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12

ESSAYS.

On the nature and immutability of TRUTH, in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism.

On POETRY and MUSIC, as they affect the Mind.

On LAUGHTER, and LUDICROUS COMPOSITION.

On the Utility of CLASSICAL LEARNING.

BY JAMES BEATTIE, LL. D.

Professor of MORAL PHILOSOPHY and LOGIC in the Marischal College and University of ABERDEEN.

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THIS Publication has been attended with some peculiar circumstances, which may be misunderstood, and which, therefore, I beg leave to explain.

About three years ago, some persons of distinction in England, who had honoured me with their friendship, were pleased to express a desire, that the *ESSAY ON TRUTH* should be printed in a more splendid form than that in which it had hitherto appeared; and so as to ensure profit, as well as honour, to the author. And the Proprietors of the Copy-right, being at the same time applied to, declared their willingness to permit an Edition to be printed for his advantage, on his agreeing to certain terms, which were thought reasonable.

It was then proposed, that a new Edition of *the Essay* should be printed in quarto, by subscription. To this the Author had some objections. He was apprehensive, that the *size* of that work might be inadequate to such a purpose. Besides, to publish in this manner a book which had already gone through two or three Editions, seemed hazardous, because unprecedented; and might, to those who were uninformed of the affair, give ground to suspect the Author of an infirmity, which no person who knows him will ever lay to his charge, an excessive love of money.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

It was answered, That the volume might be extended to a sufficiency of size, by printing, along with that *on Truth*, some other *Essays*, which, though not originally designed for the press, his Friends, who had seen them, were pleased to think not unworthy of it; and that the Proposed Subscription, being of a peculiar kind, should be conducted in a peculiar manner. “It shall never,” said the promoters of this undertaking, “be committed to Bookfellers, nor made public by advertisements; nobody shall be *solicited* to join in it; we, by ourselves and our friends, shall carry it on, without giving you any further trouble, than just to signify your consent, and prepare your materials: — and if there be, as we have reason to think there are, many persons of worth and fortune, who wish for such an opportunity, as this will afford them, to testify their approbation of you and your writings, it would seem capricious in you to deprive them of that satisfaction, and yourself of so great an honour.”

To a Proposal so uncommonly generous the Author could not refuse his consent, without giving himself airs, which would not have become him. He therefore thankfully acquiesced. And the business went on; and has now terminated in a way that does him much honour, and demands his most grateful acknowledgements to those Noble and Learned Persons who conducted and encouraged it.

Some unforeseen delays, owing to the Author's bad health, have retarded this publication much longer than was intended.

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A N
E S S A Y
O N T H E
N A T U R E and I M M U T A B I L I T Y
O F
T R U T H,
I N O P P O S I T I O N T O
S O P H I S T R Y and S C E P T I C I S M.
A N E W E D I T I O N,
R E V I S E D A N D C A R E F U L L Y C O R R E C T E D.

Nunquam aliud Natura, aliud Sapientia dicit.

JUVENAL.

P R E F A C E.

THIS Edition will, it is hoped, be found less faulty than any of the former. Several inaccuracies are now removed, unnecessary words and sentences expunged, a few erroneous passages either cancelled or rectified, and some new-modelled in the style, which before seemed too harshly or too strongly expressed.

In regard to the reasonings and general principles of this Essay, I have not as yet seen cause to alter my opinion; though I have carefully attended to what has been urged against them by several ingenious authors. Some objections will perhaps be found obviated by occasional remarks and amendments interspersed in this Edition. I once intended to have offered a more compleat vindication, and had actually prepared materials for it: but, finding them swell to a considerable bulk, and recollecting, that disputes of this nature, when once begun, are not soon terminated, and are apt to become less useful as they grow more voluminous, I was easily prevailed with to lay aside that design, at least till Providence should be pleased to grant me better health. Even then, the prosecution of this controversy may not perhaps be thought requisite. To the wise a word is said to be enough. If the principles of this Book be good, they need no further support; if erroneous or bad, they deserve none. All I shall add at present on this head, is, that after a long examination of these matters, it appears, not to me only, but to many other persons of far

superior understanding, that my principles are founded on right reason, and on that way of thinking and judging, which has in every age been most familiar to the human mind. To advance paradoxes, or to be an innovator in philosophy, was never my design. I hate paradoxes; I am no friend to innovation. If I cannot reconcile myself to some modern theories of the understanding, it is for this reason, among others, because I look upon them as paradoxical, and inconsistent with those dictates of Rationality, which seem to me to be as old and as extensive as human nature. It is possible I may have thrown a little light on some points relating to Moral Science; but to discover in the human mind any thing which was never discovered before, would require a degree of sagacity which I am certain I do not possess.

A complete theory of evidence is not to be expected in this book. The attentive reader will see I never intended one. That is a very copious and difficult subject; and I have not prosecuted it further than my argument seemed to require. It is with great pleasure I take this opportunity to declare, that the best Theory of Evidence I have ever seen, is delivered by my excellent Friend Dr Campbell, in that most ingenious and learned performance, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. His principles and mine, though they differ somewhat in the arrangement, (in which I am inclined to think that his have the advantage), will not be found to differ in any thing material.

I have been blamed for borrowing some hints, without acknowledgement, from Dr Price, Dr Oswald, and Buffier. I beg leave to say, that I am to this hour totally unacquainted with that work of Dr Price which is alluded to; and that, when I published the first Edition of the Essay on Truth, I was totally unacquainted with the writings of Buffier and Dr Oswald. I had heard indeed, that the French Philosopher used the term *Common Sense* in a way similar to that in which I use it; but this was only hearsay; and I
have

have since found, that though between his fundamental opinions and mine there is a striking resemblance, his application of that term is not entirely the same. I should not have mentioned this, if I did not think, that it supplies an argument in favour of our common principles.

I had finished all these papers for the press, when a friend at London sent me an *Advertisement*, which had just then appeared prefixed to a new Edition of Mr Hume's *Essays*; and which, in justice to that Author, I shall here insert, subjoining a few remarks in justice to myself.

“ Most of the principles and reasonings contained in this volume were published in a work in three volumes, intitled, *A Treatise of Human Nature*: a work, which the author had projected before he left college, and which he wrote and published not long after. But not finding it successful, he was sensible of his error in going to the press too early, and he cast the whole anew in the following pieces; where some negligences in his former reasoning, and more in the expression, are, he hopes, corrected. Yet several writers, who have honoured the author's philosophy with answers, have taken care to direct all their batteries against that juvenile work, which the author never acknowledged; and have affected to triumph in any advantages which, they imagined, they had obtained over it: a practice very contrary to all rules of candour and fair-dealing, and a strong instance of those polemical artifices, which a bigotted zeal thinks itself authorised to employ. Henceforth the author desires, that the following pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles.” Thus far Mr Hume.

I do not think it was with an evil purpose, that any of those who attacked this author's philosophy directed their batteries against

gainst the *Treatise of Human Nature*. In regard to myself, the case was briefly this.

Ever since I began to attend to matters of this kind, I had heard Mr Hume's philosophy mentioned as a system very unfriendly to religion both revealed and natural, as well as to science; and its author spoken of as a teacher of sceptical and atheistical doctrines, and withal as a most acute and ingenious writer. I had reason to believe, that his arguments, and his influence as a great literary character, had done harm, by subverting or weakening the good principles of some, and countenancing the licentious opinions of others. Being honoured with the care of a part of the British youth; and considering it as my indispensable duty (from which I trust I shall never deviate) to guard their minds against impiety and error, I endeavoured, among other studies that belonged to my office, to form a right estimate of Mr Hume's philosophy, so as not only to understand his peculiar tenets, but also to perceive their *connection* and *consequences*.

In forming this estimate, I thought it at once the surest and the fairest method to begin with the *Treatise of Human Nature*, which was allowed, and is well known to be, the ground-work of the whole; and in which some of the principles and reasonings are more fully prosecuted, and their connection and consequences more clearly seen by an attentive reader, (notwithstanding some inferiority in point of style), than in those more elegant republications of the system, that have appeared in the form of *Essays*. Every sound argument that may have been urged against the paradoxes of the *Treatise*, particularly against its first principles, does, in my opinion, tend to discredit the system; as every successful attempt to weaken the foundation of a building does in effect promote the downfall of the superstructure. Paradoxes there are in the *Treatise*, which are not in the *Essays*; and, in like manner, there are licentious doctrines in these, which are not in the other :

other : and therefore I have not directed *all* my batteries against the first. And if the plan I had in view when I published this book, had been completed, the reader would have seen, that, though I began with the *Treatise of Human Nature*, it was never my intention to end with it. In fact, the Essay on Truth is only one part of what I had projected. Another part was then in so great forwardness, that I thought its publication not very remote, and had even made proposals to a bookseller concerning it : tho' afterwards, on enlarging the plan, I found I had not taken so wide a view of the subject as would be necessary. In that part, my meaning was, to have applied the principles of this Book to the illustration of certain truths of morality and religion, to which the reasonings of Helvetius, of Mr Hume in his *Essays*, and of some other modern philosophers, seemed unfavourable. That work, however, I have been obliged, on account of my health, to lay aside ; and whether I shall ever be in a condition to resume it, is at present very uncertain.

For these eighteen years past, (and before that period I knew nothing of this author's writings), I have always heard the *Treatise of Human Nature* spoken of as the work of Mr Hume. Till after publishing the Essay on Truth, I knew not that it had ever been said, or insinuated, or even suspected, that he either did not acknowledge that Treatise, or wished it to be considered as a work which he did not acknowledge. On the contrary, from his reprinting so often, in *Essays* that bore his name, most of the principles and reasonings contained in it ; and never, so far as I had heard, disavowing any part of it ; I could not but think, that he set a very high value upon it. By the literary people with whom I was then acquainted it had been much read ; and by many people it was much admired. And, in general, it was considered as the author's chief work in philosophy, and as one of the most curious systems of human nature that had ever appeared. Those who fa-
voured

voured his principles spoke of it as an unanswerable performance. And whatever its success might have been as an article of sale, (a circumstance which I did not think it material to inquire into), I had reason to believe, that as a system of licentious doctrine it had been but *too successful*; and that to the author's reputation as a philosopher, and to his influence as a promoter of infidelity, it had contributed not a little.

Our author certainly merits praise, for thus publicly disowning, though late, his *Treatise of Human Nature*; though I am sorry to observe, from the tenor of his declaration, that he still seems inclined to adhere to "most of the reasonings and principles contained in that Treatise." But if he has now at last renounced any one of his errors, I congratulate him upon it with all my heart. He has many good as well as great qualities; and I rejoice in the hope, that he may yet be prevailed on to relinquish totally a system, which I should think would be as uncomfortable to him, as it is unsatisfactory to others. In consequence of his Advertisement, I thought it right to mitigate in this Edition some of the censures that more especially refer to the *Treatise of Human Nature*: but as that Treatise is still extant, and will probably be read as long at least as any thing I write, I did not think it expedient to make any material change in the reasoning or in the plan of this performance.

April 30. 1776.

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INTRODUCTION.

TO those who love learning and mankind, and who are more ambitious to distinguish themselves as men, than as disputants, it is matter of humiliation and regret, that names and things have so oft been mistaken for each other; that so much of the philosopher's time must be employed in ascertaining the signification of words; and that so many doctrines, of high renown, and of ancient date, when traced to their first principles, have been found to arise from verbal ambiguity. If I have any knowledge of my own heart, or of the subject I intend to examine, I may venture to assure the reader, that it is no part of the design of this book, to encourage verbal disputation. On the contrary, it is my sincere purpose to avoid, and to do every thing in my power to check it; convinced as I am, that it never can do any good, and that it has been the cause of much evil, both in philosophy and in common life. And I hope I have a fairer chance to escape it, than some who have gone before me in this part of science. I aim at no paradoxes; my prejudices (if certain instinctive suggestions of the understanding may be so called) are all in favour of truth, virtue, and Christianity; and I have no principles to support, but such as seem to me to have influenced the judgement of the rational part of mankind in all ages of the world.

Some readers may think, that there is but little merit in this declaration; it being as much for my own credit, as for the interest of mankind, that I guard against a practice, which is

acknowledged to be always unprofitable, and generally pernicious. A verbal disputant! what claim can he have to the title of Philosopher! what has he to do with the laws of nature, with the observation of facts, with life and manners! Let him not intrude upon the company of men of science; but repose, with his brethren Aquinas and Suares, in the corner of some Gothic cloister, dark as his understanding, and cold as his heart. Men are now become too wise to be amused with words, and too *firm-minded* to be confuted with quibbles.—Many of my contemporaries would join in this apostrophe, who yet are themselves the dupes of the most egregious dealers in logomachy that ever perverted the faculty of speech. In fact, from some instances that have occurred to my own observation, I have reason to believe, that verbal controversy has not always, even in this age, been accounted a contemptible thing: and the reader, when he comes to be better acquainted with my sentiments, will perhaps think the foregoing declaration more disinterested than at first sight it may appear.

They who form opinions concerning the manners and principles of the times, may be divided into three classes. Some will tell us, that the present age transcends all that have gone before it, in politeness, learning, and good sense; will thank Providence (or their stars) that their lot of life has been cast in so glorious a period; and wonder how men could support existence amidst the ignorance and barbarism of former days. By others we are accounted a generation of triflers and profligates; sciolists in learning, hypocrites in virtue, and formalists in good-breeding; wise only when we follow the ancients, and foolish whenever we deviate from them. Sentiments so violent are generally wrong: and therefore I am disposed to adopt the notions of those who may be considered as forming an intermediate class; who, though not blind to the follies, are yet willing to acknowledge
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the virtues, both of past ages, and of the present. And surely, in every age, and in every man, there is something to praise, as well as something to blame.

When I survey the philosophy of the present age, I find much matter of applause and admiration. Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural History, in all their branches, have risen to a pitch of perfection, that does signal honour to human capacity, and far surpasses what the most sanguine projectors of former times had any reason to look for: and the paths to further improvement in those sciences are so clearly marked out, that nothing but honesty and attention seems requisite to ensure the success of future adventurers. Moral Philosophy and Logic have not been so fortunate. Yet, even here, we have happily got rid of much pedantry and jargon; our systems have more the appearance of liberal sentiments, good taste, and correct composition, than those of the schoolmen; we disclaim (at least in words) all attachment to hypothesis and party; profess to study men and things, as well as books and words; and assert, with the utmost vehemence of protestation, our love of truth, of candour, and of sound philosophy. But let us not be deceived by appearances. Neither Moral Philosophy, nor the kindred sciences of Logic and Criticism, are at present upon the most desirable footing. The rage of paradox and system has transformed these, which of all sciences ought to be the simplest and the clearest, into a mass of confusion, darkness, and absurdity. One kind of jargon is laid aside; but another has been adopted, more fashionable indeed, but not less frivolous. Hypothesis, though verbally disclaimed, is really adhered to with as much obstinacy as ever. Words have been defined; but their meaning still remains indefinite. Appeals have been made to experience; but with such misrepresentation of fact, and in such equivocal language, as plainly show the authors to have been

been more concerned for their theory, than for the truth. All sciences, and especially Moral Philosophy, ought to regulate human practice: practice is regulated by principles, and all principles suppose conviction: yet the aim of some of our celebrated moral systems is, to divest the mind of every principle, and of all conviction; and, consequently, to disqualify man for action, and to render him useless, and wretched. In a word, SCEPTICISM is now the profession of our fashionable inquirers into human nature; a scepticism that is not confined to points of mere speculation, but has been extended to practical truths of the highest importance, even to those of morality and religion.

I said, that my prejudices are all in favour of truth and virtue. To avow any sort of prejudice, may perhaps startle some readers. If it should, I must here intreat all such to pause a moment, and ask of their own hearts these simple questions. — Are virtue and truth useful to mankind? Are they matters of indifference? Or are they pernicious? — If any one finds himself disposed to think them pernicious, or matters of indifference, I would advise him to lay my book aside; for it does not contain one sentiment in which he can be interested; nor one expression with which he can be pleased. But he who believes that virtue and truth are of the highest importance, that in them is laid the foundation of human happiness, and that on them depends the very existence of human society, and of human creatures, — that person and I are of the same mind; I have no prejudices that he would wish me not to have: he may proceed; and I hope he will proceed with pleasure, and encourage, by his approbation, this honest attempt to vindicate truth and virtue; and to overturn that pretended philosophy, which supposes, or which may lead us to suppose, every dictate of conscience, every impulse of understanding, and every information of sense, questionable and doubtful.

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This sceptical philosophy (as it is called) seems to me to be dangerous, not because it is ingenious, but because it is subtle and obscure. Were it rightly understood, no confutation would be necessary; for it does, in fact, confute itself, as I hope to demonstrate. But many, to my certain knowledge, have read it, and admitted its tenets, who do not understand the grounds of them; and many more, swayed by the fashion of the times, have greedily adopted its conclusions, without any knowledge of the premises, or any concern about them. An attempt therefore to expose this pretended philosophy to public view, in its proper colours, will not, I hope, be censured as impertinent by any whose opinion I value: if it should, I shall be satisfied with the approbation of my own conscience, which will never reproach me for intending to do good.

I am sorry, that in the course of this inquiry, it will not always be in my power to speak of some celebrated names with that deference, to which superior talents, and superior virtue, are always intitled. Every friend to civil and religious liberty, every lover of mankind, every admirer of sincerity and simple manners, every heart that warms at the recollection of distinguished virtue, must consider LOCKE as one of the most amiable, and most illustrious men, that ever our nation produced. Such he is, such he ever will be, in my estimation. The parts of his philosophy to which truth obliges me to object; are but few, and, compared with the extent and importance of his other writings, extremely inconsiderable. I object to them, because I think them erroneous and dangerous; and I am convinced, that their author, if he had lived to see the inferences that have been drawn from them, would have been the first to declare them absurd, and would have expunged them from his works with indignation.—BERKELEY was equally amiable in his life, and equally a friend to truth and virtue. In elegance of composition he was perhaps superior.

I admire his virtues : I can never sufficiently applaud his zeal in the cause of religion : but some of his reasonings on the subject of human nature I cannot admit, without renouncing my claim to rationality.—There is a writer now alive, of whose philosophy I have much to say. By his philosophy, I mean the sentiments he has published in a book called, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in three volumes, printed in the year 1739; the principal doctrines of which he has since republished again and again, under the title of, *Essays Moral and Political*, &c. Of his other works I say nothing; nor have I at present any concern with them. Virgil is said to have been a bad prose-writer; Cicero was certainly a bad poet : and this author, though his philosophy of human nature be in many things exceedingly reprehensible, may yet be a profound politician, and a learned, elegant, and accurate historian. His high merit in these characters is indeed generally allowed : and if my suffrage could add any thing to the lustre of his reputation, I should here, with great sincerity and pleasure, join my voice to that of the public, and make such an encomium on the author of *the History of England* as would not offend any of his rational admirers. But why is this author's character so replete with inconsistency ! why should his principles and his talents extort at once our esteem and detestation, our applause and contempt ! That he, whose manners in private life are said to be so agreeable, should yet, in the public capacity of an author, have given so much cause of just offence to all the friends of virtue and mankind, is to me matter of astonishment and sorrow, as well as of indignation. That he, who succeeds so well in describing the fates of nations, should yet have failed so egregiously in explaining the operations of the mind, is one of those incongruities in human genius, for which perhaps philosophy will never be able fully to account. That he, who has so impartially stated the opposite pleas and principles of our political factions, should

should yet have adopted the most illiberal prejudices against natural and revealed religion: that he, who on many occasions has displayed a profound erudition, should sometimes, when intoxicated with a favourite theory, have suffered affirmations to escape him, which men of no great learning might perceive to be ill founded: and, finally, that a moral philosopher, who seems to have exerted his utmost ingenuity in searching after paradoxes, should yet happen to light on none but such as are on the side of licentiousness and scepticism:—these are inconsistencies equally inexplicable. And yet, that this author is chargeable with all these inconsistencies, will not, I think, be denied by any person of sense and candour, who has read his writings with attention. His philosophy has done great harm. Its admirers, I know, are numerous; but I have not as yet met with one person, who both admired and understood it. We are prone to believe what we wish to be true: and most of this author's philosophical tenets are so well adapted to what I fear I may call the fashionable notions of the times, that those who are ambitious to conform to the latter, will hardly be disposed to examine scrupulously the evidence of the former.—Having made this declaration, which I do in the spirit of an honest man, I must take the liberty to treat this author with that plainness, which the cause of truth, and the interests of society, seem to me to require. The same candour that prompts me to praise, will also oblige me to blame. The inconsistency is not in me, but in him. Had I done but half as much as he, in labouring to subvert principles which ought ever to be held sacred, I know not whether the friends of truth would have granted me any indulgence; I am sure they ought not.

If it shall be acknowledged by the candid and intelligent reader, that I have in this book contributed something to the establishment of old truths, I shall not be much offended, though o-

thers should pretend to discover, that I have advanced nothing new. Indeed I would not wish to say any thing on these subjects, that has not often occurred to the rational part of mankind. In Logic and Ethics, we may have new treatises, and new theories; but we are not now to expect new discoveries. The principles of moral duty have long been understood in these enlightened parts of the world; and mankind, in the time that is past, have had more truth under their consideration, than they will probably have in the time to come. Yet he who makes these sciences the study of his life, may perhaps collect particulars concerning their evidence, which, though known to a few, are unknown to many; may set some principles in a more striking light than that in which they have been formerly viewed; may devise methods of confuting new errors, and exposing new paradoxes; and may hit upon a more popular way of displaying what has hitherto been exhibited in too dark and mysterious a form.

It is commonly allowed, that the science of human nature is of all human sciences the most curious and important. To know ourselves, is a precept which the wise in all ages have recommended, and which is enjoined by the authority of revelation itself. Can any thing be of more consequence to man, than to know what is his duty, and how he may arrive at happiness? It is from the examination of his own heart, that he receives the first intimations of the one, and the only sure criterion of the other. — What can be more useful, more delightful, and more sublime, than to contemplate the Deity? It is in the works of nature, particularly in the constitution of the human soul, that we discern the first and most conspicuous traces of the Almighty; for without some previous acquaintance with our own moral nature, we could not have any certain knowledge of His. — Destitute of the hope of immortality, and a future retribution, how contemptible, how miserable is man! And yet, did not our moral

ral feelings, in concert with what reason discovers of the Deity, evidence the probability of a future state, and that it is necessary to the full vindication of the divine government, we should be much less qualified, than we now are, to judge rationally of that revelation, by which life and immortality have been brought to light.

How then is this science to be learned? In what manner are we to study human nature? Doubtless by examining our own hearts and feelings, and by attending to the conduct of other men. But are not the writings of philosophers useful towards the attainment of this science? Most certainly they are: for whatever improves the sagacity of judgement, the sensibility of moral perception, or the delicacy of taste; whatever renders our knowledge of moral and intellectual facts more extensive; whatever impresses our minds with more enlarged and more powerful sentiments of duty, with more affecting views of God and Providence, and with greater energy of belief in the doctrines of natural religion; — every thing of this sort either makes us more thoroughly acquainted, or prepares us for becoming more thoroughly acquainted with our own nature, and with that of other beings, and with the relations they and we bear to one another. But I fear we shall not be able to improve ourselves in any one of these respects, by reading the modern systems of scepticism. What account then are we to make of those systems and their authors? The following essay is partly designed as an answer to this question. But it has a further view: which is, to examine the foundations of this scepticism, and see whether these be consistent with what all mankind acknowledge to be the foundations of truth; to inquire, whether the cultivation of scepticism be salutary or pernicious to science and mankind; and whether it may not be possible to devise certain *criteria*, by which the absurdity of its conclusions may be detected, even by those who may not

have leisure, or subtlety, or metaphysical knowledge, sufficient to qualify them for a logical confutation of all its premises. If it be confessed, that the present age has some tendency to licentiousness, both in principle and practice, and that the works of sceptical writers have some tendency to favour that licentiousness; it will also be confessed, that this design is neither absurd nor unreasonable.

A celebrated writer * on human nature has observed, that “ if truth be at all within the reach of human capacity, it is certain “ it must lie very deep and abstruse :” and a little after he adds, “ that he would esteem it a strong presumption against the philosophy he is going to unfold, were it so very easy and obvious.” I am so far from adopting this opinion, that I declare, in regard to the few things I have to say on human nature, that I should esteem it a very strong presumption against them, if they were not easy and obvious. Physical and mathematical truths are often abstruse; but facts and experiments relating to the human mind, when expressed in proper words, ought to be obvious to all. I find that those poets, historians, and novelists, who have given the most lively displays of human nature, and who abound most in sentiments easily comprehended, and readily admitted as true, are the most entertaining, as well as the most useful. How then should the philosophy of the human mind be so difficult? Indeed, if it be an author’s determinate purpose to advance paradoxes, some of which are incredible, and others beyond comprehension; if he be willing to avail himself all he can of the natural ambiguity of language in supporting those paradoxes; or if he enter upon inquiries too refined for human understanding; he must often be obscure, and often unintelligible. But my views are very different. I intend only to suggest some hints for guarding the mind against error; and these, I hope, will be found to be deduced from principles which every man of common capacity may examine by his daily experience.

It is true, that several subjects of intricate speculation are treated of in this book. But I have endeavoured, by constant appeals to fact and experience, by illustrations and examples the most familiar I could think of, and by a plainness and perspicuity of expression which sometimes may appear too much affected, to treat of them in a way, that I hope cannot fail to render them intelligible, even to those who are not much conversant in studies of this kind. Truth, like virtue, to be loved, needs only to be seen. My principles require no disguise; on the contrary, they will, if I mistake not, be most easily admitted by those who best understand them. And I am persuaded, that the sceptical system would never have made such an alarming progress, if it had been well understood. The ambiguity of its language, and the intricacy and length of some of its fundamental investigations, have unhappily been too successful in producing that confusion of thought, and indistinctness of apprehension, in the minds both of authors and readers, which are so favourable to error and sophistry.

Few men have ever engaged in controversy, religious, political, or philosophical, without being in some degree chargeable with misconception of the adversary's meaning. That I have never erred in this way, I dare not affirm. But I am conscious of having done every thing in my power to guard against it. The greater part of these papers have lain by me for several years. They have been repeatedly perused by some of the acuteest philosophers of the age, whom I have the honour to call my friends, and to whose advice and assistance, on this, as on other occasions, I am deeply indebted. I have availed myself all I could of reading and conversation; and endeavoured, with all the candour I am master of, to profit by every hint of improvement, and to examine to the bottom every objection, that others have offered, or myself could devise. And may I not be permitted to
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add, that every one of those who have perused this essay, has advised the author to publish it; and that many of them have encouraged him by this insinuation, to him the most flattering of all others, That by so doing, he would probably be of some service to the cause of truth, virtue, and mankind? In this hope he submits it to the public. And it is this hope only that could have induced him to attempt polemical disquisition: a species of writing, which, in his own judgement, is not the most creditable; which he knows, to his cost, is not the most pleasing; and of which he is well aware that it will draw upon him the resentment of a numerous, powerful, and fashionable party. But,

*Welcome for thee, fair Virtue! all the past;
For thee, fair Virtue! welcome even the last.*

If these pages, which he hopes none will condemn who have not read, shall throw any light on the first principles of moral science; if they shall suggest, to the young and unwary, any cautions against that sophistry, and licentiousness of principle, which too much infect the conversations and compositions of the age; if they shall, in any measure, contribute to the satisfaction of any of the friends of truth and virtue; his purpose will be completely answered: and he will, to the end of his life, rejoice in the recollection of those painful hours which he passed in the examination of this most important controversy.

January, 1770.

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I N O P P O S I T I O N T O
S O P H I S T R Y a n d S C E P T I C I S M.

I PURPOSE to treat this subject in the following manner.

FIRST, I shall endeavour to trace the several kinds of Evidence and Reasoning up to their first principles; with a view to ascertain the Standard of Truth, and explain its immutability.

SECONDLY, I shall show, that my sentiments on this head, however inconsistent with the genius of scepticism, and with the practice and principles of sceptical writers, are yet perfectly consistent with the genius of true philosophy, and with the practice
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and principles of those who are allowed to have been the most successful in the investigation of truth : concluding with some inferences or rules, by which the more important fallacies of the sceptical philosophy may be detected by every person of common sense, even though he should not possess acuteness or metaphysical knowledge sufficient to qualify him for a logical confutation of them.

THIRDLY, I shall answer some objections ; and make some remarks, by way of *Estimate of scepticism and sceptical writers*.

I divide my discourse in this manner, chiefly with a view to the reader's accommodation. An exact arrangement of parts is necessary to confer elegance on a whole ; but I am more studious of utility than of elegance. And though my sentiments might have been exhibited in a more systematic order, I am apt to think, that the order in which they first occurred to me is the most natural, and may be the most effectual for accomplishing my purpose.

P A R T

P A R T I.

OF THE STANDARD OF TRUTH.

THE love of truth has ever been accounted a good principle. Where it is known to prevail, we expect to find integrity and steadiness; a temper of mind favourable to every virtue, and tending in an eminent degree to public utility. To have no concern for the truth, to be false and fallacious, is a character which no person who is not utterly abandoned would chuse to bear; it is a character from which we expect nothing but levity and inconsistency. Truth seems to be considered by all mankind as something fixed, unchangeable, and eternal; it may therefore be thought, that to vindicate the permanency of truth is to dispute without an adversary. And indeed, if these questions were proposed in general terms, — Is there such a thing as truth? Are truth and falsehood different and opposite? Is truth permanent and eternal? — few persons would be hardy enough to answer in the negative. Attempts, however, have been made, sometimes through inadvertence, and sometimes (I fear) from design, to undermine the foundations of truth, and to render their stability questionable; and these attempts have been so vigorously forwarded, and so often renewed, that they now constitute a great part of what is called *the philosophy of the human mind*.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to give a definition of Truth. But we shall endeavour to give such a description of it, as may make others understand what we mean by the word. The definitions of former writers are not so clear, nor so accurate, as could be wished. These therefore we shall overlook, without seeking either to explain or to correct them; and shall satisfy ourselves with taking notice of some of the mental phenomena that attend the perception of truth. This seems to be the safest way of introducing the subject.

CHAPTER I.

Of the perception of Truth in general.

ON hearing these propositions,—I exist, Things equal to one and the same thing are equal to one another, The sun rose to-day, There is a God, Ingratitude ought to be blamed and punished, The three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, &c.—I am conscious, that my mind admits and acquiesces in them. I say, that I believe them to be true; that is, I conceive them to express something conformable to the nature of things *. Of the contrary propositions I should say, that my mind does not acquiesce in them, but disbelieves them, and conceives them to express something not conformable to the nature of things. My judgement in this case, I conceive to be the same that I should form in regard to these propositions,

* —ὅτι δ' ἕκαστον ὡς ἔχει τεῖναι, οὕτω ἔ τῆς ἀληθείας.

Arist. Metaph. lib. 2. cap. 1.

if I were perfectly acquainted with all nature, in all its parts, and in all its laws *.

If I be asked, what I mean by *the nature of things*, I cannot otherwise explain myself, than by saying, that there is in my mind something which induces me to think, that every thing existing in nature, is determined to exist, and to exist after a certain manner, in consequence of established laws; and that whatever is agreeable to those laws is agreeable to the nature of things, because by those laws the nature of all things is determined. Of those laws I do not pretend to know any thing, except so far as they seem to be intimated to me by my own feelings, and by the suggestions of my own understanding. But these feelings and suggestions are such, and affect me in such a manner, that I cannot help receiving them, and trusting in them, and believing that their intimations are not fallacious, but such as I should approve if I were perfectly acquainted with every thing in the universe, and such as I may approve, and admit of, and regulate my conduct by, without danger of any inconvenience.

It is not easy on this subject to avoid identical expressions. I am not certain that I have been able to avoid them. And perhaps I might have expressed my meaning more shortly and more clearly, by saying, that I account That to be *truth* which the constitution of our nature determines us to believe, and That to be *falsehood* which the constitution of our nature determines us to disbelieve †. Believing and disbelieving are simple acts of the

* This remark, when applied to truth in general, is subject to certain limitations; for which see part 2. chap. 1. sect. 3.

† I might have said more explicitly, but the meaning is the same, "That I account that to be *truth* which the constitution of human nature determines man to believe, and that to be *falsehood* which the constitution of human nature determines man to disbelieve."

mind; I can neither define nor describe them in words; and therefore the reader must judge of their nature from his own experience. We often believe what we afterwards find to be false; but while belief continues, we think it true; when we discover its falsity, we believe it no longer.

Hitherto I have used the word *belief* to denote an act of the mind which attends the perception of truth in general. But truths are of different kinds; some are certain, others only probable: and we ought not to call that act of the mind which attends the perception of certainty, and that which attends the perception of probability, by one and the same name. Some have called the former *conviction*, and the latter *assent*. All convictions are equally strong: but assent admits of innumerable degrees, from *moral certainty*, which is the highest degree downward, through the several stages of *opinion*, to that suspense of judgement which is called *doubt*.

We may, without absurdity, speak of probable truth, as well as of certain truth. Whatever a rational being is determined, by the constitution of his nature, to admit as probable, may be called *probable truth*; the acknowledgement of it is as universal as that rational nature, and will be as permanent. But, in this inquiry, we propose to confine ourselves chiefly to that kind of truth which may be called certain, which enforces our *conviction*, and the belief of which, in a sound mind, is not tinged with any doubt or uncertainty.

The investigation and perception of truth is commonly ascribed to our rational faculties: and these have by some been reduced to two; Reason and Judgement; the former being supposed to be conversant about certain truths, the latter chiefly about probabilities. But certain truths are not all of the same kind; some being supported by one sort of evidence, and others by another:

different energies of the understanding must therefore be exerted in perceiving them ; and these different energies must be expressed by different names, if we would speak of them distinctly and intelligibly. The certainty of some truths, for instance, is perceived intuitively ; the certainty of others is perceived not intuitively, but in consequence of a proof. Most of the propositions of Euclid are of the latter kind ; the axioms of geometry are of the former. Now, if that faculty by which we perceive truth in consequence of a proof, be called *Reason*, that power by which we perceive self-evident truth, ought to be distinguished by a different name. It is of little consequence what name we make choice of, provided that in chusing it we depart not from the analogy of language ; and that, in applying it, we avoid equivocation and ambiguity*. Some philosophers of note † have given the name of *Common Sense* to that faculty by which we perceive self-evident truth ; and, as the term seems proper enough, we shall adopt it. But in a subject of this kind, there is great danger of our being imposed upon by words ; we cannot therefore be too much upon our guard against that species of illusion. We mean to draw some important inferences from this doctrine of the distinction between Reason and Common Sense. Now these words are not always used in the strict signification we have here assigned them : let us therefore take a view of all the similar senses in which they are commonly used, and let us explain more particularly that sense in which we are to use them ; and thus we shall take every method in our power to secure our-

* We might call the one *Reason* and the other *Reasoning* ; but the similarity of the terms would frequently occasion both obscurity in the sense, and harshness in the sound.

† Dr Reid, &c.

selves against the impropriety of confounding our notions by the use of ambiguous and indefinite language. These philosophical discussions are indeed no part of philosophy; but they are very necessary to prepare us for it. “Qui ad interpretandum naturam accesserit,” says Bacon, “verborum mixtam naturam, et juvamenti et nocimenti imprimis participem, distincte sciat*.”

This distinction between Common Sense and Reason is no modern discovery †. The ancient geometricians were all acquainted with it. Aristotle treats of self-evident principles in many parts of his works, particularly in the fourth book of his *Metaphysics*, and in the first book of his latter *Analytics*. He calls them, *Axioms* or *Dignities*, *Principles*, and *Common Senti-*

* De interpretatione Naturæ, sent. 9.

† The *κοινωνικὸν* of the Greek Stoics seems to mean that benevolent affection which men owe to society and to one another. Some modern moralists have called it the *Public Sense*. But the notion or idea we mean to express by the term *Common Sense* is quite different.

The *Sensus Communis* of the Latins hath several significations. 1. It denotes this *Public Sense*, or *κοινωνικὸν*. See *Shaftesbury's Essay on the freedom of wit and humour*, part 3. sect. 1. Note. 2. It denotes that experience and knowledge of life which is acquired by living in society. Thus Horace seems to use it, *lib. 1. satir. 3. lin. 66*. And thus Quintilian, speaking of the advantages of a public education: “Sensum ipsum qui communis dicitur, ubi discet, cum se a congressu, qui non hominibus solum, sed mutis quoque animalibus naturalis est, segregarit;” *lib. 1. cap. 2*. 3. It seems to signify that instinctive persuasion of truth which arises from intuitive evidence, and is the foundation of all reasoning:

“Corpus enim per se communis deliquat esse

“Sensus: quo nisi prima fides fundata valebit,

“Haud erit occultis de rebus quo referentes

“Confirmare animi quicquam ratione queamus.”

Lucretius, lib. 1. ver. 423.

ments *; and says of them, “ That they are known by their own
 “ evidence †; that except some first principles be taken for
 “ granted, there can be neither reason nor reasoning ‡; that it
 “ is impossible that every truth should admit of proof, other-
 “ wise proof would extend in *infinitum*, which is incompatible
 “ with its nature ||; and that if ever men attempt to prove a

* Αξιώματα, Αρχαι, Κοιναι δοξαι.—Λέγω δε αποδεικτικας, η τας κοιναι δοξας, εξ ων
 απαντες δεικνυσσι οτον, ετι παν αναγκαιον η φαναι, η αποφάναι. η αδυνατον αμα ειναι η μη
 ειναι.

Metaphys. lib. 3. cap. 2.

† *Analytic, lib. 2. cap. 16.* — Of these first principles, a French Peripatetic, who wrote about the beginning of the last century, expresses himself thus: “ Ces
 “ principes portent le nom de communs, non seulement parce qu'ils servent à plu-
 “ sieurs sciences, mais aussi parce que *l'intelligence en est commune à tous*. On les ap-
 “ pelle aussi *dignitez*, et *notions communes*: à sçavoir, dignitez, quasi comme dignes
 “ entre toutes les autres qu'on y adiouste foy, à cause de la grande excellence de leur
 “ clarté et evidence; et notions communes, pour ce qu'ils sont si connus, qu' aussi
 “ tost que la signification des termes dont ils sont composez est entenduë, sans dis-
 “ courir ny argumenter davantage dessus, chacun entend naturellement leur ve-
 “ rité; si ce n'est quelque hebeté privé de raison; lequel je revoye à Aristote, qui
 “ prononce, que ceux qui doutent, qu'il faut reverer les Dieux, ou aymer les
 “ parents, meritent d'estre punis; et que ceux qui doutent que la nege est blanche
 “ ont besoin de sens: et à Averroes, qui dit, que ceux qui ne sçauroient dis-
 “ tinguer ce qui est connu par foy d'avec ce qui ne l'est pas, sont incapables de
 “ philosopher; et que ne pouvoir connoistre ces principes, procede de quelque
 “ defect de nature, ou de peu d'exercice, ou d'une mauvaise accoustumance en-
 “ racinée.

Corps de toute la Philosophie de Theophraste Bouju, p. 79.

‡ Μηδεν γαρ τιθεντες, αναιρησι το διαλέγεσθαι, η ολως λογον.

Aristot. Metaphys. lib. 2. cap. 6.

|| Όλως μεν γαρ απαντων αδυνατον αποδειξιν ειναι εις απειρον γαρ αν βαδιζοι ως μηδ'
 ουτως ειναι αποδειξιν.

Aristot. Metaphys. lib. 4. cap. 4.

“ first

“ first principle, it is because they are ignorant of the nature of
“ proof*.”

The word *Reason* is used in several different senses. 1. It is used to signify that quality of human nature which distinguishes man from the inferior animals. Man is called a *reasonable* being, and the brutes are said to be *irrational*. But the faculty of reason, taking the word in a strict sense, is perhaps not more characteristical of the nature of man, than his moral faculty, or his imagination, or his power of artificial language, or his risibility. Reason, in this acceptation, seems to be a general name for all the intellectual powers, as distinguished from the sensitive part of our constitution. 2. Every thing that is called truth is said to be perceived by reason: by reason, we are said to perceive, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles; and we are also said to perceive, by reason, that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be. But these truths are of different kinds; and therefore the energies of understanding to which they are referred, ought to be called by different names. 3. The power of invention is sometimes ascribed to reason. LOCKE tells us, that it is reason which *discovers* and *arranges* the several intermediate proofs in an argument; an office which, according to the common use of words, is to be referred, not to reason, but to imagination. 4. Reason, as implying a faculty not marked by any other name, is used by those who are most accurate in distinguishing, to signify that power of the human mind by which we draw inferences, or by

* Αξιουναι δε ἢ τὸτο ἀποδεικνύναι τινος δι' ἀπαίδευσιαν ἔστι γὰρ ἀπαίδευσις, τὸ μὴ γινώσκειν τίνων δι' ζητῶν ἀποδείξιν, ἢ τινων οὐ δι'.

Arist. Metaphys. lib. 4. cap. 4.

I cite these authorities, that I may not be supposed to affect either an uncommon doctrine, or uncommon modes of expression.

which

which we are convinced, that a relation belongs to two ideas, on account of our having found, that these ideas bear certain relations to other ideas. In a word, it is that faculty which enables us, from relations or ideas that are known, to investigate such as are unknown; and without which we never could proceed in the discovery of truth a single step beyond first principles or intuitive axioms. And it is in this last sense we are to use the word *Reason* in the course of this inquiry.

The term *Common Sense* has also several different significations.

1. Sometimes it seems to be synonymous with prudence. Thus we say, that a man has a large stock of common sense, who is quick in perceiving remote consequences, and thence instantaneously determines concerning the propriety of present conduct.
2. We often meet with persons of great sagacity in most of the ordinary affairs of life, and very capable of accurate reasoning, who yet, without any bad intention, commit blunders in regard to decorum; by saying or doing what is offensive to their company, and inconsistent with their own character: and this we are apt to impute to a defect in common sense. But it seems rather to be owing to a defect in that kind of sensibility, or sympathy, by which we suppose ourselves in the situations of others, adopt their sentiments, and in a manner perceive their thoughts; and which is indeed the foundation of good breeding*. It is by this secret, and sudden, and (to those who are unacquainted with it) inexplicable, communication of feelings, that a man is enabled to avoid what would appear incongruous or offensive. They who are prompted by inclination, or obliged by necessity, to study the art of recommending themselves to others, acquire a wonderful facility in perceiving and avoiding all possible ways of giving offence; which is a proof,

* See Smith's Theory of moral sentiments, sect. 1.

that this kind of sensibility may be improved by habit : although there are, no doubt, in respect of this, as well as of some other modifications of perception, original and constitutional differences in the frame of different minds. 3. Some men are distinguished by an uncommon acuteness in discovering the characters of others : they seem to read the soul in the countenance, and with a single glance to penetrate the deepest recesses of the heart. In their presence, the hypocrite is detected, notwithstanding his specious outside ; the gay effrontery of the coxcomb cannot conceal his insignificance ; and the man of merit appears conspicuous under all the disguises of an ungainly modesty. This talent is sometimes called *Common Sense* ; but improperly. It is far from being common ; it is even exceedingly rare : it is to be found in men who are not remarkable for any other mental excellence ; and we often see those who in other respects are judicious enough, quite destitute of it. 4. Neither ought every common opinion to be referred to common sense. Modes in dress, religion, and conversation, however absurd in themselves, may suit the notions or the taste of a particular people : but none of us will say, that it is agreeable to common sense, to worship more gods than one ; to believe that one and the same body may be in ten thousand different places at the same time * ; to like a face the better because it is painted, or to dislike a person because he does not lisp in his pronunciation. Lastly, The term *Common Sense* has been used by some philosophers to signify that power of the mind which perceives truth, or commands belief, not by progressive argumentation, but by an instantaneous and instinctive impulse ; derived neither from education nor from habit, but from nature ; acting independently on our will, whenever its object is presented, according to an established law,

* Transubstantiation.

and therefore not improperly called *Sense*; and acting in a similar manner upon all mankind, and therefore properly called *Common Sense*. It is in this signification that the term *Common Sense* is used in the present inquiry.

That there is a real and essential difference between these two faculties; that common sense cannot be accounted for, by being called the perfection of reason, nor reason, by being resolved into common sense, will perhaps appear from the following remarks. 1. We are conscious, from internal feeling, that the energy of understanding which perceives intuitive truth, is different from that other energy which unites a conclusion with a first principle, by a gradual chain of intermediate relations. We believe the truth of an investigated conclusion, because we can assign a reason for our belief; we believe an intuitive principle, without being able to assign any other reason but this, that we know it to be true; or that the law of our nature, or the constitution of the human understanding, determines us to believe it. 2. We cannot discern any *necessary* connection between reason and common sense: they are indeed generally connected; but we can conceive a being endued with the one who is destitute of the other. Nay, we often find, that this is in fact the case. In dreams, we sometimes reason without common sense. Through a defect of common sense, we adopt absurd principles; but supposing our principles true, our reasoning is often unexceptionable. The same thing may be observed in certain kinds of madness. A man who believes himself made of glass, shall yet reason very justly concerning the means of preserving his supposed brittleness from flaws and fractures. It deserves also to be remarked, that a distinction similar to the present is acknowledged by the vulgar, who speak of mother-wit as something different from the deductions of reason, and the refinements of science. When puzzled with argument, they have recourse to their common sense, and

acquiesce in it so readily, as to render all the arts of the logician ineffectual. "I am confuted, but not convinced," is an apology sometimes offered, when one has nothing to oppose to the arguments of the antagonist, but the original undisguised feelings of his own mind. This apology is indeed very inconsistent with the dignity of philosophic pride; which, taking for granted that nothing exceeds the limits of human capacity, professes to confute whatever it cannot believe, and, which is still more difficult, to believe whatever it cannot confute: but this apology may be perfectly consistent with sincerity and candour; and with that principle of which Pope says, that "though no science it is
"fairly worth the seven."

Thus far I have endeavoured to distinguish those two powers of our rational nature, to which I give the names *Reason* and *Common Sense*. Their connection and mutual dependence, and the extent of their respective jurisdictions, I now proceed more particularly to investigate. — I ought perhaps to make an apology for these, and some other metaphorical expressions. And indeed it were to be wished, that in all matters of science, they could be laid aside; for the indiscreet use of metaphor has done great harm, by leading philosophers to mistake verbal analogies for real ones; and often, too, by giving plausibility to nonsense, as well as by disguising very plain doctrines with an affected pomp of high-sounding words and gaudy images. But in the philosophy of the human mind, it is impossible to keep clear of metaphor; because we cannot speak intelligibly of immaterial things, without continual allusions to matter, and its qualities. All I need to say further on this head is, that I mean not by these metaphors to impose upon the reader; and that I shall do my utmost to prevent their imposing upon myself.

It is strange to observe, with what reluctance some people acknowledge the power of instinct. That man is governed by rea-

son, and the brutes by instinct, is a favourite topic with certain philosophers; who, like other froward children, spurn the hand that leads them; and desire, above all things, to be left at their own disposal. Were this boast founded on truth, it might be supposed to mean little more, than that man is governed by himself, and the brutes by their Maker *. But, luckily for man, it is not founded in truth, but in ignorance and inattention. Our instincts, as well as our rational powers, are far superior, both in number and dignity, to those which the brutes enjoy; and it were well for us, on many occasions, if we laid our systems aside, and were more attentive to these impulses of nature wherein reason has no part. Far be it from me to speak with disrespect of any of the gifts of God; every work of his is good; but the best things, when abused, may become pernicious. Reason is a noble faculty, and, when kept within its proper sphere, and applied to useful purposes, proves a means of exalting human creatures almost to the rank of superior beings. But this faculty has been much perverted, often to vile, and often to insignificant purposes; sometimes chained like a slave or malefactor, and sometimes soaring in forbidden and unknown regions. No wonder, then, if it has been frequently made the instrument of seducing and bewildering mankind, and of rendering philosophy contemptible.

In the science of body, glorious discoveries have been made by a right use of reason. When men are once satisfied to take things as they find them; when they believe Nature upon her bare declaration, without suspecting her of any design to impose upon

* And Reason raise o'er Instinct as you can,
In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis man.

Pope's Essay on Man, Ep. 3. ver. 99.

them; when their utmost ambition is to be her servants and interpreters; then, and not till then, will philosophy prosper. But of those who have applied themselves to the science of human nature, it may truly be said, (of many of them at least), that too much reasoning hath made them mad. Nature speaks to us by our external, as well as by our internal, senses; it is strange, that we should believe her in the one case, and not in the other; it is most strange, that supposing her fallacious, we should think ourselves capable of detecting the cheat. Common sense tells me, that the ground on which I stand is hard, material, and solid; and has a real, separate, independent existence. BERKELEY and HUME tell me, that I am imposed upon in this matter: for that the ground under my feet is really an idea in my mind; that its very essence consists in being perceived; and that the same instant it ceases to be perceived, it must also cease to exist: in a word, that *to be*, and *to be perceived*, when predicated of the ground, the sun, the starry heavens, or any corporeal object, signify precisely the same thing. Now, if my common sense be mistaken, who shall ascertain and correct the mistake? Our reason, it is said. Are then the inferences of reason in this instance clearer, and more decisive, than the dictates of common sense? By no means: I still trust to my common sense as before; and I feel that I must do so. But supposing the inferences of the one faculty as clear and decisive as the dictates of the other; yet who will assure me, that my reason is less liable to mistake than my common sense? And if reason be mistaken, what shall we say? Is this mistake to be rectified by a second reasoning, as liable to mistake as the first?—In a word, we must deny the distinction between truth and falsehood, adopt universal scepticism, and wander without end from one maze of uncertainty to another; a state of mind so miserable, that Milton makes it one of the torments of the damned;—or else we must suppose, that one of these

these faculties is of higher authority than the other; and that either reason ought to submit to common sense, or common sense to reason, whenever a variance happens between them: — in other words, that no doctrine ought to be admitted as true that exceeds belief, and contradicts a first principle.

It has been said, that every inquiry in philosophy ought to begin with doubt; — that nothing is to be taken for granted, and nothing believed, without proof. If this be admitted, it must also be admitted, that reason is the ultimate judge of truth, to which common sense must continually act in subordination. But this I cannot admit; because I am able to prove the contrary by incontestable evidence. I am able to prove, that “except we believe many things without proof, we never can believe any thing all; for that all sound reasoning must ultimately rest on the principles of common sense; that is, on principles intuitively certain, or intuitively probable; and, consequently, that common sense is the ultimate judge of truth, to which reason must continually act in subordination.” — This I mean to prove by a fair induction of particulars.

C H A P. II.

All reasoning terminates in first principles. All evidence ultimately intuitive. Common Sense the Standard of Truth to Man.

IN this induction, we cannot comprehend all sorts of evidence, and modes of reasoning; but we shall endeavour to investigate the origin of those which are the most important, and of
the

the most extensive influence in science, and common life *; beginning with the simplest and clearest, and advancing gradually to those which are more complicated, or less perspicuous.

S E C T I O N I.

Of Mathematical Reasoning.

THE evidence that takes place in pure mathematics, produces the highest assurance and certainty in the mind of him who attends to, and understands it; for no principles are admitted into this science, but such as are either self-evident, or susceptible

* That the induction here given is sufficiently comprehensive, will appear from the following analysis.

All the objects of the human understanding may be reduced to two classes, viz. *Abstract Ideas*, and *Things really existing*.

Of *Abstract Ideas*, and *their Relations*, all our knowledge is *certain*, being founded on MATHEMATICAL EVIDENCE (a); which comprehends, 1. Intuitive Evidence, and, 2. the Evidence of strict demonstration.

We judge of *Things really existing*; either, 1. from *our own experience*; or, 2. from *the experience of other men*.

1. Judging of *Real Existences* from *our own experience*, we attain either *Certainty* or *Probability*. Our knowledge is *certain* when supported by the evidence, 1. Of SENSE EXTERNAL (b) or INTERNAL (c); 2. Of MEMORY (d); and, 3. Of LEGITIMATE INFERENCES OF THE CAUSE FROM THE EFFECT (e). — Our knowledge is *probable*, when, from facts already experienced, we argue, 1. to facts OF THE SAME KIND (f) not experienced; and, 2. to facts OF A SIMILAR KIND (g) not experienced.

(a) Section I.

(b) Sect. 2.

(c) Sect. 3.

(d) Sect. 4.

(e) Sect. 5.

(f) Sect. 6.

(g) Sect. 7.

2. Judging

ceptible of demonstration. Should a man refuse to assent to a demonstrated conclusion, the world would impute the refusal, either to want of understanding, or to want of honesty : for every person of understanding feels, that by mathematical demonstration he must be convinced whether he will or not. There are two kinds of mathematical demonstration. The first is called *direct* ; and takes place, when a conclusion is inferred from premises that render it necessarily true : and this perhaps is a more perfect, or at least a simpler, kind of proof, than the other ; but both are equally convincing. The other kind is called *indirect*, *apagogical*, or *ducens ad absurdum* ; and takes place, when, by supposing a proposition false, we are led into an absurdity, which there is no other way to avoid, than by supposing the proposition true. In this manner it is proved, that the proposition is not, and cannot be, false ; in other words, that it is a certain truth. Every step in a mathematical proof, either is self-evident, or must have been formerly demonstrated ; and every demonstration does finally resolve itself into intuitive or self-evident principles, which it is impossible to prove, and equally impossible to disbelieve. These first principles constitute the foundation of mathematics : if you disprove them, you overturn the whole science ; if you refuse to believe them, you cannot, consistently with such refusal, acquiesce in any mathematical truth whatsoever. But you may as well attempt to blow out the sun, as to disprove these

2. Judging of *Real Existences* from the experience of other men, we have the EVIDENCE OF THEIR TESTIMONY (*b*). The mode of understanding produced by that evidence is properly called *Faith* ; and this faith sometimes amounts to *probable opinion*, and sometimes rises even to *absolute certainty*.

(*b*) Sect. 8.

E

principles :

principles : and if you say, that you do not believe them *, you will be charged either with falsehood or with folly ; you may as well hold your hand in the fire, and say that you feel no pain. By the law of our nature, we must feel in the one case, and believe in the other ; even as, by the same law, we must adhere to the earth, and cannot fall headlong to the clouds.

But who will pretend to prove a mathematical axiom, That a whole is greater than a part, or, That things equal to one and the same thing are equal to one another ? Every proof must be more evident than the thing to be proved. Can you then assume any more evident principle, from which the truth of these axioms may be consequentially inferred ? It is impossible ; because they are already as evident as any thing can be †. You may bring the matter

* Si quelque opiniastre les nie de la voix, on ne l'en sçauriot empêcher ; mais cela ne luy est pas permis interieurement en son esprit, parce que sa lumiere naturelle y repugne, qui est la partie où se rapporte la demonstration et le syllogisme, et non aux paroles externes. Au moyen de quoy s'il se trouve quelqu'un qui ne les puisse entendre, cettuy-là est incapable de discipline.

Dialectique de Boujou, liv. 3. ch. 3.

† Different opinions have prevailed concerning the nature of these geometrical axioms. Some suppose, that an axiom is not self-evident, except it imply an identical proposition ; that therefore this axiom, *It is impossible for the same thing, at the same time, to be and not to be*, is the only axiom that can properly be called intuitive ; and that all those other propositions commonly called *axioms*, ought to be demonstrated by being resolved into this fundamental axiom. But if this could be done, mathematical truth would not be one whit more certain than it is. Those other axioms produce absolute certainty, and produce it immediately, without any process of thought or reasoning that we can discover. And if the truth of a proposition be clearly and certainly perceived by all men without proof, and if no proof whatever could make it more clear or more certain, it seems captious not to allow that proposition the name of *Intuitive Axiom*. — Others suppose, that though the demonstration of mathematical axioms is not absolutely necessary,

matter to the test of the senses, by laying a few halfpence and farthings upon the table; but the evidence of sense is not more unquestionable, than that of abstract intuitive truth; and therefore the former evidence, though to one ignorant of the meaning of the terms, it might serve to explain and illustrate the latter, can never prove it. But not to rest any thing on the signification *we* affix to the word *proof*; and to remove every possibility of doubt as to this matter, let us suppose, that the evidence of external sense is more unquestionable than that of abstract intuitive truth, and that every intuitive principle in mathematics may thus be brought to the test of sense; and if we cannot call the evidence of sense a proof, let us call it a confirmation of the abstract principle: yet what do we gain by this method of illustration? We only discover, that the evidence of abstract intuitive truth is resolvable into, or may be illustrated by, the evidence of sense. And it will be seen in the next section, that we believe in the evidence of external sense, not because we can prove it to be true, but because the law of our nature determines us to believe in it without proof. So that in whatever way we view this subject, the point we mean to illustrate appears certain, namely, “That all mathematical truth is founded in certain first principles which common sense, or instinct, or the constitution of the human understanding, or the law of rational na-

cessary, yet that these axioms are susceptible of demonstration, and ought to be demonstrated to those who require it. Dr Barrow is of this opinion. So is Apollonius; who, agreeably to it, has attempted a demonstration of this axiom, *That things equal to one and the same thing are equal to one another.* — But whatever account we make of these opinions, they affect not our doctrine. However far the demonstration of axioms may be carried, it must at last terminate in *one* principle of common sense, if not in *many*; which principle we must believe without proof, whether we will or no.

“ture, compels us to believe without proof, whether we will or not.”

Nor would the foundation of mathematics be in the least degree more stable, if these axioms did admit of proof, or were all resolvable into one primary axiom expressed by an identical proposition. As the case now stands, we are absolutely certain of their truth; and absolute certainty is all that demonstration can produce. We are convinced by a proof, because our constitution is such, that we must be convinced by it: and we believe a self-evident axiom, because our constitution is such, that we must believe it. You ask, why I believe what is self-evident? I may as well ask, why you believe what is proved? Neither question admits of an answer; or rather, to both questions the answer is the same, namely, Because I must believe it.

Whether our belief in these cases be agreeable to the eternal relations and fitnesses of things, and such as we should entertain if we were perfectly acquainted with all the laws of Nature, is a question which no person of a sound mind can have any scruple to answer, with the fullest assurance, in the affirmative. Certain it is, our constitution is so framed, that we must believe to be true, and conformable to universal nature, that which is intimated to us, as such, by the original suggestions of our own understanding. If these are fallacious, it is the Deity who makes them so; and therefore we can never rectify, or even detect, the fallacy. But we cannot even suppose them fallacious, without violating our nature; nor, if we acknowledge a God, without impiety; for in this supposition it is implied, that we suppose the Deity a deceiver. Nor can we, consistently with such a supposition, acknowledge any distinction between truth and falsehood, or believe that one inch is less than ten thousand miles, or even that we ourselves exist.

I am inclined to think, though I have not as yet so thoroughly
examined

examined the notion as to be able to prove it, that all mathematical truth is resolvable into identical propositions. But yet I do not see, that there is any impropriety in saying, (according to my use of the terms), that mathematical truth rests on certain principles (or some one principle) of common sense, which the law of our nature (or of rational nature) determines us to believe. For, might we not have been so framed, as not to perceive the coincidence of the predicate, with the subject, of an identical proposition? And if so, is not our power of perceiving that coincidence a part of the constitution of our nature? All beings endued with reason have this power as well as we; for we cannot conceive understanding or reason to be, where this power is not. But the existence of rational creatures is an effect of that constitution of things, which the good providence of God has been pleased to establish *.

S E C T. II.

Of the evidence of External Sense.

ANother class of truths producing conviction, and absolute certainty, are those which depend upon the evidence of the external senses; Hearing, Seeing, Touching, Tasting, and Smelling. On this evidence is founded all our knowledge of external or material things; and therefore all conclusions in Natural Philosophy, and all those prudential considerations which regard the preservation of our body, as it is liable to be affected by the sen-

* See part 2. chap. 1. sect. 3.

sible qualities of matter, must finally be resolved into this principle, That things are as our senses represent them. When I touch a stone, I am conscious of a certain sensation, which I call a *sensation of hardness*. But this sensation is not hardness itself, nor any thing like hardness: it is nothing more than a sensation or feeling in my mind; accompanied, however, with an irresistible belief, that this sensation is excited by the application of an external and hard substance to a certain part of my body. This belief as certainly accompanies the sensation, as the sensation accompanies the application of the stone to my organ of sense. I believe, with as much assurance, and as unavoidably, that the external thing exists, and is hard, as I believe that I receive, and am conscious of, the sensation of hardness; or, to speak more strictly, the sensation which by experience I know to be the sign of my touching a hard body *. Now, why do I believe that this sensation is a real sensation, and really felt by me? Because my constitution is such that I must believe so. And why do I believe, in consequence of my receiving this sensation, that I touch an external object, really existing, material, and hard? The answer is the same: the matter is incapable of proof: I believe, because I must believe. Can I avoid believing, that I really am conscious of receiving this sensation? No. Can I avoid believing, that the external thing exists, and has a certain quality, which fits it, on being applied to my hand, to excite a certain feeling or sensation in my mind? No; I must believe this, whether I will or not. Nor could I divest myself of this belief, though my life and future happiness depended on the consequence. — To believe our senses, therefore, is according to the law of our nature; and we are prompted to this belief by instinct, or common sense. I am as certain, that at present I am

* See Dr Reid's Inquiry into the human mind, chap. 5. sect. 3.

in a house, and not in the open air; that I see by the light of the sun, and not by the light of a candle; that I feel the ground hard under my feet; and that I lean against a real material table, — as I can be of the truth of any geometrical axiom, or of any demonstrated conclusion; nay, I am as certain of all this as of my own existence. But I cannot prove by argument, that there is such a thing as matter in the world, or even that I myself exist: and yet I know as assuredly, that I do exist, and that there is a real material sun, and a real material world, with mountains, trees, houses, and animals, existing separately, and independently on me and my faculties; I say, I know all this with as much assurance of conviction, as the most irrefragable demonstration could produce. Is it unreasonable to believe in these cases *without* proof? Then, I affirm, it is equally unreasonable to believe in any case *with* proof. Our belief in either case is unavoidable, and according to the law of our nature; and if it be unreasonable to think according to the law of our nature, it must be equally unreasonable to adhere to the earth, to be nourished with food, or to die when the head is separated from the body. It is indeed easy to affirm any thing, provided a man can reconcile himself to hypocrisy and falsehood. A man may affirm, that he sees with the soles of his feet, that he believes there is no material world, that he doubts of his own existence. He may as well say, that he believes one and two to be equal to six, a part to be greater than a whole, a circle to be a triangle; and that it may be possible for the same thing, at the same time, to be and not to be.

But it is said, that our senses do often impose upon us; and that by means of reason we are enabled to detect the imposture, and to judge rightly even where our senses give us wrong information; that therefore our belief in the evidence of sense is not instinctive or intuitive, but such as may be either confuted or confirmed by reasoning. We shall acknowledge that our senses

do often impose upon us : but a little attention will convince us, that reason, though it may be employed in correcting the present fallacious sensation, by referring it to a former sensation, received by us, or by other men, is not the ultimate judge in this matter ; for that all such reasoning is resolvable into this principle of common sense, That things are what our external senses represent them. One instance will suffice at present for illustration of this point *.

After having looked a moment at the sun, I see a black, or perhaps a luminous, circle swimming in the air, apparently at the distance of two or three feet from my eyes. That I see such a circle, is certain ; that I believe I see it, is certain ; that I believe its appearance to be owing to some cause, is also certain : — thus far there can be no imposture, and there is no supposition of any. Suppose me from this appearance to conclude, that a real, solid, tangible or visible, round substance, of a black or yellow colour, is actually swimming in the air before me ; in this I should be mistaken. How then come I to know that I am mistaken ? I may know it in several ways. 1. I stretch out my hand to the place where the circle seems to be floating in the air ; and having *felt* nothing, I am instantly convinced, that there is no *tangible* substance in that place. Is this conviction an inference of reason ? No ; it is a conviction arising from our innate propensity to believe, that things are as our senses represent them. By this innate or instinctive propensity I believe that what I touch exists ; by the same propensity I believe, that where I touch nothing, there nothing tangible does exist. If in the present case I were suspicious of the veracity of my senses, I should neither believe nor disbelieve. 2. I turn my eyes towards the opposite quarter of the heavens ; and having still observed the same circle floating before

* See part 2. chap. 1. sect. 2.

them,

them, and knowing by experience, that the motion of bodies placed at a distance from me does not follow or depend on the motion of my body, I conclude, that the appearance is owing, not to a real, external, corporeal object, but to some disorder in my organ of sight. Here reasoning is employed; but where does it terminate? It terminates in experience, which I have acquired by means of my senses. But if I believed them fallacious, if I believed things to be otherwise than my senses represent them, I should never, by their means, acquire experience at all. Or, 3. I apply, first to one man, then to another, and then to a third, who all assure me, that they perceive no such circle floating in the air, and at the same time inform me of the true cause of the appearance. I believe their declaration, either because I have had experience of their veracity, or because I have an innate propensity to credit testimony. To gain experience implies a belief in the evidence of sense, which reasoning cannot account for; and a propensity to credit testimony previous to experience or reasoning, is equally unaccountable*.—So that, although we acknowledge some of our senses, in some instances, deceitful, our detection of the deceit, whether by the evidence of our other senses, or by a retrospect to our past experience, or by our trusting to the testimony of other men, does still imply, that we do and must believe our senses previously to all reasoning †.

A human creature born with a propensity to disbelieve his senses, would be as helpless as if he wanted them. To his own preservation he could contribute nothing; and, after ages of being, would remain as destitute of knowledge and experience, as when he began to be.

* See sect. 8. of this chapter.

† See part 2. chap. 1. sect. 2.

Sometimes we seem to distrust the evidence of our senses, when in reality we only doubt whether we have that evidence. I may appeal to any man, if he were thoroughly convinced that he had really, when awake, seen and conversed with a ghost, whether any reasoning would convince him that it was a delusion. Reasoning might lead him to suspect that he had been dreaming, and therefore to doubt whether or not he had the evidence of sense; but if he were assured that he had that evidence, no arguments would shake his belief.

S E C T. III.

Of the Evidence of Internal Sense, or Consciousness.

BY attending to what passes in my mind, I know, not only that it exists, but also that it exerts certain powers of action and perception; which, on account either of a diversity in their objects, or of a difference in their manner of operating, I consider as distinct faculties; and which I find it expedient to distinguish by different names, that I may be able to speak of them so as to be understood. Thus I am conscious that at one time I exert memory, at another time imagination: sometimes I believe, sometimes I doubt: the performance of certain actions, and the indulgence of certain affections, is attended with an agreeable feeling of a peculiar kind, which I call *moral approbation*; different actions and affections excite the opposite feeling, of *moral disapprobation*: to relieve distress, I feel to be meritorious and praise-worthy; to pick a pocket, I know to be blameable, and worthy of punishment: I am conscious that some actions are in
my

my power, and that others are not; that when I neglect to do what I ought to do, and can do, I deserve to be punished; and that when I act necessarily, or upon unavoidable and irresistible compulsion, I deserve neither punishment nor blame. Of all these sentiments I am as conscious, and as certain, as of my own existence. I cannot prove that I feel them, neither to myself, nor to others; but that I do really feel them, is as evident to me as demonstration could make it. I cannot prove, in regard to my moral feelings, that they are conformable to any extrinsic and eternal relations of things; but I know that my constitution necessarily determines me to believe them just and genuine, even as it determines me to believe that I myself exist, and that things are as my external senses represent them. An expert logician might puzzle me with words, and propose difficulties I could not solve: but he might as well attempt to convince me, that I do not exist, as that I do not feel what I am conscious I do feel. And if he could induce me to suspect that I may be mistaken, what standard of truth could he propose to me, more evident, and of higher authority in these matters, than my own feelings? Shall I believe his testimony, and disbelieve my own sensations? Shall I admit his reasons, because I cannot confute them, altho' common sense tells me they are false? Shall I suffer the ambiguities of artificial language to prevail against the clear, the intelligible, the irresistible voice of Nature?

We cannot disbelieve the evidence of internal sense, without offering violence to our nature. And if we be led into such disbelief, or distrust, by the sophistry of pretended philosophers, we act just as wisely as a mariner would do, who should suffer himself to be persuaded, that the pole-star is continually changing its place, but that the wind always blows from the same quarter. Common sense, or instinct, which prompts men to trust to their own feelings, hath in all ages continued the same: but the in-

terests, pursuits, and abilities of philosophers, are susceptible of endless variety ; and their theories vary accordingly.

Let it not be thought, that these objects and faculties of internal sensation are things too evanescent to be attended to, or that their evidence is too weak to produce a steady and well-grounded conviction. They are more necessary to our happiness than even the powers and objects of external sense ; yea, they are no less necessary to our existence. What can be of greater consequence to man, than his moral sentiments, his reason, his memory, his imagination ? What more interesting, than to know, whether his notions of duty and of truth be the dictates of his nature, that is, the voice of God, or the positive institutions of men ? What is it to which a wise man will pay more attention, than to his reason and conscience, those divine monitors, whereby he is to judge even of religion itself ? The generality of mankind, however ignorant of the received distinctions and explications of their internal powers, do yet by their conduct declare, that they feel their influence, and acknowledge their authenticity. Every instance of their being governed by a principle of moral obligation, is a proof of this. They believe an action to be lawful in the sight of God, when they are conscious of a sentiment of lawfulness attending the performance of it : they believe a certain mode of conduct to be incumbent on them in certain circumstances, because a notion of duty arises in their mind, when they contemplate that conduct in relation to those circumstances. —

“ I ought to be grateful for a favour received. Why ? Because
 “ my conscience tells me so. How do you know that you ought
 “ to do that of which your conscience enjoins the performance ?
 “ I can give no further reason for it ; but I *feel* that such is my
 “ duty.” Here the investigation must stop ; or, if carried a little further, it must return to this point : — “ I know that I ought
 “ to do what my conscience enjoins, because God is the author

“ of

“ of my constitution ; and I obey His will, when I act according to the principles of my constitution. Why do you obey the will of God ? Because it is my duty. How know you that ? Because my conscience tells me so,” &c.

If a man were sceptical in this matter, it would not be in the power of argument to cure him *. Such a man could not be said to have any moral principle distinct from the hope of reward, the fear of punishment, or the force of custom. But that there is in human nature a moral principle distinct from those motives, has been felt and acknowledged by men of all ages and nations ; and indeed was never denied or doubted, except by a few metaphysicians, who, through want either of sense or of honesty, found themselves disposed to deny the existence, or question the authenticity, of our moral feelings. In the celebrated dispute concerning liberty and necessity, some of the advocates for the latter have either maintained, that we have no sense of moral liberty ; or, granting that we have such a sense, have endeavoured to prove it deceitful. Now, if we be conscious, that we have a sense of moral liberty, it is certainly as absurd to argue against the existence of that sense, as against the reality of any other matter of

* All that is here meant, in regard to Moral Obligation, is, that Morality, like other sciences, is founded on certain first principles, and that the dictates of conscience are to every good man the highest authority in matters of duty. I see no paradox in this doctrine ; which, if I mistake not, is admitted by the best divines and moralists, and by mankind in general. How far this doctrine may be affected by what casuists have urged in regard to an erroneous conscience, or by the opinions of some philosophers concerning the mutability of moral sentiment, and its liability to be perverted by education and habit, is an inquiry of very great extent, which I have not here entered upon at all, (though I have written many a page on the subject), because I intended long ago, and do still intend, when I shall have health and leisure, to make it the argument of another book. See below, part 2, ch. 1. sect. 3. § 4.

fact. And if the real existence of that sense be acknowledged, it cannot be proved to be deceitful by any arguments which may not be applied to prove other powers of our nature deceitful, and, consequently, to show, that man ought not to believe any thing that depends, for its evidence, on these internal suggestions. — But more of this afterwards.

We have no other direct evidence than this of consciousness, or internal sensation, for the existence and identity of our own soul *. I exist; — I am the same being to-day I was yesterday, and

* I say, *direct* evidence. But there are not wanting other irrefragable, though indirect, evidences of the existence of the human soul. Such is that which results from a comparison of the known qualities of matter with the phenomena of animal motion and thought. The further we carry our inquiries into matter, the more we are convinced of its incapacity to begin motion. And as to thought, and its several modes, if we think that they *might* be produced by any possible arrangement of the minute particles of matter, we form a supposition as arbitrary, as little warranted by experience or evidence of any kind, and as contrary to the rules that determine us in all our rational conjectures, as if we were to suppose, that diamonds *might* be produced from the smoke of a candle, or that men *might* grow like mushrooms out of the earth. There must then, in all animals, and especially in man, be a principle, not only distinct and different from body, but in some respects of a quite contrary nature. To ask, whether the Deity, without uniting body with spirit, could create thinking matter, is just such a question, as, whether he could create a being essentially active and essentially inactive, capable of beginning motion, and at the same time incapable of beginning motion: questions, which, if we allow experience to be a rational ground of knowledge, we need not scruple to answer in the negative. For these questions, according to the best lights that our rational faculties can afford, seem to us to refer to the production of an effect as truly impossible, as round squareness, hot cold, black whiteness, or true falsehood.

Yet I am inclined to think, it is not by this argument that the generality of mankind are led to acknowledge the existence of their own minds. An evidence more direct, much more obvious, and not less convincing, every man discovers
in

and twenty years ago ; — this principle, or being, within me, that thinks and acts, is one permanent and individual principle, distinct from all other principles, beings, or things ; — these are dictates of internal sensation natural to man, and universally acknowledged : and they are of so great importance, that while

in the instinctive suggestions of nature. We perceive the existence of our souls by intuition ; and this I believe is the only way in which the vulgar perceive it. But their conviction is not on that account the weaker ; on the contrary, they would think the man mad who should seem to entertain any doubts on this subject.

One of the first thoughts that occur to Milton's Adam, when " new-waked from soundest sleep," is to inquire after the cause of his existence :

" Thou sun, said I, fair light !

" And thou, enlighten'd earth, so fresh and gay !

" Ye hills, and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains,

" And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell,

" Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here :

" Not of myself ; by some great Maker then,

" In goodness and in power pre-eminent.

" Tell me, how I may know him, how adore,

" From whom I have, that thus I move and live,

" And feel that I am happier than I know."

Paradise Lost, viii. 273.

Of the reality of his own life, motion, and existence, it is observable that he makes no question ; and indeed it would have been strange if he had. — But Dryden, in his opera called *The state of Innocence*, would needs attempt an improvement on this passage ; and to make surer work, obliges Adam to prove his existence by argument, before he allows him to enter upon any other inquiry :

" What am I ? or from whence ? — For that I am.

" I know, *because I think* : but whence I came,

" Or how this frame of mine began to be,

" What other being can disclose to me ?

Act 2. scene 11.

Dryden, it seems, had read Des Cartes ; but Milton had studied nature : Accordingly Dryden speaks like a metaphysician, Milton like a poet and philosopher.

we doubt of their truth, we can hardly be interested in any thing else whatsoever. If I were to believe, with some authors, that my mind is perpetually changing, so as to become every different moment a different thing, the remembrance of past, or the anticipation of future good or evil, could give me neither pleasure nor pain; yea, though I were to believe, that a cruel death would overtake me within an hour, I should be no more concerned, than if I were told, that a certain elephant, three thousand years hence, would be sacrificed on the top of Mount Atlas. To a man who doubts the individuality or identity of his own mind, virtue, truth, religion, good and evil, hope and fear, are absolutely nothing.

Metaphysicians have taken some pains to confound our notions on the subject of identity; and, by establishing the currency of certain ambiguous phrases, have succeeded so well, that it is now hardly possible for us to explain these dictates of our nature, according to common sense and common experience, in such language as shall be liable to no exception. The misfortune is, that many of the words we must use, though extremely well understood, are either too simple or too complex in their meaning, to admit a logical definition; so that the caviller is never at a loss for an evasive reply to any thing we may advance. But I will take it upon me to affirm, that there are hardly any human notions more clearly, or more universally understood, than those we entertain concerning the identity both of ourselves and of other things, however difficult we may sometimes find it to express those notions in proper words. And I will also venture to affirm, that the sentiments of the generality of mankind on this head are grounded on such evidence, that he who refuses to be convinced by it, acts irrationally, and cannot, consistently with such refusal, believe any thing.

1. The existence of our own mind, as something different
and

and distinct from the body, is universally acknowledged. I say universally; having never heard of any nation of men upon earth, who did not, in their conversation and behaviour, show, by the plainest signs, that they made this distinction. Nay, so strongly are mankind impressed with it, that the rudest barbarians, by their incantations, their funeral solemnities, their traditions concerning invisible beings, and their hopes of a future state, seem to declare, that to the existence of the soul the body is not, in their opinion, necessary. All philosophers, a few Epicureans and Pyrrhonists excepted, have acknowledged the existence of the soul, as one of the first and most unexceptionable principles of human science. Now whence could a notion so universal arise? Let us examine our own minds, and we shall find, that it could arise from nothing but consciousness, a certain irresistible persuasion, that we have a soul distinct from the body. The evidence of this notion is intuitive; it is the evidence of internal sense. Reasoning can neither prove nor disprove it. DES CARTES, and his disciple MALEBRANCHE, acknowledge, that the existence of the human soul must be believed by all men, even by those who can bring themselves to doubt of every thing else.

Mr Simon Browne *, a learned and pious clergyman of the last age, is perhaps the only person on record of whom there is reason to think, that he seriously disbelieved the existence of his own soul. He imagined, that in consequence of an extraordinary interposition of divine power, his rational soul was gradually annihilated, and that nothing was now left him, but a principle of animal life, which he held in common with the brutes. But where-ever the story of this excellent person is known, his unhappy mistake will be imputed to madness, and to a depravation of

* See his affecting story in the *Adventurer*, vol. 3. N^o 88.

intellect, as real, and as extraordinary, as if he had disbelieved the existence of his body, or the axioms of mathematics.

2. That the thinking principle, which we believe to be within us, continues the same through life, is equally self-evident, and equally agreeable to the universal consent of mankind. If a man were to speak and act in the evening, as if he believed himself to have become a different person since the morning, the whole world would pronounce him mad. Were we to attempt to disbelieve our own identity, we should labour in vain; we could as easily bring ourselves to believe, that it is possible for the same thing to be and not to be. But there is no reason to think, that this attempt was ever made by any man, not even by Mr HUME himself; though that author, in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, has asserted, yea, and proved too, (according to his notions of proof), that the human soul is perpetually changing; being nothing but “a bundle of perceptions, that succeed each other “ with inconceivable rapidity, and are (as he chuses to express it) “ in a perpetual flux*.” He might as easily, in my opinion, and as decisively, with equal credit to his own understanding, and with equal advantage to the reader, by a method of reasoning no less philosophical, and with the same degree of discretion in the use of words, have attacked the axioms of mathematics, or any other truths intuitive or demonstrable, and produced a formal and serious confutation of them. In explaining the evidence on which we believe our own identity, it is not necessary that I should here examine his arguments against that belief: first, because the point in question is self-evident; and therefore all reasoning on the other side unphilosophical and irrational: and, secondly, because I shall afterwards prove, that some of Mr HUME’s first principles are inconceivable; and that this very

* *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. I. p. 438. &c.

notion of his, concerning identity, when fairly stated, is palpably absurd.

It has been asked, how we can pretend to have full evidence of our identity, when of identity itself we are so far from having a distinct notion, that we cannot define it. It might, with as good reason be asked, how we come to believe that two and two are equal to four, or that a circle is different from a triangle, if we cannot define either equality or diversity:—why we believe in our own existence, since we cannot define existence:—why, in a word, the vulgar believe any thing at all, since they know nothing about the rules of definition, and hardly ever attempt it. In fact, we have numberless ideas that admit not of definition, and yet concerning which we may argue, and believe, and know, with the utmost clearness and certainty. To define heat or cold, identity or diversity, red or white, an ox or an ass, would puzzle all the logicians on earth; yet nothing can be clearer, or more certain, than many of our judgements concerning those objects. The rudest of the vulgar know most perfectly what they mean, when they say, Three months ago I was at such a town; and have ever since been at home: and the conviction they have of the truth of this proposition is founded on the best of evidence; namely, on that of internal sense; in which all men, by the law of their nature, do and must implicitly believe.

It has been asked, whether this continued consciousness of our being always the same, does not constitute our sameness or identity. No more, I should answer, than our perception of truth, light, or cold, is the efficient cause of truth, light, or cold. Our identity is perceived by consciousness; but consciousness is as different from identity, as the understanding is different from truth, as past events are different from memory, as colours from the power of seeing. Consciousness of identity is so far from constituting identity, that it presupposes it. An animal

might continue the same being, and yet not be conscious of its identity; which is probably the case with many of the brute creation; nay, which is often the case with man himself. When we sleep without dreaming, or fall into a fainting fit*, or rave in a fever, and often too in our ordinary dreams, we lose all sense of our identity, and yet never conceive that our identity has suffered any interruption or change: the moment we awake or recover, we are conscious that we are the same individual beings we were before.

Many doubts and difficulties have been started about our manner of conceiving identity of person under a change of substance. Plutarch tells us, that in the time of Demetrius Phalereus, the Athenians still preserved the custom of sending every

* The following case, which M. Crozaz gave in to the Academy of Sciences, is the most extraordinary instance of interrupted consciousness I have ever heard of. A nobleman of Lausanne, as he was giving orders to a servant, suddenly lost his speech and all his senses. Different remedies were tried without effect for six months; during all which time he appeared to be in a deep sleep, or deliquium, with various symptoms at different periods, which are particularly specified in the narration. At last, after some surgical operations, at the end of six months his speech and senses were suddenly restored. When he recovered, the servant to whom he had been giving orders when he was first seized with the distemper, happening to be in the room, he asked whether he had executed his commission; not being sensible, it seems, that any interval of time, except perhaps a very short one, had elapsed during his illness. He lived ten years after, and died of another disease. See *L'Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences, pour l'année 1719, p. 28.* Van Swieten also relates this story in his Commentaries on Boerhaave's Aphorisms, under the head *Apoplexy*. I mention it chiefly with a view to the reader's amusement: he may consider the evidence, and believe or disbelieve as he pleases. But that consciousness may be interrupted by a total deliquium, without any change in our notions of our own identity, I know by my own experience. I am therefore fully persuaded, that the identity of this substance which I call my soul, may continue even when I am unconscious of it: and if for a shorter space, why not for a longer?

year

year to Delos the same galley which, about a thousand years before, had brought Theseus and his company from Crete; and that it then used to be a question in the schools, how this could be the same vessel, when every part of its materials had been changed oftener than once*. It is asked, how a tree can be accounted the same, when, from a plant of an inch long, it has grown to the height of fifty feet; and how identity can be ascribed to the human body, since its parts are continually changing, so that not one particle of the body I now have, belonged to the body I had twenty years ago.

It were well, if metaphysicians would think more and speak less on these subjects: they would then find, that the difficulties so much complained of are rather verbal than real. Was there a single Athenian, who did not know in what respects the galley of Theseus continued the same, and in what respects it was changed? It was the same in respect of its name, its destination, its shape perhaps, and size, and some other particulars; in respect of substance, it was altogether different. And when one party in the schools maintained, that it was the same, and the other, that it was not the same, all the difference between them was this, that the one used the word *same* in one sense, and the other in another.

The identity of vegetables is as easily conceived. No man imagines, that the plant of an inch long is the same in substance with the tree of fifty feet. The latter is by the vulgar supposed to retain all the substance of the former, but with the addition of an immense quantity of adventitious matter. Thus far, and no further, do they suppose the substance of the tree to continue the same. They call it, however, the same tree: and the same it is, in many respects, which to every person of com-

* Plutarch, in Theseo. Plato, in Phædone.

mon understanding, are obvious enough, though not easily expressed in unexceptionable language.

Of the changes made in the human body by attrition, the vulgar have no notion. They believe the substance of a full-grown body to continue the same, notwithstanding its being sometimes fatter, and sometimes leaner; even as they suppose the substance of a wall to be the same before and after it is plaistered, or painted. They therefore do not ascribe to it identity of person, and diversity of substance, but a real and proper identity both of substance and person. Of the identity of the body while increasing in stature, they conceive, nearly in the same way, as of the identity of vegetables: they know in what respects it continues the same, and in what respects it becomes different; there is no confusion in their notions; they never suppose it to be different in those respects in which they know it to be the same.

When philosophers speak of the identity of the human body, they must mean, not that its substance is the same, for this they say is perpetually changing; but that it is the same, in respect of its having been all along animated with the same vital and thinking principle, distinguished by the same name, marked with the same or similar features, placed in the same relations of life, &c.—It must be obvious to the intelligent reader, that the difficulties attending this subject arise not from any ambiguity or intricacy in our notions or judgements, for these are extremely clear, but from our way of expressing them: the particulars in which an object continues the same, are often so blended with those in which it has become different, that we cannot find proper words for marking the distinction, and therefore must have recourse to obscure circumlocutions.

But whatever judgements we form of the identity of coporeal objects, we cannot from them draw any inference concerning the
identity

identity of our mind. We cannot ascribe extension or solidity to the soul, far less any increase or diminution of solid or extended parts. Here, therefore, there is no ground for distinguishing diversity of substance from identity of person. Our soul is the very same being now it was yesterday, last year, twenty years ago. This is a dictate of common sense, an intuitive truth, which all mankind, by the law of their nature, do and must believe, and the contrary of which is inconceivable. We have perhaps changed many of our principles; we may have acquired many new ideas and notions, and lost many of those we once had; but that the substance, essence, or personality, of the soul, has suffered any change, increase, or diminution, we never have supposed, nor can suppose. New faculties have perhaps appeared, with which we were formerly unacquainted; but these we cannot conceive to have affected the identity of the soul, any more than learning to write, or to play on a musical instrument, is conceived to affect the identity of the hand; or than the perception of harmony the first time one hears music, is conceived to affect the identity of the ear*.

But

* I beg leave to quote a few lines from an excellent poem, written by an author, whose genius and virtue were an honour to his country, and to human nature;

“ Am I but what I seem, mere flesh and blood,
 “ A branching channel, and a mazy flood?
 “ The purple stream, that through my vessels glides,
 “ Dull and unconscious flows like common tides.
 “ The pipes, through which the circling juices stray,
 “ Are not that thinking I, no more than they.
 “ This frame compacted with transcendent skill,
 “ Of moving joints, obedient to my will,
 “ Nursed from the fruitful glebe like yonder tree,
 “ Waxes and wastes: I call it MINE not ME.

“ New

But if we perceive our identity by consciousness, and if the acts of consciousness by which we perceive it be interrupted, how can we know that our identity is not interrupted? I answer, The law of our nature determines us, whether we will or not, to believe that we continue the same thinking beings. The interruption of consciousness, whether more or less frequent, makes no change in this belief. My perception of the visible creation is every moment interrupted by the winking of my eyes. Am I therefore to believe, that the visible universe, which I this moment perceive, is not the same with the visible universe I perceived last moment? Then must I also believe, that the existence of the universe depends on the motion of my eyelids; and that the muscles which move them have the power of creating and annihilating worlds.

To conclude: That our soul exists, and continues through life the same individual being, is a dictate of common sense; a truth which the law of our nature renders it impossible for us to disbelieve; and in regard to which, we cannot suppose ourselves in an error, without supposing our faculties fallacious, and consequently disclaiming all conviction, and all certainty, and disavowing the distinction between truth and falsehood.

“ New matter still the mouldering mass sustains;
 “ The mansion changed, the tenant still remains,
 “ And, from the fleeting stream repair’d by food,
 “ Distinct, as is the swimmer from the flood.”

ARBUTHNOT. See *Dodley's Collection*, vol. 1. p. 180.

S E C T. IV.

Of the Evidence of Memory.

THE evidence of memory commands our belief as effectually as that of sense. With regard to any of my transactions of yesterday which I now remember, I cannot doubt whether I performed them or not. That I dined to-day, and was in bed last night, is as certain to me, as that I at present see the colour of this paper. If we had no memory, knowledge and experience would be impossible; and if we had any tendency to distrust our memory, knowledge and experience would be of as little use in directing our conduct and sentiments, as our dreams now are. Sometimes we doubt, whether in a particular case we exert memory or imagination; and our belief is suspended accordingly: but no sooner do we become conscious, that we *remember*, than conviction instantly takes place; we say, I am certain it was so, for now I remember I was an eye-witness.

But who is it that teaches the child to believe, that yesterday he was punished, because he remembers to have been punished yesterday? Or, by what argument will you convince him, that, notwithstanding his remembrance, he ought not to believe that he was punished yesterday, because memory is fallacious? The matter depends not on education or reasoning. We trust to the evidence of memory, because we cannot help trusting to it. The same Providence that endued us with memory, without any care of ours, endued us also with an instinctive propensity to believe in it, previously to all reasoning and experience. Nay, all reasoning supposes the testimony of memory to be authentic: for, without trusting implicitly to this testimony, no train of reasoning

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ing could be prosecuted; we could never be convinced, that the conclusion is fair, if we did not *remember* the several steps of the argument, and if we were not certain that this remembrance is not fallacious.

The diversities of memory in different men are very remarkable; and in the same man the remembrance of some things is more lasting, and more lively, than that of others. Some of the ideas of memory seem to decay gradually by length of time; so that there may be some things which I distinctly remembered seven years ago, but which at present I remember very imperfectly, and which in seven years more (if I live so long) I shall have utterly forgotten. Hence some have been led to think, that the evidence of memory decays gradually, from absolute certainty, through all the degrees of probability, down to that suspense of judgement which we call *doubt*. They seem to have imagined, that the vivacity of the idea is in some sort necessary to the establishment of belief. Nay, one author * has gone so far as to say, that belief is nothing else but this vivacity of ideas; as if we never believed what we have no lively conception of, nor doubted of any thing of which we have a lively conception. But this doctrine is so absurd, that it hardly deserves confutation. I have a more lively idea of Don Quixote than of the present King of Prussia; and yet I believe that the latter does exist, and that the former never did. When I was a schoolboy, I read an abridgement of the History of Robinson Crusoe, and believed every word of it; since I grew up, I have read that ingenious work at large, and consequently have a much livelier conception of it than before; yet now I believe the whole to be a fiction. Some months ago, I read *the Treatise of Human Nature*, and have at present a pretty clear remembrance of its contents; but I shall probably

* *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1. p. 172.

forget the greater part in a short time. When that happens, I ought not, according to this theory, to believe that I ever read it. As long, however, as my faculties remain unimpaired, I fear I shall hardly be able to bring myself to this pitch of scepticism. No, no; I shall ever have good reason to remember my having read that book; however imperfect my remembrance may be, and however little ground I may have to congratulate myself upon my acquaintance with it.

The vivacity of a perception does not seem necessary to our belief of the existence of the thing perceived. I see a town afar off; its visible magnitude is not more than an inch square, and therefore my perception of it is neither lively nor distinct; and yet I as certainly believe that town to exist, as if I were in the centre of it. I see an object in motion on the top of yonder hill; I cannot discern whether it be a man, or a horse, or both; I therefore exert no belief in regard to the class or species of things to which it belongs; but I believe with as much assurance that it exists, as if I saw it distinctly in all its parts and dimensions. We have never any doubt of the existence of an object so long as we are sure that we perceive it by our senses, whether the perception be strong or weak, distinct or confused; but whenever we begin to doubt, whether the object be perceived by our senses, or whether we only imagine that we perceive it, then we likewise begin to doubt of its existence.

These observations are applicable to memory. I saw a certain object some years ago; my remembrance of it is less distinct now than it was the day after I saw it; but I believe the evidence of my memory as much at present as I did then, in regard to all the parts of it which I now am conscious that I remember. Let a past event be ever so remote in time, if I am conscious that I remember it, I still believe, with equal assurance, that this event did once take place. For what is memory, but a consciousness of

our having formerly done or perceived something? And if it be true, that something is perceived or done at this present moment, it will always be true, that at this moment that thing was perceived or done. The evidence of memory does not decay in proportion as the ideas of memory become less lively; as long as we are conscious that we *remember*, so long will the evidence attending that remembrance produce absolute certainty; and absolute certainty admits not of degrees. Indeed, as was already observed, when remembrance becomes so obscure, that we are at a loss to determine whether we *remember* or only *imagine* an event,—in this case belief will be suspended till we become certain whether we remember or not; whenever we become certain that we do remember, conviction instantly arises.

Some have supposed that the evidence of memory is liable to become uncertain, because we are not well enough acquainted with the difference between memory and imagination, to be able at all times to determine, whether the one or the other be exerted in regard to the events or facts we may have occasion to contemplate. “ You say, that while you only imagine an event, “ you neither believe nor disbelieve the existence or reality of it: “ but that as soon as you become conscious that you remember “ it, you instantly believe it to have been real. You must then “ know with certainty the difference between memory and imagination, and be able to tell by what marks you distinguish “ the operations of the former from those of the latter. If you “ cannot do this, you may mistake the one for the other, and “ think that you *imagine* when you really *remember*, and that you “ *remember* when you only *imagine*. That belief, therefore, must “ be very precarious, which is built upon the evidence of memory, “ since this evidence is so apt to be confounded with the “ visionary exhibitions of imagination, which, by your own “ knowledge, can never constitute a foundation for true rational

“ tional belief *.” This is an objection according to the metaphysical mode ; which, without consulting experience, is satisfied if a few plausible words can be put together in the form of an argument : but this objection will have no credit with those who acknowledge ultimate instinctive principles of conviction, and who have more faith in their own feelings than in the subtleties of logic.

It is certain the vulgar are not able to give a satisfactory account of the difference between memory and imagination ; even philosophers have not always succeeded in their attempts to illustrate this point †. Mr HUME tells us, that ideas of memory are distinguished from those of imagination by the superior vivacity of the former ‡. This may sometimes, but cannot always,

* I do not remember where I have met with this argument. Perhaps I may have heard it in conversation.

† Addison, in the Spectator, No. 411. seems to consider imagination as a faculty conversant among those ideas only which are derived from the sense of seeing. But is not this acceptance of the word too limited ? I can invent, and consequently imagine, a tune which I never heard. When I look at Hogarth’s humorous print of *The Enraged Musician*, I can imagine the several discordant sounds supposed to proceed from the persons and instruments there assembled. Men born blind, or who have lost all remembrance of light and colours, are as capable of invention, and dream as frequently, as those who see ; my learned, ingenious, and worthy friend Dr Blacklock of Edinburgh, who lost his sight at five months old, is an example of both. — Some authors have defined imagination, The simple apprehension of corporeal objects when absent. But cannot a good man imagine the remorse of a murderer, or the anxieties of a miser ? Cannot one invent new theories in the abstract philosophy, or even an entire new system of it ? — Imagination, in the modern philosophic language, seems to denote two things : 1. That power of the mind which contemplates *ideas* (that is, *thoughts* or *notions*) without referring them to real existence, or to our past experience ; 2. That power which combines ideas into new forms or assemblages.

‡ Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 153.

be true: for ideas of imagination are often mistaken for objects of sense; ideas of memory never. The former, therefore, must often be more lively than the latter; for, according to this author's own account, all ideas are weaker than impressions, or informations of sense *. Dreaming persons, lunatics, stage-players, enthusiasts, and all who are agitated by fear, or other violent passions, are apt to mistake ideas of imagination for real things, and the perception of those ideas for real sensation. And the same thing is often experienced by persons of strong fancy, and great sensibility of temper, at a time when they are not troubled with any fits of irrationality or violent passion.

But whatever difficulty we may find in defining or describing memory, so as to distinguish it from imagination, we are never at any loss about our own meaning, when we speak of remembering and of imagining. We all know what it is to remember, and what it is to imagine: a retrospect to former experience always attends the exertions of memory; but those of imagination are not attended with any such retrospect. "I remember to have seen a lion, and I can imagine an elephant or centaur, which I have never seen:"—Every body who uses these words knows very well what they mean, whether he be able to explain his meaning by other words or not. The truth is, that when we remember, we generally know that we remember; when we imagine, we generally know that we imagine †: such is our constitution. We therefore do not suppose the evidence of memory

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 41.

† In dreams indeed this is not the case; but the delusions of dreaming, for all our frequent experience of them, are never supposed to affect in the least degree either the veracity of our faculties, or the certainty of our knowledge. See below, Part 2. chap. 2. sect. 2.

uncertain, notwithstanding that we may be at a loss to explain the difference between that faculty and imagination: this difference is perfectly known to every man by experience, though perhaps no man can fully express it in words. There are many things very familiar to us, which we have no words to express. I cannot describe or define, either a red colour, which I know to be a simple object, or a white colour, which I know to be a composition of seven colours: but will any one hence infer, that I am ignorant of their difference, so as not to know, when I look on ermine, whether it be white or red? Let it not then be said, that because we cannot define memory and imagination, therefore we are ignorant of their difference: every person of a sound mind knows their difference, and can with certainty determine, when it is that he exerts the one, and when it is that he exerts the other.

S E C T. V.

Of Reasoning from the Effect to the Cause.

I Left my chamber an hour ago, and now at my return find a book on the table, the size, and binding, and contents of which are so remarkable, that I am certain it was not here when I went out; and that I never saw it before. I ask, who brought this book; and am told, that no body has entered my apartment since I left it. That, say I, is *impossible*. I make a more particular inquiry; and a servant, in whose veracity I can confide, assures me, that he has had his eye on my chamber-door the whole day, and that no person has entered it but myself only. Then, say

say I, the person who brought this book must have come in by the window or the chimney; for it is *impossible* that this book could have come hither of itself. The servant bids me remember, that my chimney is too narrow to admit any human creature, and that the window is secured on the inside in such a manner that it cannot be opened from without. I examine the walls; it is evident no breach has been made; and there is but one door to the apartment. What shall I think? If the servant's report be true, and if the book have not been brought by any visible agent, it must have come in a miraculous manner, by the interposition of some invisible cause; for still I must repeat, that without some cause it *could not possibly* have come hither.

Let the reader consider the case, and deliberate with himself, whether I think irrationally on this occasion, or express myself too strongly, when I speak of the *impossibility* of a book appearing in my chamber without some cause of its appearance, either visible or invisible. I would not willingly refer such a phenomenon to a miracle; but still a miracle is possible; whereas it is absolutely impossible that this could have happened without a cause; at least it seems to me to be as real an impossibility, as that a part should be greater than the whole, or that things equal to one and the same thing should be unequal to one another. And I presume the reader will be of my opinion; for, in all my intercourse with others, and after a careful examination of my own mind, I have never found any reason to think, that it is possible for a human, or for a rational creature, to conceive a thing beginning to exist, and proceeding from no cause.

I pronounce it therefore to be an axiom, clear, certain, and undeniable, That "whatever beginneth to exist, proceedeth from some cause." I cannot bring myself to think, that the reverse of any geometrical axiom is more incredible than the reverse of this; and therefore I am as certain of the truth of this, as I can
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be of the truth of the other ; and cannot, without contradicting myself, and doing violence to my nature, even attempt to believe otherwise.

Whether this maxim be intuitive or demonstrable, may perhaps admit of some dispute ; but the determination of that point will not in the least affect the truth of the maxim. If it be demonstrable, we can then assign a reason for our belief of it : if it be intuitive, it is on the same footing with other intuitive axioms ; that is, we believe it, because the law of our nature renders it impossible for us to disbelieve it.

