΑΤΑΠΑΤΕΥΜΕΝΟΣ.

Sanct. Greg. Nyss. p. 593.

l must

I must not omit the whimsical conceit with which St. Gregory asserts the honour of Miriam, the sister of Aaron, as the primitive model of true virginity. Having described her dancing with a timbrel in her hand, after the miraculous passage through the Red Sea, he imagines that this musical instrument is mentioned in scripture as a symbol of her chastity, on account of the similarity, which he discovers between virginity and the timbrel—a wonderful familiarity! which Gregory has explained in language that I forbear to copy, lest the chaste eyes of the modern sisterhood should be shocked by the expressive images of this fanciful saint.

In a former part of my work I had occasion to remark, that Miriam was not entitled to this distinction, as she, in all probability, was a married woman. The genius and talents of this fair Hebrew seem, indeed, to have operated like those of a modern fine lady, who, eclipsing her husband by the brilliancy

of her spirit, reduces him to such insignificance, that he is rarely mentioned.

But to conclude this brief account of St. Gregory. In the subsequent part of his discourse, he endeavours to settle the just medium between luxury and extreme abstinence, as he is far from being a friend to that rigorous discipline by which the health of many a monastic recluse has been destroyed. The twenty-fourth and last chapter of his treatise is very remarkable; for, instead of declaiming, like most of the fathers, against the depravity of the times, he speaks of his own age as abounding in good examples.—“Sanctity,” says he, “is now, if ever, in so flourishing a state, that it wants but little to reach the summit of perfection.”—He concludes, by recommending it to those who wish to lead a virgin life, to put themselves under the guidance of an experienced and venerable conductor.

C H A P. VIII.

*On St. Ambrose, and his several Compositions
in Praise of Virginity.*

THE Latin fathers of the church were by no means inferior to the Greek, in the zealous veneration which they paid to virginity. The chaste devotees of Italy found an ardent, indefatigable advocate and patron in the celebrated St. Ambrose, who was unexpectedly raised, by the voice of the people, from a civil station to the rank of an archbishop; and, having filled the episcopal throne of Milan about twenty years, ended his active and glorious life in that city at the age of 57, in the year 394.

This eminent writer devoted several distinct performances to the consecrated virgins. There are three of his productions that particularly claim our attention, and of these I shall speak as they occur.—The first,

and most elaborate, is a Treatise on Virgins, divided into three books, and addressed to his sister Marcellina; who, hearing that he had preached with singular eloquence on this interesting topic, and being unable to attend his public discourses, requested from her brother the particulars of his doctrine.

Saint Ambrose begins his treatise with singular humility, in comparing himself to the speaking ass of Balaam. He then takes occasion, from the festival of St. Agnes, to celebrate the excellence of that virgin martyr, a Roman damsel, distinguished by her rank and beauty, who, with miraculous fortitude, at the age of thirteen, preferred the tortures of persecution to the rich offers of a Pagan lover, and perished by the sword in the beginning of the fourth century. It may be worth remarking, that the merits of this infant martyr have given rise to many the most spirited of pious panegyrics; and that her name has been extolled by a succession of bishops, saints, and poets, from
the

the vehement Ambrose to the tender and elegant Maffillon, bishop of Clermont; whose works contain a most beautiful and pathetic sermon on the festival of this lovely martyr.

From the praise of Agnes, St. Ambrose proceeds to a general encomium on chastity, which was unknown, he says, or imperfectly preserved, through all the nations of the heathen world.—“But how,” says the saint, very candidly, “can the human understanding comprehend what nature has not included in her laws *?”—He then endeavours to prove, that celibacy is an institution of God, and heaven the true country of virgins. He expressly asserts that the preservation of chastity makes an angel, and the loss of it a devil †. He compares the condition of the wife, condemned

* Quis autem humano eam possit ingenio comprehendere, quam nec natura suis inclusit legibus?

Divi Ambrosii de Virginibus, Lib. 1.

† Qui eam servavit angelus est, qui perdidit, diabolus.

to the pains of child-birth, with the happy freedom of the consecrated maiden. He makes a very subtle and powerful address to parents, persuading them to atone for their own offences, by the early consecration of their virgin daughters; an exhortation which must have contributed very cruelly to increase the number of wretched and involuntary Old Maids, as many superstitious and selfish parents were undoubtedly ready to make their own peace with Heaven, at the expence of their unfortunate offspring.

Saint Ambrose mentions, with exultation, the swarms of pious damsels that hastened to receive the veil from his hand, not only from the neighbouring cities of Italy, but from the distant regions of Mauritania. He exhorts the young virgins to disregard all domestic impediments to their religious desires, and to embrace a monastic life in express opposition to the authority of their parents. He endeavours to justify this bold advice by a remarkable anecdote, which concludes

concludes the first division of his treatise, and which I shall copy, to render my fair readers acquainted with the singular style of this faint.—“ If you believe not the words “ of Heaven,” cries Ambrose, “ yet believe examples. In our memory, a damsel, once noble by her worldly rank, and now more ennobled by her attachment to God, being urged to marriage by her parents and relations, fled for refuge to the altar; and where can a virgin seek a better asylum, than that holy spot where the sacrifice of virginity is presented? But even here she was troubled with impious importunity. She stood by the altar of God as the offering of modesty, as the victim of continence. ‘ Why are you so anxious for my nuptials?’ she exclaimed to her relations—‘ I am betrothed already. You offer me a husband, but I have found a better. Exaggerate the riches, boast the nobility, proclaim the power, of the party you propose; I have chosen

“ chosen *Him* to whom no one can be com-
“ pared; rich in the world, powerful in
“ dominion, pre-eminent in heaven. If
“ you have such to offer, I do not refuse the
“ option; but if you find not such, your
“ conduct towards me is rather envious
“ than provident.’—One of her relations,
“ observing the rest were silenced, abruptly
“ said, ‘What if your father were living,
“ would he suffer you to remain unmar-
“ ried?’—The virgin answered, with new
“ religious fervour, and more temperate
“ piety, ‘On this account, perhaps, he
“ died, that he might not prove an impe-
“ diment to the sanctity of his daughter.’—
“ This reply concerning her father proved
“ a kind of prophecy to her relation, as
“ he also expired soon after it, and the vir-
“ gin succeeded in her holy purpose. Ob-
“ serve, ye maidens, this reward of devo-
“ tion! Beware, ye parents, of a similar of-
“ fence!”

• Saint Ambrose, having thus magnified
the excellence of virginity in the first divi-
sion

tion of his discourse, proposes, in the second, to instruct the young virgin in the particulars of her duty ; and, to guard himself from the imputation of arrogance, he offers to his fair disciples, not a collection of severe precepts, but of splendid examples. Having exhorted them to imitate the humility of the *Virgin Mary*, and the fortitude of the martyr *Thecla*, he relates a recent instance of female chastity and resolution in the interesting adventures that befel a young and beautiful virgin of Antioch, who, on her refusal to worship the Pagan Divinities, was dragged into a public brothel, where her chastity was exposed to the most imminent danger, but was happily preserved by the fervour of her eloquence, and the sincerity of her virtue. She made a convert and a friend of the heathen soldier who had taken an active part in the outrage she endured, and inspired her persecutor with such pity and esteem, that he attempted, at the hazard of his own life, to preserve the purity which he had designed to violate. By an exchange
of

of dress, he contrived the escape of the virgin, but was himself condemned to die for the pious deception. The heroic virgin bravely rushed from her concealment to intercept the fate of her generous deliverer. They mutually contended for the glory of dying for each other. Their religious heroism was derided by the barbarity of persecution, and the only indulgence they obtained, was that of perishing together.

It is remarkable, that this pathetic little story has employed the pen of a famous French poet, and of an English philosopher of equal eminence. The *Theodore* of Corneille, as he informs us himself, was founded on this anecdote related by St. Ambrose; and, among the juvenile works of our great Boyle, we find the martyrdom of Theodora and Didymus. But the tragedy of the sublime poet, and the narrative of the benevolent philosopher, are both sunk into similar neglect; a circumstance sufficiently accounted for by a lively remark of Voltaire, who observes, very justly, on this play of

Corneille, that "he chose the subject because he had more genius than taste;" an observation, perhaps, as applicable to the English philosopher as to the French poet; and certainly still more applicable to the Latin saint; for Ambrose has related these adventures in a quaint and conceited style, full of indecency and affectation. I have therefore declined a translation of the passage, from the persuasion that my readers would be more entertained by a shorter and more simple recital of this affecting story. I shall add to it the curious remarks which Corneille has made on St. Ambrose, to console himself for the ill success of his tragedy. — " * Certainly," says this great, though unequal poet, "we may congratulate ourselves

* Certes il y a de quoi congratuler à la pureté de notre théâtre, de voir qu'une histoire qui fait le plus bel ornement du second livre des Vierges de Saint Ambroise, se trouve trop licentieuse pour y être supportée, Qu'eût-on dit, si, comme ce grand docteur de l'église, j'eusse fait voir Theodore dans le lieu infâme, si
j'eusse

“ selves on the purity of our theatre, in fee-
 “ ing that a story, which forms the most
 “ beautiful ornament in St. Ambrose’s se-
 “ cond book upon virgins, is found too li-
 “ centious to be endured. What would
 “ they have said, if, like that great doctor
 “ of the church, I had exhibited Theodoras
 “ in a house of infamy, if I had described
 “ the various agitations of her soul while
 “ she remained in that scene, if I had ex-
 “ pressed the trouble that she felt in the
 “ moment when she saw Didymus enter?
 “ It is here that this great saint displays
 “ the triumph of his eloquence, it is for
 “ this spectacle that he particularly invites
 “ the virgins to open their eyes.”

*j’eusse décrit les diverses agitations de son ame durant
 qu’elle y fut, si j’eusse figuré les troubles qu’elle y
 ressentit au premier moment qu’elle y vit entrer Di-
 dyme ? C’est là-dessus que ce grand saint fait triom-
 pher son éloquence, & c’est pour ce spectacle qu’il in-
 vite particulièrement les vierges à ouvrir les yeux.*

Corneille, édit. de Voltaire,

tom. iii. p. 143.

Such

Such are the reflections of Corneille, in the epistle dedicatory to his unfortunate Theodora; and doubtless it was a consolation to the poet, in his recent disgrace, to recollect that he was infinitely more delicate than the canonized archbishop of Milan.

The third book of St. Ambrose opens with a recital of many pious precepts, delivered to Marcellina, the sister of our saint, by the pope Liberius, on the day when she received the veil from his hands. The points which the pontiff particularly recommended were, temperance and taciturnity: the latter is perpetually enjoined by the fathers, as one of the capital perfections in a consecrated virgin. St. Ambrose pays his sister the compliment of acknowledging, that her virtue had not only equalled, but even exceeded, the discipline of Liberius, and specifies her great merit in the articles of abstinence and prayer. Yet, notwithstanding the extreme sanctity of her character, he presents to her a long admonition concerning the dangers that attend the gaiety of nuptial

nuptial entertainments, and the wanton enormity of dancing. He then answers a question of Marcellina's, on a very delicate topic, Whether the religion which forbids self-destruction, allows the virgin to destroy her own life for the preservation of her faith and her virginity? St. Ambrose decides the point, by the example of Pelagia, a virgin of Antioch, who, at the age of fifteen, threw herself into a river to escape from licentious persecution. The particulars of Pelagia's death are singularly striking, and the flourishes of St. Ambrose, in relating her story, not less so. The spirit of this young martyr induced her virgin sisters, and even her mother, to share her fate. St. Ambrose describes this heroic family advancing, hand in hand, to the brink of a torrent, with their persecutors behind them; and he makes these undaunted females address the river in the following expressions:—"Behold the water! who forbids us to be baptized? Let the water receive us, which is the source of regeneration—let the