In proof of this maxim it has been said, that nothing can produce itself. But this truth is not more evident than the truth to be proved, and therefore is no proof at all. Nay, this last proposition seems to be only a different, and less proper, way of expressing the same thing : — Nothing can produce itself ; — that is, every thing produced, must be produced by some other thing ; — that is, every effect must proceed from a cause ; — and that is, (for all effects being posterior to their causes, must necessarily have a beginning), “ every thing beginning to exist proceeds from some cause.” Other arguments have been offered in proof of this maxim, which I think are sufficiently confuted by Mr HUME, in his *Treatise of Human Nature* *. This maxim therefore he affirms, and I allow, to be not demonstrably certain. But he further affirms, that it is not intuitively certain ; in which I cannot agree with him. “ All certainty,” says he, “ arises from the comparison of ideas, and from the discovery of such relations as are unalterable so long as the ideas continue the same ; but the only relations † of this kind are resemblance,

* Book I. part 3. sect. 3.

† There are, according to Mr HUME, seven different kinds of philosophical relation, to wit, Resemblance, Identity, Relations of time and place, Proportion

“ blance, proportion in quantity and number, degrees of any
 “ quality, and contrariety ; none of which is implied in the ma-
 “ xim, *Whatever begins to exist, proceeds from some cause* : — that
 “ maxim therefore is not intuitively certain.” — This argument,
 if it prove any thing at all, would prove, that the maxim is not
 even certain ; for we are here told, that it has not that character
 or quality from which all certainty arises.

But, if I mistake not, both the premises of this syllogism are
 false. In the first place, I cannot admit, that all certainty arises
 from a comparison of ideas. I am certain of the existence of
 myself, and of the other things that affect my senses ; I am cer-
 tain, that “ whatever is, is ;” and yet I cannot conceive, that
 any comparison of ideas is necessary to produce these convictions
 in my mind. Perhaps I cannot speak of them without using
 words expressive of relation ; but the simple act or perception of the
 understanding by which I am conscious of them, implies not any
 comparison that I can discover. If it did, then the simplest intui-
 tive truth requires proof, or illustration at least, before it can be
 acknowledged as truth by the mind ; which I presume will not
 be found warranted by experience. Whether others are con-
 scious of making such a comparison, before they yield assent to
 the simplest intuitive truth, I know not ; but this I know, that
 my mind is often conscious of certainty where no such compari-
 son has been made by me. I acknowledge, indeed, that no cer-
 tain truth can become an object of science, till it be expressed in
 words ; that, if expressed in words, it must assume the form of
 a proposition ; and that every proposition, being either affirma-

in quantity or number, Degrees in any common quality, Contrariety, and Causation.
 And by the word *Relation* he here means, that particular circumstance in which
 we may think proper to compare ideas. See *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1.
 p. 32. 142.

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tive or negative, must imply a comparison of the thing or subject, with that quality or circumstance which is affirmed or denied to belong to or agree with it : and therefore I acknowledge, that in science all certainty may be said to arise from a comparison of ideas. But the generality of mankind believe many things as certain, which they never thought of expressing in words. An ordinary man believes, that himself, his family, his house, and cattle, exist ; but, in order to produce this belief in his mind, is it necessary, that he compare those objects with the general idea of existence or non-existence, so as to discern their agreement with the one, or disagreement with the other ? I cannot think it : at least, if he has ever made such a comparison, it must have been without his knowledge ; for I am convinced, that, if we were to ask him the question, he would not understand us.

Secondly, I apprehend, that our author has not enumerated all the relations which, when discovered, give rise to certainty. I am certain, that I am the same person to-day I was yesterday. This indeed our author denies *. I cannot help it ; I am certain notwithstanding ; and I flatter myself, there are not many persons in the world who would think this sentiment of mine a paradox. I say, then, I am certain, that I am the same person to-day I was yesterday. Now, the relation expressed in this proposition is not resemblance, nor proportion in quantity and number, nor degrees of any common quality, nor contrariety : it is a relation different from all these ; it is identity or sameness. — That London is contiguous to the Thames, is a proposition which many of the most sensible people in Europe hold to be certainly true ; and yet the relation expressed in it is none of those four

* See part 2. chap. 2. sect. 1. of this Essay.

which our author supposes to be the sole proprietors of certainty. For it is not in respect of resemblance, of proportion in quantity or number, of contrariety, or of degrees in any common quality, that London and the Thames are here compared, but purely in respect of place or situation.

Again, that the foregoing maxim is neither intuitively nor demonstrably certain, our author attempts to prove from this consideration, that we cannot demonstrate the impossibility of the contrary. Nay, the contrary, he says, is not inconceivable: "for we can conceive an object non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without joining it to the idea of a cause, which is an idea altogether distinct and different." But this, I presume, is not a fair state of the case. Can we conceive a thing beginning to exist, and yet bring ourselves to think that a cause is not necessary to the production of such a thing? If we cannot, (I am sure I cannot), then is the contrary of this maxim, when fairly stated, found to be truly and properly inconceivable.

But whether the contrary of this maxim be inconceivable or not, the maxim itself may be intuitively certain. Of intuitive, as well as of demonstrable truths, there are different kinds. It is a character of some, that their contraries are inconceivable: such are the axioms of geometry. But of many other intuitive truths, the contraries are conceivable. "I do feel a hard body;"—"I do not feel a hard body;"—these propositions are equally conceivable: the first is true, for I have a pen between my fingers; but I cannot prove its truth by argument; therefore its truth is perceived intuitively.

Thus far we have argued for the sake of argument, and opposed metaphysic to metaphysic *, in order to prove, that our

* See part 3. chap. 2. of this Essay.

author's reasoning on the present subject is not conclusive. It is now time to enter into the merits of the cause, and consider the matter philosophically, that is, according to fact and experience. And in this way we bring it to a very short issue. The point in dispute is, Whether this maxim, "Whatever begins to exist, proceeds from some cause," be intuitively certain? That the mind naturally and necessarily assents to it without any doubt, and considers its contrary as impossible, I have already shewn; the maxim, therefore, is certainly true. That it cannot, by any argument, or medium of proof, be rendered more evident than it is when first apprehended by the mind, is also certain; for it is of itself as evident as any proposition that can be urged in proof of it. If, therefore, this maxim be true, (as every rational being feels, and acknowledges), it is a principle of common sense: we believe it, not because we can give a reason, but because, by the law of our nature, we must believe it.

Our opinion of the necessity of a cause to the production of every thing that has a beginning, is by our author supposed to arise from observation and experience. It is true, that in our experience we have never found any thing beginning to exist, and proceeding from no cause; but I imagine it will not appear, that our belief of this axiom hath experience for its foundation. For let it be remarked, that some children, at a time when their experience is very scanty, seem to be as sensible of the truth of this axiom, as many persons arrived at maturity. I do not mean, that they ever repeat it in the form of a proposition; or that, if they were to hear it repeated in that form, they would instantly declare their assent to it; for a proposition can never be rationally assented to, except by those who understand the words that compose it: but I mean, that these children have a natural propensity to inquire after the cause of any effect or event that engages their

their attention; which they would not do, if the view of an event or effect did not suggest to them, that a cause is necessary to its production. Their curiosity in asking the reasons and causes of every thing they see and hear, is often very remarkable, and rises even to impertinence; at least it is called so when one is not prepared to give them an answer. I have known a child break open his drum, to see if he could discover the cause of its extraordinary sound; and that at the hazard of rendering the plaything unserviceable, and of being punished for his indiscretion. If the ardor of this curiosity were always proportioned to the extent of a child's experience, or to the care his teachers have taken to make him attentive to the dependence of effects on causes, we might then ascribe it to the power of education, or to a habit contracted by experience. But every one who has had an opportunity of conversing with children, knows that this is not the case; and that their curiosity cannot otherwise be accounted for, than by supposing it instinctive, and, like other instincts, stronger in some minds, and weaker in others, independently on experience and education, and in consequence of the appointment of that Being who has been pleased to make one man differ from another in his intellectual accomplishments, as well as in his features, complexion, and size. Nor let it be imagined, because some children are in this respect more curious than others, that therefore the belief of this maxim is instinctive in some minds only: the maxim may be equally believed by all, notwithstanding this diversity. For do we not find a similar diversity in the genius of different *men*? Some men have a philosophical turn of mind, and love to investigate causes, and to have a reason ready on every occasion; others are indifferent as to these matters, being ingrossed by studies of another kind. And yet I presume it will be found, that the truth of this maxim

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is felt by every man, though perhaps many men never thought of putting it in words in the form of a proposition.

We repeat, therefore, that this axiom is one of the principles of common sense, which every rational mind does and must acknowledge to be true; not because it can be proved, but because the law of nature determines us to believe it without proof, and to look upon its contrary as absurd and impossible.

The axiom now before us is the foundation of the most important argument that ever employed human reason; I mean that which, from the works that are created, evinces the eternal power and godhead of the Creator. That argument, as far as it resolves itself into this axiom, is properly a demonstration, being a clear deduction from a self-evident principle; and therefore no man can pretend to understand it without feeling it to be conclusive. So that what the Psalmist says of the Atheist is literally true, *He is a fool*; as really irrational as if he refused to be convinced by a mathematical demonstration. Nay, he is more irrational; because there is no truth demonstrated in mathematics which so many powers of our nature conspire to ratify, and with which all rational minds are so deeply impressed. The contemplation of the Divine Nature is the most useful and the most ennobling exercise in which our faculties can be engaged; and recommends itself to every man of sound judgement and good taste, as the most durable and most perfect enjoyment that can fall to the share of any created being. Sceptics may wrangle, and mockers may blaspheme; but the pious man knows by evidence too sublime for their comprehension*, that his affections

* My meaning is only this, that the faith of pious men will be strengthened by such supernatural aid as unbelievers or blasphemers can have no reason to expect; a doctrine which, if I mistake not, is warranted by the scripture; John vii. 17.

*If any man will do his will, he shall know
of the doctrine whether it be of God or are
whether I speak of myself.*

are not misplaced, and that his hopes shall not be disappointed ; by evidence which, to every sound mind, is fully satisfactory ; but which, to the humble and tender-hearted, is altogether overwhelming, irresistible, and divine.

That many of the objects in nature have had a beginning, is obvious to our own senses and memory, or confirmed by unquestionable testimony : these, therefore, according to the axiom we are here considering, must be believed to have proceeded from a cause adequate at least to the effects produced. That the whole sensible universe hath to us the appearance of an effect, of something which once was not, and which exists not by any necessity of nature, but by the appointment of some powerful and intelligent cause different from and independent on it ;—that the universe, I say, has this appearance, cannot be denied : and that it is what it appears to be, an effect ; that it had a beginning, and was not from eternity, is proved by every sort of evidence the subject will admit. And if so, we offer violence to our understanding, when we attempt to believe that the whole universe does not proceed from some cause ; and we argue unphilosophically, when we endeavour to disprove this natural and universal suggestion of the human mind.

It is true, the universe is, as one may say, a work *sui generis*, altogether singular, and such as we cannot properly compare to other works ; because indeed all works are comprehended in it. But that natural dictate of the mind by which we believe the universe to have proceeded from a cause, arises from our considering it as an effect ; a circumstance in which it is perfectly similar to all works whatsoever. The singularity of the effect rather confirms (if that be possible) than weakens our belief of the necessity of a cause ; at least it makes us more attentive to the cause, and interests us more deeply in it. What is the universe, but a vast system of works or effects, some of them great, and others

others small ; some more and some less considerable ? If each of these works, the least as well as the greatest, require a cause for its production ; is it not in the highest degree absurd to say, that the whole is not the effect of a cause ? — Each link of a great chain must be supported by something, but the whole chain may be supported by nothing : — Nothing less than an ounce can be a counterpoise to an ounce, nothing less than a pound to a pound ; but the wing of a gnat, or nothing at all, may be a sufficient counterpoise to ten hundred thousand pounds : — Are not these assertions too absurd to deserve an answer ?

The reader, if he be acquainted with Mr HUME's *Essay on a particular providence and a future state*, will see, that these remarks are intended as an answer to a very strange argument there advanced against the belief of a Deity. "The universe," we are told, "is an object quite singular and unparallelled ; no other object that has fallen under our observation bears any similarity to it ; neither it nor its cause can be comprehended under any known species ; and therefore concerning the cause of the universe we can form no rational conclusion at all." —

I appeal to any man of sound judgement, whether that suggestion of his understanding, which prompts him to infer a cause from an effect, has any dependence upon a prior operation of his mind, by which the effect in question is referred to its genus or species. When he pronounces concerning any object which he conceives to have had a beginning, that it must have proceeded from some cause, does this judgement necessarily imply any comparison of that object with others of a like kind ? If the new object were in every respect unlike to other objects, would this have any influence on his judgement ? Would he not acknowledge a cause to be as necessary for the production of the most uncommon, as of the most familiar object ? — If therefore I believe, that I myself owe my existence to some cause, because there is something in my mind

which necessarily determines me to this belief, I must also, for the very same reason, believe, that the whole universe (supposed to have had a beginning) proceeds from some cause. The evidence of both is the same. If I believe the first and not the second, I believe and disbelieve the same evidence at the same time; I believe that the very same suggestion of my understanding is both true and false.

Though I were to grant, that, when an object is reducible to no known genus, no rational inference can be made concerning its cause; yet it will not follow, that our inferences concerning the cause of the universe are irrational, supposing it reasonable to believe that the universe had a beginning. If there be in the universe any thing which is reducible to no known genus, let it be mentioned: if there be any presumption for the existence of such a thing, let the foundation of that presumption be explained. And, if you please, I shall, for argument's sake, admit, that concerning the cause of that particular thing, no rational conclusion can be formed. But it has never been asserted, that the existence of such a thing is either real or probable. Mr HUME only asserts, that the universe itself, not any particular thing in the universe, is reducible to no known genus. Well, then, let me ask, What is the universe? A word? No; it is a vast collection of things.—Are all these things reducible to genera? Mr HUME does not deny it.—Each of these things, then, if it had a beginning, must also have had a cause? It must.—What thing in the universe exists uncaused? Nothing.—Is this a rational conclusion? So it seems.—It seems, then, that though it be rational to assign a cause to every thing in the universe, yet to assign a cause to the universe is not rational! It is shameful thus to trifle with words.—In fact, this argument, so highly admired by its author, is no argument at all. It is founded on a distinction that is perfectly inconceivable. Twenty shillings make a pound:

pound : though you lay twenty shillings on the table, you have not laid down a pound, you have only laid down twenty shillings. If the reader cannot enter into this distinction, he will never be able to conceive in what the force of Mr HUME's argument consists.

If the universe had a beginning, it must have had a cause. This is a self-evident axiom, or at least an undeniable consequence of one. We necessarily assent to it; such is the law of our nature. If we deny it, we cannot, without absurdity, believe any thing else; because we at the same time deny the authenticity of those instinctive suggestions which are the foundation of all truth. The Atheist will never be able to elude the force of this argument, till he can prove, that every thing in nature exists necessarily, independently, and from eternity.

If Mr HUME's argument be found to turn to so little account, from the simple consideration of the universe, as existing, and as having had a beginning, it will appear (if possible) still more irrational, when we take a view of the universe, and its parts, as of works curiously adapted to certain ends. Their existence displays the necessity of a powerful cause; their frame proves the cause to be intelligent, good, and wise. The meanest of the works of nature, (if any of Nature's works may be called mean), — the arrangement necessary for the production of the smallest plant, requires in the cause a degree of power and wisdom, which infinitely transcends the sublimest exertions of human ability. What then shall we say of the cause that produces an animal, a rational soul, a world, a system of worlds, an universe? Shall we say, that infinite power and wisdom are not necessary attributes of that universal cause, though they be necessary attributes of the cause that produces a plant? Shall we say, that the maker of a plant may be acknowledged to be powerful, intelligent, and wise; because there are many other things in nature that

resemble a plant ; but that we cannot rationally acknowledge the maker of the universe to be wise, powerful, or intelligent, because there is nothing which the universe resembles, or to which it may be compared ? Can the man who argues in this manner have any meaning to his words ?

The other cavils thrown out against the divine attributes, in this flimsy essay, I may perhaps have occasion to animadvert on hereafter. Meantime to those readers who may be in danger from them I would recommend a careful perusal of Butler's Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion.

S E C T. VI.

Of Probable or Experimental Reasoning.

IN all our reasonings from the cause to the effect, we proceed on a supposition, and a belief, that the course of nature will continue to be in time to come what we experience it to be at present, and remember it to have been in time past. This presumption of continuance is the foundation of all our judgments concerning future events ; and this, in many cases, determines our conviction as effectually as any proof or demonstration whatsoever ; although the conviction arising from it be different in kind from what is produced by strict demonstration, as well as from those kinds of conviction that attend the evidence of sense, memory, and abstract intuition. The highest degree of conviction in reasoning from causes to effects, is called *moral certainty* ; and the inferior degrees result from that species of evidence which is called *probability* or *verisimilitude*. That all men will

will die ; that the sun will rise to-morrow, and the sea ebb and flow ; that sleep will continue to refresh, and food to nourish us ; that the same articulate sounds which to-day communicate the ideas of virtue and vice, meat and drink, man and beast, will to-morrow communicate the same ideas to the same persons, — no man can doubt, without being accounted a fool. In these, and in all other instances where our experience of the past has been equally extensive and uniform, our judgement concerning the future amounts to moral certainty : we believe, with full assurance, or at least without doubt, that the same laws of nature which have hitherto operated, will continue to operate, as long as we foresee no cause to interrupt or hinder their operation.

But no person who attends to his own mind will say, that, in these cases, our belief, or conviction, is the effect of a proof, or of any thing like it. If reasoning be at all employed, it is only in order to give us a clear view of our past experience with regard to the point in question. When this view is obtained, reasoning is no longer necessary ; the mind, by its own innate force, and in consequence of an irresistible and instinctive impulse, infers the future from the past, immediately, and without the intervention of any argument. The sea has ebbed and flowed twice every day in time past ; therefore the sea will continue to ebb and flow twice every day in the time to come, — is by no means a logical deduction of a conclusion from premises *.

When our experience of the past has not been uniform nor extensive, our opinion with regard to the future falls short of moral certainty ; and amounts only to a greater or less degree of

* This remark was first made by Mr HUME. See it illustrated at great length in his *Essays*, part 2. sect. 4. See also Dr Campbell's *Dissertation on Miracles*, p. 13. 14. edit. 2.

persuasion, according to the greater or smaller proportion of favourable instances : — we say, such an event will probably happen, such another is wholly improbable. If a medicine has proved salutary in one instance, and hurtful in five, a physician would not chuse to recommend it, except in a desperate case ; and would then consider its success as a thing rather to be withheld than expected. An equal number of favourable and unfavourable instances leave the mind in a state of suspense, without exciting the smallest degree of assurance on either side, except, perhaps, what may arise from our being more interested on the one side than on the other. A physician influenced by such evidence would say, “ My patient may recover, and he may die : “ I am sorry to say, that the former event is not one whit more “ probable than the latter.” When the favourable instances exceed the unfavourable in number, we begin to think the future event in some degree probable ; and more or less so, according to the surplus of favourable instances. A few favourable instances, without any mixture of unfavourable ones, render an event probable in a pretty high degree ; but the favourable experience must be both extensive and uniform, before it can produce moral certainty.

A man brought into being at maturity, and placed in a desert island, would abandon himself to despair, when he first saw the sun set, and the night come on ; for he could have no expectation that ever the day would be renewed. But he is transported with joy, when he again beholds the glorious orb appearing in the east, and the heavens and the earth illuminated as before. He again views the declining sun with apprehension, yet not without hope ; the second night is less dismal than the first, but is still uncomfortable, on account of the weakness of the probability produced by one favourable instance. As the instances grow more numerous, the probability becomes stronger and stronger : yet

yet it may be questioned, whether a man in these circumstances would ever arrive at so high degree of moral certainty in this matter as we experience; who know, not only that the sun has risen every day since we began to exist, but also that the same phenomenon has happened regularly for more than five thousand years, without failing in a single instance. The judgement of our great epic poet appears no where to more advantage than in his eighth book; where Adam relates to the angel what passed in his mind immediately after his awaking into life. The following passage is at once transcendently beautiful, and philosophically just.

“ While thus I call’d, and stray’d I knew not whither,
 “ From where I first drew air, and first beheld
 “ This happy light, when answer none return’d,
 “ On a green shady bank, profuse of flowers,
 “ Pensive I sat me down; there gentle sleep
 “ First found me, and with soft oppression seiz’d
 “ My droused sense; *untroubled, though I thought*
 “ *I then was passing to my former state*
 “ *Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve *.*”

Paradise Lost, b. 8. l. 283.

Adam at this time had no experience of sleep, and therefore could not, with any probability, expect that he was to recover from it. Its approaches were attended with feelings similar to those he had experienced when awaking from non-existence, and would naturally suggest that idea to his mind; and as he had no reason to expect that his life was to continue, would intimate the

* The beauty of these lines did not escape the elegant and judicious Addison; but that author does not assign the reason of his approbation. Spect. N^o 345.

probability that he was again upon the verge of an insensible state *.

Now it is evident, from what has been already said, that the degree of probability must be intuitively perceived, or the degree of assurance spontaneously and instinctively excited in the mind, upon the bare consideration of the instances on either side; and that without any medium of argument to connect the future event with the past experience. Reasoning may be employed in bringing the instances into view; but when that is done, it is no longer necessary. And if you were to argue with a man, in order to convince him that a certain future event is not so improbable as he seems to think, you would only make him take notice of some favourable instance which he had overlooked, or endeavour to render him suspicious of the reality of some of the unfavourable instances; leaving it to himself to estimate the degree of probability. If he continue refractory, notwithstanding that his view of the subject is the same with yours, he can be reasoned with in no other way, than by your appealing to the common sense of mankind.

To the supreme intelligence all knowledge is intuitive and certain. But it is not unreasonable to suppose, that probabilities of one sort or other may sometimes employ the understanding of all created beings. To man, probability (as an excellent author† observes) is the very guide of life.

* "Several things (says Butler) greatly affect all our living powers, and at length suspend the exercise of them; as, for instance, drowsiness, increasing till it ends in sound sleep: and from hence we might have imagined it would destroy them, till we found by experience the weakness of this way of judging."

Butler's Analogy, part 1. ch. 1.

† *Butler's Analogy. Introduction.*

S E C T. VII.

Of Analogical Reasoning.

Reasoning from analogy, when traced up to its source, will be found in like manner to terminate in a certain instinctive propensity, implanted in us by our Maker, which leads us to expect, that similar causes, in similar circumstances, do probably produce, or will probably produce, similar effects. The probability which this kind of evidence is fitted to illustrate, does, like the former, admit of a vast variety of degrees, from absolute doubting up to moral certainty. When the ancient philosopher, who was shipwrecked in a strange country, discovered certain geometrical figures drawn upon the sand by the sea-shore, he was naturally led to believe, with a degree of assurance not inferior to moral certainty, that the country was inhabited by men, some of whom were men of study and science, like himself. Had these figures been less regular, and liker chance-work, the presumption from analogy, of the country being inhabited, would have been weaker; and had they been of such a nature as left it altogether dubious, whether they were the work of accident or of design, the evidence would have been too ambiguous to serve as a foundation for any opinion.

In reasoning from analogy, we argue *from* a fact or thing experienced *to* something similar not experienced; and from our view of the former arises an opinion with regard to the latter; which opinion will be found to imply a greater or less degree of assurance, according as the instance *from* which we argue is more or less *similar* to the instance *to* which we argue. Why the degree

of our assurance is determined by the degree of likeness, we cannot tell; but we know by experience, that this is the case: and by experience also we know, that our assurance, such as it is, arises immediately in the mind, whenever we fix our attention on the circumstances in which the probable event is expected, so as to trace their resemblance to those circumstances in which we have known a similar event to take place. A child who has been burnt with a red-hot coal, is careful to avoid touching the flame of a candle; for as the visible qualities of the latter are like to those of the former, he expects, with a very high degree of assurance, that the effects produced by the candle operating on his fingers, will be similar to those produced by the burning coal. And it deserves to be remarked, that the judgement a child forms on these occasions may arise, and often doth arise, previous to education and reasoning, and while experience is very limited. Knowing that a lighted candle is a dangerous object, he will be shy of touching a glow-worm, or a piece of wet fish shining in the dark, because of their resemblance to the flame of a candle: but as this resemblance is but imperfect, his judgement, with regard to the consequences of touching these objects, will probably be more inclined to doubt, than in the former case, where the instances were more similar.

Those who are acquainted with astronomy, think it probable, that the planets are inhabited by living creatures, on account of their being in all other respects so like our earth. A man who thinks them not much bigger than they appear to the eye, never dreams of such a notion; for to him they seem in every respect unlike our earth: and there is no other way of bringing him over to the astronomer's opinion, than by explaining to him those particulars in which the planets and our earth resemble one another. As soon as he comprehends these particulars, and this resemblance, his mind of its own accord admits the probability of
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the new opinion, without being led to it by any medium of proof, connecting the facts he hath experienced with other similar and probable facts lying beyond the reach of his experience. Such a proof indeed could not be given. If he were not convinced of the probability by the bare view of the facts, you would impute his perseverance in his old opinion, either to obstinacy, or to want of common sense; two mental disorders for which logic provides no remedy.

S E C T. VIII.

Of Faith in Testimony.

There are in the world many men, whose declaration concerning any fact which they have seen, and of which they are competent judges, would engage my belief as effectually as the evidence of my own senses. A metaphysician may tell me, that this implicit confidence in testimony is unworthy of a philosopher, and that my faith ought to be more rational. It may be so; but I believe as before notwithstanding. And I find that all men have the same confidence in the testimony of certain persons; and that if a man should refuse to think as other men do in this matter, he would be called obstinate, whimsical, narrow-minded, and a fool. If, after the experience of so many ages, men are still disposed to believe the word of an honest man, and find no inconvenience in doing so, I must conclude, that it is not only natural, but rational, expedient, and manly, to credit such testimony: and though I were to peruse volumes of metaphysic written in proof of the fallibility of testimony, I should still, like

the rest of the world, believe credible testimony without fear of inconvenience. I know very well, that testimony is not admitted in proof of any doctrine in mathematics, because the evidence of that science is of a different kind. But is truth to be found in mathematics only? is the geometrician the only person who exerts a rational belief? do we never find conviction arise in our minds, except when we contemplate an intuitive axiom, or run over a mathematical demonstration? In natural philosophy, a science not inferior to pure mathematics in the certainty of its conclusions, testimony is admitted as a sufficient proof of many facts. To believe testimony, therefore, is agreeable to nature, to reason, and to sound philosophy.

When we believe the declaration of an honest man, in regard to facts of which he has had experience, we suppose, that by the view or perception of those facts, his senses have been affected in the same manner as ours would have been, if we had been in his place. So that faith in testimony is in part resolvable into that conviction which is produced by the evidence of sense: at least, if we did not believe our senses, we could not, without absurdity, believe testimony; if we have any tendency to doubt the evidence of sense, we must, in regard to testimony, be equally sceptical. Those philosophers, therefore, who would persuade us to reject the evidence of sense, among whom are to be reckoned all who deny the existence of matter, are not to be considered as mere theorists, whose speculations are of too abstract a nature to do any harm, but as men of very dangerous principles. Not to mention the bad effects of such doctrine upon science in general*, I would only at present call upon the reader to attend to its influence upon our religious opinions and historical knowledge. Testimony is the grand external evidence of

* See below, part 2. chap. 2. sect. 2.

Christianity. All the miracles wrought by our Saviour, and particularly that great decisive miracle, his resurrection from the dead, were so many appeals to the senses of men, in proof of his divine mission : and whatever some unthinking cavillers may object, this we affirm to be not only the most proper, but the only proper, kind of external evidence, that can be employed, consistently with man's free agency and moral probation, for establishing a popular and universal religion among mankind. Now, if matter has no existence but in our mind, our senses are deceitful : and if so, St Thomas must have been deceived when he felt, and the rest of the apostles when they saw, the body of their Lord after his resurrection ; and all the facts recorded in history, both sacred and civil, were no better than dreams or delusions, with which perhaps St Matthew, St John, and St Luke, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Cæsar, were affected, but which they had no more ground of believing to be real, than I have of believing, in consequence of my having dreamed it, that I was last night in Constantinople. Nay, if I admit the non-existence of matter, I must believe, that what my senses declare to be true, is not only not truth, but contrary to it. For does not this philosophy teach, that what seems to human sense to exist does not exist ; and that what seems corporeal is incorporeal ? and are not existence and non-existence, materiality and immateriality, contraries ? Now, if men ought to believe the contrary of what their senses declare to be true, the evidence of all history, of all testimony, and indeed of all external perception, is no longer any evidence of the reality of the facts warranted by it ; but becomes, rather a proof that those facts did never happen. If it be urged, as an objection to this reasoning, that BERKELEY was a Christian, notwithstanding his scepticism (or paradoxical belief) in other matters ; I answer, that though he maintained the doctrine of the non-existence of body, there is no evidence that he understood

stood it: nay, there is positive evidence that he did not; as I shall have occasion to show afterwards*.

Again, when we believe a man's word, because we know him to be honest, or, in other words, have had experience of his veracity, all reasoning on such testimony is supported by the evidence of experience, and by our presumption of the continuance of the laws of nature:—the first evidence resolves itself into instinctive conviction, and the second is itself an instinctive presumption. The principles of common sense, therefore, are the foundation of all true reasoning concerning testimony of this kind.

It is said by Mr HUME, in his Essay on Miracles, that our belief of any fact from the report of eye-witnesses is derived from no other principle than experience; that is, from our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the report of witnesses. This doctrine is confuted with great elegance and precision, and with invincible force of argument, in Dr Campbell's *Dissertation on Miracles*. It is, indeed, like most of Mr HUME's capital doctrines, repugnant to matter of fact: for our credulity is greatest when our experience is least; that is, when we are children; and generally grows less and less, in proportion as our experience becomes more and more extensive: the very contrary of which must happen, if Mr HUME's doctrine were true.

There is then in man a propensity to believe testimony antecedent to that experience, which Mr HUME supposes, of the conformity of facts to the report of witnesses. But there is another sort of experience, which may perhaps have some influence in determining children to believe in testimony. Man is naturally disposed to speak as he thinks; and most men do so: for the

* See part 2. chap. 2. sect. 2. of this Essay.

greatest liars speak truth much oftener than they utter falsehood. It is unnatural for human creatures to falsify; and they never think of departing from the truth, except they have some end to answer by it. Accordingly children, while their native simplicity remains uncorrupted, while they have no vice to disguise, no punishment to fear, and no artificial scheme to promote, do always speak as they think: and so generally is their veracity acknowledged, that it has passed into a proverb, That children and fools tell truth. Now I am not certain, but this their innate propensity to speak truth, may in part account for their readiness to believe what others speak. They do not suspect the veracity of others, because they are conscious and confident of their own. However, there is nothing absurd or unphilosophical in supposing, that they believe testimony by one law of their nature, and speak truth by another. I seek not therefore to resolve the former principle into the latter; I mention them for the sake only of observing, that whether they be allowed to be different principles, or different effects of the same principle, our general doctrine remains equally clear, namely, That all reasoning concerning the evidence of testimony does finally terminate in the principles of common sense. This is true, as far as our faith in testimony is resolvable into experimental conviction; because we have already shown, that all reasoning from experience is resolvable into intuitive principles, either of certain or of probable evidence: and surely it is no less true, as far as our faith in testimony is itself instinctive, and such as cannot be resolved into any higher principle.

Our faith in testimony does often, but not always, amount to absolute certainty. That there is such a city as Constantinople, such a country as Lapland, and such a mountain as the peak of Teneriffe; that there were such men as Hannibal and Julius Cæsar; that England was conquered by William the Norman; that

that Charles I. was beheaded ; — of these, and such like truths, every person acquainted with history and geography accounts himself absolutely certain. When a number of persons, not acting in concert, having no interest to disguise the truth, and sufficient judges of that to which they bear testimony, concur in making the same report, it would be accounted madness not to believe them. Nay, when a number of witnesses, separately examined, and having had no opportunity to concert a plan beforehand, do all agree in their declarations, we make no scruple of yielding full faith to their testimony, even though we have no evidence of their honesty or skill ; nay, though they be notorious both for knavery and folly : because the fictions of the human mind being infinite, it is impossible that each of these witnesses should, by mere accident, devise the very same circumstances ; if therefore their declarations concur, this is a proof, that there is no fiction in the case, and that they all speak from real experience and knowledge. The inference we form on these occasions is supported by arguments drawn from our experience ; and all arguments of this sort are resolvable into the principles of common sense. In general, it will be found true of all our reasonings concerning testimony, that they are founded, either mediately or immediately, upon instinctive conviction or instinctive assent ; so that he who has resolved to believe nothing but what he can give a reason for, can never, consistently with this resolution, believe any thing, either as certain or as probable, upon the testimony of other men.

S E C T.

S E C T. IX.

Conclusion of this Chapter.

THE conclusion to which we are led by the above induction, would perhaps be admitted by some to be self-evident, or at least to stand in no great need of illustration; to others it might have been proved *a priori* in very few words; but to the greater part of readers, a detail of particulars may be necessary, in order to produce that *steady and well-grounded conviction* which it is my ambition to establish.

The argument *a priori* might be comprehended in the following words. If there be any creatures in human shape, who deny the distinction between truth and falsehood, or who are unconscious of that distinction, they are far beyond the reach, and below the notice, of philosophy, and therefore have no concern in this inquiry. Whoever is sensible of that distinction, and is willing to acknowledge it, must confess, that truth is something fixed and determinate, depending not upon man, but upon the Author of nature. The fundamental principles of truth must therefore rest upon their own evidence, perceived intuitively by the understanding. If they did not, if reasoning were necessary to enforce them, they must be exposed to perpetual vicissitude, and appear under a different form in every individual, according to the peculiar turn and character of his reasoning powers. Were this the case, no man could know, of any proposition, whether it were true or false, till after he had heard all the arguments that had been urged for and against it; and, even then, he could

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not know with certainty, whether he had heard all that could be urged : future disputants might overturn the former arguments, and produce new ones, to continue unanswered for a while, and then submit, in their turn, to their successors. Were this the case, there could be no such thing as an appeal to the common sense of mankind, even as in a state of nature there can be no appeal to the law ; every man would be “ a law unto himself,” not in morals only, but in science of every kind.

We sometimes repine at the narrow limits prescribed to human capacity. *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further*, seems a hard prohibition, when applied to the operations of mind. But as, in the material world, it is to this prohibition man owes his security and existence ; so, in the immaterial system, it is to this we owe our dignity, our virtue, and our happiness. A beacon blazing from a well-known promontory is a welcome object to the bewildered mariner ; who is so far from repining that he has not the beneficial light in his own keeping, that he is sensible its utility depends on its being placed on the firm land, and committed to the care of others.

We have now proved, that “ except we believe many things “ without proof, we never can believe any thing at all ; for that “ all sound reasoning must ultimately rest on the principles of “ common sense, that is, on principles intuitively certain, or intuitively probable ; and, consequently, that common sense is “ the ultimate judge of truth, to which reason must continually “ act in subordination *.” To common sense, therefore, all truth must be conformable ; this is its fixed and invariable standard. And whatever contradicts common sense, or is inconsistent with that standard, though supported by arguments that are deemed unanswerable, and by names that are celebrated by all

* See part 1. chap. 1. sub. fin.

the critics, academies, and potentates on earth, is not truth but falsehood. In a word, the dictates of common sense are, in respect to human knowledge in general, what the axioms of geometry are in respect to mathematics: on the supposition that those axioms are false or dubious, all mathematical reasoning falls to the ground; and on the supposition that the dictates of common sense are erroneous or deceitful, all science, truth, and virtue, are vain.

I know not but it may be urged as an objection to this doctrine, that, if we grant common sense to be the ultimate judge in all disputes, a great part of ancient and modern philosophy becomes useless. I admit the objection with all my heart, in its full force, and with all its consequences; and yet I must repeat, that if common sense be supposed fallacious, all knowledge is at an end; and that even a demonstration of the fallacy would itself be fallacious and frivolous. For if the dictates of my nature deceive me in one case, how shall I know that they do not deceive me in another? When a philosopher demonstrates to me, that matter exists not but in my mind, and, independent on me and my faculties, has no existence at all; before I admit his demonstration, I must disbelieve all my senses, and distrust every principle of belief within me: before I admit his demonstration, I must be convinced, that I and all mankind are fools; that our Maker made us such, and from the beginning intended to impose on us; and that it was not till about the six thousandth year of the world when this imposture was discovered; and then discovered, not by a divine revelation, not by any rational investigation of the laws of nature, not by any inference from previous truths of acknowledged authority, but by a pretty play of English and French words, to which the learned have given the name of metaphysical reasoning. Before I admit this pretended demonstration, I must bring myself to believe what I

find to be incredible ; which seems to me not a whit less difficult than to perform what is impossible. And when all this is done, if it were possible that all this could be done, pray what is science, or truth, or falsehood ? Shall I believe nothing ? or shall I believe every thing ? Or am I capable either of belief, or of disbelief ? Or do I exist ? or is there such a thing as existence ?

The end of all science, and indeed of every useful pursuit, is to make men happier, by improving them in wisdom and virtue. I beg leave to ask, whether the present race of men owe any part of their virtue, wisdom, or happiness, to what metaphysicians have written in proof of the non-existence of matter, and the necessity of human actions ? If it be answered, That our happiness, wisdom, and virtue, are not at all affected by such controversies, then I must affirm, that all such controversies are useless. And if it be true, that they have a tendency to promote wrangling, which of all kinds of conversation is the most unpleasant, and the most unprofitable ; or vain polemical disquisition, which cannot be carried on without waste of time, and prostitution of talents ; or scepticism, which tends to make a man uncomfortable in himself, and unserviceable to others : — then I must affirm, that all such controversies are both useless and mischievous ; and that the world would be more wise, more virtuous, and more happy, without them. — But it is said, that they improve the understanding, and render it more capable of discovering truth, and detecting error. Be it so : — but though bars and locks render our houses secure ; and though acuteness of hearing and feeling be a valuable endowment ; it will not follow, that thieves are a public blessing ; or that the man is intitled to my gratitude, who quickens my touch and hearing, by putting out my eyes.

It is further said, that such controversies make us sensible of the weakness of human reason, and the imperfection of human knowledge ;

knowledge ; and for the sanguinary principles of bigotry and enthusiasm, substitute the milky ones of scepticism and moderation. And this is conceived to be of prodigious emolument to mankind ; because a firm attachment to religion, which a man may call bigotry if he pleases, doth often give rise to a persecuting spirit ; whereas a perfect indifference about it, which some men are good-natured enough to call moderation, is a principle of great good-breeding, and gives no sort of disturbance, either in private or public life. This is a plea on which our modern sceptics plume themselves not a little. And who will venture to arraign the virtue or the sagacity of these projectors ? To accomplish so great effects by means so simple ; to prevent such dreadful calamities by so innocent an artifice ;—does it not display the perfection of benevolence and wisdom ? Truly I can hardly imagine such another scheme, except perhaps the following. Suppose a physician of the Sangrado school, out of zeal for the interest of the faculty, and the public good, to prepare a bill to be laid before the parliament, in these words : “ That whereas good health, especially when of long standing, has a tendency to
“ prepare the human frame for inflammatory distempers, which
“ have been known to give extreme pain to the unhappy patient,
“ and sometimes even bring him to the grave ; and whereas the
“ said health, by making us brisk, and hearty, and happy, is
“ apt also, on some occasions, to make us disorderly and licentious, to the great detriment of glass windows, lanthorns, and
“ watchmen : Be it therefore enacted, That all the inhabitants
“ of these realms, for the peace of government, and the repose
“ of the subject, be compelled, on pain of death, to bring their
“ bodies down to a consumptive habit ; and that henceforth no
“ person presume to walk abroad with a cane, on pain of having
“ his head broke with it, and being set in the stocks for six
“ months ; nor to walk at all, except with crutches, to be deli-
“ vered :

“vered at the public charge to each person who makes affidavit, “that he is no longer able to walk without them,” &c.—He who can eradicate conviction from the human heart, may doubtless prevent all the fatal effects of enthusiasm and bigotry; and if all human bodies were thrown into a consumption, I believe there would be an end of riot, as well as of inflammatory diseases. Whether the inconveniencies, or the remedies, be the greater grievance, might perhaps bear a question. Bigotry, enthusiasm, and a persecuting spirit, are very dangerous and destructive; universal scepticism, would, I am sure, be equally so, if it were to infect the generality of mankind. But what has religion and rational conviction to do with either? Nothing more than good health has to do with acute distempers, and rebellious insurrections; or than the peace of government, and tranquillity of the subject, have to do with a gradual decay of our muscular flesh. True religion tends to make men great, and good, and happy; and if so, its doctrines can never be too firmly believed, nor held in too high veneration. And if truth be at all attainable in philosophy, I cannot see why we should scruple to receive it as such, when we have attained it; nor how it can promote candour, good-breeding, and humanity, to pretend to doubt what we do and must believe, to profess to maintain doctrines of which we are conscious that they shock our understanding, to differ in judgement from all the world except a few metaphysicians, and to question the evidence of those principles which all other men think unquestionable and sacred. Conviction, and steadiness of principle, is that which gives dignity, uniformity, and spirit, to human conduct, and without which our happiness can neither be lasting nor sincere. It constitutes, as it were, the vital stamina of a great and manly character; whereas scepticism betrays a sickly understanding, and a levity of mind, from which nothing can be expected but inconsistency and folly. In conjunction with ill-nature,

nature, bad taste, and a hard heart, steadiness and strong conviction will doubtless make a bad man, and scepticism will make a worse : but good-nature, elegant taste, and sensibility of heart, when united with firmness of mind, become doubly respectable ; whereas no man can act on the principles of scepticism, without incurring universal contempt. — But to return :

Mathematicians, and natural philosophers, do in effect admit the distinction between common sense and reason, as illustrated above ; for they are content to rest their sciences either on self-evident axioms, or on experiments warranted by the evidence of external sense. The philosophers who treat of the mind, do also sometimes profess to found their doctrines on the evidence of sense : but this profession is merely verbal ; for whenever experience contradicts the system, they question the authenticity of that experience, and show you, by a most elaborate investigation, that it is all a cheat. For it is easy to write plausibly on any subject, and in vindication of any doctrine, when either the indolence of the reader, or the nature of the composition, gives the writer an opportunity to avail himself of the ambiguity of language. It is not often that men attend to the operations of the mind ; and when they do, it is perhaps with some metaphysical book in their hands, which they read with a resolution to admire or despise, according as the fashion or their humour directs them. In this situation, or even when they are disposed to judge impartially of the writer, their attention to what passes in their own mind is but superficial, and is very apt to be swayed by a secret bias in favour of some theory. And then, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a natural feeling and a prejudice of education ; and our deference to the opinion of a favourite author, makes us think it more difficult than it really is, and often leads us to mistake the one for the other. Nay, the very act of studying discomposes our minds a little, and prevents
that

that free play of the faculties from which alone we can judge with accuracy of their real nature.—Besides, language, being originally intended to answer the obvious exigencies of life, and express the qualities of matter, becomes metaphorical when applied to the operations of mind. Thus we talk metaphorically, when we speak of a warm imagination, a sound judgment, a tenacious memory, an enlarged understanding; these epithets being originally and *properly* expressive of material qualities. This circumstance, however obvious, is not always attended to; and hence we are apt to mistake verbal analogies for real ones, and to apply the laws of matter to the operations of mind; and thus, by the mere delusion of words, are led into error before we are aware, and while our premises seem to be altogether unexceptionable. It is a favourite maxim with LOCKE, as it was with some ancient philosophers, that the human soul, previous to education, is like a piece of white paper, or *tabula rasa*; and this simile, harmless as it may appear, betrays our great modern into several important mistakes. It is indeed one of the most unlucky allusions that could have been chosen. The human soul, when it begins to think, is not extended, nor of a white colour, nor incapable of energy, nor wholly unfurnished with ideas, (for, if it think at all, it must have some ideas, according to LOCKE's definition of the word *), nor as susceptible of any one impression or character as of any other.—Even when the terms we use are not metaphorical, the natural abstruseness of the subject makes them appear somewhat mysterious; and we are apt to consider them as of more significancy than they really are. Had

* The word *idea* serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks.—I have used it to express whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking.

Introduction to Essay on Human Understanding, sect. 8.

Mr HUME told the world in plain terms, that virtue is a species of vice, darkness a sort of light, and existence a kind of non-existence; I know not what metaphysicians might have thought of the discovery; but sure I am, no reader of tolerable understanding would have paid him any compliments upon it*. But when he says, that contrariety is a mixture of causation and resemblance; and, still more, when he brings a formal proof of this most sage remark, he imposes on us by the solemnity of the expression; we conclude, that "more is meant than meets the ear;" and begin to fancy, not that the author is absurd or unintelligible, but that we have not sagacity enough to discover his meaning. It were tedious to reckon up one half of the improprieties and errors which have been introduced into the philosophy of human nature, by the indefinite application of the words, *idea, impression, perception, sensation, &c.* Nay, it is well known, that BERKELEY's pretended proof of the non-existence of matter,

* Mr HUME had said, that the only principles of connection among ideas are three, to wit, resemblance, contiguity in time or place, and cause or effect; *Inquiry concerning Human Understanding, sect. 3.* It afterwards occurred to him, that contrary ideas have a tendency to introduce one another into the mind. But instead of adding contrariety to the list of connecting principles, which he ought to have done, and which would have been philosophical, he assumes the metaphysician, and endeavours to prove his enumeration right, by resolving contrariety, as a species, into resemblance and causation, as genera. "Contrast, or contrariety," says he, "is a connection among ideas, which may perhaps be considered as a mixture of causation and resemblance. Where two objects are contrary, the one destroys the other, *i. e.* is the cause of its annihilation; and the idea of the annihilation of an object implies the idea of its former existence." Is it possible to make any sense of this? Darkness and light are contrary; the one destroys the other, or is the cause of its annihilation; and the idea of the annihilation of darkness implies the idea of its former existence. This is given as a proof, that darkness partly resembles light, and partly is the cause of light. Indeed! But, *O si sic omnia dixisset!* This is a harmless absurdity.

at which common sense stood aghast for many years, has no better foundation, than the ambiguous use of a word. He who considers these things, will not be much disposed to overvalue metaphysical truth, (as it is called), when it happens to contradict any of the natural sentiments of mankind.

In the laws of nature, when thoroughly understood, there appear no contradictions: it is only in the systems of philosophers that reason and common sense are at variance: No man of common sense ever did or could believe, that the horse he saw coming toward him at full gallop, was an idea in his mind, and nothing else; no thief was ever such a fool as to plead in his own defence, that his crime was necessary and unavoidable, for that man is born to pick pockets as the sparks fly upward. When Reason invades the rights of Common Sense, and presumes to arraign that authority by which she herself acts, nonsense and confusion must of necessity ensue; science will soon come to have neither head nor tail, beginning nor end; philosophy will grow contemptible; and its adherents, far from being treated, as in former times, upon the footing of conjurers, will be thought by the vulgar, and by every man of sense, to be little better than downright fools.

PART

P A R T II.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE PRECEDING DOCTRINE, WITH INFERENCES.

BUT now a difficulty occurs, which it is not easy to solve. Granting what is said above to be true; that all legitimate reasoning, whether of certain or of probable evidence, does finally resolve itself into principles of common sense, which we must admit as certain, or as probable, upon their own authority; that therefore common sense is the foundation and the standard of all just reasoning; and that the genuine sentiments of nature are never erroneous:—yet, by what criterion shall we know a sentiment of nature from a prejudice of education, a dictate of common sense from the fallacy of an inveterate opinion? Must every principle be admitted as true, which we believe without being able to assign a reason? then where is our security against prejudice and implicit faith! Or must every principle that seems intuitively certain, or intuitively probable, be reasoned upon, that we may know whether it be really what it seems? then where our security against the abuse so much insisted on, of subjecting common sense to the test of reasoning!—At what point must reason stop in its investigations, and the dictates of common sense be admitted as decisive and final?

It is much to be regretted, that this matter has been so little attended to : for a full and satisfactory discussion of it would do more real service to the philosophy of human nature, than all the systems of logic in the world ; would at once exalt pneumatology to the dignity of science, by settling it on a firm and unchangeable foundation ; and would go a great way to banish sophistry from science, and rid the world of scepticism. This is indeed the grand desideratum in logic ; of no less importance to the moral sciences, than the discovery of the longitude to navigation. That I shall fully solve this difficulty, I am not so vain, nor so ignorant, as to imagine. But I humbly hope I shall be able to throw some light on the subject, and contribute a little to facilitate the progress of those who may hereafter engage in the same pursuit. If I can accomplish even this, I shall do a service to truth, philosophy, and mankind : if I should be thought to fail, there is yet something meritorious in the attempt. To have set the example, may be of consequence.

I shall endeavour to conduct the reader to the conclusion I have come to on this subject, by the same steps that led me thither ; a method which I presume will be more perspicuous, and more satisfying, than if I were first to lay down a theory, and then assign the reasons. By the way, I cannot help expressing a wish, that this method of investigation were less uncommon, and that philosophers would sometimes explain to us, not only their discoveries, but also the process of thought and experiment, whether accidental or intentional, by which they were led to them.

If the boundary of Reason and Common Sense had never been settled in any science, I would abandon my present scheme as desperate. But when I reflect, that in some of the sciences it has been long settled, with the utmost accuracy, and to universal satisfaction, I conceive better hopes ; and flatter myself, that it may perhaps be possible to fix it even in the philosophy of the mind.

mind. The sciences in which this boundary has been long settled and acknowledged, are, mathematics, and natural philosophy ; and it is remarkable, that more truth has been discovered in those sciences than in any other. Now, there is not a more effectual way of learning the rules of any art, than by attending to the practice of those who have performed in it most successfully : a maxim which, I suppose, is no less applicable to the art of investigating truth, than to the mechanical and the fine arts. Let us see, then, whether, by attending to the practice of mathematicians and natural philosophers, as contrasted with the practice of those who have treated of the human mind, we can make any discoveries preparatory to the solution of this difficulty.

C H A P. I.

Confirmation of this theory from the practice of Mathematicians and Natural Philosophers.

S E C T. I.

THAT the distinction between Reason and Common Sense, as here explained, is acknowledged by mathematicians, we have already shown *. They have been wise enough to trust to the dictates of common sense, and to take that for truth which

* See part 1. chap. 2. sect. 1.

they

they were under a necessity of believing, even though it was not in their power to prove it by argument. When a mathematician arrives, in the course of his reasoning, at a principle which he must believe, and which is of itself so evident, that no arguments could either illustrate or enforce it, he then knows, that his reason can carry him no further, and he sits down contented : and if he can satisfy himself, that the whole investigation is fairly conducted, and does indeed terminate in this self-evident principle, he is persuaded, that his conclusion is true, and cannot be false. Whereas the sceptics, from a strange conceit, that the dictates of their understanding are fallacious, and that Nature has her roguish emissaries in every corner, commissioned and sworn to play tricks with poor mortals, cannot find in their heart to admit any thing as truth, upon the bare authority of their common sense. It is doubtless a great advantage to geometry, that its first principles are so few, its ideas so distinct, and its language so definite. Yet a captious and paradoxical wrangler might, by dint of sophistry, involve the principles even of this science in confusion, provided he thought it worth his while *. But geometrical paradoxes would not rouse the attention of the public ; whereas moral paradoxes, when men begin to look about for arguments in vindication of impiety and immorality, become interesting, and can hardly fail of a powerful and numerous patronage. The corrupt judge ; the prostituted courtier ; the statesman who enriches himself by the plunder and blood of his country ; the pettifogger, who fattens on the spoils of the fatherless and the widow ; the oppressor, who, to

* The author of the *Treatise of Human Nature* has actually attempted this in his first volume : but finding, no doubt, that the public would not take any concern in that part of his system, he has not republished it in his *Essays*.

pamper his own beastly appetite, abandons the deserving peasant to beggary and despair; the hypocrite, the debauchee, the gamester, the blasphemer, — prick up their ears when they are told, that a celebrated author has written a book containing such doctrines, or leading to such consequences, as the following: — “ That moral and intellectual virtues are nearly of the same kind * :” — in other words, That to want honesty, and to want understanding, are equally the objects of moral disapprobation: — “ That every human action is necessary, and could not have been different from what it is † :” — “ That when we speak of power as an attribute of any being, God himself not excepted, we use words without meaning: — That we can form no idea of power, nor of any being endued with any power, *much less* of one endued with infinite power; and that we can never have reason to believe, that any object, or quality of an object, exists, of which we cannot form an idea ‡ : — That it is unreasonable to believe God to be infinitely wise and good, while there is any evil or disorder in the universe; and that we have no good reason to think, that the universe proceeds from a cause || : — That the external world does not exist, or at least that its existence may reasonably be doubted ** ;” and “ that if the external world be once called in doubt, we shall be at a loss to find arguments, by which we may prove the existence

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. part 3. sect. 4.

† Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 91. edit. 1767.

‡ Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 284. 302. 432. &c.

|| Hume's Essay on a Particular Providence and Future State.

** Berkeley and Hume, *passim*.

“ of the Supreme Being, or any of his attributes * : — That
 “ those who believe any thing certainly are fools † : ” — That a-
 dultery must be practised, if men would obtain all the advanta-
 ges of life ; that, if generally practised, it would in time cease to
 be scandalous ; and that, if practised secretly and frequently, it
 would by degrees come to be thought no crime at all ‡ : — “ That
 “ the question concerning the substance of the soul is unintelli-
 “ gible || : — That matter and motion may often be regarded as
 “ the cause of thought ** : — and, That the soul of man becomes
 “ every different moment a different being †† : ” from which
 doctrine it must follow as a consequence, that the actions I per-
 formed last year, or this morning, whether virtuous or vicious,
 are no more imputable to me, than the virtues of Aristides are
 imputable to Nero, or the crimes of Nero to the MAN OF ROSS.

I know no geometrical axiom, more perspicuous, more evident,
 more generally acknowledged, than this proposition, (which every
 man believes of himself), “ My body exists ; ” yet this has been
 denied, and volumes written to prove it false. Who will pretend
 to fet bounds to this spirit of scepticism and sophistry ? Where
 are the principles that can stop its progress, when it has already
 attacked the existence, both of the human body, and of the hu-
 man soul ? When it denies, and attempts to disprove this, I can-
 not see why it may not as well deny a whole to be greater than a

* Hume's Essay on the Sceptical Philosophy, part 1.

† Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 468.

‡ Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 409. edit. 1767.

|| Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 434.

** Id. ibid.

†† Id. vol. 1. p. 48.

part, the radii of the same circle to be equal to one another; and affirm, that two right lines do contain a space, and that it is possible for the same thing to be and not to be.

Had our sceptics been consulted when the first geometrical institutions were compiled, they would have given a strange turn to the face of affairs. They would have demanded reasons for the belief of every axiom; and as none could have been given, would have suspected a fallacy; and probably (for the art of metaphysical book-making is not of difficult attainment) have made books to prove *a priori*, that an axiom, from its very nature, cannot be true; or at least that we cannot with certainty pronounce whether it is so or not. “Take heed to yourselves, gentlemen; you are going to lay the foundations of a science; be careful to lay them as deep as possible. Let the love of doubt and disputation animate you to invincible perseverance. You must go deeper; truth (if there be any such thing) loves profundity and darkness. Hitherto I see you quite distinctly; and, let me tell you, that is a strong presumption against your method of operation. I would not give two pence for that philosophy which is obvious and intelligible *. Tear up that prejudice, that I may see what supports it. I see you cannot move it, and therefore am disposed to question its stability; you cannot pierce it, therefore who knows but it may be made of unsound materials? There is no trusting to appearances. It is the glory of a philosopher to doubt; yea, he must doubt, both when he is doubtful, and when he is not doubtful †. Sometimes,

* See Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 3. 4.

† “A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction.”

Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 474.

“ indeed, we philosophers are absolutely and necessarily determi-
 “ ned to live, and talk, and act, like other people, and to be-
 “ lieve the existence both of ourselves and of other things : but to
 “ this absolute and necessary determination, we ought not to sub-
 “ mit, but in every incident of life still to preserve our scepticism.
 “ Yes, friend, I tell you, we ought still to do what is contra-
 “ ry to that to which we are absolutely and necessarily determi-
 “ ned *. I see you preparing to speak ; but I tell you once for
 “ all, that if you reason or believe any thing *certainly* you are a
 “ fool †. — Good Sir, how deep must we dig ? Is not this a
 “ sure foundation ? — I have no reason to think so, as I cannot
 “ see what is under it. Then we must dig downward *in infinitum* ! — And why not ? You think you are arrived at certain-
 “ ty. This very conceit of yours is a proof that you have not
 “ gone deep enough : for you must know, that the understand-
 “ ing, when it acts alone, and according to its most general
 “ principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest de-
 “ gree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or
 “ common life ‡. This to the illiterate vulgar may seem as

* “ I dine, I play a game at back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my
 “ friends ; and when, after three or four hours amusement, I would return to
 “ these speculations, they appear so cold, so strained, and so ridiculous, that I
 “ cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further. Here then I find my-
 “ self absolutely and necessarily determined to live, and talk, and act, like other
 “ people in the common affairs of life.” *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1. p. 467.

“ In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we be-
 “ lieve that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much
 “ pains to think otherwise. Nay, if we are philosophers, it ought only to be up-
 “ on sceptical principles.” *Id.* p. 469.

† “ If I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe any thing *certainly* are,
 “ my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable.” *Id.* p. 468.

‡ Verbatim from *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1. p. 464. 465.

“ great

“ great a contradiction or paradox, as if we were to talk of a
 “ man’s jumping down his own throat : but we whose brains
 “ are heated with metaphysic, are not startled at paradoxes or
 “ contradictions, because we are ready to reject all belief and
 “ reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable
 “ or more likely than another *. You are no true philosopher
 “ if you either begin or end your inquiries with the belief of a-
 “ ny thing. — Well, Sir, you may doubt and dispute as long as
 “ you please ; but I believe that I am come to a sure foundation :
 “ here therefore will I begin to build, for I am certain there can
 “ be no danger in trusting to the stability of that which is im-
 “ moveable. — Certain ! Poor credulous fool ! Hark ye, Sir,
 “ you may be what the vulgar call an honest man, and a good
 “ workman ; but I am certain (I mean I am in doubt whether
 “ I may not be certain) that you are no philosopher. Philoso-
 “ pher indeed ! to take a thing of such consequence for granted,
 “ without proof, without examination ! I hold you four to one,
 “ that I shall demonstrate *a priori*, that this same edifice of yours
 “ will be good for nothing. I am inclined to think, that we live
 “ in too early a period to discover ANY PRINCIPLES that will
 “ bear the examination of the latest posterity ; the world, Sir,
 “ is not yet arrived at the years of discretion : it will be time e-
 “ nough, two or three thousand years hence, for men to begin
 “ to dogmatise, and affirm, that two and two are four, that
 “ a triangle is not a square, that the radii of the same circle are
 “ equal, that a whole is greater than one of its parts ; that in-
 “ gratitude and murder are crimes ; that benevolence, justice,

* “ The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in hu-
 “ man reason, has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to
 “ reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more
 “ probable or likely than another.” *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1. p. 466.

“ and fortitude, are virtues ; that fire burns, that the sun
 “ shines, that human creatures exist, or that there is such a
 “ thing as existence. These are points which our posterity, if
 “ they be wise, will probably reject *. These are points, which
 “ if they do not reject, they will be arrant fools. This is my
 “ judgement, and I am certain it is right. I maintain, indeed,
 “ that mankind are certain of nothing : but I maintain, notwith-
 “ standing, that my own opinions are true. And if any body is
 “ ill-natured enough to call this a contradiction, I protest against
 “ his judgement, and once for all declare, that I mean not either
 “ to contradict myself, or to acknowledge myself guilty of self-
 “ contradiction.”

I am well aware, that mathematical certainty is not to be expected in any science but mathematics. But I suppose that in every science, some kind of certainty is attainable, or something at least sufficient to command belief : and whether this rest on

* “ Perhaps we are still in too early an age of the world, to discover any principles which will bear the examination of the latest posterity.”

Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 473.

Some perhaps may blame me for laying any stress on detached sentences, and for understanding these strong expressions in a strict signification. But it is not my intention to take any unfair advantages. I should willingly impute these absurd sentences and expressions to the author's inadvertency : but then I must impute the whole system to the same cause ; for they imply nothing that is not again and again inculcated, either directly or indirectly, in Mr HUME's writings. It is true some of them are self-contradictory, and all of them strongly display the futility of this pretended science. But who is to blame for this ? — Again, if this science be so useless, and if its inutility be sometimes acknowledged even by Mr HUME himself, why, it may be said, so much zeal in confuting it ? For this plain reason, Because it is immoral and pernicious, as well as unprofitable and absurd ; and because, with all its absurdity, it has been approved and admired ; and been the occasion of evil to individuals, and of detriment as well as danger to society.

self-evident

self-evident axioms, or on the evidence of sense, memory, or testimony; it is still certain to me, if I feel that I must believe it. And in every science, as well as in geometry, I presume it would be consistent both with logic and with good sense, *to take that for an ultimate principle, which forces our belief by its own intrinsic evidence, and which cannot by any reasoning be rendered more evident.*

S E C T. II.

IN natural philosophy, the evidence of sense and mathematical evidence go hand in hand; and the one produces conviction as effectually as the other. A natural philosopher would make a poor figure, should he take it in his head to disbelieve or distrust the evidence of his senses. The time was, indeed, when matters were on a different footing; when physical truths were made out, not by experiment and observation, but by dint of syllogism, or in the more compendious way of *ipse dixit*. But natural philosophy was then, what the philosophy of the mind in the hands of our sceptics is now, a system of sophisms, contrived for the vindication of false theories.

That natural philosophers never question the evidence of sense, nor seek either to disprove or to correct it by reasoning, is a position, which to many may at first sight seem disputable. I foresee several objections, but shall content myself with examining two of the most important. And these I shall set in such a light, as will, I hope, show them to be inconclusive, and at the same time preclude all other objections.

1. Do we not, (it will be said), both in our physical observations, and in the common affairs of life, reject the evidence of sight, in regard to the magnitude, extension, figure, and distance

of

of visible objects, and trust to that of touch, which we know to be less fallacious? I see two buildings on the top of yonder mountain; they seem to my eyes to be only three or four feet asunder, of a round shape, and not larger than my two thumbs: but I have been at the place, and having ascertained their distance, size, and figure, by touch or mensuration, I know, that they are square towers, forty yards asunder, and fifty feet high. Do I not in this case reject the evidence of my sight as fallacious, and trust to that of touch? And what is it but reason that induces me to do so? How then can it be said, that from the evidence of sense there is no appeal to reason?—It will, however, be easy to show, that in this instance we distrust neither sight nor touch, but believe implicitly in both; not because we can confirm their evidence by reasoning, but because the law of our nature will not permit us to disbelieve their evidence.

Do you perceive these two objects when you shut your eyes? No.—It is, then, by your sight only that you perceive them? It is.—Does your sight perceive any thing in these two objects, but a certain visible magnitude, extension, and figure? No.—Do you believe that these towers really appear to your eyes round, three feet asunder, and of the size of your thumbs? Yes, I believe they have that appearance to my eyes.—And do you not also believe, that, to the eyes of all men who see as you do, and look at these objects from the place in which you now stand, they have the very same appearance? I have no reason to think otherwise.—You believe, then, that the visible magnitude, distance, and shape, of these towers, is what it appears to be? or do you think that your eyes see wrong? Be sure, the visible magnitude, figure, and distance, are not different from what I perceive them to be.—But how do you know, that what you perceive by sight either exists, or is what it appears to be? Not by reasoning, but by instinct.

Of the visible magnitude, extension, and figure, our eyes give us a true perception. It is a law of nature, That while visible objects retire from the eye, the visible magnitude becomes less as the distance becomes greater: and the proportion between the increasing distance and the decreasing visible magnitude is so well known, that the visible magnitude of any given object placed at a given distance, may be ascertained with geometrical exactness. The true visible magnitude of objects is therefore a fixed and determinate thing; that is, the visible magnitude of the same object, at the same distance, is always the same: we believe, that it is what our eyes perceive it to be; if we did not, the art of perspective would be impossible; at least we could not acknowledge, that there is any truth in that art.

But the object (you reply) seems no bigger than your thumb; and you believe it to be fifty feet high: how is that sensation reconcileable with this belief? You may easily reconcile them, by recollecting, (what is obvious enough), that the object of your belief is the tangible magnitude; that of your sensation, the visible. The visible magnitude is a perception of sense; and we have seen already, that it is conceived to be a true, and not a fallacious perception: the tangible magnitude you do not at present perceive by sense; you only remember it; or perhaps you infer it from the visible, in consequence of your knowledge of the laws of perspective. When we see a lump of salt at a little distance, we may perhaps take it for sugar. Is this a false sensation? is this a proof, either that our taste, or that our sight is fallacious? No: this is only an erroneous opinion formed upon a true sensation. A false sensation we cannot suppose it to be, without supposing that tastes are perceived by the eyes. And you cannot believe your opinion of the magnitude of these towers to be a false sensation, except you believe that tangible qualities are perceived by sight. When we speak of the magnitude of objects,

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we generally mean the tangible magnitude, which is no more an object of sight than of hearing. For it is demonstrated in optics, that a person endued with sight, but so fettered from his birth as to have no opportunity of gaining experience by touch, could never form any distinct notion of the distance, extension, magnitude, or figure of any thing. These are perceptions, not of sight, but of touch. We judge of them indeed from the visible appearance; but it is only in consequence of our having found, that certain changes in the visible appearance do always accompany, and intimate, certain changes in the tangible distance, magnitude, and figure. Visible magnitude, and tangible magnitude, are quite different things; the former changes with every change of distance, the latter is always the same; the one is perceived by one sense, the other by another. So that when you say, I see a tower two miles off, which appears no bigger than my thumb, and yet I believe it to be a thousand times bigger than my whole body;—your sensation is perfectly consistent with your belief: the contrariety is merely verbal; for the word *bigger*, in the first clause, refers to visible, in the second, to tangible magnitude. There is here no more real inconsistency than if you were to say, I see a conical body of a white colour, and I believe it to have a sweet taste. If there be any difficulty in conceiving this, it must arise from our being more apt to confound the objects of sight and touch, than those of any other two senses. As the knowledge of tangible qualities is of more consequence to our happiness and preservation, than the knowledge of visible appearances, which in themselves can do neither good nor harm; we fix our principal attention on the tangible magnitude, the visible appearance serving only as a sign by which we judge of it: the mind makes an instantaneous transition from the visible appearance, which it overlooks, to the tangible quality, on which it fixeth its attention; and the sign is as little attended to, in comparison of the thing signified, as the
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shape of written characters, or the found of articulate voices, in comparifon of the ideas which the writer or fpeaker means to communicate.

But all men (it may be faid) do not thus diftinguifh between vifible and tangible magnitude. Many philofophers have affirmed, and the vulgar ftill believe, that magnitude is a fenfation both of fight and touch: thofe people, therefore, when fenfible of the diminifhed vifible appearance of the diftant object, muft fuppofe, that the perception they receive by fight of the magnitude of that object, is really a falfe perception; becaufe different from what they fhould receive by touch, or even by fight, if the object were within three yards of their eyes. At any rate, they muft fuppofe, that what their fight perceives concerning magnitudes is not always to be depended on; and therefore that their fight is a fallacious faculty.

Let this objection have as much weight as you pleafe; yet will it not prove, that the evidence of fenfe may be either confirmed or confuted by reafon. Suppofe then I perceive real magnitude, both by fight and touch. I obferve, that what my fight perceives of magnitude is not always confiftent, either with itfelf, or with the fenfations received by touch from the fame object. The fame man, within the fame hour, appears fix feet high, and not one foot high, according as I view him at the diftance of two yards or of two miles. What is to be done in this cafe? both fenfations I cannot believe; for that the man really changes his ftature, is altogether incredible. I believe his ftature to be always the fame; and I find, that to my touch it always appears the fame; and that, when I look at the man at the diftance of a few feet, my vifible perception of his magnitude coincides with my tangible perception. I muft therefore believe, that what my fight intimates concerning the magnitude of diftant objects is not to be depended on. But whence arifes this belief? Can I

prove, by argument, that the man does not change his stature? that the sense, whose perceptions are all consistent, is a true, and not a fallacious faculty? or that a sense is not fallacious, when its perceptions coincide with the perceptions of another sense? No; I can prove none of these points. It is instinct, and not reason, that determines me to believe my touch; it is instinct, and not reason, that determines me to believe, that visible sensations, when consistent with tangible, are not fallacious; and it is either instinct, or reasoning founded on experience, (that is, on the evidence of sense), that determines me to believe the man's stature a permanent, and not a changeable thing. The evidence of sense is therefore decisive; from it there is no appeal to reason: and if I were to become sceptical in regard to it, I should believe neither the one sense nor the other; and of all experience, and experimental reasoning, I should become equally distrustful.

As the experience of an undiscerning or careless spectator may be confirmed, or corrected, by that of one who is more attentive, or more sagacious, so the evidence of an imperfect sense may be corrected by that of another sense which we conceive to be more perfect. But the evidence of sense can never be corrected by any reasoning, except by that which proceeds on a supposition, that our senses are not fallacious. And all our notions concerning the perfection or imperfection of sense are either instinctive, and therefore principles of common sense; or founded in experience, and therefore ultimately resolvable into this maxim, That things are what our senses represent them.

Lucretius is much puzzled (as his master Epicurus had been before him) about the degree of credit due to our visible perceptions of magnitude. He observes, justly enough, that no principle can be confuted, except by another more evident principle; and, therefore, that the testimony of sense, than which nothing

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is more evident, cannot be confuted at all*: that the testimony of the nostrils concerning odour cannot be corrected or refuted by that of the eye, nor the eye by the ear, nor the ear by the touch, nor the touch by the taste; because each of these senses hath a set of objects peculiar to itself, of which the other senses cannot judge, because indeed they cannot perceive them. All this is very well; but there is one thing wanting, which I should think obvious enough, even to one of Epicurean principles. Of tastes we judge by the palate only; of smell, by the nostrils only; of sound, by the ears only; of colours, by the sight only; of hardness, softness, heat, cold, &c. by the touch only; but of magnitude we judge both by sight and touch. In regard to magnitude, we must therefore believe either our sight, or our touch, or both, or neither. To believe neither is impossible: if we believe both, we shall contradict ourselves: if we trust our sight, and not our touch, our belief at one time will be inconsistent with our belief at another; we shall think the same man six feet high, and not

* See Diogenes Laertius, book 10. — Lucretius de rerum natura, lib. 4. ver. 480. This author had sagacity enough to perceive the absurdity of Pyrrhonism, and to make several judicious remarks on the nature of evidence. But in applying these to his own theory, every one knows that he is by no means consistent. The poem of Lucretius is a melancholy spectacle; it is the picture of a great genius in the state of lunacy. Except when the whim of his sect comes across his imagination, he argues with propriety, perspicuity, and elegance. Pathos of sentiment, sweetness of style, harmony of numbers, and a beauty, and sometimes a majesty, of description, not unworthy of Virgil, render his poem highly amusing, in spite of its absurd philosophy. A talent for extensive observation he seems to have possessed in an extraordinary degree; but where-ever the peculiar tenets of Epicureanism are concerned, he sees every thing through a false medium. So fatal is the admission of wrong principles. Persons of the most exalted understanding have as much need to guard against them, as those of the meanest capacity. If they are so imprudent, or so unfortunate, as to adopt them, their superior genius, like the strength of a madman, will serve no other purpose than to involve them in greater difficulties, and give them the power of doing more mischief.

one foot high : we must therefore believe our touch, if we would exert any consistent belief in regard to magnitude.

2. But do we not, in physical experiments, acknowledge the deceitfulness of sense, when we have recourse to the telescope and microscope ; and when, in order to analyse light, which, to our unassisted sight, appears one uniform uncompounded thing, we transmit the rays of it through a prism ? I answer, this implies the *imperfection*, not the *deceitfulness*, of sense. For if I suppose my sight deceitful, I can no more trust it, when assisted by a telescope or microscope, than when unassisted. I cannot prove, that things are as they appear to my unassisted sight ; and I can as little prove, that things are as they appear to my sight assisted by glasses.

But is it not agreeable to common sense to believe, that light is one uniform uncompounded thing ? and if so, is not common sense in an error ? and what can rectify this error but reasoning ?—I answer, it is undeniable, that light to the unassisted eye appears uncompounded and uniform. If from this I infer, that light is precisely what it appears to be, I form a wrong judgement, which I may afterwards rectify, upon the evidence of sense, when I see a ray of light transmitted through a prism. Here an error of judgement, or a false inference of reason, is rectified by my trusting to the evidence of sense ; to which evidence instinct or common sense determines me to trust.

But is it not common sense that leads me to form this wrong judgement ? Do not all mankind naturally, and previously to all influence from education, judge in the same manner ? Did not all philosophers before Newton, and do not all the unlearned to this day, believe that light is a simple fluid ?—I answer, Common sense teacheth me, and all mankind, to trust to experience. Experience tells us, that our unassisted sight, though sufficiently acute for the ordinary purposes of life, is not acute enough to discern the minute texture of visible objects. If, notwithstanding this

this experience, we believe, that the minute texture of light, or of any other visible substance, is nothing different from that appearance which we perceive by the naked eye; then our belief contradicts our experience, and consequently is inconsistent with common sense.

But what if you have had no experience sufficient to convince you, that your senses are not acute enough to discern the texture of the minute parts of bodies?—Then it is certain, that I can never attain this conviction by mere reasoning. If a man were to reason *a priori* about the nature of light, he might chop logic till doomsday, before he convinced me, that light is compounded of rays of seven different colours. But if he tell me of experiments which he has made, or which he knows to have been made, this is quite another matter. I believe his testimony, and it makes up for my own want of experience. When I confide in his veracity, I conceive, and believe, that his senses communicated a true perception; and that, if I had been in his place, I should also have been convinced, by the evidence of my sense, that light is truly compounded of rays of seven different colours. But I must repeat, that a supposition of my senses being fallacious, would render me wholly inaccessible to conviction, both on the one side and on the other.

Suppose a man, on seeing the coloured rays thrown off from the prism, should think the whole a delusion, and owing to the nature of the medium through which the light is transmitted, not to the nature of the light itself; and should tell me, that he could as easily believe my face to be of a green colour, because it has that appearance when viewed through a pair of green spectacles, as that every ray of light consists of seven distinct colours, because it has that appearance when transmitted through a prism:—would it be possible to get the better of this prejudice, without reasoning? I answer, it would not: but the reasoning used must all depend upon experiments; every one of which must be rejected,

rejected, if the testimony of sense be not admitted as decisive. I could think of several expedients, in the way of appeals to sense, by which it might be possible to reconcile him to the Newtonian theory of light ; but, in the way of argument, I cannot devise a single one.

On an imperfect view of nature, false opinions may be formed : but these may be rectified by a more perfect view ; or, which in many cases will amount to the same thing, by the testimony of those who have obtained a more perfect view. The powers of man operate only within a certain sphere ; and till an object be brought within that sphere, it is impossible for them to perceive it. I see a small object, which I know to be a man, at the distance of half a mile ; but cannot discern his complexion, whether it be black or fair ; nor the colour of his cloaths, whether it be brown, or black, or blue ; nor his nose, whether it be long or short : I cannot even discern, whether he have any nose at all : and his whole body seems to be of one uniform black colour. Perhaps I am so foolish as to infer, that therefore the man has no nose ; that his cloaths are black, and his face of the colour of his cloaths. On going up to him, I discover that he is a handsome man, of a fair complexion, dressed in blue. Surely it is not reasoning that sets me right in this instance ; but it is a perfect view of an object that rectifies a wrong opinion formed upon an imperfect view.

I hear the sound of a musical instrument at a distance ; but hear it so faintly, that I cannot determine whether it be that of a trumpet, a hautboy, a German flute, a French horn, or a common flute. I want to know from what instrument the sound proceeds ; and I have no opportunity of knowing from the information of others. Shall I stand still where I am, and reason about it ? No ; that would make me no wiser. I go forward to the place from whence the sound seems to come ; and by and by

I can perceive, that the sound is different from that of a French horn and of a trumpet: but as yet I cannot determine whether it be the sound of a hautboy or of a flute. I go on a little further, and now I plainly distinguish the sound of a flute; but perhaps I shall not be able to know whether it be a German or a common flute, except by means of my other senses, that is, by handling or looking at it.

It is needless to multiply instances for illustrating the difference between a perfect and an imperfect view of an object, and for showing, that the mind trusts to the former, but distrusts the latter. For obtaining a perfect view, (or perfect perception), we sometimes employ the same sense in a nearer situation; sometimes we make use of instruments, as ear-trumpets, spectacles, microscopes, telescopes; sometimes we have recourse to the testimony of our other senses, or of the senses of other men: in a word, we rectify or ascertain the evidence of sense by the evidence of sense: but we never subject the evidence of sense to the cognisance of reason; for in sensations that are imperfect or indistinct, reasoning could neither supply what is deficient, nor ascertain what is indefinite.

Our internal, as well as external senses, may be, and often are, imposed upon, by inaccurate views of their objects. We may in sincerity of heart applaud, and afterwards condemn, the same person, for the same action, according to the different lights in which that action is presented to our moral faculty. Just now I hear a report, that a human body is found dead in the neighbouring fields, with marks of violence upon it. Here a confused suspicion arises in my mind of murder committed; but my conscience suspends its judgement till the true state of the case be better known: I am not as yet in a condition to perceive those qualities of this event which ascertain the morality of the action; no more than I can perceive the beauty or deformity of a face
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while it is veiled, or at too great a distance. A passenger informs me, that a person has been apprehended who confesses himself the murderer: my moral faculty instantly suggests, that this person has committed a crime worthy of a most severe and exemplary punishment. By and by I learn, from what I think good authority, that my former information is false, for that the man now dead had made an unprovoked assault on the other, who was thus driven to the necessity of killing him in self-defence: my conscience immediately acquits the manslayer. I send a messenger to make particular inquiry into this affair; who brings word, that the man was accidentally killed by a fowler shooting at a bird, who, before he fired, had been at all possible pains to discover whether any human creature was in the way; but that the deceased was in such a situation that he could not be discovered. I regret the accident; but I blame neither party. Afterwards I learn, that this fowler was a careless fellow, and though he had no bad intention, was not at due pains to observe whether any human creature would be hurt by his firing. I blame his negligence with great severity; but I cannot charge him with guilt so enormous as that of murder. Here my moral faculty passes several different judgements on *the same action*; and each of them is right, and will be in its turn believed to be right, and trusted to accordingly, as long as the information which gave rise to it is believed to be true. I say *the same action*, not *the same intention*; a different intention appears in the manslayer from each information; and it is only the intention and affections that the moral faculty condemns or approves. To discover the intention wherewith actions are performed, reasoning is often necessary: but the design of such reasoning, is not to sway or inform the conscience, but only to ascertain those circumstances or qualities of the action from which the intention of the agent may appear. When this becomes manifest, the conscience of mankind

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immediately

immediately and intuitively declares it to be virtuous, or vitious, or innocent.—These different judgements of the moral faculty are so far from proving it fallacious, that they prove the contrary: at least this faculty would be extremely fallacious, and absolutely useless, if, in the case now supposed, it did not form different judgements.—While the intention of the agent is wholly unknown, an action is upon the same footing in regard to its morality, as a human face in regard to its beauty, while it is veiled, or at too great a distance. By removing the veil, or walking up to the object, we perceive its beauty and features; and by reasoning, or by information concerning the circumstances of the action, we are enabled to discover or infer the intention of the agent. The act of removing the veil, or of walking up to the object, has no effect on the eye; nor has the reasoning any effect on the conscience.—While we view an object through an impure or unequal medium, through a pair of green spectacles, or an uneven pane of glass, we see it discoloured or distorted: just so, when misrepresented, a good action may seem evil, and an evil action good. If we be suspicious of the representation, if we be aware of the improper medium, we distrust the appearance accordingly; if not, we do and must believe it genuine. It is by reasoning from our experience of human actions and their causes, or by the testimony of credible witnesses, that we detect misrepresentations concerning moral conduct; and it is also by the experience of our own senses, or by our belief in those who have had such experience, that we become sensible of inequalities or obscurities in the medium through which we contemplate visible objects. In either case the evidence of sense is admitted as finally decisive. A distempered sense, as well as an impure or unequal medium, may doubtless communicate false sensations; but we are never imposed upon by them in any thing material. A person in a fever may think honey bitter, and the smell of a rose

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offensive;

offensive; but the delusion is of so short continuance, and of so singular a kind, that it can do no harm, either to him, or to the cause of truth. To a jaundiced eye, the whole creation may seem tinged with yellow; but the patient's former experience, and his belief in the testimony of others, who assure him, that they perceive no alteration in the colour of bodies, and that the alteration he perceives is a common attendant on his disease, will sufficiently guard him against mistakes. If he were to distrust the evidence of sense, he could believe neither his own experience nor their testimony. He corrects, or at least becomes sensible of, the false sensation, by means of sensations formerly received when he was in health; that is, he corrects the evidence of an ill-informed sense by that of a well-informed sense, or by the declaration of those whose senses he believes to be better informed than his own. Still it is plain, that from the evidence of sense there can be no appeal to reason.

We conclude, therefore, that in natural philosophy, our sensations are not supposed deceitful, and that reasoning is not carried beyond the principles of common sense. And yet in this science full scope is given to impartial investigation. If, after the first experimental process, you suspect that the object may be set in a still fairer light, I know no law in logic, or in good sense, that can or ought to hinder you from making a new trial: but if this new trial turn to no account, if the object still appear the same, or if it appear less distinct than before, it were folly not to remain satisfied with the first trial. Newton transmitted one of the refracted primitive colours through a second prism, thinking it not impossible that this colour might resolve itself into others still more simple; but finding it remain unaltered, he was satisfied that the primitive colours are not compounded, but simple, and that the experimental process had been carried far enough.—I take in my hand a perspective glass, whose tube may

be lengthened and shortened at pleasure; and I am to find out, by my own industry, that precise length at which the maker designed it should be used in looking at distant objects. I make several trials to no purpose; the distant object appears not at all, or but very confusedly. I hold one end of the perspective at my eye with one hand, and with the other I gradually shorten the tube, having first drawn it out to its greatest length. At first all is confusion; now I can discern the inequalities of the mountains in the horizon; now the object I am in quest of begins to appear; it becomes less and less confused; I see it distinctly. I continue to shorten the tube; the object loses its distinct appearance, and begins to relapse into its former obscurity. After many trials, I find, that my perspective exhibits no distinct appearance, except when it is of one particular length. Here then I fix; I have adjusted the glasses according to the intention of the maker; and I believe, that the distinct appearance is an accurate representation of the distant object, or at least more accurate than any of the confused appearances; of which I believe, that they come the nearer to truth the more they approach to distinctness, and that the most confused representations are the most false.

It was not by reasoning about the fallacy of the senses, and prosecuting a train of argument beyond the principles of common sense, that men discovered the true system of the world. In the earlier ages, when they imagined the sun to be little bigger than the mountain beyond which he disappeared, it was absurd to think of the earth revolving round him. But in process of time, ingenious men, who applied themselves to the observation of the heavenly bodies, not with a view to confute popular errors, for they could not as yet even suspect the vulgar opinion to be erroneous, but merely to gratify their own laudable curiosity, began to conceive more exalted notions of the mundane sy-

stem. They soon distinguished the planets from the fixed stars, by observing the former to be more variable in their appearances. After a long succession of years, they came at last to understand the motions of the sun and moon so well, that, to the utter astonishment of the vulgar, they began to calculate eclipses : a degree of knowledge they could not attain, without being convinced, that the sun and moon are very large bodies, placed at very great distances from the earth, the former much larger, and more remote, than the latter. Thus far it is impossible to show, that any reasoning had been employed by those ancient astronomers, either to prove, or to disprove, the evidence of the senses. On the contrary, they must all along have taken it for granted, that the senses are not fallacious ; supposing only, (what it is certainly agreeable to common sense to suppose), that the experience of a diligent observer is more to be depended on than that of the inattentive multitude. As men grew more and more acquainted with the motions and appearances of the heavenly bodies, they became more and more sensible, that the sun, earth, and planets, bear some very peculiar relation to one another : and having learned from the phenomena of eclipses, and some other natural appearances, that the sun is bigger than the earth *, they might, without absurdity, begin to suspect, that possibly the sun might be the centre round which the earth and other planets revolve ; especially considering the magnificence of that glorious lumi-

* Heraclitus maintained, that the sun is but a foot broad ; Anaxagoras, that he is much larger than the country of Peloponnesus ; and Epicurus, that he is no bigger than he appears to the eye. But the astronomers of antiquity maintained, that he is bigger than the earth ; eight times, according to the Egyptians ; eighteen times, according to Eratosthenes ; three hundred times, according to Cleomedes ; one thousand and fifty times, according to Hipparchus ; and fifty-nine thousand three hundred and nineteen times, according to Ptolemy.

nary, and the wonderful and delightful effects produced by the influence of his beams, while at the same time he seems not to derive any advantage from the earth, or other planets. But if the matter had been carried no further, no reasoning from these circumstances could ever have amounted to a proof of the point in question, though it might breed a faint presumption in its favour. For still the evidence of sense seemed to contradict it; an evidence that nothing can disprove, but the evidence of sense placed in circumstances more favourable to accurate observation. The invention of optical glasses did at last furnish the means of making experiments with regard to this matter, and of putting man in circumstances more favourable to accurate observation; and thus the point was brought to the test of common sense. And now, we not only know, that the Copernican theory is true, for every person who understands it is convinced of its truth; but we also know to what causes the universal belief of the contrary doctrine is to be ascribed. We know that men, considering the remote situation of our earth, and the imperfection of our senses, could not have judged otherwise than they did, till that imperfection was remedied, either by accuracy of observation, or by the invention of optical instruments. We speak not of revelation; which has indeed been vouchsafed to man for the regulation of his moral conduct; but which it would be presumption to expect, or desire, merely for the gratification of curiosity.

It is evident, from what has been said, that in natural philosophy, as well as in mathematics, no argumentation is prosecuted beyond self-evident principles; that as in the latter all reasoning terminates in intuition, so in the former all reasoning terminates in the evidence of sense. And as, in mathematics, that is accounted an intuitive axiom, which is of itself so clear and evident, that it cannot be illustrated or enforced by any medium of proof,

proof, and which must be believed, and is in fact believed, by all, on its own authority; so, in natural philosophy, that is accounted an ultimate principle, undeniable and unquestionable, which is supported by the evidence of a well-informed sense, placed so as to perceive its object. In mathematics, that is accounted false doctrine which is inconsistent with any self-evident principle; in natural philosophy, that is rejected which contradicts matter of fact, or, in other words, which is repugnant to the appearances of things as perceived by external sense.

Regulated by this criterion of truth, mathematics and natural philosophy have become of all sciences the most respectable in point of certainty. Hence I am encouraged to hope, that if the same criterion were universally adopted in the philosophy of the mind, the science of human nature, instead of being, as at present, a chaos of uncertainty and contradiction, would acquire a considerable degree of certainty, perspicuity, and order. If truth be at all attainable in this science, (and if it is not attainable, why should we trouble our heads about it?), surely it must be attained by the same means as in those other sciences.

I therefore would propose, “ That in the philosophy of human nature, as well as in physics and mathematics, principles
“ be examined according to the standard of common sense, and
“ be admitted or rejected as they are found to agree or disagree
“ with it:” more explicitly, “ That those doctrines be rejected
“ which contradict matter of fact, that is, which are repugnant
“ to the appearances of things, as perceived by external and internal sense; and that those principles be accounted ultimate,
“ undeniable, and unquestionable, which are warranted by the
“ evidence of a well-informed sense, placed in circumstances favourable to a distinct perception of its object.”

But what do you mean by a *well-informed sense*? How shall I know, that any particular faculty of mine is not defective, depraved,

praved, or fallacious?—Perhaps it is not easy, at least it would furnish matter for too long a digression, to give a full answer to this question. Nor is it at present necessary; because it will appear in the sequel, that, however difficult it may be in some cases, to distinguish a first principle, yet there are certain marks, by which those reasonings that tend to the subversion of a first principle, may be detected, at least in all cases of importance. However, we shall offer a remark or two in answer to the question; which, though they should not appear perfectly unexceptionable, may yet throw light on the subject, and serve to prepare the mind of the reader for some things that are to follow.

First, then, if I wanted to certify myself concerning any particular sense or percipient faculty, that it is neither depraved nor defective, I should attend to the feelings or sensations communicated by it; and observe, whether they be clear and definite, and such as I am, of my own accord, disposed to confide in without hesitation, as true, genuine, and natural. If they are such, I should certainly act upon them till I had some positive reason to think them fallacious.—Secondly, I consider whether the sensations received by this faculty be uniformly similar in similar circumstances. If they are not, I should suspect, either that it is now depraved, or was formerly so; and if I had no other criterion to direct me, should be much at a loss to know whether I ought to trust the former or the latter experience; perhaps I should distrust both. If they are uniform, if my present and my past experience do exactly coincide, I shall then be disposed to think them both right.—Thirdly, I consider, whether, in acting upon the supposition that the faculty in question is well-informed, I have ever been misled to my hurt or inconvenience; if not, then have I good reason to think, that I was not mistaken when I formed that supposition, and that this faculty is really what I supposed it to be.—Fourthly, If the sensations communicated

communicated by this faculty be incompatible with one another, or irreconcilable to the perceptions of my other faculties, I should suspect a depravation of the former: for the laws of nature, as far as my experience goes, are consistent; and I am apt to believe that they are universally so. It is therefore a presumption, that my faculties are well informed, when the perceptions of one are quite consistent with those of the rest, and with one another. — In a state of solitude I must satisfy myself with these *criteria*; but in society I have access to another criterion, which, in many cases, will be reckoned more decisive than any of these, and which, in concurrence with these, will be sufficient to banish doubt from every rational mind. I compare my sensations and notions with those of other men; and if I find a perfect coincidence, I shall then be satisfied that my sensations are according to the law of human nature, and therefore right. — To illustrate all this by an example:

I want to know whether my sense of seeing be a well-informed faculty. — First, I have reason to think that it is; because my eyes communicate to me such sensations as I, of my own accord, am disposed to confide in. There is something in my perceptions of sight so distinct, and so definite, that I do not find myself in the least disposed to doubt whether things be what my eyes represent them. Even the obscurer informations of this faculty carry along with them their own evidence, and my belief. I am confident, that the sun and moon are round, as they appear to be, that the rainbow is arched, that grass is green, snow white, and the heavens azure; and this I should have believed, though I had passed all my days in solitude, and never known any thing of other animals, or their senses. — Secondly, I find that my notions of the visible qualities of bodies are the same now they have always been. If this were not the case; if where I saw greenness yesterday I were to see yellow to day, I should be apt to suppose,

that my sight had suffered some depravation, unless I had reason to think, that the object had really changed colour. But indeed we have so strong a tendency to believe our senses, that I doubt not but in such a case I should be more disposed to suspect a change in the object than in my eye-sight: much would depend on the circumstances of the case. We rub our eyes when we want to look at any thing with accuracy; for we know by experience, that motes, and cloudy specks, that may be removed by rubbing, do sometimes float in the eye, and hurt the sight. But if the alteration of the visible qualities in the external object be such as we have never experienced from a depravation of the organ, we should be inclined to trust our eye-sight, rather than to suppose, that the external object has remained unaltered.—Thirdly, No evil consequence has ever happened to me when acting upon the supposition, that my faculty of seeing is a well-informed sense: whereas, if I were to act on the contrary supposition, I should soon have cause to regret my scepticism. I see a post in my way; by turning a little aside, I pass it unhurt: but if I had supposed my sight fallacious, and gone straight forward, a bloody nose, or something worse, might have been the consequence. If, when I bend my course obliquely, in order to avoid the post that seems to stand directly before me, I were to run my head full against it, I should instantly suspect a depravation in my eye-sight: but as I never experience any misfortune of this kind, I believe that my sense of seeing is a well-informed faculty.—Fourthly, The perceptions received by this sense are perfectly consistent with one another, and with the perceptions received by my other faculties. When I see the appearance of a solid body in my way, my touch always confirms the testimony of my sight; if it did not, I should suspect a fallacy in one or other of those senses, perhaps in both. When I look on a line of soldiers, they all seem standing perpendicular, as I myself stand; but if

the men at the extremities of the line, without leaning against any thing, were to appear as if they formed an angle of forty-five degrees with the earth's surface, I should suspect some unaccountable obliquity in my vision.—Lastly, After the experience of many years, after all the knowledge I have been able to gather, concerning the sensations of other men, from reading, discourse, and observation, I have no reason to think their sensations of sight different from mine. Every body who uses the English language, calls snow white, and grass green; and it would be in the highest degree absurd to suppose, that what they call the sensation of whiteness, is not the same sensation which I call by that name. Some few, perhaps, see differently from me. A man in the jaundice sees that rose yellow which I see red; a short-sighted man sees that picture confusedly at the distance of three yards, which I see distinctly. But far the greater part of mankind see as I do, and differently from those few individuals; whose sense of seeing I therefore consider as less perfect than mine. Nay, tho' the generality of mankind were short-sighted, still it would be true, that we, who are not so, have the most perfect sight; for our sight is more accurate in its perceptions, qualifies us better for the business of life, and coincides more exactly, or more immediately, with the sensations received by the other senses. Yet the short-sighted, as well as they who have the acutest sight, trust to this sense, as soon as they are placed in a situation favourable to accurate observation: all the difference is, that it is more difficult, and often more inconvenient, for short-sighted persons to place themselves in such a situation. Still it should be remembered, that a *perfect sense* and a *well-informed sense* are not synonymous terms. We call a sense *well-informed*, in opposition to one that is *depraved* or *fallacious*. *Perfection* and *imperfection* of sense are relative terms; implying a comparison, either between different men, in respect of the acuteness of their senses and faculties;

or

or between any sense, as it appears in a particular man, and the degree of acuteness which is found to belong to that sense as it appears in the generality of mankind. There are two telescopes, one of which gives a distinct view of an object at two, and the other at four miles distance: both are equally *well-informed*, (if I may so speak); that is, equally true in their representations; but the one is much more *imperfect* than the other.

I do not, at present, offer any further illustrations of these *criteria* of a well-informed sense. The reader who examines them by the rules of common prudence, will perhaps be satisfied with them: at least I am apt to think, that few will suspect the veracity of their faculties when they stand this test. But let it not be supposed, that I mean to insinuate, that a man never trusts his faculties till he first examine them after this manner: we believe our senses previously to all reflection or examination; and we never disbelieve them, but upon the authority of our senses placed in circumstances more favourable to accurate observation.

If the reader is not satisfied with these *criteria*, it is no great matter. The question concerning a well-informed sense it is not perhaps easy to answer. I offer these remarks rather as hints to be attended to by other adventurers in this part of science, than as a complete solution of the difficulty: If it were not that I presume some advantage may be derived from them in this way, I should have omitted them altogether; for on them does not depend the doctrine I mean to establish.

S E C T. III.

The subject continued. Intuitive truths distinguishable into classes.

OF the notions attending the perception of certain truth, we formerly mentioned this as one, "That in regard to such truth, we suppose we should entertain the same sentiments and belief if we were perfectly acquainted with all nature *." Left it should be thought that we mean to extend this notion too far, it seems proper to introduce here the following remarks.

1. The axioms and demonstrated conclusions of geometry are certainly true, and certainly agreeable to the nature of things. Thus we judge of them at present; and thus we necessarily believe, that we should judge of them, even if we were endued with omniscience and infallibility. It is a natural dictate of human understanding, that the contrary of these truths must for ever remain absurd and impossible; and that omnipotence itself cannot change their nature; though it might so deprave our judgement, as to make us disbelieve, or not perceive them †.

2. That

* See part I. chap. I.

† Some authors are of opinion, that all mathematical truth is resolveable into identical propositions. The following remark to this purpose is taken from a Dissertation on Evidence, printed at Berlin in the year 1764. "Omnes mathematicorum propositiones sunt identicæ, et representantur hac formula, $a = a$. Sunt veritates identicæ, sub varia forma expressæ, imo ipsum, quod dicitur, contradictionis principium, vario modo enunciatum et involutum; siquidem omnes hujus generis propositiones revera in eo contineantur. Secundum nostram au-

"tem

2. That my body exists, and is endued with a thinking, active, and permanent principle, which I call my soul; — That the material world hath such an existence as the vulgar ascribe to it, that is, a real separate existence, to which its being perceived is in no wise necessary; — That the men, beasts, houses, and mountains, we see and feel around us, are not imaginary, but real and material beings, and such, in respect of shape and tangible magnitude, as they appear to our senses; I am not only conscious that I believe, but also certain, that such is the nature of these things; and that, thus far at least, in regard to the nature of these things, an omniscient and infallible being cannot think me mistaken. Of these truths I am so certain, that I scruple not to pronounce every being in an error who is of a contrary sentiment concerning them. For suppose an intelligent creature, an angel for instance, to believe that there are not in the universe any such things as this solar system, this earth, these mountains, houses, animals, this being whom I call myself; could I, by any effort, bring myself to believe, that his opinion is a true one, and implies a proposition expressive of something agreeable to the nature

“tem intelligendi facultatem ea est propositionum differentia, quod quædam longa ratiociniorum serie, alia autem breviori via, ad primum omnium principium reducantur, et in illud resolvantur. Sic. v. g. propositio $2+2=4$, statim huc cedit $1+1+1+1=1+1+1+1$, i. e. idem est idem; et, proprie loquendo, hoc modo enunciari debet. — Si contingat, adesse vel existere quatuor entia, tum existunt quatuor entia; nam de existentia non agunt geometræ, sed ea hypothetice tantum subintelligitur. Inde summa oritur certitudo ratiocinia perspicienti; observat nempe idearum identitatem; et hæc est evidentia, assensum immediate cogens, quam mathematicam aut geometricam vocamus. Mathesi tamen sua natura priva non est et propria; oritur etenim ex identitatis perceptione, quæ locum habere potest, etiamsi ideæ non repræsentent extensum.” — Of the connection of geometrical axioms with identical propositions, see Dr Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetorick*, book 1. chap. 5. sect. 1.

of things? It is impossible and inconceivable. My understanding intimates, that such an opinion would as certainly be false, as it is false that two and two are equal to ten, or that things equal to one and the same thing are unequal to one another. Yet this is an opinion which omnipotence could render true, by annihilating the whole of this solar system; or make me admit as true, by depriving me of understanding. But so long as this solar system remains unannihilated, and my intellect undepraved, there is not a geometrical axiom more true, or more evident to me, than that this solar system, and all the objects above mentioned, do exist; there is not a geometrical axiom that has any better title to be accounted a principle of human knowledge; there is not a geometrical axiom against which it is more absurd, more unreasonable, more unphilosophical, to argue.