" the

“ the water receive us, by which virgins
 “ are made — let the water receive us,
 “ which opens heaven, closes hell, hides
 “ death, and produces martyrs *.” — The
 faint relates, that they added to this address
 a short prayer for the decent preservation
 of their bodies; “ after which,” says he,
 “ unbinding their garments, so as to guard
 “ their modesty, and yet leave their steps
 “ free, and then joining hands, as if to
 “ lead a dance, they plunged together, into
 “ the deepest part of the flood †.”

Besides the example of Pelagia, St. Am-

* *Ecce aqua! Quis nos baptizari prohibet? Ex-
 cipiat nos aqua, quæ regenerare confusit—excipiat
 nos aqua, quæ virgines facit—excipiat nos aqua, quæ
 coelam aperit, inferos tegit, mortem abscondit, mar-
 tyres reddit.*

† *Incincto sinu quò pudorem tegerent, nec gressum
 impedirent, confertis manibus, tanquam choros ducer-
 rent, in medium progrediuntur alveum; ubi unda
 torrentior, ubi profundum abruptius, illò vestigia di-
 rigentes.* Divi Ambrosii de Virg. lib. iii.

brose reminds his sister of the resolution displayed by a chaste female of their own family, who perished, he says, in the severest tortures without a groan or a tear.

In the close of his elaborate treatise, St. Ambrose enters into a long and very warm vindication of his own conduct. He had been accused, it seems (and certainly with justice) of alluring young maidens to relinquish the natural idea of settling themselves in marriage, and to take the monastic vow. Instead of denying, he glories in the charge. "Can that conduct," exclaims the saint, "be considered as a crime in me, " which has always reflected honour on the " priesthood, to sow the seeds of perfection, " and promote an attachment to virginity?" —He then proceeds to examine, whether his doctrine can be censured, either as dishonest, or new, or unprofitable; and his reasoning on these three points is highly curious:—"If you call it dishonest," says the saint, "you must also apply that appellation to the life of the angels; for they
" neither

“ neither marry, nor are given in marriage.
“ Can it be condemned as a novelty? I
“ consent to abjure all things as novelties,
“ which are not taught us by Christ; but
“ does he not deliver the same doctrine,
“ when he says, ‘ There are eunuchs which
“ have made themselves eunuchs for the
“ kingdom of heaven*?’ Virginitv is
“ therefore sanctified by a celestial voice,
“ and recommended by the precepts of our
“ Lord.—But since we have thus proved,
“ that the doctrine of continence is neither
“ dishonest nor new, let us enquire if it can
“ be reckoned unprofitable. I have heard
“ many people exclaim, that the world is
“ perishing—that the human race will be-
“ come extinct—that wedlock is ruined.
“ I only ask, in reply, did ever any man
“ seek a wife without being able to find
“ one?—If any one thinks that the human
“ race will be diminished by the consecra-
“ tion of virgins, let him consider, that

* Matth. chap. xix.

“ where there are few virgins, there are
 “ fewer men. Where the devotion to vir-
 “ ginity is frequent, there the number of
 “ men is much greater.. Observe. what
 “ multitudes are annually admitted to the
 “ veil in the churches of the East, and of
 “ Africa. The men born in this country,
 “ are fewer than the virgins that are conse-
 “ crated there *.”

With the citation of this curious fact, I shall close my account of St. Ambrose's larger treatise on virgins, as the residue of that work consists only of passages from scripture very whimsically united.

The second composition of our illustrious saint, on this interesting topic, is entitled, “ An Exhortation to Virgins.” It was written as a compliment to Juliana, an opulent widow, who, having devoted her whole family, consisting of a son and three daughters, to a re-

* *Disceite quantas Alexandrina, totiusque Orientis, et Africana ecclesia, quotannis sacrare consueverint. Pauciores hic homines prodeunt quam illic virgines consecrantur.* Divi Ambrosii de Virg. lib. iii.

ligious life, employed her fortune in building a church at Florence, which she requested St. Ambrose to consecrate. Upon this ceremony the saint introduces Juliana in his discourse, extolling to her children the excellence of virginity in opposition to marriage. He makes her declare, that although she had a good husband, she laments that she was ever married; and that nothing can console her for having forfeited, in her own person, the grace of virginity, but the hope of proving the mother of holy virgins. But the most remarkable passage in this singular work is a very whimsical pun. St. Ambrose, deriving the word *nubere*, to marry, from *nubes*, a cloud, pursues his conceit with great solemnity, and gravely demonstrates the similitude between a married woman and a heavy exhalation *. The

* Et verè graves nubes, quæ sustinent sarcinam matrimonii. Nam etiam gravari alio feruntur, cum femina conceptionis acceperint.

Divi Ambrosii ad Virg. Exhortatio,
p. 108. edit. Basil.

discourse contains many sentiments and precepts, exactly similar to those of the preceding treatise, and concludes with an encomium on the piety of Juliana.

The third work, which St. Ambrose devoted to the holy sisterhood, has two different titles, being sometimes called *The Institution of a Virgin*, and sometimes, *A Discourse on the perpetual Virginity of the Virgin Mary*, which St. Ambrose very zealously supported against Bonosus, a bishop condemned by the council of Capua, for the opposite opinion. The saint alledges six arguments in favour of the point which he intends to prove; but, as the Catholic critics justly observe that some of these arguments have more wit than solidity, I shall decline an account of them, from a reverence to the hallowed personage of whom they speak.