3. That snow is white, fire hot, gold yellow, and sugar sweet, we believe to be certainly true. These bodies affect our eyes, touch, and palate, in a peculiar manner; and we have no reason to think, that they affect the organs of different men in a different manner: on the contrary, we believe, with full assurance, founded on sufficient reason, that they affect the senses of all men in the same manner. The peculiar sensation we receive from them depends on three things; on the nature of the object perceived, on the nature of the organ of perception, and on the nature of the percipient being. Of each of these things the Deity could change the nature; and make sugar bitter, fire cold, snow black, and gold green. But till this be done, in other words, while things continue as they are, it is as certainly true, that snow is white, fire hot, &c. as that two and two are equal to four, or a whole greater than a part. If we suppose, that snow, notwithstanding its appearance, is black, or not white, we must also suppose, that our senses and intellect are fallacious faculties; and therefore cannot admit any thing as true which has no

better

better evidence than that of sense and intellect. If a creature of a different nature from man were to say, that snow is black, and hot, I should reply, (supposing him to use these words in the same sense in which I use them), It may possibly have that appearance to your senses, but it has not that appearance to mine : it may therefore, in regard to your faculties, be true ; and if so, it ought to constitute a part of your philosophy : but of my philosophy it cannot constitute a part, because, in respect of my faculties, it is false, being contrary to my experience *. If the same being were to affirm, that a part is equal to a whole, I should answer, It is impossible ; none can think so but those who are destitute of understanding. If he were to say, The solar system explained by Newton does not exist, I should answer, You are mistaken ; if your knowledge were not imperfect, you would think otherwise ; I am certain that it does exist. — We see, by thus stating the case, what is the difference between these three

* This does not imply, that the same thing may be both true and false ; true in respect of one, and false in respect of another : and consequently, that truth is not something absolute and immutable, but variable and relative. I had remarked, that our sensations depend on three things, the nature of the object perceived, the nature of the organ of perception, and the nature of the percipient. Consequently, an alteration in any one of these, though the other two remain unaltered, alters the sensation. The quality of the snow, therefore, the thing perceived, remaining the same, it may affect one kind of percipient being with one sort of sensation, and another kind with a sensation entirely different. — A difference of sensation will also arise from the different states of the organ. A man who has had one hand wrapt up in his bosom, and the other exposed to frosty air, will feel the same water cold with one hand, and warm with the other. Yet he does not believe that there is any change in the water ; but he believes that the same temperature in it occasions both feelings. In like manner, we do not conceive any change to be made on the cloth, or even on the colour considered as a quality in the body, though in day-light it appear to us green, and in candle-light blue, and in every light to a person in the jaundice yellow.

forts of certainty. But still, in respect to man, these three sorts are all equally evident, equally certain, and equally unsusceptible of confutation: and none of them can be disbelieved or doubted by us, except we disavow the distinction between truth and falsehood, by supposing our faculties fallacious.

4. Of moral truth, we cannot bring ourselves to think, that the Deity's notions (pardon the expression) are contrary to ours. If we believe Him omniscient and infallible, can we also believe, that, in his sight, cruelty, injustice, and ingratitude, are worthy of reward and praise, and the opposite virtues of blame and punishment? It is absolutely impossible. The one belief destroys the other. Common sense declares, that a being possessed of perfect knowledge can no more entertain such a sentiment, than I with my eyes open can just now avoid seeing the light. If a created being were to think that virtue which we think vice, and that vice which we think virtue, what would be our notions of his intelligence? Should we not, without hesitation, pronounce him irrational, and his opinion an absurdity? The absurdity indeed is conceivable, and may be expressed in words that imply no contradiction: but that any being should think in this manner, and yet not think wrong, is to us as perfectly inconceivable, as that the same thing should be both true and false*.

* Locke says, that Moral Truth is susceptible of demonstration. If by this he means, that it admits of evidence sufficient to satisfy every rational mind, he is certainly in the right. But if by the word *demonstration* be meant, what Geometricians mean by it, a proof that may be resolved into one or more self-evident axioms whose contraries are inconceivable, we confess that neither moral nor historical truth is susceptible of demonstration, nor many other truths of the most unquestionable certainty. However, it is not to be supposed, that Locke intended to use this word in any stricter sense than what is fixed by general practice; according to which, every proof that brings indubitable evidence to the reason or senses may properly be called a demonstration.

We

We speak here of the great and leading principles of moral duty. Many subordinate duties there are, which result from the form of particular governments, and from particular modes of education; and there are some, which, though admirably adapted to the improvement of our nature, are yet so sublime, that the natural conscience of mankind, unassisted by revelation, can hardly be supposed capable of discovering them: but in regard to justice, gratitude, and those other virtues, of which no rational beings (so far as we know) are or can be ignorant, it is impossible for us to believe that our sentiments are wrong. I say, there are duties of which no rational beings can be ignorant: for if moral sentiments be the result of a bias, or *vis insita*, communicated to the rational soul by its Creator, then must they be as universal as rational nature, and as permanent as the effects of any other natural law; and it is as absurd to argue against their truth or authenticity, as against the reality of any other matter of fact. But several authors of note have denied this inference, as well as the principle whence it proceeds; or at least, by calling the one in question, have endeavoured to make us sceptical in regard to the other. They have endeavoured to prove, that moral sentiment is different in different countries, and under different forms of religion, government, and manners; that therefore, in respect of it, there is no *vis insita* in the mind; for that, previous to education, we are in a state of perfect indifference as to virtue and vice; and that an opposite course of education would have made us think that virtue which we now think vice, and that vice which we now think virtue: in a word, that moral sentiments are as much the effect of custom and human artifice, as our taste in dress, furniture, and the modes of conversation. In proof of this doctrine, a multitude of facts have been brought together, to show the prodigious diversity, and even contrariety, that takes place in the moral opinions of

different ages, nations, and climates. Of all our modern sceptical notions, this seemed to me one of the most dangerous. For my own satisfaction, and for the sake of those whom it is my duty to instruct, I have been at great pains to examine it; and the examination has turned out to my entire satisfaction. But the materials I have collected on this subject are far too bulky to be inserted here. The sceptical arguments are founded, not only on mistakes concerning the nature of virtue, but also on some historical facts misrepresented, and on others so equivocal, and bare of circumstances, that they really have no meaning. From the number of historical, as well as philosophical, disquisitions, which I found it necessary to introduce, the *inquiry concerning the universality and immutability of moral truth*, which I thought to have comprised in a few pages, soon swelled into a treatise. I meant to have finished it some years ago; but have been prevented by a number of unforeseen accidents.

5. Of probable truth, a superior being may think differently from us, and yet be in the right. For every proposition is either true or false; and every probable past event has either happened, or not happened; as every probable future event will either happen or not happen. From the imperfection of our faculties, and from the narrowness of our experience, we may judge wrong, when we think that a certain event has happened, or will happen: and a being of more extensive experience, and more perfect understanding, may see that we judge wrong; for that the event in question never did happen, nor ever will. Yet it does not follow, that a man may either prudently or rationally distrust his probable notions as fallacious. That which man, by the constitution of his nature, is determined to admit as probable, he ought to admit as probable; for, in regard to man, that is probable truth. Not to admit it probable, when at the same time he must believe it to be so, is mere obstinacy: and not to believe

believe that probable, which all other men who have the same view of all the circumstances, believe probable, would be ascribed to caprice, or want of understanding. If one in such a case were refractory, we should naturally ask, How comes it that you think differently from us in this matter? have you any reason to think us in a mistake? is your knowledge of the circumstances from which we infer the probability of this event, different from ours? do you know any thing about it of which we are ignorant? If he reply in the negative, and yet persist in contradicting our opinion, we should certainly think him an unreasonable man. Every thing, therefore, which to human creatures seems intuitively probable, is to be accounted one of the first principles of probable human knowledge. A human creature acts an irrational part when he argues against it; and if he refuse to acknowledge it probable, he cannot, without contradicting himself, acquiesce in any other human probability whatsoever.

It appears from what has been said, that there are various kinds of intuitive certainty; and that those who will not allow any truth to be self-evident, except what has all the characteristics of a geometrical axiom, are much mistaken. From the view we have given of this subject, it would be easy to reduce these intuitive certainties into classes; but this is not necessary on the present occasion. We are here treating of the nature and immutability of truth as perceived by human faculties. Whatever intuitive proposition man, by the law of his nature, must believe as certain, or as probable, is, in regard to him, certain or probable truth; and must constitute a part of human knowledge, and remain unalterably the same, as long as the human constitution remains unaltered. And we must often repeat, that he who attempts to disprove such intuitive truth, or to make men sceptical in regard to it, acts a part as inconsistent with sound reasoning, and as effectually subversive of human knowledge, as if he attempted to dis-

prove truths which he knew to be agreeable to the eternal and necessary relations of things. Whether the Deity can or cannot change these truths into falsehoods, we need not seek to determine, because it is of no consequence to us to know. It becomes us better to inquire, with humility and reverence, into what he has done, than vainly, and perhaps presumptuously, into what he can do. Whatever he has been pleased to establish in the universe, is as certainly established, as if it were in itself unchangeable and from eternity; and, while he wills it to remain what he made it, is as permanent as his own nature.

C H A P. II.

The preceding theory rejected by Sceptical Writers.

WE have seen, that mathematicians and natural philosophers do, in effect, acknowledge the distinction between common sense and reason, as above explained; admitting the dictates of the former as ultimate principles, and never attempting either to prove or to disprove them by reasoning. If we inquire a little into the genius of modern scepticism, we shall see, that, there, a very different plan of investigation has been adopted. This will best appear by instances taken from that pretended philosophy. But first let us offer a few general remarks.

SECT.

S E C T. I.

General Observations. Rise and Progress of Modern Scepticism.

1. **T**HE Cartesian philosophy is to be considered as the groundwork of modern scepticism. The source of LOCKE's reasoning against the separate existence of the secondary qualities of matter, of BERKELEY's reasoning against the existence of a material world, and of HUME's reasoning against the existence both of soul and body, may be found in the first part of the *Principia* of DES CARTES. Yet nothing seems to have been further from the intention of this worthy and most ingenious philosopher, than to give countenance to irreligion or licentiousness. He begins with doubting; but it is with a view to arrive at conviction: his successors (some of them at least) the further they advance in their systems, become more and more sceptical; and at length the reader is told, to his infinite pleasure and emolument, that the understanding, acting alone, does entirely subvert itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition *.

The first thing a philosopher ought to do, according to DES CARTES, is to divest himself of all prejudices, and all his former opinions; to reject the evidence of sense, of intuition, and of mathematical demonstration; to suppose that there is no God, nor heaven, nor earth; and that man has neither hands, nor feet, nor body;—in a word, he is to doubt of every thing of which it is possible to doubt, and to be persuaded, that every

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 464.

thing is false which can possibly be conceived to be doubtful. Now there is only one point of which it is impossible to doubt, namely, That I, the person who doubts, am thinking. This proposition, therefore, *I think*, and this only, may be taken for granted; and nothing else whatsoever is to be believed without proof.

What is to be expected from this strange introduction? One or other of these two things must necessarily follow. This author will either believe nothing at all; or if he believe any thing, it must be upon the recommendation of sophistical reasoning *. But DES CARTES is no sceptic in his moral reasonings: therefore, in his moral reasonings, he must be a sophister. Let us see, whether we can make good this charge against him by facts.

Taking it for granted that he thinks, he thence infers, that he exists: *Ego cogito, ergo sum*: I think; therefore I exist. Now there cannot be thought where there is no existence; before he take it for granted that he thinks, he must also take it for granted that he exists. This argument, therefore, proceeds on a supposition, that the thing to be proved is true; in other words, it is a sophism, a *petitio principii*. Even supposing it possible to conceive thinking, without at the same time conceiving existence, still this is no conclusive argument, except it could be shown, that it is more evident to a man that he thinks, than that he exists; for in every true proof a less evident proposition is inferred from one that is more evident. But, *I think*, and, *I exist*, are equally evident. Therefore this is no true proof.—To set an example of false reasoning in the very foundation of a system, can hardly fail to have bad consequences.

Having in this manner established his own existence, our author next proceeds to prove the veracity of his faculties; that is,

* See the first part of this Essay.

to show by reasoning, that what he thinks true, is really true, and that what he thinks false is really false. He would have done better to have taken this also for granted: the argument by which he attempts to prove it, does more honour to his heart than to his understanding. It is indeed a sophism of the same kind with the former, in which he takes that for granted which he means to prove. It runs thus. We are conscious, that we have in our minds the idea of a being infinitely perfect, intelligent, and powerful, necessarily existent and eternal. This idea differs from all our other ideas in two respects:—It implies the notions of eternal and necessary existence, and of infinite perfection;—it neither is, nor can be, a fiction of the fancy; and therefore exhibits no chimera or imaginary being, but a true and immutable nature, which must of necessity exist, because necessary existence is comprehended in the idea of it. Therefore there is a God, necessarily existent, infinitely wise, powerful, and true, and possessed of all perfection. This Being is the maker of us and of all our faculties; he cannot deceive, because he is infinitely perfect; therefore our faculties are true, and not fallacious*.—The same argument has been adopted by others, particularly by Dr BARROW. “Cartesius,” says that pious and learned author, “hath well observed, that, to make us absolutely certain of our having attained the truth, it is required to be known, whether our faculties of apprehending and judging the truth, be true; which can only be known from the power, goodness, and truth of our Creator†.”

I object not to this argument for the divine existence, drawn from the idea of an all-perfect being, of which the human mind is conscious; though perhaps this is not the most unexception-

* Cartesii Princip. Philos. part 1. § 14. 15. 18.

† Lect. Geomet. 7.

able method of evincing that great truth. I allow, that when a man believes a God, he cannot, without absurdity and impiety, deny or question the veracity of the human faculties; and that to acknowledge a distinction between truth and falsehood, implies a persuasion, that certain laws are established in the universe, on which the natures of all created things depend, which (to me at least) is incomprehensible, except on the supposition of a supreme, intelligent, directing cause. But I acquiesce in these principles, because I take the veracity of my faculties for granted; and this I feel myself necessitated to do, because I feel it to be the law of my nature, which I cannot possibly counteract. Proceeding then upon this innate and irresistible notion, that my faculties are true, I infer, by the justest reasoning, that God exists; and the evidence for this great truth is so clear and convincing, that I cannot withstand its force, if I believe any thing else whatever.

DES CARTES argues in a different manner. Because God exists, (says he), and is perfect, therefore my faculties are true. Right. —But how do you know that God exists? I infer it from the second principle of my philosophy, already established, *Cogito, ergo sum*. —How do you know that your inference is just? It satisfies my reason.—Your argument proceeds on a supposition, that what satisfies your reason is true? It does. —Do you not then take it for granted, that your reason is not a fallacious, but a true faculty? This must be taken for granted, otherwise the argument is good for nothing. And if so, your argument proceeds on a supposition, that the point to be proved is true. In a word, you pretend to prove the truth of our faculties, by an argument which evidently and necessarily supposes their truth. Your philosophy is built on sophisms; how then can it be according to common sense?

As this philosopher doubted where he ought to have been confident, so he is often confident where he ought to doubt. He

admits not his own existence, till he thinks he has proved it; yet his system is replete with hypotheses taken for granted, without proof, almost without examination. He sets out with the profession of universal scepticism; but many of his theories are founded in the most unphilosophical credulity. Had he taken a little more for granted, he would have proved a great deal more: he takes almost nothing for granted, (I speak of what he professes, not of what he performs); and therefore he proves nothing. In geometry, however, he is rational and ingenious; there are some curious remarks in his discourse on the passions; his physics are fanciful and plausible; his treatise on music perspicuous, though superficial: a lively imagination seems to have been his chief talent; want of knowledge in the grounds of evidence his principal defect.

We are informed by Father MALEBRANCHE, that the senses were at first as honest faculties as one could desire to be endued with, till after they were debauched by original sin; an adventure, from which they contracted such an invincible propensity to cheating, that they are now continually lying in wait to deceive us. But there is in man, it seems, a certain clear-sighted, stout, old faculty, called *Reason*, which, without being deceived by appearances, keeps an eye upon the rogues, and often proves too cunning for them. MALEBRANCHE therefore adviseth us to doubt with all our might. “If a man has only learned to doubt,” says he, “let him not imagine that he has made an inconsiderable progress*.” Progress! in what?—in science? Is it not a contradiction, or at least an inconsistency, in terms, to say that

* Qu'on ne s'imagine pas, que l'on ait peu avancé, si on a seulement appris à douter.

La Recherche de la Vérité, liv. 1. ch. 20.

a man makes progress in science by doubting *? If one were to ask the way to Dublin, and to receive for answer, that he ought first of all to sit down; for that if he had only learned to sit still, he might be assured, that he had made no inconsiderable progress in his journey; I suppose he would hardly trouble his informer with a second question.

It is true, this author makes a distinction between the doubts of passion, brutality, and blindness, and those of prudence, distrust, and penetration: the former, says he, are the doubts of Academics and Atheists; the latter are the doubts of the true philosopher †. It is true also, that he allows us to give an entire consent to the things that appear entirely evident ‡. But he adopts, notwithstanding, the principles of DES CARTES' first philosophy, That we ought to begin our inquiries with universal doubt, taking only our own consciousness for granted, and thence inferring our existence, and the existence of God, and proving, from the divine veracity, that our faculties are not fallacious. Where-ever it is possible that a deluding spirit may deceive us, there, says MALEBRANCHE, we ought to doubt ||: but a deluding spirit may deceive us where-ever our memory is employed in reasoning; therefore, in all such reasonings, there may be error. And if so, there may be error in reasoning of every kind;

* Est contrarietas inter verba *scivi*, et *dubia sunt*.

Des Cartes, Object. et Respons. septima.

† Recherche de la Verité, liv. 1. ch. 20. sect. 3.

‡ Qu'on ne doit jamais donner un consentement entier, qu'à des choses qui paroissent entièrement évidentes. *Recherche de la Verité, liv. 1. ch. 20. sect. 3.*— This is indeed a rational scepticism, such as Aristotle recommends, and every friend to truth must approve.

|| Id. liv. 6. ch. 6.

for without memory there can be no reasoning: but in the truths discovered by a single glance, (*connoissances de simple vuë*), such as this, That two and two make four, it is not possible, he says, for a deluding god, (*dieu trompeur*), however powerful, to deceive him. — It is easy to see, that such doctrines must lead to sophistry, or to universal scepticism, or rather to both. For if a demonstrated conclusion may be false for any thing I know to the contrary, an axiom may be so too: my belief of the first is not less necessary, than my belief of the last. Intuition is, of all evidence, the clearest, and most immediately convincing; but demonstration produces absolute certainty, and full conviction, in the mind of him who understands it*. — MALEBRANCHE, indeed, acknowledges, that we may reason when once we know that God is no deceiver: but this, he says, must be known at one glance, (that is, I suppose, intuitively), or it cannot be known at all; for all reasoning on this subject may be fallacious †.

But I do not pretend to unfold all the false and sceptical principles of this author's philosophy. To confess the truth, I do not well understand it. He is generally mystical; often, if I mistake not, self-contradictory; and his genius is strangely warped by a veneration for the absurdities of Popery. He rejects the evidence of sense, because it seems repugnant to his reason; he admits transubstantiation, though certainly repugnant both to reason and sense. Of Aristotle and Seneca, and the other ancient

* See the second chapter of the first book of the latter Analytics of Aristotle. The great philosopher holds, that intuition and demonstration are equally productive of knowledge; though the former be the first, the clearest, and most immediate evidence.

† Recherche de la Verité, liv. 6. ch. 6.

philosophers, he says, that their lights are nothing but thick darkness, and their most illustrious virtues, nothing but intolerable pride *. *Fy, M. MALEBRANCHE!* Popery, with all its absurdities, requires not from its adherents so illiberal a declaration. An Aristotelian, of your own religion and country, and nearly of your own age, delivers a very different doctrine: “A-
 “ristotle, supported by philosophy, hath ascended by the steps
 “of motion even to the knowledge of one first mover, who is
 “God. In order to arrive at the knowledge of divine things,
 “we must learn science, otherwise we shall fall into error. Phi-
 “losophy and theology bear testimony to, and mutually con-
 “firm, each other, and produce a more perfect knowledge of
 “the truth: the latter teaches what we ought to believe, and
 “reason makes us believe it more easily, and with greater steady-
 “ness. They are two lights, which, by their union, yield a
 “more brilliant lustre than either of them could yield singly, or
 “both if separated. Moses learned the philosophy of the E-
 “gyptians, and Daniel in Babylon that of the Chaldeans †.”
 This learned Peripatetic goes on to show, that Jerome, Augustine, Gregory of Nice, and Clemens Alexandrinus, entertained the same honourable opinion of the ancient philosophers.—If DES CARTES, and his disciple MALEBRANCHE, had studied the ancients more, and indulged their own imagination less, they would have made a better figure in philosophy, and done much more service to mankind. But it was their aim to decry the ancients as much as possible: and ever since their time, it has been too much the fashion, to overlook the discoveries of former ages, as unnecessary to the improvement of the present. MALEBRANCHE often inveighs against Aristotle in particular, with the

* Recherche de la Verité, liv. 6. ch. 6.

† Bouju. Introduction à la Philosophie, chap. 9. Paris 1614. folio.

most virulent bitterness; and affects, on all occasions, to treat him with supreme contempt *. Had this great ancient employed his genius in the subversion of virtue, or in establishing tenets incompatible with the principles of natural religion, he would have deserved the severest censure. But MALEBRANCHE lays nothing of this kind to his charge; he only finds him guilty of some speculative errors in natural philosophy. Aristotle was not exempted from that fallibility which is incident to human nature; yet it would not be amiss, if our modern wits would study him a little, before they venture to decide so positively on his abilities and character. It is observable, that he is most admired by those who best understand him. Now, the contrary is true of our modern sceptics: they are most admired by those who read them least, and who take their characters upon trust, as they find them delivered in coffee-houses and drawing-rooms, and other places of fashionable conversation, whose doctrines do so much honour to the virtue and good sense of this enlightened age.

I have sometimes heard the principles of the Socratic school urged as a precedent to justify our modern sceptics. Modern scepticism is of two kinds, unlike in their nature, though the one be the foundation of the other. DES CARTES begins with universal doubt, that in the end he may arrive at conviction: HUME begins with hypothesis, and ends with universal doubt. Now, does not Aristotle propose, that all investigation should begin with doubt? And does not Socrates affirm, that he knows nothing certainly, except his own ignorance?

All this is true. Aristotle proposes, that investigation should begin with doubt †. He compares doubting to a knot, which

* See Recherche de la Verité, liv. 6. ch. 5.

† Aristot. Metaphyf. lib. 3. cap. 1. Αὖτις δ' ἐκ ἑστίν ἀγνοῦντα τὸν δεσμός, &c.

it is the end of investigation to disintangle; and there can be no solution where there is no knot or difficulty to be solved. But Aristotle's doubt is quite of a different nature from that of DES CARTES. The former admits as true whatever is self-evident, without seeking to prove it; nay, he affirms, that those men who attempt to prove self-evident principles, or who think that such principles may be proved, are ignorant of the nature of proof*. It differs also most essentially from the scepticism of Mr HUME. The reasonings of this author terminate in doubt; whereas Aristotle's constant aim is, to discover truth, and establish conviction. He defines philosophy *the science of Truth*; divides it into speculative and practical; and expressly declares, that truth is the end of the former, and action of the latter†.

Cicero, in order to compliment a sect, of which, however, he was not a consistent disciple, ascribes to Socrates a very high degree of scepticism‡; making his principles nearly the same with those of the New Academy, who professed to believe, that all things are so involved in darkness, that nothing can be known with certainty. The only difference between them, according to Cicero in this place, is, that Socrates affirmed, that he knew nothing but his own ignorance: whereas Arcesilas, and the rest of the New Academy, held, that man could know nothing, not even his own ignorance, with certainty; and therefore, that affirmation of every kind is absurd and unphilosophical. But we need not take this on the authority of Cicero; as we have access to the same original authors from whom he received his information. And if we consult them, particularly Xenophon, the most

* Aristot. *Metaphys.* lib. 4. cap. 4.

† Οὐθὺς δ' ἔχει τὸ καλεῖσθαι τὴν φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιστήμην τῆς ἀληθείας. θεωρητικὸς μὲν γὰρ τέλος Ἀληθεία. πρακτικῆς, δ' ἔργον. *Metaphys.* lib. 2. cap. 1.

‡ Cic. *Academ.* lib. 1. cap. 12.

unexceptionable of them all in point of veracity, we shall find, that the reasonings, the sentiments, and the conduct of Socrates, are altogether incompatible with scepticism. The first science that engaged his attention was natural philosophy; which, as it was taught in those days by Zeno, Anaxagoras, and Xenophanes, had little to recommend it to a man of sense and candour. Socrates soon relinquished it, from a persuasion that it was at once unprofitable, and founded in uncertainty; and employed the rest of his life in the cultivation of moral philosophy, a science which to him seemed more satisfactory in its evidence, and more useful in its application *. So far was he from being sceptical in regard to the principles of moral duty, that he inculcated them with earnestness where-ever he found opportunity, and thought it incumbent on every man to make himself acquainted with them. In his reasonings, indeed, he did not formally lay down any principle, because it was his method to deduce his conclusions from what was acknowledged by his antagonist: but is this any proof, that he himself did not believe his own conclusions? Read the story of his life; his conduct never belied his principles: observe the manners of our sceptics; their conduct and principles do mutually and invariably belie one another. Do you seek still more convincing evidence, that Socrates felt, believed, and avowed the truth? Read the defence he made before his judges. See you there any signs of doubt, hesitation, or fear? any suspicion of the possibility of his being in the wrong? any dissimulation, sophistry, or art? See you not, on the contrary, the utmost plainness and simplicity, the calmest and most deliberate fortitude, and that noble assurance which so well becomes the cause of truth and virtue? Few men have shown so firm an attachment to truth, as to lay down

* Xenoph. Memorab. lib. 1. cap. 1. et lib. 4. cap. 7.

their life for its sake: yet this did Socrates. He made no external profession of any philosophical creed; but in his death, and through the whole of his life, he showed the steadiest adherence to principle; and his principles were all consistent. Xenophon has recorded many of these; and tells us in regard to some of them, that Socrates scrupled not to call those men fools who differed from his opinion*.—The sophists of his age were not solicitous to discover truth, but only to confute an adversary, and reason plausibly in behalf of their theories. That they might have the ampler field for this sort of speculation, they confined themselves, like our modern metaphysicians, to general topics, such as the nature of good, of beauty, and the like; on which one may say a great many things with little meaning, and offer a variety of arguments without one word of truth. Socrates did much to discredit this abuse of science. In his conversations he did not trouble himself with the niceties of artificial logic. His aim was, not to confute an adversary, nor to guard against that verbal confutation which the sophists were perpetually attempting; but to do good to those with whom he conversed, by laying their duty before them in a striking and persuasive manner†. He was not fond of reasoning on abstract subjects, especially when he had to do with a sophist; well knowing, that this could answer no other purpose than to furnish matter for endless and unprofitable logomachy. When, therefore, Aristippus asked him concerning the nature of good‡, with a view to confute, or at least to tease him, with quibbling

* Xenoph. Memorab. lib. 1. cap. 1. passim.

† *Αρίστιππος δὲ ἐπιχειροῦντος ἐλέγχει τὸν Σωκράτη, — βεβλόμενος τὰς συνήτας ὡφελεῖν ὁ Σωκράτης ἀπεκρίνατο, ὅτι ὥσπερ εἰ φιλαττόμενοι, μὴ πῃ ὁ λόγος ἐπαλλαχθῇ, ἀλλ' ὡς ἂν πεπεισμένοι μάλιστα πράττοιεν τα δέοντα.*
Xenoph. Memorab. lib. 3. cap. 8.

‡ Id. Ibid.

evasions, Socrates declined to answer in general terms; and desired the sophist to limit his question, by confining the word *good* to some particular thing. Do you ask me, says he, what is good for a fever, for sore eyes, or for hunger? No, says the sophist. If, replies he, you ask me concerning the nature of a good which is good for no particular purpose, I tell you once for all, that I know of none such, and have no desires after it. In like manner, he answers to the general question concerning beauty, by desiring his adversary to confine himself to some particular kind of beauty. What would the great moralist have thought of those modern treatises, which seem to have nothing else in view, but to contrive vain definitions of general ideas! Simple, certain, and useful truth, was the constant, and the only, object of this philosopher's inquiry.

True it is, he sometimes said, that he knew nothing but his own ignorance. And surely the highest attainments in human knowledge are imperfect and unsatisfying. Yet man knows something: Socrates was conscious that he knew something; otherwise Xenophon would not have asserted, that his opinions concerning God, and Providence, and Religion, and Moral Duty, were well known to all the Athenians*. But Socrates was humble, and made no pretensions to any thing extraordinary, either in virtue or in knowledge. He professed no science; he instructed others, without pedantry, and without parade; exemplifying the beauty and the practicability of virtue, by the integrity of his life, and by the charms of an instructive, though most insinuating, conversation†. His address, in conducting an argument or inquiry, was very remarkable. He put on the appearance of an ignorant person, and seemed to be only asking

* Xenoph. Memorab. lib. 1. cap. 1.

† Ibid. cap. 2.

questions for his information, when he was leading his disciple or antagonist to the acknowledgement of some useful truth. It is pity that this mode of instruction is not more generally practised. No other method conveys so clear conviction to the mind of the young student, or so effectually cultivates his understanding: for, by thus co-operating with the teacher in the investigation of truth, his attention is fixed, his fancy directed, and his judgment exercised, no less than if the discovery were altogether his own.

Cicero seems to have been an Academic rather in name than in reality. And I am apt to think, from several passages in his works *, that he made choice of this denomination, in order to have a pretence for reasoning on either side of every question, and consequently an ampler field for a display of his rhetorical talents †. To Pyrrho, Herillus, Aristo, and other sceptics, who, by asserting that all things are indifferent, destroy the distinction of virtue and vice, he will not allow even the name of philosopher: nay, he insinuates that it is impudence in such persons to pretend to it ‡. “ I wish,” says he in another place, “ that they who suppose me a sceptic were sufficiently acquainted with my sentiments. For I am not one of those whose mind wanders in error, without any fixed principle. For what sort of understanding must that man possess, what sort of life must that man lead, who, by divesting himself of principle, divests him-

* See particularly *De Officiis*, lib. 3. cap. 4.; *De Fato*, cap. 2.; *De Oratore*, lib. 3. cap. 21.

† See this point illustrated in REMARKS UPON A DISCOURSE OF FREETHINKING, &c. By *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis* (*Dr Bentley*) Edit. 7. p. 262.

‡ *De officiis*, lib. 1. cap. 2.

“ self of the means, both of reasoning and of living *!” Let it be observed also, that when the subject of his inquiry is of high importance, as in his books on moral duties, and on the nature of the gods, he follows the doctrine of the Dogmatists, particularly the Stoics; and asserts his moral and religious principles with a warmth and energy which prove him to have been in earnest.

2. Nothing was further from the intention of LOCKE, than to encourage verbal controversy, or advance doctrines favourable to scepticism. To do good to mankind, by enforcing virtue, illustrating truth, and vindicating liberty, was his sincere purpose: and he did not labour in vain. His writings are to be reckoned among the few books that have been productive of real utility to mankind. But candour obliges me to remark, that some of his tenets seem to be too rashly admitted, for the sake of a favourite hypothesis. That some of them have promoted scepticism, is undeniable. He seems indeed to have been sensible, that there were inaccuracies in his work; and candidly owns, that “ some hasty
“ and indigested thoughts on a subject never before consider-
“ ed, gave the first entrance to his Essay; which, being begun
“ by chance, was continued by intreaty, written by incoherent
“ parcels, and after long intervals of neglect resumed again, as
“ humour or occasion permitted †.”

The first book of his Essay, which, with submission, I think the worst, tends to establish this dangerous doctrine, That the human mind, previous to education and habit, is as suscep-

* Quibus vellem satis cognita esset nostra sententia. Non enim sumus ii, quorum vagetur animus errore, nec habeat unquam quid sequatur. Quæ enim esset ista mens, vel quæ vita potius, non modo disputandi, sed vivendi ratione sublata! *Cic. de Officiis, lib. 2. cap. 2.*

† Preface to the Essay on Human Understanding.

tible of any one impresson as of any other : a doctrine which, if true, would go near to prove, that truth and virtue are no better than human contrivances ; or, at least, that they have nothing permanent in their nature, but may be as changeable as the inclinations and capacities of men ; and that, as we understand the term, there is no such thing as common sense in the world. Surely this is not the doctrine that LOCKE meant to establish ; but his zeal against innate ideas, and innate principles, put him off his guard, and made him allow too little to instinct, for fear of allowing too much. This controversy, as far as it regards moral sentiment, I propose to examine in another place. At present I would only observe, that if truth be any thing permanent, which it must be if it be any thing at all, those perceptions or impulses of understanding, by which we become conscious of it, must be equally permanent ; which they could not be, if they depended on education, and if there were not a law of nature, independent on man, which determines the understanding in some cases to believe, in others to disbelieve. Is it possible to imagine, that any course of education could ever bring a rational creature to believe, that two and two are equal to three ; that he is not the same person to-day he was yesterday, that the ground he stands on does not exist ? could make him disbelieve the testimony of his own senses, or that of other men ? could make him expect unlike events in like circumstances ? or that the course of nature, of which he has hitherto had experience, will be changed, even when he foresees no cause to hinder its continuance ? I can no more believe, that education could produce such a depravity of judgement, than that education could make me see all human bodies in an inverted position, or hear with my nostrils, or take pleasure in burning or cutting my flesh. Why should not our judgements concerning truth be acknowledged to result from a bias impressed upon the mind by its

Creator,

Creator, as well as our desire of self-preservation, our love of society, our resentment of injury, our joy in the possession of good? If those judgements be not instinctive, I should be glad to know how they come to be universal: the modes of sentiment and behaviour produced by education are uniform only where education is uniform; but there are many truths which have obtained universal acknowledgement in all ages and nations. If those judgements be not instinctive, I should be glad to know how men find it so difficult, or rather impossible, to lay them aside: the false opinions we imbibe from habit and education, may be, and often are, relinquished by those who make a proper use of their reason; and he who thus renounces former prejudices, upon conviction of their falsity, is applauded by all as a man of candour, sense, and spirit; but if one were to suffer himself to be argued out of his common sense, the whole world would pronounce him a fool.

The substance, or at least the foundation, of BERKELEY'S argument against the existence of matter, may be found in LOCKE'S Essay, and in the *Principia* of DES CARTES. And if this argument be conclusive, it proves that to be false which every man must necessarily believe every moment of his life to be true, and that to be true which no man since the foundation of the world was ever capable of believing for a single moment. BERKELEY'S doctrine attacks the most incontestable dictates of common sense; and pretends to demonstrate, that the clearest principles of human conviction, and those which have determined the judgement of all men in all ages, and by which the judgement of all rational men must be determined, are certainly fallacious.

Mr HUME, more subtle, and less reserved, than any of his predecessors, hath gone still greater lengths in the demolition of common sense; and reared in its place a most tremendous fabric

of

of doctrine; upon which, if it were not for the flimsiness of its materials, engines might easily be erected, sufficient to overturn all belief, science, religion, virtue, and society, from the very foundation. He calls this work, "A Treatise of Human Nature; being an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects." This is, in the style of Edmund Curl, a *taking title-page*; but, alas! "Fronti nulla fides!" The whole of this author's system is founded on a false hypothesis taken for granted; and whenever a fact contradictory to that false hypothesis occurs to his observation, he either denies it, or labours hard to explain it away. This, it seems, in his judgment, is experimental reasoning!

He begins his book with affirming, That all the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two classes, impressions, and ideas; that the latter are all copied from the former; and that an idea differs from its correspondent impression only in being a weaker perception. Thus, when I sit by the fire, I have an impression of heat, and I can form an idea of heat when I am shivering with cold; in the one case I have a stronger perception of heat, in the other a weaker. Is there any warmth in this idea of heat? There must, according to this doctrine; only the warmth of the idea is not quite so strong as that of the impression. For this author repeats it again and again, that "an idea is by its nature weaker and fainter than an impression, but is in every other respect" (not only similar, but) "the same*." Nay, he goes further, and says, that "whatever is true of the one must be acknowledged concerning the other †;" and he is so confident of the truth of this maxim, that he makes it one of

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. i. p. 131.

† Ibid. p. 41.

the pillars of his philosophy. To those who may be inclined to admit this maxim on his authority, I would propose a few plain questions. Do you feel any, even the least, warmth, in the idea of a bonfire, a burning mountain, or the general conflagration? Do you feel more real cold in Virgil's Scythian winter, than in Milton's description of the flames of hell? Do you acknowledge that to be true of the idea of eating, which is certainly true of the impression of it, that it alleviates hunger, fills the belly, and contributes to the support of human life? If you answer these questions in the negative, you deny one of the fundamental principles of this philosophy. We have, it is true, a livelier perception of a friend when we see him, than when we think of him in his absence. But this is not all: every person of a sound mind knows, that in the one case we believe, and are certain, that the object exists, and is present with us; in the other we believe, and are certain, that the object is not present: which, however, they must deny, who maintain, that an idea differs from an impression only in being weaker, and in no other respect whatsoever.

That every idea should be a copy and resemblance of the impression whence it is derived; — that, for example, the idea of red should be a red idea; the idea of a roaring lion a roaring idea; the idea of an ass, a hairy, long-eared, sluggish idea, patient of labour, and much addicted to thistles; that the idea of extension should be extended, and that of solidity solid; — that a thought of the mind should be endued with all, or any, of the qualities of matter, — is, in my judgement, inconceivable and impossible. Yet our author takes it for granted; and it is another of his fundamental maxims. Such is the credulity of Scepticism!

If every idea be an exact resemblance of its correspondent impression, (or object, for these terms, according to this author, seem

seem to amount to the same thing *); — if the idea of extension be extended, as the same author allows †; — then the idea of a line, the shortest that sense can perceive, must be equal in length to the line itself; for if shorter, it would be imperceptible; and it will not be said, either that an imperceptible idea can be perceived, or that the idea of an imperceptible object can be formed: — consequently the idea of a line a hundred times as long, must be a hundred times as long as the former idea; for if shorter, it would be the idea, not of this, but of some other shorter line. And so it clearly follows, nay it admits of demonstration, that the idea of an inch is really an inch long; and that of a mile, a mile long. In a word, every idea of any particular extension is equal in length to the extended object. The same reasoning holds good in regard to the other dimensions of breadth and thickness. All ideas, therefore, of solid objects, must be (according to this philosophy) equal in magnitude and solidity to the objects themselves. Now mark the consequence. I am just now in an apartment containing a thousand cubic feet, being ten feet square, and ten high; the door and windows are shut, as well as my eyes and ears. Mr HUME will allow, that, in this situation, I may form ideas, not only of the visible appearance, but also of the real tangible magnitude of the whole house, of a first-rate man of war, of St Paul's cathedral, or even of a much larger object. But the solid magnitude of these ideas is equal to the solid magnitude of the objects from which they are copied: therefore I have now present with me an idea, that is, a solid extended thing, whose dimensions extend to a million of cubic feet at least. The question now is, Where is

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 12. 13. 362.

† Ibid. p. 416. 417.

this thing placed ? for a place it must have, and a pretty large one too. I should answer, In my mind ; for I know not where else the ideas of my mind can be so conveniently deposited. Now my mind is lodged in a body of no great dimensions, and my body is contained in a room ten feet square, and ten feet high. It seems then, that, into this room, I have it in my power at pleasure to introduce a solid object a thousand, or ten thousand, times larger than the room itself. I contemplate it a while, and then, by another volition, send it a-packing, to make way for another object of equal or superior magnitude. Nay, in no larger vehicle than a common post-chaise, I can transport from one place to another, a building equal to the largest Egyptian pyramid, and a mountain as big as the peak of Teneriff. — Take care, ye disciples of HUME, and be very well advised before ye reject this mystery as impossible and incomprehensible. It seems to be geometrically deduced from the principles, nay from the first principles, of your master.

Say, ye candid and intelligent, what are we to expect from a logical and systematic treatise founded on a supposition that leads into such absurdity ? Shall we expect truth ? then must it not be inferred by false reasoning ? — Shall we expect sound reasoning ? then must not the inferences be false ? — Indeed, though I cannot much admire this author's sagacity on the present occasion, I must confess myself not a little astonished at his courage. A witch going to sea in an egg-shell, or preparing to take a trip through the air on a broom-stick, would be a surprising phenomenon ; but it is nothing to Mr HUME, on such a bottom, “ launching out into the immense depths of philosophy.”

To multiply examples for the confutation of so glaring an absurdity, is ridiculous. I therefore leave it to the reader to determine, whether, if this doctrine of solid and extended ideas be true, it will not follow, that the idea of a roaring lion must emit

audible sound, almost as loud and as terrible, as the royal beast in person could exhibit; — that two ideal bottles of brandy will intoxicate as far at least as two genuine bottles of wine; — and that I must be greatly hurt, if not dashed to pieces, if I am so imprudent as to form only the idea of a bomb bursting under my feet. Nor has not our author said, that “impressions and ideas comprehend all the perceptions (or objects) of the human mind; that whatsoever is true of the one must be acknowledged concerning the other; nay, that they are in every respect the same, except that the former strike with more force than the latter?”

The absurdity and inconceivableness of the distinction between objects and perceptions, is another of our author’s doctrines. “However philosophers may distinguish (says he) betwixt the objects and perceptions of the senses; — this is a distinction which is not comprehended by the generality of mankind *.”

* See Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 353. 365. The word *perception* (and the same is true of the words *sensation*, *smell*, *taste*, and many others) has, in common language, two, and sometimes three, distinct significations. It means, 1. The thing perceived. Thus we speak of the *taste* of a fig, the *smell* of a rose. 2. The power or faculty perceiving; as when we say, “I have lost my *smell* by a severe cold, and therefore my *taste* is not so quick as usual.” 3. It sometimes denotes that impulse or impression which is communicated to the mind by the external object operating upon it through the organ of sensation. Thus we speak of a *sweet* or *bitter taste*, a *distinct* or *confused*, a *clear* or *obscure*, *sensation* or *perception*. Most of our sceptical philosophers have either been ignorant of, or inattentive to, this distinction. MALEBRANCHE, indeed, (liv. 1. ch. 10.), seems to have had some notion of it; but either I do not understand this author, or there is a strange obscurity and want of precision in almost every thing he says. Mr HUME’s philosophy does not allow this to be a rational distinction; so that it is impossible to know precisely what he means by the word *perception* in this and many other places. But I have disproved his assertion, whatever sense (consistent with common use) we affix to the word.

Now

Now how are we to know, whether this distinction be conceived and acknowledged by the generality? If we put the question to any of them, we shall find it no easy matter to make ourselves understood, and, after all, perhaps be laughed at for our pains. Shall we reason *a priori* about their sentiments and comprehensions? this is neither philosophical nor fair. Will you allow me to reckon myself one of the generality? Then I declare, for my own part, that I do comprehend and acknowledge this distinction, and have done so ever since I was capable of reflection.

Suppose me to address the common people in these words: "I see a strange sight a little way off; but my sight is weak, so that I see it imperfectly; let me go nearer, that I may have a more distinct sight of it."——If the generality of mankind be at all incapable of distinguishing between the object and the perception, this incapacity will doubtless discover itself most, when ambiguous words are used on purpose to confound their ideas; but if their ideas on this subject are not confounded even by ambiguous language, there is reason to think, that they are extremely clear, distinct, and accurate. Now I have here proposed a sentence, in which there is a studied ambiguity of language; and yet I maintain, that every person, who understands English, will instantly, on hearing these words, perceive, that by the word *sight* I mean, in the first clause, the thing seen; in the second, the power, or perhaps the organ, of seeing; in the third, the perception itself, as distinguished both from the percipient faculty, and from the visible object *. If one of the multitude, on
hearing

* To every person of common understanding this distinction is in reality and practice quite familiar. But as the words we use in expressing it are of ambiguous signification, it is not easy to write about it so as to be immediately understood by every reader. — The thing seen or perceived is something permanent and external, and is believed to exist, whether perceived or not; the faculty of seeing or per-

hearing me pronounce this sentence, were to reply as follows :
 “ The fight is not at all strange ; it is a man on horseback : but
 “ your fight must needs be weak, as you are lately recovered
 “ from sickness : however, if you wait a little, till the man and
 “ horse, which are now in the shade, come into the sunshine,
 “ you will then have a much more distinct fight of them : ” — I
 would ask, Is the study of any part of philosophy necessary to
 make a man comprehend the meaning of these two sentences ? Is
 there any thing absurd or unintelligible, either in the former or
 in the latter ? Is there any thing in the reply, that seems to ex-
 ceed the capacity of the vulgar, and supposes them to be more
 acute than they really are ? If there be not, and I am certain.

ceiving is also something permanent in the mind, and is believed to exist, whether
 exerted or not ; but what I here call *the perception itself* is temporary, and is
 conceived to have no existence but in the mind that perceives it, and to exist no
 longer than while it is perceived ; for in being perceived, its very essence does
 consist ; so that *to be*, and *to be perceived*, when predicated of it, do mean pre-
 cisely the same thing. Thus, I just now see this paper, which I call the external
 object : I turn away, or shut my eyes, and then I see it no longer, but I still be-
 lieve it to exist ; though buried an hundred fathom deep in the earth, or left in
 an uninhabitable island, its existence would be as real as if it were gazed at by ten
 thousand men. Again, when I shut my eyes, or tie a bandage over them, or go
 into a dark place, I see no longer ; that is, my faculty of seeing acts, or is acted
 upon, no longer ; but I still believe it to remain in my mind, ready to act, or to
 be acted upon, whenever it is again placed in the proper circumstances ; for no
 body supposes, that by shutting our eyes, or going into a dark place, we annihili-
 ate our faculty of seeing. But, thirdly, my *perception* of this paper is no perma-
 nent thing ; nor has it any existence, but while it is perceived ; nor does it at all
 exist, but in the mind that perceives it ; I can put an end to, or annihilate it,
 whenever I please, by shutting my eyes ; and I can at pleasure renew it again, by
 opening them. — It is really astonishing, that so many of our modern philoso-
 phers should have overlooked a distinction, which is of so great importance, that if
 we were unacquainted with it, a great part of human language would seem to be
 perfect nonsense.

there

there is not, here is an unquestionable proof, that the vulgar, and indeed all men whom metaphysic has not deprived of their senses, do distinguish between the object perceived, the faculty perceiving, and the perception or impulse communicated by the external object to the mind through the organ of sensation. What though all the three are sometimes expressed by the same name? This only shows, that accuracy of language is not always necessary for answering the common purposes of life. If the ideas of the vulgar are sufficiently distinct, notwithstanding, what shall we say of that philosopher, whose ideas are really confounded by this inaccuracy, and who, because there is no difference in the signs, imagines that there is none in the things signified! That the understanding of such a philosopher is not a vulgar one, will be readily allowed; whether it exceeds, or falls short, let the reader determine *.

This author's method of investigation is no less extraordinary than his fundamental principles. There are many notions in the human mind, of which it is not easy perhaps to explain the origin. If you can describe in words what were the circumstances in which you received an impression of any particular notion, it is well; he will allow that you may form an idea of it. But if you cannot do this, then, says he, there is no such notion in your mind; for all perceptions are either impressions or ideas; and it is not possible for us so much as to conceive any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions †: now all ideas

* Mr HUME does not seem to me to be always consistent with himself in affirming, that the vulgar do not comprehend the distinction between perceptions and objects. But, upon the whole, he seems to hold this distinction to be unreasonable, unphilosophical, and unsupported by the evidence of sense. See *Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 330. — 338.

† *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. I. p. 123.

are copied from impressions: therefore you can have no idea nor conception of any thing of which you have not received an impression.—All mankind have a notion of power or energy. No, says he; an impression of power or energy was never received by any man; and therefore an idea of it can never be formed in the human mind. If you insist on your experience and consciousness of power, it is all a mistake: his hypothesis admits not the idea of power; and therefore there is no such idea*.—All mankind have an idea of self. That I deny, says our author; I maintain, that no man ever had, or can have, an impression of self; and therefore no man can form any idea of it †. If you persist, and say, that certainly you have some notion or idea of yourself: My dear Sir, he would say, you do not consider, that this assertion contradicts my hypothesis of impressions and ideas; how then is it possible it should be true!

But though the author deny, that I have any notion of *self*, surely he does not mean to affirm, that I do not exist, or that I have no notion of myself as an existent being. In truth, it is not easy to say what he means on this subject. Most philosophical subjects become obscure in the hands of this author; for he has a notable talent at puzzling his readers and himself: but when he treats of consciousness, of personal identity, and of the nature of the soul, he expresses himself so strangely, that his words either have no meaning, or imply very great absurdity. “The question,” says he, “concerning the substance of the soul is unintelligible ‡.”—Well, Sir, if you think so, you may let it alone.—No; that must not be neither. “What we call a

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 282.

† Ibid. p. 437. 438.

‡ Ibid. p. 434. 435.

“ *mind*, is nothing but a heap or collection of different percep-
 “ tions (or objects) united together by certain relations, and sup-
 “ posed, though falsely, to be endowed with perfect simplicity
 “ and identity *. — If any one, upon serious and unprejudiced
 “ reflection, thinks he has a different notion of himself, I must
 “ confess I can reason with him no longer. All I can allow him
 “ is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are
 “ essentially different in this particular. He may perhaps per-
 “ ceive something simple and continued, which he calls *himself*;
 “ though I am certain there is no such principle in me. But
 “ setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind,” — that is, who
 feel and believe that they have a soul, — “ I may venture to
 “ affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a
 “ bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed
 “ each other with inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual
 “ flux and movement. — There is properly no simplicity in the
 “ mind at one time, nor identity in different [times], whatever
 “ natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and
 “ identity. — They are the successive perceptions only that consti-
 “ tute the mind †.”

If these words have any meaning, it is this : My soul (or rather that which I call my soul) is not one simple thing, nor is it the same thing to-day it was yesterday ; nay, it is not the same this moment it was the last ; it is nothing but a mass, collection, heap, or bundle, of different perceptions, or objects, that fleet away in succession, with inconceivable rapidity, perpetually changing, and perpetually in motion. There may be some metaphysicians, to whose souls this description cannot be applied ;

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. I. p. 361. 362.

† Ibid. p. 438. 439. 440.

but I am certain, that this is a true and complete description of my soul, and of the soul of every other individual of the human race, those few metaphysicians excepted.

That body has no existence, but as a bundle of perceptions, whose existence consists in their being perceived, our author all along maintains. He now affirms, that the soul, in like manner, is a bundle of perceptions, and nothing else. It follows, then, that there is nothing in the universe but impressions and ideas; all possible perceptions being by our author comprehended in those two classes. This philosophy admits of no other existence whatsoever, not even of a percipient being, to perceive these perceptions. So that we are now arrived at the height of human wisdom; at that intellectual eminence, from whence there is a full prospect of all that we can reasonably believe to exist, and of all that can possibly become the object of our knowledge. Alas! what is become of the magnificence of external nature, and the wonders of intellectual energy, the immortal beauties of truth and virtue, and the triumphs of a good conscience! Where now the warmth of benevolence, the fire of generosity, the exultations of hope, the tranquil ecstasy of devotion, and the pang of sympathetic delight! All, around, above, and beneath, is one vast vacuity, or rather an enormous chaos, encompassed with darkness universally and eternally impenetrable. Body and spirit are annihilated; and there remains nothing (for we must again descend into metaphysic) but a vast collection, bundle, mass, or heap, of impressions and ideas.

Such, in regard to existence, seems to be the result of this theory of the understanding. And what is this result? If the author can prove, that there is a possibility of expressing it in words which do not imply a contradiction, I will not call it nonsense. If he can prove, that it is compatible with any one acknowledged truth in philosophy, in morality, in religion natural

or revealed, I will not call it impious. If he can prove, that it does not arise *from common facts misrepresented, and common words misunderstood*, I shall admit that it may have arisen from accurate observation, candid and liberal inquiry, perfect knowledge of human nature, and the enlarged views of true philosophic genius.

S E C T. II.

Of the Non-existence of Matter.

IN the preceding section I have taken a slight survey of the principles, and method of investigation, adopted by the most celebrated promoters of modern scepticism. And it appears that they have not attended to the distinction of reason and common sense, as explained in the first part of this Essay, and as acknowledged by mathematicians and natural philosophers. Erroneous, absurd, and self-contradictory notions, have been the consequence. And now, by entering into a more particular detail, we might easily shew, that many of those absurdities that disgrace the philosophy of human nature, would never have existed, if men had acknowledged and attended to this distinction; regulating their inquiries by the criterion above mentioned, and never prosecuting any chain of argument beyond self-evident principles. I shall confine myself to two instances; one of which is connected with the evidence of external sense, and the other with that of internal.

That matter or body has a real, separate, independent exist-

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ence *; that there is a real sun above us, a real air around us, and a real earth under our feet, — has been the belief of all men who were not mad, ever since the creation. This is believed, not because it is or can be proved by argument, but because the constitution of our nature is such that we must believe it. It is absurd, nay, it is impossible, to believe the contrary. I could as easily believe, that I do not exist, that two and two are equal to ten, that whatever is, is not; as that I have neither hands, nor feet, nor head, nor cloaths, nor house, nor country, nor acquaintance; that the sun, moon, and stars, and ocean, and tempest, thunder, and lightning, mountains, rivers, and cities, have no existence but as ideas or thoughts in my mind, and, independent on me and my faculties, do not exist at all, and could not exist if I were to be annihilated; that fire, and burning, and pain, which I feel, and the recollection of pain that is past, and the idea of pain which I never felt, are all in the same sense ideas or perceptions in my mind, and nothing else; that the qualities of matter are not qualities of matter, but affections of spirit; and that I have no evidence that any being exists in nature but myself. Philosophers may say what they please; and the world, who are apt enough to admire what is monstrous, may give them credit; but I affirm, that it is not in the power, either of wit or of madness, to contrive any conceit more absurd, or more nonsensical, than this, That the material world has no existence but in my mind.

DES CARTES admits, that every person must be persuaded of the existence of a material world: but he does not allow this

* By *independent existence*, we mean an existence that does not depend on us, nor, so far as we know, on any being, except the Creator. BERKELEY, and others, say, that matter exists not but in the minds that perceive it; and consequently depends, in respect of its existence, upon those minds.

point to be self-evident, or so certain as not to admit of doubt; because, says he, we find in experience, that our senses are sometimes in an error, and because, in dreams we often mistake ideas for external things really existing. He therefore begins his philosophy of bodies with a formal proof of the existence of body *.

But however imperfect, and however fallacious, we acknowledge our senses to be in other matters, it is certain, that no man ever thought them fallacious in regard to the existence of body; nay, every man of a sound mind, is, by the law of his nature, convinced, that, in this respect at least, they are not, and cannot be mistaken. Men have sometimes been deceived by sophistical argument, because the human understanding is in some, and indeed in many, respects, fallible; but does it follow, that we cannot, without proof, be certain of any thing, not even of our own existence, nor of the truth of a geometrical axiom? Some diseases are so fatal to the mind, as to confound mens notions even of their own identity; but does it follow, that I cannot be certain of my being the same person to-day I was yesterday, and twenty years ago, till I have first proved this point by argument? And because we are sometimes deceived by our senses, does it therefore follow, that we never are certain of our not being deceived by them, till we have first convinced ourselves by reasoning, that they are not deceitful? — If a Cartesian can prove, that there have been a few persons of sound understanding, who, from a conviction of the deceitfulness of their senses, have really disbelieved, or seriously doubted, the existence of a material world, I shall allow a conviction of this deceitfulness to be a sufficient ground for such doubt or disbelief, in one or a few instances: and if he can prove that such doubt or disbelief

* Cartesii Principia, part. 1. § 4 part. 2. § 1.

has at any time been general among mankind, I shall allow that it may be so again : — but if it be certain, as I think it is, that no man of a sound mind, however suspicious of the veracity of his senses, ever did or could really disbelieve, or seriously doubt, the existence of a material world, then is this point self-evident, and a principle of common sense, even on the supposition that our senses are as deceitful as DES CARTES and MALEBRANCHE chuse to represent them. But we have formerly proved, that our senses are never supposed to be deceitful, except when we are conscious, that our experience is partial, or our observation inaccurate ; and that even then, the fallacy is detected, and rectified, only by the evidence of sense placed in circumstances more favourable to accurate observation. In regard to the *existence* of matter, there cannot be a suspicion, that our observation is inaccurate, or our experience partial ; and therefore it is not possible, that ever we should distrust our senses in this particular. If it were possible, our distrust could never be removed either by reasoning or by experience.

As to the suspicion against the existence of matter that is supposed to arise from our experience of the delusions of dreaming ; we observe, in the first place, that if this be allowed a sufficient ground for suspecting, that our waking perceptions are equally delusive, there is at once an end of all truth, reasoning, and common sense. That I am at present awake, and not asleep, I certainly know ; but I cannot prove it : for there is no criterion for distinguishing dreaming fancies from waking perceptions, more evident than that I am now awake, which is the point in question ; and, as we have often remarked, it is essential to every proof, to be more evident than that which is to be proved. That I am now awake, must therefore carry its own evidence along with it ; if it be evident at all, it must be self-evident. And so it is : we may mistake dreams for realities, but no rational

tional being ever mistook a reality for a dream. Had we the command of our understanding and memory in sleep, we should probably be sensible, that the appearances of our dreams are all delusive: which, in fact, is sometimes the case; at least I have sometimes been conscious, that my dream was a dream: and when it was disagreeable, have actually made efforts to awake myself, which have succeeded. But sleep has a wonderful power over all our faculties. Sometimes we seem to have lost our moral faculty; as when we dream of doing that, without scruple or remorse, which when awake we could not bear to think of. Sometimes memory is extinguished; as when we dream of conversing with our departed friends, without remembering any thing of their death, though it was, perhaps, one of the most striking incidents we had ever experienced, and is seldom or never out of our thoughts when we are awake. Sometimes our understanding seems to have quite forsaken us; as when we dream of talking with a dead friend, remembering at the same time that he is dead, but without being conscious of any thing absurd or unusual in the circumstance of conversing with a dead man. Considering these and the other effects of sleep upon the mind, we need not be surprised, that it should cause us to mistake our own ideas for real things, and be affected with those in the same manner as with these. But the moment we awake, and recover the use of our faculties, we are sensible, that the dream was a delusion, and that the objects which now solicit our notice are real. To demand a reason for the implicit confidence we repose in our waking perceptions; or to desire us to prove, that things are as they appear to our waking senses, and not as they appear to us in sleep, is as unreasonable as to demand a reason for our belief in our own existence: in both cases our belief is necessary and unavoidable, the result of a law of nature, and what

what we cannot in practice contradict, but to our shame and perdition.

Further: If DES CARTES thought an argument necessary to convince him, that his perception of the external world was not imaginary, but real, I would ask, how he could know that his argument was real, and not imaginary. How could he know that he was awake, and not asleep, when he wrote his Principles of Philosophy, if his waking thoughts did not, previous to all reasoning, carry along with them undeniable evidence of their reality? *I am awake*, is a principle which he must have taken for granted, even before he could satisfy himself of the truth of what he thought the first of all principles, *Cogito, ergo sum*. — To which we may add, that if there be any persons in the world who never dream at all *, (and some such I think there are), and whose belief in the existence of a material world is not a whit stronger than that of those whose sleep is always attended with dreaming; this is a proof from experience, that the delusions of sleep do not in the least affect our conviction of the authenticity of the perceptions we receive, and of the faculties we exert, when awake.

The first part of DES CARTES' argument for the existence of bodies, would prove the reality of the visionary ideas we perceive in dreams; for they, as well as bodies, present themselves to us, independent on our will. But the principal part of his ar-

* "I once knew a man," says Mr LOCKE, "who was bred a scholar, and had no bad memory, who told me, that he had never dreamed in his life, till he had that fever he was then newly recovered of, which was about the five or six and twentieth year of his age. I suppose the world affords more such instances."

Essay on Human Understanding, book 2. ch. 1.

A young gentleman of my acquaintance never dreams at all, except when his health is disordered.

gument is founded on the veracity of God, which he had before inferred from our consciousness of the idea of an infinitely perfect, independent, and necessarily-existent being: Our senses inform us of the existence of body; they give us this information in consequence of a law established by the divine will: but God is no deceiver; therefore is their information true. I have formerly given my opinion of this argument, and shown that it is a sophism, as the author states it. We must believe our faculties to be true, before we can be convinced, either by proof, or by intuitive evidence. If we refuse to believe in our faculties, till their veracity be first ascertained by reasoning, we shall never believe in them at all *.

MALEBRANCHE † says, that men are more certain of the existence of God, than of the existence of body. He allows, that DES CARTES has proved the existence of body, by the strongest arguments that reason alone could furnish; nay, he seems to acknowledge those arguments to be unexceptionable ‡: yet he does

* See the preceding section.

† Recherche de la Verité, tom. 3. p. 30. A Paris, chez Pralard, 1679.

‡ Mais quoique M. DES CARTES ait donné les preuves les plus fortes que la raison toute seule puisse fournir pour l'existence des corps; quoiqu'il soit evident, que Dieu n'est point trompeur, et qu'on puisse dire qu'il nous tromperoit effectivement, si nous nous trompions nous-mêmes en faisant l'usage que nous devons faire de notre esprit, et des autres facultez dont il est l'auteur; cependant on peut dire que l'existence de la matiere n'est point encore parfaitement démontrée. Car, enfin, en matiere de philosophie, nous ne devons croire quoique ce soit, *que lorsque l'evidence nous y oblige*. Nous devons faire usage de notre liberté autant que nous le pouvons. — Pour être plainement convaincus qu'il y a des corps, il faut qu'on nous demontre, non seulement qu'il y a un Dieu, et que Dieu n'est point trompeur, mais encore que Dieu nous a assuré qu'il en a effectivement crée: ce que je ne trouve point prouvé dans les ouvrages de M. DES CARTES.

Tom. 3. p. 37. 38. 39.

not admit, that they amount to a full demonstration of the existence of matter. In philosophy, says he, we ought to maintain our liberty as long as we can, and to believe nothing but what evidence compels us to believe. To be fully convinced of the existence of bodies, it is necessary that we have it demonstrated to us, not only that there is a God, and that he is no deceiver, but also that God hath assured us, that he has actually created such bodies; and this, says he, I do not find proved in the works of M. DES CARTES.

There are, according to MALEBRANCHE, but two ways in which God speaks to the mind, and compels (or obliges) it to believe; to wit, by evidence, and by the faith. “The faith obliges us to believe that bodies exist; but as to the evidence of this truth, it certainly is not complete: and it is also certain, that we are not invincibly determined to believe, that any thing exists, but God, and our own mind. It is true, that we have an extreme propensity to believe, that we are surrounded with corporeal beings; so far I agree with M. DES CARTES: but this propensity, natural as it is, doth not force our belief by evidence; it only inclines us to believe by impression. Now we ought not to be determined, in our free judgements, by any thing but light and evidence; if we suffer ourselves to be guided by the sensible impression, we shall be almost always mistaken *.” — Our author then proposes, in brief,

* Dieu ne parle à l'esprit, et ne l'oblige à croire qu'en deux manieres; par l'evidence, et par la foi. Je demeure d'accord, que *la foi oblige à croire* qu'il y a des corps: mais pour l'evidence, il est certain, qu'elle n'est point entiere, et que nous ne sommes point invinciblement portez à croire qu'il y ait quelque autre chose que Dieu et nôtre esprit. Il est vray, que nous avons un penchant extrême à croire qu'il y a des corps qui nous environnent. Je l'accorde à M. DES CARTES: mais ce penchant, tout naturel qu'il est, *ne nous y force point* par evidence; il nous y incline

brief, the substance of that argument against the existence of body, which BERKELEY afterwards took such pains to illustrate; and discovers, upon the whole, that, as a point of philosophy, the existence of matter is but a probability, to which we have it in our power either to assent, or not to assent, as we please. In a word, it is by the faith, and not by evidence, that we become certain of this truth.

This is not a proper place for analysing the passage above quoted, otherwise it would be easy to show, that the doctrine (such as it is) which the author here delivers, is not reconcileable with other parts of his system. But I only mean to observe, that what is here asserted, of our belief in the existence of body being not necessary, but such as we may with-hold if we please, is contrary to my experience. That my body, and this pen and paper, and the other corporeal objects around me, do really exist, is to me as evident, as that my soul exists; it is indeed so evident, that nothing is or can be more so; and though my life depended upon the consequence, I could not bring myself to entertain a doubt of it, even for a single moment.

I must therefore affirm, that the existence of matter can no more be disproved by argument, than the existence of myself, or than the truth of a self-evident axiom in geometry. To argue against it, is to set reason in opposition to common sense; which

incline seulement par impression. Or nous ne devons suivre dans nos jugemens libres que la lumiere et l'evidence; et si nous nous laissons conduire à l'impression sensible, nous nous tromperons presque toujours. Tom. 3. p. 39. — La foi I translate *The faith*, because I suppose the author to mean the *Christian* or *Catholic faith*. If we take it to denote *faith* or *belief in general*, I know not how we shall make any sense of the passage.

is indirectly to subvert the foundation of all just reasoning, and to call in question the distinction between truth and falsehood. We are told, however, that a great philosopher has actually demonstrated, *that matter does not exist*. Demonstrated! truly this is a piece of strange information. At this rate, any falsehood may be proved to be true, and any truth to be false. For it is impossible, that any truth should be more evident to me than this, *that matter does exist*. Let us see, however, what BERKELEY has to say in behalf of this extraordinary doctrine. It is natural for demonstration, and for all sound reasoning, to produce conviction, or at least some degree of assent, in the person who attends to it, and understands it. I read *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, together with *The Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. The arguments, I confess, are subtle, and well adapted to the purpose of puzzling and confounding. Perhaps I will not undertake to confute them. Perhaps I am busy, or indolent, or unacquainted with the principles of this philosophy, or little versed in your metaphysical logic. But am I convinced, from this pretended demonstration, that matter has no existence but as an idea in the mind? Not in the least; my belief now is precisely the same as before.—Is it unphilosophical, not to be convinced by arguments which I am not able to confute? Perhaps it may, but I cannot help it: you may, if you please, strike me off the list of philosophers, as a nonconformist; you may call me unpliant, unreasonable, unfashionable, and a man with whom it is not worth while to argue: but till the frame of my nature be unhinged, and a new set of faculties given me, I cannot believe this strange doctrine, because it is perfectly incredible. But if I were permitted to propose one clownish question, I would fain ask, Where is the harm of my continuing in my old opinion, and believing, with the rest of the world, that I am not the only created

created being in the universe, but that there are many others, whose existence is as independent on me, as mine is on them? Where is the harm of my believing, that if I were to fall down yonder precipice, and break my neck, I should be no more a man of this world? My neck, Sir, may be an idea to you, but to me it is a reality, and an important one too. Where is the harm of my believing, that if in this severe weather, I were to neglect to throw (what you call) the idea of a coat over the ideas of my shoulders, the idea of cold would produce the idea of such pain and disorder as might possibly terminate in my real death? What great offence shall I commit against God or man, church or state, philosophy or common sense, if I continue to believe, that material food will nourish me, though the idea of it will not; that the real sun will warm and enlighten me, though the liveliest idea of him will do neither; and that, if I would obtain true peace of mind and self-approbation, I must not only form ideas of compassion, justice, and generosity, but also really exert those virtues in external performance? What harm is there in all this? — O! no harm at all, Sir; — but — the truth, — the truth, — will you shut your eyes against the truth? — No, honest man ever will: convince me that your doctrine is true, and I will instantly embrace it. — Have I not convinced thee, thou obstinate, unaccountable, inexorable —? Answer my arguments, if thou canst. — Alas, Sir, you have given me arguments in abundance, but you have not given me conviction; and if your arguments produce no conviction, they are worth nothing to me. They are like counterfeit bank-bills; some of which are so dexterously forged, that neither your eye nor mine can detect them; yet a thousand of them would go for nothing at the bank; and even the paper-maker would allow me more handsomely for old rags. You need not give yourself the trouble to tell me, that I ought to

be convinced : I ought to be convinced only when I feel conviction ; when I feel no conviction I ought not to be convinced. — It has been observed of some doctrines and reasonings, that their extreme absurdity prevents their admitting a rational confutation. What ! am I to believe such a doctrine ? am I to be convinced by such reasoning ? Now, I never heard of any doctrine more scandalously absurd, than this of the non-existence of matter. There is not a fiction in the *Persian tales* that I could not as easily believe ; the silliest conceit of the most contemptible superstition that ever disgraced human nature, is not more shocking to common sense, nor more repugnant to every principle of human belief. And must I admit this jargon for truth, because I cannot confute the arguments of a man who is a more subtle disputant than I ? Does philosophy require this of me ? Then it must suppose, that truth is as variable as the fancies, the characters, and the intellectual abilities of men, and that there is no such thing in nature as common sense.

But all this, I shall perhaps be told, is but cavil and declamation. What if, after all, this very doctrine be believed, and the sophistry (as you call it) of BERKELEY be admitted as sound reasoning, and legitimate proof ? What then becomes of your common sense, and your instinctive convictions ? — What then, do you ask ? Then indeed I acknowledge the fact to be very extraordinary ; and I cannot help being in some pain about the consequences, which must be important and fatal. If a man, out of vanity, or from a desire of being in the fashion, or in order to pass for wonderfully wise, shall say, that BERKELEY'S doctrine is true, while, at the same time, his belief is precisely the same with mine, it is well ; I leave him to enjoy the fruits of his hypocrisy, which will no doubt contribute mightily to his improvement in candour, happiness, and wisdom. If a man pro-
fessing

feeling this doctrine, act like other men in the common affairs of life, I will not believe his profession to be sincere. For this doctrine, by removing body out of the universe, makes a total change in the circumstances of men; and therefore, if it is not merely verbal, must produce a total change in their conduct. When a man is only turned out of his house, or stripped of his cloaths, or robbed of his money, he must change his behaviour, and act differently from other men, who enjoy those advantages. Persuade a man that he is a beggar and a vagabond, and you shall instantly see him change his manners. If your arguments against the existence of matter have ever carried conviction along with them, they must at the same time have produced a much more extraordinary change of conduct; but if they have produced no change of conduct, I insist on it, they have never carried conviction along with them, whatever vehemence of protestation men may have used in avowing such conviction. If you say, that though a man's understanding be convinced, there are certain instincts in his nature that will not permit him to alter his conduct; or, if he did, the rest of the world would account him a mad-man; by the first apology, you allow the belief of the non-existence of body to be inconsistent with the laws of nature; by the second, to be inconsistent with common sense.

But if a man be convinced, that matter has no existence, and believe this strange tenet as steadily, and with as little distrust, as I believe the contrary; he will, I am afraid, have but little reason to applaud himself on this new acquisition in science; he will soon find, it had been better for him to have reasoned, and believed, and acted, like the rest of the world. If he fall down a precipice, or be trampled under foot by horses, it will avail him little, that he once had the honour to be a disciple of BERKELEY, and to believe that those dangerous objects are nothing.

thing but ideas in the mind. And yet, if such a man be seen to avoid a precipice, or to get out of the way of a coach and six horses at full speed, he acts as inconsistently with his belief, as if he ran away from the picture of an angry man, even while he believed it to be a picture. Supposing his life preserved by the care of friends, or by the strength of natural instinct urging him to act contrary to his belief; yet will this belief cost him dear. For if the plainest evidence, and fullest conviction, be certainly fallacious, I beg to be informed, what kind of evidence, and what degree of conviction, may reasonably be depended on. If nature be a juggler by trade, is it for us, poor purblind reptiles, to attempt to penetrate the mysteries of her art, and take upon us to decide, when it is she presents a true, and when a false appearance! I will not say, however, that this man runs a greater risk of universal scepticism, than of universal credulity. Either the one or the other, or both, must be his portion; and either the one or the other would be sufficient to embitter my whole life, and to disqualify me for every duty of a rational creature. He who can believe against common sense, and against the clearest evidence, and against the fullest conviction, in any one case, may do the same in any other; consequently he may become the dupe of every wrangler who is more acute than he; and then, if he is not entirely secluded from mankind, his liberty, and happiness, are gone for ever. Indeed a cheerful temper, strong habits of virtue, and the company of the wise and good, may still save him from perdition, if he have no temptations nor difficulties to encounter. But it is the end of every useful art, to teach us to surmount difficulties, not to disqualify us for attempting them. Men have been known to live many years in a warm chamber, after they were become too delicate to bear the open air; but who will say, that such a habit
of

of body is desirous? what physician will recommend to the healthy such a regimen as would produce it?

But, that I may no longer suppose, what I maintain to be impossible, that mankind in general, or even one rational being, could, by force of argument, be convinced, that this absurd doctrine is true; — what if all men were in one instant deprived of their understanding by almighty power, and made to believe, that matter has an existence but as an idea in the mind, all other earthly things remaining as they are? — Doubtless this catastrophe would, according to our metaphysicians, throw a wonderful light on all the parts of knowledge. I pretend not even to guess at the number, extent, or quality, of astonishing discoveries that would then start forth into view. But of this I am certain, that, in less than a month after, there could not, without another miracle, be one human creature alive on the face of the earth*.

BERKELEY foresaw, and has done what he could to obviate, *some* of these objections. There are two points which he has taken great pains to prove. The first is, That his system differs not from the belief of the rest of mankind; the second, That our conduct cannot be in the least affected by our disbelief of the existence of a material world.

1. As to the first, it is certainly false. Mr HUME himself seems willing to give it up. I have known many who could not answer BERKELEY's arguments; I never knew one who believed

* This, I think, must follow, if we allow that our external senses are necessary to our preservation. And I do not see how that can be denied. A blind or deaf man may live not uncomfortably in the society of those who see or hear: but if all mankind were blind and deaf, or deprived of their reason so as to disbelieve their eyes and ears, and other percipient faculties, I know not how human life could be preserved without a miracle.

his doctrine. I have mentioned it to some who were unacquainted with philosophy, and therefore could not be supposed to have any bias in favour of either system; they all treated it as most contemptible jargon, and what no man in his senses ever did or could believe. I have carefully attended to the effects produced by it upon my own mind; and it appears to me at this moment, as when I first heard it, incredible and incomprehensible. I say incomprehensible: for though, by reading it over and over, I have got a set of phrases and arguments by heart, which would enable me, if I were so disposed, to talk, and argue, and write, "about it and about it;" yet, when I lay systems and syllogisms aside, when I enter on any part of the business of life, or when I refer the matter to the unbiassed decision of my own mind, I plainly see, that I had no distinct meaning to my words when I said, that the material world has no existence but in the mind that perceives it. In a word, if this author had asserted, that I and all mankind acknowledge and believe the *Arabian Nights Entertainment* to be a true history, I could not have had any better reason for contradicting that assertion, than I have for contradicting this, "That BERKELEY'S principles in regard to the existence of matter, differ not from the belief of the rest of mankind."

2. In behalf of the second point he argues, "That nothing gives us an interest in the material world, except the feelings pleasant or painful which accompany our perceptions; that these perceptions are the same, whether we believe the material world to exist or not to exist; consequently, that our pleasant or painful feelings are also the same; and therefore, that our conduct, which depends on our feelings and perceptions, must be the same, whether we believe or disbelieve the existence of matter."

But if it be certain, that by the law of our nature we are unavoidably

avoidably determined to believe that matter exists, and to act upon this belief, (and nothing, I think, is more certain), how can it be imagined, that a contrary belief would produce no alteration in our conduct and sentiments? Surely the laws of nature are not such trifles, as that it should be a matter of perfect indifference, whether we act and think agreeably to them or not? I believe that matter exists; — I must believe that matter exists; — I must continually act upon this belief; such is the law of my constitution. Suppose my constitution changed in this respect, all other things remaining as they are; — would there then be no change in my sentiments and conduct? If there would not, then is this law of nature, in the first place, useless, because men could do as well without it; secondly, inconvenient, because its end is to keep us ignorant of the truth; and, thirdly, absurd, because insufficient for answering its end, the Bishop of Cloyne, and others, having, it seems, discovered the truth in spite of it. Is this according to the usual economy of Nature? Does this language become her servants and interpreters? Is it possible to devise any sentiments or maxims more subversive of truth, and more repugnant to the spirit of true philosophy?

Further: All external objects have some qualities in common; but between an external object and an idea, or thought of the mind, there is not, there cannot possibly be, any resemblance. A grain of sand, and the globe of the earth; a burning coal, and a lump of ice; a drop of ink, and a sheet of white paper, resemble each other, in being extended, solid, figured, coloured, and divisible; but a thought or idea has no extension, solidity, figure, colour, nor divisibility: so that no two external objects can be so unlike, as an external object and (what philosophers call) the idea of it. Now we are taught by BERKELEY, that external objects (that is, the things we take for external objects)

are nothing but ideas in our minds ; in other words, that they are in every respect different from what they appear to be. This candle, it seems, hath not one of those qualities it appears to have : it is not white, nor luminous, nor round, nor divisible, nor extended ; for to an idea of the mind, not one of these qualities can possibly belong. How then shall I know what it really is ? From what it seems to be, I can conclude nothing ; no more than a blind man, by handling a bit of black wax, can judge of the colour of snow, or the visible appearance of the starry heavens. The candle may be an Egyptian pyramid, the King of Prussia, a mad dog, or nothing at all : it may be the island of Madagascar, Saturn's ring, or one of the Pleiades, for any thing I know, or can ever know, to the contrary, except you allow me to judge of its nature from its appearance ; which, however, I cannot reasonably do, if its appearance and nature are in every respect so different and unlike as not to have one single quality in common. I must therefore believe it to be, what it appears to be, a real, corporeal, external object, and so reject BERKELEY's system ; or I never can, with any shadow of reason, believe any thing whatsoever concerning it. — Will it yet be said, that the belief of this system cannot in the least affect our sentiments and conduct ? With equal truth may it be said, that Newton's conduct and sentiments would not have been in the least affected by his being metamorphosed into an idiot, or a pillar of salt.

Some readers may perhaps be dissatisfied with this reasoning, on account of the ambiguity of the words *external object* and *idea* ; which, however, the assertors of the non-existence of matter have not as yet fully explained. Others may think that I must have misunderstood the author ; for that he was too acute a logician to leave his system exposed to objections so decisive, and so obvious. To gratify such readers, I will not insist on these objections.

objections. That I may have misunderstood the author's doctrine, is not only possible, but highly probable; nay, I have reason to think, that it was not perfectly understood even by himself. For did not BERKELEY write his *Principles of human Knowledge*, with this express view, (which does him great honour), to banish scepticism both from science and from religion? Was he not sanguine in the hope of success? And has not the event proved, that he was egregiously mistaken? For is it not evident, from the use to which other authors have applied it, that his system leads to Atheism and universal scepticism? And if a machine disappoint its inventor so far as to produce effects contrary to those he wished, intended, and expected; may we not, without breach of charity, conclude, that he did not perfectly understand his plan? At any rate, it appears from this fact, that our author did not foresee all the objections to which his theory is liable. He did not foresee, that it might be made the foundation of a sceptical system: if he had, we know he would have renounced it with abhorrence.

This one objection, therefore, (in which I think I cannot be mistaken), will fully answer my present purpose: Our author's doctrine is contrary to common belief, and leads to universal scepticism. Suppose it, then, universally and seriously adopted; suppose all men divested of all belief, and consequently of all principle: would not the dissolution of society, and the destruction of mankind, necessarily ensue?

Still I shall be told, that BERKELEY was a good man, and that his principles did him no hurt. I allow it; he was indeed a most excellent person; none can revere his memory more than I. But does it appear, that he ever acted according to his principles, or that he thoroughly understood them? Does it appear, that, if he had put them in practice, no hurt would have ensued to

himself *, or to society? Does it appear, that he was a sceptic, or a friend to scepticism? Does it appear, that men may adopt his principles without danger of becoming sceptics? The contrary of all this appears with uncontrovertible evidence.

Surely pride was not made for man. The most exalted genius may find in himself many affecting memorials of human frailty, and such as often render him an object of compassion to those who in virtue and understanding are far inferior. I pity BERKELEY's weakness in patronising an absurd and dangerous theory; I doubt not but it may have overcast many of his days with a gloom, which neither the approbation of his conscience, nor the natural serenity of his temper, could entirely dissipate. And though I were to believe, that he was intoxicated with this theory, and rejoiced in it; yet still I should pity the intoxication as a weakness: for candour will not permit me to give it a harsher name; as I see in his other writings, and know by the testimony of his contemporaries, particularly Pope and Swift, that he was a friend to virtue, and to human nature.

We must not suppose a false doctrine harmless, merely because it has not been able to corrupt the heart of a good man. Nor, because a few sceptics have not authority to render science con-

* Let it not be pretended, that a man may disbelieve his senses without danger of inconvenience. Pyrrho (as we read in Diogenes Laertius) professed to disbelieve his senses, and to be in no apprehension from any of the objects that affected them. The appearance of a precipice or wild beast was nothing to Pyrrho; at least he said so: he would not avoid them; he knew they were nothing at all, or at least that they were not what they seemed to be. Suppose him to have been in earnest; and suppose his keepers to have in earnest adopted the same principles: would not their limbs and lives have been in as great danger, as the limbs and life of a blind and deaf man wandering by himself in a solitary place, with his hands tied behind his back? I would as soon say, that our senses are useless faculties, as that we might disbelieve them without danger of inconvenience.

temptible,

temptible, nor power to overturn society, must we suppose, that therefore scepticism is not dangerous to science or mankind. The effects of a general scepticism would be dreadful and fatal. We must therefore, notwithstanding our reverence for the character of BERKELEY, be permitted to affirm, what we have sufficiently proved, that his doctrine is subversive of man's most important interests, as a moral, intelligent, and percipient being.

After all, though I were to grant, that the disbelief of the existence of matter could not produce any considerable change in our principles of action and reasoning, the reader will find in the sequel *, that the point I have chiefly in view would not be much affected even by that concession. I say not this, as being diffident or sceptical in regard to what I have advanced on the present subject. Doctrines which I do not believe, I will never recommend to others. I am absolutely certain, that to me the belief of BERKELEY's system would be attended with the most fatal consequences ; and that it would be equally dangerous to the rest of mankind, I cannot doubt, so long as I believe their nature and mine to be the same.

Though it be absurd to attempt a proof of what is self-evident, it is manly and meritorious to confute the objections that sophistry may urge against it. This, with respect to the subject in question, has been done, in a decisive and masterly manner, by the learned and sagacious Dr Reid † ; who proves, that the reasonings of BERKELEY, and others, concerning primary and se-

* Part 2. chap. 3.

† Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense.

condary qualities *, owe all their strength to the ambiguity of words. I have proved, that, though this fundamental error had never been detected, the philosophy of BERKELEY is in its own nature absurd, because it supposes the original principles of common sense controvertible and fallacious: a supposition repugnant to the genius of true philosophy; and which leads to universal credulity, or universal scepticism; and, consequently, to the subversion of all knowledge and virtue.

It is proper, before we proceed to the next instance, to make a remark or two on what has been said.

1. Here we have an instance of a doctrine advanced by some philosophers, in direct contradiction to the general belief of all men in all ages.

2. The reasoning by which it is supported, though long accounted unanswerable, did never produce a serious and steady conviction. Common sense still declared the doctrine to be false; we were sorry to find the powers of human reason so limited, as not to afford a logical confutation of it; we were convinced it

* DES CARTES, LOCKE, and BERKELEY, suppose, that what we call a *body* is nothing but a collection of qualities; and these they divide into *primary* and *secondary*. Of the former kind are magnitude, extension, solidity, &c. which LOCKE and the CARTESIANS allow to belong to bodies at all times, whether perceived or not. Of the latter kind are the *heat* of fire, the *smell* and *taste* of a rose, &c. and these, by the same authors, and by BERKELEY, are said to exist, not in the bodies themselves, but only in the mind that perceives them: an error they are led into by supposing, that the words *heat*, *taste*, *smell*, &c. signify nothing but a *perception*; whereas we have formerly shown, that they also signify an *external thing*. BERKELEY, following the hints which he found in DES CARTES, MALEBRANCHE, and LOCKE, has applied the same mode of reasoning to prove, that primary, as well as secondary qualities, have no external existence; and consequently, that body (which consists of these two classes of qualities, and nothing else) exists only as an idea in the mind that perceives it, and exists no longer than while it is perceived.

merited

merited confutation, and flattered ourselves, that one time or other it would be confuted.

3. The real and general belief of this doctrine would be attended with fatal consequences to science, and to human nature; for this is a doctrine according to which a man could not act nor reason in the common affairs of life, without incurring the charge of insanity or folly, and involving himself in distress and perdition.

4. An ingenious man, from a sense of the bad tendency of this doctrine, applies himself to examine the principles on which it is founded; discovers them to be erroneous; and proves, to the full conviction of competent judges, that from beginning to end it is all a mystery of falsehood, arising from the use of ambiguous words, and from the gratuitous admission of principles which never could have been admitted if they had been thoroughly understood.

S E C T. III.

Of Liberty and Necessity.

THE second instance to which I purpose to apply the principles of this discourse, by showing the danger of carrying any investigation beyond the dictates of common sense, is no other than the celebrated question concerning liberty and necessity; a question on which many things have been said, and some things, I presume, to little purpose. To enter into all the particulars of this controversy, is foreign to my present design; and I would not wish to add to a dispute already too bulky. My intention

is,

is, to treat the doctrine of necessity as I treated that of the non-existence of matter; by enquiring, whether the one be not, as well as the other, contrary to common sense, and therefore absurd.

1. That certain intentions and actions are in themselves, and previous to all consideration of their consequences, good, laudable, and meritorious; and that other actions and intentions are bad, blameable, and worthy of punishment,—has been felt and acknowledged by all reasonable creatures in all ages and nations. We need not wonder at the universality of this sentiment: it is as natural to the human constitution, as the faculties of hearing, seeing, and memory; it is as clear, unequivocal, and affecting, as any intimation from any sense external or internal.

2. That we cannot do some things, but have it in our power to do others, is what no man in his senses will hesitate to affirm. I can take up my staff from the ground, but I cannot lift a stone of a thousand weight. On a common, I may walk southward or northward, eastward or westward; but I cannot ascend to the clouds, nor sink downward to the centre of the earth. Just now I have power to think of an absent friend, of the Peak of Teneriffe, of a passage in Homer, or of the death of Charles I. When a man asks me a question, I have it in my power to answer or be silent, to answer softly or roughly, in terms of respect or in terms of contempt. Frequent temptations to vice fall in my way; I may yield, or I may resist: if I resist, I applaud myself, because I am conscious it was in my power to do otherwise; if I yield, I am filled with shame and remorse, for having neglected to do what I might have done, and ought to have done. My liberty in these instances I cannot prove by argument; but there is not a truth in geometry of which I am more certain.

Is not this doctrine sufficiently obvious? Must I quote Epictetus,

tus, or any other ancient author, to prove that men were of the same opinion in former times? No idea occurs more frequently in my reading and conversation, than that of *power* or *agency*; and I think I understand my own meaning as well when I speak of it as when I speak of any thing else. But this idea has had the misfortune to come under the examination of a certain author, who, according to custom, has found means so to darken and disfigure it, that, till we have cleared it of his misrepresentations, we cannot proceed any further in the present subject. And we are the more inclined to digress on this occasion, because he has made his theory of power the ground of some Atheistical inferences, which we should not scruple at any time to step out of our way to overturn. — Perhaps these frequent digressions are offensive to the reader: they are equally so to the writer. To remove rubbish is neither an elegant nor a pleasant work, but it is often necessary. It is peculiarly necessary in the philosophy of human nature. The road to moral truth has been left in such a plight by some modern projectors, that a man of honesty and plain sense must either, with great labour and loss of time, delve his way through, or be swallowed up in a quagmire. The metaphysician advances more easily. His levity, perhaps, enables him, like Camilla in Virgil, to skim along the surface without sinking; or perhaps, the extreme subtlety of his genius can, like Satan in Paradise Lost, penetrate this chaos, without being much incumbered or retarded in his progress. But men of ordinary talents have not those advantages, and must therefore be allowed to flounce along, though with no very graceful motion, the best way they can.

All ideas, according to Mr HUME's fundamental hypothesis, are derived from and represent impressions: But we have never any impression that contains any power or efficacy: We never,

therefore, have any idea of power*. In proof of the minor proposition of this syllogism, he remarks, That “when we think
 “we perceive our mind acting on matter, or one piece of mat-
 “ter acting upon another, we do in fact perceive only two ob-
 “jects or events contiguous and successive, the second of which
 “is always found in experience to follow the first; but that we
 “never perceive, either by external sense, or by consciousness,
 “that power, energy, or efficacy, which connects the one event
 “with the other. By observing that the two events do always
 “accompany each other, the imagination acquires a habit of go-
 “ing readily from the first to the second, and from the second
 “to the first; and hence we are led to conceive a kind of neces-
 “sary connection between them. But in fact there is neither ne-
 “cessity nor power in the objects we consider, but only in the
 “mind that considers them; and even in the mind, this power
 “of necessity is nothing but a determination of the fancy, ac-
 “quired by habit, to pass from the idea of an object to that of
 “its usual attendant †.” — So that what we call the efficacy of
 a cause to produce an effect, is neither in the cause nor in the
 effect, but only in the imagination, which has contracted a habit of
 passing from the object called the cause, to the object called the
 effect, and thus associating them together. Has the fire a power
 to melt lead? No; but the fancy is determined by habit to pass
 from the idea of fire to that of melted lead, on account of our
 having always perceived them contiguous and successive; — and
 this is the whole matter. Have I a power to move my arm?
 No; the volition that precedes the motion of my arm has no
 connection with that motion; but the motion having been always
 observed to follow the volition, comes to be associated with it in

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. I. p. 282.

† Ibid. p. 272. — 300.

the fancy; and what we call the power, or necessary connection, has nothing to do, either with the volition, or with the motion, but is merely a determination of my fancy, or your fancy, or any body's fancy, to associate the idea or impression of my volition with the impression or idea of the motion of my arm.—I am sorry I cannot express myself more clearly; but I should not do justice to my author, if I did not imitate his language on the present occasion: plain words will never do, when one has an unintelligible doctrine to support.

What shall we say to this collection of strange phrases? or what name shall we give it? Shall we call it a most ingenious discovery, illustrated by a most ingenious argument? This would be complimenting the author at a very great expence; for this would imply, not only that he is the wisest of mortal men, but also that he is the only individual of that species of animals who is not a fool. Certain it is, that all men have in all ages talked, and argued, and acted, from a persuasion that they had a very distinct notion of power. If our author can prove, that they had no such notion, he can also prove, that all human discourse is nonsense, all human actions absurdity, and all human compositions (his own not excepted) words without meaning. The boldness of this theory will, however, pass with many, for a proof of its being ingenious. Be it so, Gentlemen, I dispute not about epithets; if you will have it, that genius consisteth in the art of putting words together so as to form absurd propositions, I have nothing more to say. Others will admire this doctrine, because the words by which the author means to illustrate and prove it, if printed on a good paper and with an elegant type, would of themselves make a pretty sizeable volume. It were pity to deprive these people of the pleasure of admiring; otherwise I might tell them, that nothing is more easy than this method of composition; for that I would under-

take, at a very short warning, (if it could be done innocently, and without prejudice to my health), to write as many pages, with equal appearance of reason and argument, and with equal advantage to philosophy and mankind, in vindication of any given absurdity; provided only, that (like the absurdity in question), it were expressed in words of which one at least is ambiguous.

In truth, I am so little disposed to admire this extraordinary paradox, that nothing could make me believe its author to have been in earnest, if I had not found him drawing inferences from it too serious to be jested with by any person who is not absolutely distracted. It is one of Mr HUME's maxims, "That we can never have reason to believe, that any object, or quality of an object, exists, of which we cannot form an idea*." But, according to this astonishing theory of power, and causation, "we have *no idea* of power, nor of a being endowed with any power, MUCH LESS of one endowed with infinite power†." The inference is but too glaring; and though our author does not plainly and avowedly express it, he once and again puts his reader in mind, that this inference, or something very like it, is deducible from his theory‡:—for which, no doubt, every friend to truth, virtue, and human nature, is infinitely obliged to him!

But what do you say in opposition to my theory? You affect to treat it with a contempt which hardly becomes you, and which my philosophy has not met with from your betters! pray let us hear your arguments.—And do you, Sir, really think it incumbent on me to prove by argument, that I, and all other

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 302.

† Ibid. p. 432.

‡ Ibid. p. 284. 291. &c.

men, have a notion of power; and that the efficacy of a cause (of fire, for instance, to melt lead) is in the cause, and not in my mind? Would you think it incumbent on me to confute you with arguments, if you were pleased to affirm, that all men have tails and cloven feet; and that it was I who produced the earthquake that destroyed Lisbon, the plague that depopulates Constantinople, the heat that scorches the wilds of Africa, and the cold that freezes the Hyperborean ocean? Truly, Sir, I have not the face to undertake a direct confutation of what I do not understand; and I am so far from comprehending this part of your system, that I will venture to pronounce it perfectly unintelligible. I know there are some who say they understand it; but I also know, that there are some who speak, and read, and write too, with very little expence of thought.

These are all but evasions, you exclaim; and insist on my coming to the point. Never fear, Sir; I am too deeply interested in some of the consequences of this theory of yours, to put you off with evasions. To come therefore to the point, I shall first state your doctrine in your own words, that there may be no risk of misrepresentation; and then, if I should not be able *directly* to prove it false, (for the reason already given), I shall demonstrate, *indirectly* at least, or by the apagogical method, that it is not, and cannot be true.

“As the necessity,” says our author, “which makes two times two equal to four, or three angles of a triangle equal to two right ones, lies only in the act of the understanding, by which we consider and compare these ideas* ; in like manner, the

* What! is it an act of my understanding that makes two and two equal to four! Was it not so before I was born, and would it not be so though all intelligence were to cease throughout the universe! — But it is idle to spend time in confuting what every child who has learned the very first elements of science, knows to be absurd.

“ necessity or power which unites causes and effects, lies in the
 “ determination of the mind to pass from the one to the other.
 “ The efficacy, or energy, of causes, is neither placed in the
 “ causes themselves, nor in the Deity, nor in the concurrence of
 “ these two principles ; but belongs entirely to the soul, which
 “ considers the union of two or more objects in all past instances.
 “ It is here that the real power of causes is placed, along with
 “ their connection and necessity *.”

To find that his principles lead to Atheism, would stagger an ordinary philosopher, and make him suspect his fundamental hypothesis, and all his subsequent reasonings. But the author now quoted is not apt to be staggered by considerations of this kind. On the contrary, he is so intoxicated with his discovery, that, however sceptical in other points, he seems willing to admit this as one certain conclusion †.

If a man can reconcile himself to Atheism, which is the greatest of all absurdities, I fear I shall hardly put him out of conceit with his doctrine, when I show him, that other less enor-

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 291.

† Speaking of it in another place, he says, “ A conclusion which is somewhat extraordinary, but which seems founded on sufficient evidence. Nor will its evidence be weakened by any general diffidence of the understanding, or sceptical suspicion, concerning every conclusion which is new and extraordinary. No conclusions can be more agreeable to scepticism than such as make discoveries concerning the weakness and narrow limits of human reason and capacity.”

Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 87. edit. 1767.

I know not what discoveries this conclusion may lead others to make concerning our author's reason and capacity ; but I have some ground to think, that in him it has not wrought any extraordinary self-abasement ; otherwise he would not have asserted, with so much confidence, what he acknowledges to be a *most violent paradox*, and what is indeed contrary to the experience and conviction of every person of common sense. See *Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 291. 299.*

mous absurdities are implied in it. We may make the trial however. Gentlemen are sometimes pleased to entertain unaccountable prejudices against their Maker; who yet, in other matters, where neither fashion nor hypothesis interfere, condescend to acknowledge, that the good old distinction between truth and falsehood is not altogether without foundation.

On the supposition that we have no idea of power or energy, and that the preceding theory of causation is just, our author gives the following definition of a cause; which seems to be fairly deduced from his theory, and which he says is the best that he can give. "A cause is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other*." There are now in my view two contiguous houses, one of which was built last summer, and the other two years ago. By seeing them constantly together for several months, I find, that the idea of the one determines my mind to form the idea of the other, and the

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. I. p. 298. This is not the only definition of a cause which Mr HUME has given. But his other definitions are all, in my opinion, inadequate; being all founded on the same absurd theory. My business, however, at present is, not to criticise Mr HUME's definitions, but to confute (if I can) his licentious doctrines. These will be allowed to be absurd, if they be found to lead to absurd consequences. So Mr HUME himself, in another place, very justly determines: "When any opinion leads into absurdities, it is certainly false." *Essay on Liberty and Necessity, part 2.*—The definition of a cause, here quoted, is a consequence drawn by Mr HUME himself (and in my opinion fairly drawn) from his theory of power and causation. By proving that consequence to be absurd, I prove (according to Mr HUME's own rules of logic) the absurdity of the opinion that leads to it. This is all that I mean by quoting it; and this I presume is enough. A doctrine is sufficiently confuted, if it be shown to lead into one absurdity.

impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other. So that, according to our author's definition, the one house is the cause, and the other the effect! — Again, day and night have always been contiguous and successive; the imagination naturally runs from the idea or impression of the one to the idea of the other: consequently, according to the same profound theory and definition, either day is the cause of night, or night the cause of day, just as we consider the one or the other to have been originally prior in time; that is, in other words, light is either the cause or the effect of darkness; and its being the one or the other depends entirely on my imagination! Let those admire this discovery who understand it.

Causation * implies more than priority and contiguity of the cause to the effect. This relation cannot be conceived at all, without a supposition of power or energy in the cause †. Let the reader recollect two things that stand related as cause and effect; let him contemplate them with a view to this relation; then let him conceive the cause divested of all power; and he must at the same instant conceive, that it is a cause no longer: for a cause divested of power, is divested of that by which it is a cause. If a man, after examining his notion of causation in this manner, is conscious that he has an idea of power, then I say he has that idea. If all men, in all ages, have used the word *power*, or something synonymous to it, and if all men know what they mean when they speak of power, I maintain, that all men have a notion, conception, or idea of power, in whatever way they came by it: and I also maintain, that no true philosopher ever

* Causation denotes the relation of cause and effect.

† Non sic causa intelligi debet, ut quod cuique antecedit id ei causa sit, sed quod cuique efficienter antecedit. Cicero *De Fato*, cap. 15.

denied the existence or reality of any thing, merely because he could not give an account of its origin, or because the opinion commonly received concerning its origin did not happen to quadrate with his system.

When, therefore, our author says, that the efficacy or energy of causes is not placed in the causes themselves, he says neither less nor more than this, that what is essential to a cause is not in a cause; or, in other words, — that a cause is not a cause. — Are there any persons who, upon the authority of this theorist, have rashly adopted Atheistical principles? I believe there are such. Ye dupes of unmeaning words and incomprehensible arguments, behold on what a champion ye have placed your confidence! All the comfort I can give you is, that if it be possible for the same thing at the same time to be and not to be, you may possibly be in the right.

It follows from what has been said, that we cannot admit this theory of power and causation, without admitting, at the same time, the grossest and most impious absurdities. Is this a sufficient confutation of it? I think it is. If any person think otherwise, I take a shorter method, and utterly deny all the premises from which this strange conclusion is supposed to result. I deny the doctrine of impressions and ideas, as the author has explained it; nay, I have already affirmed, and proved, it to be not only false, but unintelligible. And I maintain, that though it could be shown, that all simple ideas are derived from impressions, or intimations of sense, it is true, notwithstanding, that all men have an idea of power. They get it by experience, that is, by intimations of sense, both external and internal. Their mind acting upon their body gives them this notion or idea; their body acting on other bodies, and acted on by other bodies, gives them the same idea; which is also suggested by all the effects and changes they see produced in the universe. So tho-

roughly are we acquainted with it, that we can, in cases innumerable, determine, with the utmost accuracy and certainty, the degree of power necessary to produce a given effect.

I repeat, therefore, that some things are in our power, and others are not; and that we perfectly understand our own meaning when we say so. — That the reader may not lose any chain in our reasoning, he will please to look back to the second and third paragraphs of this section.

3. By attending to my own internal feelings, and to the evidence given by other men of theirs, I am sensible, that I deserve reward or punishment for those actions only which are in my own power. I am no more accountable for the evil which I can neither prevent nor remedy, than for the destruction of Troy, or the plagues of Egypt; and for the good which happens by my means, but against my will, I no more deserve reward or praise, than if I were a piece of inanimate matter.

This is the doctrine of common sense; and this doctrine has in all ages been supported by some of the most powerful principles of our nature; by principles which, in the common affairs of life, no man dares suppose to be equivocal or fallacious. A man may as well tell me that I am blind, or deaf, or that I feel no heat when I approach the fire, as that I have not a natural sentiment disposing me to blame intentional injury, and to praise intentional beneficence; and which makes me feel and be conscious, that the evil I am compelled to do is not criminal; and that the good I perform against my will is not meritorious. That other men are conscious of the same sentiment, I know with as much certainty as I can know any thing of what passes in the minds of other men; for I have daily and hourly opportunities of making observations in regard to this very point. The greatest part of conversation turns upon the morality of human actions; and I never yet heard any person seriously blamed or applauded, by a
reasonable

reasonable creature, for an action in the performance of which he was not considered as a free agent *. The most rigid Predestinarians suppose freedom of will to be in one way or other consistent with eternal and unconditional decrees: if they cannot explain in what way, — they call it a mystery; it surpasses their understanding; — but it must be so; for otherwise the morality of actions is altogether inconceivable †. Do the interests of science,

* Si omnia fato sunt, omnia sunt causa antecedente; et, si appetitus, illa etiam quæ appetitum sequuntur: ergo, etiam assensiones. At si causa appetitus non est sita in nobis, ne ipse quidem appetitus est in nostra potestate. Quod si ita est, ne illa quidem quæ appetitu efficiuntur sunt sita in nobis. Non sunt igitur, neque assensiones neque actiones, in nostra potestate: *ex quo efficitur, ut nec laudationes justæ sint, nec vituperationes, nec honores, nec supplicia.* Quod cum vitiosum sit, probabiliter concludi putant, non omnia fato fieri quæcunque fiant.

Cicero, De Fato, cap. 17.

† The reader, I hope, does not think me such a novice in reasoning, as to urge the judgement of the council of Trent in behalf of any doctrine, philosophical or religious. Yet every fact in logic and morality is worth our notice, if we would establish those sciences on their only firm foundation, the universal consent and practice of mankind. It deserves, therefore, to be remarked, that, at the Reformation, this consciousness of free will was acknowledged, both by the Lutherans, and by the church of Rome, to be a principle of common sense, which was to be ascertained, not by reasoning, but by experimental proof. So says a most judicious and elegant historian, whose words are remarkably apposite to the present subject, and to the manner in which we treat it. Speaking of some articles said to be maintained by the Lutherans, in opposition to free-will, the historian informs us, that, in the judgement of many of that celebrated council, the opinion implied in these articles, “*E empia, e biasfema contra Dio. — Ch’era una pazzia contra il senso comune, sperimentando ogni uomo la propria libertà, che non merita contestazione, ma, comme Aristotele dice, o castigo, o prova sperimentale. Che i medesimi discepoli di Lutero s’erano accorti della pazzia; e, moderando l’asfurdità, dissero poi, esservi libertà nell’uomo in quello, che tocca le azioni e-*

science, or of virtue, suffer by this representation of the matter? I think not.

But some philosophers, not satisfied with this view of it, are for bringing the sentiment of moral liberty to the test of reason. They want to prove by argument, either that I have, or that I have not, such a feeling: or, if I shall be found to have it, they want to know whether it be fallacious or not. In other words, they want to prove, or to disprove, what I know by instinct to be unquestionably certain: or they want to inquire, whether it be reasonable for me to act and think according to a principle, which, by the law of my nature, I cannot contradict, either in thought or in action. Would not the same spirit of inquiry lead a geometrician to attempt a proof or confutation of his axioms; a natural philosopher to doubt whether things be what his senses represent them; an ordinary man to argue concerning the propriety of perceiving colours by the eyes, and odours by the nostrils? Would not the same spirit of doubt and disputation, applied to more familiar instances, transform a philosopher into a madman, and a person of plain sense into an idiot?

But let us not be too rigid. If a philosopher must needs have his rattles and playthings, let him have them: only, for his own sake, and for the sake of the neighbours, I would advise, that edge-tools, and other dangerous instruments of amusement, be kept out of his reach. If a Cartesian will not, on any account, believe his own existence, except I grant him his *Cogito, ergo sum*, far be it from me to deprive the poor man of that con-

“ sterne politiche ed economiche, e quanto ad ogni giustitia civile; le quali è scioc-
 “ co chi non tensesse venir dal consiglio ed ellettione; restringendosi a negar la liberta
 “ quanto alla sola giustitia divina.”

Istoria del Concilio Trid. di P. Sarpi, lib. 2. p. 214. edit. 4.

folation.

folation. The reasoning indeed is bad, but the principle is good; and a good principle is so good a thing, that rather than oblige a man to renounce it, I would dispense with the strict observance of a logical precept. If a star-gazer cannot see the inhabitants of the moon with one perspective, let him tie a score of them together, with all my heart. If a virtuoso is inclined to look at the sun through a microscope, and at rotten cheese through a telescope, to apply ear-trumpets to his eyes, and equip his two ears with as many pairs of spectacles, he has my full permission; and much good may it do him. These amusements are idle, but they are innocent. The Cartesian, if the truth were known, would be found neither the better nor the worse for his enthymeme. The star-gazer has not achieved a single glimpse of his lunar friends, but sees more confusedly than before: however, he may console himself with this reflection, that one may pass through life with the character of a very honest and tolerably happy man, though he should never have it in his power to extend the sphere of his acquaintance beyond this sublunary globe. The virtuoso takes a wrong, and indeed a preposterous method, for improving his sight and hearing; but if he is careful to confine these frolics to his private apartment, and never boast in public of his auditory, or optical apparatus, he may live comfortably and respectably enough, though he should never see the spots in the sun, nor the bristles on a mite's back.

I would, however, earnestly exhort my friend the metaphysician, to believe himself a free agent upon the bare authority of his feelings, and not to imagine that Nature is such a bungler in her trade, as first to intend to impose upon him, and then inadvertently give him sagacity to see through the imposture. Indeed, if it were a matter of indifference, whether we believe our moral feelings or disbelieve them, I should not object to the use of a little unbelief now and then, by way of experiment or cordial, provided

provided it were a thing that a reasonable man could take any pleasure in. But I am convinced, that habitual dram-drinking is not more pernicious to our animal nature, than habitual scepticism to our rational. And when once this scepticism comes to affect our moral sentiments, or active principles, all is over with us : we are in the condition of a man intoxicated ; fit only for raving, dozing, and doing mischief.

But, alas ! the metaphysician is too headstrong to follow my advice. It would be a fine thing, indeed, says he, if gentlemen were to yield to the dictates of nature. Is there a single dictate of nature to which people of fashion now-a-days pay any regard ? No, no ; the world is grown wiser. As to this sentiment of moral liberty, I very much question its title to be ranked with the dictates of nature. It seems to be a piece of vile sophistification, a paltry prejudice, hatched by the nurse, and fostered by the priest. I am determined to take it roundly to task, and examine its pretensions with the eye of a philosopher and free-thinker. — Very well, Sir, you may take your own way ; it requires no skill in magic to be able to foretell the consequence. A traveller no sooner quits the right road, on supposition of its being wrong, than he gets into one that is really so. If you set out in your inquiry, with suspecting the principles of common sense to be erroneous, you have little chance of falling in with any other principles that are not erroneous.

The result of the metaphysical inquiry is as follows. “ Every human action must proceed from some motive as its cause. “ The motive or cause must be sufficient to produce the action or effect ; otherwise it is no motive : and, if sufficient to produce it, must necessarily produce it ; for every effect proceeds necessarily from its cause, as heat necessarily proceeds from fire. Now, “ the immediate causes of action are volitions, or energies of the will : these arise necessarily from passions or appetites ; which “ proceed

“ proceed necessarily from judgements or opinions; which are
 “ the necessary effect of external things, or of ideas, operating,
 “ according to the necessary laws of nature, upon our senses, in-
 “ tellect, or fancy: and these ideas, or things, present them-
 “ selves to our powers of perception, as necessarily as light pre-
 “ sents itself when we turn our open eyes to the sun. In a
 “ word, every human action is the effect of a series of causes,
 “ each of which does necessarily produce its own proper effect:
 “ so that if the first operate, all the rest must follow. It is con-
 “ fessed, that an action may proceed immediately from volition,
 “ and may therefore properly be called voluntary: but the
 “ *primum mobile* or first cause, even of a voluntary action, is
 “ something as independent on our will, as the production of
 “ the great-grandfather is independent on the grandson. Be-
 “ tween physical and moral necessity there is no difference; the
 “ phenomena of the moral world being no less necessary than
 “ those of the material. And, to conclude, if we are conscious
 “ of a feeling or sentiment of moral liberty, it must be a de-
 “ ceitful one; for no past action of our lives could have been
 “ prevented, and no future action can be contingent. Therefore
 “ man is not a free, but a necessary agent.”

This is just such a conclusion as I should have expected; for
 thus it always has been, and will be, when the dictates of com-
 mon sense are questioned and disputed. The existence of body,
 the existence of the soul, the reality of our idea of power, the
 difference between moral and intellectual virtue, the certainty of
 the inference from an effect to the cause, and many other such
 truths, dictates of common sense, have been called in question, and
 argued upon. And what is the result? Why truly it has been
 found, that there is no body, that there is no soul, that we have no
 idea of power, that moral and intellectual virtue are not different,
 and that a cause is not necessary to the production of that which

bath

hath a beginning. And now the liberty of human actions is questioned and debated, what could we expect, but that it would share the same fate ! But passing this for the present *, which, however, seems to merit attention, we shall here only inquire, whether this doctrine of necessity be not in some important points extremely similar to that of the non-existence of matter.

1. Of this doctrine we observe, in the first place, that, if any regard is to be had to the meaning of words, and if human actions may reasonably be taken for the signs of human sentiments, all mankind have, in all ages, been of a different opinion. The number of professed philosophers who have maintained that all things happen through unavoidable necessity, is but small ; nor are we to imagine that all the ancient Fatalists were of this number. The Stoics were Fatalists by profession ; but they still endeavoured, as well as they could, to reconcile fate with moral freedom † ; and the first sentence of the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus contains a declaration, that “ opinion, pursuit, desire, and aversion, and, in one word, whatever are our own actions, are “ in our own power.” We see in Cicero’s fragment *De Fato*, and in the beginning of the sixth book of Aulus Gellius, by what sub-

* Some readers may possibly, on this occasion, call to mind a saying of an old Greek author, who, though now obsolete, was in his day, and for several ages after, accounted a man of considerable penetration. I neither mention his name, nor translate his words, for fear of offending (pardon a fond author’s vanity) my polite readers. *ΑΝΘ’ ὈΝ ΤΗΝ ΑΓΑΠΗΝ ΤΗΣ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑΣ ΟΥΚ ΕΔΕΞΑΝΤΟ — ΔΙΑ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΠΕΜΨΕΙ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ Ὁ ΘΕΟΣ ΕΞΕΟΣ ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑΝ ΠΛΑΝΗΣ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΥΣ ΤΩ ΨΕΥΔΕΙ.*

† “ By Fate the Stoics seem to have understood a series of events appointed by “ the immutable counsels of God ; or, that law of his providence by which he “ governs the world. It is evident by their writings, that they meant it in no “ sense which interferes with the liberty of human actions.” See Mrs Carter’s admirable Introduction to her very elegant translation of the works of Epictetus, § 17.

terfuges and quibbling distinctions the Stoic Chrysippus reconciled the seemingly opposite principles of fate and free-will. I am not surpris'd, that what he says on this subject is unsatisfactory : for many Christians have puzzled themselves to no purpose in the same argument. But though the manner in which the divine prescience is exerted be mysterious and inexplicable, it does not follow, that the freedom of our will is equally so. Of this we may be, and we are, competent judges. It is sufficiently intimated to every man by his own experience ; and every man is satisfied with this intimation, and by his conduct declares, that he trusts to it as certain and authentic. Nothing can be a clearer proof, that the sentiment of moral liberty is one of the most powerful in human nature, than its having been so long able to maintain its ground, and often in opposition to other popular opinions apparently repugnant. The notion of fate has prevailed much in the world, and yet could never subvert this sentiment even in the vulgar.—If it be asked, where the vulgar opinions of ancient times are to be found ? I answer, that in the writings of the most popular poets we have a chance to find them more genuine than in systems of philosophy.—To advance paradoxes, and consequently to disguise facts, is often the most effectual recommendation of a philosopher : but a poet must conform himself to the general principles and manners of mankind ; otherwise he can never become a general favourite.

Now the system of Homer and Virgil concerning fate and free-will, is perfectly explicit. “ Homer assigns three causes,” I quote the words of Pope, “ of all the good and evil that happens “ in this world, which he takes a particular care to distinguish. “ First, the will of God, superior to all. Secondly, destiny or “ fate, meaning the laws and order of nature, affecting the con- “ stitutions of men, and disposing them to good or evil, pro- “ sperity or misfortune ; which the Supreme Being, if it be his
D d “ pleasure,

“ pleasure, may over-rule, (as Jupiter is inclined to do in the
 “ case of Sarpedon *); but which he generally suffers to take ef-
 “ fect. Thirdly, our own free-will, which either by prudence
 “ overcomes those natural influences and passions, or by folly
 “ suffers us to fall under them †.” In regard to some of the de-
 crees of fate, Homer informs us, that they were conditional, or
 such as could not take effect, except certain actions were per-
 formed by men. Thus Achilles had it in his power to continue
 at Troy, or to return home before the end of the war. If he chose
 to stay, his life would be short and glorious; if to return, he
 was to enjoy peace and leisure to a good old age ‡. He prefers

* Iliad, xvi. 433.

† Iliad, i. 5. xix. 90. Odys. i. 7. 39. See Pope's notes on these passages.

‡ Μητιρ γαρ τί με φησὶ δια Θέτις ἀργυρέτιζα
 Διχθαδίας κῆρας φερέμεν θανάτῳ τέλοσδε — &c. Iliad ix. 415.

My fates long since by Thetis were disclos'd,
 And each alternate, life or fame, propos'd.
 Here if I stay before the Trojan town,
 Short is my date, but deathless my renown;
 If I return, I quit immortal praise
 For years on years, and long extended days. *Pope.*

On voit (says M. Dacier, in her note on this passage) partout dans Homere des marques qu'il avoit connu cette double destinée des hommes, si nécessaire pour ac-
 corder le libre arbitre avec la predestination. En voicy un témoignage bien for-
 mel et bien exprès. Il y a deux chemins pour tous les hommes : s'ils prennent
 celui-la, il leur arrivera telle chose ; s'ils prennent celui-cy, leur sort sera différent.

Sophocles, in like manner, represents the decree of Destiny concerning Ajax,
 as conditional. The anger of Minerva against that hero was to last only one day :
 if his friends kept him within doors during that space, all would be well ; if they
 suffered him to go abroad unattended, his death was inevitable. *Ajax Masfig.* 772.
 794. 818. Εἰ μὴ ἴδεν μοι (says the scholiast), σωθήσεται· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἀπώλεται. διὰ
 τοῦτο δὲ τὸ εἶπεν τῷ μερίδιον ἐγκαλεῖ ὡς καὶ Ὅμηρος, Διχθαδίας κῆρας φερέμεν θανάτῳ τε-
 λοςδε.
Sophocles, apud H. Steph. 1588. p. 48.

the

the former, though he well knew what was to follow: and I know not whether there be any other circumstance in the character of this hero, except his love to his friend and to his father, which so powerfully recommends him to our regard. This gloomy resolution invests him with a mournful dignity, the effects of which the reader often feels at his heart, in a sentiment made up of admiration, pity, and horror. But this by the by. — According to Virgil, the completion, even of the absolute decrees of fate, may be retarded by the agency of beings inferior to Jupiter *: a certain term is fixed to every man beyond which his life cannot last; but before this period arrives, he may die, by accidental misfortune, or deserved punishment †: to virtue and vice necessity reaches not at all ‡.

In

* Non dabitur regnis (esto) prohibere Latinis,
Atque immota manet fatis Lavinia conjux;
At trahere, atque moras tantis licet addere rebus.

Æneid. vii. 313.

† Nam quia nec fato, merita nec morte peribat,
Sed misera ante diem, subitoque accensa furore,
Nondum illi flavum Proserpina vertice crinem
Abstulerat. —————

Æneid. iv. 696.

‡ Stat sua cuique dies; breve et irreparabile tempus
Omnibus est vitæ; sed famam extendere factis,
Hoc virtutis opus. —————

Æneid. x. 467.

I agree with Servius (not. in *Æneid. x.*) that the philosophical maxims to be found in poets are not always consistent. The reason is plain: Poets imitate the sentiments of people of different characters, placed in different circumstances, and actuated by different passions; and no body expects, that the language or thoughts suitable to a certain character, placed in certain circumstances, and actuated by certain passions, should be consistent with those of a different character whose circumstances and passions are different. But I cannot agree with that annotator,

In all the histories I have read of ancient or modern, savage or civilized nations, I find the conduct of mankind has ever been such as I should expect from creatures possessed of moral freedom, and conscious of it. Several-forms of false religion, and some erroneous commentaries on the true, have imposed tenets inconsistent with this freedom; but men have still acted, notwithstanding, as if they believed themselves to be free. Creeds, expressed in general terms, may easily be imposed on the ignorant, and the selfish; by the former they are misunderstood, by the latter disregarded: but to overpower a natural instinct is a difficult task; and a doctrine which is easily swallowed when proposed in general terms, may prove disgusting when applied to a particular case.

“The belief of a destiny,” says Mr Macaulay in his history of St Kilda *, “is one of the strongest articles of this people’s creed; and it will possibly be found upon examination, that the common people, in all ages, and in most countries, give into the same notion. At St Kilda, fate and providence are much the same thing. After having explained these terms, I asked some of the people there, Whether it was in their power to do

in supposing the passage quoted from the fourth book, inconsistent with what is quoted from the 10th; and that the former is according to the Epicurean, and the latter according to the Stoical, philosophy. In the latter passage, it is said, that a certain day or time is appointed by fate for the utmost limit of every man’s life: in the former, the very same thing is implied; only it is said further, that Dido died before her time; and there is nothing in the 10th book that insinuates the impossibility of this. The sentiments contained in these three quotations are conformable to Homer’s theology, and to one another; and it deserves our notice, that the first comes from the mouth of Juno, the second from the poet or his muse, and the third from Jupiter himself; whence I infer, that they were agreeable to the poet’s creed, or at least to the popular creed of his age.

* p. 243.

“good

“ good and evil? The answer made by those who were unacquainted with the systematical doctrines of divinity was, That the question was a very childish one; as every man alive must be conscious, that he himself is a free agent.” — If it be true, as I believe it is, that the common people in most countries are inclined to acknowledge a destiny or fate; and if it be also true, that they are conscious of their own free agency notwithstanding; this alone would convince me, though I had never consulted my own experience, that the sentiment of moral liberty is one of the strongest in human nature. For how many of their vices might they not excuse, if they could persuade themselves, or others, that these proceed from causes as independent on their will, as those from which storms, earthquakes, and eclipses, arise, and the temperature of soils and seasons, and the sound and unsound constitutions of the human body! Such a persuasion, however, we find not that they have at any time entertained or attempted; from which I think there is good reason to conclude, that it is not in their power.

There is no principle in man, religion excepted, that has produced so great revolutions, and makes such a figure in the history of the world; as the love of political liberty: of which indeed all men do not form the same notion; some placing it in the power of doing what they please, others in the power of doing what is lawful; some in being governed by laws of their own making, and others in being governed by equitable laws, and tried by equitable judges: — but of which it is universally agreed, that it leaves in our power many of our most important actions. And yet, say some authors, all things happen through irresistible necessity, and there is not in the human mind any idea of any power. Strange! that so many, especially among the best, the bravest, and the wisest of men, should have been so passionately enamoured of an inconceivable nonentity, as to abandon,

bandon, for its sake, their ease, their health, their fortunes, and their lives ! At this rate we are wonderfully mistaken, when we speak of Don Quixote as a madman, and of Leonidas, Brutus, Wallace, Hampden, Paoli, as wise, and good, and great ! The case it seems is just the reverse : these heroes deserve no other name than that of raving bedlamites ; and the illustrious knight of La Mancha, to whom the object of his valour was at least a *conceivable phantom*, was a person of excellent understanding, and most perfect knowledge of the world !

Do not all mankind distinguish between mere harm and injury ? Is there one rational being unacquainted with this distinction ? If a man were to act as if he did not comprehend it, would not the world pronounce him a fool ? And yet this distinction is incomprehensible, except we suppose some beings to act necessarily, and others from free choice. A man gives me a blow, and instantly I feel resentment : but a bystander informs me, that the man is afflicted with the epilepsy, which deprives him of the power of managing his limbs ; that the blow was not only without design, but contrary to his intention ; and that he could not have prevented it. My resentment is gone, tho' I still feel pain from the blow. Can there be any mistake in this experience ? Can I think that I feel resentment, when in reality I do not feel it ? that I feel no resentment, when I am conscious of the contrary ? And if I feel resentment in the one case, and not in the other, it is certain there seems to me to be some dissimilitude between them. But it is only in respect of the intention of him who gave the blow that there can be any dissimilitude : for all that I learn from the information by which my resentment was extinguished is, that what I supposed to proceed from an evil intention, did really proceed from no evil intention, but from the necessary effect of a material cause, in which the will had no concern. What shall we say then ? that the distinction
between

between injury and mere harm, acknowledged by all mankind, does imply, that all mankind suppose the actions of moral beings to be free? or shall we say, that resentment, though it arises uniformly in all men on certain occasions, does yet proceed from no cause; the actions which do give rise to it being in every respect the same with those which do not give rise to it?

Further, all men expect, with full assurance, that fire will burn to-morrow; but all men do not with full assurance expect, that a thief will steal to-morrow, or a miser refuse an alms to a beggar, or a debauchee commit an act of intemperance, even tho' opportunities offer. If I had found, on blowing up my fire this morning, that the flame was cold, and converted water into ice; I should have been much more astonished, than if I had detected a man reputed honest in the commission of an act of theft. The former I would call a prodigy, a contradiction to the known laws of Nature: of the latter I should say, that I am sorry for it, and could never have expected it; but I should not suppose any prodigy in the case. All general rules, that regard the influence of human characters on human actions, admit of exceptions; but the general laws of matter admit of none. Ice was cold, and fire hot, ever since the creation; hot ice, and cold fire, are, according to the present constitution of the world, impossible: but that a man should steal to-day, who never stole before, is no impossibility at all. The coldness of the flame I should doubtless think owing to some cause, and the dishonesty of the man to some strange revolution in his sentiments and principles; but I never could bring myself to think the man as passive, in regard to this revolution, as the fire must be supposed to be, in regard to the cause by which its nature is changed. The man has done what he ought not to have done, what he might have prevented, and what he deserves punishment for not preventing; — this is the language of all rational beings: — but the fire is wholly

wholly unconscious and inert. Who will say that there is the same necessity in both cases !

Fatalists are fond of inferring moral necessity from physical, in the way of analogy. But some of their arguments on this topic are most ridiculously absurd. "There is," says Voltaire's *Ignorant Philosopher*, "nothing without a cause. An effect without a cause, are words without meaning. Every time I have a will, this can only be in consequence of my judgement good or bad; this judgement is necessary; therefore so is my will." — All this hath been said by others: but what follows is, I believe, peculiar to this *Ignorant Philosopher*. "In effect," continues he, "it would be very singular, that all nature, all the planets, should obey eternal laws, and that there should be a little animal, five feet high, who, in contempt of these laws, could act as he pleased, solely according to his caprice." Singular! aye, singular indeed. So very singular, that yours, Sir, if I mistake not, is the first human brain that ever conceived such a notion. If man be free, no body ever dreamed that he made himself so, in contempt of the laws of Nature; it is in consequence of a law of Nature that he is a free agent. But passing this, let us attend to the reasoning. The planets are not free agents; — therefore it would be very singular, that man should be one. Not à whit more singular, than that this same animal of five feet should perceive, and think, and read, and write, and speak; attributes which no astronomer has ever supposed to belong to the planets, notwithstanding their brilliant appearance, and stupendous magnitude *. We do too much honour to such reasoning,

* Mr Voltaire has often laboured, with more zeal than success, to prove, amongst other strange doctrines, that Shakespeare and Milton were no great poets. What if I should here help him to an argument as decisive on that point as any

reasoning, when we reply to it in the bold, but sublime words of the poet :

Know'st thou th' importance of a soul immortal ?
 Behold this midnight glory, worlds on worlds !
 Amazing pomp ! redouble this amaze ;
 Ten thousand add ; and twice ten thousand more ;
 Then weigh the whole ; ONE SOUL outweighs them all,
 And calls th' astonishing magnificence
 Of unintelligent creation poor.

Complaint, Night 7.

Or in the simpler language of another great genius : “ If we
 “ consider the dignity of an intelligent being, and put that in
 “ the scale against brute and inanimate matter, we may affirm,
 “ without overvaluing human nature, that the soul of one vir-
 “ tuous and religious man is of greater worth and excellency,
 “ than the sun and his planets, and all the stars in the world *.”

Mr HUME, in an essay on this subject, maintains, that the ap-
 pearances in the moral and material world are equally uniform, and
 equally necessary ; nay, and acknowledged to be so, both by philo-

he has yet invented, and framed exactly according to the rules of his own logic, as
 exemplified in the passage now before us ? “ The English say, that Shakespeare
 “ and Milton were great poets. Now it is well known, that neither Plinlimmon
 “ in Wales, nor Mealfourvouny in Scotland, neither Lebanon in Syria, nor Atlas
 “ in Mauritania, ever wrote one good verse in their days ; and yet each of these
 “ mountains exceeds in corporeal magnitude ten thousand Miltons, and as many
 “ Shakespeares. But it would be very singular, that masses of so great distinction
 “ should never have been able to put pen to paper with any success, and yet that
 “ no fewer than two pieces of English flesh and blood, scarce six feet long, should,
 “ in contempt of Nature and all her laws, have penned poems that are intitled
 “ to general admiration ! ”

* Bentley's Sermons at Boyle's Lectures, Sermon VIII.

fophers and by the vulgar. In proof of this, he confines himself to general topics, on which he declaims with some plausibility. Human nature has been nearly the same in all ages. True. For all men possess nearly the same faculties, which are employed about nearly the same objects, and destined to operate within the same narrow sphere. And if a man have power to chuse one of two things, to act or not to act, he has all the liberty we contend for. How is it possible, then, that human nature, taken in the gross, should not be found nearly the same in all ages! But if we come to particulars, we shall not perhaps find two human minds exactly alike. In two of the most congenial characters on earth, the same causes will not produce the same effects; nay, the same causes will not always produce the same effects even in the same character.

Some Fatalists deny, that our internal feelings are in favour of moral liberty. "It is true," says a worthy and ingenious, though fanciful, author, "that a man by internal feeling may
 "prove his own free-will, if by free-will be meant the power of
 "doing what a man wills or desires; or of resisting the motives
 "of sensuality, ambition, &c.; that is free-will in the popular
 "and practical sense. Every person may easily recollect instances, where he has done these several things. But these are entirely foreign to the present question. To prove that a man
 "has free-will in the sense opposite to mechanism, he ought to
 "feel, that he can do different things while the motives remain
 "precisely the same. And here I apprehend the internal feelings are entirely against free-will, where the motives are of a
 "sufficient magnitude to be evident: where they are not, nothing can be proved *." — Questions of this kind would be more easily solved, if authors would explain their doctrine by

* Hartley's Observations on man, vol. 1. p. 507.

examples. When this is not done, we cannot always be sure that we understand their meaning, especially in abstract subjects, where language, after all our care, is often equivocal and inadequate. If I rightly understand this author, and am allowed to examine his principles by my own experience, I must conclude, that he very much mistakes the fact. Let us take an example. A man is tempted to the commission of a crime: his motive to commit, is the love of money, or the gratification of appetite: his motive to abstain, is a regard to duty, or to reputation. Suppose him to weigh these motives in his mind, for an hour, a day, or a week; and suppose, that, during this space, no additional consideration occurs to him on either side: which, I think, may be supposed, because I know it is possible, and I believe often happens. While his mind is in this state, the motives remain precisely the same: and yet it is to me inconceivable, that he should at any time, during this space, feel himself under a necessity of committing, or under a necessity of not committing, the crime. He is indeed under a necessity either to do, or not to do: but every man, in such a case, feels that he has it in his power to chuse the one or the other. At least, in all my experience, I have never been conscious, nor had any reason to believe that other men were conscious, of any such necessity as the author here speaks of.

Again: Suppose two men, in the circumstances above mentioned, to yield to the temptation, and to be differently affected by a review of their conduct; the one repining at fortune, or fate, or providence, for having placed him in too tempting a situation, and solicited him by motives too powerful to be resisted; the other blaming and upbraiding himself for yielding to the bad motive, and resisting the good:—I would ask, which of these two kinds of remorse or regret is the most rational? The first, according to the doctrine of the Fatalists; the last, according to

the opinion of mankind. No divine, no moralist, no man of sense, ever supposes true penitence to begin, till the criminal become conscious, that he has done, or neglected, something which he ought not to have done or neglected: a sentiment which would be not only absurd, but impossible, if all criminals and guilty persons believed, from internal feeling, that what is done could not have been prevented. Whenever you can satisfy a man of this, he may continue to bewail himself, or repine at fortune; but his repentance is at an end. It is always a part, and too often the whole, of the language of remorse: "I wish the deed had never been done; wretch that I was, not to resist the temptation!" Does this imply, that the penitent supposes himself to have been under a necessity of committing the action, and that his conduct could not have been different from what it is? To me it seems to imply just the contrary. And am not I a competent judge of this matter? Have not I been in these circumstances? Has not this been often the language of my soul? And will any man say, that I do not know my own thoughts, or that he knows them better than I? — All men, indeed, have but too frequent experience of at least this part of repentance: then why multiply words, when by facts it is so easy to determine the controversy?

Other Fatalists acknowledge, that the free agency of man is universally felt and believed: That though man in truth is a necessary agent, having all his actions determined by fixed and immutable laws; yet, this being concealed from him, he acts with the conviction of being a free agent *. — Concealed from him †

* In the former editions of this Essay, a particular book was here specified and quoted. But I have lately heard, that in a second edition of that book, which, however, I have not yet seen, the author has made some alterations, by which he gets clear of the absurdity exposed in this passage.

Who conceals it? Does the author of nature conceal it, — and do these writers discover it! What deference is not due to the judgement of a metaphysician, whose sagacity is so irresistibly (I had almost said omnipotently) penetrating! But, Gentlemen, as ye are powerful, ye should have been merciful. It was not kind to rob poor mortals of this crumb of comfort which had been provided for them in their ignorance; nor generous to publish so openly the secrets of Heaven, and thus baffle the designs of Providence by a few strokes of your pen! — In truth, metaphysic is a perplexing affair to the passions, as well as to the judgement. Sometimes it is so absurd, that not to be merry is impossible; and sometimes so impious, that not to be angry were unpardonable: but often it partakes so much of both qualities, that one knows not with what temper of mind to consider it:

“ To laugh, were want of goodness, and of grace;

“ And to be grave, exceeds all power of face.”

But why insist so long on the universal acknowledgement of man's free agency? To me it is as evident, that all men believe themselves free, as that all men think. I cannot see the heart; I judge of the sentiments of others from their outward behaviour; from the highest to the lowest, as far as history and experience can carry me, I find the conduct of human beings similar in this respect to my own: and of my own free agency I have never yet been able to entertain the least doubt. “ Here then we have an instance of a doctrine advanced by some philosophers, in direct contradiction to the general belief of all men in all ages.” This is a repetition of the first remark formerly made on the non-existence of matter.

2. The second was to this purpose: “ The reasoning by which

“ this

“ this doctrine is supported, though long accounted unanswer-
 “ able, did never produce a serious and steady conviction ; com-
 “ mon sense still declared it to be false ; we were sorry to find
 “ the powers of human reason so limited as not to afford a logi-
 “ cal confutation of it ; we were convinced it merited confuta-
 “ tion, and flattered ourselves, that one time or other it would be
 “ confuted.”

I shall here take it for granted, that the scheme of necessity has not as yet been fully confuted ; and on this supposition (which the Fatalists can hardly fail to acknowledge a fair one) I would ask, whether the remark just now quoted be applicable to the reasonings urged in behalf of that scheme ? My experience tells me, it is. After giving the advocates for necessity a fair hearing, my belief is exactly the same as before. I am puzzled perhaps, but not convinced, no not in the least degree. In reading some late essays on this subject, I find many things allowed to pass without scruple, which I cannot admit : and when I have got to the end, and ask myself, whether I am a free or a necessary agent, nature recurs to me so irresistibly, that the investigation I have just finished seems (as Shakespeare says) “ like the fierce vex-
 “ ation of a dream,” which, while it lasted, had some resemblance of reality, but now, when it is gone, appears to have been altogether a delusion. This is prejudice, you say ; be it so. Before the confutation of BERKELEY’S system, would it have been called prejudice not to be convinced by his arguments ? I know not but it might ; but I am sure, that of such prejudice no honest man, nor lover of truth, needs be ashamed. I confess, that when I enter upon the controversy in question, I am not wholly indifferent ; I am a little biased in favour of common sense, and I cannot help it : yet if the reasoning were conclusive, I am confident it would breed in my mind some suspicion, that my sentiment of moral liberty is ambiguous. As I experience nothing
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of this kind, my conviction remaining the same as before, what must I infer? Surely I must infer, and I sin against my own understanding if I do not infer, that though the reasoning be subtle, the doctrine is absurd.

But what if a man be really convinced by that reasoning, that he is a necessary agent? — Then I expect he will think and act according to his conviction. If he continue to act and think as he did before, and as I and the rest of the world do now, he must pardon me if I should suspect his conviction to be insincere. For let it be observed, that the Fatalists are not satisfied with calling their doctrine probable; they affirm, that it is certain, and rests on evidence not inferior to demonstration. If, therefore, it convince at all, it must convince thoroughly. Between rejecting it as utterly false, and receiving it as undeniably true, there is no medium to a considerate person. And let it be observed further, that the changes which the real belief of fatality must produce in the conduct and sentiments of men, are not slight and imperceptible; but, as will appear afterwards, important and striking. If you say, that the instincts of your nature, the customs of the world, and the force of human laws, oblige you to act like free agents, you acknowledge fatality to be contrary to common sense; which is the point I want to prove.

Clay is not more obsequious to the potter, than words to the skilful disputant. They may be made to assume almost any form, to enforce almost any doctrine. So true it is, that much may be said on either side of most questions, that we have known dealers in controversy, who were always of the same mind with the author whom they read last. We have seen theories of morality deduced from pride, from sympathy, from self-love, from benevolence; and all so plausible, as would surprise one who is unacquainted with the ambiguities of language. Of these the ad-

vocates for simple truth are less careful to avail themselves, than their paradoxical antagonists. The arguments of the former, being more obvious, stand less in need of illustration; those of the latter require all the embellishments of eloquence and refinement to recommend them. Robbers seldom go abroad without arms; they examine every corner and countenance with a penetrating eye, which habitual distrust and circumspection have rendered intensely sagacious: the honest man walks carelessly about his business, intending no harm, and suspecting none. It cannot be denied, that philosophers do often, in the use of words, impose on themselves as well as on others; an ambiguous word slipping in by accident will often perplex a whole subject, to the equal surprise of both parties; and perhaps, in a long course of years, the cause of this perplexity shall not be discovered. This was never more remarkably the case, than in the controversy about the existence of matter; and this no doubt is one great hindrance to the utter confutation of the doctrine of necessity. Fatalists, indeed, make a stir, and seem much in earnest, about settling the signification of words: but "words beget words," as Bacon well observeth; and it cannot be expected, that they who are interested in supporting a system will be scrupulously impartial in their definitions.

With a few of these a theorist commonly begins his system. This has the appearance of fairness and perspicuity. We hold it for a maxim, that a man may use words in any sense he pleases, provided he explain the sense in which he uses them; and we think it captious to find fault with words. We therefore are easily prevailed on to admit his definitions, which are generally plausible, and not apparently repugnant to the analogy of language. But the understanding of the author when he writes, and that of the student when he reads them, are in very different circumstances. The former knows his system already, and

adapts his definitions to it: the latter is ignorant of the system, and therefore can have no notion of the tendency of the definitions. Besides, every system is in some degree obscure to one who is but beginning to study it; and this obscurity serves to disguise whatever in the preliminary illustrations is forced or inexplicit. Thus the mind of the most candid and most attentive reader is prepared for the reception of error, long before he has any suspicion of the author's real design. And then, the more he is accustomed to use words in a certain signification, the more he is disposed to think it natural; so that, the further he advances in the system, he is still more and more reconciled to it. Need we wonder then at the variety of moral systems? need we wonder to see a man's judgement so easily, and often so egregiously, misled, by abstract reasoning? need we wonder at the success of any theorist, who has a tolerable command of language, and a moderate share of cunning, provided his system be adapted to the manners and principles of his age? Neither need we wonder to see the grossest and most detestable absurdities recommended by singular plausibility of argument, and such as may for a time impose even on the intelligent and sagacious; till at last, when the author's design becomes manifest, common sense begins to operate, and men have recourse to their instinctive and intuitive sentiments, as the most effectual security against the assaults of the logician.

Further, previous to all influence from habit and education, the intellectual abilities of different men are very different in respect of reasoning, as well as of common sense. Some men, sagacious enough in perceiving truth, are but ill qualified to reason about it; while others, not superior in common sense, or intuitive sagacity, are much more dextrous in devising and confuting arguments. If you propose a sophism to the latter, you are at once contradicted and confuted: the former, though they

cannot confute you, are perhaps equally sensible of your false doctrine, and unfair reasoning; they know, that what you say is not true, though they cannot tell in what respect it is false. Perhaps all that is wanting to enable them to confute as well as contradict, is only a little practice in speaking and wrangling: but surely this affects not the truth or falsehood of propositions. What is false is as really so to the person who perceives its falsity, without being able to prove it, as to him who both perceives and proves; and it is equally false, before I learn logic, and after. — Is it not therefore highly unreasonable to expect conviction from every antagonist who cannot confute you, and to ascribe to prejudice what is owing to the irresistible impulse of unerring nature?

I have conversed with many people of sense on the subject of this controversy concerning liberty and necessity. To the greater part, the arguments of Clarke and others, in vindication of liberty, seemed quite satisfying; others owned themselves puzzled with the subtleties of those who took the opposite side of the question; some reposed with full assurance on that consciousness of liberty which every man feels in his own breast; in a word, as far as my experience goes, I have found the greater part of mankind, enemies to fatality in their hearts; willing to consider the arguments for it as rather specious than solid; and disposed to receive, with joy and thankfulness, a thorough vindication of human liberty, and a logical confutation of the opposite doctrine.

3. It has been said, That philosophers are answerable, not for the consequences, but only for the truth, of their tenets; and that, if a doctrine be true, its being attended with disagreeable consequences will not render it false. We readily acquiesce in this remark; but we imagine it cannot be meant of any truth but what is certain and incontrovertible. No genuine truth did ever
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of itself produce effects inconsistent with real utility *. But many principles pass for truth, which are far from deserving that honourable appellation. Some give it to all doctrines which have been defended with subtlety, and which, whether seriously believed or not, have never been logically confuted. But to affirm, that all such doctrines are certainly true, would argue great ignorance of human language, and human nature. It is therefore absurd to say, that the bad consequences of admitting such doctrines ought not to be urged as arguments against them.—Now, there are many persons in the world, of most respectable understanding, who would be extremely averse to acknowledge, that the doctrine of necessity has ever been demonstrated beyond all doubt. I may therefore be permitted to consider it as a controvertible tenet, and to expose the absurdities and dangerous consequences with which the general belief of it may be attended.

Mr HUME endeavours to raise a prejudice against this method of refutation. He probably foresaw, that the tendency of his principles would be urged as an argument against them; and being somewhat apprehensive of the consequences, as well he might, he insinuates, that all such reasoning is no better than personal invective. “There is no method of reasoning,” says he, “more common, and yet none more blameable, than in philosophical debates to endeavour the refutation of any hypothesis, by a pretence of its dangerous consequences to religion and morality. When any opinion leads into absurdities, it is certainly false; but it is not certain that an opinion is false, because it is of dangerous consequence. Such topics therefore ought entirely to be forborn; as serving nothing to the discovery of truth, but only to make the person of an anta-

* Ζητῶ τὴν ἀληθεῖαν ὑφ’ ἧς ὕδεις πώποτε ἐβλάβη.

Marc. Antonin.

“ gonist odious *.” If your philosophy be such, that its consequences cannot be unfolded without rendering your person odious, pray, Sir, who is to blame? you, who contrive and publish it; or I, who criticise it? There is a kind of philosophy so salutary in its effects, as to endear the person of the author to every good man: why is not yours of this kind? If it is not, as you yourself seem to apprehend, do you think, that I ought to applaud your principles, or suffer them to pass unexamined, even though I am certain of their pernicious tendency? or that, out of respect to your person, I ought not to put others on their guard against them? Surely you cannot be so blinded by self-admiration, as to think it the duty of any man to sacrifice the interest of mankind to your interest, or rather to your reputation as a metaphysical writer. If you do think so, I must take the liberty to differ from your judgement in this, as in many other matters.

Nor can I agree to what our author says of this method of reasoning, that it tends nothing to the discovery of truth. Does not every thing tend to the discovery of truth, that disposes men to think for themselves, and to consider opinions with attention, before they adopt them? And have not many well-meaning persons rashly adopted a plausible opinion on the supposition of its being harmless, who, if they had been aware of its bad tendency, would have proceeded with more caution, and made a better use of their understanding?

This is truly a notable expedient for determining controversy in favour of licentious theories. An author publishes a book, in which are many doctrines fatal to human happiness, and subversive of human society. If, from a regard to truth, and to mankind, we endea-

* Essay on Liberty and Necessity, part 2.

vour to expose them in their proper colours, and, by displaying their dangerous and absurd consequences, to deter men from rashly adopting them without examination ; our adversary immediately exclaims, " This is not fair reasoning ; this is personal invective." Were the sentiments of the public to be regulated by this exclamation, licentious writers might do what mischief they pleased, and no man durst appear in opposition, without being hooted at for his want of breeding. — It is happy for us all, that the law is not to be brow-beaten by insinuations of this kind ; otherwise we should hear some folks exclaim against it every day, as one of the most ungentle things in the world. And truly they would have reason : for it cannot be denied, that an indictment at the Old Bailey has much the air of a personal invective ; and banishment, or burning in the hand, amounts nearly to a personal assault ; nay, both have often this express end, to make the person of the criminal odious : and yet, in his judgement, perhaps, there was no great harm in picking a pocket of a handkerchief, value thirteen pence, provided it was done with a good grace. Let not the majesty of science be offended by this allusion ; I mean not to argue from it, for it is not quite similar to the case in hand. That those men act the part of good citizens, who endeavour to overturn the plainest principles of human knowledge, and to subvert the foundations of all religion, I am far from thinking ; but I should be extremely sorry to see any other weapons employed against them than those of reason and ridicule chastised by decency and truth. Other weapons this cause requires not ; nay, in this cause, all other weapons would do more harm than good. And let it still be remembered, that the object of our strictures is not men, but books ; and that these incur our censure, not because they bear certain names, but because they contain certain principles.

These remarks relate rather to the doctrines of scepticism in general,

general, than to this of necessity in particular; which I am not ignorant that many men, respectable both for their talents and principles, have asserted. I presume, however, they would have been more cautious, if they had attended to the consequences that may be drawn from it. — To which I now return.

Some of the Fatalists are willing to reconcile their system with our natural notions of moral good and evil; but all they have been able to do is, to remove the difficulty a step or two further off. But others of that party are not solicitous to render these points consistent. If they can only establish necessity, they leave natural religion to shift for itself. Mr HUME allows, that, on the principles of those who deny liberty and contingency, it is impossible for natural reason to vindicate the divine character: — for that, on the supposition that God is the ultimate cause of every one of our volitions and actions, either none of these can be criminal; or, if they be criminal, (which Mr HUME seems to admit), “we must retract the attribute of perfection which we ascribe to the Deity, and acknowledge him to be the ultimate author of guilt and moral turpitude in all his creatures.” — Were authors possessed of that modesty, which Mr HUME recommends in the conclusion of this essay, I should think they would shudder at the thought of inculcating a doctrine, which *they know* to be irreconcilable with the very first principles of religion; and of which, therefore, they must know that it tends to subvert the only durable foundation of human society and human happiness.

The advocates for liberty, on the other hand, have zealously asserted the infinite wisdom and purity of the divine nature. Now, I confess, that this very consideration is, according to my notion of things, a strong argument in favour of the last-mentioned doctrine. Here are two opinions; the one inconsistent with the first principles of natural religion, as some of those who maintain

maintain it acknowledge, as well as with the experience, the belief, and the practice, of the generality of rational beings; the other perfectly consistent with religion, conscience, and common sense. If the reader believe, with me, that the Deity is infinitely good and wise, he cannot balance a moment between them; nor hesitate to affirm, that the universal belief of the former would produce much mischief and misery to mankind. If he be prepossessed in favour of Mr HUME's necessity, he ought, however, before he acquiesce in it as true, to be well assured, that the evidences of natural religion, particularly of the divine existence and attributes, are weaker than the proofs that have been urged in behalf of this necessity. But will any one say, that this doctrine admits of a proof, as unexceptionable as that by which we evince the being and attributes of God? I appeal to his own heart, I appeal to the experience and consciousness of mankind;—are you as thoroughly convinced, that no past action of your life could possibly have been prevented, and that no future action can possibly be contingent, as that God is infinitely wise, powerful, and good?—Examine the evidence of both propositions, examine with candour the instinctive suggestions of your own mind;—and then tell me, whether you find Atheism or man's moral liberty hardest to be believed.

Perhaps I shall be told, that the belief of moral liberty is attended with equal difficulties; for that, to reconcile the contingency of human actions with the prescience of God, is as impossible as to reconcile necessity with his goodness and wisdom. Others have answered this objection at length; I make therefore only two brief remarks upon it. 1. As it implies not any reflection on the divine power, to say that it cannot perform impossibilities; so neither, I presume, does it imply any reflection on his knowledge, to say that he cannot foresee, *as certain*, that which he himself has determined to be *not certain*, but only *contingent*. Yet he sees all possible effects of all possible causes; and
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our freedom to chuse good or evil can no more be conceived to interfere with the final purposes of his providence, than our power of moving our limbs is inconsistent with our inability to remove mountains. 2. No man will take it upon him to say, that he distinctly understands the manner in which the Deity acts, perceives, and knows: but the incomprehensibleness of his nature will never induce men to doubt his existence and attributes, unless there be men who fancy themselves infallible, and of infinite capacity. Shall I then conclude, because I cannot fully comprehend the manner in which the divine prescience operates, that therefore the Deity is not infinitely perfect? or that therefore I cannot be certain of the truth of a sentiment which is warranted by my constant experience, and by that of all mankind? Shall I say, that because my knowledge is not infinite, therefore I have no knowledge? Because I know not when I shall die, does it follow, that I cannot be certain of my being now alive? Because God has not told me every thing, shall I refuse to believe what he has told me? To draw such a conclusion from such premises, is, in my judgement, as contrary to reason, as to say, that, because I am ignorant of the cause of magnetical attraction, therefore I ought not to believe that the needle points to the north.—That I am a free agent, I know and believe; that God foresees whatever can be foreseen, as he can do whatever can be done, I also know and believe: nor have the Fatalists ever proved, nor can they ever prove, that the one belief is inconsistent with the other.

The asserters of human liberty have always maintained, that to believe all actions and intentions necessary, is the same thing as to believe, that man is not an accountable being, or, in other words, no moral agent. And indeed this notion is natural to every person who has the courage to trust his own experience, without seeking to puzzle plain matter of fact with verbal distinctions

tinctions and metaphysical refinement. But, it is said, the sense of moral beauty and turpitude still remains with us, even after we are convinced, that all actions and intentions are necessary; that this sense maketh us moral agents; and therefore that our moral agency is perfectly consistent with our necessary agency. But this is nothing to the purpose; it is putting us off with mere words. For what is moral agency, and what is implied in it? This at least must be implied in it, that we ought to do some things, and not to do others. But if every intention and action of my life is fixed by eternal laws, which I can neither elude nor alter, it is as absurd to say to me, You ought to be honest to-morrow, as to say, You ought to stop the motion of the planets to-morrow. Unless some events depend upon my determination, *ought*, and *ought not*, have no meaning when applied to me. Moral agency further implies, that we are accountable for our conduct; and that if we do what we ought not to do, we deserve blame and punishment. My conscience tells me, that I am accountable for those actions only that are in my own power; and neither blames nor approves, in myself or in others, that conduct which is the effect, not of choice, but of necessity. Convince me, that all my actions are equally necessary, and you silence my conscience for ever, or at least prove it to be a fallacious and impertinent monitor: you will then convince me, that all circumspection is unnecessary, and all remorse absurd. And is it a matter of little moment, whether I believe my moral feelings authentic and true, or equivocal and fallacious? Can any principle be of more fatal consequence to me, or to society, than to believe, that the dictates of conscience are false, unreasonable, or insignificant? Yet this is one certain effect of my becoming a Fatalist, or even sceptical in regard to moral liberty.

I observe, that when a man's understanding begins to be so far perverted by debauchery, as to make him imagine his crimes un-

avoidable, from that moment he begins to think them innocent, and deems it a sufficient apology, that in respect of them he is no longer a free, but a necessary agent. The drunkard pleads his constitution, the blasphemer urges the invincible force of habit, and the sensualist would have us believe, that his appetites are too strong to be resisted. Suppose all men so far perverted as to argue in the same manner with regard to crimes of every kind; — then it is certain, that all men would be equally disposed to think all crimes innocent. And what would be the consequence? Licentiousness, misery, and desolation, irremediable and universal. If God intended that men should be happy, and that the human race should continue for many generations, he certainly intended also that men should believe themselves free, moral, and accountable creatures.

Supposing it possible for a man to act upon the belief of his being a necessary agent, let us see how he would behave in some of the common affairs of life. He does me an injury. I go to him and remonstrate. You will excuse me, says he; I was put upon it by one on whom I am dependent, and who threatened me with beggary and perdition if I refused to comply. I acknowledge this to be a considerable alleviation of the poor man's guilt. Next day he repeats the injury; and, on my renewing my remonstrances, Truly, says he, I was offered sixpence to do it; or I did it to please my humour: but I know you will pardon me, when I tell you, that as all motives are the necessary causes of the actions that proceed from them, it follows, that all motives productive of the same action are irresistible, and therefore, in respect of the agent, equally strong: I am therefore as innocent now as I was formerly; for the event has proved, that the motive arising from the offer of sixpence, or from the impulse of whim, was as effectual in producing the action which you call an injury, as the motive arising from the fear of ruin. Notwithstanding

standing this fine speech, I should be afraid, that these principles, if persisted in, and acted upon, would soon bring the poor Fatalist to Tyburn or Bedlam.

Will you promise to assist me to-morrow with your labour, advice, or interest? No, says the practical Fatalist; I can promise nothing: for my conduct to-morrow will certainly be determined by the motive that then happens to predominate. Let your promise, say I, be your motive. How can you be so ignorant, he replies, as to imagine that our motives to action are in our own power! O sad, O sad! you must study metaphysic, indeed you must. Why, Sir, our motives to action are obtruded upon us by irresistible necessity. Perhaps they arise, immediately, from some passion, judgement, fancy, or (if you please) volition; but this volition, fancy, judgement, or passion — what is it? an effect without a cause? No, no; it is necessarily excited by some idea, object, or notion, which presents itself independently on me, and in consequence of some extrinsic cause, the operation of which I can neither foresee nor prevent. — Where is the man who would chuse this Fatalist for his friend, companion, or fellow-citizen? who will say, that society could at all subsist, if the generality of mankind were to think, and speak, and act, on such principles *?

But, says the Fatalist, is it not easy to imagine cases in which the men who believe themselves free, would act the part of fools or knaves? Nothing indeed is more easy. But let it be obser-

* This, it may be said, would suppose a partial necessity. It may be so: but in this manner I apprehend that mankind will always argue, as long as they are conscious of a power of self-determination. And while they are conscious of that power, and argue in this manner, they must consider the doctrine of necessity as repugnant to our most familiar and most permanent notions in regard to morality and human agency.

ved, that the folly or knavery of such men arises, not from their persuasion of their own free agency ; for many millions of this persuasion have passed through life with a fair character ; but from other causes. I cannot conceive any greater discouragement from knavery and folly, than the consideration, that man is an accountable being ; and I know not how we can suppose him *accountable*, in the common acceptance of that word, unless we suppose him free.

The reader, if disposed to pursue these hints, and attend, in imagination, to the behaviour of the consistent and practical Fatalist, in the more interesting scenes of private and public life, may entertain himself with a series of very strange and comical adventures. I presume I have said enough to show, that it is not without reason I affirm, “ That the real and general belief of “ necessity would be attended with fatal consequences to science, “ and to human nature ; ” — which is a repetition of the third remark we formerly made on the doctrine of the non-existence of body *.

And now we have proved, that if there was any reason for rejecting BERKELEY’S doctrine as absurd, and contrary to common sense, before his arguments were shown to arise from the abuse of words, there is at present the same reason for rejecting the doctrine of necessity, even on the supposition that it hath not as yet been logically confuted. Both doctrines are repugnant to the general belief of mankind : both, notwithstanding all the efforts of the subtlest sophistry, are still incredible : both are so contrary to nature, and to the condition of human beings, that they cannot be carried into practice ; and so contrary to true philosophy, that they cannot be admitted into science, without bringing scepticism along with them, and rendering questionable the

* See the end of the preceding section.

plainest principles of moral truth. In a word, we have proved, that common sense, as it teacheth us to believe and be assured of the existence of matter, doth also teach us to believe and be assured, that man is a free agent.

It would lead us too far from our present purpose, to enter upon a logical examination of the argument for necessity. Our design is only to explain, by what marks one may distinguish the principles of common sense, that is, intuitive or self-evident notions, from those deceitful and inveterate opinions that have sometimes assumed the same appearance. If I have satisfied the reader, that the free agency of men is a self-evident fact, I have also satisfied him, that all reasoning on the side of necessity, though accounted unanswerable, is, in its very nature, and previously to all confutation, absurd and irrational, and contrary to the practice and principles of true philosophy.

Let not the friends of liberty be discouraged by the perplexing arguments of the Fatalist *. Arguments in opposition to self-evident truth, must, if plausible, be perplexing. Think what method of argumentation a man must pursue, who sets himself to confute any axiom in geometry, or to argue against the existence of a sentiment, acknowledged and felt by all mankind. Indeed I cannot see how such a person should ever impose upon people of sense, except by availing himself of expressions, which ei-

* There is no subject on which doubts and difficulties may not be started by ingenious and disputatious men: and therefore, from the number of their objections, and the length of the controversy to which they give occasion, we cannot, in any case, conclude, that the original evidence is weak, or even that it is not obvious and striking. Were we to presume, that every principle is dubious against which specious objections may be contrived, we should be quickly led into universal scepticism. The two ways in which the ingenuity of speculative men has been most commonly employed, are dogmatical assertions of doubtful opinions, and subtle cavils against certain truths.

Gerard's Dissertations, ii. 4.

ther are in themselves ambiguous, or become so by his manner of applying them. If the ambiguity be discernible, the argument can have no force; if there be no suspicion of ambiguity, the dispute may be continued from generation to generation, without working any change in the sentiments of either party. When fact is disregarded, when intuition goes for nothing, when no standard of truth is acknowledged, and every unanswered argument is deemed unanswerable, true reasoning is at an end; and the disputant, having long ago lost sight of common sense, is so far from regaining the path of truth, that, like Thomson's peasant bewildered in the snow, he continues "to wander on, still more and more astray." If any person will give himself the trouble to examine the whole controversy concerning liberty and necessity, he will find, that the arguments on both sides come at last to appear unanswerable:—there is no common principle acknowledged by both parties, to which an appeal can be made, and each party charges the other with begging the question. Is it not then better to rest satisfied with the simple feeling of the understanding? I feel that it is in my power to will or not to will: all you can say about the influence of motives will never convince me of the contrary; or if I should say, that I am convinced by your arguments, my conduct must continually belie my profession. One thing is undeniable: your words are obscure, my feeling is not;—this is universally attended to, acknowledged, and acted upon; those to the majority of mankind would be unintelligible, nay, perhaps they are in a great measure so even to yourselves*.

CHAP.

* "It is evident (says a great philosopher) that as it is from internal consciousness I know any thing of liberty, so no assertion contrary to what I am conscious of concerning it can be admitted: and it were better perhaps to treat of
" this

C H A P. III.

Recapitulation, and Inference.

THE substance of the preceding illustrations, when applied to the principal purpose of this discourse, is as follows.

Although it be certain, that all just reasoning does ultimately terminate in the principles of common sense; that is, in principles which must be admitted as certain, or as probable, upon their own authority, without evidence, or at least without proof; even as all mathematical reasoning does ultimately terminate in self-evident axioms: yet philosophers, especially those who have applied themselves to the investigation of the laws of human nature, have not always been careful to confine the reasoning fa-

“ this abstruse subject after the manner of experimental philosophy, than to fill a thousand pages with metaphysical discussions concerning it.”

Maclaurin's account of Newton's discoveries, book 1. chap. 4.

“ The constitution of the present world, (says Bishop Butler), and the condition in which we are actually placed, is as if we were free. And it may perhaps be justly concluded, that since the whole process of action through every step of it is as if we were free, therefore we are so.” *Analogy, part 1. chap. 6. § 6.*

One who is a Fatalist, and — one who keeps to his *natural sense* of things, and believes himself a free agent, — these two are contrasted by the same excellent author, part 1. ch. 6. § 3.

culty within its proper sphere, but have vainly imagined, that even the principles of common sense are subject to the cognifance of reason, and may be either confirmed or confuted by argument. They have accordingly, in many instances, carried their investigations higher than the ultimate and self-supported principles of common sense ; and by so doing, have introduced many errors, and much false reasoning, into the moral sciences. To remedy this, it was proposed, as a matter deserving serious attention, to ascertain the separate provinces of reason and common sense. And because, in many cases, it may be difficult to distinguish a principle of common sense from an acquired prejudice ; and, consequently, to know at what point reasoning ought to stop, and the authority of common sense to be admitted as decisive ; it was therefore judged expedient to inquire, “ Whether such reasonings as have been prosecuted beyond ultimate principles, be not marked with some peculiar characters, by which they may be distinguished from legitimate investigation.” To illustrate this point, the doctrines of *the non-existence of matter*, and *the necessity of human actions*, were given as examples ; in which, at least in the former of which, common sense, in the opinion of all competent judges, is confessedly violated ; — the natural effects produced upon the mind by the reasonings that have been urged in favour of these doctrines, were considered ; — and the consequences, resulting from the admission of such reasonings, were taken notice of, and explained. And it was found, that the reasonings that have been urged in favour of these doctrines are really marked with some peculiar characters, which, it is presumed, can belong to no legitimate argumentation. Of these reasonings it was observed, and proved, “ That the doctrines they are intended to establish are contradictory to the general belief of all men in all ages ; — That, though enforced and supported with singular subtlety, and though admitted

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“ by some professed philosophers, they do not produce that conviction which sound reasoning never fails to produce in the intelligent mind ; — and, lastly, That really to believe, and to act from a real belief of, such doctrines and reasonings, must be attended with fatal consequences to science, to virtue, and to human society.”

I do not suppose, that all the errors which have arisen from not attending to the foundation of truth, and essential rules of reasoning, as here explained, are equally dangerous. Some of them perhaps may be innocent ; to such the last of these characters cannot belong. If wholly innocent, it is of little consequence, whether we know them to be errors or not. When a new tenet is advanced in moral science, there will be a strong presumption against it, if contrary to universal opinion : for as every man may find the evidence of moral science in his own breast, it is not to be supposed, that the generality of mankind would, for any length of time, persist in an error, which their own daily experience, if attended to without prejudice, could not fail to rectify. Let, therefore, the evidence of the new tenet be carefully examined, and attended to. If it produce a full and clear conviction in the intelligent mind, and at the same time serve to explain the causes of the universality and long continuance of the old erroneous opinion, the new one ought certainly to be received as true. But if the assent produced by the new doctrine be vague, indefinite, and unsatisfying ; if nature and common sense reclaim against it ; if it recommend modes of thought that are inconceivable, or modes of action that are impracticable ; — it is not, it cannot be, true, however plausible its evidence may appear.

Some will think, perhaps, that a straighter and shorter course might have brought me sooner, and with equal security, to this conclusion. I acknowledge I have taken a pretty wide circuit. This was owing in part to my love of perspicuity, which in these

subjects hath not always been studied so much as it ought to have been; and partly, and chiefly, to my desire of confuting, on this occasion, as many of the most pernicious tenets of modern scepticism as could be brought within my present plan. But the reader will perceive, that I have endeavoured to conduct all my digressions in such a manner, as that they might serve for illustrations of the principal subject.

To teach men to distinguish by intuition a dictate of common sense from an acquired prejudice, is a work which nature only can accomplish. We shall ever be more or less sagacious in this respect, according as Heaven has endowed us with greater or less strength of mind, vivacity of perception, and solidity of judgement. The method here recommended is more laborious, and much less expeditious. Yet this method, if I am not greatly mistaken, may be of considerable use, to enable us to form a proper estimate of those reasonings, which, by violating common sense, tend to subvert every principle of rational belief, to sap the foundations of truth and science, and to leave the mind exposed to all the horrors of scepticism. To be puzzled by such reasonings, is neither a crime nor a dishonour; though in many cases it may be both dishonourable and criminal to suffer ourselves to be deluded by them. For is not this to prefer the equivocal voice of an ensnaring wrangler, to the clear, the benevolent, the infallible dictates of nature? Is not this to belie our sentiments, and to violate our constitution? Is not this “to forsake the
“fountains of living water, and to hew out unto ourselves bro-
“ken cisterns that can hold no water?”

P A R T III.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

THEY who consider virtue as a subject of mere curiosity, and think that the principles of morals and properties of conic sections ought to be explained with the same degree of apathy and indifference, will find abundant matter for censure in the preceding observations. As the author is not very ambitious of the good opinion of such theorists, he will not give himself much trouble in multiplying apologies for what, to them, may have the appearance of keenness or severity in the animadversions he has hitherto made, or may hereafter make, on the principles of certain noted philosophers. He considers happiness as the end and aim of our being; and he thinks philosophy valuable only so far as it may be conducive to this end. Human happiness seemeth to him wholly unattainable, except by the means that virtue and religion provide. He is therefore persuaded, that while employed in pleading the cause of virtue, and of true science, its best auxiliary, he supports, in some measure, the character of a friend to mankind; and he would think his right to that glorious appellation extremely questionable, if the warmth of his zeal did not bear

some proportion to the importance of his cause. However suspicious he may be of his ability to vindicate the rights of his fellow-creatures, he is not suspicious of his inclination. He feels, that, on such a subject, he must speak from the heart, or not speak at all.—For the genius and manner of his discourse he has no other apology to offer : and by every person of spirit, candour, and benevolence, he is sure that this apology will be deemed sufficient.

As to the principles and matter of it, he is less confident. These, though neither visionary nor unimportant, may possibly be misunderstood. He therefore begs leave to urge a few things, for the further vindication and illustration of them. To his own mind they are fully satisfactory ; he hopes to render them equally so to every candid reader. Happy ! if he should be as successful in establishing conviction, as others have been in subverting it.

C H A P. I.

Further remarks on the consistency of these principles with the interests of Science, and the Rights of Mankind.

IT may possibly be objected to this discourse, That “ it tends “ to discourage freedom of inquiry, and to promote implicit “ faith.”

But nothing is more contrary to my design ; as those who attend,

tend, without prejudice, to the full import of what I have advanced on the subject of evidence, will undoubtedly perceive. Let me be permitted to repeat, that the truths in which man is most concerned do not lie exceedingly deep; nor are we to estimate either their importance, or their certainty, by the length of the line of our investigation. The evidences of the philosophy of human nature are found in our own breast; we need not roam abroad in quest of them; the unlearned are judges of them as well as the learned. Ambiguities have arisen, when the feelings of the heart and understanding were expressed in words; but the feelings themselves were not ambiguous. Let a man attentively examine himself, with a sincere purpose of discovering the truth, and without any bias in favour of particular theories, and he will seldom be at a loss in regard to those truths, at least, that are most essential to his happiness and duty. If men must needs amuse themselves with metaphysical investigation, let them apply it, where it can do no harm, to the distinctions and logomachies of ontology. In the science of human nature it cannot do good, but must of necessity do great harm. What avail the obscure deductions of verbal argument, in illustrating what we sufficiently know by experience? or in showing that to be fictitious and false, whose energy we must feel and acknowledge every moment? When therefore I find a pretended principle of human nature evinced by a dark and intricate investigation, I am tempted to suspect, not without reason, that its evidence is no where to be found but in the arguments of the theorist; and these, when disguised by quaint distinctions, and ambiguous language, it is sometimes hard to confute, even when the heart recoils from the doctrine with contempt or detestation. If the doctrine be true, it must also be agreeable to experience: to experience, therefore, let the appeal be made; let the circumstances be pointed out, in which the controverted sentiment arises, or is supposed to

to arise. This is to act the philosopher, not the metaphysician ; the interpreter of nature, not the builder of systems. But let us consider the objection more particularly.

What then do you mean by that implicit faith, to which you suppose these principles too favourable? Do you mean an acquiescence in the dictates of our own understanding, or in those of others? If the former, I must tell you, that such implicit faith is the only kind of belief which true philosophy recommends. I have already remarked, that, while man continues in his present state, our own intellectual feelings are, and must be, the standard of truth to us. All evidence productive of belief, is resolvable into the evidence of consciousness; and comes at last to this point, I believe because I believe, or because the law of rational nature determines me to believe. This belief may be called implicit; but it is the only rational belief of which we are capable: and to say, that our minds ought not to submit to it, is as absurd as to say, that our bodies ought not to be nourished with food. Revelation itself must be attended with evidence to satisfy consciousness or common sense; otherwise it can never be rationally believed. By the evidence of the gospel, the rational Christian is persuaded that it comes from God. He acquiesces in it as truth, not because it is recommended by others, but because it satisfies his own understanding.

But if, by implicit faith, you mean, what I think is commonly meant by that term, an unwarrantable or unquestioned acquiescence in the sentiments of other men, I deny that any part of this discourse hath a tendency to promote it. I never said, that doctrines are to be taken for granted without examination; though I affirmed, that, in regard to moral doctrines, a long and intricate examination is neither necessary nor expedient. With moral truth, it is the business of every man to be acquainted; and therefore the Deity has made it level to every capacity.

Far be it from a lover of truth to discourage freedom of inquiry ! Man is possessed of reasoning powers ; by means of which he may bring that within the sphere of common sense, which was originally beyond it. Of these powers he may, and ought to avail himself ; for many important truths are not self-evident, and our faculties were not designed for a state of inactivity. But neither were they designed to be employed in fruitless or dangerous investigation. Our knowledge and capacity are limited ; it is fit and necessary they should be so : we need not wander into forbidden paths, or attempt to penetrate inaccessible regions, in quest of employment ; the cultivation of useful and practical science, the improvement of arts, and the indispensable duties of life, will furnish ample scope to all the exertions of human genius. Surely that man is my friend, who dissuades me from attempting what I cannot perform, nor even attempt without danger. And is not he a friend to science and mankind, who endeavours to discourage fallacious and unprofitable speculation, and to propose a criterion by which it may be known and avoided ?

But if reasoning ought not be carried beyond a certain boundary, and if it is the authority of common sense that fixeth this boundary, and if it be possible to mistake a prejudice for a principle of common sense, how (it may be said) are prejudices to be detected ? At this rate, a man has nothing to do, but to call his prejudice a dictate of common sense, and then it is established in perfect security, beyond the reach of argument. Does not this furnish a pretence for limiting the freedom of inquiry ?—Having already said a great deal in answer to the first part of this question, I need not now say much in answer to the last. I shall only ask, on the other hand, what method of reasoning is the properest for overcoming the prejudices of an obstinate man ? Are we to wrangle with him *in infinitum*,

nitum, without ever arriving at any fixed principle? That surely is not the way to illustrate truth, or rectify error. Do we mean to ascertain the importance of our arguments by their number, and to pronounce that the better cause whose champion gives the last word? This, I fear, would not mend the matter. Suppose our antagonist should deny a self-evident truth, or refuse his assent to an intuitive probability; must we not refer him to the common sense of mankind? If we do not, we must either hold our peace, or have recourse to sophistry: for when a principle comes to be intuitively true or false, all legitimate reasoning is at an end, and all further reasoning impertinent. To the common sense of mankind we must therefore refer him sooner or later; and if he continue obstinate, we must leave him. Is it not then of consequence to truth, and may it not serve to prevent many a sophistical argument, and unprofitable logomachy, that we have it continually in view, that common sense is the standard of truth? a maxim, which men are not always disposed to admit in its full latitude, and which, in the heat and hurry of dispute, they are apt to overlook altogether. Some men will always be found, who think the most absurd prejudices founded in common sense. Reasonable men never scruple to submit their prejudices or principles to examination: but if that examination turn to no account, or if it turn to a bad account; if it only puzzle where it ought to convince, and darken what it ought to illustrate; if it recommend impracticable modes of action, or inconceivable modes of thought;—I must confess I cannot perceive the use of it. This is the only kind of reasoning that I mean to discourage. It is this kind of reasoning that has proved so fatal to the abstract sciences. In it all our sceptical systems are founded; of it they consist; and by it they are supported. Till the abstract sciences be cleared of this kind of reasoning, they deserve not the name of philosophy: they may amuse a

weak and turbulent mind, and render it still weaker and more turbulent; but they cannot convey any real instruction: they may undermine the foundations of virtue and science; but they cannot illustrate a single truth, nor establish one principle of importance, nor improve the mind of man in any respect whatsoever.

By some it may be thought an objection to the principles of this essay, "That they seem to recommend a method of confutation which is not strictly according to logic, and do actually contradict some of the established laws of that science."

It will readily be acknowledged, that many of the maxims of the school-logic are founded in truth and nature, and have so long obtained universal approbation, that they are now become proverbial in philosophy. Many of its rules and distinctions are extremely useful, not so much for strengthening the judgement, as for enabling the disputant quickly to comprehend, and perspicuously to express, in what the force or fallacy of an argument consists. The ground-work of this science, the Logic of Aristotle, if we may judge of the whole by the part now extant, is one of the most successful and most extraordinary efforts of philosophic genius that ever appeared in the world. And yet, if we consider this science, with regard to its design and consequences, we shall perhaps see reason to think, that a strict observance of its laws is not always necessary to the discovery of truth.

It was originally intended as a help to discourse among a talkative and sprightly people. The constitution of Athens made public speaking of great importance, and almost a certain road to preferment or distinction. This was also in some measure the case at Rome; but the Romans were more reserved, and did not, till about the time of Cicero, think of reducing conversation or public speaking to rule. The vivacity of the Athenians, encour-

ged by their democratical spirit, made them fond of disputes and declamations, which were often carried on without any view to discover truth, but merely to gratify humour, give employment to the tongue, and amuse a vacant hour. Some of the dialogues of Plato are to be considered in this light, rather as exercises in declamation, than serious disquisitions in philosophy. It is true, this is not the only merit even of such of them as seem the least considerable. If we are often dissatisfied with his doctrine; if we have little curiosity to learn the characters and manners of that age, whereof he has given so natural a representation; we must yet acknowledge, that as models for elegance and simplicity of composition, the most inconsiderable of Plato's dialogues are very useful and ingenious. His speakers often compliment each other on the beauty of their style, even when there is nothing very striking in the sentiment *. If, therefore, we would form a just estimate of Plato, we must regard him, not only as a philosopher, but also as a rhetorician; for it is evident he was ambitious to excel in both characters. But it appears not to have been his opinion, that the practice of extemporary speaking and disputing, so frequent in his time, had any direct tendency to promote the investigation of truth, or the acquisition of wisdom. The Lacedemonians, the most reserved and most silent people in Greece, and who made the least pretensions to a literary character, were, in his judgement, a nation, not only of the wisest men, but of the greatest philosophers. Their words were few, their address not without rusticity; but the meanest of them was able, by a single expression, dextrously aimed, and seasonably introduced, to make the stranger with whom he conversed appear no wiser than a child †.

The.

* See the Symposium. Platonis opera, vol. 3. p. 198. Edit. Serran.

† Εἰ τις ἐβίλει Λακεδαιμονίων τῷ φαυλότατῳ συγγενέσθαι. τὰ μὲν πολλὰ ἐν ταῖς λέγουσι
ἐνρίσει

The Athenians, accustomed to reduce every thing to art, and among whom the spirit of science was more prevalent than in any other nation, had contrived a kind of technical logic long before the days of Aristotle. Their sophists taught it in conjunction with rhetoric and philosophy. But Aristotle brought it to perfection, and seems to have been the first who professedly disjoined it from the other arts and sciences. On his logic was founded that of the schoolmen. But they, like other commentators, often misunderstood the text, and often perverted it to the purpose of a favourite system. They differed from one another in their notions of Aristotle's doctrine, ranged themselves into sects and parties; and, instead of explaining the principles of their master, made it their sole business to comment upon one another. Now and then men of learning arose, who endeavoured to revive the true Peripatetic philosophy; but their efforts, instead of proving successful, served only to provoke persecution; and at length the scholastic system grew so corrupt, and at the same time so enormous in magnitude, that it became an insuperable incumbrance to the understanding, and contributed not a little to perpetuate the ignorance and barbarism of those times. The chief aim of the old logic, even in its purest form, (so far at least as it was a practical science), was to render men expert in arguing readily on either side of any question. But it is one thing to employ our faculties in searching after truth, and a very different thing to employ them equally in defence of truth and of error: and the same modification of intellect that fits a man for the one, will by no means qualify him for the other.

ἐξηγήσει αὐτὸν φαῦλον τινα φαινόμενον, ἕπειτα ὅπου ἂν τύχοι τῶν λεγόμενων, ἐνέβαλε ῥήμα
ἀξιον λόγου βραχὺ ἢ συνεγραμμένον, ὥσπερ δεινὸς ἀκοντιστὴς ὥστε φαίνεσθαι τὸν προσδιαλεγόμε-
νον παῖδας μὴδὲν βελτίω.

Socrates in Plat. Protagora, vol. i. p. 342.

Nay, if I mistake not, the talents that fit us for discovering truth are rather hurt than improved by the practice of sophistry. To argue against one's own conviction, must always have a bad effect on the heart, and render one more indifferent about the truth, and perhaps more incapable of perceiving it *.

To dispute readily on either side of any question, is admired by some as a very high accomplishment: but it is what any person of moderate abilities may easily acquire by a little practice. Perhaps moderate abilities are the most favourable to the acquisition of this talent. Sensibility and penetration, the inseparable attendants, or rather the most essential parts, of true genius, qualify a man for discovering truth with little labour of investigation; and at the same time interest him so deeply in it, that he cannot bear to turn his view to the other side of the question. Thus he never employs himself in devising arguments; and, therefore, seldom arrives at any proficiency in that exercise. But the man of slow intellect and dull imagination advances step by step in his inquiries, without any keenness of sentiment, or ardor of fancy, to distract his attention; and without that instantaneous anticipation of consequences, that leads the man of genius to the conclusion, even before he has examined all the intermediate relations. Hence he naturally acquires a talent for minute observation, and for a patient examination of circumstances; at the same time that his insensibility prevents his interesting himself warmly on either side, and leaves him leisure to attend equally to his own arguments, and to those of the antagonist. This gives him eminent superiority in a dispute, and fits him, not indeed

* See the story of Pertinax in the Rambler, N^o 95.; where the effects of habitual disputation, in perverting the judgement, and vitiating the heart, are illustrated with the utmost energy and elegance.

for discovering truth, but for baffling an adversary, and supporting a system.

I have been told, that Newton, the first time he read Euclid's Elements, perceived instantly, and almost intuitively, the truth of the several propositions, before he consulted the proof. Such vivacity and strength of judgement are extraordinary: and indeed, in the case of mathematical and physical truths, we are seldom to expect this instantaneous anticipation of consequences, even from men of more than moderate talents. But in moral subjects, and in most of the matters that are debated in conversation, there is rarely any need of comparing a great number of intermediate relations: every person of sound judgement sees the truth at once: or, if he does not, it is owing to his ignorance of some facts or circumstances, which may be soon learned from a plain narrative, but which are disguised and confounded more and more by wrangling and contradiction. If there be no means of clearing the disputed facts and difficulties, it would not, I presume, be imprudent to drop the subject, and talk of something else.

It is pleasant enough to hear the habitual wrangler endeavouring to justify his conduct by a pretence of zeal for the truth. It is not the love of truth, but of victory, that engages him in disputation. I have witnessed many contests of this kind; but have seldom seen them lead, or even tend, to any useful discovery. Where ostentation, self-conceit, or love of paradox, are not concerned, they commonly arise from some verbal ambiguity, or from the misconception of some fact, which both parties taking it for granted that they perfectly understand, are at no pains to ascertain: and, when once begun, are, by the vanity or obstinacy of the speakers, or perhaps by their mere love of speaking, continued, till accident put an end to them, by silencing the parties, rather than reconciling their opinions. I once
saw

saw a number of persons, neither unlearned nor ill-bred, meet together to pass a social evening. As ill-luck would have it, a dispute arose about the propriety of a certain *manœuvre* at *quadrille*, in which some of the company had been interested the night before. Two parties of disputants were immediately formed; and the matter was warmly argued from six o'clock till midnight, when the company broke up. Being no adept in cards, I could not enter into the merits of the cause, nor take any part in the controversy; but I observed, that each of the speakers persisted to the last in the opinion he took up at the beginning, in which he seemed to be rather confirmed than staggered by the arguments that had been urged in opposition. — With such enormous waste of time, with such vile prostitution of reason and speech, with such wanton indifference to the pleasures of friendship, all disputes are not attended; but most of them, if I mistake not, will be found to be equally unprofitable.

I grant, that much of our knowledge is gathered from our intercourse with one another; but I cannot think, that we are greatly indebted to the argumentative part of conversation; and nobody will say, that the most disputatious companions are the most agreeable. For my own part, I have always found those to be the most delightful and most improving conversations, in which there was the least contradiction; every person entertaining the utmost possible respect both for the judgement and for the veracity of his associate; and none assuming any of those dictatorial airs, which are so offensive to the lovers of liberty, modesty, and friendship. — If a catalogue were to be made of all the truths that have been discovered by wrangling in company, or by solemn disputation in the schools, I believe it would appear, that the contending parties might have been employed as advantageously to mankind, and much more so to themselves, in whipping a top, or brandishing a rattle.

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The extravagant fondness of the Stoics for logical quibbles is one of the most disagreeable peculiarities in the writings of that sect. Every body must have been disgusted with it in reading some passages of the conversations of Epictetus preserved by Arrian; and must be satisfied, that it tended rather to weaken and bewilder, than to improve the understanding. One could hardly believe to what ridiculous excess they carried it. There was a famous problem among them called the *Pseudomenos*, which was to this purpose. "When a man says, *I lie*, does he lie, or does he not? If he lies, he speaks truth: if he speaks truth, he lies." Many were the books that their philosophers wrote, in order to solve this wonderful problem. Chrysippus favoured the world with no fewer than six: and Philetas studied himself to death in his attempts to solve it. Epictetus, whose good sense often triumphs over the extravagance of Stoicism, justly ridicules this logical phrenzy*.

Socrates made little account of the subtleties of logic; being more solicitous to instruct others, than to distinguish himself†. He inferred his doctrine from the concessions of those with whom he conversed; so that he left no room for dispute, as the adversary could not contradict him, without contradicting himself. And yet, to Socrates philosophy is perhaps more indebted, than to any other person whatever‡.

We

* Arrian, lib. 2. cap. 17.; Cicero Lucull. cap. 30.

† Supra, part 2. chap. 2. sect. 1.

‡ Cicero in one place (*de Finib. lib. 2.*) calls him *Parens Philosophiæ*, and in another (*de Orat. lib. 3.*) affirms, that, in the judgement of all Greece, and according to the testimony of all the learned, Socrates, on every subject to which he applied himself, excelled all men, in wisdom, politeness, and penetration, as well as in copiousness and variety of eloquence; and that succeeding philosophers, though they differed widely in their principles, were however ambitious to be
thought

We have therefore no reason to think, that truth is discoverable by those means only which the technical logic prescribes. Aristotle knew the theory both of sophisms and syllogisms, better than any other man; yet Aristotle himself is sometimes imposed on by sophisms of his own invention *. And it is remarkable, that his moral, rhetorical, and political writings, in which his own excellent judgement is little warped by logical subtleties, are far the most useful, and, in point of sound reasoning, the most unexceptionable, part of his philosophy.

The apparent tendency of the school-logic is, to render men disputatious and sceptical, adepts in the knowledge of words, but inattentive to fact and experience. It makes them fonder of speaking than thinking, and therefore strangers to themselves; solicitous chiefly about rules, names, and distinctions, and there-

thought to belong to the Socratic school, and willing to believe that they derived their doctrines from that great seminary of knowledge. — Socrates was the first Grecian philosopher who made experience the ground-work of all his reasonings, who applied philosophy to the regulation of human conduct, and who taught, that those theories only were valuable, which could be applied to practical and useful purposes. The more we consider the state of learning at the time of his appearance, and the pride and insignificance of those sophists, whom Greece then regarded as the oracles of wisdom, and to whose character and profession his conduct as a public teacher formed so striking a contrast, the more we shall be sensible of our obligations to this great and excellent man, who was said to have brought philosophy down from heaven; and who may truly be said to have

————— turn'd the *reasoning* art
From words to things, from fancy to the heart.

* Thus he is said to have proved the earth to be the centre of the universe by the following sophism. — “ Heavy bodies naturally tend to the centre of the universe; we know by experience, that heavy bodies tend to the centre of the earth; therefore the centre of the earth is the same with that of the universe.”
—— Which is what the logicians call *petitio principii*, or *begging the question*.

fore leaves them neither leisure nor inclination for the study of life and manners. In a word, it makes them more ambitious to distinguish themselves as the partisans of a dogmatist, than as inquirers after truth. It is easy to see how far a man of this temper is qualified to make discoveries in knowledge. To such a man, indeed, the name of truth is only a pretence: he neither is, nor can be, much interested in the solidity or importance of his tenets; it is enough if he can render them plausible; nay, it is enough if he can silence his adversary by any means. The captious turn of an habitual wrangler deadens the understanding, sours the temper, and hardens the heart: by rendering the mind suspicious, and attentive to trifles, it weakens the sagacity of instinct, and extinguishes the fire of imagination; it transforms conversation into a state of warfare; and restrains those lively sallies of fancy, so effectual in promoting good-humour and good-will, which, though often erroneous, are a thousand times more valuable than the dull correctness of a mood-and-figure disciplinarian.

One of the first maxims of the school-logic is, That nothing is to be believed, but what we can give a reason for believing; a maxim destructive of all truth and science, as hath been fully shown in the former part of this discourse. We must not, however, lay this maxim to the charge of the ancient logic. DES CARTES, and the modern sceptics, got it from the schoolmen, who forged it out of some passages of Aristotle misunderstood. The philosopher said indeed, that all investigation should begin with doubt; but this doubt is to remain only till the understanding be convinced; which, in Aristotle's judgement, may be effected by intuitive evidence as well as by argumentative. The doctrine we have been endeavouring to illustrate, tends not to encourage any prejudices, or any opinions, unfriendly to truth or virtue: its only aim is, to establish the authority of those instinc-

tive principles of conviction and assent, which the rational part of mankind have acknowledged in all ages, and which the condition of man, in respect both of action and intelligence, renders it absurd not to acknowledge.—We cannot suppose, that the human mind, unlike to all other natural systems, is made up of incompatible principles; in it, as in all the rest, there must be unity of design; and therefore the principles of human belief, and of human action, must have one and the same tendency. But many of our modern philosophers teach a different doctrine; endeavouring to persuade themselves, and others, that they ought not to believe what they cannot possibly disbelieve; and that those actions may be absurd, and contrary to truth, the performance of which is necessary to our very existence. If they will have it, that this is philosophy, I shall not dispute about the word; but I insist on it, that all such philosophy is no better than pedantic nonsense; and that, if a man were to write a book, to prove, that fire is the element in which we ought to live, he would not act more absurdly, than some metaphysicians of these times would be thought to have acted, if their works were understood, and rated according to their intrinsic merit.

That every thing may be made matter of dispute, is another favourite maxim of the school-logic; and it would not be easy to devise one more detrimental to true science. What a strange propensity these doctors have had to disputation! One would think, that, in their judgement, “the chief end of man is, to contradict his neighbour, and wrangle with him for ever.” To attempt a proof of what I know to be false, and a confutation of what I know to be true, is an exercise from which I can never expect advantage so long as I deem rationality a blessing. I never heard it prescribed as a recipe for strengthening the sight, to keep constantly blindfolded in the day-time, and put on spectacles when we go to sleep; nor can I imagine how the ear of a musician

musician could be improved, by his playing frequently on an ill-tuned fiddle. And yet the school-men seem to have thought, that the more we shut our eyes against the truth, we shall the more distinctly perceive it; and that the oftener we practise falsehood, we shall be the more sagacious in detecting, and the more hearty in abhorring it. To suppose, that we may make every thing matter of dispute, is to suppose, that we can account for every thing. Alas! in most cases, to feel and believe, is all we have to do, or can do. Destined for action rather than for knowledge, and governed more by instinct than by reason, we can extend our investigations, especially with regard to ourselves, but a very little way. And, after all, when we acquiesce with implicit confidence in the dictates of our nature, where is the harm or the danger of such a conduct? Is our life shortened, or health injured by it? No. Are our judgements perverted, or our hearts corrupted? No. Is our happiness impaired, or the sphere of our gratification contracted? Quite the contrary. Have we less leisure for attending to the duties of life, and for adorning our minds with useful and elegant literature? We have evidently more time left for those purposes. Why then so much logic, so many disputes, and so many theories, about the first philosophy? Rather than in disguising falsehood, and labouring to subvert the foundations of truth, why do we not, with humility and candour, employ our faculties in the attainment of plain, practical, and useful knowledge? *

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* It is far from my intention to say, that a talent for arguing on either side of a controvertible question is of no use. When exerted with good-nature and modesty, it may sometimes help to enliven conversation, and give play to the intellectual faculties. And it may also be applied with good effect to purposes still more important.

The consequences of submitting every sentiment and principle to the test of reasoning, have been considered already. This practice has, in every age, tended much to confound science, to prevent the detection of error, and (may we not add ?) to debase the human understanding. For have we not seen real genius, under

It would seem that Cicero thought, that the end of public speaking was not to elucidate or investigate truth, but only to make one opinion appear more probable than another ; and that when an orator had done his best, it could only be said, “*Illum prudentibus diserte, stultis etiam vere dicere videri.*” *De Oratore, lib. 1. & 3.* For such an employment, disputation was a very proper preparatory exercise, as the same author often declares. But it does not follow, that a habit of disputation is of benefit to the philosopher, or to those public speakers, whose aim, far more noble than that of the Ciceronian orator, is to inform the judgement, and improve the heart.

In a senate or council, met for the purpose of preparing or making laws, it is highly expedient, that the reasons for and against every public measure be urged with freedom. This tends not only to preserve the laws and constitution, but also to quiet mens minds, by removing those jealousies which are generally entertained against persons in high office. Besides, political truth depends often on principles so exceedingly complicated, that a magistrate or senator will hardly trust his own judgement, till he finds it warranted by that of others, and has heard the most material reasons that can be urged in opposition. But to argue against conviction, and for the sake of argument, or in order to gratify private pique, or to support a faction, is surely unworthy of senators met in solemn assembly, and deliberating upon affairs of the utmost importance, both to the present, and to future generations.

Moreover : As it is better that a criminal escape, than an innocent man suffer punishment ; and as the law should not only determine the differences, but as much as possible satisfy the minds of men ; it will be readily allowed, that in a court of justice every prisoner should be presumed to be innocent, till the proofs of his guilt appear, and every cause thoroughly discussed on both sides, that the grounds upon which the sentence proceeds may be evident to all concerned. It is therefore right, that each party should be permitted to exert itself, as far as truth and decency will permit, in its own vindication. So that a habit of devising arguments on either side of controverted questions seems to be a necessary qualification

under the influence of a disputatious spirit, derived from nature, fashion, or education, evaporate in subtlety, sophistry, and vain refinement? Lucretius, Cicero, and Des Cartes, might be mentioned as examples. And it will be matter of lasting regret in the republic of letters, that one, greater in some respects than the greatest of these, I mean John Milton, had the misfortune to be born in an age when the study of scholastic theology was deemed an essential part of intellectual discipline.

It is either affectation, or false modesty, that makes men say they know nothing with certainty. Man's knowledge, indeed, compared with that of superior beings, may be very inconsiderable; and compared with that of The Supreme, is "as nothing,

to every person who wishes to make a figure at the bar. For the more fully those questions are discussed before the judges, the greater honour redounds, not to the pleader only, but to the law also, and consequently the greater emolument to the community. Yet even these judicial disputations may be carried too far. And the more a pleader indulges himself in deviating from truth, in perplexing the cause with arguments that he knows to be frivolous, in confounding the judgment of his hearers by unreasonable appeals to their passions, or in wearing out their attention with studied prolixity, the less respectable will he be in his private character, and the less useful as a member of society. I never heard a lawyer blamed for declining a cause notoriously bad: but to engage for hire in all causes, good and bad, with equal zeal, and equal alacrity, is surely not commendable.

To be able to speak readily and plausibly in vindication of any opinion, is no doubt an ornamental, and may be an useful accomplishment. But to teach it, belongs rather to the rhetorician, than to the philosopher. And it is to be feared, that, in their ardour to acquire it, young men have sometimes become more enamoured of victory than of truth, and more intent upon words than upon argument; and that they may have also been too eager to display it in private company, where, unless seasoned with wit and modesty, with sweetness of temper, and softness of voice, it soon becomes a most intolerable nuisance. — To philosophy, that is, to the right observation and interpretation of nature, habits of wrangling, and theories of syllogism, seem to me to be just as necessary a prelude, as the art of rope-dancing is to the study of agriculture.

" and

“ and vanity :” and it is true, that we are daily puzzled in attempting to account for the most familiar appearances. But it is true, notwithstanding, that we do know, and cannot doubt of our knowing, some things with certainty. And

“ Let school-taught pride dissemble all it can,

“ These little things are great to little man *.”

To be vain of any attainment, is presumption and folly : but to think every thing disputable, is a proof of a weak mind and capitious temper. And however sceptics may boast of their modesty, in disclaiming all pretensions to certain knowledge, I would appeal to the man of candour, whether they or we seem to possess least of that virtue ; — they, who suppose, that they can raise insurmountable objections in every subject ; or we, who believe, that our Maker has permitted us to know with certainty some few things ?

In opposition to this practice of making every thing matter of dispute, we have endeavoured to show, that the instinctive suggestions of common sense are the ultimate standard of truth to man ; that whatever contradicts them is contrary to fact, and therefore false ; that to suppose them cognisable by reason, is to suppose truth as variable as the intellectual, or as the argumentative, abilities of men ; and that it is an abuse of reason, and tends to the subversion of science, to call in question the authenticity of our natural feelings, and of the natural suggestions of the human understanding.

That science never prospered while the old logic continued in fashion, is undeniable. Lord Verulam was one of the first who brought it into disrepute ; and proposed a different method of

* Goldsmith's Traveller.

investigating truth, namely, that the appearances of nature should be carefully observed; and, instead of facts being wrested to make them fall in with theory, that theory should be cautiously inferred from facts, and from them only. The event has fully proved, that our great philosopher was in the right: for science has made more progress since his time, and by his method, than for a thousand years before. The court of Rome well knew the importance of the school-logic in supporting their authority; they knew it could be employed more successfully in disguising error, than in vindicating truth: and Puffendorff scruples not to insinuate, that they patronised it for this very reason *. Let it not then be urged, as an objection to this discourse, that it recommends a method of confutation which is not strictly logical. It is enough for me, that the method here recommended is agreeable to good sense and sound philosophy, and to the general notions and practices of men.

C H A P. II.

The subject continued. Estimate of Metaphysic.
Causes of the Degeneracy of Moral Science.

THE reader has no doubt observed, that I have frequently used the term *Metaphysic*, as if it implied something worthy of contempt or censure. That no lover of science may be of-

* De Monarchia Pontificis Romani.

fended, I shall now account for this, by explaining the nature of that metaphysic which I conceive to be repugnant to true philosophy, though it has often assumed the name; and which, therefore, in my judgement, the friends of truth ought solicitously to guard against. This explanation will lead to some remarks that may perhaps throw additional light on the present subject.

Aristotle bequeathed by legacy his writings to Theophrastus; who left them, together with his own, to Neleus of Scepsis. The posterity of Neleus, being illiterate men, kept them for some time locked up; but afterwards hearing, that the king of the country was making a general search for books to furnish his library at Pergamus, they hid them in a hole under ground; where they lay for many years, and suffered much from worms and dampness. At last, however, they were sold to one Apellicon; who caused them to be copied out; and, having (according to Strabo) a greater passion for books than for knowledge, ordered the transcribers to supply the chasms from their own invention. When Sylla took Athens, he seized on Apellicon's library, and carried it to Rome. Here the books of Aristotle were revised, by Tyrannio the grammarian, and afterwards by Andronicus of Rhodes, a Peripatetic philosopher, who published the first complete edition of them *. To fourteen of these books, which it seems had no general title, Andronicus prefixed the words, *Ta meta ta physica* †; that is, *The books posterior to the physics*; either because, in the order of the former arrangement, they happened to be placed, or because the editor meant that they should be studied, next after the physics. This is said to be the origin of the word *Metaphysic*.

* Strabo, p. 609. Paris edit. 1620. Plut. Sylla.

† Τα μετὰ τα φυσικά.

The subject of these fourteen books is miscellaneous : yet the Peripatetics seem to have considered them as constituting but one branch of science ; the place of which in their system may be thus conceived. All philosophy is either speculative or practical. The practical regulates the moral and intellectual operations of men, and therefore comprehends ethics and logic. The speculative rests in the knowledge of truth ; and is divided into three parts, to wit, Physics, which inquire into the nature of material substances, and the human soul ; Mathematics, which consider certain properties of body as abstracted from body ; and this Metaphysic, (which Aristotle is said to have called *Theology*, and the *First Philosophy*), which, besides some remarks on truth in general, the method of discovering it, and the errors of former philosophers, explains, first, the general properties of being ; and, secondly, the nature of things separate from matter, namely, of God the one first cause, and of the forty-seven inferior deities.

Following the notion, that these fourteen books comprehend only one part of philosophy, the Christian Peripatetics divided metaphysics into universal and particular. In the first, they treated of being, and its properties and parts, considered as it is being * ; in the second, of God and angels.

The schoolmen disjoined the philosophy of the human mind from physics, where Aristotle had placed it ; and added it to metaphysics, because its object is an immaterial substance. So that their metaphysics consisted of three parts ; Ontology, in which they pretended to explain the general properties of being ; Pneumatics, which treated of the human mind ; and Natural Theolo-

* Metaphysique universelle — a laquelle il est traité de l'estant, et des ses propriétés, et des parties ou membres de l'estant, selon qu'il est estant, &c. *Bouju.*

gy, which treated of the Supreme Being, and of those spirits which have either no body at all, or one so very fine as to be imperceptible to human sense.

From the account we have given of the manner in which Aristotle's works were first published, the reader will admit, that some of the errors to be found in them may reasonably enough be imputed to the first transcribers and editors. It was a gross error in distribution, to reduce God, and the inferior deities, who were conceived to be a particular species of beings, to the same class with those qualities or attributes that are common to all being, and to treat of both in the same part of philosophy. It was no less improper than if a physiologist should compose a treatise, "Of men, horses, and identity." This inaccuracy could not have escaped Aristotle: it is to be charged on his editors, who probably mistook a series of treatises on various subjects for one treatise on one particular subject. To many this may seem a trifling mistake; but it has produced important consequences. It led the earlier Peripatetics into the impropriety of explaining the divine existence, and the general properties of being, by the same method of reasoning; and it induced the schoolmen to confound the important sciences of pneumatics and natural theology with the idle distinctions and logomachies of ontology. Natural theology ought to consist of legitimate inferences from the effect to the cause; pneumatics, or the philosophy of the human mind, are nothing but a detail of facts, illustrated, methodized, and applied to practice, by obvious and convincing reasonings: both sciences are founded in experience; but ontology pretends to ascertain its principles by demonstrations *a priori*. In fact, though ontology were, what it professes to be, an explication of the general properties of being, it could not throw any light on natural theology and pneumatics; for in them the ontological method of reasoning would be as improper as the mathematical.

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But the systems of ontology that have come into my hands are little better than vocabularies of those hard words which the schoolmen had contrived, in order to give an air of mystery and importance to their doctrine. While, therefore, the sciences of Natural Theology and Pneumatics were, by this preposterous division, referred to the same part of philosophy with ontology, how was it possible they could prosper, or be explained by their own proper evidence ! In fact, they did not prosper : experience, their proper evidence, was laid aside ; and fictitious theory, disguised by ontological terms and distinctions, and supported by ontological reasoning, was substituted in its stead.

LOCKE was one of the first who rescued the philosophy of human nature out of the hands of the schoolmen, cleared it of the enormous incumbrance of strange words which they had heaped upon it, and set the example of ascertaining our internal operations, not by theory, but by experience. His success was wonderful : for, though he has sometimes fallen into the scholastic way of arguing, as in his first book, and sometimes suffered himself to be imposed on by words, as in his account of secondary qualities, too rashly adopted from the Cartesians ; yet has he done more to establish the abstract sciences on a proper foundation, than could have been expected from one man, who derived almost all his lights from himself. His successors, BUTLER and HUTCHESON excepted, have not been very fortunate. BERKELEY'S book, though written with a good design, did more harm than good, by recommending and exemplifying a method of argumentation subversive of all knowledge, and leading directly to universal scepticism. Mr HUME'S *Treatise* and *Essays* are still more exceptionable. This author has revived the scholastic way of reasoning from theory, and of wresting facts to make them coincide with it. His language indeed is more modish, but equally favourable to sophistical argument, and equally proper for giving

an air of plausibility and importance to what is frivolous or unintelligible. What regard we are to pay to his profession of arguing from experience has been already considered.

The word *metaphysics*, according to vulgar use, is applied to all disquisitions concerning things immaterial. In this sense, the plainest account of the faculties of the mind, and of the principles of morality and natural religion, would be termed *metaphysics*. Such metaphysics, however, we are so far from despising or censuring, that we account it the sublimest and most useful part of science.

Those arguments also and illustrations in the abstract philosophy, which are not obvious to ordinary understandings, are sometimes called *metaphysical*. But as the principles of this philosophy, however well expressed, appear somewhat abstruse to one who is but a novice in the study; and as very plain principles may seem intricate in an author who is inattentive to his expression, as the best authors sometimes are, it would be unfair to reject, or conceive a prejudice against, every moral doctrine that is not perfectly free from obscurity. Yet a continued obscurity, in matters whereof every man should be a competent judge, cannot fail to breed a suspicion, either that the doctrine is faulty, or that the writer is not equal to his subject.