CHAP. IX.

*On St. Chrysoftom, and his Panegyric on
Virginity.*

IF the pious virgins of Italy had reason to admire the zeal which the holy Ambrose displayed in their behalf, those of Constantinople enjoyed a patron and pastor yet more admirable in the famous St. Chrysoftom, who equalled the archbishop of Milan in his enthusiastic veneration for celibacy, with the insinuating advantage of a superior eloquence. This talent, from which he received the appellation of Chrysoftom, or the golden mouth, had raised him from the condition of a sequestered monk, to preside over the clergy of the Eastern empire: but his elevation, though propitious to his glory, was fatal to his peace. The austerity of a hermit was ill suited to the manners of a corrupt metropolis. The in-

flexible prelate engaged in a dangerous quarrel with the empress Eudoxia, and, after sustaining his episcopal office nine years, under the vicissitudes of triumph and disgrace, he expired in 407, at the age of sixty, and in the midst of hardships inflicted on him as a persecuted exile.

I have already had occasion to quote some passages from this accomplished saint, in speaking of the unorthodox cohabitation of priests and virgins; a licentious, or at least an offensive custom, which Chrysostom had the honour of suppressing, by his eloquent invectives. In these we have seen, that the holy father bestowed on virginity the most magnificent praise; but I am yet to give an account of a long and regular panegyric, which he composed expressly on this favourite topic.

He opens this elaborate treatise with a severe condemnation of all heretical virgins, whom he sinks to a condition below that of the Christian adulterers. He uncharitably represents the Pagan Old Maid as an im-

mediate

diate minister of the devil; nay, he will not allow that she could be a virgin; for, although her person was pure, yet her soul, the more important part, was corrupted:—

“And what,” cries the animated saint, “what is the advantage, if the temple be demolished, that the vestibule stands entire?”

He proceeds, with great subtlety, to shew, “that he who condemns marriage, diminishes the glory of true virginity; and that he who praises wedlock, does the highest honour to celibacy: for that which is considered as good, on a comparison with evil, may be not eminently good; but that which is better than a blessing of universal estimation, must be supremely excellent; and in this light,” continues the saint, “we recommend virginity. Matrimony is good; and on this account virginity is marvellous, because it is better than good* ; and, if you wish

* Καλον ο γαμος και δια τουτο η παρθενια θαυμαστον οτι καλυ κρειττον εστι.

Sanct. Chryl. tom. iv. p. 322. edit. Par.

“it,

“ it, I will inform you how far it is better ;
 “ as much as heaven is better than earth,
 “ and angels than men.”

In this comparison, St. Chrysoſtom only echoes the ſentiment and expreſſion which we have already ſeen in more than one of his predeceſſors ; but this eloquent encomiaſt of virginity was of a ſpirit too animated to content himſelf with a ſervile repetition, and we accordingly find him purſuing this idea, with addreſs and vigour peculiar to himſelf.

After ſaying, that virginity is as much ſuperior to wedlock, as angels are to men, he exclaims, “ Or, to ſpeak with juſt energy,
 “ yet more ; for the angels, if they neither
 “ marry nor are given in marriage, are not
 “ compounded of fleſh and blood ; they
 “ have no ſettlement on earth, they feel not
 “ the perturbations of deſire. They neither
 “ hunger nor thirſt, they have no organs
 “ which can be ſoftened by muſic or faſci-
 “ nated by beauty ; but, as the meridian
 “ ſky, where no clouds are collected, ap-
 “ pears

“ pears pure, so their nature, unclouded by
“ mortal passions, must of necessity be clear
“ and lucid.”

The faint proceeds to shew, that virgins, under the disadvantage of mortality, engage in a successful competition with these celestial spirits, and equal them in purity and perfection.—“ But this,” he exclaims with indignation, “ this touches not you, ye worldlings, who waste this lovely treasure!—the portion of the unprofitable servant is reserved for you; but to the virgins of the church, many and great rewards shall be allotted, such as neither eye nor ear can perceive, nor human understanding comprehend.”

He then attempts to refute the objections which have been urged against celibacy, by affirming, that marriage is by no means necessary for the preservation and continuance of the human race; and, as a proof of this, he asserts (what other faints have also maintained) that Adam had no connubial intercourse

course with Eve, till after their expulsion from Paradise.

He goes yet farther, and affirms, it is not virginity, but sin, that has a tendency to diminish and destroy the human species; and supports his remark by the history of the deluge.

The faint proceeds to make many severe reflections on those who treat virginity with contempt. He expatiates on the excellence and the merits of the maidenly condition. He dwells on the severe bondage of wedlock, and particularly on the hard case of that wife who may wish to live in a state of continence, and yet cannot lawfully refuse those caresses to which she has no inclination. He contrasts the single and the married life in every point of view, and uniformly decides in favour of the first.

C H A P. X.

On St. Jerom, and his various Compositions in Praise of Virginity.

I SHALL close my catalogue of holy panegyrists with the mention of a saint who was equal, and perhaps superior, to all his sainted brethren, in extent of learning, in vigour of genius, and, above all, in vehemence of zeal for the support of virginity. I mean the passionate and the witty St. Jerom, who passed a great part of his singular life either in struggling with his own turbulent desires in a lonely wilderness, or in preaching continence to the devout and rich ladies of a luxurious city. He was born about the year 345, on the confines of Dalmatia, received his education at Rome, and travelled into Gaul. He then proposed to settle in the metropolis of Italy, but the religious activity of his spirit soon hurried
6 him

him into the East ; and, having visited the most hallowed places of that country, he devoted himself to a state of severest mortification in the deserts of Syria. Sickness drove him to Antioch ; from thence he was led to Constantinople by his desire of conversing with St. Gregory Nazianzen. Ecclesiastical business now carried him to Rome, and it was at this advanced period of his life that he became the favourite preceptor of many Roman ladies, who, while they attended his exhortations to chastity, were very wantonly censured for their devout familiarity with this eloquent enthusiast. The attachment of his female disciples, though probably very innocent, was undoubtedly very strong, as some of them followed him into the Holy Land, where he ended an unquiet but illustrious life, at the age of fourscore. Among these disciples, a widow, whose name was Paula, attracted the notice of the world by her rank and fortune, and still more by the fervency of her devotion. The ardent friendship which

St. Jerom professed for this lady had a considerable influence on his life and writings. What he suffered, and what he enjoyed, in the pious connection, he has himself very forcibly described, in a letter addressed to Afella, a religious maiden of peculiar sanctity. In speaking of the Roman ladies; he says, “ * I lived among them almost three
 “ years, and was frequently surrounded
 “ by a croud of virgins. To some I often
 “ explained the scripture. My lectures
 “ produced attention — attention, familiarity—
 “ and familiarity, confidence. But
 “ let them say if they ever observed in me
 “ any thing unbecoming a Christian. I accepted,
 “ indeed, the money of some; their presents,
 “ whether small or great, I did not

* Penè certè triennium cum eis vixi; multa me virginum crebrò turba circumdedit. Divinos libros, ut potui, nonnullis sæpè differui. Lectio assiduitatem, assiduitas familiaritatem, familiaritas fiduciam fecerat. Dicant quid unquam in me aliter fenserint quam Christianum decebat. Pecuniam cujusquam accepi; munera vel parva vel magna non sprevi: nihil mihi aliud

" not despise; yet nothing was ever al-
 " ledged against me except my sex, and
 " even that was never alledged against me,
 " till Paula travelled to Jerusalem. Before
 " I became familiar with the house of the
 " holy Paula, I had gained the general ap-
 " plause of the whole city; and by the
 " judgment of almost all, I was regarded
 " as worthy the highest rank in the church.
 " I was called a saint, I was called humble
 " and eloquent.—Did I ever enter the
 " doors of any gay or wanton lady? Were
 " silk and jewels, a painted face, and a pro-
 " fusion of gold, any attractions to me?—
 " There was no matron of Rome who
 " could

aliud obijcitur nisi sexus meus; et hoc nunquam obijci-
 tur, nisi quum Jerosolymam Paulæ proficiscitur. Ante-
 quam domum sanctæ Paulæ nôsem, totius in me urbis
 studia consonabant; omnium penè judicio dignus
 summo sacerdotio decernebar. Dicebar sanctus, di-
 cebar humilis et disertus. Numquid domum alicujus
 lascivioris ingressus sum? numquid me vestes sericæ,
 nitentes gemmæ, picta facies, auri rapuit ambitio?
 Nulla fuit alia Romæ matronarum quæ meam posset
 edomare

“ could conquer my mind, except her dis-
 “ tinguished by mourning and mortifica-
 “ tion, coarse in her attire, and almost
 “ blind with weeping—whom the sun often
 “ finds imploring, through successive nights,
 “ the mercy of her God—whose songs are
 “ psalms—whose conversation, the gospel
 “ —whose luxury, continence—whose life
 “ a fast. No woman could delight me, ex-
 “ cept her whom I never beheld in the act
 “ of eating: but as soon as I began to es-
 “ teem, to revere, and look up to her for
 “ the merit of her chastity, from that mo-
 “ ment all my own virtues forsook me.”

The saint proceeds to vent his indignation against the envy and malice of those

edomare mentem, nisi lugens atque jejunans, squalens fordibus, fletibus penè cæcata; quam continuis noctibus misericordiam Domini deprecantem sol sæpè deprehendit; cujus canticum psalmi, sermo evangelium; deliciae continentia, vita jejunium. Nulla me potuit alia delectare, nisi illa quam manducantem nunquam vidi; sed postquam eam pro suæ merito castitatis venerari, colere, suscipere cœpi, omnes me illicò deseruere virtutes.

Sanct. Hieron. tom. iv. p. 66.

who had accused him of a criminal intrigue with this devout lady; and he closes his letter with all the animation of injured innocence, professing, in spite of the censorious world, an everlasting attachment both to the widow Paula, and her maiden daughter Eustochium. To the latter he has addressed one of his most remarkable compositions; and of this I shall now give a brief account. It is intitled, "An Epistle on the Preservation of Virginity."—"I do not intend in this discourse," says the saint to his fair disciple, "to rehearse to you the praises of that maidenly condition, which you have found to be most excellent, nor to enumerate the troubles of matrimony. There will be no adulation in this little treatise, no rhetorical pomp of language, which may invest you with the dignity of an angel, and, by describing the beatitude of virginity, lay the world at your feet. I do not wish that the life you have embraced should inspire you with pride, but with caution:

6

" you

“ you travel, laden with treasure, it is there-
 fore your business to avoid a thief*.”

After this friendly admonition, the saint proceeds to speak of the incessant danger to which virginity is exposed; and, to alarm his tender pupil in the highest degree, he says, with a temerity of language which his zeal, I think, can hardly excuse, “ Though
 “ God is all powerful, he cannot raise up a
 “ virgin that is ruined. He is able, indeed,
 “ to deliver her from punishment; but
 “ he will not bestow a crown on the cor-
 “ rupted †. Virginity,” continues the saint,
 “ may even perish by the simple offences
 “ of the mind, and be lost only by har-
 “ bouring a licentious idea.”—St. Jerome is very candid, in adding to this rigid maxim a striking history of his own turbu-

* Onusta incedis auro, latro tibi vitandus est.

Epist. ad Eustoch.

† Audenter loquar: quum omnia possit Deus, suscitare virginem non potest post ruinam. Valet quidem liberare de pœna, sed non vult coronare corruptam.