The term *metaphysical*, in those passages of this book where it is expressive of censure, will be found to allude to that mode of abstract investigation, so common among the sceptics and the schoolmen, which is supported, either wholly by an ambiguous and indefinite phraseology, or by that in conjunction with a partial experience; and which seldom fails to lead to such conclusions as contradict matter of fact, or truths of indisputable authority. It is this mode of investigation that has introduced so many errors into the moral sciences; for few, even of our most candid moral philosophers, are entirely free from it. The love
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of system, or partiality to a favourite opinion, not only puts a man off his guard, so as to make him overlook inaccurate expressions, and indefinite notions, but may sometimes occasion even a mistake of fact. When such mistakes are frequent, and affect the most important truths, we must blame the author for want of candour, or want of capacity: when they are innocent, and recur but seldom, we ought to ascribe them to the imperfection of human nature.

Instances of this metaphysic are so common, that we might almost fill a volume with a list of them. Spinoza's pretended demonstration of the existence of the one great being, by which, however, he meant only the universe, is a metaphysical argument, founded in a series of false or unintelligible, though plausible, definitions *. BERKELEY's proof of the non-existence of matter is wholly metaphysical; and arises chiefly from the mistake of supposing certain words to have but one meaning, which really have two, and sometimes three. LOCKE's discourse against innate ideas and principles, is likewise too metaphysical. Some of his notions on that subject are, I believe, right; but he has not explained them with his wonted precision; and most of his arguments are founded on an ambiguous acceptance of the words *idea* and *innate*.

The author of the *Fable of the Bees* seems to have carried this mode of reasoning as far as it will go. If there had been no ambiguous words in the English language, the understanding of mankind would never have been affronted with his system. Many of our appetites become criminal only when excessive; and we have not always names to express that degree of indulgence which is consistent with virtue. The shameless word-catcher takes advantage of this, and confounds the innocent gratification

* See the Appendix to vol. 1. of Chev. Ramsay's Principles of Religion.

with the excessive or criminal indulgence; calling both by the same name, and taking it for granted, that what he proves to be true of the one is also true of the other. What is it that may not be proved by this way of arguing? May not vice be proved to be virtue, and virtue to be vice? May not a regard to reputation, cleanliness, industry, generosity, conjugal love, be proved to be the same with vanity, luxury, avarice, profusion, sensuality? May it not be proved, that private virtues are private vices; and, consequently, that private vices are public benefits? Such a conclusion is indeed so easily made out by such logic, that nothing but ignorance, impudence, and a hard heart, is necessary to qualify a man for making it. If it be said, that considerable genius must be employed in dressing up these absurd doctrines, so as to render them plausible; I would ask, who are the persons that think them plausible? Never did I hear of one man of virtue or learning, who did not both detest and despise them. They seem plausible, perhaps, to gamblers, highwaymen, and *petit maitres*; but it will not be pretended, that those gentlemen have leisure, inclination, or capacity, to reflect on what they read or hear, so as to separate truth from falsehood.

Among metaphysical writers, Mr HUME holds a distinguished place. Every part of philosophy becomes metaphysic in his hands. His whole theory of the understanding is founded on the doctrine of impressions and ideas, which, as he explains it, is so contrary to fact, that nothing but the illusion of words could make it pass upon any reader. I have already given several instances of this author's metaphysical spirit. I shall give one more; which I beg leave to consider at some length; that I may have an opportunity of confuting a very dangerous error, and, at the same time, of displaying more minutely, than by this general description, the difference between metaphysical and philosophical investigation.

Does

Does any one imagine, that moral and intellectual virtues, that justice and genius, are virtues of the same kind; that they are contemplated with the same sentiments, and known to be virtues by the same criterion? Few, I presume, are of this opinion; but Mr HUME has adopted it, and taken pains to prove it. I shall demonstrate, that this very important error has arisen, either from inaccurate observation, or from his being imposed on by words not well understood, or rather from both causes.

It is true, that justice, great genius, and bodily strength, are all useful to the possessor and to society; and all agreeable to, or (which in this author's style amounts to the same thing) approved by, every one who considers or contemplates them. They therefore, at least the two first, completely answer our author's definition of virtue *. And it would be easy to write a great book, to show the reasons why moral, intellectual, and corporeal abilities, yield pleasure to the beholder and possessor, and to trace out a number of analogies, real or verbal, subsisting between them. But this is nothing to the purpose: they may resemble in ten thousand respects, and yet differ as widely, as a beast or statue differs from a man. Let us trace the author's argument to its source.

Virtue is known by a certain agreeable feeling or sentiment, arising from the consciousness of certain affections or qualities in ourselves, or from the view of them in others. Granted. Justice, humanity, generosity, excite approbation; — a handsome

* It is the nature, and indeed the definition, of virtue, "that it is a quality of the mind agreeable to, or approved by, every one who considers or contemplates it."

Hume's Essays, vol. 2. p. 333. edit 1767. Note.

Bodily qualities are excluded by this definition, but seem to be admitted by our author in some of his reasonings on the subject, as indeed upon his principles they very well may.

face

face excites approbation ; — great genius excites approbation : the effect or sentiment produced is the same in each instance : the object, or cause, must therefore, in each instance, be of the same kind. This is genuine metaphysic : but before a man can be misled by it, he must either find, on consulting his experience, that the feeling excited by the contemplation of these objects is the same in each instance ; in which case I would say, that his feelings are defective, or himself an inaccurate observer of nature : — or he must suppose, that the word *approbation*, because written and pronounced the same way, does really mean the same thing in each of the three propositions above mentioned ; in which case, I would say, that his judgement and ideas are confounded by the mere sound and shape of a word. I am conscious, that my approbation of a fine face is different in-kind from my approbation of great genius ; and that both are extremely different from my approbation of justice, humanity, and generosity : if I call these three different kinds of approbation by the same general name, I use that name in three different significations. Therefore moral, intellectual, and corporeal virtues, are not of the same, but of different kinds.

I confess, says our author, that these three virtues are contemplated with three different kinds of approbation. But the same thing is true of different moral virtues : piety excites one kind of approbation, justice another, and compassion a third ; the virtues of Cato excite our esteem, those of Cesar our love : if therefore piety, justice, and compassion, be virtues of the same kind, notwithstanding that they excite different kinds of approbation, why should justice, genius, and beauty, be accounted virtues of different kinds * ? — This is another metaphysical argument ; an attempt to determine by words what facts only can determine. I

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 258.

still insist on fact and experience. My sentiments, in regard to these virtues, are so diversified, and in each variety so peculiar, that I know, and am assured, that piety, justice, and humanity, are distinct individual virtues of the same kind; and that piety, genius, and beauty, are virtues of different kinds. Applied to each of the former qualities, the word *virtue* means the same thing; but beauty is virtue in one sense, genius in another, and piety in a third.

Well, if the sentiments excited in you by the contemplation of these virtues, are so much diversified, and in each variety so peculiar, you must be able to explain in what respect your approbation of intellectual virtue differs from your approbation of moral; which I presume you will find no easy task.—It is not so difficult, Sir, as you seem to apprehend. When a man has acted generously or justly, I praise him, and think him worthy of praise and reward, for having done his duty; when ungenerously or unjustly, I blame him, and think him worthy of blame and punishment: but a man deserves neither punishment nor blame for want of beauty or of understanding; nor reward nor praise for being handsome or ingenious.—But why are we thought worthy of blame and punishment for being unjust, and not for being homely, or void of understanding? The general conscience of mankind would reply, Because we have it in our power to be just, and ought to be so; but an idiot cannot help his want of understanding, nor an ugly man his want of beauty. This our author will not allow to be a satisfactory answer; because, says he, I have shown, that free-will has no place with regard to the actions, no more than the qualities of men *. What an immense metaphysical labyrinth should we have to run through if we were to disentangle ourselves out of this argument in the common course of lo-

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 260.

gie! To shorten the controversy, I must beg leave to affirm, in my turn, that our moral actions are in our own power, though beauty and genius are not; and to appeal, for proof of this affirmation, to the second part of this Essay, or, rather, to the common sense of mankind.

Again, "Moral distinctions," says Mr HUME, "arise from the natural distinctions of pain and pleasure; and when we receive those feelings from the general consideration of any quality or character, we denominate it virtuous or vicious. Now I believe no one will assert, that a quality can never produce pleasure or pain to the person who considers it, unless it be perfectly voluntary in the person who possesses it *." — More metaphysic! and a sophism too — a *petitio principii*! Here our author endeavours to confound intellectual with moral virtue, by an argument which supposeth his own theory of virtue to be true; of which theory this confusion of the virtues is a necessary consequence. The reader must see, that this argument, if it prove any thing at all, might be made to prove, that the smell or beauty of a rose, the taste of an apple, the hardness of steel, and the glittering of a diamond, as well as bodily strength and great genius, are all virtues of the same kind with justice, generosity, and gratitude. — Still we wander from the point. How often must it be repeated, that this matter is to be determined, not by metaphysical arguments founded on ambiguous words, but by facts and experience!

"Have I not appealed to facts?" he will say. "Are not all the qualities that constitute the great man, constancy, fortitude, magnanimity, as involuntary and necessary, as the qualities of the judgement and imagination? †" The term *great*

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 260.

† Ibid. p. 259.

man is so very equivocal, that I will have nothing to do with it. The vilest scoundrel on earth, immediately commences great man, when he has with impunity perpetrated any extraordinary act of wickedness; murdered fifty thousand men; robbed all the houses of half a dozen provinces; or dexterously plundered his own country, to defray the expence of a ruinous war, contrived on purpose to satiate his avarice, or divert the public attention from his blunders and villanies. I speak of the qualities that constitute the *good man*, that is, of moral qualities; and these, I affirm, to be within every man's reach, though genius and beauty are not.

“ But are not men afraid of passing for good-natured, lest that “ should be taken for want of understanding? — and do they not “ often boast of more debauches than they have been really engaged in, to give themselves airs of fire and spirit?*” Yes: fools do the first, to recommend themselves to fools; and profligates the last, to recommend themselves to profligates: but he is little acquainted with the human heart, who does not perceive, that such sentiments are affected, and contrary to the way of thinking that is most natural to mankind.

“ But are you not as jealous of your character, with regard to “ sense and knowledge, as to honour and courage?†” This question ought to be addressed to those in whom courage is a virtue, and the want of it a vice: and I am certain, there is not in his Majesty's service one officer or private man, who would not wish to be thought rather a valiant foldier, though of no deep reach, than a very clever fellow, with the addition of an infamous coward. — The term *honour* is of dubious import. Accord-

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 257.

† Id. Ibid.

ing to the notions of these times, a man may blaspheme God, sell his country, murder his friend, pick the pocket of his fellow-sharper, and employ his whole life in seducing others to vice and perdition, and yet be accounted a man of honour; provided he be accustomed to speak certain words, wear certain cloaths, and haunt certain company. If this be the honour alluded to by the author, an honest man may, for a slender consideration, renounce all pretensions to it. But if he allude (as I rather suppose) to those qualities of the heart and understanding which intitle one to general esteem and confidence, Mr HUME knows, that this kind of honour is dearer to a man than life.

“ Well, then, temperance is a virtue in every station; yet
 “ would you not chuse to be convicted of drunkenness rather
 “ than of ignorance? * ” — I have heard of a witty parson, who, having been dismissed for irregularities, used afterwards, in conversation, to say, that he thanked God he was not cashiered for ignorance and insufficiency, but only for vice and immorality. According to our author’s doctrine, this speech was neither absurd nor profane: but I am sure the generality of mankind would be of a different opinion. To be ignorant of what we ought to know, is to be deficient in moral virtue; to profess to know what we are ignorant of, is falsehood, a breach of moral virtue: whether these vices be more or less atrocious than intemperance, must be determined by the circumstances of particular cases. To be ignorant of what we could not know, of what we do not profess to know, and of what it is not our duty to know, is no vice at all: and a man must have made some progress in debauchery, before he can say, from serious conviction, I would rather be chargeable with intemperance, than with ignorance of this kind.

* See Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 3. p. 257.

It appears, then, that our author's reasoning on the present subject, is not philosophical, but what I call *metaphysical* *; being founded, not on fact, but on theory, and supported by ambiguous words and inaccurate experience.

The judgement of the wiser ancients in matters of morality, is doubtless of very great weight, but, in opposition to the dictates of our own moral nature, can never preponderate; because these are our ultimate standard of moral truth. Mr HUME endeavours to confirm his theory of virtue by authorities from the ancients, particularly the Stoics and Peripatetics. Though he had accomplished this, we might have appealed from their opinion, as well as from his, to our own feelings. But he fails in this, as in the other parts of his proof.

It is true, the Peripatetics and Stoics made Prudence the first (not the most important) of the cardinal virtues; because they conceived it necessary to enable a man to act his part aright in life, and because they thought it their duty to take every opportunity of improving their nature: but they never said, that an incurable defect of understanding is a vice, or that it is as much our duty to be learned and ingenious, as to be honest and grateful. "All the praise of virtue consists in action," says Cicero †, in name of the Stoics, when treating of this virtue of prudence. And, when explaining the comparative merit of the several classes of moral duty, he declares, that "All knowledge which is not followed by action, is unprofitable and imperfect, like a beginning without an end, or a foundation without a superstruc-

* I do not contend, that this use of the word *metaphysical* is strictly proper: I mean nothing more, than to give the reader a notion of this particular mode of false reasoning; and, by satisfying him that it is *not philosophical*, to guard him against its influence.

† De Officiis, lib. 1. cap. 6.

ture; and that the acquisition of the most sublime and most important science ought to be, and will by every good man be relinquished, when it interferes with the duties we owe our country, our parents, and society *.” Wisdom, indeed, he allows to be the first and most excellent of the virtues: but the Stoics made a distinction between Prudence and Wisdom. By Prudence they meant that virtue which regulates our desires and aversions, and fixes them on proper objects. Wisdom was another name for mental perfection: it comprehended all the virtues, the religious as well as the social and prudential; and was equally incompatible with vice and with error †. The wise man, the standard of Stoical excellence, was, by their own acknowledgement, an ideal character; the purest virtue attainable in this life being necessarily tainted with imperfection. Hence some have endeavoured to turn their notions of *wisdom* into ridicule; but I think, without reason. For is there any thing absurd or ridiculous in an artist working after a model of such perfection as he can never hope to equal? In the judgement of Aristotle and Bacon, the true poet forms his imitations of nature after a model of ideal perfection, which perhaps hath no existence but in his own mind ‡. And are not Christians commanded to imitate the Deity himself, that great original and standard of perfection, between whom and the most excellent of his creatures an infinite distance must remain for ever ||?

“The ancient moralists,” says Mr HUME, “made no material distinction among the different species of mental endow-

* De Officiis, lib. 1. cap. 43. 44.

† Id. ib.

‡ Aristot. Poetica. Bacon, De augmentis scientiarum, lib. 2. cap. 13.

§ Matth. v. 48.

ments and defects, but treated all alike, under the appellation of virtues and vices, and made them indiscriminately the objects of their moral reasonings *.” That they considered both intellectual and moral endowments as necessary to the formation of a perfect character, and sometimes treated of both in one and the same book or system, and often called both by the same general name *Virtue*, I do not deny: but that they made no *material distinction* among them, I can by no means admit. I might here fill many a page with quotations: but a few will suffice. “Man’s virtue and vice,” says Marcus Aurelius, “consists not in those affections in which we are passive, but in action.” To a stone thrown upward it is no evil to fall, nor good to have mounted †.” And in another place, “The vain-glorious man placeth his good in the action of another; the sensual, in his own passive feelings; the wise man in his own action ‡.” “The contemplative life,” says Plutarch, “when it fails to produce the active, is unprofitable ||.” “To acquire knowledge,” says Lucian, “is of no use, if we do not also frame our lives according to something better **.” It is remarkable, that the Greek tragedians (I know not by what authority, for Homer’s idea is very different) represent Ulysses as a character more distinguished for political prudence or cunning,

* Hume’s Essays, vol. 2. p. 387. 388.

† Οὐδὲ ἡ ἀρετὴ ἢ κακία αὐτῇ ἐν πέσει ἢ ἐν ἀνάρριφθῆντι κινῶ οὐδὲν κακὸν τὸ κατενεχθῆναι, οὐδὲ ἀγαθὸν τὸ ἀνενεχθῆναι. Lib. 9. c. 17.

‡ Οἱ μὲν φιλόδοξοι ἀλλοτρίαν ἐργασίαν ἴδιον ἀγαθὸν ὑπολαμβάνειν ὁ δὲ φιλόδοξος, ἴδιον πείπειν ὁ δὲ νοῦν, ἔχων, ἴδιον πρᾶξιν. Lib. 6. c. 51.

|| Οἱ δὲ θεωρητικὸς βίος τῷ πρακτικῷ διαμαρτάνων, ἀνωφελὲς.

Plutarch. de Educatione.

** Οὐδὲν ὕψος ἢ ἐπίστασθαι τὰ μαθήματα, εἰ μὴ τις ἄρα ἢ τὴν βίον ρυθμίζει πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον. Lucian. Conviv.

than for strict moral virtue; and often place him in such attitudes as make him appear odious on this very account *. And Cicero, in his treatise of Moral Duties, often declares, that cunning, when it violates the rules of justice, is blameable and hateful †. Does Virgil consign cripples and idiots, as well as tyrants, to

* See particularly Sophocles. Philoct. vers. 100. and vers. 1260. I beg leave to quote a few remarkable lines. Neoptolemus having, by the advice of Ulysses, fraudulently got possession of the arrows of Philoctetes, repents of what he had done, and is going to restore them. To deter him from his purpose, Ulysses threatens him with the resentment of the whole Grecian army.

Neop. Σοφὸς περὶ καὶς ἔσθ' ἐξαυτῶς σοφὸν.

Ulys. Σὺ δ' ἔντε φωνῆς, ἔντε δραστείης σοφὸν.

Neop. Ἀλλ' αἱ δίκαια, τῶν σοφῶν κρίσσω τάδε.

Ulys. Καὶ πῶς δίκαιον, ἃ γ' ἔλαβες βουλῆς ἐμαῖς

Πάλιν μεθεῖναι ταῦτα; *Neop.* Τὴν ἀμαρτίαν

Ἀισχρὰν ἀμαρτῶν, ἀναλαβὼν παράσσομαι;

Ulys. Στράτοι δ' Ἀχαιῶν ἔσθ' ἡ πράσσει τάδε;

Neop. Ξὺν τῷ δικαίῳ τὴν σὸν οὐ τερβῶ φοβέοι.

vers. 1279.

— *Neop.* Wife as thou art, Ulysses,
Thou talk'st most idly. *Ulys.* Wisdom is not thine,
Either in word or deed. *Neop.* Know, *to be just*
Is better far than to be wise. *Ulys.* But where,
Where is the justice, thus unauthoris'd,
'To give a treasure back thou owest to me,
And to my counsels? *Neop.* I have done a wrong,
And I will try to make atonement for it.
Ulys. Dost thou not fear the power of Greece? *Neop.* I fear
Nor Greece, nor thee, when I am doing right.

Franklin.

Throughout the whole play, the fire and generosity of the young hero (so well becoming the son of Achilles) is finely opposed to the caution and craft of the politician, and forms one of the most striking contrasts that can well be imagined.

† — Quippe cum ea (justitia) sine prudentia satis habeat auctoritatis, prudentia

to Tartarus? Does he say, that a great genius, and handsome face, as well as a pure heart, were the passports to Elysium? No. Virgil was too good a man to injure the cause of virtue, and too wise to shock common sense, by so preposterous a distribution of reward and punishment. The impious, the unnatural, the fraudulent, the avaricious; adulterers, incestuous persons, traitors, corrupt judges, venal statesmen, tyrants, and the minions of tyrants, are those whom he dooms to eternal misery: and he peoples Elysium with the shades of the pure and the pious, of heroes who have died in defence of their country, of ingenious men who have employed their talents in recommending piety and virtue, and of all who by acts of beneficence have merited the love and gratitude of their fellow-creatures*.

The

ia sine justitia nihil valet ad faciendam fidem. Quo enim quis versutior et calidior est, hoc invisior et suspensior, detracta opinione probitatis.

De Officiis, lib. 2. cap. 9.

Fundamentum perpetuæ commendationis et famæ est justitia, sine qua nihil potest esse laudabile.

Ibid. cap. 20.

The same doctrine is repeatedly inculcated in the third book, and in other parts of his works, and indeed in all the good books I am acquainted with. And in all the rational conversations I ever witnessed, the same doctrine was implied; nor could any man be thought seriously to believe the contrary, without forfeiting the esteem and confidence of mankind.

* Virgil. *Æneid.* vi. 547. — 665. — As the moral sentiments of nations may often be learned from their fables and traditions, as well as from their history and philosophy, it will not perhaps be deemed foreign from our design, to give the following brief abstract of this poet's sublime theory of future rewards and punishments; the outlines of which he is known to have taken from the Pythagoreans and Platonists, who probably were indebted for them to some ancient tradition.

The shades below are divided by Virgil into three districts or provinces. On this side Styx, the souls of those whose bodies have not been honoured with the rites of sepulture, wander about in a melancholy condition for a hundred years,

N n

before

The Peripatetics held prudence to be an active principle diffused through

before they are permitted to pass the river. When this period expires, or when their bodies are buried, they are ferried over, and appear before Minos and the other judges, who allot them such a mansion as their lives on earth are found to have deserved. They who have been of little or no use to mankind; or who have not been guilty of any very atrocious crimes; or whose crimes, though atrocious, were the effects rather of an unhappy destiny, than of wilful depravation, are disposed of in different parts of the *regions of mourning*, (*lugentes campi*), where they undergo a variety of purifying pains. From thence, when thoroughly refined from all the remains of vice, they pass into Elysium; where they live a thousand years in a state of happiness; and then, after taking a draught of the waters of oblivion, are sent back to earth to animate new bodies. — Those who have been guilty of great crimes, as impiety, want of natural affection, adultery, incest, breach of trust, subverting the liberties of their country, &c. are delivered by the judge Rhadamanthus to Tisiphone and the other furies, who shut them up in an immense dungeon of darkness and fire, called *Tartarus*, where their torments are unspeakable and eternal. — The souls of good men are re-united, either with the Deity himself, or with that universal spirit which he created in the beginning, and which animates the world; and their shades, ghosts, or *idola*, enjoy for ever the repose and pleasures of Elysium. These shades might be seen, though not touched; they resembled the bodies with which they had formerly been invested; and retained a consciousness of their identity, and a remembrance of their past life, with almost the same affections and character that had distinguished them on earth.

On this system, Virgil has founded a series of the sublimest descriptions that are to be met with in poetry. Milton alone has equalled them in the first and second books of *Paradise Lost*. Homer's *Necyomanteia*, in the eleventh of the *Odyssey*, has the merit of being original: but Virgil's imitation is confessedly far superior. The dream of Henry, in the seventh canto of the *Henriade*, notwithstanding the advantages the author might have drawn from the Christian theology, is but a trifle, compared with the magnificent and stupendous scenery exhibited in the sixth book of the *Æneid*.

This theory of future rewards and punishments, however imperfect, is consonant enough with the hopes and fears of men, and their natural notions of virtue and vice, to render the poet's narrative alarming and interesting in a very high degree. But were an author to adopt Mr HUME's theory of virtue and the soul,
and

through the whole of moral virtue *. “None but a good man,” says Aristotle, “can be prudent;”—and, a little after, “It is not possible for a man to be properly good without prudence, nor prudent without moral virtue †.” Will it yet be said, that the ancient moralists made no material distinction between moral and intellectual virtues? Is it not evident, that though they considered both as necessary to the formation of a perfect character, and sometimes discoursed of both in the same treatise or system, yet they deemed the latter valuable only as means to qualify us for the former, and insignificant, or even odious, when they failed to answer this end?

“We may,” says Mr HUME, “by perusing the titles of the chapters in Aristotle’s Ethics, be convinced, that he ranks courage, temperance, magnificence, magnanimity, modesty, prudence, and a *manly freedom*, among the virtues, as well as justice and friendship ‡.” True; but if our learned metaphysi-

and endeavour to set it off in a poetical description, all the powers of human genius could not save it from being ridiculous. A metaphysician may “blunder” for a long time, “round about a meaning,” without giving any violent shock to an inattentive reader: but a poet, who clothes his thoughts with imagery, and illustrates them by examples, must come to the point at once; and, if he means to please, and not disgust his readers, to move their admiration, and not their contempt, must be careful not to contradict their natural notions, especially in matters of such deep and universal concern as morality and religion.

* —Ανάγκη τὴν φρόνησιν ἔξιν εἶναι—πρακτικὴν.

Ethic. ad Nicom. vi. 5.

† Αδύνατον φρόνιμον εἶναι μὴ ὄντα ἀγαθόν.—Οὐχ’ ὅσον ἀγαθοὶ εἶναι κυρίως ἀνευ φρονήσεως οἷδε φρονιμον ἀνευ τῆς ἠθικῆς ἀρετῆς.

Id. vi. 13.

See the elegant paraphrase of Andronicus the Rhodian, upon these passages.

‡ Hume’s Essays, vol. 2. p. 388.—The term *manly freedom* does not express the meaning of the Greek ἐλευθεριότης. By this word the philosopher denotes that virtue which consists in the moderate use of wealth. — περὶ χρημάτων μεσότης. See *Ethic. ad Nicom. lib. 4. cap. 1. 2.*

cian had extended his researches a little beyond the *titles* of those chapters, he would have found, that, in Aristotle's judgment, "Moral virtue is a voluntary disposition or habit; and "that moral approbation and disapprobation are excited by those "actions and affections only which are in our own power, that "is, of which the first motion arises in ourselves, and proceeds "from no extrinsic cause *."

This is true philosophy, and very properly determines the degree of merit of our intellectual and constitutional virtues. A man makes proficiency in knowledge: — if in this he has acted from a desire to improve his nature, and qualify himself for moral virtue, that desire, and the action consequent upon it, are virtuous, laudable, and of good desert. Is a man possessed of great genius? — this invests him with dignity and distinction, and qualifies him for noble undertakings: but this of itself is no moral virtue; because it is not a disposition resulting from a spontaneous effort. Is his constitution naturally disposed to virtue? — he still has it in his power to be vicious, and therefore his virtue is meritorious; though not so highly as that of another man, who, in spite of outrageous appetites, and tempting circumstances, hath attained an equal degree of moral improvement. A man constitutionally brave, generous, or grateful, commands our admiration more than another, who struggles to overcome the natural baseness of his temper. The former is a sublimer object, and may be of greater service to society; and as his virtue is secured by constitution as well as by inclination, we repose in it without fear of being disappointed. Yet perhaps the latter, if his merit were equally conspicuous, would be found equally worthy of our moral approbation. Indeed, if his virtue

* Ethic. ad Nicom. lib. 2. & 3. Andronicus Rhodius, p. 89. 90. &c. Edit. Cantab. 1679.

be so irresolute, as to leave him wavering between good and evil, he is not intitled to praise: such irresolution is criminal, because he may and ought to correct it; we cannot, and we ought not to trust him, till we see a strong prepossession established in favour of virtue. — However, let us love virtue where-ever we find it: whether the immediate gift of Heaven, or the effect of human industry co-operating with divine influence, it always deserves our esteem and veneration.

The reader may now form an estimate of that author's attention, who says, that "the ancient moralists made no material distinction among the different species of mental endowments and defects." If any one is disposed to think, that I have made out my point, rather by inference than by direct proof, I submit to his consideration the following passages, which are too plain to need a commentary.

Having proposed a general distribution of our mental powers, (which seems to amount to this, that some of them fit us for knowledge, and others for action), Aristotle proceeds in this manner. "According to this distribution, virtue is also divided into intellectual and moral. Of the former kind are wisdom, intelligence, and prudence; of the latter, temperance, and frugal liberality. When we speak of morals, we do not say, that a man is wise or intelligent, but that he is gentle or temperate. Yet we praise a wise man in respect of his dispositions [or habits]; for laudable dispositions are what we call virtues *."

* Διαρίζεται δὲ ἡ ἀρετὴ κατὰ τὴν διαφορὰν ταύτην. λέγομεν γὰρ αὐτῶν τὰς μὲν διανοητικάς, τὰς δὲ ἠθικάς. σοφίαν μὲν ἢ σύνεσιν. ἢ φρονήσιν, διανοητικάς· ἐλευθεριότητα δὲ ἢ σωφροσύνην, ἠθικάς. λέγοντες γὰρ περὶ τῶν ἠθικῶν, ὃ λέγομεν ὅτι σόφος, ἢ σύνετος, ἀλλ' ὅτι πραὸς ἢ σώφρων. ἐπαινοῦμεν δὲ ἢ τὸν σοφὸν τὴν ἔξιν, τῶν ἔξων δὲ τὰς ἐπαινετάς ἀρέτας λέγομεν.

Ethic. ad Nicom. lib. 1. sub. fin.

“ The virtues of the soul,” says Cicero, “ and of its principal part the understanding, are various, but may be reduced to two kinds. The first are those which Nature has implanted, and which are called *not voluntary*. The second kind are more properly called *virtues*, because they depend on the will; and these, as objects of approbation, are transcendently superior. Of the former kind are docility, memory, and all the virtues distinguished by the general name of genius, or capacity: persons possessed of them are called ingenious. The latter class comprehends *the great and genuine virtues*, which we denominate *voluntary*; as prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice, and others of the same kind *.”

The word *virtue* has indeed great latitude of signification. It denotes any quality of a thing tending to the happiness of a perceiving being; it denotes that quality, or perfection of qualities, by which a thing is fitted to answer its end; sometimes it denotes power or agency in general; and sometimes any habit which improves the faculties of the human mind. In the first three senses we ascribe virtue to the soul, and to the body, to brutes, and inanimate things; in the last, to our intellectual as well as moral nature. And no doubt instances may be found of ambiguity and want of precision, even in the best moralists, from an

* *Animi autem, et ejus animi partis quæ princeps est, quæque mens nominatur, plures sunt virtutes, sed duo prima genera: unum earum quæ ingenerantur suapte natura, appellanturque non voluntariæ: alterum autem earum, quæ in voluntate positæ, magis proprie eo nomine appellari solent; quarum est excellens in animorum laude præstantia. Prioris generis est docilitas, memoria; qualia fere omnia appellantur uno ingenii nomine; easque virtutes qui habent ingeniosi vocantur. Alterum autem genus est *magnarum verarumque virtutum*, quas appellamus voluntarias, ut prudentiam, temperantiam, fortitudinem, justitiam, et reliquas ejusdem generis. — Virtutes voluntariæ proprie virtutes appellantur, multumque excellunt, &c. Cicero *De Finibus*, lib. 5. cap. 13. ex editione Davissii.*

improper use of this word. Yet I believe this attempt of Mr HUME's is the first that has been made to prove, that among these very different sorts of virtue there is little or no difference.

Is it not strange, that a man of science should ever have taken it in his head, that the characteristic of a genus is a sufficient description of a species? He might as well have supposed, that, because perception and self-motion belong to animal life in general, it is therefore a sufficient definition of man, to call him a self-moving and percipient creature: from which profound principle it clearly follows, that man is a beast, and that a beast is a man.

By such reasoning it would be easy to prove any doctrine. The method is this: — and I hope those who may hereafter chuse to astonish the world with a system of metaphysical paradoxes, will do me the honour to acknowledge, that I was the first who unfolded the whole art and mystery of one branch of that manufacture within the compass of one short RECIPE: — Take a word (an abstract term is the most convenient) which admits of more than one signification; and, by the help of a predicate and copula, form a proposition, suitable to your system, or to your humour, or to any other thing you please, except truth. When laying down your premises, you are to use the name of the quality or subject, in one sense; and, when inferring your conclusion, in another. You are then to urge a few equivocal facts, very slightly examined, (the more slightly the better), as a further proof of the said conclusion; and to shut up all with citing some ancient authorities. A few occasional strictures on religion as an unphilosophical thing, and a sneer at the *Whole Duty of Man**, or any other good book, will give your dissertation what many are

* See Hume's *Essays*, vol. 2. p. 388. edit. 1767.

pleased to call a *liberal turn*; and will go near to convince the world, that you are a candid philosopher, a manly free-thinker, and a very fine writer.

It is to no purpose that our author calls this a verbal dispute, and sometimes condescends to soften matters by an *almost*, or some such evasive word. This doctrine obviously tends to confound all our ideas of virtue and duty, and to make us consider ourselves as mere machines, acted upon by external impulse, and not more accountable for moral blemishes, than for ignorance, and want of understanding. If the reader think as seriously of the controversy as I do, he will pardon the length of this digression.

I hope it now appears, that there is a kind of metaphysic, which, whatever respectable names it may have assumed, deserves contempt or censure from every lover of truth. If it be detrimental to science, it is equally so to the affairs of life. Whenever one enters on business, the metaphysical spirit must be laid aside, otherwise it will render him ridiculous, perhaps detestable. Sure it will not be said, that any portion of this spirit is necessary to form a man for stations of high importance. For these, a turn to metaphysic would be an effectual disqualification. The metaphysician is cold, wavering, distrustful, and perpetually ruminates on words, distinctions, arguments, and systems. He attends to the events of life with a view chiefly to the system that happens for the time to predominate in his fancy, and to which he is anxious to reconcile every appearance. His observation is therefore partial and inaccurate, because he contemplates Nature through the medium of his favourite theory, which is always false; so that experience, which enlarges, ascertains, and methodises, the knowledge of other men, serves only to heighten the natural darkness and confusion of his. His literary studies are conducted with the same spirit, and produce the same effects.

—Whereas, to the administration of great affairs, truth and steadiness of principle, constancy of mind, intuitive sagacity, extreme quickness in apprehending the present and anticipating the future, are indispensably necessary. Whatever tends to weaken and unsettle the mind, to cramp the imagination, to fix the attention on minute and trifling objects, and withdraw it from those enlarged prospects of nature and mankind in which true genius loves to expatiate; whatever has that tendency, and surely this metaphysic has it, is the bane of genius, and of every thing that is great in human nature.

In the lower walks of life, our theorist will be oftener the object of ridicule than of detestation. Yet even here, the man is to be pitied, who, in matters of moment, happens to be connected with a stanch metaphysician. Doubts, disputes, and conjectures, will be the plague of his life. If his associate form a system of action or inaction, of doubt or confidence, he will stick by it, however absurd, as long as he has one verbal argument unanswered to urge in defence of it. In accounting for the conduct of others, he will reject obvious causes, and set himself to explore such as are more remote and refined. Making no proper allowance for the endless variety of human character, he will suppose all men influenced, like himself, by system and verbal argument: certain causes, in his judgement, must of necessity produce certain effects; for he has twenty reasons ready to offer, by which it is demonstrable, that they cannot fail: and it is well, if experience at last convince him, that there was a small verbal ambiguity in his principles, and that his views of mankind were not quite so extensive as they ought to have been. In a word, unless he be very good-natured, and of a passive disposition, his refinements will do more harm than even the stiff stupidity of an idiot. If inclined to fraud, or any sort of vice, he will never be at a loss for an evasion; which, if it should not satisfy

his associate, will, however, perplex and plague him. I need not enlarge; the reader may conceive the rest. To aid his fancy, he will find some traits of this character, in one of its most amusing and least disagreeable forms, delineated with a masterly pencil in the person of Walter Shandy, Esq;

It is astonishing to consider, how little mankind value the good within their reach, and how ardently they pursue what Nature has placed beyond it; how blindly they over-rate what they have no experience of, and how fondly they admire what they do not understand. This verbal metaphysic has been dignified with the name of *Science*; and verbal metaphysicians have been reputed philosophers, and men of genius. Doubtless a man of genius may, by the fashion of the times, be seduced into these studies: but that particular cast of mind which fits a man for them, and recommends them to his choice, is not genius, but a minute and feeble understanding; capable indeed of being made, by long practice, expert in the management of words; but which never did, and never will, qualify any man for the discovery or illustration of sentiment. For what is genius? What, but sound judgement, sensibility of heart, and a talent for accurate and extensive observation? And will sound judgement prepare a man for being imposed on by words? will sensibility of heart render him insensible to his own feelings, and inattentive to those of other men? will a talent for accurate and extensive observation, make him ignorant of the real phenomena of Nature, and, consequently, incapable of detecting what is false or equivocal in the representation of facts? And yet, when facts are fairly and fully represented; when human sentiments are strongly felt, and perspicuously described; and when the meaning of words is ascertained, and the same word has always the same idea annexed to it, — there is an end of metaphysic.

A body is neither vigorous nor beautiful, in which the size of
some

some members is above, and that of others below, their due proportion : every part must have its proper size and strength, otherwise the result of the whole will be deformity and weakness. Neither is real genius consistent with a disproportionate strength of the reasoning powers above those of taste and imagination. Those minds in whom all the faculties are united in their due proportion, are far superior to the puerilities of metaphysical scepticism. They trust to their own feelings, which are strong and decisive, and leave no room for hesitation or doubts about their authenticity. They see through moral subjects at one glance; and what they say carries both the heart and the understanding along with it. When one has long drudged in the dull and unprofitable pages of metaphysic, how pleasing the transition to a moral writer of true genius ! Would you know what that genius is, and where it may be found ? Go to Shakespeare, to Bacon, to Johnson, to Montesquieu, to Rousseau * ; and when
you

* As several persons, highly respectable both for their talents and principles, have desired to know my reasons for joining Rousseau's name to those of Bacon, Shakespeare, Johnson, and Montesquieu, I beg leave to take this opportunity of explaining my sentiments in regard to that celebrated author.

It is because I consider Rousseau as a *moral writer of true genius*, that I mention his name in this place. Sensibility of heart, a talent for extensive and accurate observation, liveliness and ardour of fancy, and a style copious, nervous, and elegant, beyond that of any other French writer, — are his distinguishing characteristics. In argument he is not always equally successful, for he often mistakes declamation for proof, and hypothesis for fact ; but his eloquence, when addressed to the heart, overpowers with force irresistible. A greater number of important facts relating to the human mind are recorded in his works, than in all the books of all the sceptical philosophers, ancient and modern. And he appears in general to be a friend to virtue, to mankind, to natural religion, and sometimes to Christianity.

Yet none even of his best works are free from absurdity. His reasonings, on

you have studied them, return, if you can, to HUME, and HOBBS, and MALEBRANCHE, and LEIBNITZ, and SPINOSA. If, while you learned wisdom from the former, your heart exulted within you, and rejoiced to contemplate the sublime and successful

the effects of the sciences, and on the origin and progress of human society, are diffuse, inaccurate, and often weak; much perverted by theories of his own, as well as by too implicit an admittance of the vague assertions of travellers, and of the systems and doctrines of some favourite French philosophers: and he seems, in these, and frequently too in his other writings, to consider animal pleasure and bodily accomplishments as the happiness and perfection of man. His plan of education, though admirable in many parts, is in some injudicious and dangerous, and impracticable as a whole. The character of Julia's lover is drawn with a masterly hand indeed, and well conducted throughout; but the lady has two characters, and those incompatible; — the wife of Wolmar is quite a different person from the mistress of St Preux. Wolmar himself is an impossible character; destitute of principle, yet of rigid virtue; destitute of feeling, yet capable of tenderness and attachment; delicate in his notions of honour, yet not ashamed to marry a woman whom he knew to be to all intents and purposes devoted to another.

Some of this author's remarks on the spirit of Christianity, and on the character of its Divine Founder, are not only excellent, but transcendently so; and I believe no Christian ever read them without feeling his heart warmed, and his faith confirmed. But what he says, — of the absurdities which he fancies to be contained in the sacred history, — of the impropriety of the evidence of miracles, — of the analogy between those of Jesus Christ and the tricks of jugglers, — of the insignificance and impertinence of prayer, — of the sufficiency of human reason for discovering a complete and comfortable scheme of natural religion, — of the discouraging nature of the terms of salvation offered in the gospel, — of the measure of evidence that ought to accompany divine revelation, (which, as he states it, would be incompatible with man's free agency and moral probation), — what he says of these, and of several other theological points of great importance, betrays a degree of ignorance and prejudice, of which, as a philosopher, as a scholar, and as a man, he should have been utterly ashamed. He appears to be distressed with his doubts; and yet, without having ever examined whether they be well or ill founded, scruples not to exert all his eloquence on purpose to infuse them into others: a conduct which I must ever condemn, as illiberal, unjust, and cruel.

Had

cessful efforts of human intellect; perhaps it may now be of use, as a lesson of humility, to have recourse to the latter, and, for a while, to behold the picture of a soul wandering from thought to thought, without knowing where to fix; and from a total want of feeling, or a total ignorance of what it feels, mistaking names

Had Rousseau studied the scripture, and the writings of rational divines, with as much care as he seems to have employed in reading the books, and listening to the conversation, of French infidels, and in attending to the unchristian practices and doctrines warranted by some ecclesiastical establishments; I may venture to assure him, that his mind would have been much more at ease, his works much more valuable, and his memory much dearer to all good men.

Rousseau is, in my opinion, a great philosophical genius, but wild, irregular, and often self-contradictory; disposed, from the fashion of the times, and from his desire of being reputed a bold speaker and free-thinker, to adopt the doctrines of infidelity; but of a heart too tender, and an imagination too lively, to permit him to become a thorough-paced infidel. Had he lived in an age less addicted to hypothesis, he might have distinguished himself as a moral philosopher of the first rank. What pity, that a proper sense of his superiority to his contemporaries upon the continent, could not preserve him from the contagion of their example! For, though now it is the fashion for every French declaimer to talk of Bacon and Newton, I question, whether, in any age since the days of Socrates, the building of fanciful theories was so epidemical as in the present. If the men of learning formerly employed their ingenuity in defending the theories of that philosopher by whose name they were ambitious to be distinguished; they are now no less industrious in devising and vindicating, each man a theory of his own.

To conclude: The writings of this author, with all their imperfections, may be read by the philosopher with advantage, as they often direct to the right observation and interpretation of nature; and by the Christian without detriment, as the cavils they contain against religion are too slight and too paradoxical to weaken the faith of any one who is tolerably instructed in the principles and evidence of Christianity. To the man of taste they can never fail to recommend themselves, by the charms of the composition.

The improprieties in Rousseau's late conduct appear to me to have arisen rather from bodily infirmity than from moral depravation, and consequently to render him an object of forbearance and pity rather than of persecution or ridicule.

for things, verbal distinctions and analogies for real difference and similitude, and the obscure insinuations of a bewildered understanding, puzzled with words, and perverted with theory, for the sentiments of Nature, and the dictates of Reason. A metaphysician, exploring the recesses of the human heart, has just such a chance for finding the truth, as a man with microscopic eyes would have for finding the road. The latter might amuse himself with contemplating the various mineral strata that are diffused along the expansion of a needle's point; but of the face of Nature he could make nothing: he would start back with horror from the caverns yawning between the mountainous grains of sand that lie before him; but the real gulf or mountain he could not see at all.

Is the futility of metaphysical systems exaggerated beyond the truth by this allusion? Tell me, then, in which of those systems I shall find such a description of the soul of man as would enable me to know what it is. A great and excellent author observes, that if all human things were to perish except the works of Shakespeare, it might still be known from them what sort of creature man was *: — A sentiment nobly imagined, and as just as it is sublime! Can the same thing be said with truth of any one, or of all the metaphysical treatises that have been written on the nature of man? If an inhabitant of another planet were to read *The Treatise of Human Nature*, what notions of human nature could he gather from it? — That man must believe one thing by instinct, and must also believe the contrary by reason: — That the universe is nothing but a *heap* of perceptions without a substance: — That though a man could bring himself to believe, yea, and have reason to believe, that every thing in the universe proceeds from some cause; yet it would be unreasonable for him

* Lord Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead*.

to believe, that the universe itself proceeds from a cause : — That the soul of man is not the same this moment it was the last; that we know not what it is; that it is not one, but many things; and that it is nothing at all; — and yet, that in this soul is the agency of all the causes that operate throughout the sensible creation; — and yet, that in this soul there is neither power nor agency, nor any idea of either : — That the perfection of human knowledge is to doubt : — That man ought to believe nothing, and yet that man's belief ought to be influenced and determined by certain principles : — That we ought to doubt of every thing, yea of our doubts themselves; and therefore the utmost that philosophy can do, is to give a doubtful solution of doubtful doubts * : — That Nature continually imposes on us, and continually counteracts herself, by giving us sagacity to detect the imposture : — That we are necessarily and unavoidably determined to think in certain cases after a certain manner; but that we ought not to submit to this unavoidable necessity; and that they are fools who do so : — That man, in all his perceptions, actions, and volitions, is a mere passive machine, and has no separate existence of his own, being entirely made up of other things, of the existence of which, however, he is by no means certain; and yet, that the nature of all things depends so much upon man, that two and two could not be equal to four, nor fire produce heat, nor the sun light, without an act of the human understanding : — That none of our actions are in our power; that we ought to exercise power over our actions; and that there is no

* Strange as this expression may seem, it is not without a precedent. The fourth section of Mr HUME's *Essays on the Human Understanding* is called, *Sceptical doubts concerning the operations of the understanding*; and the fifth section bears this title, *Sceptical solution of these doubts*.

such thing as power : — That body and motion may be regarded as the cause of thought ; and that body does not exist : — That the universe exists in the mind ; and that the mind does not exist : — That the human understanding, acting alone, does entirely subvert itself, and prove by argument, that by argument nothing can be proved : — These are a few of the many sublime mysteries brought to light by this great philosopher, or plainly deducible from his principles. But these, however they may illuminate our terrestrial *literati*, would convey no information to the planetary stranger, except perhaps, that the sage metaphysician knew nothing of his subject.

What a strange detail ! does not the reader exclaim ? Can it be, that any man should ever bring himself to think, or imagine that he could bring others to think so absurdly ! What a taste, what a heart * must they possess, whose delight it is, to represent

* “ A free and impartial inquiry after truth, where-ever it is to be found, is indeed a noble and most commendable disposition : a disposition, which every man ought himself to labour after, and to the utmost of his power encourage in all others. It is the great foundation of all useful knowledge, of all true virtue, and of all sincere religion. But when a man, in his searches into the nature of things, finds his inquiries leading him towards such notions as, if they should prove true, would manifestly subvert the very essences of good and evil ; the least that a sober-minded man can in such a case possibly be supposed to owe to God, to virtue, to the dignity of a rational nature, is, that he ought to be in the highest degree fearful and suspicious of himself, lest he be led away by any prejudice, lest he be deceived by any erroneous argument, lest he suffer himself to be imposed on by any wrong inclination. Too great an assurance in arguments of this nature, even though at present they seemed to him to be demonstrations, — rejoicing in the strength of them, and taking pleasure in the carrying of such a cause, is what a good mind can never be capable of. To such a person, the finding his own arguments unanswerable would be the greatest grief ; triumphing in so melancholy a field would be the highest dissatisfaction ; and nothing could afford so pleasing, so agreeable a disappointment, as to find

sent nature as a chaos, and man as a monster; to search for deformity and confusion, where others rejoice in the perception of order and beauty; and to seek to imbitter the happiest moments of human life, namely, those we employ in contemplating the works of creation, and adoring their Author, by this suggestion, equally false and malevolent, that the moral as well as material world, is nothing but darkness, dissonance, and perplexity!

“ Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds

“ Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,

“ Abominable, unutterable, and worse

“ Than fables yet have feign'd, or fear conceiv'd!

“ his own reasonings shown to be inconclusive.” *Dr S. Clarke's Remarks on a book entitled, A Philosophical Enquiry concerning Human Liberty.* — p. 45.

“ This is certain (says Shaftesbury) that it can be no great strengthening to
 “ the moral affection, no great support to the pure love of goodness and virtue,
 “ to suppose that there is neither goodness nor beauty in the WHOLE itself; nor
 “ any example or precedent of any good affection in any superior being. Such
 “ a belief must tend rather to the weaning the affections from any thing amiable
 “ or self-worthy, and to the suppressing the very habit and familiar custom of
 “ admiring natural beauties, or whatever in the order of things is according to
 “ just design, harmony, and proportion. For how little disposed must a person
 “ be, to love or admire any thing as orderly in the universe, who thinks the
 “ universe itself a pattern of disorder? How unapt to reverence or respect any
 “ particular subordinate beauty of a *part*, when even the *whole* itself is thought
 “ to want perfection, and to be only a vast and infinite deformity? — Nothing in-
 “ deed can be more melancholy, than the thought of living in a distracted uni-
 “ verse, from whence many ills may be suspected, and where there is nothing
 “ good or lovely which presents itself, nothing which can satisfy in contempla-
 “ tion, or raise any passion besides that of contempt, hatred, or dislike. Such
 “ an opinion as this may by degrees imbitter the temper, and not only make the
 “ love of virtue to be less felt, but help to impair and ruin the very principle
 “ of virtue, to wit, natural and kind affection.”

Inquiry concerning Virtue, b. 1. p. 3. § 3.

Were this doctrine true, we should be little obliged to him who gives it to the public; for we could hardly imagine a greater misfortune than such a cast of understanding as would make us believe it. But founded, as it is, in words misunderstood, and facts misrepresented;—supported, as it is, by sophistry so egregious, and often so peurile, that we can hardly conceive how even the author himself should be imposed upon by it;—surely they who attempt to obtrude it on the weak and unwary, must have something in their disposition, which, to a man of a good heart, or good taste, can never be the object of envy.

We are told, that the end of scepticism, as it was taught by Pyrrho, Sextus Empiricus, and other ancients, was to obtain *indisturbance* *. I know not whether this be the end our modern sceptics have in view; if it is, the means they employ for attaining it are very preposterous. If the prospect of nature exhibited in their systems produce tranquillity or indisturbance, how dreadful must that tranquillity be! It is like that of a man, turned adrift amidst a dark and tempestuous ocean, in a crazy skiff, with neither rudder nor compass, who, exhausted by the agitations of despair, loses at last all sense of his misery, and becomes totally stupid. In fact, the only thing that can enable sceptics to endure existence, is insensibility. And how far

* Pyrrho, as he affected not to believe his senses, affected also to be free from all passions and emotions: for when Anaxarchus, his master and fellow-traveller, happened to fall into a ditch, that worthy sceptic passed on without once looking behind him; for which indifference his besotted master is said to have held him in great admiration. An instance like this, when it occurs in history, is not less astonishing, than a monstrous birth, or any other uncommon appearance;—except we suppose these precious patterns of wisdom to have played tricks with one another, to make the people stare. At any rate, it is surely unworthy of a man of honour and learning, to lift himself under their banners, by reviving any of their silly paradoxes.

that

that is consistent with delicacy of mind, let those among them explain who are ambitious of passing for men of taste.

It is remarked by a very ingenious and amiable writer, that “many philosophers have been infidels, few men of taste and “sentiment*.” This, if I mistake not, holds equally true of our sceptics in philosophy, and infidels in religion: and it holds true of both for the same reason. The views and expectations of the infidel and sceptic are so full of horror, that to a man of taste, that is, of sensibility and imagination, they are insupportable. On the other hand, what true religion and true philosophy dictate of God, and providence, and man, is so charming, so consonant with all the finer and nobler feelings in human nature, that every man of taste who hears of it must wish it to be true: and I never yet heard of one person of candour, who wished to find the evidence of the gospel satisfactory, and did not find it so. Dull imaginations and hard hearts can bear the thought of endless confusion, of virtue depressed and vice triumphant, of an universe peopled with fiends and furies, of creation annihilated, and chaos restored, to remain a scene of darkness and solitude for ever and for ever: but it is not so with the benevolent and tender-hearted. Their notions are regulated by another standard; their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, are quite of a different kind.

The moral powers and the powers of taste are more congenial than is commonly imagined; and he who is destitute of the latter will ever be found as incapable to describe or judge of the former, as a man wanting the sense of smell is to decide concerning relishes. Nothing is more true, than that “a little “learning is a dangerous thing.” If we are but a little acquainted with one part of a complicated system, how is it pos-

* Dr Gregory's Comparative View, p. 201. fourth edition.

fible for us to judge aright, either of the nature of the whole, or of the fitness of that part! And a little knowledge of one small part of the mental system, is all that any man can be allowed to have, who is defective in imagination, sensibility, and the other powers of taste. Yet, as ignorance is apt to produce temerity, I should not be surpris'd to find such men most forward to attempt reducing the philosophy of human nature to system: and, if they made the attempt, I should not wonder that they fell into the most important mistakes. Like a short-sighted landscape-painter, they might possibly delineate some of the largest and roughest figures with tolerable exactness: but of the minuter objects, some would wholly escape their notice, and others appear blotted and distorted, on which nature had bestowed the utmost delicacy of colour, and harmony of proportion.

The modern sceptical philosophy is as corrupt a body of science as ever appeared in the world. And it deserves our notice, that the most considerable of its adherents and promoters were more eminent for subtlety of reason, than for sensibility of taste. We know that this was the case with MALEBRANCHE, of whom Mr D'Alembert says, that he could not read the most sublime verses without weariness and disgust *. This was also the case with another author, to whom our sceptics are more obliged than they seem willing to acknowledge, I mean Mr HOBBS; whose translation of Homer bears just such a resemblance to the Iliad and Odyssey, as a putrefying carcase bears to a beautiful and vigorous human body.

The philosophy of the mind, if such as it ought to be, would certainly interest us more than any other science. Are the sceptical treatises on this subject interesting? Do they bring conviction to the judgement, or delight to the fancy? Do they either reach

* Essai sur le Gout.

the heart, or seem to proceed from it? Do they make us better acquainted with ourselves, or better prepared for the business of life? Do they not rather enfeeble and harass the soul, divert its attention from every thing that can enlarge and improve it, give it a disrelish for itself, and for every thing else, and disqualify it alike for action, and for useful knowledge?

Other causes might be assigned for the present degeneracy of the moral sciences. I shall mention one, which I the rather chuse to take notice of, and insist upon, because it has been generally overlooked. DES CARTES and MALEBRANCHE introduced the fashion, which continues to this day, of neglecting the ancients in all their philosophical inquiries. We seem to think, because we are confessedly superior in some sciences, that we must be so in all. But that this is a rash judgement, may easily be made appear, even on the supposition, that human genius is nearly the same in all ages.

When accidental discovery, long experience, or profound investigation, are the means of advancing a science, it is reasonable to expect, that the improvements of that science will increase with length of time. Accordingly we find, that in natural philosophy, natural history, and some parts of mathematical learning, the moderns are far superior to the ancients. But the science of human nature, being attainable rather by intuition than by deep reasoning or nice experiment, must depend for its cultivation upon other causes. Different ages and nations have different customs. Sometimes it is the fashion to be reserved and affected, at other times to be simple and sincere: sometimes, therefore, it will be easy, and at other times difficult, to gain a competent knowledge of human nature by observation. In the old romances, we seek for human nature in vain; the manners are all affected; prudery is the highest, and almost the only ornament, of the women; and a fantastical honour of the men: but the writers adapted

apted themselves to the prevailing taste, and painted the manners as they saw them. In our own country, we have seen various modes of affectation, successively prevail within a few years. To say nothing of present times; every body knows, how much pedantry, libertinism, and false wit, contributed to disguise human nature in the last century. And I apprehend, that in all monarchies one mode or other of artificial manners must always prevail; to the formation of which the character of princes, the taste of the times, and a variety of other causes will co-operate.

Montesquieu's opinion, that the courts of monarchs must always of necessity be corrupt, I cannot subscribe to: I think, that virtue may be, and sometimes is, the principle of action, even in the highest offices of monarchy: my meaning is, that under this form of government, human manners, must generally deviate, more or less, from the simplicity of nature; and that, consequently, human sentiments must be of more difficult investigation than under some other forms. In courts, it seems requisite, for the sake of that order which is essential to dignity, to establish certain punctilios in dress, language, and gesture: there too, the most inviolable secrecy is expedient: and there, where men are always under the eye of their superiors, and for the most part engaged in the pursuits of ambition or interest, a smoothness of behaviour will naturally take place, which, among persons of ordinary talents, and ordinary virtue, must on many occasions degenerate into hypocrisy. The customs of the court are always imitated by the higher ranks; the middle ranks follow the higher; and the people come after as fast as they can. It is, however, in the last mentioned class, where nature appears with the least disguise: but, unhappily for moral science, the vulgar are seldom objects of curiosity, either to our philosophers, or historians.

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The influence of these causes, in distinguishing human sentiments, will, I presume, be greater or less, according as the monarchy partakes more or less of democratical principles.—There is, indeed, one set of sentiments, which monarchy and modern manners are peculiarly fitted for disclosing, I mean those that relate to gallantry : and it is evident, that these (taking the word Gallantry in the best sense) tend in some respects to render society comfortable, and to enlarge the sphere of comic writing ; but whether to make the essential principles of human nature more or less known, might perhaps bear a question.

Modern history ought, on many accounts, to interest us more than the ancient. It describes manners that are familiar to us, events whereof we see and feel the consequences, political establishments on which our property and security depend, and places and persons in which experience or tradition has already given us a concern. And yet I believe it will be acknowledged, that the ancient histories, particularly of Greece and Rome, are more interesting than those of latter times. In fact, the most affecting part, both of history and of poetry, is that which best displays the characters, manners, and sentiments of men. Histories that are deficient in this respect, may communicate instruction to the geographer, the warrior, the genealogist, and the politician ; but will never please the general taste, because they excite no passion, and awaken no sympathy. Now, I cannot help thinking, that the personages described in modern history have, with a very few exceptions, a stiffness and reserve about them, which doth not seem to adhere to the great men of antiquity, particularly of Greece. I will not say, that our historians have less ability or less industry ; but I would say, that democratical governments, like those of ancient Greece, are more favourable to simplicity of manners, and consequently to the knowledge of the human mind, than our modern monarchies. At Athens and Sparta, the public assemblies,

assemblies, the public exercises, the regular attendance given to all the public solemnities, whether religious or civil, and other institutions that might be mentioned, gave the citizens many opportunities of being well acquainted with one another. There the great men were not cooped up in palaces and coaches; they were almost constantly in the open air, and on foot. The people saw them every day, conversed with them, and observed their behaviour in the hours of relaxation, as well as of business. Themistocles could call every citizen of Athens by his name; a proof that the great men courted an universal acquaintance.

No degree of genius will ever make one a proficient in the science of man, without accurate observation of human nature in all its varieties. Homer, the greatest master in this science ever known, passed the most of his life in travelling: his poverty, and other misfortunes, made him often dependent on the meanest, as his talents recommended him to the friendship of the greatest; so that what he says of Ulysses may justly be applied to himself, that "he visited many states and nations, and knew the characters of many men." Virgil had not the same opportunities: he lived in an age of more refinement, and was perhaps too much conversant in courtly life, as well as too bashful in his deportment, and delicate in his constitution, to study the varieties of human nature, where in a monarchy they are most conspicuous, namely in the middle and lower ranks of mankind. Need we wonder, then, that in the display of character he falls so far short of his great original? Shakespeare was familiarly acquainted with all ranks and conditions of men; without which, notwithstanding his unbounded imagination, it is not to be supposed, that he could have succeeded so well in delineating every species of human character, from the constable to the monarch, from the hero to the clown. And it deserves our notice, that, however ignorant he might be of Latin and Greek, he was well acquainted,

acquainted, by translation, with some of the ancients, particularly Plutarch, whom he seems to have studied with much attention, and who indeed excels all historians in exhibiting lively and interesting views of human nature. Great vicissitudes of fortune gave Fielding an opportunity of associating with all classes of men, except perhaps the highest, whom he rarely attempts to describe: Swift's way of life is well known: and I have been told, that Congreve used to mingle in disguise with the common people, and pass whole days and weeks among them.

That the ancient painters and statuaries were in many respects superior to the modern, is universally allowed. The monuments of their genius that still remain, would convince us of it, even though we were to suppose the accounts given by Pliny, Lucian, and other contemporary authors, to be a little exaggerated. The uncommon spirit and elegance of their attitudes and proportions are obvious to every eye: and a great master seems to think, that modern artists, though they ought to imitate, can never hope to equal the magnificence of their ideas, or the beauty of their figures*. To account for this, we need not suppose, that human genius decays as the world grows older. It may be ascribed, partly to the superior elegance of the human form in those days, and partly to the artists having then better opportunities of observing the human body, free from the incumbrances of dress, in all the varieties of action and motion. The ancient discipline of the Greeks and Romans, particularly the former, was admirably calculated for improving the human body in health, strength, swiftness, flexibility, and grace. In these respects, therefore, they could hardly fail to excel the moderns, whose education and manners tend rather to enervate the body, and cramp all its fa-

* Fresnoy, *De Arte Graphica*, lin. 190.

culties. And as the ancients performed their exercises in public, and performed many of them naked, and thought it honourable to excel in them; as their cloathing was less cumbersome than our Gothic apparel, and showed the body to more advantage; it must be allowed, that their painters and statuaries had better opportunities of observation than ours enjoy, who see nothing but awkward and languid figures, disguised by an unwieldy and ungraceful attire *.

Will it not, then, be acknowledged, that the ancients may have excelled the moderns in the science of human nature, provided it can be shown, that they had better opportunities of observing it? That this was the case, appears from what has been already said. And that they really excelled us in this science, will not be doubted by those who acknowledge their superiority in rhetoric and criticism; two arts which are founded in the philosophy of the human mind. But a more direct proof of the point in question may be had in the writings of Homer, Plutarch, and the Socratic philosophers; which, for their admirable pictures of human nature in its genuine simplicity, are not equalled by any compositions of a later date. Of Aristotle I say nothing. We are assured by those who have read his works, that no author ever understood human nature better than he. Fielding himself * pays him this compliment; and his testimony will be allowed to have considerable weight.

Let me therefore recommend it to those philosophers who may hereafter make human nature the subject of their speculation, to study the ancients more than our modern sceptics seem to have done. If we set out, like the author of *The Treatise of Human Nature*, with a fixed purpose to advance as many paradoxes as pos-

* See Algarotti on painting, chap. 2.

† Fielding's works, vol. II. p. 384. London 1766, 12mo:

fible; or with this foolish conceit, that men in all former ages were utter strangers to themselves, and to one another; and that we are the first of our species on whom Nature has bestowed any glimmerings of discernment; we may depend on it, that in proportion as our vanity is great, our success will be small. It will be, like that of a musician, who should take it in his head, that Corelli had no taste in counterpoint, nor Handel or Jackson any genius for melody; of an epic poet, who should fancy, that Homer, Virgil, and Milton, were bad writers; or of a painter, who should suppose all his brethren of former times to have been unacquainted with the colours, lineaments, and proportions of visible objects.

If Columbus, before he set out on his famous expedition to the western world, had amused himself with writing a history of the countries he was going to visit; would the lovers of truth, and interpreters of nature, have received any improvement or satisfaction from such a specimen of his ingenuity? And is not the system which, without regard to experience, a philosopher frames in his closet, concerning the nature of man, equally frivolous? If Columbus, in such a history, had described the Americans with two heads, cloven feet, wings, and a scarlet complexion; and, after visiting them, and finding his description false in every particular, had yet published that description to the world, affirming it to be true, and at the same time acknowledging, that it did not correspond with his experience; I know not whether mankind would have been most disposed to blame his disingenuity, to laugh at his absurdity, or to pity his want of understanding. And yet we have known a metaphysician contrive a system of human nature, and, though sensible that it did not correspond with the real appearances of human nature, deliver it to the world as sound philosophy; we have heard this system applauded as a masterpiece of genius; and we have seen

the experience of individuals, the consent of nations, the accumulated wisdom of ages, the principles of science, the truths of religion, and the dictates of common sense, sacrificed to this contemptible and self-contradictory chimera.

I would further recommend it to our moral philosophers, to study themselves with candour and attention, and cultivate an acquaintance with mankind, especially with those whose manners retain most of the truth and simplicity of nature. Acquaintance with the great makes a man of fashion, but will not make a philosopher. They who are ambitious to merit this appellation, think nothing below them which the Author of Nature has been pleased to create, to preserve, and to adorn.—Away with this passion for system-building! it is pedantry: away with this lust of paradox! it is presumption. Be equally ashamed of dogmatical prejudice, and sceptical incredulity; for both are as remote from the spirit of true philosophy, as bullying and cowardice from true valour.

It will be said, perhaps, that a general knowledge of man is sufficient for the philosopher; and that this particular knowledge which we recommend, is necessary only for the novelist and poet. But let it be remembered, that many important errors in moral philosophy have arisen from the want of this particular knowledge; and that it is by too little, not by too much experience; by scanty, not by copious, induction, that philosophy is corrupted. Men have rarely framed a system, without first consulting experience in regard to some few obvious facts. We are apt to be prejudiced in favour of the notions that prevail within our own narrow circle; but we must quit that circle, if we would divest ourselves of prejudice, as we must go from home, if we would get rid of our provincial accent. “ Horace asserts wisdom and
“ good sense to be the source and principle of good writing; for
“ the attainment of which he prescribes a careful study of the So-
“ cratic,

“ cratic, that is, moral wisdom, and a thorough acquaintance
 “ with human nature, that great exemplar of manners, as he
 “ finely calls it; or, in other words, a wide extensive view of
 “ real practical life. The joint direction of these two,” I quote
 the words of an admirable critic and most ingenious philosopher,
 “ as means of acquiring moral knowledge, is perfectly necessary.
 “ For the former, when alone, is apt to grow abstracted and un-
 “ affecting; the latter uninstrueting and superficial. The philo-
 “ sopher talks without experience, and the man of the world
 “ without principles. United they supply each other’s defects;
 “ while the man of the world borrows so much of the philoso-
 “ pher, as to be able to adjust the several sentiments with preci-
 “ sion and exactness; and the philosopher so much of the man
 “ of the world, as to copy the manners of life (which we can
 “ only do by experience) with truth and spirit. Both together
 “ furnish a thorough and complete comprehension of human
 “ life *.”

That I may not be thought a blind admirer of antiquity, I
 would here crave the reader’s indulgence for one short digression
 more, in order to put him in mind of an important error in mo-
 rals, inferred from partial and inaccurate experience, by no less a
 person than Aristotle himself. He argues, “ That men of little
 “ genius, and great bodily strength, are by Nature destined to
 “ serve, and those of better capacity to command; that the na-
 “ tives of Greece, and of some other countries, being superior
 “ in genius, have a natural right to empire; and that the rest
 “ of mankind, being naturally stupid, are destined to labour and
 “ slavery †.” This reasoning is now, alas! of little advantage to

* Hurd’s Commentary on Horace’s Epistle to the Pisos, p 25. edit. 4.

† De Republ. lib. 1. cap 5. 6.

Aristotle's countrymen, who have for many ages been doomed to that slavery which, in his judgement, Nature had destined them to impose on others; and many nations whom he would have consigned to everlasting stupidity, have shewn themselves equal in genius to the most exalted of human kind. It would have been more worthy of Aristotle, to have inferred man's natural and universal right to liberty, from that natural and universal passion with which men desire it, and from the salutary consequences to learning, to virtue, and to every human improvement, of which it never fails to be productive. He wanted, perhaps, to devise some excuse for servitude; a practice which, to their eternal reproach, both Greeks and Romans tolerated even in the days of their glory.

Mr HUME argues nearly in the same manner in regard to the superiority of white men over black. "I am apt to suspect," says he, "the negroes, and in general all the other species of men, (for there are four or five different kinds), to be naturally inferior to the whites. There *never was* a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, *nor even any individual eminent* either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures among them, *no* arts, *no* sciences.—There are negro-slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which *none* ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity*." These assertions are strong; but I know not whether they have any thing else to recommend them.—For, first, though true, they would not prove the point in question, except it were also proved, that the Africans and Americans, even though arts and sciences were introduced among them, would still remain unsusceptible of cultivation. The inhabitants of Great Britain and France were as savage two thousand years ago, as those of Africa and America are at this day. To civilize a nation, is a work which it requires long time to ac-

* Hume's Essay on National Characters.

complish.

complish. And one may as well say of an infant, that he can never become a man, as of a nation now barbarous, that it never can be civilized. — Secondly, of the facts here asserted, no man could have sufficient evidence, except from a personal acquaintance with all the negroes that now are, or ever were, on the face of the earth. These people write no histories; and all the reports of all the travellers that ever visited them, will not amount to any thing like a proof of what is here affirmed. — But, thirdly, we know that these assertions are not true. The empires of Peru and Mexico could not have been governed, nor the metropolis of the latter built after so singular a manner, in the middle of a lake, without men eminent both for action and speculation. Every body has heard of the magnificence, good government, and ingenuity, of the ancient Peruvians. The Africans and Americans are known to have many ingenious manufactures and arts among them, which even Europeans would find it no easy matter to imitate. Sciences indeed they have none, because they have no letters; but in oratory, some of them, particularly the Indians of *the Five Nations*, are said to be greatly our superiors. It will be readily allowed, that the condition of a slave is not favourable to genius of any kind; and yet the negro-slaves dispersed over Europe, have often discovered symptoms of ingenuity, notwithstanding their unhappy circumstances. They become excellent handicraftsmen, and practical musicians, and indeed learn every thing their masters are at pains to teach them, perfidy and debauchery not excepted. That a negro-slave, who can neither read nor write, nor speak any European language, who is not permitted to do any thing but what his master commands, and who has not a single friend on earth, but is universally considered and treated as if he were of a species inferior to the human; — that such a creature should so distinguish himself among Europeans, as to be talked of through the world as a man of genius, is surely

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ly no reasonable expectation. To suppose him of an inferior species, because he does not thus distinguish himself, is just as rational, as to suppose any private European of an inferior species, because he has not raised himself to the condition of royalty.

Had the Europeans been destitute of the arts of writing, and working in iron, they might have remained to this day as barbarous as the natives of Africa and America. Nor is the invention of these arts to be ascribed to our superior capacity. The genius of the inventor is not always to be estimated according to the importance of the invention. Gunpowder, and the mariner's compass, have produced wonderful revolutions in human affairs, and yet were accidental discoveries. Such, probably, were the first essays in writing, and working in iron. Suppose them the effects of contrivance, they were at least contrived by a few individuals; and if they required a superiority of understanding, or of species, in the inventors, those inventors, and their descendants, are the only persons who can lay claim to the honour of that superiority.

That every practice and sentiment is barbarous which is not according to the usages of modern Europe, seems to be a fundamental maxim with some of our philosophers. Their remarks often put us in mind of the fable of the man and the lion. If negroes or Indians were disposed to recriminate; if a Lucian or a Voltaire, from the coast of Guinea, or from *the Five Nations*, were to pay us a visit; what a picture of European manners might he present to his countrymen at his return! Nor would caricatura, or exaggeration, be necessary to render it hideous. A plain historical account of some of our most fashionable duellists, gamblers, and adulterers, (to name no more), would exhibit specimens of brutish barbarity and sottish infatuation, such as
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might vie with any that ever appeared in Kamfchatka, California, or the land of Hottentots.

The natural inferiority of negroes is a favourite topic with some modern writers. They mean perhaps to invalidate the authority of that Book, which declares, that "Eve was the mother of all living," and that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth." And perhaps some of them may have it in view to vindicate a certain barbarous piece of policy, which, though it does no honour to the Christian world, and is not, I believe, attended with pecuniary advantage to the commercial, has notwithstanding many patrons even in this age of light and liberty. — But Britons are famous for generosity; a virtue in which it is easy for them to excel both the Romans and the Greeks. Let it never be said, that slavery is countenanced by the bravest and most generous people on earth; by a people who are animated with that heroic passion, the love of liberty, beyond all nations ancient or modern; and the fame of whose toilsome, but unwearied perseverance, in vindicating, at the expence of life and fortune, the sacred rights of mankind, will strike terror into the hearts of sycophants and tyrants, and excite the admiration and gratitude of all good men to the latest posterity.

C H A P. III.

Consequences of Metaphysical Scepticism.

AFTER all, it will perhaps be objected to this discourse, that I have laid too much stress upon the consequences of metaphysical absurdity, and represented them as much more dangerous than they are found to be in fact. I shall be told, that many of the controversies in metaphysic are merely verbal; and the errors proceeding from them of so abstract a nature, that philosophers run little risk, and the vulgar no risk at all, of being influenced by them in practice. It will be said, that I never heard of any man who fell a sacrifice to BERKELEY's system, by breaking his neck over a material precipice, which he had taken for an ideal one; nor of any Fatalist, whose morals were, upon the whole, more exceptionable than those of the asserters of free agency: in a word, that whatever effect such tenets may have upon the understanding, they seldom or never produce any sensible effects upon the heart. In considering this objection, I must confine myself to a few topics; for the subject to which it leads is of vast extent. The influence of the metaphysical spirit upon art, science, and manners, would furnish matter for a large treatise. It will suffice at present to show, that metaphysical errors are not harmless, but may produce, and actually have produced, some very important and interesting consequences.

I begin with an observation often made, and indeed obvious enough, namely, That happiness is the end of our being; and
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that knowledge, and even truth itself, are valuable only as they tend to promote it. Every useless study is a pernicious thing; because it wastes our time, and misemploys our faculties. To prove that metaphysical absurdities do no good, would therefore sufficiently justify the present undertaking. But it requires no deep sagacity to be able to prove a great deal more.

We acknowledge, however, that all metaphysical errors are not equally dangerous. There is an obscurity in the abstract sciences, as they are commonly taught, which is often no bad preservative against their influence. This obscurity is sometimes unavoidable, on account of the insufficiency of language; sometimes it is owing to the spiritless or slovenly style of the writer; and sometimes it is affected; as when a philosopher, from prudential considerations, thinks fit to disguise any occasional attack on the religion or laws of his country, by some artful equivocation, in the form of allegory, dialogue, or fable. The style of *The Treatise of Human Nature* is so obscure and uninteresting, that if the author had not in his *Essays* republished the capital doctrines of that work in a more elegant style, a confutation of them would not have been very necessary: their uncouth and gloomy aspect would have deterred most people from courting their acquaintance. And, after all, though this author is one of the deadliest, he is not perhaps one of the most dangerous, enemies of religion. Bolingbroke, his inferior in subtlety, but far superior in wit and eloquence, is more dangerous, because more entertaining. So that, though the reader may be disposed to applaud the patriotism of the grand jury of Westminster, who presented the posthumous works of that Noble Lord as a public nuisance, he must be sensible, that there was no necessity for affixing any such stigma to the philosophical writings of the Scottish author. And yet it cannot be denied, that even these, notwithstanding their obscurity, have done mischief enough to make

every sober-minded person earnestly wish that they had never existed.

Further, some metaphysical errors are so grossly absurd, that there is hardly a possibility of their perverting our conduct. Such, considered in itself, is the doctrine of the non-existence of matter; which no man in his senses was ever capable of believing for a single moment. Pyrrho was a vain hypocrite: he took it in his head to say, that he believed nothing, because he wanted to be taken notice of: he affected, too, to act up to this pretended disbelief; and would not of his own accord step aside to avoid a dog, a chariot, or a precipice: but he always took care to have some friends or servants at hand, whose business it was to keep the philosopher out of harm's way.—That the universe is nothing but a *heap* of impressions and ideas, is another of those profound mysteries, from which we need not apprehend much danger; because it is so absurd, that no words but such as imply a contradiction, will fully express it. I know not whether the absurdity of a system was ever before urged as an apology for its author. But it is better to be absurd than mischievous: and happy it were for the world, and much to the credit of some persons now in it, if metaphysicians were chargeable with nothing worse than absurdity.

Again, certain errors in our theories of human nature, considered in themselves, are in some measure harmless, when the principles that oppose their influence are strong and active. A gentle disposition, confirmed habits of virtue, obedience to law, a regard to order, or even the fear of punishment, often prove antidotes to metaphysical poison. When Fatality has these principles to combat, it may puzzle the judgement, but will not corrupt the heart. Natural instinct never fails to oppose it; all men believe themselves free agents, as long at least as they keep clear of metaphysic; nay, so powerful is the sentiment of moral liberty,

ty, that I cannot think it was ever entirely subdued in any rational being. But if it were subdued, (and surely no Fatalist will acknowledge it invincible); if the opposite principles should at the same time cease to act; and if debauchery, bad example, and licentious writings, should extinguish or weaken the sense of duty; what might not be apprehended from men who are above law, or can screen themselves from punishment? What virtue is to be expected from a being who believes itself a mere machine? If I were persuaded, that the evil I commit is imposed upon me by fatal necessity, I should think repentance as absurd as Xerxes scourging the waves of the Hellespont; and be as little disposed to form resolutions of amendment, as to contrive schemes for preventing the frequent eclipses of the satellites of Jupiter. Every author who publishes an essay in behalf of Fatality, is willing to run the risk of bringing all men over to his opinion. What if this should be the consequence? If it be possible to make one reasonable creature a Fatalist, may it not be possible to make many such? And would this be a matter of little or no moment? It is, I think, demonstrable, that it would not. But I have already explained myself on this head.

Other metaphysical errors there are, which, though they do not strike more directly at the foundations of virtue, are more apt to influence mankind, because they are not so vigorously counteracted by any particular propensity. What shall we say to the theory of HOBBS, who makes the distinction between vice and virtue artificial, and dependent on the arbitrary laws of human governors? According to this account, no action that is commanded by a king or chief magistrate can be vitious, and none virtuous except warranted by that authority *. Were

* See this doctrine of Mr Hobbes more particularly explained, and very well confuted, by Dr Clarke, in his *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, vol. 2. prop. 1.

this opinion univerfal, what could deter men from fecret wickednefs, or fuch as is not cognifable by law? What could reftrain governors from the utmoft infolence of tyranny*? What but a miracle could fave the human race from perdition?

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* It is vain to quote hiftory to men who will not believe their own eyes; and fuch I take all thofe to be, who look round them in the world, and deny that the licentious theories of philofophers have any influence on human practice. Yet perhaps it may not be improper to lay before fome readers the following paffage from Plutarch's Life of Alexander, as it is elegantly tranflated by Dr Langhorne.

“ — Alexander fnatched a fpear from one of the guards, and meeting Clitus, — ran him through the body. He fell immediately to the ground, and with a difmal groan expired. — Alexander's rage fubfided in a moment: he came to himfelf; and feeing his friends ftanding in filent aftonifhment by him, he haftily drew the fpear out of the dead body, and was applying it to his own throat, when his guards feized his hands, and carried him by force into his chamber. He paffed that night and the next day in anguifh inexpressible; and when he had waffed himfelf with tears and lamentations, he lay in fpeechlefs grief, uttering only now and then a groan. His friends, alarmed at this melancholy f Silence, forced themfelves into the room, and attempted to confole him. But he would liften to none of them, except Ariftander, who put him in mind of his dream, and the ill omen of the fleep, and affured him, that *the whole was by the decree of Fate*. As he feemed a little comforted, Califthenes the philofopher, Ariftotle's near relation, and Anaxarchus the Abderite, were called in. Califthenes began in a foft and tender manner, endeavouring to relieve him, without fearching the wound. But Anaxarchus, who had a particular walk in philofophy, and looked upon his fellow-labourers in fcience with contempt, cried out, on entering the room, “ Is “ this Alexander, upon whom the whole world have their eyes? Can it be he “ who lies extended on the ground, crying like a flave, in fear of the law, and “ the tongues of men, to whom he fhould himfelf be a law, and the meafure of “ right and wrong? What did he conquer for, but to rule and to command, not “ fervilely to fubmit to the vain opinions of men? Know you not, (continued he), “ that Jupiter is reprefented with Themis and Juftice by his fide, to fhew, that “ whatever is done by fupreme power is right?” By this and other difcourfes of

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In the preface to one of Mr HUME's late publications, we are presented with an elaborate panegyric on the author. "He hath exerted," says the writer of the preface, "those great talents he received from Nature, and the acquisitions he made by study, in the search of truth, and in promoting the good of mankind." A noble encomium indeed! If it be a true one, what are we to think of a Douglas, a Campbell, a Gerard, a Reid, and some others, who have attacked several of Mr HUME's opinions, and proved them to be contrary to truth, and subversive of the good of mankind? I thought indeed, that the works of those excellent writers had given great satisfaction to the friends of truth and virtue, and done an important service to society: but, if I believe this prefacer, I must look on them, as well as on this attempt of my own, with detestation and horror. But before so great a change in my sentiments can take place, it will be necessary that Mr HUME prove, to my satisfaction, that he is neither the author nor the publisher of the *Essays* that bear his name, nor of the *Treatise of Human Nature*. For I will not take it on his, nor on any man's word, that religion, both revealed and natural, and all conviction in regard to truth, are detrimental to mankind. And it is most certain, that he, if he is indeed the author of those *Essays*, and of that *Treatise*, hath exerted his great talents, and employed several years of his life, in endeavouring to persuade the world, that the fundamental doctrines of natural religion are irrational, and the proofs of revealed religion

the same kind, *he alleviated the king's grief indeed, but made him withal more haughty and unjust.* At the same time he insinuated himself into his favour in so extraordinary a manner, that he could no longer bear the conversation of Calisthenes, who before was not very agreeable, on account of his austerity."

Langhorne's Plutarch, vol. 4. p. 294.

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such as ought not to satisfy an impartial mind; and that there is not in any science an evidence of truth sufficient to produce certainty. Suppose these opinions established in the world, and say, if you can, that the good of mankind would be promoted by them. To me it seems impossible for society to exist under the influence of such opinions. Nor let it be thought, that we give an unfavourable view of human nature, when we insist on the necessity of good principles for the preservation of good order. Such a total subversion of human sentiment is, I believe, impossible: mankind, at their very worst, are not such monsters, as to admit it; reason, conscience, taste, habit, interest, fear, must perpetually oppose it: but the philosophy that aims at a total subversion of human sentiment is not on that account the less detestable. And yet it is said of the authors of this philosophy, that they exert their great talents in promoting the good of mankind. What an insult on human nature and common sense! If mankind are tame enough to acquiesce in such an insult, and servile enough to reply, "It is true, we have been much obliged to the celebrated sceptics of this most enlightened age,"—they would almost tempt one to express himself in the style of misanthropy, and say, "*Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur.*"

Every doctrine is dangerous that tends to discredit the evidence of our senses, external or internal, and to subvert the original instinctive principles of human belief. In this respect the most unnatural and incomprehensible absurdities, such as the doctrine of the non-existence of matter, and of perceptions without a percipient substance, are far from being harmless; as they seem to lead, and actually have led, to universal scepticism; and set an example of a method of reasoning sufficient to overturn all truth, and pervert every human faculty. In this respect also we have proved the doctrine of Fatality to be of most pernicious tendency,

as it leads men to suppose their moral sentiments fallacious or equivocal ; not to mention its influence on our notions of God, and natural religion. When a sceptic attacks one principle of common sense, he does in effect attack all ; for if we are made distrustful of the veracity of instinctive conviction in one instance, we must, or at least we may, become equally distrustful in every other. A little scepticism introduced into science will soon assimilate the whole to its own nature ; the fatal fermentation, once begun, spreads wider and wider every moment, till all the mass be transformed into rottenness and poison.

There is no exaggeration here. The present state of the abstract sciences is a melancholy proof, that what I say is true. This is called the age of reason and philosophy ; and this is the age of avowed and dogmatical Atheism. Sceptics have at last grown weary of doubting ; and have now discovered, by the force of their *great talents*, that one thing at least is certain, namely, that God, and religion, and immortality, are empty sounds. This is the final triumph of our so much boasted philosophic spirit ; these are the limits of the dominion of error, beyond which we can hardly conceive it possible for human sophistry to penetrate. Exult, O Metaphysic, at the consummation of thy glories. More thou canst not hope, more thou canst not desire. Fall down, ye mortals, and acknowledge the stupendous blessing : adore those men of *great talents*, those daring spirits, those patterns of modesty, gentleness, and candour, those prodigies of genius, those heroes in beneficence, who have thus laboured—to strip you of every rational consolation, and to make your condition ten thousand times worse than that of the beasts that perish.

Why can I not express myself with less warmth ! Why can I not devise an apology for these philosophers, to screen them from this dreadful imputation of being the enemies and plagues of

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mankind! — Perhaps they do not themselves believe their own tenets, but publish them only as the means of getting a name and a fortune. But I hope this is not the case; God forbid that it should! for then the enormity of their guilt would surpass all power of language; we could only gaze at it, and tremble. Compared with such wickedness, the crimes of the thief, the robber, the incendiary, would almost disappear. These sacrifice the fortunes or the lives of some of their fellow-creatures, to their own necessity or outrageous appetite: but those would run the hazard of sacrificing, to their own avarice or vanity, the happiness of mankind, both here and hereafter. No; I cannot suppose it: the heart of man, however depraved, is not capable of such malignity. — Perhaps they do not foresee the consequences of their doctrines. BERKELEY most certainly did not. — But BERKELEY did not attack the religion of his country, did not seek to undermine the foundations of virtue, did not preach or recommend Atheism. He erred; and who is free from error? but his intentions were irreproachable; and his conduct as a man, and a Christian, did honour to human nature. — Perhaps our modern sceptics are ignorant, that, without the belief of a God, and the hope of immortality, the miseries of human life would often be insupportable. But can I suppose them in a state of total stupidity, utter strangers to the human heart, and to human affairs! Sure they would not thank me for such a supposition. Yet this I must suppose, or I must believe them to be most perfidious and cruel men.

Careless by those who call themselves the great, ingrossed by the formalities and fopperies of life, intoxicated with vanity, pampered with adulation, dissipated in the tumult of business, or amidst the vicissitudes of folly, they perhaps have little need, and little relish, for the consolations of religion. But let them know,
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that, in the solitary scenes of life, there is many an honest and tender heart pining with incurable anguish, pierced with the sharpest sting of disappointment, bereft of friends, chilled with poverty, racked with disease, scourged by the oppressor; whom nothing but trust in Providence, and the hope of a future retribution, could preserve from the agonies of despair. And do they, with sacrilegious hands, attempt to violate this last refuge of the miserable, and to rob them of the only comfort that had survived the ravages of misfortune, malice, and tyranny! Did it ever happen, that the influence of their execrable tenets disturbed the tranquillity of virtuous retirement, deepened the gloom of human distress, or aggravated the horrors of the grave? Is it possible, that this may have happened in many instances? Is it probable, that this hath happened, or may happen, in one single instance?—Ye traitors to human kind, how can ye answer for it to your own hearts! Surely every spark of your generosity is extinguished for ever, if this consideration do not awaken in you the keenest remorse, and make you wish in bitterness of soul—— But I remonstrate in vain. Could I enforce the present topic by an appeal to your vanity, I might perhaps make some impression: but to plead with you on the principles of benevolence or generosity, is to address you in language ye do not, or will not, understand.

But let not the lovers of truth be discouraged. Atheism cannot be of long continuance, nor is there any danger of its becoming universal. The influence of some conspicuous characters has brought it too much into fashion; which, in a thoughtless and profligate age, it is no difficult matter to accomplish. But when men have retrieved the powers of serious reflection, they will find it a frightful phantom; and the mind will return gladly and eagerly to its old endearments. One thing we certainly know: the fashion of sceptical systems soon passeth away. Those unna-

tural productions, the vile effusion of a hard heart, that mistakes its own restlessness for the activity of genius, and its own captiousness for sagacity of understanding, may, like other monsters, please a while by their singularity; but the charm is soon over: and the succeeding age will be astonished to hear, that their forefathers were deluded, or amused, with such fooleries. The measure of Scepticism seems indeed to be full; it is time for Truth to vindicate her rights, and we trust they shall yet be completely vindicated. Such are the hopes and the earnest wishes of one, who has seldom made controversy his study, who never took pleasure in argumentation, and who disclaims all ambition of being reputed a subtle disputant; but who, as a friend to human nature, would account it his honour to be instrumental in promoting, though by means unpleasant to himself, the cause of virtue and true science, and in bringing to contempt that sceptical sophistry which is equally subversive of both.

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P O S T S C R I P T.

November, 1770.

TO read and criticise the modern systems of scepticism, is so disagreeable a task, that nothing but a regard to duty could ever have determined me to engage in it. I found in them neither instruction nor amusement; I wrote against them with all the disgust that one feels in wrangling with an unreasonable adversary; and I published what I had written, with the certain prospect of raising enemies, and with such an opinion of my performance, as allowed me not to entertain any sanguine hope of success. I thought it however possible, nay, and probable too, that this book might do good. I knew that it contained some matters of importance, which, if I was not able to set them in the best light, might however, by my means, be suggested to others more capable to do them justice..

Since these papers were first published, I have laid myself out to obtain information of what has been said of them, both by their friends, and by their enemies; hoping to profit by the censures of the latter, as well as by the admonitions of the former. I do not hear, that any person has accused me of misconceiving or misrepresenting my adversaries doctrine. Again and again have I requested it of those whom I know to be masters
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of the whole controversy, to give me their thoughts freely on this point; and they have repeatedly told me, that, in their judgement, nothing of this kind can be laid to my charge.

Most of the objections that have been made, I had foreseen, and, as I thought, sufficiently obviated by occasional remarks in the course of the essay. But, in regard to some of them, I find it necessary now to be more particular. I wish to give the fullest satisfaction to every candid mind: and I am sure I do not, on these subjects, entertain a single thought which I need be ashamed or afraid to lay before the public.

I have been blamed for entering so warmly into this controversy. In order to prepossess the minds of those who had not read this performance, with an unfavourable opinion of it, and of its author, insinuations have been made, and carefully propagated, that it treats only of some abstruse points of speculative metaphysics; which, however, I am accused of having discussed, or attempted to discuss, with all the zeal of a bigot, indulging myself in an indecent vehemence of language, and uttering rancorous invectives against those who differ from me in opinion. Much, on this occasion, has been said in praise of moderation and scepticism; moderation, the source of candour, good-breeding, and good-nature; and scepticism, the child of impartiality, and the parent of humility. When men believe with full conviction, nothing, it seems, is to be expected from them but bigotry and bitterness: when they suffer themselves in their inquiries to be warmed with affection, they are philosophers no longer, but revilers and enthusiasts!—If this were a just account of the matter and manner of *the Essay on Truth*, I should not have the face even to attempt an apology; for were any person guilty of the fault here complained of, I myself should certainly be one of the first to condemn him.

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In the whole circle of human sciences, real or pretended, there is not any thing to be found which I think more perfectly contemptible, than the speculative metaphysics of the moderns. It is indeed a most wretched medley of ill-digested notions, indistinct perceptions, inaccurate observations, perverted language, and sophistical argument; distinguishing where there is no difference, and confounding where there no similitude; feigning difficulties where it cannot find them, and overlooking them when real. I know no end that the study of such jargon can answer, except to harden and stupify the heart, bewilder the understanding, sour the temper, and habituate the mind to irresolution, captiousness, and falsehood. For studies of this sort I have neither time nor inclination, I have neither head nor heart. To enter into them at all, is foolish; to enter into them with warmth, ridiculous; but to treat those with any bitterness, whose judgments concerning them may differ from ours, is in a very high degree odious and criminal. Thus far, then, my adversaries and I are agreed. Had the sceptical philosophers confined themselves to those inoffensive wranglings that show only the subtlety and captiousness of the disputant, but affect not the principles of human conduct, they never would have found an opponent in me. My passion for writing is not strong; and my love of controversy so weak, that, if it could always be avoided with a safe conscience, I would never engage in it at all. But when doctrines are published subversive of morality and religion, doctrines of which I perceive and have it in my power to expose the absurdity, my duty to the public forbids me to be silent; especially when I see, that, by the influence of fashion, folly, or more criminal causes, those doctrines spread wider and wider every day, diffusing ignorance, misery, and licentiousness, where-ever they prevail. Let us oppose the torrent, though we should not be able to check it. The zeal and example of the weak have often
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roused to action, and to victory, the flumbering virtue of the strong.

I likewise agree with my adversaries in this, that scepticism, where it tends to make men well-bred, and good-natured, and to rid them of pedantry and petulance, without doing individuals or society any harm, is an excellent thing. And some sorts of scepticism there are, that really have this tendency. In philosophy, in history, in politics, yea, and even in theology itself, there are many points of doubtful disputation, in regard to which a man's judgement may lean to either of the sides, or hang wavering between them, without the least inconvenience to himself, or others. Whether pure space exists, or how we come to form an idea of it; whether all the objects of human reason may be fairly reduced to Aristotle's ten categories; whether Hannibal, when he passed the Alps, had any vinegar in his camp; whether Richard III. was as remarkable for cruelty and a hump-back, as is commonly believed; whether Mary Queen of Scotland married Bothwell from inclination, or from the necessity of her affairs; whether the earth is better peopled now than it was in ancient times; whether public prayers should be recited from memory, or read: — in regard to these, and such like questions, a little scepticism may be very safe and very proper, and I will never think the worse of a man for differing from me in opinion. And if ever it should be my chance to engage in controversy on such questions, I here *pledge myself to the public*, (*absit invidia verbo!*), that I will conduct the whole affair with the most exemplary coolness of blood, and lenity of language. I have observed, that strong conviction is more apt to breed strife, in matters of little moment, than in subjects of high importance. Not to mention (what I would willingly forget) the scandalous contests that have prevailed in the Christian world about trifling ceremonies and points of doctrine, I need only put the reader

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in mind of those learned critics and annotators, Salmasius, Valla, and Scaliger, who, in their squabbles about words, gave scope to such rancorous animosity, and virulent abuse, as is altogether without example. In every case where dogmatical belief tends to harden the heart, or to breed prejudices incompatible with candour, humanity, and the love truth, all good men will be careful to cultivate moderation and diffidence.

But there are other points, in regard to which a strong conviction produces the best effects, and doubt and hesitation the worst: and these are the points that our sceptics labour to subvert, and I to establish. That the human soul is a real and permanent substance, that God exists, that virtue and vice are distinctly and essentially different, that there is such a thing as truth, and that man in many cases is capable of discovering it, are some of the principles which this book is intended to vindicate from the objections of scepticism. Attempts have been made to persuade us, that there is no evidence of truth in any science; that the human understanding ought not to believe any thing, but rather to remain in perpetual suspense between opposite opinions; that it is unreasonable to believe the Deity to be perfectly wise and good, or even to exist; that the soul of man has nothing permanent in its nature, nor indeed any kind of existence distinct from its present perceptions, which are continually changing, and will soon be at an end; and that moral distinctions are ambiguous. This scepticism, the reader will observe, is totally subversive of science, morality, and religion, both natural and revealed. And this is the scepticism which I am blamed for having opposed with warmth and earnestness.

I desire to know, what good effects this scepticism is likely to produce? "It humbles," we are told, "our pride of understanding." Indeed! And are they to be considered as patterns of humility, who set the wisdom of all former ages at

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nought, bid defiance to the common sense of mankind, and say to the wisest and best men that ever did honour to our nature, Ye are fools or hypocrites; we only are candid, honest, and sagacious! Is this humility! Should I be humble, if I were to speak and act in this manner! Every man of sense would pronounce me lost to all shame, an apostate from truth and virtue, an enemy to human kind; and my own conscience would justify the censure.

And so it seems that pride of understanding is inseparable from the disposition of those who believe, that they have a soul, that there is a God, that virtue and vice are essentially different, and that men are in some cases permitted to discern the difference between truth and falsehood! Yet the gospel requires or supposes the belief of all these points: the gospel also commands us to be humble: and the spirit and influence of the gospel have produced the most perfect examples of that virtue that ever appeared among men. A believer may be proud: but it is neither his belief, nor what he believes, that can make him so; for both ought to teach him humility. To call in question, and labour to subvert, those first principles of science, morality, and religion, which all the rational part of mankind acknowledge, is indeed an indication of a presumptuous understanding: but does the sceptic lay this to the charge of the believer? I have heard of a thief, when close pursued, turning on his pursuers, and charging them with robbery: but I do not think the example worthy a philosopher's imitation.

The prevention of bigotry is said to be another of the blessed effects of this modern scepticism. And indeed, if sceptics would act consistently with their own principles, there would be ground for the remark: for a man who believes nothing at all, cannot be said to be blindly attached to any opinion, except perhaps to this one, that nothing is to be believed; in which, however, if
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he have any regard to uniformity of character, he will take care not to be dogmatical. But it is well known to all who have had any opportunity of observing his conduct, that the sceptic rejects those opinions only which the rest of mankind admit: for that, in regard to his own paradoxes, he is as dogmatical as other people. An ingenious author has therefore, with good reason, made it one of the articles of the Infidel's creed, That "he believeth in all unbelief *." Though a late writer is a perfect sceptic in regard to the existence of his soul and body, he is certain, that men have no idea of power: though he has many doubts and difficulties about the evidence of mathematical truth, he is quite positive, that his soul is not the same thing to-day it was yesterday: and though he affirms, that it is by an act of the human understanding, that two and two have come to be equal to four; yet he cannot allow, that to steal or to abstain from stealing, to act or to cease from action, is in the power of any man. In reading sceptical books, I have often found, that the strength of the author's attachment to his paradox, is in proportion to its absurdity. If it deviates but a little from common opinion, he gives himself but little trouble about it; if it be inconsistent with universal belief, he condescends to argue the matter, and to bring what with him passes for a proof of it; if it be such as no man ever did or could believe, he is still more conceited of his proof, and calls it a demonstration; but if it is inconceivable, it is a wonder if he does not take it for granted. Thus, that our idea of extension is extended, is inconceivable; and in the *Treatise of Human Nature* seems to be taken for granted: that matter exists only in the mind that perceives it, is what no man ever did or could believe; and the author of the *Treatise concerning the*

* Connoisseur, N^o 9.

Principles of Human Knowledge has favoured the world with what passes among the fashionable metaphysicians for a demonstration of it : that moral and intellectual virtues are upon the same footing, is inconsistent with universal belief ; and a famous author has argued the matter at large, and would ~~fair~~ persuade us, that he has proved it ; though I do not recollect, that he triumphs in this proof as so irresistible, as those by which he conceives himself to have annihilated the idea of power, and exploded the permanency of percipient substances. I will not say, however, that this gradation holds universally. Sceptics, it must be owned, bear a right zealous attachment to all their absurdities, both greater and less. If they are most warmly interested in behalf of the former, it is, I suppose, because they have had the sagacity to foresee, that those would stand most in need of protection.

We see now how far scepticism may be said to prevent bigotry. It prevents all bigotry, and all strong attachment on the side of truth and common sense ; but in behalf of its own paradoxes, it establishes bigotry the most implicit and the most obstinate. It is true, that sceptics sometimes tell us, that, however positively they may assert their doctrines, they would not have us think them positive assertors of any doctrine. Sextus Empiricus has done this ; and some too, if I mistake not, of our modern Pyrrhonists. But common readers are not capable of such exquisite refinement, as to believe their author to be in earnest, and at the same time not in earnest ; as to believe, that when he asserts some points with diffidence, and others with the utmost confidence, he holds himself to be equally diffident of all.

There is but one way in which it is possible for a sceptic to satisfy us, that he is equally doubtful of all doctrines. He must assert nothing, lay down no principles, contradict none of the opinions of other people, and advance none of his own : in a word,

word, he must confine his doubts to his own breast, at least the grounds of his doubts; or propose them modestly and privately, not with a view to make us change our mind, but only to shew his own diffidence. For from the moment that he attempts to obtrude them on the public, or on any individual, or even to represent the opinions of others as less probable than his own, he commences a dogmatist; and is to be accounted more or less presumptuous, according as his doctrine is more or less repugnant to common sense, and himself more or less industrious to recommend it.