Epist. ad Eustoch.

lent and wanton thoughts in the wilderness to which he retired. In spite of the severe mortifications by which he there endeavoured to subdue the propensities of nature, in the midst of fasting, solitude, and prayer, his ardent imagination, he confesses, hurried him from the silent desert to scenes of Roman luxury, and the society of girls. From this honest confession, he draws a forcible argument in favour of temperance. —“ If they,” says the saint, “ who reduce
“ their bodies by abstinence, are thus tor-
“ mented by their fancy, what must the
“ damsel suffer, who is indulged in every
“ delicacy? If, therefore, I have any right
“ to advise, if you can credit experience,
“ this is my first admonition, this my most
“ earnest intreaty, that the consecrated vir-
“ gin may fly from wine as from poison.”
—The saint expatiates on the necessity of abstinence, both as to food and liquor; and he concludes his advice on this topic with these remarkable expressions: —“ It
“ is not that Heaven is delighted with the
“ rumbling

“ rumbling of our intestines, but chastity
 “ cannot otherwise be safe *.”

This caution is followed by a very striking picture of the dissolute manners which prevailed in that age. The ladies and the clergy are treated with equal severity by the indignant Jerom; their vices are described with that singular vehemence of angry wit, that energy of metaphor, by which the writings of this eloquent father are peculiarly distinguished: “ I am ashamed
 “ to say,” exclaims the animated saint,
 “ how many virgins are daily ruined!
 “ what illustrious maidens are lost from the
 “ very bosom of our mother church! over
 “ what fallen stars the proud enemy rears
 “ his throne †!” He strikes at the coha-

* Non quod Deus intestinorum nostrorum rugitu delectetur, sed quod aliter pudicitia tuta esse non possit. Epist. ad Eustoch.

† Pudet dicere quot quotidie virgines ruant, quantas de suo gremio mater perdat ecclesia, super quæ sydera inimicus superbus ponat thronum suum; quot petras excavet, et habitet coluber in foraminibus earum.

bitation, that I have mentioned before, between the priests and the canonical virgins: "How was this pest," cries the angry Jerom, "introduced into the church *?"

The saint proceeds to contrast with these licentious manners the extreme purity of his young disciple, in which he exhorts her to persevere with various precepts; he dwells chiefly on abstinence and nightly prayer. He recommends to her several authors, who had written on virgins—Tertullian, St. Cyprian, his friend Damafus the Roman pontiff, who celebrated virginity both in prose and verse, but, above all, the treatise of St. Ambrose, of which I have given an account, and which St. Jerom extols as a master-piece of eloquence. He cautions her at the same time, against all profaner studies, and particularly the amusement of poetry.

* Unde in ecclesiis agapetarum pestis introit? unde meretrices univiræ? Eadem domo, uno cubiculo, sæpè uno tenentur et lectulo, et suspiciosos nos vocant, si aliquid existimamus. Epist. ad Eustoch.

There

There is a very pleasing peculiarity in this generous saint ; I mean, his custom of relating a little history of his own frailties, to form a more forcible lesson for the use of his disciple. Of this we have already seen one example, in the narration of his wanton thoughts in the desert. A second now occurs, on the subject of profane literature. He confesses to his fair pupil, that, after spending some time in his sacred studies, in fasting and prayer, he used to amuse himself with the comedies of Plautus, which delighted him so much, that when he returned to the perusal of the prophets, he found them insufferably dull. A fever attacked him, and, at the height of his distemper, he was transported, in a vision, before the tribunal of a judge, who, upbraiding him for his attachment to the literature of the Gentiles, commanded him to be scourged. The conscious Jerom acknowledges the justice of this sentence, and supports the reality of his punishment, by appealing to the stripes which he continued,

he says, to feel after his sleep had left him.

In speaking of literature, St. Jerom has some curious expressions concerning the literary magnificence of his age. "Parchment," says he, "is tinged with purple, gold flows into letters, and books are arrayed in jewels." He ascribes this passion for splendor to the Roman ladies, whom he represents, in general, as full of ostentation, and destitute of virtue.

From hence he takes occasion to put his fair disciple on her guard against luxury and avarice.

At the distance of thirty years from the composition of these instructions to the tender Eustochium, we find the ardent St. Jerom addressing, with the same zeal for chastity, another Roman virgin, of equal or superior eminence; I mean the celebrated Demetrias, the grand-daughter of Proba, a matron of the highest rank and character in Rome, who, flying from that city, when it was taken by the Goths, escaped with her family,

family, and the wreck of an immense fortune, to the coast of Africa. The young and lovely Demetrias—inflamed with a pious passion for the palm of virginity, or alarmed, perhaps, by the fate of many illustrious Roman damsels, torn from their exiled parents, and basely sold to Syrian merchants by the infamous Count Heraclian, who commanded in Africa—sought an asylum in the church, by assuming the veil. The holy maiden was complimented by the most eminent saints of the age on this act of devotion. Nothing can more forcibly shew the high consequence of canonical virgins in that period, than the epistle of St. Jerom to Demetrias. After some praise bestowed on her own character, and that of her family, he represents her consecration as an event which diffused such universal joy throughout the Roman world, that it compensated in a great measure the late overthrow of the imperial city. He affirms, that the delight and exultation of the Roman

man people, on this occasion, were superior to what they had formerly displayed, both when their country was delivered from the ravages of the Gauls, and when, after the fatal battles of Trebia, Thrasymene, and Cannæ, they first heard of the victory which Marcellus obtained at Nola. This, surely, is one of the most hyperbolical compliments that was ever paid to a fair devotee, and affords us a curious proof how far the imagination of our lively saint would sometimes outrun his judgment. But though his zeal has overcharged the picture, we must remember that he painted from life: and his description of the effects produced by the consecration of this noble damsel, exhibits in the strongest light the maidenly enthusiasm of that period. After declaring that the joy of Demetrius's family was such as the eloquence both of Cicero and Demosthenes would be unequal to describe, St Jerom exclaims, " Good God, what was their exultation! as from one fruit-
" ful

“ful root many virgins shot forth* ; a
 “multitude of female dependants pursued
 “the example of their lady ; the profession
 “of virginity prevailed in every house †.
 “I speak too faintly : all the churches of
 “Africa exulted ; the fame of the pious
 “virgin pervaded every city, every town
 “every village, to the most lonely hut ; all
 “the islands between Africa and Italy were
 “filled with the joyful tidings. Then Italy
 “threw off her garb of mourning, and the
 “half demolished walls of Rome recovered
 “a part of their pristine splendor, her God
 “being deemed propitious in this perfect
 “conversion of her daughter. You would
 “have thought the race of Goths ex-
 “tinguished, and all her base enemies
 “struck dead by the avenging thunder of
 “heaven.”

* Quasi ex radice fecunda, multæ simul virgines pullularunt.

† Per omnes domos fervebat virginitatis professio, Parum loquor, &c.

Sanct. Hieron, Epist. ad Demetriadem.

Having

Having represented the effects of her consecration in these flattering colours, St. Jerom proceeds to favour this illustrious virgin with many precepts for the maintenance of her purity. He dwells on the usual topics of temperance and prayer. He ingeniously compares the virgin, who lives chastely in the warmth of youth, to those holy persons who continued unhurt in the fiery furnace. To the rich virgin he observes, that it is more meritorious to employ a large fortune in charitable donations to the poor, than in building a costly and splendid church. He advises his fair pupil to amuse herself with manual work. He cautions her against the insidious doctrine of the heretic Rufinus. He exhorts her never to hear any conversation between a man and his wife, as such dialogues are of an infectious nature*. “Chuse her for your companion,” says the saint, “who

* Ne audias quid vel maritus uxori, vel uxor locuta sit viro: venenatae sunt hujuscemodi confabulationes.
Epiſt. ad Demet.

“ never

“ never suspects that she is handsome ; who
 “ never throws back her cloak to discover
 “ her neck, but covers even her face so
 “ carefully, that she has hardly one eye,
 “ when she is walking in public, suffi-
 “ ciently unveiled to discern her path.”

The faint then speaks of his own former composition on the preservation of virginity ; a work, he says, which raised to him many enemies, on account of the honest freedom with which he arraigned the vices of the time. He is still, however, equally severe on female licentiousness : “ Many,” says he, “ affect the sanctity of canonical
 “ virgins, that they may more quietly in-
 “ dulse their impure desires. These things,” continues the faint, “ we see and suffer,
 “ and, when dazzled by a piece of gold,
 “ we even rank them in the catalogue of
 “ good works *.” He concludes with exhorting his chaste disciple to love the scripture ; and, what has a ludicrous tendency to

* *Hæc videmus et patimur, et si aureus nummus affulserit, inter bona opera deputamus.*

overthrow all his favourite doctrine, he entreats her to revere her *grandmother* as a model of perfection.

The respectful love which St. Jerom had conceived for virginity was so great, that it appears to have been the ruling passion of his life, and may be traced in almost all his writings. In his letters to different friends who had consulted him on the education of their female infants, he discovers the most ardent and anxious desire to form, from the cradle, a religious Old Maid. In advising a lady, whose name was *Læta*, to teach her little daughter to read by letters of box or ivory, he gives her a particular caution to let no boys come near the infant maiden. The whole letter is curious, as it circumstantially describes the very singular cautions which St. Jerom thought necessary to form a female character of accomplished purity.—But I must hasten to speak of the two more elaborate works of this saint, in which his predominant passion may be said to burst forth with the greatest fervency.

The

The first of these is a treatise on the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary, in opposition to Helvidius, who had attempted to prove, by passages from the gospel, that, after the birth of our Saviour, the Virgin Mary had other children by her husband Joseph. After replying to all the arguments of his adversary with great acuteness and strength of reason, St. Jerom indulges himself in a rhetorical description of the two opposite characters, a virgin and a wife; and he concludes his treatise by magnifying the pre-eminence of the former with all the lively spirit of eloquent enthusiasm.—The second is a work, in which the zeal of our saint, for the honour of virginity, arose to a still higher pitch; I mean his answer to Jovinian. This Italian monk, of a moderate and respectable character, had very candidly asserted, that the married women and virgins, who lived in equal obedience to the laws of the gospel, were equally meritorious. The indignation of the zealous Jerom took fire at this assertion; he could not

not bear that those objects of his idolatry, the pure virgins of the church, should be thus placed on a level with women debased, in his idea, even by a legal cohabitation with man. He is so hurried on by the vehemence of his anger, that he exclaims, in the opening of his reply, "How shall I check myself, and not indulge the weapon so impatient to strike in the cause of virginity *?" Indeed, the warm saint appears utterly unable to conduct the controversy with any degree of temper. Comparing the candid doctrine of his adversary to the hissing of the old serpent, he threatens to crush him as the most vile and pernicious of reptiles.

The passionate compositions of a bold and vigorous mind, enriched with extensive learning, are generally entertaining, though

* Unde cohibebo cursum, nec indulgebo mucroni jam nunc pro virginitate ferire cupienti ?

S. Hieron. adversus Jovinianum, lib. i.

full of error and absurdity. There is an attractive energy in satirical wit, however destitute of truth, when it is sharpened by indignation or envy. It is owing, perhaps, in some measure, to this forcible charm, that some unjust compositions of two very different authors, Voltaire and Dr. Johnson, have been read with peculiar avidity. In many strokes of personal character, and in the compact vigour of their style, these great writers both resembled St. Jerom. Sarcastic imagination and literary pride were, perhaps, the predominant characteristics of this singular triumvirate; they all delighted to exert the talent which they all possessed, of blowing an adversary to pieces with a sparkling explosion of irritable wit.