Though he were to content himself with urging objections, without seeking to lay down any principle of his own, which however is a degree of moderation that no sceptic ever yet arrived at, we would not on that account pronounce him an inoffensive man. If his objections have ever weakened the moral or religious belief of any one person, he has injured that person in his dearest and most important concerns. They who know the value of true religion, and have had any opportunity of observing its effects on themselves or others, need not be told, how dreadful to a sensible mind it is, to be staggered in its faith by the cavils of the Infidel. Every person of common humanity, who knows any thing of the heart of man, would shudder at the thought of infusing scepticism into the pious Christian. Suppose the Christian to retain his faith, in spite of all objections; yet the confutation of these cannot fail to distress him; and a habit of doubting, once begun, may, to the latest hour of his life, prove fatal to his peace of mind. Let no one mistake or misrepresent me: I am not speaking of those points of doctrine which rational believers allow to be indifferent: I speak of those great and most essential articles of faith; the existence of a Deity, infinitely wise, beneficent, and powerful; the certainty of a future state of retribution; and the divine authority of the gospel.

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These are the articles which some late authors labour with all their might to overturn; and these are the articles which every person who loves virtue and mankind, would wish to see ardently and zealously defended. Is it bigotry to believe these sublime truths with full assurance of faith? I glory in such bigotry: I would not part with it for a thousand worlds: I congratulate the man who is possessed of it; for, amidst all the vicissitudes and calamities of the present state, that man enjoys a fund of consolation, of which it is not in the power of fortune to deprive him. Calamities, did I say? The evils of a very short life will not be accounted such by him who has a near and certain prospect of a happy eternity.—Will it be said, that the firm belief of these divine truths did ever give rise to ill-nature or persecution? It will not be said, by any person who is acquainted with history, or the human mind. Of such belief, when sincere, and undebaſed by criminal paſſions, meekneſs, benevolence, and forgivenesſ, are the natural and neceſſary effects. There is not a book on earth ſo favourable to all the kind, and all the ſublime affections, or ſo unfriendly to hatred and perſecution, to tyranny, injuſtice, and every ſort of malevolence, as that very goſpel againſt which our ſceptics entertain ſuch a rancorous antipathy. Of this they cannot be ignorant, if they have ever read it; for it breathes nothing throughout, but mercy, benevolence, and peace. If they have not read it, they and their prejudices are as contemptible, as any thing ſo hateful can be: if they have, their pretended concern for the rights of mankind is all hypocrify and a lie. Nor need they attempt to frame an answer to this accusation, till they have proved, that the morality of the goſpel is faulty or imperfect; that virtue is not uſeful to individuals, nor beneficial to ſociety; that the evils of life are moſt effectually alleviated by the extinction of hope; that annihilation is a more encouraging proſpect to virtue, than the cer-
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tain view of eternal happiness; that nothing is a greater check to vice, than a firm persuasion that no punishment awaits it; and that it is a consideration full of misery to a good man, when weeping on the grave of a beloved friend, to reflect, that they shall soon meet again in a better state, never to part any more.

I wonder at those men who charge upon Christianity all the evils that superstition, avarice, sensuality, and the love of power, have introduced into the Christian world; and then suppose, that these evils are to be prevented, not by suppressing criminal passions, but by extirpating Christianity, or weakening its influence. In fact, our religion supplies the only effectual means of suppressing these passions, and so preventing the mischief complained of; and this it will ever be more or less powerful to accomplish, according as its influence over the minds of men is greater or less; and greater or less will its influence be, according as its doctrines are more or less firmly believed. It was not because they were Christians, but because they were covetous and cruel, that the first invaders of America perpetrated those diabolical cruelties in Peru and Mexico, the narrative of which is insupportable to humanity. Had they been Christians in any thing but in name, they would have loved their neighbour as themselves; and no man who loves his neighbour as himself, will ever cut his throat, or roast him alive, in order to get at his money.

If zeal be warrantable on any occasion, it must be so in the present controversy: for I know of no doctrines more important in themselves, or more affecting to a sensible mind, than those which the scepticism I controvert tends to overturn. But why, it may be said, should zeal be warrantable on any occasion? The answer is easy: Because on some occasions it is decent and natural. When a man is deeply interested in his subject, it is

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not natural for him to keep up the appearance of as much coolness, as if he were disputing about an indifferent matter: and whatever is not natural is offensive. Were he to hear his dearest friends branded with the appellation of knaves and ruffians, would it be natural, would it be decent, for him to preserve the same indifference in his look, and softness in his manner, as if he were investigating a truth in conic sections, arguing about the cause of the Aurora Borealis, or settling a point of ancient history? Ought he not to show, by the sharpness as well as by the solidity of his reply, that he not only disavows, but detests the accusation? Is there a man whose indignation would not kindle at such an insult? Is there a man who would be so much overawed by any antagonist, as to conceal his indignation? Of such a man I shall only say, that I would not chuse him for my friend. When our subject lies near our heart, our language must be animated, or it will be worse than lifeless; it will be affected and hypocritical. Now what subject can lie nearer the heart of a Christian, or of a man, than the existence and perfections of God, and the immortality of the human soul? If he cannot, if he ought not, to hear with patience the blasphemies uttered by unthinking profligates in their common conversation, with what temper of mind will he listen or reply to the cool, insidious, and envenomed impieties of the deliberate Atheist! — Fy on it! that I should need to write so long an apology for being an enemy to Atheism and nonsense!

“ But why engage in the controversy at all? Let the Infidel
 “ do his worst, and heap sophism on sophism, and rail, and blas-
 “ pheme as long as he pleases; if your religion be from God, or
 “ founded in reason, it cannot be overthrown. Why then give
 “ yourself or others any trouble with your attempts to support a
 “ cause, against which it is said that hell itself shall not pre-
 “ vail?” — This objection has been made, and urged too with
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confidence. It has just as much weight as the following. Why enact laws against, or inflict punishment upon murderers? Let them do their worst, and stab, and strangle, and poison, as much as they please, they will never be able to accomplish the final extermination of the human species, nor perhaps to depopulate a single province. — Such idle talk deserves no answer, or but a very short one. We do believe, and therefore we rejoice, that our religion shall flourish in spite of all the sophistry of malevolent men. But is their sophistry the less wicked on that account? Does it not deserve to be punished with ridicule and confutation? Have we reason to hope, that a miracle will be wrought to save any individual from infidelity, or even any believer from those doubts and apprehensions which the writings of infidels are intended to raise? And is it not worth our while, is it not our duty, ought it not to be our inclination, to endeavour to prevent such a calamity? Nor let us imagine that this is the business of the clergy alone. They, no doubt, are best qualified for this service; but we of the laity who believe the gospel, are under the same obligation to wish well, and, according to our ability, to do good to our fellow-creatures. For my own part, though the writing of this book had been a work of much greater difficulty than I found it to be, I would have cheerfully undertaken it, in the hope of being instrumental in reclaiming even a single sceptic from his unhappy prejudices, or in preserving even a single believer from the horrors of scepticism. Tell me not, that those horrors have no existence. I know the contrary. Tell me not, that the good ends proposed can never in any degree be accomplished by performances of this kind. Of this too I know the contrary.

Suppose a set of men, subjects of the British government, to publish books setting forth, That liberty, both civil and religious, is an absurdity; that trial by juries, the *Habeas corpus* act, magna charta, and the Protestant religion, are intolerable nui-

fances ; and that Popery, despotism, and the inquisition, ought immediately to be established throughout the British empire ; suppose them to exhort their countrymen to overturn, or at least to disregard, our excellent laws and constitution, and make a tender of their souls and consciences to the Pope, and of their lives and fortunes to the King of France ;—and suppose them to write so cautiously as to escape the censure of the law, and yet with plausibility sufficient to seduce many, and give rise to much dissatisfaction, discord, and licentious practice, equally fatal to the happiness of individuals and to the public peace :—With what temper would an Englishman of sense and spirit set about confuting their principles ? Would it be decent, or even pardonable, to handle such a subject with coolness, or to behave with complaisance towards such adversaries ? Suppose them to have specious qualities, and to pass with their own party for men of candour, genius, and learning : yet the lover of liberty and mankind would not, I presume, be disposed to pay them any excessive compliments on that account, or on any other. But suppose these political apostates to appear, in the course of the controversy, chargeable with ignorance and sophistical reasoning, with evasive and quibbling refinements, with misrepresentation of common facts, and misapprehension of common language, more attached to hypothesis than to the truth, preferring their own conceits to the common sense of mankind, and seeking to gratify their own exorbitant vanity and lust of paradox, though at the expence of the happiness of millions :—with what face could their most implicit admirers complain of the severity of that antagonist who should treat both them and their principles with contempt and indignation ? with what face urge in their defence, that though perhaps somewhat blameable on the present occasion, they and their works were notwithstanding intitled to universal esteem, and the most respectful usage, on account of their skill
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in music, architecture, geometry, and the Greek and Latin tongues ! On this account, would they be in any less degree the pests of society, or the enemies of mankind ? would their false reasoning be less sophistical, their presumption less arrogant, or their malevolence less atrocious ? Do not the men who, like Alexander, Machiavel, and the author of *La Pucelle d'Orleans*, employ their great talents in destroying and corrupting mankind, aggravate all their other crimes by the dreadful addition of ingratitude and breach of trust ? And are not their characters, for this very reason, the more obnoxious to universal abhorrence ? An illiterate blockhead in the Robinhood tavern, blaspheming the Saviour of mankind, or labouring to confound the distinctions of vice and virtue, is a wicked wretch, no doubt : but his wickedness admits of some shadow of excuse ; he might plead his ignorance, his stupidity, and the still more profligate lives and principles of those whom the world, by a preposterous figure of speech, is pleased to call his betters : but the men of parts and learning, who join in the same infernal cry, are criminals of a higher order ; for in their defence nothing can be pleaded that will not aggravate their guilt.

My design in this book was, to give others the very same notions of the sceptical philosophy that I myself entertain ; which I could not have done, if I had not taken the liberty to deliver my thoughts plainly and without reserve. And truly I saw no reason for being more indulgent to the writings of sceptics, than to those of other men. The taste of the public requires not any such extraordinary condescension. If ever it should, which is not probable, we may then think it prudent to comply ; but, as we scorn, in matters of such moment, to express ourselves by halves, we will then also throw pen and ink aside, never to be resumed until we again find, that we may with safety write, and be honest at the same time.

Infidels take it upon them to treat religion and its friends with opprobrious language, misrepresentation, undeserved ridicule, and divers other sorts of abuse. Some of them assert, with the most dogmatical assurance, what they know to be contrary to the common sense of mankind. All this passes for wit, and eloquence, and liberal inquiry, and a manly spirit. But whenever the friends of truth espouse, with warmth, that cause which they know to be agreeable to common sense and universal opinion, this is called *bigotry*: and whenever the Christian vindicates, with earnestness, those principles which he believes to be of the highest importance, and which he knows to be essential to the happiness of man, immediately he is charged with want of moderation, want of temper, enthusiasm, and the spirit of persecution. Far be it from the lover of truth to imitate those authors in misrepresentation, or in endeavouring to expose their adversaries to unmerited ridicule. But if a man were to obtain a patent for vending poison, it would be very hard to deny his neighbour the privilege of selling the antidote. If their zeal in spreading and recommending their doctrines be suffered to pass without censure, our zeal in vindicating ours has at least as good a title to pass uncensured. If this is not allowed, I must suppose, that the present race of infidels, like the *jure divino* kings, imagine themselves invested with some peculiar sanctity of character; that whatever they are pleased to say is to be received as law; and that to contradict their will, or even address them without prostration, is indecent and criminal. I know not whence it is that they assume these airs of superiority. Is it from the high rank some of them hold in the world of letters? I would have them know, that it is but a short time since that high rank was either yielded to, or claimed by, such persons. Spinoza, Hobbes, Collins, Woolston, and the rest of that tribe, were within these forty or fifty years accounted a very contemptible brotherhood. The great geniuses of the last age treated them

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with little ceremony; and would not, I suppose, were they now alive, pay more respect to imitators, than they did to the original authors. If the enemies of our religion would profit by experience, they might learn, from the fate of some of their most renowned brethren, that infidelity, however fashionable and lucrative, is not the most convenient field for a successful display of genius. Ever since Voltaire, stimulated by avarice, and other dotages incident to unprincipled old age, formed the scheme of turning a penny by writing against the Christian religion, he has dwindled from a genius of no common magnitude into a paltry book-maker; and now thinks he does great and terrible things, by retailing the crude and long-explored notions of the free-thinkers of the last age, which, when seasoned with a few mistakes, misrepresentations, and ribaldries of his own, form such a mess of falsehood, impiety, obscenity, and other abominable ingredients, as nothing but the monstrous maw of an illiterate infidel can either digest or endure. Several of our famous sceptics have lived to see the greatest part of their profane tenets confuted. I hope, and earnestly wish, that they may live to make a full recantation. Some of them must have known, and many of them might have known, that their tenets were confuted before they adopted them: yet did they adopt them notwithstanding, and display them to the world with as much confidence as if nothing had ever been advanced on the other side. So have I seen a testy and stubborn dogmatist, when all his arguments were answered, and all his invention exhausted, comfort himself at last with simply repeating his former positions at the end of each new remonstrance from the adversary.

They who are conversant in the works of the sceptical philosophers, know very well, that those gentlemen do not always maintain that moderation of style which might be expected from persons of their profession; and if I thought my conduct in this re-

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spect needed to be, or could be, justified by such a precedent, I might plead even their example as my apology. But I disclaim every plea that such a precedent could afford me: I write not in the spirit of retaliation; and when I find myself inclined to be an imitator, I will look out for other models. Indeed it is hardly to be supposed, that I would take those for my pattern, whose principles and projects are so directly opposite to mine. Their writings tend to subvert the foundations of human knowledge, to poison the sources of human happiness, and to overturn that religion which the best and wisest men have believed to be of divine original, and which every good man, who understands it, must reverence as the greatest blessing ever conferred upon the human race. I write with a view to counteract these tendencies, by vindicating some fundamental articles of religion and science from the sceptical objections, and by showing, that no man can attempt to disprove the first principles of knowledge without contradicting himself. To the common sense of mankind, they scruple not to oppose their own conceits, as if they judged these to be more worthy of credit than any other authority, human or divine. I urge nothing with any degree of confidence or fervour, in which I have not good reason to think myself warranted by the common sense of mankind. Does their cause, then, or does mine, deserve the warmest attachment? Have they, or have I, the most need to guard against vehemence of expression *? As certainly as the happiness of mankind is a desirable object, so certainly is my cause good, and theirs evil.

To

* "There is no satisfying the demands of false delicacy," says an elegant and pious author, "because they are not regulated by any fixed standard. But a man of candour and judgement will allow, that the bashful timidity practised by those who put themselves on a level with the adversaries of religion, would ill become

To conclude: Liberty of speech and writing is one of those high privileges that distinguish Great Britain from all other nations. Every good subject wishes, that it may be preserved to the latest posterity; and would be sorry to see the civil power interpose to check the progress of rational inquiry. Nay, when inquiry ceases to be rational, and becomes both whimsical and pernicious, advancing as far as some late authors have carried it, to controvert the first principles of knowledge, morality, and religion, and consequently the fundamental laws of the British government, and of all well-regulated society; even then, it must do more hurt than good to oppose it with the arm of flesh. For persecution and punishment for the sake of opinion, seldom fail to strengthen the party they are intended to suppress; and when opinions are combated by such weapons only, (which would probably be the case if the law were to interpose), a suspicion arises in the minds of men, that no other weapons are to be had; and therefore that the sectary, though destitute of power, is not wanting in argument. Let opinions then be combated by reason, and let ridicule be employed to expose nonsense. And to keep our licentious authors in awe, and to make it their interest to think before they write, to examine facts before they draw inferences, to read books before they criticise them, and to study both sides of a question before they take it upon them to give judgment, it would not be amiss, if their vices and follies, as authors, were sometimes chastised by a satirical severity of expression. This is a proper punishment for their fault; this punish-

“ become one who, declining all disputes, asserts primary truths on the authority of common sense; and that whoever pleads the cause of religion in this way, has a right to assume a firmer tone, and to pronounce with a more decisive air, not upon the strength of his own judgement, but on the reverence due from all mankind to the tribunal to which he appeals.”

Oswald's Appeal in behalf of religion, p. 14.

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ment they certainly deserve; and this it is not beneath the dignity of a philosopher, or divine, or any man who loves God and his fellow-creatures, to inflict. Milton, Locke, Cudworth, Sidney, Tillotson, and several of the greatest and best writers of the present age, have set the example; and have, I doubt not, done good by their nervous and animated expression, as well as by the solidity of their arguments. This punishment, if inflicted with discretion, might teach our licentious authors something of modesty, and of deference to the judgement of mankind; and, it is to be hoped, would in time bring down that spirit of presumption, and affected superiority, which hath of late distinguished their writings, and contributed, more perhaps than all their subtlety and sophistry, to the seduction of the ignorant, the unwary, and the fashionable. It is true, the best of causes may be pleaded with an excess of warmth; as when the advocate is so blinded by his zeal, as to lose sight of his argument; or as when, in order to render his adversaries odious, he alludes to such particulars of their character or private history as are not to be gathered from their writings. The former fault never fails to injure the cause which the writer means to defend: the latter, which is properly termed *personal abuse*, is in itself so hateful, that every person of common prudence would be inclined to avoid it for his own sake, even though he were not restrained by more weighty motives. If an author's writings be subversive of virtue, and dangerous to private happiness, and the public good, we ought to hold them in detestation, and, in order to counteract their baneful tendency, to endeavour to render them detestable in the eyes of others; thus far we act the part of honest men, and good citizens: but with his private history we have no concern; nor with his character, except so far as he has thought proper to submit it to the public judgement, by displaying it in his works. When these are of that peculiar sort, that we cannot

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expose them in their proper colours, without reflecting on his abilities and moral character, we ought by no means to sacrifice our love of truth and mankind to a complaisance, which, if we are what we pretend to be, and ought to be, would be hypocritical at best, as well as mockery of the public, and treachery to our cause. The good of society is always to be considered as a matter of higher importance than the gratification of an author's vanity. If he does not think of this in time, and take care that the latter be consistent with the former, he has himself to blame for all the consequences. The severity of Collier's attack upon the stage, in the end of the last century, was, even in the judgment of one * who thought it excessive, and who will not be suspected of partiality to that author's doctrine, productive of very good effects; as it obliged the succeeding dramatic poets to curb that propensity to indecency, which had carried some of their predecessors so far beyond the bounds of good taste and good manners. If we are not permitted to answer the objections of the infidel as plainly, and with as little reserve, as he makes them, we engage him on unequal terms. And many will be disposed to think most favourably of that cause, whose adherents display the greatest ardour; and some, perhaps, may be tempted to impute to timidity, or to a secret diffidence of our principles, what might have been owing to a much more pardonable weakness.

For my own part, though I have always been, and shall always be, happy in applauding excellence where-ever I find it; yet neither the pomp of wealth nor the dignity of office, neither the frown of the great nor the sneer of the fashionable, neither the sciolist's clamour nor the profligate's repentment, shall ever

* Colley Cibber. See his Apology, vol. i. p. 201.

footh or frighten me into an admiration, real or pretended, of impious tenets, sophistical reasoning, or that paltry metaphysic with which literature has been so disgraced and pestered of late years. I am not so much addicted to controversy, as ever to enter into any but what I judge to be of very great importance: and into such controversy I cannot, I will not, enter with coldness and unconcern. If I should, I might please a party, but I must offend the public; I might escape the censure of those whose praise I would not value, but I should justly forfeit the esteem of good men, and incur the disapprobation of my own conscience.

T H E E N D.

ESSAYS

ON

POETRY and MUSIC,

AS THEY AFFECT THE MIND.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE following Effays, (which were read in a private literary fociety many years ago), having been feen and approved of by fome learned perfons in England, are now publifhed at their defire. In writing them out for the prefs, confiderable amendments were made, and new obfervations added ; and hence one or two flight anachronifms have arifen, which, as they affect not the fenfe, it was not thought neceffary to guard againft.

A N
E S S A Y
O N
P O E T R Y and M U S I C,
AS THEY AFFECT THE MIND.

Written in the year 1762.

THE rules of every useful art may be divided into two kinds. Some are necessary to the accomplishment of the end proposed by the artist, and are therefore denominated Essential Rules; while others, called Ornamental or Mechanical, have no better foundation than the practice of some great performer, whom it has become the fashion to imitate. The latter are to be learned from the communications of the artist, or by observing his work: the former may be investigated upon the principles of reason and philosophy.

These two classes of rules, however different, have often been confounded by critical writers, without any material injury to art, or any great inconvenience, either to the artist or to his disciple.

ciple. For frequently it happens, that fashion and philosophy coincide; and that an artist gives the law in his profession, whose principles are as just as his performance is excellent. Such has been the fate of POETRY in particular. Homer, whom we consider as the founder of this art, because we have none more ancient to refer to, appears, in the structure of his two poems, to have proceeded upon a view of things equally comprehensive and rational: nor had Aristotle, in laying down the philosophy of the art, any thing more to do, than to trace out the principles of his contrivance. What the great critic has left on this subject, proves Homer to have been no less admirable as a philosopher than as a poet; possessed not only of unbounded imagination, and all the powers of language, but also of a most exact judgement, which could at once propose a noble end, and devise the very best means of attaining it.

An art, thus founded on reason, could not fail to be durable. The propriety of the Homeric mode of invention has been acknowledged by the learned in all ages; every real improvement which particular branches of the art may have received since his time, has been conducted upon his principles; and poets, who never heard of his name, have, merely by their own good sense, been prompted to tread the path, which he, guided by the same internal monitor, had trod before them. And hence, notwithstanding its apparent licentiousness, true Poetry is a thing perfectly rational and regular; and nothing can be more strictly philosophical, than that part of criticism may and ought to be, which unfolds the general characters that distinguish it from other kinds of composition.

Whether the following discourse will in any degree justify this last remark, is submitted to the reader. It aspires to little other praise, than that of plain language and familiar illustration; disclaiming all paradoxical opinions and refined theories, which are
indeed

indeed showy in the appearance, and not of difficult invention, but have no tendency to diffuse knowledge, or enlighten the human mind ; and which, in matters of taste that have been canvassed by mankind these two thousand years, would seem to be peculiarly incongruous.

The train of thought that led me into this inquiry was suggested by a conversation many years ago, in which I had taken the freedom to offer an opinion different from what was maintained by the company, but warranted, as I then thought, and still think, by the greatest authorities and the best reasons. It was pleaded against me, that taste is capricious, and criticism variable ; and that the rules of Aristotle's Poetics, being founded in the practice of Sophocles and Homer, ought not to be applied to the poems of other ages and nations. I admitted the plea, as far as these rules are local and temporary ; but asserted, that many of them, being founded in nature, were indispensable, and could not be violated without such impropriety, as, though overlooked by some, would always be offensive to the greater part of readers, and obstruct the general end of poetical composition : and that it would be no less absurd, for a poet to violate the *essential* rules of his art, and justify himself by an appeal from the tribunal of Aristotle, than for a mechanic to construct an engine on principles inconsistent with the laws of motion, and excuse himself by disclaiming the authority of Sir Isaac Newton.

The characters that distinguish poetry from other works of literature, belong either to the SUBJECT, or to the LANGUAGE : so that this discourse naturally resolves itself into two parts. — What we have to say on Music will be found to belong to the first.

P A R T I.

POETRY CONSIDERED WITH RESPECT TO ITS MATTER OR SUBJECT.

WHEN we affirm, that every art or contrivance which has a meaning must have an end, we only repeat an identical proposition : and when we say, that the essential or indispensable rules of an art are those that direct to the accomplishment of the end proposed by the artist, we repeat a definition whereof it would be captious to controvert the propriety. And therefore, before we can determine any thing in regard to the essential rules of this art, we must form an idea of its **END** or **DESTINATION**.

C H A P T E R I.

Of the end of Poetical Composition.

THAT one end of Poetry, in its first institution, and in every period of its progress, must have been, **TO GIVE PLEASURE**, will hardly admit of any doubt. If men first employed it to express their adoration of superior and invisible beings, their gratitude to the benefactors of mankind, their admiration of moral, intellectual, or corporeal excellence, or, in general, their love of what was agreeable in their own species, or in other parts of
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Nature; they must be supposed to have endeavoured to make their poetry *pleasing*; because, otherwise, it would have been unsuitable to the occasion that gave it birth, and to the sentiments it was intended to enliven. Or if, with Horace, we were to believe, that it was first used as a vehicle to convey into savage minds the principles of government and civility*; still we must allow, that one chief thing attended to in its composition must have been, to give it charms sufficient to engage the ear and captivate the heart of an unthinking audience. In latter times, the true poet, tho' in chusing materials he never lost sight of utility, yet in giving them form, (and it is the *form* chiefly that distinguishes poetry from other writings), has always made the entertainment of mankind his principal concern. Indeed, we cannot conceive, that, independently on this consideration, men would ever have applied themselves to arts so little necessary to life, and withal so difficult, as music, painting, and poetry. Certain it is, that a poem, containing the most important truths, would meet with a cold reception, if destitute of those graces of sound, invention, and language, whereof the sole end and aim is, to give pleasure.

But is it not the end of this art, *to instruct*, as well as *to please*? Verses, that give pleasure only, without profit, — what are they but chiming trifles? And if a poem were to please, and at the same time, instead of improving, to corrupt the mind, would it not deserve to be considered as a poison rendered doubly danger-

* The honour of civilizing mankind, is by the poets ascribed to poetry, (*Hor. Ar. Poet. vers.* 391.); — by the orator, to oratory, (*Cicero, de Orat. lib. 1. § 33.*); — and by others to philosophy, (*Cicero, de Orat. lib. 1. § 36. 37.*; and *Tusc. Quest. lib. 5. § 5.*). — It is probably a gradual thing, the effect of many co-operating causes; and proceeding rather from favourable accidents, or the special appointment of Heaven, than from the art and contrivance of men.

ous and desirable by its alluring qualities? — All this is true : and yet pleasure is undoubtedly the immediate aim of all those artifices by which poetry is distinguished from other compositions. — of the harmony, the rhythm, the ornamented language, the compact and diversified fable — for I believe it will be allowed, that a plain treatise, destitute of all these beauties, might be made to convey more instruction than any poem in the world. As writing is more excellent than painting, and speech than music, on account of its superior usefulness : so a discourse, containing profitable information even in a rude style, may be more excellent, because more useful, than any thing in Homer or Virgil : but such a discourse partakes no more of the nature of poetry, than language does of melody, or a manuscript of a picture : whereas an agreeable piece of writing may be poetical, though it yield little or no instruction. To instruct, is an end common to all good writing, to all poetry, all history, all sound philosophy. But of these last the principal end is to instruct ; and if this single end be accomplished, the philosopher and the historian will be allowed to have acquitted themselves well : but the poet must do a great deal for the sake of pleasure only ; and if he fail to please, he may indeed deserve praise on other accounts, but as a poet he has done nothing. — But do not historians and philosophers, as well as poets, make it their study to please their readers? They generally do : but the former please, that they may instruct ; the latter instruct, that they may the more effectually please. Pleasing, though uninstructional, poetry may gratify a light mind ; and what tends even to corrupt the heart may gratify profligates : but the true poet addresses his work, not to the giddy, nor to the worthless, nor to any party, but to mankind ; and, if he means to please the *general* taste, must often employ instruction as one of the arts that minister to this kind of pleasure.

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The necessity of this arises from a circumstance in human nature, which is to man (as Erasmus in Pope's opinion was to the priesthood) "at once his glory and his shame;" namely, that the human mind, unless when debased by passion or prejudice, never fails to take the side of truth and virtue: — a sad reflection, when it leads us to consider the debasing influence of passion and prejudice; but a most comfortable one, when it directs our view to the original dignity and rectitude of the human soul. To favour virtue, and speak truth, and take pleasure in those who do so, is natural to man; to act otherwise, requires an effort, does violence to nature, and always implies some evil purpose in the agent. The first, like progressive motion, is easy and graceful; the last is unseemly and difficult, like walking side-ways, or backwards. The one is so common, that it is little attended to, and when it becomes the object of attention, is always considered as an energy suitable to moral and rational nature: the other has a strangeness in it, that provokes at once our surprise and disapprobation. And hence the virtuous character of the ancient chorus * was reconcileable, not only to probability, but to real

* *Adversis partes chorus, officiosque viris*

Defendat ———

Ille bonis faveatque, et consuletur amicis,

Et regat iras, et amice pacare sementes:

Ille cupes ludes mentis brevis, ille salubrem

Iuramentum, legemque, et spectis omni potens.

Ille regis commissa, Deoque precor et oro,

Ut redeat miseris, abest fortuna superbis. *Hor. Art. Poet. vers. 135*

"Let the chorus, like the player, support a character, and let it act a manly part. Let it favour the good, and give friendly counsel, and restrain the angry, and love to compose the swellings of passion. Let it celebrate the praises of temperance, of salutary justice, of law, and of peace, with open pipes: let it be faithful to its trust, and supplicate the Gods, and pray, that fortune may return to the afflicted, and forsake the haughty."

matter of fact.——The dramatic poets of Greece rightly judged, that great persons, like those who appear in tragedy, engaged in any great action, are never without attendants or spectators, or those at least who observe their conduct, and make remarks upon it. And therefore, together with the persons principally concerned, they always introduced attendants or spectators on the stage, who, by the mouth of one of their number, joined occasionally in the dialogue, and were called the Chorus. That this artifice, though perhaps it might not suit the modern drama, had a happy effect in beautifying the poetry, illustrating the morality, and heightening the probability, of the ancient, is a point, which in my opinion admits of sufficient proof, and has in fact been fully proved by Mr Mason, in his *Letters*, and admirably exemplified in his *Elfrida* and *Caractacus*; two poems that do honour to the English tongue, and to modern genius. But I do not now enter into any controversy on the subject: I speak of it with a view only to observe, that the propriety of the character assigned to the chorus is founded on that moral propensity above mentioned. For to introduce a company of unprejudiced persons, even of the vulgar, witnessing a great event, and yet not pitying the unfortunate, nor exclaiming against tyranny and injustice, nor rejoicing when the good are successful, nor wishing well to the worthy, would be to feign what seldom or never happens in real life; and what, therefore, in the improved state of things that poetry imitates, must never be supposed to happen.——Sentiments that betray a hard heart, a depraved understanding, unwarrantable pride, or any other moral or intellectual perversity, never fail to give offence, except where they appear to be introduced as examples for our improvement. Poetry, therefore, that is uninstructional, or immoral, cannot please those who retain any moral sensibility, or uprightness of judgement; and must consequently displease the greater part of any regular society of rational

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nal creatures. Great wickedness and great genius may have been united in the same person; but it may be doubted, whether corruption of heart and delicacy of taste be at all compatible.

Whenever a writer forgets himself so far, as to give us ground to suspect him even of momentary impiety or hardheartedness, we charge him in the same breath with want of conscience and want of taste; the former being generally, as well as justly, supposed to comprehend the latter. Cowley was an excellent person, and a very witty poet: — but where is the man who would not be ashamed to acknowledge himself pleased with that clause in the following quotation, which implies, that the author, puffed up with an idle conceit of the importance of literary renown, was disposed for a moment to look down with equal contempt upon the brutes and the common people!

What shall I do, to be for ever known,
And make the age to come my own?
I shall like beasts or common people die,
Unless you write my elegy *.

Virgil, describing a plague among the beasts, gives the following picture, which has every excellence that can belong to descriptive poetry; and of which Scaliger, with a noble enthusiasm, de-

* The learned and amiable Dr Hurd has omitted these two lines in his late edition of Cowley's poems. I wish some editor of Dryden would expunge the last part of the following sentence, which, as it now stands, is a reproach to humanity. "One is for raking in Chaucer for antiquated words, which are never to be revived, but when sound or significancy is wanting in the present language: but many of his deserve not this redemption; any more than the crouds of men who daily die or are slain for sixpence in a battle, merit to be restored to life; if a wish could revive them."

Postscript to Virgil.

clares;

clares, that he would rather be the author, than first favourite to Cyrus or Crefus :

Ecce autem duro fumans sub vomere taurus
 Concidit, et mixtum spumis vomit ore cruorem,
 Extremosque ciet gemitus. It tristis arator,
 Mærentem abjungens fraterna morte juvenum,
 Atque opere in medio defixa relinquit aratrum.

Which Dryden thus renders :

The steer, who to the yoke was bred to bow,
 (Studious of tillage, and the crooked plow),
 Falls down and dies ; and, dying, spews a flood
 Of foamy madness mixed with clotted blood.
 The clown, *who cursing Providence repines*,
 His mournful fellow from the team disjoins ;
 With many a groan forakes his fruitless care,
 And in th' unfinish'd furrow leaves the share.

Not to insist upon the misrepresentation of Virgil's meaning in the first couplet, I would only appeal to the reader, whether, by debasing the charming simplicity of *It tristis arator* with his blasphemous paraphrase, Dryden has not destroyed the beauty of the passage *. Such is the opposition between good poetry and bad morality !

* Examples of bad writing might no doubt be produced, on almost any occasion, from Quarles and Blackmore ; but as no body reads their works, no body is liable to be misled by them. It would seem, therefore, more expedient to take such examples from authors of merit, whose beauties too often give a sanction to their blemishes. For this reason it is, that I have, both here and in other places, taken the liberty to speak of Dryden with disapprobation. But as I would not be thought insensible to the merit of an author, to whom every lover of English poetry

morality ! So true it is, that the bard who would captivate the heart must sing in unison to the voice of conscience ! — and that
instruction

try is deeply indebted, I beg leave, once for all, to deliver at large my opinion of that great genius.

There is no modern writer, whose style is more distinguishable. Energy and ease are its chief characters. The former is owing to a happy choice of expressions, equally emphatical and plain : the latter to a laudable partiality in favour of the idioms and radical words of the English tongue ; the *native* riches and *peculiar* genius whereof are perhaps more apparent in him, than in any other of our poets. In Dryden's more correct pieces, we meet with no affectation of words of Greek or Latin etymology, no cumbersome pomp of epithets, no drawling circumlocutions, no idle glare of images, no blunderings round about a meaning : his English is pure and simple, nervous and clear, to a degree which Pope has never exceeded, and not always equalled. Yet, as I have elsewhere remarked, his attachment to the vernacular idiom, as well as the fashion of his age, often betrays him into a vulgarity, and even meanness, of expression, which is particularly observable in his translations of Virgil and Homer, and in those parts of his writings where he aims at pathos or sublimity. In fact, Dryden's genius did not lead him to the sublime or pathetic. Good strokes of both may doubtless be found in him ; but they are momentary, and seem to be accidental. He is too witty for the one, and too familiar for the other. That he had no adequate relish for the majesty of Paradise Lost, is evident to those who have compared his opera called *The state of innocence* with that immortal poem ; and that his taste for the true pathetic was imperfect, too manifestly appears from the general tenor of his Translations, as well as Tragedies. His Virgil abounds in lines and couplets of the most perfect beauty ; but these are mixed with others of a different stamp : nor can they who judge of the original by this translation, ever receive any tolerable idea of that uniform magnificence of sound and language, that exquisite choice of words and figures, and that sweet pathos of expression and of sentiment, which characterise the Mantuan Poet. — In delineating the more familiar scenes of life, in clothing plain moral doctrines with easy and graceful versification, in the various departments of Comic Satire, and in the spirit and melody of his Lyric poems, Dryden is inferior to none of those who went before him. He exceeds his master Chaucer in the first : in the three last he rivals Horace ; the style of whose epistles he has happily imitated in his *Religio Laici*, and other didactic pieces ; and the harmony and elegance of whose odes he has proved that he could have
 equalled,

instruction (taking the word in no unwarrantable latitude) is one of the means that must be employed to render poetry agreeable.

For

equalled, if he had thought proper to cultivate that branch of the poetic art. Indeed, whether we consider his peculiar significancy of expression, or the purity of his style; the sweetness of his lyric, or the ease and perspicuity of his moral poems; the sportive severity of his satire, or his talents in wit and humour; Dryden, in point of *genius*, (I do not say *taste*), seems to bear a closer affinity to Horace, than to any other ancient or modern author. For energy of words, vivacity of description, and apposite variety of numbers, his *Feast of Alexander* is superior to any ode of Horace or Pindar now extant.

Dryden's verse, though often faulty, has a grace, and a spirit, peculiar to itself. That of Pope is more correct, and perhaps upon the whole more harmonious; but it is in general more languid, and less diversified. Pope's numbers are sweet but elaborate; and our sense of their energy is in some degree interrupted by our attention to the art displayed in their contexture: Dryden's are natural and free; and, while they communicate their own sprightly motion to the spirits of the reader, hurry him along with a gentle and pleasing violence, without giving him time either to animadvert on their faults, or to analyse their beauties. Pope excels in solemnity of sound; Dryden, in an easy melody, and boundless variety of rhythm. In this last respect I think I could prove, that he is superior to all other English poets, Milton himself not excepted. Till Dryden appeared, none of our writers in rhyme of the last century approached in any measure to the harmony of Fairfax and Spenser. Of Waller it can only be said, that he is not harsh; of Denham and Cowley, if a few couplets were struck out of their works, we could not say so much. But in Dryden's hands, the English rhiming couplet assumed a new form; and seems hardly susceptible of any further improvement. One of the greatest poets of this century, the late and much-lamented Mr Gray of Cambridge, modestly declared to me, that if there was in his own numbers any thing that deserved approbation, he had learned it all from Dryden.

Critics have often stated a comparison between Dryden and Pope, as poets of the same order, and who differed only in *degree* of merit. But, in my opinion, the merit of the one differs considerably in *kind* from that of the other. Both were happy in a sound judgement and most comprehensive mind. Wit, and humour, and learning too, they seem to have possessed in equal measure; or, if

Dryden

For by instruction I do not here understand merely the communication of moral and physical truth. Whatever tends to raise

Dryden may be thought to have gone deeper in the sciences, Pope must be allowed to have been the greater adept in the arts. The diversities in point of correctness and delicacy, which arose from their different ways of life, I do not now insist upon. But, setting those aside, if Dryden founds any claim of preference on the originality of his manner, we shall venture to affirm, that Pope may found a similar claim, and with equal justice, on the perfection of his taste; and that, if the critical writings of the first are more voluminous, those of the second are more judicious; if Dryden's inventions are more diversified, those of Pope are more regular, and more important. Pope's style may be thought to have less simplicity, less vivacity, and less of the purity of the mother-tongue; but is at the same time more uniformly elevated, and less debased by vulgarism, than that of his great master:—and the superior variety that animates the numbers of the latter, will perhaps be found to be compensated by the steadier and more majestic modulation of the former. Thus far their merits would appear to be pretty equally balanced.—But if the opinion of those critics be true, who hold that the highest regions of Parnassus are appropriated to pathos and sublimity, Dryden must after all confess, that he has never ascended so far as his illustrious imitator: there being nothing in the writings of the first so deeply pathetic as the *Epistle of Eloisa*, or the *Elegy on the Unfortunate Lady*; nor so uniformly sublime as the *Essay on Man*, or the *Pastoral of the Messiah*. This last is indeed but a selection and imitation of choice passages; but it bespeaks a power of imitation, and a taste in selection, that Dryden does not seem to have possessed. To all which may I not be permitted to add, what I think I could prove, that the pathos of Homer is frequently improved by Pope, and that of Virgil very frequently debased by Dryden?

The writings of Dryden are stamped with originality, but are not always the better for that circumstance. Pope is an imitator professedly, and of choice; but to most of those whom he copies he is at least equal, and to many of them superior: and it is pleasing to observe, how he rises in proportion to his originals. Where he follows Denham, Buckingham, Roscomon, and Rochester, in his *Windfor-forest*, *Essay on Criticism*, and poem on Silence, he is superior indeed, but does not soar very high above them. When he versifies Chaucer, he catches, as by instinct, the ease, simplicity, and spirit of Dryden, whom he there emulates. In the *Rape of the Lock* he outshines Boileau, as much as the sylphs

raise those human affections that are favourable to truth and virtue, or to repress the opposite passions, will always gratify and improve our moral and intellectual powers, and may properly enough be called *instructive*. All poetry, therefore, is intitled to this epithet, not only which imparts knowledge we had not before; but also which awakens our pity for the sufferings of our fellow-creatures; promotes a taste for the beauties of nature animated or inanimate; makes vice appear the object of indignation or ridicule; inculcates a sense of our dependence upon Heaven; fortifies our minds against the evils of life; or promotes the love of virtue and wisdom, either by delineating their native charms, or by setting before us in suitable colours the dreadful consequences of imprudent and immoral conduct. There are few good poems of length, that will not be found in one or more or perhaps in several of these respects, to promote the instruction of a reader of taste. Even the poem of Lucretius, notwithstanding its absurd philosophy, (which, when the author gives way to it, divests him for a time of the poetical, and even of the rational, character), abounds in sentiments of great beauty and high importance; and in such delightful pictures of nature, as must inflame the enthusiasm wherewith a well-informed mind contemplates the wonders and glories of creation. Who can at-

that flutter round Belinda exceed in sprightliness and luminous beauty those mechanical attendants of the goddess of luxury, who knead up plumpness for the chin of the canon, and pound vermilion for the cheek of the monk*. His Eloisa is beyond all comparison more sublime and more interesting than any of Ovid's letter-writing ladies. His imitations of Horace equal their archetypes in elegance, and often surpass them in energy and fire. In the lyric style, he was no match for Dryden: but when he copies the manner of Virgil, and borrows the thoughts of Isaiah, Pope is superior not only to himself, but to almost all other poets.

* See Rape of the Lock, canto 2. vers. 55.; and Lutrin, chant. 2. vers. 100.

tend to the execrable designs of Iago, to Macbeth's progress through the several stages of guilt and misery, to the ruin that overtakes the impious and tyrannical Mezentius, to the thoughts and machinations of Satan and his angels in *Paradise Lost*, without paying a fresh tribute of praise to virtue, and renewing his resolutions to persevere in the paths of innocence and peace! Nay the machinery of Homer's deities, which in many parts I abandon as indefensible, will, if I mistake not, generally appear, where-ever it is really pleasing, to have somewhat of an useful tendency. I speak not now of the importance of machinery, as an instrument of the sublime and of the marvellous, necessary to every epic poem; but of Homer's use of it in those passages where it is supposed by some to be unnecessary. And in these, it often serves to set off a simple fact with allegorical decoration, and, of course, by interesting us more in the fable, to impress upon us more effectually the instruction conveyed in it. And sometimes it is to be considered, as nothing more than a personification of the attributes of the divinity, or the operations of the human soul. And, in general, it teaches emphatically this important lesson, that Providence ever superintends the affairs of men; that injustice and impiety are peculiarly obnoxious to divine vengeance; and that a proper attention to religious and moral duty, never fails to recommend both nations and individuals to the divine favour.

But if instruction may be drawn from the speeches and behaviour of Milton's devils, of Shakespeare's Macbeth, and of Virgil's Mezentius, why is Cowley blamed for a phrase, which at worst implies only a slight fallacy of momentary pride? I answer, that to speak seriously the language of intemperate passion, is one thing; to imitate or describe it another. By the former, one can never merit praise or esteem; by the latter one may merit much praise, and do much good. In the one case, we recom-

mend intemperate passions by our example; in the other, we may render them odious, by displaying their absurdity and consequences. To the greater part of his readers an author cannot convey either pleasure or instruction, by delivering sentiments as his own, which contradict the general conscience of mankind.

Well; but Dryden, in the passage lately quoted and censured, does not deliver his own sentiments, but only describes those of another: why then should he be blamed for making the unfortunate plowman irreligious? Why? Because he misrepresents his author's meaning; and (which is worse) counteracts his design. The design of the Latin poet was, not to expatiate on the punishment due to blasphemy or atheism, but to raise pity, by describing the melancholy effects of a plague so fatal to the brute creation:—a theme very properly introduced in the conclusion of a poem on the art of rearing and preserving cattle. Now, had Virgil said, as Dryden has done, that the farmer who lost his work-beast was a blasphemer, we should not have pitied him at all. But Virgil says only, that “the sorrowful husbandman went, “and unyoked the surviving bullock, and left his plough fixed “in the middle of the unfinished furrow;”—and by this pregnant and picturesque brevity, affects us a thousand times more, than he could have done by recapitulating all the sentiments of the poor farmer in the form of a soliloquy:—as indeed the view of the scene, as Virgil has drawn it, with the emphatic silence of the sufferer, would have been incomparably more moving, than a long speech from the plowman, fraught with moral reflections on death, and disappointment, and the uncertainty of human things. For to a poem mere morality is not so essential as accurate description; which, however, in matters of importance, must have a moral tendency, otherwise the human affections will take part against it.

But

But what do you say to the tragedy of *Venice preserved*, in which our pity and other benevolent emotions are engaged in behalf of those whom the moral faculty disapproves? Is not the poetry, for this very reason, immoral? And yet, is it not pathetic and pleasing? How then can you say, that something of a moral or instructive tendency is necessary to make a poem agreeable?—In answer to this, let it be observed,—first, That it is natural for us to sympathise with those who suffer, even when they suffer justly; which, however, implies not any liking to their crimes, or that our moral sentiments are at all perverted, but which, on the contrary, by quickening our sense of the misery consequent upon guilt, may be useful in confirming good principles, and improving the moral sensibility of the mind:—secondly, That the most pleasing and most pathetic parts of the play in question are those which relate to an amiable lady, with whose distress, as well as with her husband's on her account, we rationally sympathise, because that arises from their mutual affection:—thirdly, That the conspirators give a plausible colour to their cause, and exert a greatness of mind, which takes off our attention from their crimes, and leaves room for the tender emotions to operate occasionally in their favour:—and fourthly, That the merit of this play, like that of *the Orphan*, lies rather in the beauty of particular passages, than in the general effect of the whole; and that, if in any part the author has endeavoured to interest our kind affections in opposition to conscience, his poetry will there be found to be equally unpleasing and uninstrusive.

But may not agreeable affections arise in the mind, which partake neither of vice nor of virtue; such as joy, and hope, and those emotions that accompany the contemplation of external beauty, or magnificence? And, if pastorals and songs, and Anacreontic odes, awaken these agreeable affections, may

not

not such poems be pleasing, without being instructive? This may be, no doubt. And for this reason, among others, I take instruction to be only a secondary end of poetry. But it is only by short poems, as songs and pastorals, that these agreeable affections indifferent alike to vice and virtue, are excited, without any mixture of others. For moral sentiments are so prevalent in the human mind, that no affection can long subsist there, without intermingling with them, and being assimilated to their nature. Nor can a piece of real and pleasing poetry be extended to any great length, without operating, directly or indirectly, either on those affections that are friendly to virtue, or on those sympathies that quicken our moral sensibility, and prepare us for virtuous impressions. In fact, man's true happiness is derived from the moral part of his constitution; and therefore we cannot suppose, that any thing which affects not his moral part, should be lastingly and generally agreeable. We sympathise with the pleasure one takes in a feast, where there is friendship, and an interchange of good offices; but not with the satisfaction an epicure finds in devouring a solitary banquet. A short Anacreontic we may relish for its melody and sparkling images; but a long poem, in order to be pleasing, must not only charm the ear and the fancy, but also touch the heart and exercise the conscience.

Still perhaps it may be objected to these reasonings, That Horace, in a well-known verse *, declares the end of poetry to be twofold, to please, or to instruct; whereas we maintain, that the ultimate end of this art is to please; instruction being only one of the means (and not always a necessary one) by which that ultimate end is to be accomplished. This interpretation of Horace has indeed been admitted by some modern critics: but it is erroneous; for the passage, rightly understood, will not appear to

* Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poetæ.

contain any thing inconsistent with the present doctrine. The author is there stating a comparison between the Greek and Roman writers, with a view to the poetry of the stage; and, after commending the former for their correctness, and for the liberal spirit wherewith they conducted their literary labours, and blaming his countrymen for their inaccuracy and avarice, he proceeds thus: "The ends proposed by our dramatic poets (or by poets in general) are, to please, to instruct, or to do both. When instruction is your aim, let your moral sentences be expressed with brevity, that they may be readily understood, and long remembered: where you mean to please, let your fictions be conformable to truth, or probability. The elder part of your audience (or readers) have no relish for poems that give pleasure only without instruction; nor the younger for such writings as give instruction without pleasure. He only can secure the universal suffrage in his favour, who blends the useful with the agreeable, and delights at the same time that he instructs the reader. Such are the works that bring money to the bookseller, that pass into foreign countries, and perpetuate the author's name through a long succession of ages *."——

Now, what is the meaning of all this? What, but that to the *perfection* of dramatic poetry (or, if you please, of poetry in general) both sound morals and beautiful fiction are requisite. But Horace never meant to say, that instruction, as well as pleasure, is necessary to give to any composition the *poetical character*: or he would not in another place have celebrated, with so much affection and rapture, the melting strains of Sappho, and the playful genius of Anacreon †;—two authors transcendently sweet,

* Hor. Ar. Poet. 333. — 347.

† Hor. Carm. lib. 4. ode 9.

but not remarkably instructive. We are sure, that pathos, and harmony, and elevated language, were, in Horace's opinion, essential to poetry *; and of these decorations no body will affirm, that instruction is the end, who considers that the most instructive books in the world are written in plain prose.

Let this therefore be established as a truth in criticism, That the end of poetry is, TO PLEASE. Verses, if pleasing, may be poetical, though they convey little or no instruction; but verses, whose sole merit is, that they convey instruction, are not poetical. Instruction, however, especially in poems of length, is necessary to their *perfection*, because they would not be *perfectly agreeable* without it.

C H A P. II.

Of the Standard of Poetical Invention.

HOMER's beautiful description of the heavens and earth, as they appear in a calm evening by the light of the moon and stars, concludes with this circumstance, "And the heart of the shepherd is glad †." Madame Dacier, from the turn she gives to the passage in her version, seems to think, and Pope, in order perhaps to make out his couplet, insinuates, that the gladness of the shepherd is owing to his sense of the utility of those luminaries. And this may in part be the case: but this is not

* Hor. Sat. lib. 1. sat. 4. vers. 40.

† Iliad, b. 8. vers. 555.

in Homer; nor is it a necessary consideration. It is true, that, in contemplating the material universe, they who discern the causes and effects of things must be more rapturously entertained, than those who perceive nothing but shape and size, colour and motion. Yet, in the mere outside of Nature's works, (if I may so express myself), there is a splendour and a magnificence to which even untutored minds cannot attend, without great delight.

Not that all peasants, or all philosophers, are equally susceptible of these charming impressions. It is strange to observe the callousness of some men, before whom all the glories of heaven and earth pass in daily succession, without touching their hearts, elevating their fancy, or leaving any durable remembrance. Even of those who pretend to sensibility, how many are there to whom the lustre of the rising or setting sun; the sparkling concave of the midnight-sky; the mountain-forest tossing and roaring to the storm, or warbling with all the melodies of a summer-evening; the sweet interchange of hill and dale, shade and sunshine, grove, lawn, and water, which an extensive landscape offers to the view; the scenery of the ocean, so lovely, so majestic, and so tremendous, and the many pleasing varieties of the animal and vegetable kingdom, could never afford so much real satisfaction, as the steams and noise of a ball-room, the insipid fiddling and squeaking of an opera, or the vexations and wranglings of a card-table!

But some minds there are of a different make; who, even in the early part of life, receive from the contemplation of Nature a species of delight which they would hardly exchange for any other; and who, as avarice and ambition are not the infirmities of that period, would, with equal sincerity and rapture, exclaim,

I care not, Fortune, what you me deny;
You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace;
You cannot shut the windows of the sky,
Through which Aurora shows her brightening face;
You cannot bar my constant feet to trace
The woods and lawns by living stream at eve *. —

Such minds have always in them the seeds of true taste, and frequently of imitative genius. At least, though their enthusiastic or visionary turn of mind (as the man of the world would call it) should not always incline them to practise poetry or painting, we need not scruple to affirm, that without some portion of this enthusiasm, no person ever became a true poet or painter. For he who would imitate the works of Nature, must first accurately observe them; and accurate observation is to be expected from those only who take great pleasure in it.

To a mind thus disposed no part of creation is indifferent. In the crowded city, and howling wilderness; in the cultivated province, and solitary isle; in the flowery lawn, and craggy mountain; in the murmur of the rivulet, and in the uproar of the ocean; in the radiance of summer, and gloom of winter; in the thunder of heaven, and in the whisper of the breeze; he still finds something to rouse or to sooth his imagination, to draw forth his affections, or to employ his understanding. And from every mental energy that is not attended with pain, and even from some of those that are, as moderate terror and pity, a sound mind derives satisfaction; exercise being equally necessary to the body and the soul, and to both equally productive of health and pleasure.

* Castle of Indolence.

This happy sensibility to the beauties of Nature should be cherished in young persons. It engages them to contemplate the Creator in his wonderful works; it purifies and harmonizes the soul, and prepares it for moral and intellectual discipline; it supplies an endless source of amusement; it contributes even to bodily health; and, as a strict analogy subsists between material and moral beauty, it leads the heart by an easy transition from the one to the other; and thus recommends virtue for its transcendent loveliness, and makes vice appear the object of contempt and abomination. An intimate acquaintance with the best descriptive poets, Spenser, Milton, and Thomson, but above all with the divine Georgic, joined to some practice in the art of drawing, will promote this amiable sensibility in early years; for then the face of Nature has novelty superadded to its other charms, the passions are not pre-engaged, the heart is free from care, and the imagination warm and romantic.

But, not to insist longer on those ardent emotions that are peculiar to the enthusiastic disciple of Nature, may it not be affirmed of all men, without exception, or at least of all the enlightened part of mankind, that they are gratified by the contemplation of things natural, as opposed to unnatural? Monstrous sights please but for a moment, if they please at all; for they derive their charm from the beholder's amazement, which is quickly over. I have read indeed of a man of rank in Sicily*, who chuses to adorn his villa with pictures and statues of most unnatural deformity; but it is a singular instance: and one would not be much more surprised to hear of a person living without food, or growing fat by the use of poison. To say of any thing, that it is *contrary to nature*, denotes censure and disgust on the part of the speaker; as the epithet *natural* intimates an agreeable

* See Mr Brydone's Tour in Sicily, letter 24.

quality, and seems for the most part to imply, that a thing is as it ought to be, suitable to our own taste, and congenial with our own constitution. Think, with what sentiments we should peruse a poem, in which Nature was totally misrepresented, and principles of thought and of operation supposed to take place, repugnant to every thing we had seen or heard of: — in which, for example, avarice and coldness were ascribed to youth, and prodigality and passionate attachment to the old; in which men were made to act at random, sometimes according to character, and sometimes contrary to it; in which cruelty and envy were productive of love, and beneficence and kind affection of hatred; in which beauty was invariably the object of dislike, and ugliness of desire; in which society was rendered happy by atheism, and the promiscuous perpetration of crimes, and justice and fortitude were held in universal contempt. Or think, how we should relish a painting, where no regard was had to the proportions, colours, or any of the physical laws, of Nature: — where the ears and eyes of animals were placed in their shoulders; where the sky was green, and the grass crimson; where trees grew with their branches in the earth, and their roots in the air; where men were seen fighting after their heads were cut off, ships sailing on the land, lions entangled in cobwebs, sheep preying on dead carcases, fishes sporting in the woods, and elephants walking on the sea. Could such figures and combinations give pleasure, or merit the appellation of sublime or beautiful? Should we hesitate to pronounce their author mad? And are the absurdities of madmen proper subjects either of amusement or of imitation to reasonable beings?

Let it be remarked too, that though we distinguish our internal powers by different names, because otherwise we could not speak of them so as to be understood, they are all but so many energies of the same individual mind; and therefore it is not to be supposed,

supposed, that what contradicts any one leading faculty should yield permanent delight to the rest. That cannot be agreeable to reason, which conscience disapproves; nor can that gratify imagination, which is repugnant to reason.— Besides, belief and acquiescence of mind are pleasant, as distrust and disbelief are painful; and therefore, that only can give solid and general satisfaction, which has something of plausibility in it; something which we conceive it possible for a rational being to believe. But no rational being can acquiesce in what is obviously contrary to nature, or implies palpable absurdity.

Poetry, therefore, and indeed every art whose end is to please, must be natural; and if so, must exhibit real matter of fact, or something like it; that is, in other words, must be, either according to truth, or according to verisimilitude.

And though every part of the material universe abounds in objects of pleasurable contemplation, yet nothing in nature so powerfully touches our hearts, or gives so great variety of exercise to our moral and intellectual faculties, as man. Human affairs and human feelings are universally interesting. There are many who have no great relish for the poetry that delineates only irrational or inanimate beings; but to that which exhibits the fortunes, the characters, and the conduct of men, there is hardly any person who does not listen with sympathy and delight. And hence, to imitate human action, is considered by Aristotle as essential to this art; and must be allowed to be essential to the most pleasing and most instructive part of it, I mean to epic and dramatic composition. Mere descriptions, however beautiful, and moral reflections, however just, become tiresome, where our passions are not occasionally awakened by some event that concerns our fellow-men. Do not all readers of taste receive peculiar pleasure from those little tales or episodes, with which Thomson's descriptive poem on the Seasons is here and there enlivened? and

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are they not sensible, that the thunder-storm would not have been half so interesting without the tale of the two lovers *; nor the harvest-scene, without that of Palemon and Lavinia †; nor the driving snows, without that exquisite picture of a man perishing among them ‡? It is much to be regretted, that Young did not employ the same artifice to animate his Night-Thoughts. Sentiments and descriptions may be regarded as the pilasters, carvings, gildings, and other decorations of the poetical fabric; but human actions are the columns and the rafters, that give it stability and elevation. Or, changing the metaphor, we may consider these as the soul which informs the lovely frame; while those are little more than the ornaments of the body.

Whether the pleasure we take in things natural, and our dislike to what is the reverse, be the effect of habit or of constitution, is not a material inquiry. There is nothing absurd in supposing, that between the soul, in its first formation, and the rest of nature, a mutual harmony and sympathy may have been established, which experience may indeed confirm, but no perverse habits could entirely subdue. As no sort of education could make man believe the contrary of a self-evident axiom, or reconcile him to a life of perfect solitude; so I should imagine, that our love of nature and regularity might still remain with us in some degree, though we had been born and bred in the Sicilian villa above mentioned, and never heard any thing applauded but what deserved censure, nor censured but what merited applause. Yet habit must be allowed to have a powerful influence over the sentiments and feelings of mankind. Objects to

* Summer, vers. 1171.

† Autumn, vers. 177.

‡ Winter, vers. 276.

which

which we have been long accustomed, we are apt to contract a fondness for ; we conceive them readily, and contemplate them with pleasure ; nor do we quit our old tracts of speculation or practice, without reluctance and pain. Hence in part arises our attachment to our own professions, our old acquaintance, our native soil, our homes, and to the very hills, streams, and rocks in our neighbourhood. It would therefore be strange, if man, accustomed as he is from his earliest days to the regularity of nature, did not contract a liking to her productions, and principles of operation.

Yet we neither expect nor desire, that every human invention, where the end is only to please, should be an exact transcript of real existence. It is enough, that the mind acquiesce in it as probable, or plausible, or such as we think might happen without any direct opposition to the laws of Nature : — or, to speak more accurately, it is enough, that it be consistent, either, first, with general experience ; or, secondly, with popular opinion ; or, thirdly, that it be consistent with itself, and connected with probable circumstances.

First : If a human invention be consistent with *general* experience, we acquiesce in it as sufficiently probable. *Particular* experiences, however, there may be, so uncommon and so little expected, that we should not admit their probability, if we did not know them to be true. No man of sense believes, that he has any likelihood of being enriched by the discovery of hidden treasure ; or thinks it probable, on purchasing a lottery-ticket, that he shall gain the first prize ; and yet great wealth has actually been acquired by such good fortune. But we should look upon these as poor expedients in a play or romance for bringing about a happy catastrophe. We expect that fiction should be more consonant to the *general* tenor of human affairs ; in a word, that

that not possibility, but probability, should be the standard of poetical invention.

Secondly : Fiction is admitted as conformable to this standard, when it accords with received opinions. These may be erroneous, but are not often *apparently* repugnant to nature. On this account, and because they are familiar to us from our infancy, the mind readily acquiesces in them, or at least yields them that degree of credit which is necessary to render them pleasing. Hence the fairies, ghosts, and witches of Shakespeare, are admitted as probable beings; and angels obtain a place in religious pictures, though we know that they do not now appear in the scenery of real life. Even when a popular opinion has long been exploded, and has become repugnant to universal belief, the fictions built upon it are still admitted as natural, because they were accounted such by the people to whom they were first addressed; whose sentiments and views of things we are willing to adopt, when, by the power of pleasing description, we are introduced into their scenes, and made acquainted with their manners. Hence we admit the theology of the ancient poets, their Elysium and Tartarus, Scylla and Charybdis, Cyclops and Circe, and the rest of those “beautiful wonders” (as Horace calls them) which were believed in the heroic ages; as well as the demons and enchantments of Tasso, which may be supposed to have obtained no small degree of credit among the Italians of the sixteenth century, and are suitable enough to the notions that prevailed universally in Europe not long before*. In fact, when

Poetry

* In the fourteenth century, the common people of Italy believed, that the poet Dante actually went down to hell; that the *Inferno* was a true account of what he saw there; and that his fallow complexion, and stunted beard, (which seemed by its growth and colour to have been too near the fire), were the consequence of

Poetry is in other respects true ; when it gives an accurate display of those parts of nature about which we know that men in all ages must have entertained the same opinion, I mean those appearances in the visible creation, and those feelings and workings of the human mind, which are obvious to all mankind ; — when Poetry, I say, is thus far according to nature, we are very willing to be indulgent to what is fictitious in it, and to grant a temporary allowance to any system of fable which the author pleases to adopt ; provided that he lay the scene in a distant country, or fix the date to a remote period. This is no unreasonable piece of complaisance : we owe it both to the poet and to ourselves ; for without it we should neither form a right estimate of his genius, nor receive from his works that pleasure which they were intended to impart. Let him, however, take care, that his system of fable be such, as his countrymen and contemporaries (to whom his work is immediately addressed) might be supposed capable of yielding their assent to ; for otherwise we should not believe him to be in earnest : and let him connect it as much as he can with probable circumstances, and make it appear in a series of events consistent with itself.

For (thirdly) if this be the case, we shall admit his story as probable, or at least as natural, and consequently be interested in it, even though it be not warranted by general experience, and derive but slender authority from popular opinion. Caliban, in

his passing so much of his time in that hot and smoky region. *See Vicende della letteratura del Sig. C. Denina, cap. 4.* — Sir John Mandeville's Book of Travels, written not long after, was not only ratified by the Pope, after having been compared with the *Mappa Mundi* of that time, but, what is more strange, seems to have been seriously believed by that adventurous knight himself, though a man of considerable learning, and no despicable taste. *See the Conclusion of the Book.*

the *Tempest*, would have shocked the mind as an improbability, if we had not been made acquainted with his origin, and seen his character displayed in a series of consistent behaviour. But when we are told, that he sprung from a witch and a demon, a connection not contrary to the laws of Nature, as they were understood in Shakespeare's time, and find his manners conformable to his descent, we are easily reconciled to the fiction. In the same sense, the Lilliputians of Swift may pass for probable beings; not so much because we know that a belief in pygmies was once current in the world, (for the true ancient pygmy was at least thrice as tall as those whom Gulliver visited), but because we find, that every circumstance relating to them accords with itself, and with their supposed character. It is not the size of the people only that is diminutive; their country, seas, ships, and towns, are all in exact proportion; their theological and political principles, their passions, manners, customs, and all the parts of their conduct, betray a levity and littleness perfectly suitable: and so simple is the whole narration, and apparently so artless and sincere, that I should not much wonder, if it had imposed (as I have been told it has) upon some persons of no contemptible understanding. The same degree of credit may perhaps for the same reasons be due to his giants. But when he grounds his narrative upon a contradiction to nature; when he presents us with rational brutes, and irrational men; when he tells us of horses building houses for habitation, milking cows for food, riding in carriages, and holding conversations on the laws and politics of Europe; not all his genius (and he there exerts it to the utmost) is able to reconcile us to so monstrous a fiction: we may smile at some of his absurd exaggerations; we may be pleased with the energy of style, and accuracy of description, in particular places; and a malevolent heart may triumph in the satire: but we can never relish it as a fable, because it is at once unnatural

tural and self-contradictory. Swift's judgement seems to have forsaken him on this occasion*: he wallows in nastiness and brutality; and the general run of his satire is downright defamation. Lucian's *True History* is a heap of extravagancies put together without order or unity, or any other apparent design, than to ridicule the language and manner of grave authors. His ravings, which have no better right to the name of Fable, than a hill of rubbish has to that of Palace, are destitute of every colour of plausibility. Animal trees, ships sailing in the sky, armies of monstrous things travelling between the sun and moon on a pavement of cobwebs, rival nations of men inhabiting

* There are improprieties in this narrative, which one would think a very slight attention to nature might have prevented; and which, without heightening the satire, serve only to aggravate the absurdity of the fable. *Houyhnhnms* are horses in perfection, with the addition of reason and virtue. Whatever, therefore, takes away from their perfection as horses, without adding to their rational and moral accomplishments, must be repugnant to the author's design, and ought not to have found a place in his narration. Yet he makes his beloved quadrupeds dwell in houses of their own building, and use warm food and the milk of cows as a delicacy: though these luxuries, supposed attainable by a nation of horses, could contribute no more to their perfection, than brandy and imprisonment would to that of a man. — Again, did Swift believe, that religious ideas are natural to a reasonable being, and necessary to the happiness of a moral one? I hope he did. Yet has he represented his *houyhnhnms*, as patterns of moral virtue, as the greatest masters of reason, and withal as completely happy, without any religious ideas, or any views beyond the present life. In a word, he would make stupidity consistent with mental excellence, and unnatural appetites with animal perfection. These, however, are small matters, compared with the other absurdities of this abominable tale. — But when a Christian Divine can set himself deliberately to trample upon that nature, which he knows to have been made but a little lower than the angels, and to have been assumed by One far more exalted than they; we need not be surprised if the same perverse habits of thinking which harden his heart, should also debase his judgement.

woods and mountains in a whale's belly, — are liker the dreams of a bedlamite, than the inventions of a rational being.

If we were to prosecute this subject any further, it would be proper to remark, that in some kinds of poetical invention a stricter probability is required than in others: — that, for instance, Comedy, whether Dramatic or Narrative *, must seldom deviate from the ordinary course of human affairs, because it exhibits the manners of real, and even of familiar life; — that the Tragic poet, because he imitates characters more exalted, and generally refers to events little known, or long since past, may be allowed a wider range; but must never attempt the marvellous fictions of the Epic Muse, because he addresses his work, not only to the passions and imagination of mankind, but also to their eyes and ears, which are not easily imposed on, and refuse to be gratified with any representation that does not come very near the truth; — that the Epic Poem may claim still ampler privileges, because its fictions are not subject to the scrutiny of any outward sense, and because it conveys information in regard both to the highest human characters, and the most important and wonderful events, and also to the affairs of unseen worlds, and superior beings. Nor would it be improper to observe, that the several species of Comic, of Tragic, of Epic composition, are not confined to the same degree of probability; for that Farce may be allowed to be less probable than the regular Comedy; the Masque, than the regular Tragedy; and the Mixed Epic, such as *The Fairy Queen*, and *Orlando Furioso*, than the pure Epopee of Homer, Virgil, and Milton. — But this part of the subject seems not to require further illustration. Enough has been said, to show, that nothing

* Fielding's *Tom Jones*, *Amelia*, and *Joseph Andrews*, are examples of what I call the Epic or Narrative Comedy: perhaps the *Comic Epopee* is a more proper term.

unnatural can please; and that therefore Poetry, whose end is to please, must be ACCORDING TO NATURE.

And if so, it must be, either according to real nature, or according to nature somewhat different from the reality.

C H A P. III.

Poetry exhibits a system of nature somewhat different from the reality of things.

TO exhibit *real nature* is the business of the historian; who, if he were strictly to confine himself to his own sphere, would never record even the minutest circumstance of any speech, event, or description, which was not warranted by sufficient authority. It has been the language of critics in every age, that the historian ought to relate nothing as true which is false or dubious, and to conceal nothing material which he knows to be true. But I doubt whether any writer of profane history has ever been so scrupulous. Thucydides himself, who began his history when that war began which he records, and who set down every event soon after it happened, according to the most authentic information, seems however to have indulged his fancy not a little in his harangues and descriptions, particularly that of the plague of Athens: and the same thing has been practised, with greater latitude, by Livy and Tacitus, and more or less by all the best historians, both ancient and modern. Nor do I blame them for it. By these improved or invented speeches, and by the heightenings thus given to their descriptions,

tions, their work becomes more interesting, and more useful; nobody is deceived, and historical truth is not materially affected. A medium is however to be observed in this, as in other things. When the historian lengthens a description into a detail of fictitious events, as Voltaire has done in his account of the battle of Fontenoy, he loses his credit with us, by raising a suspicion that he is more intent upon a pretty story, than upon the truth. And we are disgusted with his insincerity, when, in defiance even of verisimilitude, he puts long elaborate orations in the mouth of those, of whom we know, either from the circumstances that they could not, or from more authentic records that they did not, make any such orations; as Dionysius of Halicarnassus has done, in the case of Volumnia haranguing her son Coriolanus, and Flavius Josephus in that of Judah addressing his brother as viceroy of Egypt. From what these historians relate, one would conjecture, that the Roman matron had studied at Athens under some long-winded rhetorician, and that the Jewish patriarch must have been one of the most flowery orators of antiquity. But the fictitious part of history, or of story-telling, ought never to take up much room; and must be highly blameable when it leads into any mistake either of facts or of characters.

Now, why do historians take the liberty to embellish their works in this manner? One reason, no doubt, is, that they may display their talents in oratory and narration: but the chief reason, as hinted already, is, to render their composition more agreeable. It would seem, then, that something more pleasing, than real nature, or something which shall add to the pleasing qualities of real nature, may be devised by human fancy. And this may certainly be done. And this it is the poet's business to do. And when this is in any degree done by the historian, his narrative becomes in that degree poetical.

The possibility of thus improving upon nature must be obvious

vious to every one. When we look at a landscape, we can fancy a thousand additional embellishments. Mountains loftier and more picturesque; rivers more copious, more limpid, and more beautifully winding; smoother and wider lawns; vallies more richly diversified; caverns and rocks more gloomy and more stupendous; ruins more majestic; buildings more magnificent; oceans more varied with islands, more splendid with shipping, or more agitated by storm, than any we have ever seen, it is easy for human imagination to conceive. Many things in art and nature exceed expectation; but nothing sensible transcends, or equals, the capacity of thought:—a striking evidence of the dignity of the human soul! The finest woman in the world appears to every eye susceptible of improvement, except perhaps to that of her lover. No wonder, then, if in poetry events can be exhibited more compact, and of more pleasing variety, than those delineated by the historian, and scenes of inanimate nature more dreadful or more lovely, and human characters more sublime and more exquisite both in good and evil. Yet still let nature supply the ground-work and materials, as well as the standard, of poetical fiction. The most expert painters use a layman, or other visible figure, to direct their hand and regulate their fancy. Homer himself founds his two poems on authentic tradition; and Tragic as well as Epic poets have followed the example. The writers of romance too are ambitious to interweave true adventures with their fables; and, when it can be conveniently done, to take the outlines of their plan from real life. Thus the tale of Robinson Crusoe is founded on an incident that actually befel one Alexander Selkirk, a sea-faring man, who lived several years alone in the island of Juan Fernandes; Smollet is thought to have given us several of his own adventures in the history of Roderick Random; and the chief characters in Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews, and Pamela, are said to have been copied

copied from real originals.—Dramatic Comedy, indeed, is for the most part purely fictitious; for if it were to exhibit real events as well as present manners, it would become too personal to be endured by a well-bred audience, and degenerate into downright abuse; which appears to have been the case with the *old comedy* of the Greeks*.—But, in general, hints taken from real existence will be found to give no little grace and stability to fiction, even in the most fanciful poems. Those hints, however, may be improved by the poet's imagination, and set off with every probable ornament that can be devised, consistently with the design and genius of the work;—or, in other words, with the sympathies that the poet means to awaken in the mind of his reader. For mere poetical ornament, when it fails to interest the affections, is not only useless but improper; all true poetry being addressed to the heart, and intended to give pleasure by raising or soothing the passions;—the only effectual way of pleasing a rational and moral creature. And therefore I would take Horace's maxim to be universal in poetry; “Non fatis est, pulchra esse poemata; *dulcia* funto;” “It is not enough that poems be beautiful; let them also be *affecting*.”—for that this is the meaning of the word *dulcia* in this place, is admitted by the best interpreters, and is indeed evident from the context †.

That the sentiments and feelings of percipient beings, when expressed in poetry, should call forth our affections, is natural enough; but can descriptions of inanimate things also be made affecting? Certainly they can: and the more they affect, the more they please us; and the more poetical we allow them to

* Compare Hor. lib. 1. sat. 4. vers. 1.—5. with Ar. Poet. vers. 281.—285.

† Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 95.—100.

be. Virgil's Georgic is a noble specimen (and indeed the noblest in the world) of this sort of poetry. His admiration of external nature gains upon a reader of taste, till it rise to perfect enthusiasm. The following observations will perhaps explain this matter.

Every thing in nature is complex in itself, and bears innumerable relations to other things; and may therefore be viewed in an endless variety of lights, and consequently described in an endless variety of ways. Some descriptions are good, and others bad. An historical description, that enumerates all the qualities of any object, is certainly good, because it is true; but may be as uninteresting as a logical definition. In poetry no uninteresting description is good, however conformable to truth; for here we expect not a complete enumeration of qualities, (the chief end of the art being to please), but only such an enumeration as may give a lively and interesting idea. It is not memory, or the knowledge of rules, that can qualify a poet for this sort of description; but a peculiar liveliness of fancy and sensibility of heart, the nature whereof we may explain by its effects, but we cannot lay down rules for the attainment of it.

When our mind is occupied by any emotion, we naturally use words, and meditate on things, that are suitable to it, and tend to encourage it. If a man were to write a letter when he is very angry, there would probably be something of vehemence or bitterness in the style, even though the person to whom he wrote were not the object of his anger. The same thing holds true of every other strong passion or emotion:—while it predominates in the mind, it gives a peculiarity to our thoughts, as well as to our voice, gesture, and countenance: and hence we expect, that every personage introduced in poetry should see things through the medium of his ruling passion, and that his thoughts and language should be tinged accordingly. A me-

lancholy man walking in a grove, attends to those things that suit and encourage his melancholy; the sighing of the wind in the trees, the murmuring of waters, the darkness and solitude of the shades: a chearful man in the same place, finds many subjects of chearful meditation, in the singing of birds, the brisk motions of the babbling stream, and the liveliness and variety of the verdure. Persons of different characters, contemplating the same thing, a Roman triumph, for instance, feel different emotions, and turn their view to different objects. One is filled with wonder at such a display of wealth and power; another exults in the idea of conquest, and pants for military renown; a third, stunned with clamour, and harassed with confusion, wishes for silence, security, and solitude; one melts with pity to the vanquished, and makes many a sad reflection upon the insignificance of wordly grandeur, and the uncertainty of human things; while the buffoon, and perhaps the philosopher, considers the whole as a vain piece of pageantry, which, by its solemn procedure, and by the admiration of so many people, is only rendered the more ridiculous:—and each of these persons would describe it in a way suitable to his own feelings, and tending to raise the same in others. We see in Milton's *Allegro* and *Penferoso*, how a different cast of mind produces a variety in the manner of conceiving and contemplating the same rural scenery. In the former of these excellent poems, the author personates a chearful man, and takes notice of those things in external nature that are suitable to chearful thoughts, and tend to encourage them; in the latter, every object described is serious and solemn, and productive of calm reflection and tender melancholy: and I should not be easily persuaded, that Milton wrote the first under the influence of sorrow, or the second under that of gladness.—We often see an author's character in his works; and if every author were in earnest when he writes,

we should oftener see it. Thomson was a man of piety and benevolence, and a warm admirer of the beauties of nature; and every description in his delightful poem on the Seasons tends to raise the same laudable affections in his reader. The parts of nature that attract his notice are those which an impious or hardhearted man would neither attend to nor be affected with, at least in the same manner. In Swift we see a turn of mind very different from that of the amiable Thomson; little relish for the sublime or beautiful, and a perpetual succession of violent emotions. All his pictures of human life seem to show, that deformity and meanness were the favourite objects of his attention, and that his soul was a constant prey to indignation*, disgust, and other gloomy passions arising from such a view of things. And it is the tendency of almost all his writings (though it was not always the author's design) to communicate the same passions to his reader: inasmuch, that, notwithstanding his erudition, and knowledge of the world, his abilities as a popular orator and man of business, the energy of his style, the elegance of some of his verses, and his extraordinary talents in wit and humour, there is reason to doubt, whether by studying his works any person was ever much improved in piety or benevolence.

And thus we see, how the compositions of an ingenious author may operate upon the heart, whatever be the subject. The affections that prevail in the author himself direct his attention to objects congenial, and give a peculiar bias to his inventive powers, and a peculiar colour to his language. Hence his work, as well as face, if Nature is permitted to exert herself freely in

* For part of this remark we have his own authority, often in his letters, and very explicitly in the Latin Epitaph which he composed for himself: — “ubi fœva
“ indignatio ulterius cor lacerare nequit.” See his last will and testament.

it, will exhibit a picture of his mind, and awaken correspondent sympathies in the reader. When these are favourable to virtue, which they always ought to be, the work will have that *sweet pathos* which Horace alludes to in the passage above mentioned; and which we so highly admire, and so warmly approve, even in those parts of the *Georgic* that describe inanimate nature.

Horace's account of the matter in question differs not from what is here given. "It is not enough," says he, "that poems be beautiful; let them be affecting, and agitate the mind with whatever passions the poet wishes to impart. The human countenance, as it smiles on those who smile, accompanies also with sympathetic tears those who mourn. If you would have me weep, you must first weep yourself; then, and not before, shall I be touched with your misfortunes. — For nature *first* makes the emotions of our mind correspond with our circumstances, infusing real joy, sorrow, or resentment, according to the occasion; and *afterwards* gives the true pathetic utterance to the voice and language*." — This doctrine, which concerns the orator and the player no less than the poet, is strictly philosophical, and equally applicable to dramatic, to descriptive, and indeed to every species of interesting poetry. The poet's sensibility must first of all engage him warmly in his subject, and in every part of it; otherwise he will labour in vain to interest the reader. If he would paint external nature, as Virgil and Thomson have done, so as to make her amiable to others, he must first be enamoured of her himself; if he would have his heroes and heroines speak the language of love or sorrow, devotion or courage, ambition or anger, benevolence or pity, his heart must be susceptible of those emotions, and in some degree

* *Ar. Poet. vers. 99. — 111.*

feel them, as long at least as he employs himself in framing words for them; being assured, that

He best shall paint them who can feel them most *.

The true poet, therefore, must not only study nature, and know the reality of things; but must also possess fancy, to invent additional decorations; judgement, to direct him in the choice of such as accord with verisimilitude; and sensibility, to enter with ardent emotions into every part of his subject, so as to transfuse into his work a pathos and energy sufficient to raise corresponding emotions in the reader.

“The historian and the poet,” says Aristotle, “differ in this, that the former exhibits things as they are, the latter as they might be †:”—I suppose he means, in that state of perfection which is consistent with probability, and in which, for the sake of our own gratification, we wish to find them. If the poet, after all the liberties he is allowed to take with the truth, can produce nothing more exquisite than is commonly to be met with in history, his reader will be disappointed and dissatisfied. Poetical representations must therefore be framed after a pattern of the highest probable perfection that the genius of the work will admit:—external nature must in them be more picturesque than in reality; action more animated; sentiments more expressive of the feelings and character, and more suitable to the circumstances of the speaker; personages better accomplished in those qualities that raise admiration, pity, terror, and other ardent emotions; and events, more compact, more clearly connected with causes and consequences, and unfolded in an order

* Pope's *Eloisa*, vers. 366.

† Poetic. sect. 9.

more flattering to the fancy, and more interesting to the passions. But where, it may be said, is this pattern of perfection to be found? Not in real nature; otherwise history, which delineates real nature, would also delineate this pattern of perfection. It is to be found only in the mind of the poet; and it is imagination, regulated by knowledge, that enables him to form it.

In the beginning of life, and while experience is confined to a small circle, we admire every thing, and are pleased with very moderate excellence. A peasant thinks the hall of his landlord the finest apartment in the universe, listens with rapture to the strolling ballad-singer, and wonders at the rude wooden cuts that adorn his ruder compositions. A child looks upon his native village as a town; upon the brook that runs by, as a river; and upon the meadows and hills in the neighbourhood, as the most spacious and beautiful that can be. But when, after long absence, he returns in his declining years, to visit, once before he die, the dear spot that gave him birth, and those scenes whereof he remembers rather the original charms than the exact proportions, how is he disappointed to find every thing so debased, and so diminished! The hills seem to have sunk into the ground, the brook to be dried up, and the village to be forsaken of its people; the parish-church, stripped of all its fancied magnificence, is become low, gloomy, and narrow, and the fields are now only the miniature of what they were. Had he never left this spot, his notions might have remained the same as at first; and had he travelled but a little way from it, they would not perhaps have received any material enlargement. It seems then to be from observation of many things of the same or similar kinds, that we acquire the talent of forming ideas more perfect than the real objects that lie immediately around us: and these ideas we may improve gradually more and more, according to the vivacity of

our mind, and extent of our experience, till at last we come to raise them to a degree of perfection superior to any thing to be found in real life. There cannot, sure, be any mystery in this doctrine; for we think and speak to the same purpose every day. Thus nothing is more common than to say, that such an artist excels all we have ever known in his profession, and yet that we can still conceive a superior performance. A moralist, by bringing together into one view the separate virtues of many persons, is enabled to lay down a system of duty more perfect than any he has ever seen exemplified in human conduct. Whatever be the emotion the poet intends to raise in his reader, whether admiration or terror, joy or sorrow; and whatever be the object he would exhibit, whether Venus or Tisiphone, Achilles or Therites, a palace or a pile of ruins, a dance or a battle; he generally copies an idea of his own imagination; considering each quality as it is found to exist in several individuals of a species, and thence forming an assemblage more or less perfect in its kind, according to the purpose to which he means to apply it.

Hence it would appear, that the ideas of Poetry are rather general than singular; rather collected from the examination of a species or class of things, than copied from an individual. And this, according to Aristotle, is in fact the case, at least for the most part; whence that critic determines, that Poetry is something more exquisite and more philosophical than history*. The historian may describe Bucephalus, but the poet delineates a war-horse; the former must have seen the animal he speaks of, or received authentic information concerning it, if he mean to describe it historically; for the latter it is enough that he has seen several animals of that sort. The former tells us, what Alcibiades actually did and said; the latter, what such a species of human

* Poetic. sect. 9.

*character

character as that which bears the name of Achilles would probably do or say in certain given circumstances.

It is indeed true, that the poet may, and often does, copy after individual objects. Homer, no doubt, took his characters from the life; or at least, in forming them, was careful to follow tradition as far as the nature of his plan would allow. But he probably took the freedom to add or heighten some qualities, and take away others; to make Achilles, for example, stronger, perhaps, and more impetuous, and more eminent for filial affection, and Hector more patriotic and more amiable, than he really was. If he had not done this, or something like it, his work would have been rather a history than a poem; would have exhibited men and things as they were, and not as they might have been; and Achilles and Hector would have been the names of individual and real heroes; whereas, according to Aristotle, they are rather to be considered as two distinct modifications or species of the heroic character.——Shakespeare's account of the cliffs of Dover comes so near the truth, that we cannot doubt of its having been written by one who had seen them: but he who takes it for an exact historical description, will be surprised when he comes to the place, and finds those cliffs not half so lofty as the poet had made him believe. An historian would be to blame for such amplification; because, being to describe an individual precipice, he ought to tell us just what it is; which if he did, the description would suit that place, and perhaps no other in the whole world. But the poet means only to give an idea of what such a precipice may be; and therefore his description may perhaps be equally applicable to many such chalky precipices on the sea-shore.

This method of copying after general ideas formed by the artist from observation of many individuals, distinguishes the Italian, and all the sublime painters, from the Dutch, and their imitators.

tors. These give us bare nature, with the imperfections and peculiarities of individual things or persons; but those give nature improved as far as probability and the design of the piece will admit. Teniers and Hogarth draw faces, and figures, and dresses, from real life, and present manners; and therefore their pieces must in some degree lose the effect, and become awkward, when the present fashions become obsolete.—Raphael and Reynolds take their models from general nature; avoiding, as far as possible, (at least in all their great performances), those peculiarities that derive their beauty from mere fashion; and therefore their works must give pleasure, and appear elegant, as long as men are capable of forming general ideas, and of judging from them. The last-mentioned incomparable artist is particularly observant of children, whose looks and attitudes, being less under the control of art and local manners, are more characteristic of the species, than those of men and women. This field of observation has supplied him with many fine figures, particularly that most exquisite one of Comedy, struggling for and winning (for who could resist her!) the affections of Garrick:—a figure which could never have occurred to the imagination of a painter who had confined his views to grown persons looking and moving in all the formality of polite life:—a figure which in all ages and countries would be pronounced natural and engaging;—whereas those human forms that we see every day bowing, and courtesying, and strutting, and turning out their toes, *secundum artem*, and dressed in ruffles, and wigs, and flounces, and hoop-petticoats, and full-trimmed suits, would appear elegant no further than the present fashions are propagated, and no longer than they remain unaltered.

I have heard it disputed, whether a portrait ought to be habited according to the fashion of the times, or in one of those dresses which, on account of their elegance, or having been long in use,

are affected by great painters, and therefore called picturesque. The question may be determined upon the principles here laid down. If you wish to have a portrait of your friend, that shall always be elegant, and never aukward, chuse a picturesque dress. But if you mean to preserve the remembrance of a particular suit of cloaths, without minding the ridiculous figure which your friend will probably cut in it a hundred years hence, you may array his picture according to the fashion. The history of dresses may be worth preserving : but who would have his image set up, for the purpose of hanging a coat or periwig upon it, to gratify the curiosity of antiquarian tailors or wigmakers ?

There is, in the progress of human society, as well as of human life, a period to which it is of great importance for the higher order of poets to attend, and from which they will do well to take their characters, and manners, and the era of their events ; I mean, that wherein men are raised above savage life, and considerably improved by arts, government, and conversation ; but not advanced so high in the ascent towards politeness, as to have acquired a habit of disguising their thoughts and passions, and of reducing their behaviour to the uniformity of the mode. Such was the period which Homer had the good fortune (as a poet) to live in, and to celebrate. This is the period at which the manners of men are most picturesque, and their adventures most romantic. This is the period when the appetites, unperverted by luxury, the powers unenervated by effeminacy, and the thoughts disengaged from artificial restraint, will, in persons of similar dispositions and circumstances, operate in nearly the same way ; and when, consequently, the characters of particular men will approach to the nature of poetical or general ideas, and, if well imitated, give pleasure to the whole, or at least to a great majority of mankind. But a character tinged with the fashions of polite life would not be so generally interesting. Like a hu-
man

man figure adjusted by a modern dancing-master, and dressed by a modern tailor; it may have a good effect in satire, comedy, or farce; but if introduced into the higher poetry, it would be admired by those only who had learned to admire nothing but present fashions, and by them no longer than the present fashions lasted; and to all the rest of the world would appear awkward, unaffected, and perhaps ridiculous. But Achilles and Sarpedon, Diomedes and Hector, Nestor and Ulysses, as drawn by Homer, must in all ages, independently on fashion, command the attention and admiration of mankind. These have the qualities that are universally known to belong to human nature; whereas the modern fine gentleman is distinguished by qualities that belong only to a particular age, society, and corner of the world. I speak not of moral or intellectual virtues, which are objects of admiration to every age; but of those outward accomplishments, and that particular temperature of the passions, which form the most perceptible part of a human character.—As, therefore, the politician, in discussing the rights of mankind, must often allude to an imaginary state of nature; so the poet who intends to raise admiration, pity, terror, and other important emotions, in the generality of mankind, especially in those readers whose minds are most improved, must take his pictures of life and manners, rather from the heroic period we now speak of, than from the ages of refinement; and must therefore (to repeat the maxim of Aristotle) “exhibit things, not as they are, but as they might be.”

If, then, there be any nations who entertain such a partiality in favour of one system of artificial manners, that they cannot endure any other system, either artificial or natural; may we not fairly conclude, that in those nations Epic poetry will not flourish? How far this may account for any peculiarities in the

taste and literature of a neighbouring nation *, is submitted to the reader. — Were a man so perverted by nature, or by habit, as to think no state of the human body graceful, but what depends on lace and fringe, powder and pomatum, buckram and whalebone, I should not wonder, if he beheld with dissatisfaction the naked majesty of the Apollo Belvidere, or the flowing simplicity of robe that arrays a Cicero or Flora. But if one of his favourite figures were to be carried about the world in company with these statues, I believe the general voice of mankind would not ratify his judgement. Homer's simple manners may disgust a Terrillon, or a Chesterfield; but will always please the universal taste, because they are more picturesque in themselves, than any form of artificial manners can be, and more suitable to those ideas of human life which are most familiar to the human mind.

Let it not be thought, that I have any partiality to the tenets of those philosophers who recommend the manners of the heroic period, or even of the savage state, as better in a moral view, than those of our own time; or that I mean any reflection upon the virtue or good sense of the age, when I speak disrespectfully of some fashionable articles of external decoration. Our dress and attitudes are not perhaps so graceful as they might be: but that is not our fault, for it depends on causes which are not in our power: — that affects not the virtue of any good man, and no degree of outward elegance will ever reform the heart of a bad

* Je me souviens, que lorsque je consultai, sur ma *Henriade*, feu M. de Malezieux, homme qui joignoit une grande imagination à une littérature immense, il me dit : Vous entreprenez un ouvrage qui n'est pas fait pour notre nation ; LES FRANÇAIS N'ONT PAS LA TÊTE ÉPIQUE.

Voltaire. Essai sur la poésie épique, chap. 9.

one : and that is no more a proof of our ill taste, than the roughness of our language, or the coldness of our climate. As a moralist, one would estimate the things of this life by their influence on the next ; but I here speak as a critic, and judge of things according to their effects in the fine arts. Poetry, as an instrument of pleasure, gives the preference to those things that have most variety, and operate most powerfully on the passions ; and, as an art that conveys instruction rather by example than by precept, must exhibit evil as well as good, and vicious as well as virtuous characters. That savages, and heroes like those of Homer, may sleep sounder ; and eat and drink, and perhaps fight, with a keener appetite, than modern Europeans ; that they may excel us in strength, swiftness, and many sorts of manual dexterity ; in a word, that they may be *finer animals* than we ; and further, that, being subject to fewer restraints both from virtue and from delicacy, they may display a more animated picture of the undisguised energies of the human soul, I am very willing to allow : but I hold, that the manners of polished life are beyond comparison more favourable to that benevolence, piety, and self-government, which are the glory of the Christian character, and the highest perfection of our nature, as rational and immortal beings. The former state of mankind I would therefore prefer as the best subject of Epic and Tragic Poetry : but for supplying the means of real happiness here, and of eternal felicity hereafter, every man of reflection, unless blinded by hypothesis, or by prejudice, must give the preference to the latter.

C H A P. IV.

The subject continued. Of Poetical Characters.

HORACE seems to think, that a competent knowledge of moral philosophy will fit an author for assigning the suitable qualities and duties to each poetical personage *. The maxim may be true, as far as mere morality is the aim of the poet; but cannot be understood to refer to the delineation of poetical characters in general: for a thorough acquaintance with all the moral philosophy in the world would not have enabled Blackmore to paint such a personage as Homer's Achilles, Shakespeare's Othello, or the Satan of Paradise Lost. To a competency of moral science, there must be added an extensive knowledge of mankind, a warm and elevated imagination, and the greatest sensibility of heart, before a genius can be formed equal to so difficult a task. Horace is indeed so sensible of the danger of introducing a new character in poetry, that he even discourages the attempt, and advises the poet rather to take his persons from the ancient authors, or from tradition †.

To conceive the idea of a good man, and to invent and support a great poetical character, are two very different things, however they may seem to have been confounded by some late critics. The first is easy to any person sufficiently instructed in the duties of life; the last is perhaps of all the efforts of human genius the most difficult; so very difficult, that, though attempt-

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 309. — 316.

† Ibid. vers. 119. — 130.

ed by many, Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton, are almost the only authors who have succeeded in it. But characters of perfect virtue are not the most proper for poetry. It seems to be agreed, that the Deity should not be introduced in the machinery of a poetical fable. To ascribe to him words and actions of our own invention, is in my judgement very unbecoming; nor can a poetical description, that is known to be, and must of necessity be, infinitely inadequate, ever satisfy the human mind *. Poetry, according to the best critics, is an imitation of human action; and therefore poetical characters, though elevated, should still partake of the passions and frailties of humanity. If it were not for the vices of some principal personages, the *Iliad* would not be either so interesting or so moral: — the most moving and most eventful parts of the *Æneid* are those that describe the effects of unlawful passion †: — the most instructive tragedy in the world,

* It is somewhat amusing to observe, what different ideas our poets have entertained of the manner of speaking that may be most suitable to the Divine Nature. Milton ascribes to him that mode of reasoning which in his own age was thought to be the most sacred and most important. Cowley, in his *Davideis* , introduces the Deity speaking in the Alexandrine measure; from an opinion, no doubt, that a line of six feet has more dignity than one of five. Brown, on the contrary, in *The Cure of Saul*, supposes him to speak in rhyming verses of three syllables. And the author of *Pre-existence, a Poem*, in Dodsley's Collection, thinks it more congruous, that the Supreme Being should "set wide the fate of things," in a speech "majestically long, repugnant to all princes customs here," &c.

† The destruction of Troy, the war with Turnus, and the despair and death of Dido, are here alluded to. That the first was owing to criminal passion, is well known. On the fate of Turnus and Dido, I beg leave to offer a few remarks.

1. Turnus is a brave and gallant young prince: but his disobedience to the will of Jupiter, as repeatedly declared by oracles and prodigies whereof he could not misunderstand the meaning, (*Æneid*, vii. *vers.* 104. & 596.), in persisting to urge his claim to Lavinia, whom Fate had destined to be the wife of his rival, engages him

I mean Macbeth, is founded in crimes of dreadful enormity : — and if Milton had not taken into his plan the fall of our first parents, as well as their state of innocence, his divine poem must have wanted much of its *pathos*, and could not have been (what it now is) such a treasure of important knowledge, as no other uninspired

him in the war which concludes with his death. We pity his fall, of which, however, himself, with his dying breath, acknowledges the justice. Had he been less amiable, we should have been less interested in his fate; had he been more virtuous, the poet must either have omitted the Italian war altogether, or brought it about by means less probable perhaps, and less honourable to the Trojans, and consequently to Rome. Piety to the gods is every where recommended by Virgil as the first and greatest human virtue, to which all other duties and all other affections are to give place, when they happen to be inconsistent.

2. The loves of Eneas and Dido are criminal on both sides. By connecting himself with this unfortunate queen, with whom he knew that he could not, without disobedience to the will of Heaven, remain, he is guilty, not only of impiety, but also of a temporary neglect of duty to his people as their leader and sovereign : and she, in obtruding herself upon the Trojan prince, violates the most solemn vows, and acts a part of which she could not be ignorant, that it was incompatible with his destiny; for he had told her from the first, that he was appointed by Fate to settle his Trojans in Italy, and to marry a wife of that country. *Æneid.* ii. 781. — Dido has many great and many amiable qualities : yet the Poet blends in her character some harsh ingredients; with a view, no doubt, partly to reconcile us in some measure to her sad catastrophe, but chiefly to make her appear in the eyes of his countrymen an adequate representative of that people, who had so long been the object of their jealousy and hatred. Her passion for Eneas is disrespectful to the gods, injurious to that prince and his followers, and indecent in itself : she is somewhat libertine in her religious principles; a shocking circumstance in a lady, and which to our pious poet must have been peculiarly offensive : and her behaviour, when Eneas is going to leave her, though suitable to a haughty princess under the power of a passion more violent than delicate, is not at all what we should expect from that softness of nature, and gentleness of affection, without which no woman can be truly amiable. If we except her wish for a young Eneas, there is hardly one sentiment of feminine tenderness, in all her threats, complaints, and expostulations. Pride, self-condemnation, and revenge,

engross

uninspired writer ever comprehended in so small a compass.—
Virtue, like truth, is uniform and unchangeable. We may anti-
cipate

engross her whole soul, and extinguish every other thought; and she concludes her life, by imprecating, with cool, but dreadful solemnity, perdition upon the fugitive Trojan, and misery upon his people, and their descendents, for ever.

Virgil has been blamed for some things in the conduct of this part of the poem; I know not with what good reason. He was not obliged to give moral perfection to his characters. That of Eneas, if it had been less perfect, might perhaps have made the poem more animated; but then it would not have suited the poet's main design of reconciling the Romans to the person and government of Augustus, of whom Eneas is to be considered as the poetical type. This hero does indeed, in attaching himself to Dido, act inconsistently with his pious and patriotic character; but his fault is human, and not without circumstances of alleviation: and we must not estimate the morality of an action by its consequences, except where they might have been foreseen. But he is no sooner reprimanded by Mercury for his transgression, than he returns to his duty, notwithstanding his liking to the country, and his love for the lady, which now seems to be more delicate, than hers for him. — But is not Dido's fault also human, and attended also with alleviating circumstances? — and if so, is not her punishment greater than her crime? — Granting all this, it will not follow, that Virgil is to blame. Poetry, if strict retributive justice were always to be expected in it, would not be an imitation of human life; and, as all its great events would be anticipated, and exactly such as we wish for, could melt or surprise us no longer. In fact, unlawful love has, in every age, been attended with worse consequences to the weaker, than to the stronger sex; not because it is less unlawful in the one than in the other; but that the former may be guarded by the strongest motives of interest, as well as of honour and duty; and the latter restrained by every principle, not only of conscience, but also of generosity and compassion. Our poet assigns to Dido, in the shades below, one of the least uncomfortable situations in the *region of mourning*; from whence, according to his system, (see the *Essay on Truth* part 3. chap. 2.) after undergoing the necessary pains of purification, she was to pass into Elysium, and enjoy the pleasures of that happy place for a thousand years; and afterwards to be sent back to earth to animate another body, and thus have another opportunity of rising to virtue and happiness by a suitable behaviour.

Those incidents, and those only, are blameable in a poem, which either hurt

cipate the part a good man will act in any given circumstances; and therefore the events that depend on such a man must be less surprising than those that proceed from passion; the vicissitudes whereof it is frequently impossible to foresee. From the violent temper of Achilles, in the *Iliad*, spring many great incidents; which could not have taken place, if he had been calm and prudent like Ulysses, or pious and patriotic like Eneas: — his rejection of Agamemnon's offers, in the ninth book, arises from the violence of his resentment; — his yielding to the request of Patroclus, in the sixteenth, from the violence of his friendship (if I may so speak) counteracting his resentment; and his restoring to Priam the dead body of Hector, in the twenty-fourth, from the violence of his affection to his own aged father, and his re-

the main design, or are in themselves unnatural, insipid, or immoral. The episode of Dido, as Virgil has given it, is perfectly consonant with his main design; for it sets his hero in a new light, and raises our idea of his personal accomplishments; and must have been particularly interesting to the Romans, as it accounts for their jealousy of Carthage, one of the most important events in all their history. Unnatural or insipid this episode cannot be called; for it is without doubt the finest piece of poetry in the world: the whole description of Dido's love, in every period of its progress, from its commencement to its lamentable conclusion, is sublime, and harmonious, natural, pathetic, and picturesque, to a degree which was never equalled, and never can be surpassed. And who will object to the morality of that fable, which recommends piety and patriotism as the most indispensable duties of a sovereign; and paints, in the most terrifying colours, the fatal effects of female imprudence, of opposition to the will of Heaven, of the violation of solemn vows, and the gratification of criminal desires?