The mild and unfortunate Jovinian, though he had mercy and justice on his side, sunk under the vindictive eloquence of St. Jerom, who supported against his antagonist the pre-eminence of his favourite virginity by a variety of arguments,

and a torrent of sacred and prophane erudition. The saint very artfully perverts many texts of scripture to his purpose, and from some of them draws a wonderful inference against the purity of matrimonial duties *. He dwells on the authority of St. Paul, in his famous exhortation to celibacy. He affirms that virgins are more beloved by heaven, because their sacrifice is not enjoined, but voluntary. He declares, there is as much difference between marriage and virginity, as between not sinning and doing good.

Having made the utmost of those texts in scripture, which could be converted to the honour of virginity, he proceeds to shew, that a state of continence was no new establishment, introduced in opposition to nature by the Christian church, but of ancient and universal estimation. In this

* Si abstinemus nos a coitu, honorem tribuimus uxoribus; si non abstinemus, perspicuum est honori contrariam esse contumeliam. Sanct. Hieron.

part of his treatise, he gives an ample catalogue of the most eminent supposed virgins of the Pagan world, not omitting the Camilla and Harpalice of Virgil. He mentions the tradition of the Indian Gymnosophists, that the founder of their religious institutions was generated from the side of a virgin. He condescends to repeat even the Grecian fable concerning Plato's mother, who was said to have been impregnated by a phantom of Apollo*.

There are several points of religious doctrine which St. Jerom disputes with his antagonist, but I touch only on that which is particularly connected with the subject of this Essay. This, indeed, is the point for which the angry saint most vehemently contends. His indignation seems to have been particularly roused by the great eagerness with which the Roman ladies had embraced the liberal maxims of his opponent. Some canonical virgins, convinced by Jovi-

* Phantasmate Apollinis.

ESSAY ON

nian of the innocence and the merits of matrimony, had dropped the veil, and preferred the warm protection of a husband, to the chilling shelter of the church. St. Jerom, in the close of his invective, very forcibly describes the popularity of his antagonist. He laments that the rich and noble received him with deference and affection. He represents him as the preceptor of impurity, surrounded by multitudes of lascivious women, who have lost, not only their modesty, but all sense of shame; "and who display more wantonness," says the saint, "in the argumentative defence of their desire, than in its actual exertion."— He concludes with a spirited address to Rome, as the mistress of the world. He beseeches the imperial city to act in conformity to her ancient reputation, to be exalted by virtue, and not humbled by pleasure.

Though Jovinian seems to have had a large majority of the fair sex on his side, his mild doctrine concerning them was formally

mally condemned by ecclesiastical authority, and he died in exile. St Jerom arose triumphant from the contest; yet we find that many pious critics in Rome arraigned his composition, for extolling virginity to such a pitch, by the degradation of wedlock. In some of his letters he treats these critics with the utmost contempt. He asserts, in support of his own doctrine, that the apostles were either unmarried, or continent after marriage*. He concludes one of his epistles on this topic with an air of jocularity, by saying, "To explain my sentiments on wedlock completely, I would have all those provide themselves with wives, who, from their nightly fears, are unable to lie alone †."

Such was the doctrine, and such the suc-

* *Apostoli vel virgines, vel post nuptias continentes.* Sanct. Hieron. Epist. ad Pammachium, tom. iv. p. 242. edit. Par. 1705.

† *Volo omnes, qui propter nocturnos forsitan metus soli cubitare non possunt, uxores ducere.*

Sanct. Hieron Epist. ad Domnionem.

cess, of St. Jerom, as the eulogist of virginity. It may amuse the English reader to see this eloquent and chaste enthusiast in the character of a poet; I shall therefore close the chapter with a translation of the epitaph which he composed on his great friend and patroness, the illustrious Paula.—This lady, after residing about twenty years in Bethlem, where she had founded three monasteries for virgins, and one for monks—and after acting as a mother to all the Christian pilgrims, who then crowded to the holy sepulchre—ended a life of the strictest piety, in the year 404, at the age of fifty-six. The faithful St. Jerom lamented her with the most passionate affliction, and placed on different parts of the rock which was converted into her tomb, the two following inscriptions.

She,

*She, who from Scipio deriv'd her birth,
 Paula, is laid within this ballow'd earth:
 Her lineage from the Gracchi's splendid race,
 And Agamemnon's royal house, we trace;
 Eustochium's mother, first of Roman dames!
 But scorning worldly pride, and pompous names,
 In Bethlem sacred rural spot! she chose
 With christiān poverty her life to close.*

On the front of the cave.

*See you this stony sepulchre? It hides
 Paula's remains, who now in heaven resides.*

** Scipio quam genuit, Pauli fudere parentes,
 Gracchorum soboles, Agamemnonis inclyta proles,
 Hoc jacet in tumulo; Paulam dixere priores:
 Eustochii genetrix, Romani prima senatūs!
 Pauperiem Christi et Bethlemitica rura sequuta.*

In fronte speluncae.

*Aspicias augustum præcisâ rupe sepulcrum?
 Hospitium Paulæ est, cælestia regna tentantis.
 Fratrem, cognatōs, Roman, patriamque relinquens,
 Divitias, sobolem, Bethlemiti conditur antro.
 Hic præsepe tuum, Christe, atque hic mystica Magi
 Munera portantes, Hominique Deoque dadera.*

Sanct. Hieron. tom. iv. p. 689.

Friends,

*Friends, country, children, wealth—from all
she fled*

*To lay in Bethlem's holy rock her head:
Cradle of Christ! a scene the Magi trod,
Hailing, with mystic gifts, our human God.*

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