As to the part that Venus and Juno take in this affair, against which I have heard some people exclaim; — it is to be considered as a poetical figure, of sufficient probability in the days of Virgil; and only signifies, that Dido was ensnared in this unhappy amour, first by her love, and then by her ambition. See her conference with her sister in the beginning of the fourth book. — The reader who loves Virgil as much as I wish him to do, will not be offended at the length of this note.

gard to the command of Jupiter, counteracting, in some measure, both his sorrow for his friend, and his thirst of vengeance. — Besides, except where there is some degree of vice, it pains us too exquisitely to see misfortune; and therefore Poetry would cease to have a pleasurable influence over our tender passions, if it were to exhibit virtuous characters only. And as, in life, evil is necessary to our moral probation, and the possibility of error to our intellectual improvement; so bad or mixed characters are useful in poetry, to give to the good such opposition as puts them upon displaying and exercising their virtue.

All those personages, however, in whose fortune the poet means that we should be interested, must have agreeable and admirable qualities to recommend them to our regard. And perhaps the greatest difficulty in the art lies in suitably blending those faults, which the poet finds it expedient to give to any particular hero, with such moral, intellectual, or corporeal accomplishments, as may engage our esteem, pity, or admiration, without weakening our hatred of vice, or love of virtue. In most of our novels, and in many of our plays, it happens unluckily, that the hero of the piece is so captivating, as to incline us to be indulgent to every part of his character, the bad as well as the good. But a great master knows how to give the proper direction to human sensibility, and, without any perversion of our faculties, or any confusion of right and wrong, to make the same person the object of very different emotions, of pity and hatred, of admiration and horror. Who does not esteem and admire Macbeth, for his courage and generosity? who does not pity him when beset with all the terrors of a pregnant imagination, superstitious temper, and awakened conscience? who does not abhor him as a monster of cruelty, treachery, and ingratitude? His good qualities, by drawing us near to him, make us, as it were, eye-witnesses of his crime, and give us a fellow-feeling of

his remorse; and, therefore, his example cannot fail to have a powerful effect in cherishing our love of virtue, and fortifying our minds against criminal impressions: whereas, had he wanted those good qualities, we should have kept aloof from his concerns, or viewed them with a superficial attention; in which case his example would have had little more weight, than that of the robber, of whom we know nothing, but that he was tried, condemned, and executed.—Satan, in *Paradise Lost*, is a character drawn and supported with the most consummate judgement. The old furies and demons, Hecate, Tisiphone, Alecto, Megara, are objects of unmixed and unmitigated abhorrence; Tityus, Enceladus, and their brethren, are remarkable for nothing but impiety, deformity, and vastness of size; Pluto is, at best, an insipid personage; Mars, a hairbrained ruffian; Tasso's infernal tyrant, an ugly and overgrown monster:—but in the Miltonic Satan, we are forced to admire the majesty of the ruined archangel, at the same time that we detest the unconquerable depravity of the fiend. But, of all poetical characters, the Achilles of Homer* seems to me the most exquisite in the invention, and the most highly finished. The utility of this character in a moral view is obvious; for it may be considered as the source of all the morality of the *Iliad*. Had not the generous and violent temper of Achilles determined him to patronise the augur Calchas.

* I say, the Achilles of Homer. Latter authors have degraded the character of this hero, by supposing every part of his body invulnerable except the heel. I know not how often I have heard this urged as one of Homer's absurdities; and indeed the whole *Iliad* is one continued absurdity, on this supposition. But Homer all along makes his hero equally liable to wounds and death with other men. Nay, to prevent all mistakes in regard to this matter, (if those who cavil at the poet would but read his work), he actually wounds him in the right arm, by the lance of Asteropæus, in the battle near the river Scamander. See *Il.* xxi. vers. 161. — 168.

in defiance of Agamemnon, and afterwards, on being affronted by that vindictive commander, to abandon for a time the common cause of Greece;—the fatal effects of dissension among confederates, and of capricious and tyrannical behaviour in a sovereign, would not have been the leading moral of Homer's poetry; nor could Hector, Sarpedon, Eneas, Ulysses, and the other amiable heroes, have been brought forward to signalize their virtues, and recommend themselves to the esteem and imitation of mankind.

They who form their judgement of Achilles from the imperfect sketch given of him by Horace in the *Art of Poetry* *; and consider him only as a hateful composition of anger, revenge, fierceness, obstinacy, and pride, can never enter into the views of Homer, nor be suitably affected with his narration. All these vices are no doubt, in some degree, combined in Achilles; but they are tempered with qualities of a different sort, which render him a most interesting character, and of course make the Iliad a most interesting poem. Every reader abhors the faults of this hero; and yet, to an attentive reader of Homer, this hero must be the object of esteem, admiration, and pity; for he has many good as well as bad affections, and is equally violent in all:—nor is he possessed of a single vice or virtue, which the wonderful art of the poet has not made subservient to the design of the poem, and to the progress and catastrophe of the action; so that the hero of the Iliad, considered as a poetical personage, is just what he should be, neither greater nor less, neither worse nor better.—He is every where distinguished by an abhorrence of oppression, by a liberal and elevated mind, by a passion for glory, and by a love of truth, freedom, and sincerity. He is for the most part attentive to the duties of religion; and, except to

* vers. 121. 122.

those who have injured him, courteous and kind : he is affectionate to his tutor Phenix ; and not only pities the misfortunes of his enemy Priam, but in the most soothing manner administers to him the best consolation that poor Homer's theology could furnish. Though no admirer of the cause in which his evil destiny compels him to engage, he is warmly attached to his native land ; and, ardent as he is in vengeance, he is equally so in love to his aged father Peleus, and to his friend Patroclus. He is not luxurious like Paris, nor clownish like Ajax ; his accomplishments are princely, and his amusements worthy of a hero. Add to this, as an apology for the vehemence of his anger, that the affront he had received was (according to the manners of that age) of the most atrocious nature ; and not only unprovoked, but such as, on the part of Agamemnon, betrayed a brutal insensibility to merit, as well as a proud, selfish, ungrateful, and tyrannical disposition. And though he is often inexcusably furious ; yet it is but justice to remark, that he was not naturally cruel * ; and that his wildest outrages were such as in those rude times might be expected from a violent man of invincible strength and valour, when exasperated by injury, and frantic with sorrow. — Our hero's claim to the admiration of mankind is indisputable. Every part of his character is sublime and astonishing. In his person, he is the strongest, the swiftest, and most beautiful of men : — this last circumstance, however, occurs not to his own observation, being too trivial to attract the notice of so great a mind. The Fates had put it in his power, either to return

* See Iliad xxi. 100. and xxiv. 485. — 673. — In the first of these passages, Achilles himself declares, that before Patroclus was slain, he often spared the lives of his enemies, and took pleasure in doing it. It is strange that this should be left out in Pope's Translation.

home before the end of the war, or to remain at Troy : — if he chose the former, he would enjoy tranquillity and happiness in his own country to a good old age ; if the latter, he must perish in the bloom of his youth : — his affection to his father and native country, and his hatred to Agamemnon, strongly urged him to the first ; but a desire to avenge the death of his friend determines him to accept the last, with all its consequences. This at once displays the greatness of his fortitude, the warmth of his friendship, and the violence of his sanguinary passions : and it is this that so often and so powerfully recommends him to the pity, as well as admiration, of the attentive reader. — But the magnanimity of this hero is superior, not only to the fear of death, but also to prodigies, and those too of the most tremendous import. I allude to the speech of his horse Xanthus, in the end of the nineteenth book, and to his behaviour on that occasion ; and I shall take the liberty to expatiate a little upon that incident, with a view to vindicate Homer, as well as to illustrate the character of Achilles.

The incident is marvellous, no doubt, and has been generally condemned even by the admirers of Homer ; yet to me, who am no believer in the infallibility of the great poet, seems not only allowable, but useful and important. That this miracle has probability enough to warrant its admission into Homer's poetry, is fully proved by Madame Dacier. It is the effect of Juno's power ; which if we admit in other parts of the poem, we ought not to reject in this : and in the poetical history of Greece, and even in the civil history of Rome, there are similar fables, which were once in no small degree of credit. But neither M. Dacier, nor any other of the commentators, (so far as I know), has taken notice of the propriety of introducing it in this place, nor of its utility in raising our idea of the hero. — Patroclus was now slain ; and Achilles, forgetting the injury he had received from Agamemnon,

Agamemnon, and frantic with revenge and sorrow, was rushing to the battle, to satiate his fury upon Hector and the Trojans. This was the critical moment on which his future destiny depended. It was still in his power to retire, and go home in peace to his beloved father and native land, with the certain prospect of a long and happy, though inglorious, life : if he went forward to the battle, he might avenge his friend's death upon the enemy, but his own must inevitably happen soon after. This was the decree of Fate concerning him, as he himself very well knew. But it would not be wonderful, if such an impetuous spirit should forget all this, during the present paroxysm of his grief and rage. His horse, therefore, miraculously gifted by Juno for that purpose, after expressing, in dumb show, the deepest concern for his lord, opens his mouth, and in human speech announces his approaching fate. The fear of death, and the fear of prodigies, are different things; and a brave man, though proof against the one, may yet be overcome by the other. " I have known a soldier (says Addison) that has entered a breach, affrighted at his own shadow; and look pale upon a little scratching at his door, who the day before had marched up against a battery of cannon *." But Achilles, of whom we already knew that he feared nothing human, now shows, what we had not as yet been informed of, and what must therefore heighten our idea of his fortitude, that he is not to be terrified or moved, by the view of certain destruction, or even by the most alarming prodigies. I shall quote Pope's Translation, which in this place is equal, if not superior, to the original.

Then ceas'd for ever, by the Furies tied,
His fateful voice. Th' intrepid chief replied,

* Spectator, Numb. 12.

With unabated rage : “ So let it be !
 Portents and prodigies are lost on me.
 I know my fate ; — to die, to see no more
 My much-loved parents, and my native shore.
 Enough : — when Heaven ordains, I sink in night. —
 Now perish, Troy.” He said, and rush’d to fight.

It is equally a proof of rich invention and exact judgement in Homer, that he mixes some good qualities in all his bad characters, and some degree of imperfection in almost all his good ones. — Agamemnon, notwithstanding his pride, is an able general, and a valiant man, and highly esteemed as such by the greater part of the army. — Paris, though effeminate, and vain of his dress and person, is, however, good-natured, patient of reproof, not destitute of courage, and eminently skilled in music, and other fine arts. — Ajax is a huge giant ; fearless rather from insensibility to danger, and confidence in his massy arms, than from any nobler principle ; boastful and rough ; regardless of the gods, though not downright impious* : yet there is in his manner something of frankness and blunt sincerity, which entitle him to a share in our esteem ; and he is ever ready to assist his countrymen, to whom he renders good service on many a perilous emergency. — The character of Helen, in spite of her faults, and

* His natural bluntness appears in that short, but famous address, to Jupiter, in the nineteenth book, when a preternatural darkness hindered him from seeing either the enemy or his own people. The prayer seems to be the effect rather of vexation, than of piety or patriotism. Pope gives a more solemn turn to it, than either Homer’s words, or the character of the speaker, will justify.

—— Lord of earth and air !
 O King, O Father, hear my humble prayer, &c.

of the many calamities whereof she is the guilty cause, Homer has found means to recommend to our pity, and almost to our love; and this he does, without seeking to extenuate the crime of Paris, of which the most respectable personages in the poem are made to speak with becoming abhorrence. She is so full of remorse, so ready on every occasion to condemn her past conduct, so affectionate to her friends, so willing to do justice to every body's merit, and withal so finely accomplished, that she extorts our admiration, as well as that of the Trojan senators.—— Menelaus, though sufficiently sensible of the injury he had received, is yet a man of moderation, clemency, and good-nature, a valiant foldier, and a most affectionate brother; but there is a dash of vanity in his composition, and he entertains rather too high an opinion of his own abilities; yet never overlooks or undervalues the merit of others.—— Priam would claim unreserved esteem, as well as pity, if it were not for his inexcusable weakness, in gratifying the humour, and by indulgence abetting the crimes, of the most worthless of all his children, to the utter ruin of his people, family, and kingdom. Madame Dacier supposes, that he had lost his authority, and was obliged to fall in with the politics of the times: but of this I find no evidence; on the contrary, he and his unworthy favourite Paris seem to have been the only persons of distinction in Troy, who were averse to the restoring of Helen. Priam's foible (if it can be called by so soft a name), however faulty, is not uncommon, and has often produced calamity both in private and public life. The scripture gives a memorable instance, in the history of the good old Eli.—— Sarpedon comes nearer a perfect character, than any other of Homer's heroes; but the part he has to act is short. It is a character, which one could hardly have expected in those rude times: A sovereign prince, who considers himself as a magistrate set up by the people for the public good, and therefore bound in honour

honour and gratitude to be himself their example, and study to excel as much in virtue, as in rank and authority.——Hector is the favourite of every reader; and with good reason. To the truest valour he joins the most generous patriotism. He abominates the crime of Paris: but, not being able to prevent the war, he thinks it his duty to defend his country, and his father and sovereign, to the last. He too, as well as Achilles, foresees his own death; which heightens our compassion, and raises our idea of his magnanimity. In all the relations of private life, as a son, a father, a husband, a brother, he is amiable in the highest degree; and he is distinguished among all the heroes for tenderness of affection, gentleness of manners, and a pious regard to the duties of religion. One circumstance of his character, strongly expressive of a great and delicate mind, we learn from Helen's lamentation over his dead body, That he was almost the only person in Troy, who had always treated her with kindness, and never uttered one reproachful word to give her pain, nor heard others reproach her without blaming them for it. Some tendency to ostentation (which however may be pardonable in a commander in chief), and temporary fits of timidity, are the only blemishes discoverable in this hero; whose portrait Homer appears to have drawn with an affectionate and peculiar attention. And it must convey a favourable idea of the good old bard, as well as of human nature, to reflect, that the same person who was loved and admired three thousand years ago, as a pattern of heroic excellence and manly virtue, is still an object of admiration and love to the most enlightened nations. This is one striking proof, that, notwithstanding the endless vicissitude to which human affairs are liable, the understanding and moral sentiments of men have continued nearly the same in all ages; and that the faculties whereby we distinguish truth and virtue are as really parts of our original nature, and as little obnoxious to the

caprice of fashion, as our love of life, our senses of seeing and hearing, or the appetites of hunger and thirst. Rectitude of moral-principle, and a spirit of good-nature and humanity, are indeed eminently conspicuous in this wonderful poet; whose works, in whatever light we consider them, as a picture of past ages, as a treasure of moral wisdom, as a specimen of the power of human genius, or as an affecting and instructive display of the human mind, are truly inestimable.

By ascribing so many amiable qualities to Hector, and some others of the Trojans, the poet interests us in the fate of that people, notwithstanding our being continually kept in mind, that they are the injurious party. And by thus blending good and evil, virtue and frailty, in the composition of his characters, he makes them the more conformable to the real appearances of human nature, and more useful as examples for our improvement: and at the same time, without hurting verisimilitude, gives every necessary embellishment to particular parts of his poem, and variety, coherence, and animation, to the whole fable. And it may also be observed, that though several of his characters are complex, not one of them is made up of incompatible parts: all are natural and probable, and such as we think we have met with, or might have met with, in our intercourse with mankind.

From the same extensive views of good and evil, in all their forms and combinations, Homer has been enabled to make each of his characters perfectly distinct in itself, and different from all the rest; insomuch that, before we come to the end of the Iliad, we are as well acquainted with his heroes, as with the faces and tempers of our most familiar friends. Virgil, by confining himself to a few general ideas of fidelity and fortitude, has made his subordinate heroes a very good sort of people; but they are all the same, and we have no clear knowledge of any one of them.

Achates

Achates is faithful, and Gyas is brave, and Cloanthus is brave; and this is all we can say of the matter *. We see these heroes at a distance, and have some notion of their shape and size; but are not near enough to distinguish their features: and every face seems to exhibit the same faint and ambiguous appearance. But of Homer's heroes we know every particular that can be known. We eat, and drink, and talk, and fight with them: we see them in action, and out of it; in the field, and in their tents and houses: — the very face of the country about Troy, we seem to be as well acquainted with, as if we had been there. Similar characters there are among these heroes, as there are similar faces in every society; but we never mistake one for another. Nestor and Ulysses are both wise, and both eloquent; but the wisdom of the former seems to be the effect of experience; that of the latter, of genius: the eloquence of the one is sweet and copious, but not always to the purpose, and apt to degenerate into story-telling; that of the other is close, emphatical, and persuasive, and accompanied with a peculiar modesty and simplicity of man-

* I cannot, however, admit the opinion of those who contend, that there is nothing of character in Virgil. Turnus is a good poetical character, but borrowed from Homer, being an Achilles in miniature. Mezentius is well drawn, and of the poet's own invention: — a tyrant, who, together with impiety, has contracted intolerable cruelty and pride; yet intrepid in the field, and graced with one amiable virtue, sometimes found in very rugged minds, a tender affection to a most deserving son. In the good old King Evander, we have a charming picture of simple manners, refined by erudition, and uncorrupted by luxury. Dido has been already analysed. There is nothing, I think, in Camilla, which might not be expected in any female warrior; but the adventures of her early life are romantic and interesting. The circumstance of her being, when an infant, thrown across a river, tied to a spear, is so very singular, that it would seem to have had a foundation in fact, or in tradition. Something similar is related by Plutarch of King Pyrrhus.

ner. Homer's heroes are all valiant; yet each displays a modification of valour peculiar to himself. One is valiant from principle, another from constitution; one is rash, another cautious; one is impetuous and headstrong, another impetuous, but tractable; one is cruel, another merciful; one is insolent and ostentatious, another gentle and unassuming; one is vain of his person, another of his strength, and a third of his family. — It would be tedious to give a complete enumeration. Almost every species of the heroic character is to be found in Homer.

The *Paradise Lost*, though truly Epic, cannot properly be called an Heroic poem; for the agents in it are not heroes, but beings of a higher order*. Of these the poet's plan did not admit the introduction of many; but most of those whom he has introduced are well characterised. I have already spoken of his Satan; which is the highest imaginable species of the diabolical character. The inferior species are well diversified, and in each variety distinctly marked: one is slothful, another avaricious, a third sophistical, a fourth furious; and though all are impious, some are more outrageously and blasphemously so, than others. — Adam and Eve, in the state of innocence, are characters well imagined, and well supported; and the different sentiments arising from difference of sex, are traced out with inimitable delicacy, and philosophical propriety. After the fall, he makes them retain the same characters, without any other change than what the transition from innocence to guilt might be supposed to produce: Adam has still that pre-eminence in dignity, and Eve in loveli-

* Samson, in the *Agonistes*, is a species of the heroic character not to be found in Homer; distinctly marked, and admirably supported. And Delilah, in the same tragedy, is perhaps a more perfect model of an alluring, insinuating, worthless woman, than any other to be met with in ancient or modern poetry.

ness, which we should naturally look for in the father and mother of mankind. — Of the blessed spirits, Raphael and Michael are well distinguished; the one for affability, and peculiar good-will to the human race; the other for majesty, but such as commands veneration, rather than fear. — We are sorry to add, that Milton's attempt to soar still higher, only shows, that he had already soared as high, as, without being "blasted with" excess of light," it is possible for the human imagination to rise.

I have been led further into this subject of poetical characters than I intended to have gone, or than was necessary in the present investigation. For I presume, it was long ago abundantly evident; — that the end of Poetry is to please, and therefore that the most perfect poetry must be the most pleasing; — that what is unnatural cannot give pleasure, and therefore that poetry must be according to nature; — that it must be either according to real nature, or according to nature somewhat different from the reality; — that if, according to real nature, it would give no greater pleasure than history, which is a transcript of real nature; — that greater pleasure is, however, to be expected from it, because we grant it superior indulgence, in regard to fiction, and the choice of words; — and, consequently, that poetry must be, not according to real nature, but according to nature improved to that degree, which is consistent with probability, and suitable to the poet's purpose *. — And hence it is that we call Poetry, AN

IMITATION.

* Cum mundus sensibilis sit anima rationali dignitate inferior, videtur Poësis hæc humanæ naturæ largiri quæ historia denegat; atque animo umbris rerum ut-
cunque satisfacere, cum solida haberi non possint. Si quis enim rem acutius in-
trospiciat, firmum ex Poësi sumitur argumentum, magnitudinem rerum magis illu-
stre, ordinem magis perfectum, et varietatem magis pulchram, animæ humanæ
complacere,

IMITATION OF NATURE.—For that which is properly termed *Imitation* has always in it something which is not in the original. If the prototype and transcript be exactly alike; if there be nothing in the one which is not in the other; we may call the latter a representation, a copy, a draught, or a picture, of the former; but we never call it an imitation.

C H A P. V.

Further Illustrations. Of Poetical Arrangement.

IT was formerly remarked, that the *events* of Poetry must be “more compact, more clearly connected with causes and consequences, and unfolded in an order more flattering to the imagination, and more interesting to the passions,” than the

complacere, quam in natura ipsa, post lapsum, reperiri ullo modo possit. Quapropter, cum res gestæ, et eventus, qui veræ historiæ subjiçuntur, non sint ejus amplitudinis, in qua anima humana sibi satisfaciât, præsto est Poesis, quæ facta magis heroica consingat. Cum historia vera successus rerum, minime pro meritis virtutum et scelerum narret; corrigit eam Poesis, et exitus, et fortunas, secundum merita, et ex lege Nemeseos, exhibet. Cum historia vera, obvia rerum faticitate et similitudine, animæ humanæ fastidio sit; reficit eam Poesis, inexpectata, et varia, et vicissitudinum plena canens. Adeo ut Poesis ista non solum ad delectationem, sed etiam ad animi magnitudinem, et ad mores conferat. Quare et merito etiam divinitatis particeps videri possit; quia animum erigit, et in sublime rapit; rerum simulacra ad animi desideria accommodando, non animum rebus (quod ratio facit et historia) submittendo.

Bacon. *De Aug. Scient.* pag. 168. *Lug. Bat.* 1645.

events

events of history commonly are. This may seem to demand some illustration.

I. Some parts of history interest us much; but others so little, that, if it were not for their use in the connection of events, we should be inclined to overlook them altogether. But all the parts of a poem must be interesting:—Great, to raise admiration or terror; unexpected, to give surprise; pathetic, to draw forth our tender affections; important, from their tendency to the elucidation of the fable, or to the display of human character; amusing, from the agreeable pictures of nature they present us with; or of peculiar efficacy in promoting our moral improvement. And therefore, in forming an Epic or Dramatic Fable, from history or tradition, the poet must omit every event that cannot be improved to one or other of these purposes.

II. Some events are recorded in history, merely because they are true; though their consequences be of no moment, and their causes unknown. But of all poetical events, the causes ought to be manifest, for the sake of probability; and the effects considerable, to give them importance.

III. A history may be as long as you please; for, while it is instructive and true, it is still a good history. But a poem must not be too long:—first, because to write good poetry is exceedingly difficult, so that a very long poem would be too extensive a work for human life, and too laborious for human ability;—secondly, because, if you would be suitably affected with the poet's art, you must have a distinct remembrance of the whole fable, which could not be, if the fable were very long*;—and, thirdly, because poetry is addressed to the imagination and passions, which cannot long be kept in violent exercise, without working

* Aristot. Poet. § 7.

the mind into a disagreeable state, and even impairing the health of the body. — That, by these three peculiarities of the poetical art, its powers of pleasing are heightened, and consequently its end promoted, is too obvious to require proof.

IV. The strength of a passion depends in part on the vivacity of the impression made by its object. Distress which we see, we are more affected with than what we only hear of; and, of several descriptions of an affecting object, we are most moved by that which is most lively. Every thing in poetry, being intended to operate on the passions, must be displayed in lively colours, and set as it were before the eyes: and therefore the poet must attend to many minute, though picturesque circumstances, that may, or perhaps must, be overlooked by the historian. Achilles putting on his armour, is described by Homer with a degree of minuteness, which, if it were the poet's business simply to *relate* facts, might appear tedious or impertinent; but which in reality answers a good purpose, that of giving us a distinct image of this dreadful warrior: it being the end of poetical description, not only to *relate* facts, but to *paint* them*; not merely to inform.

* Homer's poetry is always picturesque. Algarotti, after Lucian, calls him the prince of painters. He sets before us the whole visible appearance of the object he describes, so that the painter would have nothing to do but to work after his model. He has more epithets expressive of colour than any other poet I am acquainted with: *black earth*, *wine-coloured ocean*, and even *white milk*, &c. This to the imagination of those readers who study the various colourings of nature is highly amusing, however offensive it may be to the delicacy of certain critics; — whose rules for the use of epithets if we were to adopt, we should take the palm of poetry from Homer, Virgil, and Milton, and bestow it on those simple rhimers, who, because they have no other merit, must be admired for barrenness of fancy, and poverty of language. — An improper use of epithets is indeed a grievous fault. And epithets become improper: — 1. when they add nothing to the sense; or to the picture; — and still more, when, 2. they seem rather to take something

form the judgement, and enrich the memory, but to awaken the passions, and captivate the imagination. Not that every thing in poetry

something from it; — 3. when by their colloquial meanness they debase the subject. — These three faults are all exemplified in the following lines :

The chariot of the King of kings, Which *active* troops of angels drew,
On a strong tempest's *rapid* wings, With *most amazing* swiftness flew.

Tate and Brady.

4. Epithets are improper, when, instead of adding to the sense, they only exaggerate the sound. Homer's πολυφλοισβειο θαλασσης contains both an imitative sound, and a lively picture : but Thomson gives us nothing but noise, when he says, describing a thunder storm,

Follows the loosen'd aggravated roar,
Enlarging, deepening, mingling, peal on peal,
Crush'd horrible, convulsing heaven and earth.

Summer.

The following line of Pope is perhaps liable to the same objection :

Then rustling, crackling, crashing, thunder down.

Iliad 23.

5. Epithets are faulty, when they overcharge a verse so as to hurt its harmony, and incumber its motion. — 6. When they darken the sense, by crowding too many thoughts together. Both these faults appear in this passage :

Her eyes in liquid light luxurious swim,
And languish with unutterable love;
Heaven's warm bloom glows along each *brightening* limb,
Where fluttering *bland* the veil's *thin mantlings* rove.

Lastly, Epithets are improper, when they recur more frequently, than the genius either of the language or of the composition will admit. For some languages are more liberal of epithets than others, the Italian, for instance, than the English; and some sorts of verse require a more perfect simplicity than others, those, for example, that express dejection or composure of mind, than those that give utterance to enthusiasm, indignation, and other ardent emotions.

In general, Epithets, that add to the sense, and at the same time assist the harmony, must be allowed to be ornamental, if they are not too frequent. Nor

poetry is to be minutely described, or that every minute description must of necessity be a long one. Nothing has a worse effect, than descriptions too long, too frequent, or too minute; — witness the *Dauids* of Cowley: — and the reader is never so effectually interested in his subject, as when, by means of a few circumstances well selected, he is made to conceive a great many others. From Virgil's *Pulcherrima Dido*, and the following simile of Diana amidst her nymphs *, our fancy may form for itself a picture of feminine loveliness and dignity more perfect than ever Cowley or Ovid could exhibit in their most elaborate descriptions. Nay, it has been justly remarked by the best critics †, that, in the description of great objects, a certain degree of obscurity, not in the language, but in the picture or notion presented to the mind, has sometimes a happy effect in producing admiration, terror, and other emotions connected with the sublime: — as when the witches in *Macbeth* describe the horrors

should those be objected to, which give to the expression either delicacy or dignity. And as these qualities do not at all times depend on the same principle, being in some degree determined by fashion, is there not reason for supposing, that the most exceptionable of Homer's epithets, those I mean which he applies to his persons, might in that remote age have had a propriety, whereof at present we have no conception? The epithets assumed by Eastern kings seem ridiculous to an European; and yet perhaps may appear significant and solemn to those who are accustomed to hear them in the original language. Let it be observed too, that Homer composed his immortal work at a time when writing was not common; when people were rather hearers than readers of poetry, and could not often enjoy the pleasure even of hearing it; and when, consequently, the frequent repetition of certain words and phrases, being a help to memory, as well as to the right apprehension of the poet's meaning, would be thought rather a beauty than a blemish. The same thing is observable in some of our old ballads.

* Virg. *Æneid.* lib. 1. vers. 500.

† Demet. Phaler. § 266. Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful.

of their employment by calling it in three words, "A deed WITH-
" OUT A NAME."—But it is only a great artist, who knows
when to be brief in description, and when copious; where to
light up his landscape with sunshine, and where to cover it with
darkness and tempest. To be able to do this, without suffering
the narration to languish in its progress, or to run out into
an immoderate length; without hurrying us away from affecting
objects before our passions have time to operate, or fixing our at-
tention too long upon them,—it will be proper, that the poet
confine the action of his poem to a short period of time. But
history is subject to no restraints, but those of truth; and,
without incurring blame, may take in any length of duration.

V. The origin of nations, and the beginnings of great events,
are little known, and seldom interesting; whence the first part of
every history, compared with the sequel, is somewhat dry and
tedious. But a poet must, even in the beginning of his work,
interest the readers, and raise high expectation; not by any af-
fected pomp of style, far less by ample promises or bold profes-
sions; but by setting immediately before them some incident,
striking enough to raise curiosity, in regard both to its causes and
to its consequences. He must therefore take up his story, not at
the beginning, but in the middle; or rather, to prevent the work
from being too long, as near the end as possible: and afterwards
take some proper opportunity to inform us of the preceding e-
vents, in the way of narrative, or by the conversation of the per-
sons introduced, or by short and natural digressions.

The action of both the Iliad and Odyssæy begins about
six weeks before its conclusion; although the principal events
of the war of Troy are to be found in the former, and
the adventures of a ten years voyage, followed by the suppres-
sion of a dangerous domestic enemy, in the latter. One of the
first things mentioned by Homer in the Iliad, is a plague, which
Apollo

Apollo in anger sent into the Grecian army commanded by Agamemnon, and now encamped before Troy. Who this Agamemnon was, and who the Grecians were; for what reason they had come hither; how long the siege had lasted; what memorable actions had been already performed, and in what condition both parties now were:—all this, and much more, we soon learn from occasional hints and conversations interspersed through the poem.

In the *Eneid*, which, though it comprehends the transactions of seven years, opens within a few months of the concluding event, we are first presented with a view of the Trojan fleet at sea, and no less a person than Juno interesting herself to raise a storm for their destruction. This excites a curiosity to know something further: who these Trojans were; whence they had come, and whither they were bound; why they had left their own country, and what had befallen them since they left it. On all these points, the poet, without quitting the track of his narrative, soon gives the fullest information. The storm rises; the Trojans are driven to Africa, and hospitably received by the Queen of the country; at whose desire their commander relates his adventures.

The action of *Paradise Lost* commences not many days before Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden of Eden, which is the concluding event. This poem, as its plan is incomparably more sublime and more important, than that of either the *Iliad* or *Eneid*, opens with a far more interesting scene: a multitude of angels and archangels shut up in a region of torment and darkness, and rolling on a lake of unquenchable fire. Who these angels are, and what brought them into this miserable condition, we naturally wish to know; and the poet in due time informs us; partly from the conversation of the fiends themselves; and more particularly by the mouth of a happy spirit; sent from heaven to

caution

caution the father and mother of mankind against temptation, and confirm their good resolutions by unfolding the dreadful effects of impiety and disobedience.

This poetical arrangement of events, so different from the historical, has other advantages besides those arising from brevity, and compactness of detail: it is obviously more affecting to the fancy, and more alarming to the passions; and, being more suitable to the order and the manner in which the actions of other men strike our senses, is a more exact imitation of human affairs. I hear a sudden noise in the street, and run to see what is the matter. An insurrection has happened, a great multitude is brought together, and something very important is going forward. The scene before me is the first thing that engages my attention; and is in itself so interesting, that for a moment or two I look at it in silence and wonder. By and by, when I get time for reflection, I begin to inquire into the cause of all this tumult, and what it is the people would be at; and one who is better informed than I, explains the affair from the beginning; or perhaps I make this out for myself, from the words and actions of the persons principally concerned.—This is a sort of picture* of poetical arrangement, both in Epic and Dramatic Composition; and this plan, has been followed in narrative odes and ballads both ancient and modern.—The historian pursues a different method. He begins perhaps with an account of the manners of a certain age, and of the political constitution of a certain country; then introduces a particular person, gives the story of his birth, connections, private character, pursuits, disappointments, and of the events that promoted his views, and brought him acquainted with other turbulent spirits like himself; and so proceeds, un-

* This illustration, or something very like it, I think I have read in Bâteux's Commentary on Horace's Art of Poetry.

folding, according to the order of time, the causes, principles, and progress of the conspiracy ;—if that be the subject which he undertakes to illustrate. It cannot be denied, that this latter method is more favourable to calm information : but the former, compared with it, will be found to have all the advantages already specified, and to be more effectually productive of that mental pleasure which depends on the passions and imagination.

VI. If a work have no determinate end, it has no meaning ; and if it have many ends, it will distract by its multiplicity. Unity of design, therefore, belongs in some measure to all compositions, whether in verse or prose. But to some it is more essential than to others ; and to none so much as to the higher poetry. In certain kinds of history, there is unity sufficient, if all the events recorded be referred to one person ; in others, if to one period of time, or to one people, or even to the inhabitants of one and the same planet. But it is not enough, that the subject of a poetical fable be the exploits of *one person* ; for these may be of various and even of opposite sorts and tendencies, and take up longer time, than the nature of poetry can admit :—far less can a regular poem comprehend the affairs of *one period*, or of *one people* :—it must be limited to some *one great action or event*, to the illustration of which all the subordinate events must contribute ; and these must be so connected with one another, as well as with the poet's general purpose, that one cannot be changed, transposed, or taken away, without affecting the consistence and stability of the whole *. In itself an incident may be interesting, a character well drawn, a description beautiful ; and yet, if it disfigure the general plan, or if it obstruct or incumber the main action, instead of helping it forward, a correct artist would consider it as but a gaudy superfluity or splendid de-

* Aristot. Poet. § 3.

formity; like a piece of scarlet cloth sowed upon a garment of a different colour*. Not that all the parts of the fable either are, or can be, equally essential. Many descriptions and thoughts, of little consequence to the plan, may be admitted for the sake of variety; and the poet may, as well as the historian and philosopher, drop his subject for a time, in order to take up an affecting or instructive digression.

The doctrine of poetical digressions and episodes has been largely treated by the critics. I shall only remark, that, in estimating their propriety, three things are to be attended to:—their connection with the fable or subject;—their own peculiar excellence;—and their subserviency to the poet's design.

1. Those digressions, that both arise from and terminate in the subject; like the episode of the angel Raphael in *Paradise Lost*, and the transition to the death of Cæsar and the civil wars in the first book of the *Georgic*; are the most artful, and if suitably executed claim the highest praise:—those that arise from, but do not terminate in the subject, are perhaps second in the order of merit; like the story of Dido in the *Æneid*, and the encomium on a country-life in the second book of the *Georgic*:—those come next, that terminate in, but do not rise from the fable; of which there are several in the third book of the *Æneid*, and in the *Odyssey*:—and those, that neither terminate in the fable, nor rise from it, are the least artful; and if they be long, cannot escape censure, unless their beauty be very great.

But, 2. we are willing to excuse a beautiful episode, at whatever expence to the subject it may be introduced. They who can blame Virgil for obtruding upon them the charming tale of Orpheus and Eurydice in the fourth *Georgic*, or Milton for the apostrophe to light in the beginning of his third book, ought to

* Hor. *Ar. Poet.* vers. 15. &c.

forfeit all title to the perusal of good poetry ; for of such divine strains one would rather be the author, than of all the books of criticism in the world. Yet still it is better, that an episode possesses the beauty of connection, together with its own intrinsic elegance, than this without the other.

Moreover, in judging of the propriety of episodes, and other similar contrivances, it may be expedient to attend, 3. to the *design* of the poet, as distinguished from the fable or subject of the poem. The great design, for example, of Virgil, was to interest his countrymen in a poem written with a view to reconcile them to the person and government of Augustus. Whatever, therefore, in the poem tends to promote this design, even though it should, in some degree, hurt the contexture of the fable, is really a proof of the poet's judgement, and may be not only allowed but applauded. — The progress of the action of the *Eneid* may seem to be too long obstructed, in one place, by the story of Dido, which, though it rises from the preceding part of the poem, has no influence upon the sequel ; and, in another, by the episode of Cacus, which, without injury to the *fable*, might have been omitted altogether. Yet these episodes, interesting as they are to us and to all mankind, because of the transcendent merit of the poetry, must have been still more interesting to the Romans, because of their connection with the Roman affairs : for the one accounts poetically for their wars with Carthage ; and the other not only explains some of their religious ceremonies, but also gives a most charming rural picture of those hills and vallies in the neighbourhood of the Tiber, on which, in after times, their majestic city was fated to stand. — And if we consider, that the design of Homer's *Iliad* was, not only to show the fatal effects of dissension among confederates, but also to immortalise his country, and celebrate the most distinguished families in it, we shall be inclined to think more favourably than critics generally do,
of

of some of his long speeches and digressions; which, though to us they may seem trivial, must have been very interesting to his countrymen, on account of the genealogies and private history recorded in them.—Shakespeare's Historical Plays, considered as Dramatic fables, and tried by the laws of Tragedy and Comedy, appear very rude compositions. But if we attend to the poet's *design*, (as the elegant critic * has with equal truth and beauty explained it), we shall be forced to admire his judgement in the general conduct of those pieces, as well as unequalled success in the execution of particular parts.

There is yet another point of view (as hinted formerly) in which these digressions may be considered. If they tend to elucidate any important character, or to introduce any interesting event not otherwise within the compass of the poem, or to give an amiable display of any particular virtue, they may be intitled, not to our pardon only, but even to our admiration, however loosely they may hang upon the fable. All these three ends are effected by that most beautiful episode of Hector and Andromache in the sixth book of the Iliad; and the two last, by the no less beautiful one of Euryalus and Nisus, in the ninth of the *Eneid*.

The beauties of poetry are distinguishable into local and universal. The former may reflect great honour on the poet, but the latter are more excellent in themselves; and these chiefly we must be supposed to have in our eye, when we speak of the essential characters of the art. A well-invented fable, as it is one of the most difficult operations of human genius †, must be allowed

* Essay on the writings and genius of Shakespeare, pag. 55.

† The difficulty of constructing an Epic or Dramatic fable may appear from the bad success of very great writers who have attempted it. Of Dramatic fables there

lowed to be one of the highest beauties of poetry. The *design*, as distinguished from the *fable*, may stand in need of commentators to explain it; but a well-wrought fable is universally understood, and universally pleasing. And if ever a poet shall arise, who to the art of Sophocles and Homer, can join the correctness and delicacy of Virgil, and the energy, variety, and natural colouring of Shakespeare, the world will then see something in poetry more excellent than we can at present conceive.

are indeed several in the world, which may be allowed to have come near perfection. But the beauty of Homer's fable remains unrivalled to this day. Virgil and Tasso have imitated, but not equalled it. That of *Paradise Lost* is artful, and for the most part judicious: I am certain the author could have equalled Homer in this, as he has excelled him in some other respects: — but the nature of his plan would not admit the introduction of so many incidents, as we see in the *Iliad*, co-operating to one determinate end. — Of the *Comic Epopee* we have two exquisite models in English, I mean the *Amelia* and *Tom Jones* of Fielding. The introductory part of the latter follows indeed the historical arrangement, in a way somewhat resembling the practice of Euripides in his Prologues, or at least as excusable: but, with this exception, we may venture to say, that both fables would bear to be examined by Aristotle himself, and, if compared with those of Homer, would not greatly suffer in the comparison. This author, to an amazing variety of probable occurrences, and of characters well drawn, well supported, and finely contrasted, has given the most perfect unity, by making them all co-operate to one and the same final purpose. It yields a very pleasing surprise to observe, in the unravelling of his plots, particularly that of *Tom Jones*, how many incidents, to which, because of their apparent minuteness, we had scarce attended as they occurred in the narrative, are found to have been essential to the plot. And what heightens our idea of the poet's art is, that all this is effected by natural means, and human abilities, without any machinery: — while his great master Cervantes is obliged to work a miracle for the cure of *Don Quixote*. — Can any reason be assigned, why the inimitable Fielding, who was so perfect in Epic fable, should have succeeded so indifferently in Dramatic? Was it owing to the peculiarity of his genius, or of his circumstances? to any thing in the nature of Dramatic writing in general, or of that particular taste in Dramatic Comedy which Congreve and Vanburgh had introduced, and which he was obliged to comply with?

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And now, from the position formerly established, that the end of this divine art is, *to give pleasure*, I have endeavoured to prove, that, whether in displaying the appearances of the material universe, or in imitating the workings of the human mind, and the varieties of human character, or in arranging and combining into one whole the several incidents and parts whereof his fable consists, — the aim of the poet must be, to copy Nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection in which, consistently with the particular genius of the work, and the laws of verisimilitude, it may be supposed to be.

Such, in general, is the nature of that poetry which is intended to raise admiration, pity, and other *serious* emotions. But in this art, as in all others, there are different degrees of excellence; and we have hitherto directed our view chiefly to the highest. All serious poets are not equally solicitous to improve nature. Euripides is said to have represented men as they were; Sophocles, more poetically, as they should or might be *. Theocritus, in his *Idyls*, and Spenser, in his *Shepherd's Calendar*, give us language and sentiments more nearly approaching those of the *Rus verum et barbarum* †, than what we meet with in the *Pastorals* of Virgil and Pope. In the *Historical drama*, human characters and events must be according to historical truth, or at least not so remote from it, as to lead into any important misapprehension of fact. And in the *Historical Epic poem*, such as the *Pharsalia* of Lucan, and the *Campaign* of Addison, the historical arrangement is preferred to the poetical, as being nearer the truth. Yet nature is a little improved even in these poems. The persons in Shakespeare's *Historical Plays*, and the heroes of the *Pharsalia*, talk in verse, and suitably to their characters, and with a readiness, beauty, and harmony of expression, not to be met with in

* Aristot. Poet.

† Martial.

real life, nor even in history; speeches are invented, and, to heighten the description, circumstances added, with great latitude; real events are rendered more compact and more strictly dependent upon one another, and fictitious ones brought in, to elucidate human characters, and diversify the narration.

The more poetry improves nature, by copying after general ideas collected from extensive observation, the more it partakes (according to Aristotle) of the nature of philosophy; the greater stretch of fancy and of observation it requires in the artist, and the better chance it has to be universally agreeable. An ordinary painter can give a portrait of a beautiful face: but from a number of such faces to collect a general idea of beauty more perfect than is to be found in any individual, and then to give existence to that idea, by drawing it upon canvas, (as Zeuxis is said to have done when he made a famous picture of Helen *), is a work which one must possess invention and judgement, as well as dexterity, to be able to execute. For it is not by copying the eyes of one lady, the lips of another, and the nose of a third, that such a picture is to be formed;—a medley of this kind would probably be ridiculous, as a certain form of feature may suit one face, which would not suit another:—but it is by comparing together several beautiful mouths, (for example), remarking the peculiar charm of each; and then conceiving an idea of that feature, different perhaps from all, and more perfect than any: and thus proceeding through the several features, with a view, not only to the colour, shape, and proportion, of each part, but also to the harmony of the whole. It rarely happens, that an individual is so complete in any one quality as we could desire; and though it were in the opinion of some, it would not in that of all. A lover may think his mistress a model of per-

* Plin. Hist. Natur. lib. 35.

fection; she may have moles and freckles on her face, and an odd cast of her eye; and yet he shall think all this becoming: but another man sees her in a different light; discovers many blemishes perhaps, and but few beauties; thinks her too fat or too lean, too short or too tall. Now, what would be the consequence, if this lady's portrait were to appear in a picture, under the character of Helen or Venus? The lover would admire it; but the rest of the world would wonder at the painter's taste. Great artists have, however, fallen into this error. Rubens, while he was drawing some of his pieces, would seem to have had but two ideas of feminine loveliness; and those were copied from his two wives: all the world approves his conjugal partiality; but his taste in female beauty all the world does not approve.

Individual objects there are, no doubt, in nature, which command universal admiration. There are many women in Great Britain, whose beauty all the world would acknowledge. Nay, perhaps, there are some such in every nation: for, however capricious our taste for beauty may be esteemed by modern philosophers, I have been assured, that in the West Indies a female negro seldom passes for handsome among the blacks, who is not really so in the opinion of the white people. There are characters in real life, which, with little or no heightening, might make a good figure even in Epic poetry: there are natural landscapes, than which one could not desire any thing of the kind more beautiful. But such individuals are not the most common; and therefore, though the rule is not without exceptions, it may, however, be admitted as a rule, That the poet or painter, who means to adapt himself to the *general* taste, should copy after *general* ideas collected from extensive observation of nature. For the most part, the peculiarities of individuals are agreeable only to individuals; the manners of Frenchmen to Frenchmen; the
dresses

dress of the season to the beaux and belles of the season; the sentiments and language of Newmarket, to the heroes of the turf, and their imitators. But manners and sentiments, dresses and faces, may be imagined, which shall be agreeable to all who have a right to be pleased: and these it is the business of the imitative artist to invent, and to exhibit.

Yet mere portraits are useful and agreeable: and poetry, even when it falls short of this philosophical perfection, may have great merit as an instrument of both instruction and pleasure. Some minds have no turn to abstract speculation, and would be better pleased with a *notion* of an individual, than with an *idea* of a species*; or with seeing in an Historical picture or Epic poem, the portraits or characters of their acquaintance, than the same form of face or disposition improved into a general idea†. And to most men, simple unadorned nature is, at certain times,

* *Idea*, according to the usage of the Greek philosophers, from whom we have the word, signifies, “A thought of the mind which is expressed by a general term.” *Notion* is used by many English writers of credit to signify, “A thought of the mind which may be expressed by a proper or individual name.” Thus, I have a *notion* of London, but an *idea* of a city; a *notion* of a particular hero, but an *idea* of heroism. These two words have long been confounded by the best writers: but it were to be wished, that, as the things are totally different, the names had been so too. Had this been the case, a great deal of confusion peculiar to modern philosophy, and arising from an ambiguous, and almost unlimited, use of the word *idea*, might have been prevented.

† An historical picture, like West’s *Death of Wolfe*, in which the faces are all portraits of individual heroes, and the dresses according to the present mode, may be more interesting now, than if these had been more picturesque, and those expressive of different modifications of heroism. But in a future age, when the dresses are become unfashionable, and the faces no longer known as portraits, is there not reason to fear, that this excellent piece will lose of its effect?

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and in certain compositions, more agreeable, than the most elaborate improvements of art; as a plain short period, without modulation, gives a pleasing variety to a discourse. Many such portraits of simple nature there are in the subordinate parts both of Homer's and of Virgil's poetry: and an excellent effect they have (as was already observed) in giving probability to the fiction *, as well as in gratifying the reader's fancy with images distinct and lively, and easily comprehended. The historical plays of Shakespeare raise not our pity and terror to such a height, as *Lear*, *Macbeth*, or *Othello*; but they interest and instruct us greatly, notwithstanding. The rudest of the *Eclogues* of Theocritus, or even of Spenser, have by some authors been extolled above those of Virgil, because more like real life. Nay, Corneille is known to have preferred the *Pharsalia* to the *Eneid*, perhaps from its being nearer the truth; or perhaps from the sublime sentiments of Stoical morality so forcibly and so ostentatiously displayed in it.

Poets may refine upon nature too much, as well as too little; for affectation and rusticity are equally remote from true elegance. — The style and sentiments of comedy should no doubt be more correct and more pointed than those of the most polite conversation: but to make every footman a wit, and every gentleman and lady an epigrammatist, as Congreve has done, is an excessive and faulty refinement. The proper medium has been hit by Menander and Terence, by Shakespeare in his happier scenes, and by Garrick, Cumberland, and some others of late renown. — To describe the passion of love with as little delicacy as some men speak of it, would be unpardonable; but to transform it into mere platonic adoration, is to run into another extreme, less criminal indeed, but too remote from universal truth

* See chap. 3.

to be universally interesting. To the former extreme Ovid inclines; and Petrarch, and his imitators, to the latter. Virgil has happily avoided both: but Milton has painted this passion, as distinct from all others, with such peculiar truth and beauty, that we cannot think Voltaire's encomium too high, when he says, that love in all other poetry seems a weakness, but in *Paradise Lost* a virtue. — There are many good strokes of nature in Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*; but the author's passion for the *Rus verum* betrays him into some indelicacies*: — a censure that falls with greater weight upon Theocritus, who is often absolutely indecent. The Italian pastoral of Tasso and Guarini, and the French of Fontenelle, run into the opposite extreme, (though in some parts beautifully simple), and display a system of rural manners, so quaint and affected as to outrage all probability. I should oppose several great names, if I were to say, that Virgil has given us the pastoral poem in its most perfect state; and yet I cannot help being of this opinion, though I have not time at present to specify my reasons. — In fact, though mediocrity of execution in poetry be allowed to deserve the doom pronounced upon it by Horace †; yet is it true, notwithstanding, that in this art, as in many other good things, the point of excellence lies in a middle between two extremes; and has been reached by those only who sought to improve nature as far as the genius.

* The language of this poem has been blamed, on account of its vulgarity. The Scotch dialect is sufficiently rustic, even in its most improved state: but in the *Gentle Shepherd* it is often debased by a phraseology not to be met with, except among the most illiterate people. Writers on pastoral have not always been careful to distinguish between coarseness and simplicity; and yet a plain suit of cloaths and a bundle of rags are not more different.

† Hor. Ar. Post. vers. 373.

of their work would permit, keeping at an equal distance from rusticity on the one hand, and affected elegance on the other.

If it were asked, what effects a view of nature degraded, or rendered less perfect than the reality, would produce in poetry; I should answer, The same which caricatura produces in painting;—it would make the piece ludicrous. In almost every countenance, there are some exceptionable features, by heightening the deformity whereof, it is easy to give a ridiculous likeness even of a good face. And in most human characters there are blemishes, moral, intellectual, or corporeal, by exaggerating which *to a certain degree*, you may form a comic character; as by raising the virtues, abilities, or external advantages of individuals, you form Epic or Tragic characters. I say, *to a certain degree*; for if, by their vices, want of understanding, or bodily infirmities, they should raise disgust, pity, or any other important emotion, they are then no longer the objects of comic ridicule; and it is an egregious fault in a writer to attempt to make them so *. It is a fault, because it proves his judgement to be perverted, and tends to pervert the sentiments, and ruin the morals of mankind.

But is nature always degraded in Comic performances? I answer, No; neither is it always improved, as we remarked already, in serious poetry. Some human characters are so truly heroic, as to raise admiration, without any heightenings of poetical art; and some are so truly laughable, that the comic writer would have nothing to do, but to represent them as they are. Besides, to raise laughter is not always the aim, either of the Epic Comedy †, or of the Dramatic: sublime passions and characters

* See Essay on Laughter, chap. 3.

† Of the Epic Comedy, which might perhaps be called rather the *Comic Epic*, *Tom Jones* and *Anelia* are examples.

are sometimes introduced; and these may be heightened as much as the poet finds necessary for his purpose, provided that, in his style, he affect no heroical elevation; and that his action, and the rank of his persons, be such as might probably be met with in common life. In regard to fable, and the order of events, all Comedy requires, or at least admits, as great perfection as Epic poetry itself.

C H A P. VI.

Remarks on Music.

S E C T. I.

Of Imitation. Is Music an Imitative Art?

MAN from his birth is prone to imitation, and takes great pleasure in it. At a time when he is too young to understand or attend to rules, he learns, by imitating others, to speak, and walk, and do many other things equally requisite to life and happiness. Most of the sports of children are imitative, and many of them dramatical. Mimickry occasions laughter; and a just imitation of human life upon the stage is highly delightful to persons of all ranks, conditions, and capacities.

Our natural propensity to imitation may in part account for the pleasure it yields: for that is always pleasing which gratifies natural propensity; nay, to please, and to gratify, are almost synonymous

synonymous terms. Yet the peculiar charm of imitation may also be accounted for upon other principles. To compare a copy with the original, and trace out the particulars wherein they differ and wherein they resemble, is in itself a pleasing exercise to the mind; and, when accompanied with admiration of the object imitated, and of the genius of the imitator, conveys a most intense delight; which may be rendered still more intense by the agreeable qualities of the *instrument* of imitation,—by the beauty of the colours in painting, by the harmony of the language in poetry; and in music, by the sweetness, mellowness, pathos, and other pleasing varieties of vocal and instrumental sound. And if to all this there be added, the merit of a moral design, Imitation will then shine forth in her most amiable form, and the enraptured heart acknowledge her powers of pleasing to be irresistible.

Such is the delight we have in imitation, that what would in itself give neither pleasure nor pain, may become agreeable when well imitated. We see without emotion many faces, and other familiar objects; but a good picture even of a stone, or common plant, is not beheld with indifference. No wonder, then, that what is agreeable in itself, should, when surveyed through the medium of skilful imitation, be highly agreeable. A good portrait of a grim countenance is pleasing; but a portrait equally good of a beautiful one is still more so. Nay, though a man in a violent passion, a monstrous wild beast, or a body agonized with pain, be a most unpleasing spectacle, a picture, or poetical description of it, may be contemplated with delight*; the pleasure we take in the artist's ingenuity, joined to our consciousness that the object before us is not real, being more than sufficient to counterbalance every disagreeable feeling occasioned by the

* Aristot. Poet. sect. 4.; Gerard on Taste, part 1. sect. 4.

deformity of the figure *. Even human vices, infirmities, and misfortunes, when well represented on the stage, form a most interesting amusement. So great is the charm of imitation.

That has been thought a very mysterious pleasure, which we take in witnessing tragical imitations of human action, even while they move us to pity and sorrow. Several causes seem to co-operate in producing it. 1. It gives an agreeable agitation to the mind, to be deeply interested in any event, that is not attended with real harm to ourselves or others. Nay, certain events of the most substantial distress would seem to give a gloomy entertainment to some minds: else why should men run so eagerly to see shipwrecks, executions, riots, and even battles, and fields of slaughter? But the distress upon the stage neither is, nor is believed to be, real; and therefore the agreeable exercise it may give to the mind is not allayed by any bitter reflections, but is rather heightened by this consideration, that the whole is imaginary. To those who mistake it for real, as children are

* Pictures, however, of great merit as imitations, and valuable for the morality of the design, may yet be too horrid to be contemplated with pleasure. A robber, who had broke into a repository of the dead, in order to plunder a corpse of some rich ornaments, is said to have been so affected with the hideous spectacle of mortality which presented itself when he opened the coffin, that he slunk away, trembling and weeping, without being able to execute his purpose.

I have met with an excellent print upon this subject; but was never able to look at it for half a minute together. Too many objects of the same character may be seen in Hogarth's *Progress of Cruelty*. — There is another class of shocking ideas, which poets have not always been sufficiently careful to avoid. Juvenal and Swift, and even Pope himself, have given us descriptions which it turns one's stomach to think of. And I must confess, that, notwithstanding the authority of Atterbury and Addison, and the general merit of the passage, I could never reconcile myself to some filthy ideas, which, to the unspeakable satisfaction of Mr Voltaire, Milton has unwarily introduced in the famous allegory of *Sin and Death*.

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said to do sometimes, it gives no pleasure, but intense pain. 2. Throughout the performance, we admire the genius of the poet, as it appears in the language and sentiments, in the right conduct of the fable, in diversifying and supporting the characters, and in devising incidents affecting in themselves, and conducive to the main design. 3. The ingenuity of the actors must be allowed to be a principal cause of the pleasure with which we witness either tragedy or comedy. A bad play well acted may please, and in fact often does; but a good play ill acted is intolerable. 4. We sympathize with the emotions of the audience, and this heightens our own. For I apprehend, that no person of sensibility would chuse to be the sole spectator of a play, if he had it in his power to see it in company with a multitude. When we have read by ourselves a pleasing narrative, till it has lost every charm that novelty can bestow, we may renew its relish by reading it in company, and perhaps be even more entertained than at the first perusal. 5. The ornaments of the theatre, the music, the scenery, the splendor of the company, nay the very dress of the players, must be allowed to contribute something to our amusement: else why do managers expend so much money in decoration? And, lastly, let it be observed, that there is something very peculiar in the nature of pity. The pain, however exquisite, that accompanies this amiable affection, is such, that a man of a generous mind would not disqualify himself for it, even if he could: nor is the "luxury of woe," that we read of in poetry, a mere figure of speech, but a real sensation, where-with every person of humanity is acquainted, by frequent experience. Pity produces a tenderness of heart very friendly to virtuous impressions. It inclines us to be circumspect and lowly, and sensible of the uncertainty of human things, and of our dependence upon the great Author of our being; while continued joy and prosperity harden the heart, and render men proud, irreligious,

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religious, and inattentive : so that Solomon had good reason for affirming, that “ by the softness of the countenance the heart is “ made better.” The exercise of pity, even towards imaginary sufferings, cannot fail to give pleasure, if attended, as it generally is, with the approbation of reason and conscience, declaring it to be a virtuous affection, productive of signal benefit to society, and peculiarly suitable to our condition, honourable to our nature, and amiable in the eyes of our fellow-creatures*.

Since Imitation is so plentiful a source of pleasure, we need not wonder, that the imitative arts of poetry and painting should have been greatly esteemed in every enlightened age. The imitation itself, which is the work of the artist, is agreeable; the thing imitated, which is nature, is also agreeable; and is not the same thing true of the instrument of imitation? Or does any one doubt, whether harmonious language be pleasing to the ear, or certain arrangements of colour beautiful to the eye?

Shall I apply these, and the preceding reasonings, to the Musical Art also, which I have elsewhere called, and which is generally understood to be, Imitative? Shall I say, that some melodies please, because they imitate nature, and that others, which do not imitate nature, are therefore unpleasing? — that an air expressive of devotion, for example, is agreeable, because it presents us with an imitation of those sounds by which devotion does naturally express itself? — Such an affirmation would hardly pass upon the reader; notwithstanding the plausibility it might seem to derive from that strict analogy which all the fine

* Since these remarks were written, Dr Campbell has published a very accurate and ingenious dissertation on this subject. See his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, vol. 1.

arts are supposed to bear to one another. He would ask, What is the natural sound of devotion? Where is it to be heard? When was it heard? What resemblance is there between Handel's *Te Deum*, and the tone of voice natural to a person expressing, by articulate sound, his veneration of the Divine Character and Providence? — In fact, I apprehend, that critics have erred a little in their determinations upon this subject, from an opinion, that Music, Painting, and Poetry, are all imitative arts. I hope at least I may say, without offence, that while this was my opinion, I was always conscious of some unaccountable confusion of thought, whenever I attempted to explain it in the way of detail to others.

But while I thus insinuate, that Music is not an imitative art, I mean no disrespect to Aristotle, who seems in the beginning of his *Poetics* to declare the contrary. It is not the whole, but *the greater part* of music, which that philosopher calls Imitative; and I agree with him so far as to allow this property to some music, though not to all. But he speaks of the ancient music, and I of the modern; and to one who considers how very little we know of the former, it will not appear a contradiction to say, that the one might have been imitative, though the other is not.

Nor do I mean any disrespect to music, when I would strike it off the list of imitative arts. I allow it to be a fine art, and to have great influence on the human soul: I grant, that, by its power of raising a variety of agreeable emotions in the hearer, it proves its relation to poetry, and that it never appears to the best advantage but with poetry for its interpreter: and I am satisfied, that, though musical genius may subsist without poetical taste, and poetical genius without musical taste; yet these two talents united might accomplish nobler effects, than either could do singly. I acknowledge too, that the principles and essential rules

of this art are as really founded in nature, as those of poetry and painting. But when I am asked, What part of nature is imitated in any good picture or poem, I find I can give a definite answer : whereas, when I am asked, What part of nature is imitated in Handel's *Water-music*, for instance, or in Corelli's *eighth concerto*, or in any particular English song or Scotch tune, I find I can give no definite answer : — though no doubt I might say some plausible things ; or perhaps, after much refinement, be able to show, that Music may, by one shift or other, be made an imitative art, provided you allow me to give any meaning I please to the word *imitative*.

Music is imitative, when it readily puts one in mind of the thing imitated. If an explication be necessary, and if, after all, we find it difficult to recognise any exact similitude, I would not call such music an imitation of nature ; but consider it as upon a footing, in point of likeness, with those pictures, wherein the action cannot be known but by a label proceeding from the mouth of the agent, nor the species of animal ascertained without a name written under it. But between imitation in music and imitation in painting, there is this one essential difference : — a bad picture is always a bad imitation of nature, and a good picture is necessarily a good imitation ; but music may be exactly imitative, and yet intolerably bad ; or not at all imitative, and yet perfectly good. I have heard, that the *Pastorale* in the eighth of Corelli's *Concertos* (which appears by the inscription to have been composed for the night of the Nativity) was intended for an imitation of the song of angels hovering above the fields of Bethlehem, and gradually soaring up to heaven. The music, however, is not such as would of itself convey this idea : and, even with the help of the commentary, it requires a lively fancy to connect the various movements and melodies of the piece with the motions and evolutions of the heavenly host ; as sometimes
flying

flying off, and sometimes returning; fingering sometimes in one quarter of the sky, and sometimes in another; now in one or two parts, and now in full chorus. It is not clear, that the author intended any imitation; and whether he did or not, is a matter of no consequence; for the music will continue to please, when the tradition is no more remembered. The harmonies of this *passorale* are indeed so uncommon, and so ravishingly sweet, that it is almost impossible not to think of heaven when one hears them. I would not call them imitative; but I believe they are finer than any imitative music in the world.

Sounds in themselves can imitate nothing directly but sounds, nor in their motions any thing but motions. But the natural sounds and motions that music is allowed to imitate, are but few. For, first, they must all be consistent with the fundamental principles of the art, and not repugnant either to melody or to harmony. Now, the foundation of all true music, and the most perfect of all musical instruments, is the human voice; which is therefore the prototype of the musical scale, and a standard of musical sound. Noises, therefore, and inharmonious notes of every kind, which a good voice cannot utter without straining, ought to be excluded from this pleasing art: for it is impossible, that those vocal sounds which require any unnatural efforts, either of the finger or speaker, should ever give permanent gratification to the hearer. I say, permanent gratification; for I deny not, that the preternatural screams of an Italian singer may occasion surprise, and momentary amusement: but those screams are not music; they are admired, not for their propriety or pathos, but, like rope-dancing, and the eating of fire, merely because they are uncommon and difficult.—— Besides, the end of all genuine music is, to introduce into the human mind certain affections, or susceptibilities of affection. Now, all the affections, over which music has any power, are of the agreeable

kind. And therefore, in this art, no imitations of natural sound or motion, but such as tend to inspire agreeable affections, ought ever to find a place. The song of certain birds, the murmur of a stream, the shouts of multitudes, the tumult of a storm, the roar of thunder, or a chime of bells, are sounds connected with agreeable or sublime affections, and reconcileable both with melody and with harmony; and may therefore be imitated, when the artist has occasion for them: but the crowing of cocks, the barking of dogs, the mewling of cats, the grunting of swine, the gabbling of geese, the cackling of a hen, the braying of an ass, the creaking of a saw, or the rumbling of a cart-wheel, would render the best music ridiculous. The movement of a dance may be imitated, or the stately pace of an embattled legion; but the hobble of a trotting horse would be intolerable.

There is another sort of imitation by sound, which ought never to be heard, or seen, in music. To express the local elevation of objects by what we call *high* notes, and their depression by *low* or *deep* notes, has no more propriety in it, than any other pun. We call notes *high* or *low*, with respect of their situation in the written scale. There would have been no absurdity in expressing the highest notes by characters placed at the bottom of the scale or musical line, and the lowest notes by characters placed at the top of it, if custom or accident had so determined. And there is reason to think, that something like this actually obtained in the musical scale of the ancients. At least it is probable, that the deepest or gravest sound was called *Summa* by the Romans, and the shrillest or acute *Ima*; which might be owing to the construction of their instruments; the string that sounded the former being perhaps highest in place, and that which sounded the latter lowest.—Yet some people would think a song faulty, if the word *heaven* was set to what we call a *low* note, or the word *hell* to what we call a *high* one.

All these sorts of illicit imitation have been practised, and by those too from whom better things were expected. This abuse of a noble art did not escape the satire of Swift; who, though deaf to the charms of music, was not blind to the absurdity of musicians. He recommended it to Dr Ecclin, an ingenious gentleman of Ireland, to compose a *Cantata* in ridicule of this puerile mimicry. Here we have *motions* imitated, which are the most inharmonious, and the least connected with human affections; as the *trotting*, *ambling*, and *galloping*, of Pegasus; and *sounds* the most unmusical, as *crackling* and *sniveling*, and *rough roystering rustic roaring strains*: the words *high* and *deep* have high and deep notes set to them; a series of short notes of equal lengths are introduced, to imitate *shivering* and *shaking*; an irregular rant of quick sounds, to express *rambling*; a sudden rise of the voice, from a low to a high pitch, to denote *flying above the sky*; a ridiculous run of chromatic divisions on the words *Celia dies*; with other droll contrivances of a like nature. In a word, Swift's *Cantata* alone may convince any person, that music uniformly imitative would be ridiculous.—I just observe in passing, that the satire of this piece is levelled, not at absurd imitation only, but also at some other musical improprieties; such as the idle repetition of the same words, the running of long extravagant divisions upon one syllable, and the setting of words to music that have no meaning.

If I were entitled to suggest any rules in this art, I would humbly propose, (and a great musician and ingenious writer seems to be of the same mind *), that no imitation should ever be introduced into music purely instrumental. Of vocal melody the expression is, or ought to be, ascertained by the poetry; but the expression of the best instrumental music is ambiguous. In

* Avison on Musical Expression, p. 57. 60. second edit.

this, therefore, there is nothing to lead the mind of the hearer to recognise the imitation, which, though both legitimate and accurate, would run the risk of being overlooked and lost. If, again, it were so very exact, as to lead our thoughts instantly to the thing imitated, we should be apt to attend to the imitation only, so as to remain insensible to the general effect of the piece. In a word, I am inclined to think, that imitation in an instrumental *concerto* would produce either no effect, or a bad one. The same reasons would exclude it from instrumental *solos*; provided they were such as deserve to be called music: — if they be contrived only to show the dexterity of the performer, imitations, and all possible varieties of sound, may be thrown in *ad libitum*; any thing will do, that can astonish the audience; but to such fiddling or fingering I would no more give the honourable name of Music, than I would apply that of Poetry to Pope's "Fluttering spread thy purple pinions," or to Swift's *Ode on Ditton and Whiston*.

In vocal music, truly such, the words render the expression determinate, and fix the hearer's attention upon it. Here therefore legitimate imitations may be employed; both because the subject of the song will render them intelligible, and because the attention of the hearer is in no danger of being seduced from the principal air. Yet even here, these imitations must be laid upon the instrumental accompaniment, and by no means attempted by the singer, unless they are expressive, and musical, and may be easily managed by the voice. In the song, which is the principal part, expression should be predominant, and imitations never used at all, except to assist the expression. Besides, the tones of the human voice, though the most pathetic of all sounds, are not suited to the quirks of imitative melody, which will always appear to best advantage on an instrument. In the first part of that excellent song, "Hide me from day's gairish eye, " While
 " the

“ the bee with honey’d thigh “ At her flowery work does sing,
 “ And the waters murmuring, “ With such concert as they
 “ keep, “ Intice the dewy feather’d sleep,”—Handel imitates
 the murmur of groves and waters by the accompaniment of tenors: in another song of the same *Oratorio*, “ On a plat of
 “ rising ground, “ I hear the far-off curfew found, “ Over some
 “ wide-water’d shore, “ Swinging flow with fullen roar,”—he
 makes the bass imitate the evening-bell: in another fine song,
 “ Hush, ye pretty warbling choir,”—he accompanies the voice
 with a flageolet that imitates the singing of birds: in the “ Sweet
 “ bird that shun’st the noise of folly,” the chief accompaniment is
 a German flute imitating occasionally the notes of the nightingale.
 —Sometimes, where expression and imitation happen to coincide,
 and the latter is easily managed by the voice, he makes the song
 itself imitative. Thus, in that song, “ Let the merry bells ring
 “ round, “ And the jocund rebecks found, “ To many a youth
 “ and many a maid, “ Dancing in the chequer’d shade,”—he
 makes the voice in the beginning imitate the *sound* of a chime
 of bells, and in the end the *motion* and gaiety of a dance.

Of these imitations no body will question the propriety. But
 Handel, notwithstanding his inexhaustible invention, and wonder-
 ful talents in the sublime and pathetic, is subject to fits of tri-
 fling, and frequently errs in the application of his imitative con-
 trivances. In that song “ What passion cannot music raise and
 “ quell,” when he comes to the words, “ His listening brethren
 “ stood around, “ And wondering on their faces *fell*,”—the
 accompanying violoncello *falls* suddenly from a quick and *high*
 movement to a very *deep* and long note. In another song of the
 same piece *, “ Sharp violins proclaim “ Their jealous pangs and
 “ desperation, “ Fury, frantic indignation, “ *Depth* of pains

* Dryden’s Ode on St Cecilia’s day.

“and *height* of passion, “For the fair disdainful dame;”—the words “*Depth* of pains and *height* of passion,” are thrice repeated to different keys; and the notes of the first clause are constantly *deep*, and those of the second as regularly *high*. The poet however is not less blameable than the musician.—And many other examples of the same kind might be produced from the works of this great artist*.

What has been said may serve to show both the extent, and the merit of Imitative Music†. It extends to those natural sounds and motions only, which are agreeable in themselves, consistent with melody and harmony, and associated with agreeable affections and sentiments. Its merit is so inconsiderable, that music purely instrumental is rather hurt than improved by it; and vocal music employs it only as a help to the expression, except in some rare cases, where the imitation is itself expressive as well as agreeable, and at the same time within the power of the human voice.

The best masters lay it down as a maxim, that melody and harmony are not to be deserted, even for the sake of expression itself‡. Expression that is not consistent with these is not *musical* expression; and a composer who does not render them consistent,

* That pretty pastoral ode of Shakespeare, “When daisies pied and violets blue,” has been set to music by Mr Leveridge; who makes the singer imitate, not only the note of the cuckoo, (which may be allowed, because easily performed, and perfectly musical), but also the shriek of the owl.

† By Imitative Music I must always be understood to mean, that which imitates *natural* sounds and motions. Fugues, and other similar contrivances, which, like echoes, repeat or imitate particular portions of the melody, it belongs not to this place to consider.

‡ Avison on Musical Expression, page 56.

violates the essential rules of his art *. If we compare Imitation with Expression, the superiority of the latter will be evident. Imitation without Expression is nothing : Imitation detrimental to Expression is faulty : Imitation is never tolerable, at least in

* Harmony and Melody are as essential to genuine music, as perspective is to painting. However solicitous a painter may be to give expression to the figures in his back ground, he must not strengthen their colour, nor define their outlines, so as to hurt the perspective by bringing them too near. A musician will be equally faulty, if he violate the harmony of his piece, in order to heighten the pathos. There is likewise in poetry something analogous to this. In those poems that require a regular and uniform versification, a poet may perhaps, in some rare instances, be allowed to break through the rules of his verse, for the sake of rendering his numbers more emphatical. Milton at least is intitled to take such a liberty :

——— Eternal wrath

Burn'd after them to the bottomless pit.

Parad. Lost.

And Virgil :

Proluit infano contorquens vortice sylvas

Fluviorum rex Eridanus. —

Geor. i.

And Homer :

Δία μὲν ἀσπίδος ἦλθε φαιῆς ἔμβριμον ἔγχος.

Iliad iii.

But these licences must not be too glaring : and therefore I know not whether Dyer is not blameable for giving us, in order to render his numbers imitative, a Trochaic verse of four feet and an half, instead of an Iambic of five :

The pilgrim oft

At dead of night, midst his oraison hears

Aghast the voice of Time ; disparting towers

Tumbling all precipitate, down dash'd,

Rattling around, &c.

Ruins of Rome.

ferious music, except it promote and be subservient to Expression. If then the highest excellence may be attained in instrumental music, without imitation; and if, even in vocal music, imitation have only a secondary merit; it must follow, that the imitation of nature is not essential to this art; though sometimes, when judiciously employed, it may be ornamental.

Different passions and sentiments do indeed give different tones and accents to the human voice. But can the tones of the most pathetic melody be said to bear a resemblance to the voice of a man or woman speaking from the impulse of passion? — The *flat key*, or *minor mode*, is found to be well adapted to a melancholy subject; and, if I were disposed to refine upon the imitative qualities of the art, I would give this for a reason, that melancholy, by depressing the spirits, weakens the voice, and makes it rise rather by *minor thirds*, which consist of but four semitones, than by *major thirds*, which consist of five. But is not this reason more subtle than solid? Are there not melancholy airs in the *sharp key*, and chearful ones in the *flat*? Nay, in the same air, do we not often meet with a transition from the one key to the other, without any sensible change in the expression?

Courage is apt to vent itself in a strong tone of voice: but can no musical strains inspire fortitude, but such as are sonorous? The Lacedemonians did not think so; otherwise they would not have used the music of soft pipes when advancing to battle *. If it be objected, that the firm deliberate valour, which the Spartan music was intended to inspire, does not express itself in a blustering, but rather in a gentle accent, resembling the music of soft pipes, I would recommend it to the objector to chuse, from all the music he is acquainted with, such an air as he thinks would most effectually awaken his courage; and then

* Aulus Gellius, lib. 1. cap. 11.

consider,

consider, how far that animating strain can be said to resemble the accent of a commander complimenting his troops after a victory, or encouraging them before it. Shakspeare speaks of the “spirit-stirring drum;” and a most emphatical epithet it must be allowed to be. But why does the drum excite courage? Is it because the *sound* imitates the voice of a valiant man? or does the *motion* of the drumsticks bear any similitude to that of his legs or arms?

Many Christians (I wish I could say *all*) know to their happy experience, that the tones of the organ have a wonderful power in raising and animating devout affections. But will it be said, that there is any resemblance between the sound of that noble instrument, or the finest compositions that can be played on it, and the voice of a human creature employed in an act of worship?

One of the most affecting styles in music is the *Pastoral*. Some airs put us in mind of the country, of “rural sights and rural “sounds,” and dispose the heart to that chearful tranquillity, that pleasing melancholy, that “vernal delight,” which groves and streams, flocks and herds, hills and vallies, inspire. But of what are these pastoral airs imitative? Is it of the murmur of waters, the warbling of groves, the lowing of herds, the bleating of flocks, or the echo of vales and mountains? Many airs are pastoral, which imitate none of these things. What then do they imitate?—the songs of ploughmen, milkmaids, and shepherds? Yes: they are such, as we think we have heard, or might have heard, sung by the inhabitants of the country. Then they must *resemble* country-songs; and if so, these songs must also be in the pastoral style. Of what then are these country-songs, the supposed archetypes of pastoral music, imitative? Is it of other country-songs? This shifts the difficulty a step backward, but does not by any means take it away. Is it of rural sounds, pro-

ceeding from things animated, or from things inanimate? or of rural motions — of men, beasts, or birds? of winds, woods, or waters? — In a word, an air may be pastoral, and in the highest degree pleasing, which imitates neither sound nor motion, nor any thing else whatever.

After all, it must be acknowledged, that there is some relation at least, or analogy, if not similitude, between certain musical sounds, and mental affections. Soft music may be considered as analogous to gentle emotions; and loud music, if the tones are sweet and not too rapid, to sublime ones; and a quick succession of noisy notes, like those we hear from a drum, seems to have some relation to hurry and impetuosity of passion. Sometimes, too, there is from nature, and sometimes there comes to be from custom, a connection between certain musical instruments, and certain places and occasions. Thus a flute, hautboy, or bagpipe, is better adapted to the purposes of rural music, than a fiddle, organ, or harpsichord, because more portable, and less liable to injury from the weather: thus an organ, on account both of its size and loudness, requires to be placed in a church, or some large apartment: thus violins and violoncellos, to which any degree of damp may prove hurtful, are naturally adapted to domestic use; while drums and trumpets, fifes and french-horns, are better suited to the service of the field. Hence it happens, that particular tones and modes of music acquire such a connection with particular places, occasions, and sentiments, that by hearing the former we are put in mind of the latter, so as to be affected with them more or less, according to the circumstances. The sound of an organ, for example, puts one in mind of a church, and of the affections suitable to that place; military music, of military ideas; and flutes and hautboys, of the thoughts and images peculiar to rural life. This may serve in part to account for musical expressiveness or efficacy; that is, to explain.

explain how it comes to pass, that certain passions are raised, or certain ideas suggested, by certain kinds of music : but this does not prove music to be an imitative art, in the same sense wherein painting and poetry are called imitative. For between a picture and its original ; between the ideas suggested by a poetical description and the objects described, there is a strict similitude : but between soft music and a calm temper there is no strict similitude ; and between the sound of a drum or of an organ and the affection of courage or of devotion, between the music of flutes and a pastoral life, between a concert of violins and a cheerful company, there is only an accidental connection, formed by custom, and founded rather on the nature of the instruments, than on that of the music.

It may perhaps be thought, that man learned to sing by imitating the birds ; and therefore, as vocal music is allowed to have been the prototype of instrumental, that the whole art must have been essentially imitative. Granting the fact, this only we could infer from it, that the art was imitative at first : but that it still continues to be so, does not follow ; for it cannot be said, either that the style of our music resembles that of birds, or that our musical composers make the song of birds the model of their compositions. But it is vain to argue from hypothesis : and the fact before us, though taken for granted by some authors, is destitute of evidence, and plainly absurd. How can it be imagined, that mankind learned to sing by imitating the feathered race ? I would as soon suppose, that we learned to speak by imitating the neigh of a horse, or to walk by observing the motion of fishes in water ; or that the political constitution of Great Britain was formed upon the plan of an ant-hillock. Every musician, who is but moderately instructed in the principles of his art, knows, and can prove, that, in the *sharp series* at least, the divisions of the diatonic scale, which is the standard of human music, are no artificial

tificial contrivance, but have a real foundation in nature: but the singing of birds, if we except the cuckoo and one or two more, is not reducible to that scale, nor to any other that was ever invented by man; for birds diversify their notes by intervals which the human organs cannot imitate without unnatural efforts, and which therefore it is not to be supposed that human art will ever attempt to express by written symbols. In a word, it is plain, that nature intended one kind of music for men, and another for birds: and we have no more reason to think, that the former was derived by imitation from the latter, than that the nests of a rookery were the prototype of the Gothic architecture, or the combs in a bee-hive of the Grecian.

Music, therefore, is pleasing, not because it is imitative, but because certain melodies and harmonies have *an aptitude* to raise certain passions, affections, and sentiments in the soul. And, consequently, the pleasures we derive from melody and harmony are seldom or never resolvable into that delight which the human mind receives from the imitation of nature.

All this, it may be said, is but a dispute about a word. Be it so: but it is, notwithstanding, a dispute somewhat material both to art and to science. It is material, in science, that philosophers have a determined meaning to their words, and that things be referred to their proper classes. And it is of importance to every art, that its design and end be rightly understood, and that artists be not taught to believe that to be essential to it, which is only adventitious, often impertinent, for the most part unnecessary, and at best but ornamental.

S E C T. II.

How are the pleasures we derive from Music to be accounted for ?

IT was said, that certain melodies and harmonies have *an aptitude* to raise certain passions, affections, and sentiments, in the human soul. Let us now inquire a little into the nature of this *aptitude*; by endeavouring, from acknowledged principles of the human constitution, to explain the cause of that pleasure which mankind derive from music. I am well aware of the delicacy of the argument, and of my inability to do it justice; and therefore I promise no complete investigation, nor indeed any thing more than a few cursory remarks. As I have no theory to support, and as this topic, though it may amuse, is not of any great utility, I shall be neither positive in my assertions, nor abstruse in my reasoning.

The vulgar distinguish between the sense of hearing, and that faculty by which we receive pleasure from music, and which is commonly called *a musical ear*. Every body knows, that to hear, and to have a relish for melody, are two different things; and that many persons have the first in perfection, who are destitute of the last. The last is indeed, like the first, a gift of nature; and may, like other natural gifts, languish if neglected, and improve exceedingly if exercised. And though every person who hears, might no doubt, by instruction and long experience, be made sensible of the musical properties of sound, so far as to be in some measure gratified with good music and disgusted with bad; yet both his pain and his pleasure would be very different in kind.

kind and degree, from that which is conveyed by a true musical ear.

I. Does not part of the pleasure, both of melody and of harmony, arise from the very nature of the notes that compose it? Certain inarticulate sounds, especially when continued, produce very pleasing effects on the mind. They seem to withdraw the attention from the more tumultuous concerns of life, and, without agitating the soul, to pour gradually upon it a train of softer ideas, that sometimes lull and soothe the faculties, and sometimes quicken sensibility, and stimulate the imagination. Nor is it altogether absurd to suppose, that the human body may be mechanically affected by them. If in a church one feels the floor, and the pew, tremble to certain tones of the organ; if one string vibrates of its own accord when another is sounded near it of equal length, tension, and thickness; if a person who sneezes, or speaks loud, in the neighbourhood of a harpsichord, often hears the strings of the instrument murmur in the same tone; we need not wonder, that some of the finer fibres of the human frame should be put in a tremulous motion, when they happen to be in unison with any notes proceeding from external objects. — That certain bodily pains might be alleviated by certain sounds, was believed by the Greeks and Romans: and we have it on the best authority, that one species at least of madness was once curable by melody*. I have seen even instrumental music of little expression draw tears from those who had no knowledge of the art, nor any particular relish for it. Nay, a friend of mine, who is profoundly skilled in the theory of music, well acquainted with the animal economy, and singularly accurate in his inquiries into nature, assures me, that he has been once and again wrought into a feverish fit by the tones of an Eolian

* First book of Samuel, chap. xvi. vers. 23.

harp. These, and other similar facts that might be mentioned, are not easily accounted for, unless we suppose, that certain sounds may have a mechanical influence upon certain parts of the human body. — Be that however as it will, it admits of no doubt, that the mind may be agreeably affected by mere sound, in which there is neither meaning nor modulation; not only by the tones of the Eolian harp, and other musical instruments, but also by the murmur of winds, groves, and water-falls*; nay by the shouts of multitudes, by the uproar of the ocean in a storm; and, when one can listen to it without fear, by that “deep and dreadful organ-pipe,” the thunder itself.

Nothing is more valued in a musical instrument or performer, than sweetness, fullness, and variety of tone. Sounds are disagreeable, which hurt the ear by their shrillness, or which cannot be heard without painful attention on account of their exility. But *loud* and *mellow* sounds, like those of thunder, of a storm, and of the full organ, elevate the mind through the ear; even as vast magnitude yields a pleasing astonishment, when contemplated by the eye. By suggesting the idea of great power, and sometimes of great expansion too, they excite a pleasing admiration, and seem to accord with the lofty genius of that soul whose chief desire is for truth, virtue, and immortality, and the object of whose most delightful meditation is the greatest and best of Beings†. *Sweetness* of tone, and beauty of shape and colour, produce a placid acquiescence of mind, accompanied with some de-

* Quæ tibi, quæ tali reddam pro carmine dona?
Nam neque me tantum venientis fibilus austri,
Nec percussa juvant fluctu tam littora, nec quæ
Saxofas inter decurrunt flumina valles.

Virg. Eclog. 5.

† See Longinus, sect. 34. Spectator, N^o 413. Pleasures of Imagination, book 1. vers. 151. &c.

gree of joy, which plays in a gentle smile upon the countenance of the hearer and beholder. *Equable* sounds, like smooth and level surfaces, are in general more pleasing than such as are rough, uneven, or interrupted; yet, as the flowing curve, so essential to elegance of figure, and so conspicuous in the outlines of beautiful animals, is delightful to the eye; so notes *gradually swelling*, and *gradually decaying*, have an agreeable effect on the ear, and on the mind; the former tending to rouse the faculties, and the latter to compose them; the one promoting gentle exercise, and the other rest.

But of all sounds, that which makes its way most directly to the human heart, is the human voice: and those instruments that approach nearest to it are in expression the most pathetic, and in tone the most perfect. The notes of a man's voice, well tuned and well managed, have a mellowness, variety, and energy, beyond those of any instrument; and a fine female voice, modulated by sensibility, is beyond comparison the sweetest, and most melting sound, in art or nature. Is it not strange, that the most musical people upon earth, dissatisfied, as it would seem, with both these, should have incurred a dreadful reproach, in order to introduce a third species of vocal sound, that has not the perfection of either? For may it not be affirmed with truth, that no person of uncorrupted taste ever heard for the first time the music I allude to, without some degree of horror; proceeding not only from the disagreeable ideas suggested by what was before his eyes, but also from the thrilling sharpness of tone that startled his ear? Let it not be said, that by this abominable expedient, choruses are rendered more complete, and melodies executed, which before were impracticable. Nothing that shocks humanity ought to have a place in human art; nor can a good ear be gratified with unnatural sound, or a good taste with too intricate composition. Surely, every lover of music, and of man-
kind,

kind, would wish to see a practice abolished which is in itself a disgrace to both; and, in its consequences, so far from being desirable, that it cannot truly be said to do any thing more than to debase a noble art into trick and grimace, and make the human breath a vehicle, not to human sentiments, but to mere empty screaming and squalling.

II. Some notes, when sounded together, have an agreeable, and others a disagreeable effect. The former are *conords*, the latter *discords*. When the fluctuations of air produced by two or more contemporary notes do mutually coincide, the effect is agreeable; when they mutually repel each other, the effect is disagreeable. These coincidences are not all equally perfect; nor these repulsions equally strong: and therefore all conords are not equally sweet, nor all discords equally harsh. A man unskilled in music might imagine, that the most agreeable harmony* must be made up of the sweetest conords, without any mixture of discord: and in like manner, a child might fancy, that a feast of sweet-meats would prove the most delicious banquet. But both would be mistaken. The same concord may be more or less pleasing, according to its position; and the sweeter conords often produce their best effect, when they are introduced by the harsher ones, or even by discords; for then they are most agreeable, because they give the greatest relief to the ear: even as health is doubly delightful after sickness, liberty after confinement, and a sweet taste when preceded by a bitter. Dissonance, therefore, is necessary to the perfection of harmony. But consonance predominates; and to such a degree, that, except on rare

* *Melody*, in the language of art, is the agreeable effect of a single series of musical tones: *Harmony* is the agreeable effect of two or more series of musical tones sounded at the same time.

occasions, and by a nice ear, the discord in itself is hardly perceptible.

Musicians have taken pains to discover the principles on which concords and discords are to be so arranged as to produce the best effect; and have thus brought the whole art of harmony within the compass of a certain number of rules, some of which are more, and others less indispensable. These rules admit not of demonstrative proof: for though some of them may be inferred by rational deduction from the very nature of sound; yet the supreme judge of their propriety is the human ear. They are, however, founded on observation so accurate and so just, that no artist ever thought of calling them in question. Rousseau indeed somewhere insinuates, that habit and education might give us an equal relish for a different system of harmony; a sentiment which I should not have expected from an author, who for the most part recommends an implicit confidence in our natural feelings, and who certainly understands human nature well, and music better than any other philosopher. That a basis of *sevenths* or *fourths*, or even of *fifths*, should ever become so agreeable to any human ear, as one constructed according to the system, is to me as inconceivable, as that Virgil, though turned into rugged prose, would be read and admired as much as ever. Rousseau could not mean to extend this remark to the whole system, but only to some of its mechanical rules: and indeed it must be allowed, that in this, as well as in other arts, there are rules which have no better foundation than fashion, or the practice of some eminent composer.

Natural sensibility is not taste, though it be necessary to it. A painter discovers both blemishes and beauties in a picture, in which an ordinary eye can perceive neither. In poetical language, and in the arrangement and choice of words, there are many niceties, whereof they only are conscious who have practi-
 fed

fed versification, as well as studied the works of poets, and the rules of the art. In like manner, harmony must be studied a little in its principles by every person who would acquire a true relish for it; and nothing but practice will ever give that quickness to his ear which is necessary to enable him to enter with adequate satisfaction, or rational dislike, into the merits or demerits of a musical performance. When once he can attend to the progress, relations, and dependencies, of the several parts; and remember the past, and anticipate the future, at the same time he perceives the present; so as to be sensible of the skill of the composer, and dexterity of the performer;—a regular concerto, well executed, will yield him high entertainment, even though its regularity be its principal recommendation. The pleasure which an untutored hearer derives from it is far inferior: and yet there is something in harmony that pleases, and in dissonance that offends, every ear; and were a piece to be played consisting wholly of discords, or put together without any regard to rule, I believe no person whatever would listen to it without great disgust.

After what has been briefly said of the agreeable qualities of musical notes, it will not seem strange, that a piece, either of melody or of harmony, of little or no expression, should, when elegantly performed, give some delight; not only to adepts, who can trace out the various contrivances of the composer, but even to those who have little or no skill in this art, and must therefore look upon the whole piece as nothing more than a combination of pleasing sounds.

III. But Pathos, or Expression, is the chief excellence of music. Without this, it may amuse the ear, it may give a little exercise to the mind of the hearer, it may for a moment withdraw the attention from the anxieties of life, it may show the performer's dexterity, the skill of the composer, or the merit of the instruments;

ments; and in all or any of these ways, it may afford a slight pleasure: but, without engaging the affections, it can never yield that permanent, useful, and heart-felt gratification, which legislators, civil, military, and ecclesiastical, have expected from it. Is it absurd to ascribe utility, and permanence, to the effects produced by this noble art? Let me expatiate a little in its praise.—Did not one of the wisest, and least voluptuous, of all ancient legislators, give great encouragement to music*? — Does not a most judicious author ascribe the humanity of the Arcadians to the influence of this art, and the barbarity of their neighbours the Cynethians to their neglect of it†? — Does not Montefquieu, one of the first names in modern philosophy, prefer it to all other amusements, as being that which least corrupts the soul‡? — Quintilian is very copious in the praise of music; and extols it as an incentive to valour, as an instrument of moral and intellectual discipline, as an auxiliary to science, as an object of attention to the wisest men, and a source of comfort and an assistant in labour, even to the meanest||. The heroes of ancient Greece were ambitious to excel in music; and it is recorded of Themistocles, as something extraordinary, that he was not. Socrates appears to have had checks of conscience for neglecting to accomplish himself in this art; for he tells Cebes, a little before he swallowed the deadly draught, that he had all his life been haunted with a dream, in which one seemed to say to him, “O Socrates, compose and practise music;” in compliance with which admonition he amused himself while under sentence of death, with turning some of Esop’s fables into verse, and making a hymn in honour of Apollo,—the only sort of harmo-

* Lycurgus. See Plutarch.

† Polybius. Hist. lib. 4.

‡ *Esprit des loix*, liv. 4. ch. 8.

|| *Inst. Orat.* lib. 1. cap. 8.

nious composition that was then in his power *. In armies, music has always been cultivated as a source of pleasure, a principle of regular motion, and an incentive to valour and enthusiasm. The Son of Sirach declares the ancient poets and musicians to be worthy of honour, and ranks them with the benefactors of mankind †. Nay, Jesus Christ and his apostles were pleased to introduce this art into the Christian worship; and the church has in every age followed the example.

Music, however, would not have recommended itself so effectually to general esteem, if it had always been merely instrumental. For, if I mistake not, the expression of music without poetry is vague and ambiguous; and hence it is, that the same air may sometimes be repeated to every stanza of a long ode or ballad. The change of the poet's ideas, provided the subject continue nearly the same, does not always require a change of the music: and if critics have ever determined otherwise, they were led into the mistake, by supposing, what every musician knows to be absurd, that, in fitting verses to a tune, or a tune to verses, it is more necessary, that *particular words* should have *particular notes* adapted to them, than that the *general tenor* of the music should accord with the *general nature* of the sentiments.

It is true, that to a favourite air, even when unaccompanied with words, we do commonly annex certain ideas, which may have come to be related to it in consequence of some accidental associations: and sometimes we imagine a resemblance (which however is merely imaginary) between certain melodies and certain thoughts or objects. Thus a Scotchman may fancy, that there is some sort of likeness between that charming air which he calls *Tweedside*, and the scenery of a fine pastoral country: and to the same air, even when only played on an instrument, he

* Plat. Phædon. sect. 4.

† Ecclesiasticus, xliv. 1. — 8.

may annex the ideas of romantic love and rural tranquillity; because these form the subject of a pretty little ode, which he has often heard sung to that air. But all this is the effect of habit. A foreigner, who hears that tune for the first time, entertains no such fancy. The utmost we can expect from him is, to acknowledge the air to be sweet and simple. He would smile, if we were to ask him, whether it bears any resemblance to the hills, groves, and meadows, adjoining to a beautiful river; nor would he perhaps think it more expressive of romantic love, than of conjugal, parental, or filial affection, tender melancholy, moderate joy, or any other gentle passion. Certain it is, that on any one of these topics, an ode might be composed, which would suit the air most perfectly. So ambiguous is musical expression.

It is likewise true, that music merely instrumental does often derive significancy from external circumstances. When an army in battle-array is advancing to meet the enemy, words are not necessary to give meaning to the military music. And a solemn air on the organ, introducing or dividing the church-service, may not only elevate the mind, and banish impertinent thoughts, but also, deriving energy from the surrounding scene, may promote religious meditation.

Nor can it be denied, that instrumental music may both quicken our sensibility, and give a direction to it; that is, may both prepare the mind for being affected, and determine it to one set of affections rather than another;—to melancholy, for instance, rather than merriment, composure rather than agitation, devotion rather than levity, and contrariwise. Certain tunes, too, there are, which, having been always connected with certain actions, do, merely from the power of habit, dispose men to those actions. Such are the tunes commonly used to regulate the motions of dancing.

Yet it is in general true, that Poetry is the most immediate and most accurate interpreter of Music. Without this auxiliary, a piece of the best music, heard for the first time, might be said to mean something, but we should not be able to say what. It might incline the heart to sensibility: but poetry, or language, would be necessary to improve that sensibility into a real emotion, by fixing the fancy upon some definite and affecting ideas. A fine instrumental symphony well performed, is like an oration delivered with propriety, but in an unknown tongue; it may affect us a little, but conveys no determinate feeling; we are alarmed, perhaps, or melted, or soothed, but it is very imperfectly, because we know not why: — the finger, by taking up the same air, and applying words to it, immediately translates the oration into our own language; then all uncertainty vanishes, the fancy is filled with determinate ideas, and determinate emotions take possession of the heart.

A great part of our fashionable music seems intended rather to tickle and astonish the hearers, than to inspire them with any permanent emotions. And if that be the end of the art, then, to be sure, this fashionable music is just what it should be, and the simpler strains of former ages are good for nothing. Nor am I now at leisure to inquire, whether it be better for an audience to be thus tickled and astonished, than to have their fancy impressed with beautiful images, and their hearts melted with tender passions, or elevated with sublime ones. But if you grant me this one point, that music is more or less perfect, in proportion as it has more or less power over the heart, it will follow, that all music merely instrumental, and which does not derive significance from any of the associations, habits, or outward circumstances, above mentioned, is to a certain degree imperfect; and that, while the rules hinted at in the following queries are overlooked by composers and performers, vocal music, though it

may astonish mankind, or afford them a slight gratification, will never be attended with those important effects that we know it produced of old in the days of simplicity and true taste.

1. Is not good music set to bad poetry as unexpressive, and therefore as absurd, as good poetry set to bad music, or as harmonious language without meaning? Yet the generality of musicians appear to be indifferent in regard to this matter. If the sound of the words be good, or the meaning of particular words agreeable; if there be a competency of hills and rills, doves and loves, fountains and mountains, with a tolerable collection of garlands and lambkins, nymphs and cupids, *berger's* and *tortorellas*, they are not solicitous about sense or elegance. In which they seem to me to consult their own honour as little as the rational entertainment of others. For what is there to elevate the mind of that composer, who condemns himself to set music to insipid doggerel? Handel's genius never soared to heaven, till it caught strength and fire from the strains of inspiration.— 2. Should not the words of every song be intelligible to those to whom it is addressed, and be distinctly articulated, so as to be heard as plainly as the notes? Or can the human mind be rationally gratified with that which it does not perceive, or which, if it did perceive, it would not understand? And therefore, is not the music of a song faulty, when it is so complex as to make the distinct articulation of the words impracticable?— 3. If the singer's voice and words ought to be heard in every part of the song, can there be any propriety in noisy accompaniments? And as every performer in a numerous band is not perfectly discreet, and as some performers may be more careful to distinguish themselves than do justice to the song, will not an instrumental accompaniment be almost necessarily too noisy, if it is complex?— 4. Does not the frequent repetition of the same words in a song, confound its meaning, and distract the attention
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of both the finger and the hearer? And are not long-winded divisions (or successions of notes warbled to one syllable) attended with a like inconvenience, and with this additional bad effect, that they disqualify the voice for expression, by exhausting it? Is not simplicity as great a perfection in music, as in painting and poetry? Or should we admire that orator who chose to express by five hundred words, a sentiment that might be more emphatically conveyed in five? — 5. Ought not the finger to bear in mind, that he has sentiments to utter as well as sounds? And if so, should he not perfectly understand what he says, as well as what he sings; and not only modulate his notes with the art of a musician, but also pronounce his words with the propriety of a public speaker? If he is taught to do this, does he not learn of course to avoid all grimace and finical gesticulation? And will he not then acquit himself in singing like a rational creature, and a man of sense? Whereas, by pursuing a contrary conduct, is he not to be considered rather as a puppet or wind-instrument, than as an elegant artist? — 6. Is not church-music more important than any other? and ought it not for that reason to be most intelligible and expressive? But will this be the case, if the notes are drawn out to such an immoderate length, that the words of the singer cannot be understood? Besides, does not excessive slowness, in singing or speaking, tend rather to wear out the spirits, than to elevate the fancy, or warm the heart? It would seem, then, that the vocal part of church-music should never be so slow as to fatigue those who sing, or to render the words of the song in any degree unintelligible to those who hear. — 7. Do flourished cadences, whether by a voice or instrument, serve any other purpose, than to take off our attention from the subject, and set us a-staring at the flexibility of the performer's voice, the swiftness of his fingers, or the sound of his fiddle? And if this be their only use, do

they not counteract, instead of promoting, the chief end of music? What should we think, if a tragedian, at the conclusion of every scene, or of every speech, in Othello, were to strain his throat into a preternatural scream, make a hideous wry face, or cut a caper four feet high? We might wonder at the strength of his voice, the pliancy of his features, or the springiness of his limbs; but should hardly admire him as intelligent in his art, or respectful to his audience.

But is it not agreeable to hear a *florid song* by a fine performer, though now and then the voice should be drowned amidst the accompaniments, and though the words should not be understood by the hearers, or even by the singer? I answer, that nothing can be very agreeable, which brings disappointment. In the case supposed, the tones of the voice might no doubt give pleasure: but from instrumental music we expect something more, and from vocal music a great deal more, than mere sweetness of sound. From poetry and music united we have a right to expect pathos, sentiment, and melody, and in a word every gratification that the tuneful art can bestow. But in sweetness of tone the best singer is not superior, and scarcely equal, to an Eolus harp, to Vischer's hautboy, or to Giardini's violin. And can we without dissatisfaction see a human creature dwindle into mere wood and cat-gut? Can we be gratified with what only tickles the ear, when we had reason to hope, that a powerful address would have been made to the heart?—A handsome actress walking on the stage would no doubt be looked at with complacency for a minute or two, though she were not to speak a word. But surely we had a right to expect a different sort of entertainment; and were her silence to last a few minutes longer, I believe the politest audience in Europe would let her know that they were offended.—To conclude: A song, which we listen to without understanding the words, is like a picture seen at too great

great a distance. The former may be allowed to charm the ear with sweet sounds, in the same degree in which the latter pleases the eye with beautiful colours. But, till the design of the whole, and the meaning of each part, be made obvious to sense, it is impossible to derive any rational entertainment from either.

I hope I have given no offence to the connoisseur by these observations. They are dictated by a hearty zeal for the honour of an art, of which I have heard and seen enough to be satisfied, that it is capable of being improved into an instrument of virtue, as well as of pleasure. If I did not think so, I should hardly have taken the trouble to write these remarks, slight as they are, upon the philosophy of it. But to return :

Every thing in art, nature, or common life, must give delight, which communicates delightful passions to the human mind. And because all the passions that music can inspire are of the agreeable kind, it follows, that all pathetic or expressive music must be agreeable. Music may inspire devotion, fortitude, compassion, benevolence, tranquillity ; it may infuse a gentle sorrow that softens, without wounding, the heart, or a sublime horror that expands, and elevates, while it astonishes, the imagination : but music has no expression for impiety, cowardice, cruelty, hatred, or discontent. For every essential rule of the art tends to produce pleasing combinations of sound ; and it is difficult to conceive, how from these any painful or criminal affections should arise. I believe, however, it might be practicable, by means of harsh tones, irregular rhythm, and continual dissonance, to work the mind into a disagreeable state, and to produce horrible thoughts, and criminal propensity, as well as painful sensations. But this would not be music ; nor can it ever be for the interest of any society to put such a villanous art in practice.

Milton was so sensible of the moral tendency of musical expression, that he ascribes to it the power of raising some praiseworthy

worthy emotions even in the devils themselves *. Would Dryden, if he had been an adept in this art, as Milton was, have made the song of Timotheus inflame Alexander to revenge and cruelty?—At any rate, I am well pleased that Dryden fell into this mistake (if it be one), because it has produced some of the most animated lines that ever were written †. And I am also pleased to find, for the honour of music, and of this criticism, that history ascribes the burning of Persepolis, not to any of the tuneful tribe, but to the instigation of a drunken harlot.

IV. Is there not reason to think, that variety and simplicity of structure may contribute something to the agreeableness of music, as well as of poetry and prose. Variety, kept within due bounds, cannot fail to please, because it refreshes the mind with perpetual novelty; and is therefore studiously sought after in all the arts, and in none of them more than in music. To give this character to his compositions, the poet varies his phraseology and syntax; and the feet, the pauses, and the sound of contiguous verses, as much as the subject, the language, and the laws of versification will permit: and the prose-writer combines longer with shorter sentences in the same paragraph, longer with shorter clauses in the same sentence, and even longer with shorter words in the same clause; terminates contiguous clauses and sentences by a different cadence, and constructs them by a different syntax; and in general avoids all monotony and similar sounds, except where they are unavoidable, or where they may contribute (as indeed they often do) to energy or perspicuity. The musician diversifies his *melody*, by changing his keys; by deferring or interrupting his cadences; by a mixture of slower and quicker, higher and lower,

* Paradise Lost, b. i. vers. 549.—562.

† Alexander's Feast, stanza 6.

softer and louder notes ; and, in pieces of length, by altering the rhythm, the movement, and the air : and his *harmony* he varies, by varying his concords and discords, by a change of modulation, by contrasting the ascent or slower motion of one part to the descent or quicker motion of another, by assigning different harmonies to the same melody, or different melodies to the same harmony, and by many other contrivances.

Simplicity makes music, as well as language, intelligible and expressive. It is in every work of art a recommendatory quality. In music it is indispensable ; for we are never pleased with that music which we cannot understand, or which seems to have no meaning. Of the ancient music little more is known, than that it was very affecting and very simple. All popular and favourite airs ; all that remains of the old national music in every country ; all military marches, church-tunes, and other compositions that are more immediately addressed to the heart, and intended to please the general taste ; all proverbial maxims of morality and prudence, and all those poetical phrases and lines, which every body remembers, and is occasionally repeating, are remarkable for simplicity. To which we may add, that language, while it improves in simplicity, grows still more and more perfect : and that, as it loses this character, it declines in the same proportion from the standard of elegance, and draws nearer and nearer to utter depravation *. Without simplicity, the varieties of art, instead of pleasing, would only bewilder the attention, and confound the judgement.

Rhythm, or Number, is in music a copious source of both variety and uniformity. Not to enter into any nice speculation

* See *Le Vicende della Letteratura del Sig. Carlo Denina*.

on the nature of rhythm *, (for which this is not a proper place), I shall only observe, that notes, as united in music, admit of the distinction of quick and slow, as well as of acute and grave; and that on the former distinction depends what is here called *Rhythm*. It is the only thing in a tune which the drum can imitate. And by that instrument, the rhythm of any tune may be imitated most perfectly, as well as by the sound of the feet in dancing:—only as the feet can hardly move so quick as the drum-ticks, the dancer may be obliged to repeat his strokes at longer intervals, by supposing the music divided into larger portions; to give one stroke, for example, where the drummer might give two or three, or two where the other would give four or six. For every piece of regular music is supposed to be divided into small portions (separated in writing by a cross line called a *bar*) which, whether they contain more or fewer notes, are all equal in respect of time. In this way, the rhythm is a source of *uniformity*; which pleases, by suggesting the agreeable ideas of regularity and skill, and, still more, by rendering the music intelligible. It also pleases, by raising and gratifying expectation: for if the movement of the piece were governed by no rule; if what one hears of it during the present moment were in all respects unlike and incommensurable to what one was to hear the next, and had heard the last, the whole would be a mass of confusion; and the ear would either be bewildered, having nothing to rest upon, and nothing to anticipate; or, if it should expect any stated *ratio* between the motion and the time, would be disappointed when it found that there was none.—That rhythm is a source of very great *variety*, every person must be sensible,

* The nature of Rhythm, and the several divisions of it, are very accurately explained by the learned author of *An Essay on the origin and progress of language*, vol. 2. p. 301.

who knows only the names of the musical notes, with such of their divisions and subdivisions as relate to time; or who has attended to the manifold varieties of quick and slow motion, which the drum is capable of producing.

As order and proportion are always delightful, it is no wonder that mankind should be agreeably affected with the rhythm of music. That they are, the universal use of dancing, and of the “spirit-stirring drum,” is a sufficient evidence. Nay, I have known a child imitate the rhythm of tunes before he could speak, and long before he could manage his voice so as to imitate their melody;—which is a proof, that human nature is susceptible of this delight previously to the acquirement of artificial habits.

V. I hinted at the power of accidental association in giving significancy to musical compositions. It may be remarked further, that association contributes greatly to heighten their agreeable effect. We have heard them performed, some time or other, in an agreeable place perhaps, or by an agreeable person, or accompanied with words that describe agreeable ideas; or we have heard them in our early years; a period of life, which we seldom look back upon without pleasure, and of which Bacon recommends the frequent recollection as an expedient to preserve health. Nor is it necessary, that such melodies or harmonies should have much intrinsic merit, or that they should call up any distinct remembrance of the agreeable ideas associated with them. There are seasons, at which we are gratified with very moderate excellence. In childhood, every tune is delightful to a musical ear; in our advanced years, an indifferent tune will please, when set off by the amiable qualities of the performer, or by any other agreeable circumstance.—During the last war, the *Belleisle march* was long a general favourite. It filled the minds of our people with magnificent ideas of armies, and conquest, and military splendor; for they believed it to be the tune that was

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played by the French garrison when it marched out with the honours of war, and surrendered that fortress to the British troops. — The flute of a shepherd, heard at a distance, in a fine summer day, amidst a beautiful scene of groves, hills, and waters, will give rapture to the ear of the wanderer, though the tune, the instrument, and the musician, be such as he could not endure in any other place. — If a song, or piece of music, should call up only a faint remembrance, that we were happy the last time we heard it, nothing more would be needful to make us listen to it again with peculiar satisfaction.

It is an amiable prejudice that people generally entertain in favour of their national music. This lowest degree of patriotism is not without its merit: and that man must have a hard heart, or dull imagination, in whom, though endowed with musical sensibility, no sweet emotions would arise, on hearing, in his riper years, or in a foreign land, those strains that were the delight of his childhood. What though they be inferior to the Italian? What though they be even irregular and rude? It is not their merit, which in the case supposed would interest a native, but the charming ideas they would recal to his mind: — ideas of innocence, simplicity, and leisure, of romantic enterprise, and enthusiastic attachment; and of scenes, which, on recollection, we are inclined to think, that a brighter sun illuminated, a fresher verdure crowned, and purer skies and happier climes conspired to beautify, than are now to be seen in the dreary paths of care and disappointment, into which men, yielding to the passions peculiar to more advanced years, are tempted to wander. — There are couplets in Ogilvie's Translation of Virgil, which I could never read without emotions far more ardent than the merit of the numbers would justify. But it was that book which first taught me "the tale of Troy divine," and first made acquainted with poetical sentiments; and though I read

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it when almost an infant, it conveyed to my heart some pleasing impressions, that remain there unimpaired to this day.

There is a dance in Switzerland, which the young shepherds perform to a tune played on a sort of bag-pipe. The tune is called *Rance des vaches*; it is wild and irregular, but has nothing in its composition that could recommend it to our notice. But the Swifs are so intoxicated with this tune, that if at any time they hear it, when abroad in foreign service, they burst into tears; and often fall sick, and even die, of a passionate desire to revisit their native country; for which reason, in some armies where they serve, the playing of this tune is prohibited *. This tune, having been the attendant of their childhood and early youth, recalls to their memory those regions of wild beauty and rude magnificence, those days of liberty and peace, those nights of festivity, those happy assemblies, those tender passions, which formerly endeared to them their country, their homes, and their employments; and which, when compared with the scenes of uproar they are now engaged in, and the servitude they now undergo, awaken such regret as entirely overpowers them.

S E C T. III.

Conjectures on some peculiarities of National Music.

There is a certain style of melody peculiar to each musical country, which the people of that country are apt to prefer to every other style. That they should prefer their own, is not surprising;

* Rousseau. Dictionnaire de Musique, art. *Rance des vaches*.

and that the melody of one people should differ from that of another, is not more surprizing, perhaps, than that the language of one people should differ from that of another. But there is something not unworthy of notice in the particular expression and style that characterise the music of one nation or province, and distinguish it from every other sort of music. Of this diversity Scotland supplies a striking example. The native melody of the highlands and western isles is as different from that of the southern part of the kingdom, as the Irish or Frise language is different from the English or Scotch. In the conclusion of a discourse on music as it relates to the mind, it will not perhaps be impertinent to offer a conjecture on the cause of these peculiarities; which, though it should not (and indeed I am satisfied that it will not) fully account for any one of them, may however incline the reader to think that they are not unaccountable, and may also throw some faint light on this part of philosophy.

Every thought that partakes of the nature of passion, has a correspondent expression in the look and gesture: and so strict is the union between the passion and its outward sign, that, where the former is not in some degree felt, the latter can never be perfectly natural, but, if assumed, becomes awkward mimicry, instead of that genuine imitation of nature, which draws forth the sympathy of the beholder. If, therefore, there be, in the circumstances of particular nations or persons, any thing that gives a peculiarity to their passions and thoughts, it seems reasonable to expect, that they will also have something peculiar in the expression of their countenance, and even in the form of their features. Caius Marius, Jugurtha, Tamerlane, and some other great warriors, are celebrated for a peculiar ferocity of aspect, which they had no doubt contracted from a perpetual and unrestrained exertion of fortitude, contempt, and other violent emotions. These produced in the face their correspondent expressions, which

which being often repeated, became at last as habitual to the features, as the sentiments they arose from were to the heart. Savages, whose thoughts are little inured to controul, have more of this significancy of look, than those men, who, being born and bred in civilized nations, are accustomed from their childhood to suppress every emotion that tends to interrupt the peace of society. And while the bloom of youth lasts, and the smoothness of feature peculiar to that period, the human face is less marked with any strong character, than in old age:—a peevish or surly stripling may elude the eye of the physiognomist; but a wicked old man, whose visage does not betray the evil temperature of his heart, must have more cunning than it would be prudent for him to acknowledge. Even by the trade or profession the human countenance may be characterised. They who employ themselves in the nicer mechanic arts, that require the earnest attention of the artist, do generally contract a fixedness of feature suited to that one uniform sentiment which engrosses them while at work. Whereas, other artists, whose work requires less attention, and who may ply their trade and amuse themselves with conversation at the same time, have for the most part smoother and more unmeaning faces: their thoughts are more miscellaneous, and therefore their features are less fixed in one uniform configuration. A keen penetrating look indicates thoughtfulness and spirit: a dull torpid countenance is not often accompanied with great sagacity.

This, though there may be many an exception, is in general true of the visible signs of our passions; and it is no less true of the audible. A man habitually peevish, or passionate, or querulous, or imperious, may be known by the sound of his voice, as well as by his physiognomy. May we not go a step farther, and say, that if a man under the influence of any passion were to compose a discourse, or a poem, or a tune, his work would in some measure

measure exhibit an image of his mind? I could not easily be persuaded, that Swift and Juvenal were men of sweet tempers; or that Thomson, Arbuthnot, and Prior were ill-natured. The airs of Felton are so uniformly mournful, that I can not suppose him to have been a merry, or even a chearful man. If a musician, in deep affliction, were to attempt to compose a lively air, I believe he would not succeed: though I confess I do not well understand the nature of the connection that may take place between a mournful mind and a melancholy tune. It is easy to conceive, how a poet or an orator should transfuse his passions into his work: for every passion suggests ideas congenial to its own nature; and the composition of the poet, or of the orator, must necessarily consist of those ideas that occur at the time he is composing. But musical sounds are not the signs of ideas; rarely are they even the imitations of natural sounds: so that I am at a loss to conceive how it should happen, that a musician, overwhelmed with sorrow, for example, should put together a series of notes, whose expression is contrary to that of another series which he had put together when elevated with joy. But of the fact I am not doubtful; though I have not sagacity, or knowledge of music, enough to be able to explain it. And my opinion in this matter is warranted by that of a more competent judge; who says, speaking of church-voluntaries, that if the Organist “do not feel in himself the divine energy of devotion, he
 “will labour in vain to raise it in others. Nor can he hope to
 “throw out those happy instantaneous thoughts, which some-
 “times far exceed the best concerted compositions, and which
 “the enraptured performer would gladly secure to his future
 “use and pleasure, did they not as fleetly escape as they arise *.”
 A man who has made music the study of his life, and is well ac-

* Avison on Musical Expression, pag. 88. 89.

quainted with all the best examples of style and expression that are to be found in the works of former masters, may, by memory and much practice, attain a sort of mechanical dexterity in contriving music suitable to any given passion; but such music would, I presume, be vulgar and spiritless, compared to what an artist of genius throws out, when under the power of any ardent emotion. It is recorded of Lulli, that, once when his imagination was all on fire with some verses descriptive of terrible ideas, which he had been reading in a French tragedy, he ran to his harpsichord, and struck off such a combination of sounds, that the company felt their hair stand on end with horror.

Let us therefore suppose it proved, or, if you please, take it for granted, that different sentiments in the mind of the musician will give different and peculiar expressions to his music;—and upon this principle, it will not perhaps be impossible to account for some of the phenomena of a national ear.

The highlands of Scotland are a picturesque, but in general a melancholy country. Long tracts of mountainous desert, covered with dark heath, and often obscured by misty weather; narrow vallies, thinly inhabited, and bounded by precipices resounding with the fall of torrents; a soil so rugged, and a climate so dreary, as in many parts to admit neither the amusements of pasturage, nor the labours of agriculture; the mournful dashing of waves along the friths and lakes that intersect the country; the portentous noises which every change of the wind, and every increase and diminution of the waters, is apt to raise, in a lonely region, full of echoes, and rocks, and caverns; the grotesque and ghastly appearance of such a landscape by the light of the moon:—objects like these diffuse a gloom over the fancy, which may be compatible enough with occasional and social merriment, but cannot fail to tincture the thoughts of a native in the hour of silence and solitude. If these people, notwithstanding their reformation

mation in religion, and more frequent intercourse with strangers, do still retain many of their old superstitions, we need not doubt but in former times they must have been much more enslaved to the horrors of imagination, when beset with the bugbears of Popery, and the darkness of Paganism. Most of their superstitions are of a melancholy cast. That *Second Sight*, wherewith some of them are still supposed to be haunted, is considered by themselves as a misfortune, on account of the many dreadful images it is said to obtrude upon the fancy. I have been told, that the inhabitants of some of the Alpine regions do likewise lay claim to a sort of second sight. Nor is it wonderful, that persons of lively imagination, immured in deep solitude, and surrounded with the stupendous scenery of clouds, precipices, and torrents, should dream, even when they think themselves awake, of those few striking ideas with which their lonely lives are diversified; of corpses, funeral processions, and other objects of terror; or of marriages, and the arrival of strangers, and such like matters of more agreeable curiosity *. Let it be observed also, that
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* I do not find sufficient evidence for the reality of *second sight*, or at least of what is commonly understood by that term. A treatise on the subject was published in the year 1762, in which many tales were told of persons, whom the author believed to have been favoured, or haunted, with these illuminations; but most of the tales were trifling and ridiculous: and the whole work betrayed on the part of the compiler such extreme credulity, as could not fail to prejudice many readers against his system. — That any of these visionaries are liable to be swayed in their declarations by sinister views, I will not say; though a gentleman of character assured me, that one of them offered to sell him this unaccountable talent for half a crown. But this I think may be said with confidence, that none but ignorant people pretend to be gifted in this way. And in them it may be nothing more, perhaps, than short fits of sudden sleep or drowsiness attended with lively dreams, and arising from some bodily disorder, the effect of idleness, low spirits, or a gloomy imagination. For it is admitted, even by the most credulous
highlanders,

the ancient highlanders of Scotland had hardly any other way of supporting themselves, than by hunting, fishing, or war, professions that are continually exposed to fatal accidents. And hence, no doubt, additional horrors would often haunt their solitude, and

highlanders, that, as knowledge and industry are propagated in their country, the second sight disappears in proportion: and nobody ever laid claim to this faculty, who was much employed in the intercourse of social life. Nor is it at all extraordinary, that one should have the appearance of being awake, and should even think one's self so, during these fits of dozing; or that they should come on suddenly, and while one is engaged in some business. The same thing happens to persons much fatigued, or long kept awake, who frequently fall asleep for a moment, or for a longer space, while they are standing, or walking, or riding on horseback. Add but a lively dream to this slumber, and (which is the frequent effect of disease) take a way the consciousness of having been asleep; and a superstitious man, who is always hearing and believing tales of second sight, may easily mistake his dream for a waking vision: which however is soon forgotten when no subsequent occurrence recalls it to his memory; but which, if it shall be thought to resemble any future event, exalts the poor dreamer into a highland prophet. This conceit makes him more reclusive and more melancholy than ever, and so feeds his disease, and multiplies his visions; which, if they are not dissipated by business or society, may continue to haunt him as long as he lives; and which, in their progress through the neighbourhood, receive some new tincture of the marvellous from every mouth that promotes their circulation. — As to the prophetic nature of this second-sight, it cannot be admitted at all. That the Deity should work a miracle, in order to give intimation of the frivolous things that these tales are made up of, the arrival of a stranger, the nailing of a coffin, or the colour of a suit of cloaths; and that these intimations should be given for no end, and to those persons only who are idle and solitary, who speak Erse, or who live among mountains and deserts, — is like nothing in nature or providence that we are acquainted with; and must therefore, unless it were confirmed by satisfactory proof, (which is not the case), be rejected as absurd and incredible. The visions, such as they are, may reasonably enough be ascribed to a disordered fancy. And that in them, as well as in our ordinary dreams, certain appearances should, on some rare occasions, resemble certain events, is to be expected from the laws of chance; and seems to have in it nothing more marvellous or supernatural, than

and a deeper gloom overshadow the imagination even of the hardiest native.

What then would it be reasonable to expect from the fanciful tribe, from the musicians and poets, of such a region? Strains,

that the parrot, who deals out his feurrilities at random, should sometimes happen to salute the passenger by his right appellation.

But, whatever the reader may think of these remarks, or of their pertinency to the present subject, I am sure I shall not be blamed for quoting, from a poem little known, the following very picturesque lines; which may show, that what in history or philosophy would make but an awkward figure, may sometimes have a charming effect in poetry.

E'er since of old the haughty Thanes of Rofs
 (So to the simple swain tradition tells)
 Were wont, with clans and ready vassals throng'd,
 To wake the bounding stag, or guilty wolf;
 There oft is heard at midnight, or at noon,
 Beginning faint, but rising still more loud
 And nearer, voice of hunters and of hounds,
 And horns, hoarse-winded, blowing far and keen.
 Forthwith the hubbub multiplies; the gale
 Labours with wilder shrieks, and ruder din
 Of hot pursuit; the broken cry of deer
 Mangled by throttling dogs; the shouts of men,
 And hoofs thick-beating on the hollow hill.
 Sudden, the grazing heifer in the vale
 Starts at the tumult, and the herdsman's ears
 Tingle with inward dread. Aghast he eyes
 The mountain's height, and all the ridges round;
 Yet not one trace of living wight discerns:
 Nor knows, o'eraw'd and trembling as he stands,
 To what, or whom, he owes his idle fear,
 To ghost, to witch, to fairy, or to fiend;
 But wonders; and no end of wondering finds.

ALBANIA, a poem. London, 1737, folio.

expressive

expressive of joy, tranquillity, or the softer passions? No: their style must have been better suited to their circumstances. And so we find in fact that their music is. The wildest irregularity appears in its composition: the expression is warlike, and melancholy, and approaches even to the terrible. — And that their poetry is almost uniformly mournful, and their views of nature dark and dreary, will be allowed, by all who admit the authenticity of Ossian; and not doubted by any who believe those fragments of highland poetry to be genuine, which many old people, now alive, of that country, remember to have heard in their youth, and were then taught to refer to a pretty high antiquity.

Some of the southern provinces of Scotland present a very different prospect. Smooth and lofty hills covered with verdure; clear streams winding through long and beautiful vallies; trees produced without culture, here straggling or single, and there crowding into little groves and bowers; — with other circumstances peculiar to the districts I allude to, render them fit for pasturage, and favourable to romantic leisure and tender passions. Several of the old Scotch songs take their names from the rivulets, villages, and hills, adjoining to the Tweed near Melrose*; a region distinguished by many charming varieties of rural scenery, and which, whether we consider the face of the country, or the genius of the people, may properly enough be termed the Arcadia of Scotland. And all these songs are sweetly and powerfully expressive of love and tenderness, and other emotions suited to the tranquillity of pastoral life.

It is a common opinion, that these songs were composed by David Rizzio, a musician from Italy, the unfortunate favourite

* Cowdenknows, Galashiels, Galawater, Etterick banks, Braes of Yarrow, Bush above Traquair, &c.

of a very unfortunate queen. But this must be a mistake. The style of the Scotch music was fixed before his time; for many of the best of these tunes are ascribed by tradition to a more remote period. And it is not to be supposed, that he, a foreigner, and in the latter part of his life a man of business, could have acquired or invented a style of musical composition so different in every respect from that to which he had been accustomed in his own country. *Melody* is so much the characteristic of the Scotch tunes, that I doubt whether even basses were set to them before the present century; whereas, in the days of Rizzio, *Harmony* was the fashionable study of the Italian composers. Palestrina himself, who flourished about two hundred and fifty years ago, and who has obtained the high title of Father of Harmony, is by a great master * ranked with those who neglected air, and were too closely attached to counterpoint; and at the time when Rizzio was a student in the art, Palestrina's must have been the favourite music in Italy. — Besides, though the style of the old Scotch melody has been well imitated by Mr Oswald, and some other natives, I do not find that any foreigner has ever caught the true spirit of it. Geminiani, a great and original genius in this art, and a professed admirer of the Scotch songs, (some of which he published with accompaniments), used to say, that he had blotted many a quire of paper to no purpose, in attempting to compose a second strain to that fine little air which in Scotland is known by the name of *The broom of Cowdenknows*. — To all which we may add, that Taffoni, the author of *La Secchia rapita*, speaks of this music as well esteemed by the Italians of his time, and ascribes the invention of it to James King of Scotland: — which a foreigner might naturally do, as all the Scotch

* Avison on Mus. Expression, p. 49. 51.

kings of that name, particularly the first, third, fourth, and fifth, were skilled both in music and poetry.

But though I admit Tassoni's testimony as a proof, that the Scotch music is more ancient than Rizzio, I do not think him right in what he says of its inventor. Nor can I acquiesce in the opinion of those who give the honour of this invention to the monks of Melrose. I rather believe, that it took its rise among men who were real shepherds, and who actually felt the sentiments and affections, whereof it is so very expressive. Rizzio may have been one of the first, perhaps, who made a collection of these songs; or he may have played them with more delicate touches than the Scotch musicians of that time; or perhaps corrected the extravagance of certain passages;—for one is struck with the regularity of some, as well as amused with the wildness of others:—and in all or any of those cases, it might be said with truth, that the Scotch music is under obligations to him:—but that this style of pastoral melody, so unlike the Italian, and in every respect so peculiar, should have been established or invented by him, is incredible; nay, (if it were worth while to assert any thing so positively on such a subject), we might even say impossible.

The acknowledged and unequalled excellence of the Italian music, is one of those phenomena of a National Taste, that may in part be accounted for. Let us recollect some particulars of the history of that period, when this music began to recommend itself to general notice.

Leo the Tenth, and some of his immediate predecessors, had many great vices, and some virtues; and we at this day feel the good effects of both: for Providence has been pleased, in this instance, as in many others, to bring good out of evil, and to accomplish the most glorious purposes by means that seemed to have an opposite tendency. The profusion, and other more scandalous
qualities

qualities of Leo, were instrumental in hastening forward the Reformation : to his liberality and love of art we owe the finest pictures, the finest musical compositions, and some of the finest poems in the world.

The sixteenth century does indeed great honour to Italian genius. The ambition of Alexander the Sixth, and Julius the Second, had raised the Papal power to higher eminence, and settled it on a firmer foundation, than had been known before their time. Leo, therefore, had leisure to indulge his love of luxury and of art ; and the Italians, under his administration, to cultivate the arts and sciences, which many other favourable events conspired to promote. Printing had been lately found out : the taking of Constantinople by the Turks had made a dispersion of the learned, many of whom took refuge in Italy : Leo found, in the treasures accumulated by Julius the Second, and in the ample revenues of the pontificate, the means both of generosity and of debauchery : and when the Pope, and the houses of Medici and Montefeltro, had set the example, it became the fashion all over Italy, to patronise genius, and encourage learning. The first efforts of a literary spirit appeared in translating the Greek authors into Latin ; a tongue which every scholar was ambitious to acquire, and in which many elegant compositions, both verse and prose, were produced about this time in Italy. Fracastorius, Sannazarius, Vida, distinguished themselves in Latin poetry ; Bembo, Casa, Manutius, Sigonius, in Latin prose. But genius seldom displays itself to advantage in a foreign tongue. The cultivation of the Toscan language, since the time of Petrarcha, who flourished one hundred and fifty years before the period we speak of, had been too much neglected ; but was now resumed with the most desirable success ; particularly by Tasso and Ariosto, who carried the Italian poetry to its highest perfection.

The other fine arts were no less fortunate in the hands of Raphael

phael and Palestina. What Homer was in poetry, these authors were in painting and music. Their works are still regarded as standards of good taste, and models for imitation : and though improvement may no doubt have been made since their time, in some inferior branches of their respective arts, particularly in what regards delicacy of manner ; it may with reason be doubted, whether in grandeur of design, and strength of invention, they have as yet been excelled or equalled. Greece owed much of her literary glory to the merit of her ancient authors. They at once fixed the fashion in the several kinds of writing ; and they happened to fix it on the immoveable basis of simplicity and nature. Had not the Italian music in its infant state fallen into the hands of a great genius like Palestina, it would not have arrived at maturity so soon. A long succession of inferior composers might have made discoveries in the art, but could not have raised it above mediocrity : and such people are not of influence enough to render a new art respectable in the eyes, either of the learned, or of the vulgar. But Palestina made his art an object of admiration, not only to his own country, but to a great part of Europe. In England he was studied and imitated by Tallis, in the reign of Henry the Eighth. All good judges were satisfied, that this system of harmony was founded on right principles ; and that, though it might perhaps be improved, nothing in the art could be a real improvement, which was contradictory to it.

In the age of Leo, a genius like Palestina must have been distinguished, even though the art he professed had gratified no important principle of the human mind ; but as his art gratified the religious principle, he could not fail, in those days, and among Italians ; to meet with the highest encouragement. In fact, music since that time has been cultivated in Italy with the utmost attention and success. Scarlatti, Corelli, Geminiani, Martini, Marcello, were all men of extraordinary abilities ; and any one of
them,

them, in the circumstances of Palestina, might perhaps have been as eminent as he. Need we wonder, then, at the unequalled excellence of the Italian music?

But other causes have contributed to this effect. Nobody who understands the language of modern Italy, will deny, that the natives have a peculiar delicacy of perception in regard to vocal sound. This delicacy appears in the sweetness of their verse, in the cadence of their prose, and even in the formation and inflection of their words. Whether it be owing to the climate, or to the influence of the other arts; whether it be derived from their Gothic ancestors, or from their more remote forefathers of ancient Rome; whether it be the effect of weakness or of soundness in the vocal and auditory organs of the people, this national niceness of ear must be considered as one cause of the melody both of their speech and of their music. They are mistaken who think the Italian an effeminate language. Soft it is indeed, and of easy modulation, but susceptible withal of the utmost dignity of sound, as well as of elegant arrangement and nervous phraseology. In history and oratory, it may boast of many excellent models: and its poetry is far superior to that of every other modern nation, except the English. And if it be true, that all music is originally song, the most poetical nation would seem to have the fairest chance to become the most musical. The Italian tongue, in strength and variety of harmony, is not superior, and perhaps not equal, to the English; but, abounding more in vowels and liquid sounds, and being therefore more easily articulated, is fitter for the purposes of music: and it deserves our notice, that poetical numbers were brought to perfection in Italy two hundred years sooner than in any other country of modern Europe.

C H A P. VII.

Of Sympathy.

AS a great part of the pleasure we derive from poetry depends on our Sympathetic Feelings, the philosophy of Sympathy ought always to form a part of the science of Criticism. On this subject, therefore, I beg leave to subjoin a few brief remarks, that may possibly throw light on some of the foregoing, as well as subsequent reasonings.

When we consider the condition of another person, especially if it seem to be pleasurable or painful, we are apt to fancy ourselves in the same condition, and to feel in some degree the pain or pleasure that we think we should feel if we were really in that condition. Hence the good of others becomes in some measure our good, and their evil our evil; the obvious effect of which is, to bind men more closely together in society, and prompt them to promote the good, and relieve the distresses, of one another. Sympathy with distress is called Compassion or Pity: Sympathy with happiness has no particular name; but, when expressed in words to the happy person, is termed Congratulation.

We sympathise, in some degree, even with things inanimate. To lose a staff we have long worn, to see in ruins a house in which we have long lived, may affect us with a momentary concern, though in point of value the loss be nothing. With the dead we sympathise, and even with those circumstances of their condition whereof we know that they are utterly insensible; such as, their

being shut up in a cold and solitary grave, excluded from the light of the sun, and from all the pleasures of life, and liable in a few years to be forgotten for ever. — Towards the brute creation our sympathy is, and ought to be, strong, they being percipient creatures like ourselves. A merciful man is merciful to his beast; and that person would be deemed melancholy or hard-hearted, who should see the frisking lamb, or hear the cheerful song of the lark, or observe the transport of the dog when he finds the master he had lost, without any participation of their joy. There are few passages of descriptive poetry into which we enter with a more hearty fellow-feeling, than where Virgil and Lucretius paint so admirably, the one the sorrow of a steer for the loss of his fellow, the other the affliction of a cow deprived of her calf*. — But our sympathy exerts itself most powerfully towards our fellow-men: and, other circumstances being equal, is stronger or weaker, according as they are more or less nearly connected with us, and their condition more or less similar to our own.

We often sympathise with one another, when the person principally concerned has little sense of either good or evil. We blush for another's ill-breeding, even when we know that he himself is not aware of it. We pity a madman, though we believe him to be happy in his phrensy. We tremble for a mason standing on a high scaffold, though we know that custom has made it quite familiar to him. It gives us pain to see another on the brink of a precipice, though we be secure ourselves, and have no doubt of his circumspection. In these cases, it would seem, that our sympathy is raised, not so much by our reflecting on what others really feel, as by a lively conception of what they would feel if their nature were exactly such as ours; or of what

* Virgil, Georg. iii. vers. 519.; Lucretius, ii. vers. 355.

we ourselves should feel, if we were in their condition, with the same sentiments we have at present *.

Many of our passions may be communicated and strengthened by sympathy. If we go into a chearful company, we become chearful; if into a mournful one, we become sad. The presence of a great multitude engaged in devotion, tends to make us devout. Cowards have behaved valiantly, when all their companions were valiant; and the timidity of a few has struck a panic into a whole army.——We are not, however, much inclined to sympathise with violent anger, jealousy, envy, malevolence, and other sanguinary or unnatural passions: we rather take part against them, and sympathise with those persons who are in danger from them; because we can more easily enter into their distress, and suppose ourselves in their condition. But indignation at vice, particularly at ingratitude, cruelty, treachery, and the like, when we are well acquainted with the case, awakens in us a most intense fellow-feeling: and the satisfaction we are conscious of, when such crimes are adequately punished, though somewhat stern and gloomy, is however sincere, and by no means dishonourable or detrimental to our moral nature; nor at all inconsistent with that pity, which the sufferings of the criminal extort from us, when we are made to conceive them in a lively manner.

Of sympathy all men are not equally susceptible. They who have a lively imagination, keen feelings, and what we call a tender heart, are most subject to it. Habits of attention, the study of the works of nature, and of the best performances in art, experience of adversity, the love of virtue and of mankind, tend greatly to cherish it; and those passions whereof self is the object, as pride, self-conceit, the love of money, sensuality, envy,

* See Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, sect 1.

vanity, have a tendency no less powerful to destroy it. Nothing renders a man more amiable, or more useful, than a disposition to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with those that weep; to enter heartily, not officiously, into the concerns of his fellow-creatures; to comply with the innocent humour of his company, more attentive to them than to himself, and to avoid every occasion of giving pain or offence. And nothing but downright immorality is more disagreeable, than that person is, who affects bluntness of manner, and would be thought at all times to speak all that he thinks, whether people take it well or ill; or than those pedants are, of whatever profession, (for we have them of all professions), who, without minding others, or entering into their views of things, are continually obtruding themselves upon the conversation, and their own concerns, and the sentiments and language peculiar to their own trades and fraternities. This behaviour, though under the name of plain-dealing it may arrogate a superiority to artificial rules, is generally the effect of pride, ignorance, or stupidity, or rather of all the three in conjunction. A modest man, who sympathetically attends to the condition and sentiments of others, will of his own accord make those allowances in their favour, which he wishes to be made in his own; and will think it as much his duty to promote their happiness, as he thinks it theirs to promote his. And such a man is well principled in equity, as well as in good-breeding: and tho', from an imperfect knowledge of forms, or from his having had but few opportunities to put them in practice, his manner may not be so graceful, or so easy, as could be wished, he will never give offence to any person of penetration and good-nature.

With feelings which we do not approve, or have not experienced, we are not apt to sympathise. The distress of the miser when his hoard is stolen, of the fop when he soils his fine jubilee cloaths, of the vaunting coxcomb when his lies are detected, of the

the unnatural parent when his daughter escapes with a deserving lover, is more likely to move laughter than compassion. At Sparta, every father had the privilege of correcting any child; he who had experience of paternal tenderness being supposed incapable of wounding a parent's sensibility by unjust or rigorous chastisement. When the Cardinal of Milan would expostulate with the Lady Constance upon her violent sorrow for the loss of her child, she answers, but without deigning to address her answer to one who she knew could be no competent judge of her case, "He speaks to me who never had a son *."——The Greeks and Romans were as eminent for public spirit, and for parental affection, as we; but, for a reason elsewhere assigned †, knew little of that romantic love between unmarried persons, which modern manners and novels have a tendency to inspire. Accordingly the distress in their tragedies often arose from patriotism, and from the conjugal and filial charities, but not from the romantic passion whereof we now speak. But there are few English tragedies, and still fewer French, wherein some love-affair is not connected with the plot. This always raises our sympathy; but would not have been so interesting to the Greeks or Romans, because they were not much acquainted with the refinements of this passion.

Sympathy, as the means of conveying certain feelings from one breast to another, might be made a powerful instrument of moral discipline, if poets, and other writers of fable, were careful to call forth our sensibility towards those emotions only that favour virtue, and invigorate the human mind. Fictions, that breathe the spirit of patriotism or valour; that make us sympathise with the parental, conjugal, or filial charities; that recommend misfortune to our pity, or expose crimes to our abhorrence,

* King John, act 3. scene 3.

† Essay on Laughter, chap. 4.

may certainly be useful in a moral view, by cherishing passions, that, while they improve the heart, can hardly be indulged to excess. But those dreadful tales, that only give anguish to the reader, can never do any good: they fatigue, enervate, and overwhelm the soul: and when the calamities they describe are made to fall upon the innocent, our moral principles are in some danger of a temporary depravation from the perusal, whatever resemblance the fable may be supposed to bear to the events of real life. Some late authors of fiction seem to have thought it incumbent upon them, not only to touch the heart, but to tear it in pieces. They heap "misfortune on misfortune, grief on grief," without end, and without mercy: which discomposes the reader too much to give him either pleasure or improvement; and is contrary to the practice of the wiser ancients, whose most pathetic scenes were generally short.

It is said, that at the first representation of *the Furies* of Æschylus, the horror of the spectacle was so great, that several women miscarried; which was indeed pathos with a vengeance. But though the truth of that story should be questioned, it admits of no doubt, that objects of grief and horror too much enlarged on by the poet or novelist may do more harm than good, and give more pain than pleasure, to the mind of the reader. Surely this must be contrary to the essential rules of art, whether we consider poetry as intended to please that it may instruct, or to instruct that it may the more effectually please. And supposing the real evils of life to be as various and important as is commonly believed, we must be thought to consult our own interest very absurdly, if we seek to torment ourselves with imaginary misfortune. Horace insinuates, that the ancient *Satyrical Drama* (a sort of burlesque tragi-comedy) was contrived for the entertainment of the more disorderly part of the audience

audience*; and our critics assure us, that the modern farce is addressed to the upper gallery, where, it is supposed, there is no great relish for the sublime graces of the Tragic Muse. Yet I believe these *little pieces*, if consistent with decency, will be found neither unpleasant nor unprofitable even to the most learned spectator. A man, especially if advanced in years, would not chuse to go home with that gloom upon his mind which an affecting tragedy is intended to diffuse: and if the play has conveyed any sound instruction, there is no risk of its being dissipated by a little innocent mirth.

Upon the same principle, I confess, that I am not offended with those comic scenes wherewith our great Dramatic Poet has occasionally thought proper to diversify his tragedies. Such a licence will at least be allowed to be more pardonable in him, than it would be in other Tragic poets. They must make their way to the heart, as an army does to a strong fortification, by slow and regular approaches; because they cannot, like Shakespeare, take it at once, and by storm. In their pieces, therefore, a mixture of comedy might have as bad an effect, as if besiegers were to retire from the outworks they had gained, and leave the enemy at leisure to fortify them a second time. But Shakespeare penetrates the heart by a single effort, and can make us as sad in the present scene, as if we had not been merry in the former. With such powers as he possessed in the pathetic, if he had made his tragedies uniformly mournful or terrible from beginning to end, no person of sensibility would have been able to support the representation.——As to the probability of these mixed compositions, it admits of no doubt. Nature every where presents a similar mixture of tragedy and comedy, of joy and

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 221.

forrow, of laughter and solemnity, in the common affairs of life. The servants of a court know little of what passes among princes and statesmen, and may therefore, like the porter in Macbeth, be very jocular when their superiors are in deep distress. The death of a favourite child is a great affliction to parents and friends; but the man who digs the grave may, like Goodman Delver in Hamlet, be very chearful while he is going about his work. A conspiracy may be dangerous; but the constable who apprehends the traitors may, like Dogberry, be a ludicrous character, and his very absurdities may be instrumental in bringing the plot to light, as well as in delaying or hastening forward the discovery. — I grant, that compositions, like those I would now apologize for, cannot properly be called either tragedies or comedies: but the name is of no consequence; let them be called *Plays*: and if in them nature is imitated in such a way as to give pleasure and instruction, they are as well entitled to the denomination of *Dramatic Poems*, as any thing in Sophocles, Racine, or Voltaire. — But to return:

Love is another “tyrant of the throbbing breast,” of whom they who wish to see the stage transformed into a school of virtue, complain, that his influence in the modern drama is too despotical. Love, kept within due bounds, is no doubt, as the song says, “a gentle and a generous passion;” but no other passion has so strong a tendency to transgress the due bounds: and the frequent contemplation of its various ardours and agonies, as exhibited in plays and novels, can scarce fail to enervate the mind, and to raise emotions and sympathies unfriendly to innocence. And certain it is, that fables in which there is neither love nor gallantry, may be made highly interesting even to the fancy and affections of a modern reader. This appears, not only from the writings of Shakespeare, and other great authors,

but from the *Pilgrim's Progress* of Bunyan, and the history of Robinson Crusoe : than which last, there is not perhaps in any language a more interesting narrative ; or a tale better contrived for communicating to the reader a lively idea of the importance of the mechanic arts, of the sweets of social life, and of the dignity of independence.

3 R

PART

PART II.

OF THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY.

HAVING finished what I intended to say on the general nature of Poetry, as an Imitative Art, I proceed to consider the INSTRUMENT which it employs in its imitations; or, in other words, to explain the General Nature of POETIC LANGUAGE. For *language* is the poet's instrument of imitation, as *sound* is the musician's, and *colour* the painter's. My conclusions on this part of the subject will be found to terminate in the principles already laid down.

Words in Poetry are chosen, first, for their *sense*; and, secondly, for their *sound*. That the first of these grounds of choice is the more excellent, nobody can deny. He who in literary matters prefers sound to sense, is a fool. Yet sound is to be attended to, even in prose; and in verse demands particular attention. I shall consider Poetical Language, first, as SIGNIFICANT; and, secondly, as SUSCEPTIBLE OF HARMONY.

CHAP.

C H A P. I.

Of Poetical Language, considered as significant.

IF, as I have endeavoured to prove, Poetry be imitative of Nature, poetical fictions of real events, poetical images of real appearances in the visible creation, and poetical personages of real human characters; it would seem to follow, that the *language of Poetry* must be an imitation of the *language of Nature*. For nothing but what is supposed to be natural can please; and language, as well as fable, imagery, and moral description, may displease, by being unnatural. — What then is meant by *Natural Language*? This comes to be our first inquiry.

S E C T. I.

An idea of Natural Language.

THE term *Natural Language* has sometimes been used by philosophers to denote those tones of the human voice, attitudes of the body, and configurations of the features, which, being *naturally* expressive of certain emotions of the soul, are universal among mankind, and every where understood. Thus anger, fear, pity, adoration, joy, contempt, and almost every other passion, has a look, attitude, and tone of voice, peculiar to itself; which would seem to be the effect, not of men imitating one another,

other, but of the soul operating upon the body; and which, when well expressed in a picture or statue, or when it appears in human behaviour, is understood by all mankind, as the external sign of that passion which it is for the most part observed to accompany. In this acceptation, *natural language* is contradistinguished to those articulate voices to which the name of *speech* has been appropriated; and which are also universal among mankind, though different in different nations; but derive all their meaning from human compact and *artifice*, and are not understood except by those who have been instructed in the use of them.—But in this inquiry the term *Natural Language* denotes that use of speech, or of *artificial language*, which is suitable to the speaker and to the occasion. “Proper words in proper places,” is Swift’s definition of a good style; and may with equal propriety, serve for a definition of that style, or mode of language, which is here called *Natural*, in contradistinction, not to *artificial* (itself being artificial) but to *unnatural*; and which it is the poet’s business to imitate. I say, *to imitate*: for as poets (for a reason already given) copy nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection, wherein, consistently with verisimilitude, and with the genius of their work, it may be supposed to be; and are therefore said to *imitate* nature, that is, to give a view of nature similar to, but somewhat different from the reality:—so, in forming poetical language, they must take for their model human speech, not in that imperfect state wherein it is used on the common occasions of life, but in that state of perfection, whereof, consistently with verisimilitude, it may be supposed to be susceptible.

But, as we cannot estimate the perfection or imperfection of poetical imagery, till we know the natural appearance of the thing described; so neither can we judge of this perfection of human speech, till we have formed some idea of that quality of language which we express by the epithet *natural*. That some
modes

modes of language are more natural than others, and that one mode may be natural at one time which at another would be unnatural, must be evident even to those who never studied criticism. Would soft words, for example, be natural in the mouth of a very angry man? or do even the vulgar expect blustering expressions from him who melts with pity, or love, or sorrow? Between groans and pain, tears and grief, laughter and jocularity, trembling and fear, the connection is not more natural, than between certain sentiments of the human mind and certain modifications of human language.

Natural language and *good* language are not the same: and Swift's definition, which is equally applicable to both, will not perhaps be found to express adequately the characteristic of either. The qualities of good language are perspicuity, simplicity, elegance, energy, and harmony. But language may possess all these qualities, and yet not be natural. Would the Anacreontic or Ovidian simplicity be natural in the mouth of Achilles upbraiding Agamemnon with his tyranny and injustice; or of Lear defying the tempestuous elements, and imprecating perdition upon his daughters? Would that perspicuity which we justly admire in Cato's soliloquy *, be accounted natural in Hamlet's †, by those who know, that the former is supposed to speak with the rationality of a philosopher, and the latter with the agitation of a young man tortured to madness with sorrow, and love, disappointment, and revenge? Would language so magnificent as that in which the sublime Othello speaks of the pomps and honours of war, be natural in the mouth of the soft, the humble, the broken-hearted Desdemona bewailing her unhappy fate? Or would the sonorous harmony of the Dithyrambic song, or Epic

* It must be so. Plato, thou reason'st well, &c.

† To be, or not to be, &c.

poem, suit the simplicity of shepherds, contending in alternate verse, and praising their mistresses, putting forth riddles, or making remarks upon the weather?—Yet language must always be so far simple as to have no superfluous decoration; so far perspicuous, as to let us see clearly what is meant; and so far elegant, as to give no ground to suspect the author of ignorance, or want of taste.

Good language is determinate and absolute. We know it where-ever we meet with it; we may learn to speak and write it from books alone. Whether pronounced by a clown or a hero, a wise man or an idiot, language is still good if it be according to rule. But natural language is something not absolute but relative; and can be estimated by those only, who have studied men as well as books; and who attend to the real or supposed character of the speaker, as well as to the import of what is spoken.

There are several particulars relating to the speaker which we must attend to, before we can judge whether his expression be natural.—It is obvious, that his *temper* must be taken into the account. From the fiery and passionate we expect one sort of language, from the calm and moderate another. That impetuosity which is natural in Achilles, would in Sarpedon or Ulysses be quite the contrary; as the mellifluent copiousness of Nestor would ill become the blunt rusticity of Ajax. Those diversities of temper, which make men think differently on the same occasion, will also make them speak the same thoughts in a different manner. And as the temper of the same man is not always uniform, but is variously affected by youth and old age, and by the prevalence of temporary passions; so neither will that style which is most natural to him be always uniform, but may be energetic or languid, abrupt or equable, figurative or plain, according to the passions or sentiments that may happen to predominate in his mind.

And

And hence, to judge whether his language be natural, we must attend, not only to the habitual temper, but also to the *present passions*, and even to the *age* of the speaker.—Nor should we overlook his *intellectual peculiarities*. If his thoughts be confused or indistinct, his style must be immethodical and obscure; if the former be much diversified, the latter will be equally copious.—The *external circumstances* of the speaker, his rank and fortune, his education and company, particularly the two last, have no little influence in characterising his style. A clown and a man of learning, a pedantic and a polite scholar, a husbandman and a soldier, a mechanic and a seaman, reciting the same narrative, will, each of them, adopt a peculiar mode of expression, suitable to the ideas that occupy his mind, and to the language he has been accustomed to speak and hear: and if a poet, who had occasion to introduce these characters in a comedy, were to give the same uniform colour of language to them all, the style of that comedy, however elegant, would be unnatural.—Our language is also affected by the very thoughts we utter. When these are lofty or groveling, there is a correspondent elevation or meanness in the language. The style of a great man is generally simple, but seldom fails to partake of the dignity and energy of his sentiments. In Greece and Rome, the corruption of literature was a consequence of the corruption of manners; and the manly simplicity of the old writers disappeared, as the nation became effeminate and servile. Horace and Longinus* scruple not to ascribe the decline of eloquence, in their days, to a littleness of mind, the effect of avarice and luxury. The words of Longinus are remarkable. “The truly eloquent (says he) must possess an exalted and noble mind; for it is not possible for those
“who have all their lives been employed in servile pursuits, to

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 323.—332. Longinus, sect. 9. 44.

“produce

“ produce any thing worthy of immortal renown or general admiration.” In fact, our words not only are the signs, but may be considered as the pictures of our thoughts. The same glow or faintness of colouring, the same consistency or incoherence, the same proportions of great and little, the same degrees of elevation, the same light and shade, that distinguish the one, will be found to characterise the other: and from such a character as Achilles or Othello we as naturally expect a bold, nervous, and animated phraseology, as a manly voice and commanding gesture.—It is hardly necessary to add, that style, in order to be natural, must be adapted to the *sex* and to the *nation* of the speaker. These circumstances give a peculiarity to human thought, and must therefore diversify the modes of human language. I will not say, as some have done, that a lady is always distinguishable by her style and hand-writing, as well as by her voice and features; but I believe it may be truly said, that female conversation, even when learned or philosophical, has, for the most part, an ease and a delicacy, which the greatest masters of language would find it difficult to imitate. The style that Shakespeare has given to Juliet’s nurse, Mrs Quickly, Desdemona, or Katharine, would not suit any male; nor the phraseology of Dogberry or Petruchio, Pistol or Falstaff, any female character. National peculiarities are also to be attended to by those who study natural language in its full extent. We should expect a copious and flowery style from an Asiatic monarch, and a concise and figurative expression from an American chief. A French marquis, and a country-gentleman of England, would not use the same phrases on the same subject, even though they were speaking the same language with equal fluency. And a *valet-de-chambre* newly imported from Paris, or a Scotch footman who had been born and bred in Edinburgh, appearing in an

English.

English comedy, would be censured as an unnatural character, if the poet were to make him speak pure English.

May we not infer, from what has been said, that “Language is then according to nature, when it is suitable to the supposed condition of the speaker?”—meaning by the word *condition*, not only the outward circumstances of *fortune, rank, employment, sex, age, and nation*, but also the internal temperature of the *understanding and passions*, as well as the peculiar nature of the *thoughts* that may happen to occupy the mind. Horace seems to have had this in view, when he said, that “if what is spoken on the stage shall be unsuitable to the *fortunes* of the speaker, both the learned and unlearned part of the audience will be sensible of the impropriety:—For that it is of great importance to the poet to consider, whether the person speaking be a slave or a hero; a man of mature age, or warm with the passions of youth; a lady of rank, or a bustling nurse; a luxurious Assyrian, or a cruel native of Colchis; a mercantile traveller, or a stationary husbandman; an acute Argive, or a dull Boeotian*.”

But Horace’s remark, it may be said, refers more immediately to the style of the drama; whereas we would extend it to poetry, and even to composition, in general. And it may be thought, that in those writings wherein the imitation of human life is less perfect, as in the Epic poem, or wherein the style is uniformly elevated and pure, as in History and Tragedy, this rule of language is not attended to. In what respect, for example, can the style of Livy or Homer be said to be suitable to the condition of the speaker? Have we not, in each author, a great variety of speeches, ascribed to men of different nations, ranks, and characters; who are all, notwithstanding, made to utter a language,

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 112.

that is not only grammatical, but elegant and harmonious? Yet no reader is offended; and no critic ever said, that the style of Homer or Livy is unnatural.

The objection is plausible: But a right examination of it will be found not to weaken, but to confirm and illustrate the present doctrine. I say, then, that language is natural, when it is suited to the supposed condition and circumstances of the speaker.—Now, in history, the speaker is no other than the historian himself; who claims the privilege of telling his tale in his own way; and of expressing the thoughts of other men, where he has occasion to record them, in his own language. All this we must allow to be natural, if we suppose him to be serious. For every man, who speaks without affectation, has a style and a manner peculiar to himself. A person of learning and eloquence, recapitulating on any solemn occasion the speech of a clown, would not be thought in earnest if he did not express himself with his wonted propriety. It would be difficult, perhaps he would find it impossible, to imitate the hesitation, barbarisms, and broad accent, of the poor man; and if he were to do so, he would affront his audience, and, instead of being thought a natural speaker, or capable of conducting important business, would prove himself a mere buffoon. Now an historian is a person who assumes a character of great dignity, and addresses himself to a most respectable audience. He undertakes to communicate information, not to his equals only or inferiors, but to the greatest, and most learned men upon earth. He wishes them to listen to him, and to listen with pleasure, to believe his testimony, and treasure up his sayings as lessons of wisdom, to direct them in the conduct of life, and in the government of kingdoms. In so awful a presence, and with views so elevated, what style is it natural for him to assume? A style uniformly serious, and elegant, clear, orderly, and emphatical, set off with modest ornaments to render

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it pleasing, yet plain and simple, and such as becomes a man whose chief concern it is to know and deliver the truth. The moralist and the preacher are in similar circumstances, and will naturally adopt a similar style: only a more sublime and more pathetic energy, and language still plainer than that of the historian, though not less pure, will with reason be expected from those, who pronounce the dictates of divine wisdom, and profess to instruct the meanest, as well as the greatest of mankind, in matters of everlasting importance.

When a man, for the public amusement, assumes any character, it is not necessary, nor possible, for him to impose upon us so far as to make us believe him to be the very person he represents: but we have a right to expect that his behaviour shall not belie his pretensions in any thing material. With all his powers of incantation, Garrick himself will never be able to charm us into a belief, that he is really Macbeth: all that can be done he does; he speaks and acts just as if he were that person: and this is all that the public requires of him. Were he to fall short,—or rather (for we need not suppose what will never happen)—were any other tragedian to fall short of our expectations, and plead, by way of excuse, that truly he was neither a king nor a traitor, neither an ambitious nor a valiant man; and therefore ought not to be blamed for not acting as becomes one; we should more easily pardon the fault, than the apology.—Now it is very true, that an Epic poet is no more inspired than any other writer, and perhaps was never seriously believed to be so. But as he lays claim to inspiration; and before the whole world professes to display the most interesting and most marvellous events, to be particularly informed in regard to the thoughts as well as actions of men, and to know the affairs of invisible beings and the economy of unseen worlds; we have a right to expect from him a language as much elevated above that of history and philosophy,

sophy, as his assumed character and pretensions are higher than those of the historian and philosopher. From such a man, supposed to be invested with such a character, we have indeed a right to require every possible perfection of human thought and language. And therefore, if he were to introduce mean persons talking in their own dialect, it would be as unnatural, as if a great orator, on the most solemn occasion, were to lisp and prattle like a child; or a hero to address his victorious army in the jargon of a gypsy or pickpocket.

In the Epopee, the Muse, or rather the Poet, is supposed to speak from beginning to end; the incidental orations ascribed to Therites or Nestor, to Ulysses or Polypheme, to Ascanius or Eneas, to Satan or Raphael, not being delivered, as in tragedy, by the several speakers in their own persons, but rehearsed by the poet in the way of narrative. These orations, therefore, must not only be adapted to the characters of those to whom they are ascribed, and to the occasion upon which they are spoken, but must also partake of the supposed dignity of the poet's character. And if so, they must be elevated to the general pitch of the composition; even though they be said to have been uttered by persons from whom, in common life, elegance of style would not have been expected. And a certain degree of the same elevation must adhere to every description in Epic poetry, though the thing described should be comparatively unimportant: — which is no more than we naturally look for, when an eloquent man, in a solemn assembly, gives a detail of ordinary events, or recapitulates, in his own style and manner, the sentiments of an illiterate peasant. So that in the Epic poem, (and in all serious poetry, narrative or didactic, wherein the poet is the speaker), language, in order to be natural, must be suited to the assumed or supposed character of the poet, as well as to the occasion and subject. Polyphemus, in a farce or comedy, might speak clownishly; be-
cause

cause he there appears in person, and rusticity is his character : but Homer and Virgil, rehearsing a speech of Polyphemus, would indeed deliver thoughts suitable to his character and condition, but would express them in their own elegant and harmonious language. — And hence we see, how absurdly those critics argue, who blame Virgil for making Eneas *too poetical* (as they are pleased to phrase it) in the account he gives Dido of his adventures. They might with equal reason affirm, that every person in the Iliad and Odyssey, as well as Eneid, speaks too poetically. The mistake arises from confounding Epic with Dramatic composition, and supposing that the heroes both of the one and of the other speak in their own persons. Whereas, in the first the poet is the only speaker, and in the last he never speaks at all : nay, the first is nothing more, from beginning to end, but a narration, or speech, delivered by a person assuming, and pretending to support, the character of an inspired poet. In the style, therefore, of the Epopee, the poetic character must every where predominate, as well as the heroic ; because a speech, in order to appear natural, must be suited to the supposed character of the speaker, as well as to the things and persons spoken of.

The puns that Milton ascribes to his devils, on a certain occasion *, are generally and justly condemned. It has, however, been urged, as an apology for them, that they are uttered by evil beings, who may be supposed to have lost, when they fell, all taste for elegance, as well as for virtue ; and that the poet, on this one occasion, might have intended to make them both detestable as devils, and despicable as buffoons. But this plea cannot be admitted. For the fiends of Milton, notwithstanding their extreme wickedness, retain an elevation of mind, without which they could not have appeared in an Epic poem, and which is in-

* Paradise Lost, book 6. vers. 609. — 627.

consistent with the futility of a buffoon or witling. Granting, then, (what is not likely), that the poet, in this one instance, meant to render them contemptible for their low wit, he must yet be blamed for assigning them a part so repugnant to their general character. Or, even if he could be vindicated on this score, he is liable to censure for having put so paltry a part of his narration in the mouth of the holy angel Raphael. Or, if even for this we were to pardon him, still he is inexcusable, for having forgotten the assumed dignity of his own character so far, as to retail those wretched quibbles; which, whether we suppose them to be uttered by an angel, a devil, or an epic poet, are grossly unnatural, because totally unsuitable to the condition and character of the speaker. — A mind possessed with great ideas does not naturally attend to such as are trifling*; and, while actuated by admiration, and other important emotions, will not be apt to turn its view to those things that provoke contempt or laughter. Such we suppose the mind of every sublime writer to be; and such in fact it must be, as long at least as he employs himself in

* Who that, from Alpine heights, his labouring eye
Shoots round the wide horizon, to survey
The Nile or Ganges roll his wasteful tide
Through mountains, plains, through empires black with shade,
And continents of sand, will turn his gaze
To mark the windings of a scanty rill,
That murmurs at his feet? *Pleasures of Imagination, book 1.*

"The meditations," says a very ingenious writer, (speaking of the view from Mount Etna), "are ever elevated in proportion to the grandeur and sublimity of the objects that surround us; and here, where you have all nature to rouse your imagination, what man can remain inactive?" See the whole passage; which, from its sublimity, one would be tempted to think had been composed on the spot; *Brydon's Travels, letter 10.*

sublime

sublime composition. Mean language, therefore, or ludicrous sentiment, are unnatural in an Epic poem, for this reason, among others, that they do not naturally occur while one is composing it. And hence Milton's humorous description of the *limbo of Vanity* *, however just as an allegory, however poignant as a satire, ought not to have obtained a place in *Paradise Lost*. Such a thing might suit the volatile genius of Ariosto and his followers; but is quite unworthy of the sober and well-principled disciple of Homer and Virgil.

In Dramatic Poetry, the persons act and speak in their own character, and the author never appears at all. An elevated style may, however, be natural in tragedy, on account of the high rank of the persons, and of the important affairs in which they are engaged. Even Comedy, who takes her characters from the middle and lower ranks of mankind, may occasionally lift up her voice, as Horace says †, when she means to give utterance to any important emotion, or happens to introduce a personage of more than ordinary dignity. — But what if persons of low condition should make their appearance in Tragedy? And as the great must have attendants, how can this be guarded against? And if such persons appear, will not their language be unnatural, if raised to a level with that of their superiors? Or, would it not give a motley cast to the poem, if it were to fall below that level? — No doubt, an uniform colour of language, though not essential to Tragi-comedy, or to the Historic drama, is indispensable in a regular tragedy. But persons of mean rank, if the tragic poet find it necessary to bring them in, may easily be supposed to have had advantages of education to qualify them for bearing a part in the dialogue, or for any other office in which he may think proper to employ them. — Besides, language ad-

* *Paradise Lost*, book 3. vers. 444.

† Hor. *Ar. Poet.* vers. 92.

mits of many degrees of elevation; and a particular turn of fancy, or temperature of the passions, will sometimes give wonderful sublimity to the style even of a peasant or of a savage. So that the style of tragedy, notwithstanding its elevation, may be as various as the characters and passions of men, and may yet in each variety be natural. — Moreover, the subject, and consequently the emotions, of tragedy, are always important; and important emotions prevailing in the mind of a peasant will exalt and invigorate his language. When the old shepherd in *Douglas* exclaims, “Blest be the day that made me a poor man; My poverty has saved my master’s house;” the thought and the words, though sufficiently tragical, have no greater elevation, than we should expect from any person of his character and circumstances. Simplicity of style, for which none are disqualified by the meanness of their condition, often enforces a sublime or pathetic sentiment with the happiest effect. — Let it be observed further, that poetical language is an imitation of real language improved to a state of perfection; and therefore, that the style of tragedy, though raised above that of common life, will never offend, so long as its elevations are at all consistent with probability. In fact, when the passions are well expressed, and the characters well drawn, a tragic poet needs not fear, that he shall be found fault with for the elegance of his language: tho’ no doubt a great master will always know how to proportion the degree of elegance to the character of the speaker.

The dignity of a Tragic hero may be so great as to require an elevation of language equal to the pitch of Epic poetry itself. This might be exemplified from many of the speeches of Lear, Othello, Hamlet, and Cato, and of Samson in the Agonistes. But, in general, the Epic style is to be distinguished from the Tragic, by a more uniform elevation, and more elaborate harmony: because a poet, assuming the character of calm inspiration,

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and rather relating the feelings of others, than expressing his own, would speak with more composure, steadiness, and art, than could reasonably be expected from those who deliver their thoughts according to the immediate impulse of passion.

The language of Comedy is that of common life improved in point of correctness; but not much elevated; — both because the speakers are of the middle and lower ranks of mankind, and also because the affairs they are engaged in give little scope to those emotions that exalt the mind, and rouse the imagination. — As to the style of farce, which is frequently blended with comedy; — it is purposely degraded below that of common life; or rather, it is the ridiculous language of common life made more ridiculous. I have already remarked, that Farce is to Poetry, what Caricatura is to Painting: as in the last we look for no beauty of attitude or feature, so neither in the first do we expect elegance of diction. Absurdity of thought produces absurdity of words and behaviour: the true farcical character is more extravagantly and more uniformly absurd, than the droll of real life; and his language, in order to be natural, must be exaggerated accordingly. Yet as nothing is esteemed in the fine arts, but what displays the ingenuity of the artist, I should imagine, that, even in a farce, one would not receive much pleasure from mere incongruity of words or actions; because that may be so easily invented. Studied absurdity cannot be entertaining, unless it be in some degree uncommon*.

We may therefore repeat, and lay it down as a maxim, That “language is natural, when it is suited to the speaker’s condition, character, and circumstances.” And as, for the most part, the images and sentiments of serious poetry are copied from the images and sentiments, not of real, but of improved, na-

* Essay on Laughter, chap. 3.

ture *; so the language of serious poetry must (as hinted already) be a transcript, not of the real language of nature, which is often dissonant and rude, but of natural language improved as far as may be consistent with probability, and with the supposed character of the speaker. If this be not the case, if the language of poetry be such only as we hear in conversation, or read in history, it will, instead of delight, bring disappointment: because it will fall short of what we expect from an art which is recommended rather by its pleasurable qualities, than by its intrinsic utility; and to which, in order to render it pleasing, we grant higher privileges, than to any other kind of literary composition, or any other mode of human language.

The next inquiry must therefore be, “How is the language of nature to be improved?” or rather, “What are those improvements that peculiarly belong to the language of poetry?”

S E C T. II.

Natural language is improved in poetry by the use of Poetical words.

ONE mode of improvement peculiar to poetical diction results from the use of those words, and phrases, which, because they rarely occur in prose, and frequently in verse, are by the grammarian and lexicographer termed *Poetical*. In these some languages abound more than others: but no language I am acquainted with is altogether without them; and perhaps no language can

* See above, part I. chap. 3. 4. 5.

be so, in which any number of good poems have been written. For poetry is better remembered than prose, especially by poetical authors; who will always be apt to imitate the phraseology of those they have been accustomed to read and admire: and thus, in the works of poets, down through successive generations, certain phrases may have been conveyed, which, though originally perhaps in common use, are now confined to poetical composition. Prose-writers are not so apt to imitate one another, at least in words and phrases; both because they do not so well remember one another's phraseology, and also because their language is less artificial, and must not, if they would make it easy and flowing, (without which it cannot be elegant), depart essentially from the style of correct conversation. Poets too, on account of the greater difficulty of their numbers, have, both in the choice and in the arrangement of words, a better claim to indulgence, and stand more in need of a discretionary power.

The language of Homer differs materially from what was written and spoken in Greece in the days of Socrates. It differs in the mode of inflection, it differs in the syntax, it differs even in the words; so that one might read Homer with ease, who could not read Xenophon; or Xenophon, without being able to read Homer. Yet I cannot believe, that Homer, or the first Greek poet who wrote in his style, would make choice of a dialect quite different from what was intelligible in his own time; for poets have in all ages written with a view to be read, and to be read with pleasure; which they could not be, if their diction were hard to be understood. It is more reasonable to suppose, that the language of Homer is according to some ancient dialect, which, though not perhaps in familiar use among the Greeks at the time he wrote, was however intelligible. From the Homeric to the Socratic age, a period had elapsed of no less than four hundred years; during which the style both of discourse and of writing must have un-

dergone great alterations. Yet the *Iliad* continued the standard of heroic poetry, and was considered as the very perfection of poetical language; notwithstanding that some words in it were become so antiquated, or so ambiguous, that Aristotle himself seems to have been somewhat doubtful in regard to their meaning*. And if Chaucer's merit as a poet had been as great as Homer's, and the English tongue under Edward the Third, as perfect as the Greek was in the second century after the Trojan war, the style of Chaucer would probably have been our model for poetical diction at this day; even as Petrarcha, his contemporary, is still imitated by the best poets of Italy.

I have somewhere read, that the rudeness of the style of Ennius was imputed by the old critics to his having copied too closely the dialect of common life. But this, I presume, must be a mistake. For, if we compare the fragments of that author with the comedies of Plautus, who flourished in the same age, and whose language was certainly copied from that of common life, we shall be struck with an air of antiquity in the former, that is not in the latter. Ennius, no doubt, like most other sublime poets, affected something of the antique in his expression: and many of his words and phrases, not adopted by any prose-writer now extant, are to be found in Lucretius and Virgil, and were by them transmitted to succeeding poets. These form part of the Roman poetical dialect; which appears from the writings of Virgil, where we have it in perfection, to have been very copious. The style of this charming poet is indeed so different from prose, and is altogether so peculiar, that it is perhaps impossible to analyse it on the common principles of Latin grammar. And yet no author can be more perspicuous or more expressive; notwithstanding the frequency of Grecism in his syntax, and his love of old words,

* Aristot. Poet. cap. 25-

which he, in the judgement of Quintilian, knew better than any other man how to improve into decoration *.

The poetical dialect of modern Italy is so different from the prosaic, that I have known persons who read the historians, and even spoke with tolerable fluency the language of that country, but could not easily construe a page of Petrarcha or Tasso. Yet it is not probable, that Petrarcha, whose works are a standard of the Italian poetical diction †, made any material innovations in his native tongue. I rather believe, that he wrote it nearly as it was spoken in his time, that is, in the fourteenth century; omitting only harsh combinations, and taking that liberty which Homer probably, and Virgil certainly, took before him, of reviving such old, but not obsolete expressions, as seemed peculiarly significant and melodious; and polishing his style to that degree of elegance which human speech, without becoming unnatural, may admit of, and which the genius of poetry, as an art subservient to pleasure, may be thought to require.

The French poetry in general is distinguished from prose rather by the rhyme and the measure, than by any old or uncommon phraseology. Yet the French, on certain subjects, imitate the style of their old poets, of Marot in particular; and may therefore be said to have something of a poetical dialect, tho' far less extensive than the Italian, or even than the English. And it may, I think, be presumed, that in future ages they will have more of this dialect than they have at present. This I would infer from the very uncommon merit of some of their late poets, particularly Boileau and La Fontaine, who, in their respective departments, will continue to be imitated, when the present modes of

* Quintil. Instit. viii. 3. § 3.

† Vicende della letteratura del Denina, cap. 4.

French prose are greatly changed : an event that, for all the pains they take to preserve their language, must inevitably happen, and whereof there are not wanting some presages already.

The English poetical dialect is not characterised by any peculiarities of inflection, nor by any great latitude in the use of foreign idioms. More copious it is, however, than one would at first imagine. I know of no author who has considered it in the way of detail *. — What follows is but a very short specimen.

1. A few Greek and Latin idioms are common in English poetry, which are seldom or never to be met with in prose. QUENCHED OF HOPE. Shakespeare. — SHORN OF HIS BEAMS.

* Since writing the above, I have had the pleasure to read the following judicious remarks on this subject. “ The language of the age is never the language of poetry, except among the French, whose verse, where the sentiment or image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose. Our poetry, on the contrary, has a language peculiar to itself; to which almost every one that has written has added something, by enriching it with foreign idioms and derivatives; nay, sometimes words of their own composition or invention. Shakespeare and Milton have been great creators this way; and no one more licentious than Pope or Dryden, who perpetually borrow expressions from the former. Let me give you some instances from Dryden, whom every body reckons a great master of our poetical tongue. Full of *useful moppings* — unlike the trim of love — a pleasant *beverage* — a *roundelay* of love — stood silent in his *mood* — with knots and *knarres* deformed — his *ireful mood* — in proud *array* — his *boon* was granted — and *disarray* and shameful rout — *wayward* but wise — *furbished* for the field — *dodder’d* oaks — *disherited* — *smouldering* flames — *retchless* of laws — *crones* old and ugly — the *bellam* at his side — the *grandam* — *hag* — *villanize* his father’s fame. — But they are infinite: and our language not being a settled thing, (like the French), has an undoubted right to words of an hundred years old, provided antiquity have not rendered them unintelligible.”

Mr Gray’s Letters, sect. 3. letter 4.

Milton.

Milton. — *Created thing* NOR VALU'ED HE NOR SHUN'D. Milton. — *'Tis thus we riot, while* WHO SOW IT STARVE. Pope. — *This day* BE BREAD AND PEACE MY LOT. Pope. — INTO WHAT PIT THOU SEE'ST FROM WHAT HEIGHT FALLEN. Milton. — *He deceived The mother of mankind,* WHAT TIME HIS PRIDE HAD CAST HIM *out of heaven.* Milton. — Some of these, with others to be found in Milton, seem to have been adopted for the sake of brevity, which in the poetical tongue is indispensable. For the same reason, perhaps, the articles *a* and *the* are sometimes omitted by our poets, though less frequently in serious than burlesque composition *. — In English, the adjective generally goes before the substantive, the nominative before the verb, and the active verb before (what we call) the accusative. Exceptions, however, to this rule, are not uncommon even in prose. But in poetry they are more frequent. *Their homely joys, and* DESTINY OBSCURE. *Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight; and all the air a solemn stillness holds.* In general, that versification may be less difficult, and the cadence more uniformly pleasing; and sometimes, too, in order to give energy to expression, or vivacity to an image, — the English poet is permitted to take much greater liberties, than the prose-writer, in arranging his words, and modulating his lines and periods. Examples may be seen in every page of *Paradise Lost*.

* In the Greek poetry, the omission of the article is more frequent than the use of it. The very learned and ingenious author of *A Treatise On the origin and progress of Language*, supposes, that in the time of Homer, who established their poetical language, the article was little used by the Greeks: and this supposition appears highly probable, when we consider, that in the Latin, which was derived from the Pelasgic tongue, (a very ancient dialect of Greek), there is no article. Yet, though the article had been in use in Homer's age, I imagine, that he, and every other Greek poet who wrote hexameters, would have often found it *necessary* to leave it out.

2. Some of our poetical words take an additional syllable, that they may suit the verse the better; as, *dispart*, *distain*, *disport*, *afright*, *enchain*, for *part*, *stain*, *sport*, *fright*, *chain*. Others seem to be nothing else than common words made shorter, for the convenience of the versifier. Such are *auxiliar*, *sublunar*, *trump*, *vale*, *part*, *clime*, *submit*, *frolic*, *plain*, *drear*, *dread*, *helm*, *morn*, *mead*, *eve* and *even*, *gan*, *illum* and *illumine*, *ope*, *hoar*, *bide*, *swage*, *seape*; for *auxiliary*, *sublunary*, *trumpet*, *valley*, *depart*, *climate*, *submissive*, *frolicsome*, *complain*, *dreary*, *dreadful*, *helmet*, *morning*, *meadow*, *evening*, *began* or *began to*, *illuminate*, *open*, *hoary*, *abide*, *assuage*, *escape*. — Of some of these the short form is the more ancient. In Scotland, *even*, *morn*, *bide*, *swage*, are still in vulgar use; but *morn*, except when contradistinguished to *even*, is synonymous, not with *morning*, (as in the English poetical dialect), but with *morrow*. — The Latin poets, in a way somewhat similar, and perhaps for a similar reason, shortened *fundamentum*, *tutamentum*, *munimentum*, &c. into *fundamen*, *tutamen*, *munimen* *.

3. Of the following words, which are now almost peculiar to poetry, the greater part are ancient, and were once no doubt in common use in England, as many of them still are in Scotland. *Afield*, *amain*, *annoy* (a noun), *anon*, *aye* (ever), *behest*, *blithe*, *brand* (sword), *bridal*, *carol*, *dame* (lady), *featly*, *fell* (an adjective), *gaude*, *gore*, *host* (army), *lambkin*, *late* (of late), *lay* (poem), *lea*, *glade*, *gleam*, *hurl*, *lore*, *meed*, *orisons*, *plod* (to travel laboriously), *ringlet*, *ruè* (a verb), *ruth*, *ruthless*, *sojourn* (a noun), *snite*, *speed*

* — Quod poetæ alligati ad certam pedum necessitatem, non semper propriis uti possint, sed depulsi a recta via necessario ad eloquendi quædam diverticula confugiant; nec mutare quædam modo verba, sed *extendere*, *corripere*, *convertere*, *dividere*, cogantur. Quintilian.

(an active verb), *save* (except), *spray* (twig), *steed*, *strain* (song), *strand*, *swain*; *thrall*, *thrill*, *trail* (a verb), *troll*, *wail*, *welter*, *warble*, *wayward*, *was*, *the while* (in the mean time), *yon*, *of yore*.

4. These that follow are also poetical; but, so far as I know, were never in common use. *Appal*, *arrowy*, *attune*, *battailous*, *breezy*, *car* (chariot), *clarion*, *cates*, *courser*, *darkling*, *flicker*, *flower-et*, *emblaze*, *gairish*, *circlet*, *impearl*, *nightly*, *noiseless*, *pinion* (wing), *shadowy*, *slumberous*, *streamy*, *troublous*, *wilder* (a verb), *shrink* (a verb), *shook* (shaken), *madding*, *viewless*. — I suspect too, that the following, derived from the Greek and Latin, are peculiar to poetry. *Clang*, *clangor*, *choral*, *bland*, *boreal*, *dire*, *ensanguined*, *ire*, *ireful*, *lave* (to wash), *nymph* (lady, girl), *orient*, *panoply*, *philomel*, *infuriate*, *jocund*, *radiant*, *rapt*, *redolent*, *refulgent*, *verdant*, *vernal*, *zypher*, *zone* (girdle), *sylvan*, *suffuse*.

5. In most languages, the rapidity of pronunciation abbreviates some of the commonest words, or even joins two, or perhaps more, of them, into one; and some of these abbreviated forms find admission into writing. The English language was quite disfigured by them in the end of the last century; but Swift, by his satire and example, brought them into disrepute: and, though some of them be retained in conversation, as *don't*, *shan't*, *can't*, they are now avoided in solemn style; and by elegant writers in general, except where the colloquial dialect is imitated, as in comedy. *'Tis* and *'twas*, since the time of Shaftesbury, seem to have been daily losing credit, at least in prose; but still have a place in poetry; perhaps because they contribute to conciseness. *'Twas on a lofty vase's side*. Gray. *'Tis true, 'tis certain, man though dead retains part of himself*. Pope. In verse too, *over* may be shortened into *o'er*, (which is the Scotch, and probably was the old English, pronunciation), *ever* into *e'er*, and *never* into *ne'er*; and from *the* and *to*, when they go before

a word beginning with a vowel, the final letter is sometimes cut off. *O'er hills, o'er dales, o'er crags, o'er rocks they go.* Pope. *Where-e'er she turns, the Graces homage pay. And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave. Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll.* Gray. *T'alarm th' eternal midnight of the grave.* — These abbreviations are now peculiar to the poetical tongue, but not necessary to it. They sometimes promote brevity, and render versification less difficult.

6. Those words which are commonly called *compound epithets*, as *rosy-finger'd, rosy-bosom'd, many-twinkling, many-sounding, moss-grown, bright-eyed, straw-built, spirit-stirring, incense-breathing, heaven-taught, love-whispering, lute-resounding*, are also to be considered as part of our poetical dialect. It is true we have compounded adjectives in familiar use, as *high-seasoned, well-natured, ill-bred*, and innumerable others. But I speak of those that are less common, that seldom occur except in poetry, and of which in prose the use would appear affected. And that they sometimes promote brevity and vivacity of expression, cannot be denied. But, as they give, when too frequent, a stiff and finical air to a performance; as they are not always explicit in the sense, nor agreeable in the sound; as they are apt to produce a confusion, or too great a multiplicity of images; as they tend to disfigure the language, and furnish a pretext for endless innovation; I would have them used sparingly; and those only used, which the practice of popular authors has rendered familiar to the ear, and which are in themselves peculiarly emphatical and harmonious. For I cannot think, with Dacier and Sanadon, that this well-known verse in Horace's Art of Poetry,

Dixeris egregie, notum si callida verbum
Reddiderit junctura novum——

gives

gives any warrant, even to a Latin poet, for the formation of these compound words; which, if I mistake not, were more fashionable in the days of Ennius, than of Horace and Virgil *.

7. In

* The critics are divided about the meaning of this passage. Horace is speaking of *new words*; which he allows to be sometimes necessary; but which, he says, ought to be *sparingly* and *cautiously* introduced; *In verbis etiam tenuis cantusque ferendis*; and then subjoins the words quoted in the text, *Dixeris egregie*, &c.

1. Some think, that this *callida junctura* refers to the formation of *compound epithets*, as *velivolus*, *faxifragus*, *solivagus*, &c.; and that the import of the precept is this: "Rather than by bringing in a word altogether new, even when a new word is necessary, you should express yourself by two known words artfully joined together into one, so as to assume a new appearance, and to admit a new though analogical signification." This might no doubt be done with propriety in some cases. But I cannot think, that Horace is here speaking of compound words. — For, first, this sort of words were much more suitable to the genius of the Greek than of the Latin tongue; as Quintilian somewhere insinuates, and every body knows who is at all acquainted with these languages. — Secondly, we find in fact, that these words are less frequent in Horace and Virgil, than in the older poets; whence we may infer, that they became less fashionable as the Latin tongue advanced nearer to perfection. — Thirdly, Virgil is known to have introduced three or four new words from the Greek, *Lychni*, *Spelea*, *Thyas*, &c.; but it does not appear, that either Virgil or Horace ever fabricated one of these compound words; and it is not probable, that Horace would recommend a practice, which neither himself nor Virgil had ever warranted by his example. — Fourthly, our author, in his illustrations upon the precept in question, affirms, that new words will more easily obtain currency if taken from the Greek tongue; and Virgil, if we may judge of his opinions by his practice, appears to have been of the same mind. And there was good reason for it. The Greek and Latin are kindred languages; and as the former was much studied at Rome, there was no risk of introducing any obscurity into the Roman language by the introduction of a Greek word. — Lastly, it may be doubted, whether *junctura*, though it often denotes the composition of words in a sentence or clause (Quintil. ix. 4.), and sometimes arrangement or composition in general (Hor. Ar. Poet. verse 242.) — is ever used to express the union of syllables in a word, or of simple words in a compound epithet.

2. Other interpreters suppose, that this *callida junctura* refers to the arrange-

7. In the transformation of nouns into verbs and participles, our poetical dialect admits of greater latitude than prose. Hymn, pillow,

ment of words in the sentence, and that the precept amounts to this: "When a new expression is necessary, you will acquit yourself well, if by means of an artful arrangement you can to a known word give a new signification." But one would think, that the observance of this precept must tend to the utter confusion of language. To give new significations to words in present use, must increase the ambiguity of language; which in every tongue is greater than it ought to be, and which would seem to be more detrimental to eloquence and even to literature, than the introduction of many new words of definite meaning. Those who favour this interpretation give *coma sylvarum* for *folia*, as a phrase to exemplify the precept. But the foliage of a tree is not a new idea, nor could there be any need of a new word or new phrase to express it: though a poet, no doubt, on account of his verse, or on some other account, might chuse to express it by a *figure*, rather than by its *proper* name. *Coma sylvarum* for *folia*, is neither less nor more than a metaphor, or, if you please, a catachresis; but Horace, is speaking, not of figurative language, but of new words. — Both these interpretations suppose, that the words of our poet are to be construed according to this order: *Dixeris egregie, si callida junctura reddiderit notum verbum novum.*

3. The best of all our poet's interpreters, the learned Dr Hurd, construes the passage in the same manner, and explains it thus: "Instead of framing new words, I recommend to you any kind of artful management, by which you may be able to give a new air and cast to old ones." And this explication he illustrates most ingeniously by a variety of examples, that throw great light on the subject of poetical diction. See his notes on the *Ars Poetica*.

I should ill consult my own credit, if I were to oppose my judgement to that of this able critic and excellent author. Yet I would beg leave to say, that to me the poet seems, through this whole passage, from vers. 46. to vers. 72. to be speaking of the *formation of new words*; a practice whereof he allows the danger, but proves the necessity. And I find I cannot divest myself of an old prejudice in favour of another interpretation, which is more obvious and simple, and which I considered as the best, long before I knew it was authorized by that judicious annotator Joannes Bond, and by Dryden in his notes upon the *Eneid*, as well as by the Abbe Batteux in his commentary on Horace's *art of poetry*. "New words" (says the poet) are to be cautiously and sparingly introduced; but, when necessary, an author will do well to give them such a position in the sentence, as

"that

pillow, curtain, story, pillar, picture, peal, surge, cavern, honey, career, cincture, bosom, sphere, are common nouns; but, *to hymn, to pillow, curtained, pillared, pictured, pealing, surging, cavern'd, bonied, careering, cinctured, bosomed, sphered*, would appear affected in prose, though in verse they are warranted by the very best authority.

Some late poets, particularly the imitators of Spenser, have introduced a great variety of uncommon words, as certes, estfoons, ne, whilom, tranfnew, moil, fone, losel, albe, hight, dight, pight, thews, couthful, affot, muchel, wend arrear, &c. These were once poetical words, no doubt; but they are now obsolete, and to many readers unintelligible. No man of the present age, however conversant in this dialect, would naturally express himself in it on any interesting emergence; or, supposing this natural to the antiquarian, it would never appear so to the common hearer or reader. A mixture of these words, therefore, must ruin the pathos of modern language; and as they are not familiar to our ear, and plainly appear to be sought after and affected, will generally give a stiffness to modern versification. Yet in subjects approaching to the ludicrous they may have a good effect; as in the *Schoolmistress* of Shenstone, Parnel's Fairy-tale, Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, and Pope's lines in the *Dunciad* upon Wormius. But this effect will be most pleasing to those who have least occasion to recur to the glossary.

But why, it may be asked, should these old words be more pathetic and pleasing in Spenser, than in his imitators? I an-

“that the reader shall be at no loss to discover their meaning.” For I would construe the passage thus, *Dixeris egregie, si callida junctura reddiderit novum verbum notum*. But why, it may be said, did not Horace, if this was really his meaning, put *novum* in the first line, and *notum* in the second? The answer is easy. His verse would not admit that order: for the first syllable of *novum* is short, and the first syllable of *notum* long.

swer, Because in him they seem, or we believe them to be, natural; in them we are sure that they are affected. In him there is an ease and uniformity of expression, that shows he wrote a language not materially different from what was written by all the serious poets of his time; whereas the mixed dialect of these imitators is plainly artificial, and such as would make any man ridiculous, if he were now to adopt it in conversation. A long beard may give dignity to the portrait, or statue of a hero, whom we know to have been two hundred years in his grave: but the chin of a modern European commander bristling with that antique appendage, would appear awkward and ridiculous. — But did not Spenser himself make use of words that are known to have been obsolete, or merely provincial, in his time? Yes; and those words in Spenser have the same bad effect, that words now obsolete have in his imitators; they are to most readers unintelligible, and to those who understand them appear ludicrous or affected. Some of his Eclogues, and even some passages in the *Fairy Queen*, are liable to this censure. — But what if Spenser had fixed the poetical language of England, as Homer did that of Greece? Would any of his old words in that case have appeared awkward in a modern poem? Perhaps they would not: but let it be observed, that, in that case, they would have been adopted by Milton, and Dryden, and Pope, and by all our serious poets since the age of Elizabeth; and would therefore have been perfectly intelligible to every reader of English verse; and, from our having been so long accustomed to meet with them in the most elegant compositions, would have acquired a dignity equal, or perhaps superior, to that which now belongs to the poetical language of Pope and Milton.

I grant, it is not always easy to fix the boundary between poetical and obsolete expressions. To many readers, *lore*, *meed*, *best*, *blithe*, *gaude*, *spray*, *thrall*, may already appear antiquated; and

and to some the style of Spenser, or even of Chaucer, may be as intelligible as that of Dryden. This however we may venture to affirm, that a word, which the majority of readers cannot understand without a glossary, may with reason be considered as obsolete; and ought not to be used in modern composition, unless revived, and recommended to the public ear, by some very eminent writer. There are but few words in Milton, as *nathless*, *tine*, *frore*, *bosky*, &c.; there are but one or two in Dryden, as *falsify* *; and in Pope, there are none at all, which every reader of our poetry may not be supposed to understand: whereas in Shakespeare there are many, and in Spenser many more, for which one who knows English very well may be obliged to consult the dictionary. The practice of Milton, Dryden, or Pope, may therefore, in almost all cases, be admitted as good authority for the use of a poetical word. And in them, all the words above enumerated, as poetical, and in present use, may actually be found. And of such poets as may chuse to observe this rule, it will not be said, either that they reject the judgement of Quintilian, who recommends the newest of the old words, and the oldest of the new, or that they are unattentive to Pope's precept,

Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside †.

We must not suppose, that these poetical words never occur at all, except in poetry. Even from conversation they are not ex-

* Dryden in one place (Eneid ix. vers. 1095) uses *Falsified* to denote *Pierced through and through*. He acknowledges, that this use of the word is an innovation; and has nothing to plead for it but his own authority, and that *Falsure* in Italian sometimes means the same thing.

† Essay on Criticism, vers. 335.

cluded; and the ancient critics allow, that they may be admitted into prose; where they occasionally confer dignity upon a sublime subject, or, for reasons elsewhere hinted at *, heighten the ludicrous qualities of a mean one. But it is in poetry only, where the frequent use of them does not favour of affectation.

Nor must we suppose them essential to this art. Many passages there are of exquisite poetry, wherein not a single phrase occurs, that might not be used in prose. In fact the influence of these words in adorning English verse is not very extensive. Some influence however they have. They serve to render the poetical style, first, more melodious; and, secondly, more solemn.

First, They render the poetical style more melodious, and more easily reducible into measure. Words of unwieldy size, or difficult pronunciation, are never used by correct poets, where they can be avoided; unless in their sound they have something imitative of the sense. Homer's poetical inflections contribute wonderfully to the sweetness of his numbers: and if the reader is pleased to look back to the specimen I gave of the English poetical dialect, he will find that the words are in general well-sounding, and such as may coalesce with other words, without producing harsh combinations. Quintilian observes, that poets, for the sake of their verse, are indulged in many liberties, not granted to the orator, of lengthening, shortening, and dividing their words †: — and if the Greek and Roman poets claimed this indulgence from necessity, and obtained it, the English, those of them especially who write in rhyme, may claim it with better reason; as the words of their language are less musical, and far less susceptible of variety in arrangement and syntax.

Secondly, Such poetical words as are known to be ancient have something venerable in their appearance, and impart a so-

* Essay on Laughter, chap. 2. sect. 4.

† Instit. Orat. lib. 10. cap. 1. § 3.

lemnity to all around them. This remark is from Quintilian ; who adds, that they give to a composition that cast and colour of antiquity, which in painting is so highly valued, but which art can never effectually imitate *. Poetical words that are either not ancient, or not known to be such, have however a pleasing effect from association. We are accustomed to meet with them in sublime and elegant writing ; and hence they come to acquire sublimity and elegance : — even as the words we hear on familiar occasions come to be accounted familiar ; and as those that take their rise among pickpockets, gamblers, and gypsies, are thought too indelicate to be used by any person of taste or good manners. When one hears the following lines, which abound in poetical words,

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed :

— one is as sensible of the dignity of the language ; as one would be of the vileness or vulgarity of that man's speech, who should prove his acquaintance with Bridewell, by interlarding his discourse with such terms as *mill-doll*, *queer cull*, or *nubbing cheat* † ; or who, in imitation of fops and gamblers, should, on the common occasions of life, talk of being *beat hollow*, or *saving his distance* ‡. — What gives dignity to persons gives dignity to language. A man of this character is one who has borne important employments, been connected with honourable associates, and never degraded himself by levity, or immorality of conduct.

* Lib. 8. cap. 3. § 3.

† See the Scoundrel's Dictionary.

‡ Language of Newmarket.

Dignified phrases are those which have been used to express elevated sentiments, have always made their appearance in elegant composition, and have never been profaned by giving permanency or utterance to the passions of the vile, the giddy, or the worthless. And as by an active old age, the dignity of such men is confirmed and heightened; so the dignity of such words, if they be not suffered to fall into disuse, seldom fails to improve by length of time.

S E C T. III.

Natural Language is improved in poetry, by means of Tropes and Figures.

SO much for the nature and use of those words that are *poetical*, and yet not figurative. But from *Figurative Expression* there arises a more copious and important source of Poetic Eloquence. Some sorts of poetry are distinguished by the beauty, boldness, and frequency of the Figures, as well as by the measure, or by any of the contrivances above mentioned. And in prose we often meet with such figures and words, as we expect only in poetry; in which case the language is called *Poetical*: and in verse we sometimes find a diction so tame, and so void of ornament, that we brand it with the appellation of *Prosaic*.

As my design in this discourse is, not to deliver a system of rhetoric, but to explain the peculiar effects of poetry upon the mind, by tracing out the characters that distinguish this from other literary arts; it would be improper to enter here, with any degree of minuteness, into the philosophy of Tropes and Figures: these being ornamental, not to poetry only, but to human speech.

in

in general. All that the present occasion requires will be performed, when it is shown, in what respects tropical and figurative language is more necessary to poetry than to any other sort of composition.

- If it appear, that, by means of Figures, Language may be made more *pleasing*, and more *natural*, than it would be without them; it will follow, that to Poetic Language, whose end is to *please* by imitating *nature*, Figures must be not only ornamental, but necessary. I shall therefore, first, make a few remarks on the importance and utility of figurative language; secondly, show, that Figures are more necessary to poetry in general, than to any other mode of writing; and, thirdly, assign a reason why they are more necessary in some kinds of poetry than in others.

I. I purpose to make a few remarks on the importance and utility of Figurative Expression, in making language more pleasing and more natural.

1. The first remark is, that Tropes and Figures are often necessary to supply the unavoidable defects of language. When *proper* words are wanting, or not recollected, or when we do not chuse to be always repeating them, we must have recourse to tropes and figures. — When philosophers began to explain the operations of the mind, they found, that most of the words in common use, being framed to answer the more obvious exigencies of life, were in their proper signification applicable to matter only and its qualities. What was to be done in this case? Would they think of making a new language to express the qualities of mind? No: that would have been difficult, or impracticable; and granting it both practicable and easy, they must have foreseen, that nobody would read or listen to what was thus spoken or written in a new, and, consequently, in an unknown, tongue. They therefore took the language as they found it; and, where-ever they thought there was a similarity or analogy

between the qualities of mind and the qualities of matter, scrupled not to use the names of the material qualities tropically, by applying them to the mental qualities. Hence came the phrases, *solidity* of judgement, *warmth* of imagination, *enlargement* of understanding, and many others; which, though figurative, express the meaning just as well as *proper* words would have done. In fact, numerous as the words in every language are, they must always fall short of the unbounded variety of human thoughts and perceptions. Tastes and smells are almost as numerous as the species of bodies. Sounds admit of perceptible varieties that surpass all computation, and the seven primary colours may be diversified without end. If each variety of external perception were to have a name, language would be insurmountably difficult; nay, if men were to appropriate a class of names to each particular sense, they would multiply words exceedingly, without adding any thing to the clearness of speech. Those words, therefore, that in their proper signification denote the objects of one sense, they often apply tropically to the objects of another; and say, sweet taste, sweet smell, sweet sound; sharp point, sharp taste, sharp sound; harmony of sounds, harmony of colours, harmony of parts; soft silk, soft colour, soft sound, soft temper; and so in a thousand instances; and yet these words, in their tropical signification, are not less intelligible than in their proper one; for sharp taste and sharp sound, are as expressive as sharp sword; and harmony of tones is not better understood by the musician, than harmony of parts by the architect, and harmony of colours by the painter.

Savages, illiterate persons, and children, have comparatively but few words in proportion to the things they may have occasion to speak of; and must therefore recur to tropes and figures more frequently, than persons of copious elocution. A seaman, or mechanic, even when he talks of that which does not belong
to

to his art, borrows his language from that which does; and this makes his diction figurative to a degree that is sometimes entertaining enough. “Death (says a seaman in one of Smollet’s novel’s) has not yet *boarded* my comrade; but they have been “*yard arm and yard arm* these *three glaffes*. His *starboard* eye is “open, but fast *jamm’d* in his head; and the *baulyards* of his “under jaw have given way.” These phrases are exaggerated; but we allow them to be natural, because we know that illiterate people are apt to make use of tropes and figures taken from their own trade, even when they speak of things that are very remote and incongruous. In those poems, therefore, that imitate the conversation of illiterate persons, as in comedy, farce, and pastoral, such figures judiciously applied may render the imitation more pleasing, because more exact and natural.

Words that are untuneable and harsh the poet is often obliged to avoid, when perhaps he has no other way to express their meaning than by tropes and figures; and sometimes the measure of his verse may oblige him to reject a proper word that is not harsh, merely on account of its being too long, or too short, or in any other way unsuitable to the rhythm, or to the rhyme. And hence another use of figurative language, that it contributes to poetical harmony. Thus, *to press the plain* is frequently used to signify *to be slain in battle*; *liquid plain* is put for *ocean*, *blue serene* for *sky*, and *sylvan reign* for *country life*.

2. Tropes and Figures are favourable to delicacy. When the proper name of a thing is in any respect unpleasant, a well-chosen trope will convey the idea in such a way as to give no offence. This is agreeable, and even necessary, in polite conversation, and cannot be dispensed with in elegant writing of any kind. Many words, from their being often applied to vulgar use, acquire a meannefs that disqualifies them for a place in serious poetry; while perhaps, under the influence of a different system of manners,

ners, the corresponding words in another language may be elegant, or at least not vulgar. When one reads Homer in the Greek, one takes no offence at his calling Eumeus by a name which, literally rendered, signifies *Swine-herd*; first, because the Greek word is well-sounding in itself; secondly, because we have never heard it pronounced in conversation, nor consequently debased by vulgar use; and, thirdly, because we know, that the office denoted by it was, in the age of Eumeus, both important and honourable. But Pope would have been blamed, if a name so indelicate as *swine-herd* had in his translation been applied to so eminent a personage; and therefore he judiciously makes use of the trope *synecdoche*, and calls him *Swain* *; a word both elegant and poetical, and not likely to lead the reader into any mistake about the person spoken of, as his employment had been described in a preceding passage. The same Eumeus is said, in the simple, but melodious language of the original, to have been making his own shoes when Ulysses came to his door; a work which in those days the greatest heroes would often find necessary. This too the translator softens by a tropical expression:

Here sat Eumeus, and his cares applied
To form strong *bushkins* of well-season'd hide.

A hundred other examples might be quoted from this translation; but these will explain my meaning.

There are other occasions, on which the delicacy of figurative language is still more needful: as in Virgil's account of the effects of animal love, and of the plague among the beasts, in the third Georgic; where Dryden's style, by being less figurative than

* Pope's Homer's *Odyssey*, book 14. vers. 41.

the original, is in one place exceedingly filthy, and in another shockingly obscene.

Hobbes could construe a Greek author; but his skill in words must have been all derived from the dictionary: for he seems not to have known, that any one articulate sound could be more agreeable, or any one phrase more dignified, than any other. In his *Iliad* and *Odyssæy*, even when he hits the author's sense, (which is not always the case), he proves, by his choice of words, that of harmony, elegance, or energy of style, he had no manner of conception. And hence that work, tho' called a Translation of Homer, does not even deserve the name of *poem*; because it is in every respect *unpleasing*, being nothing more than a fictitious narrative delivered in mean prose, with the additional meanness of harsh rhyme, and untuneable measure. — Trapp understood Virgil well enough as a grammarian, and had a taste for his beauties; yet his Translation bears no resemblance to Virgil; which is owing to the same cause, an imprudent choice of words and figures, and a total want of harmony.

I grant, that the delicacy we here contend for may, both in conversation and in writing, be carried too far. To call *killing an innocent man in a duel* an affair of honour, and a *violation of the rights of wedlock* an affair of gallantry, is a prostitution of figurative language. Nor do I think it any credit to us, that we are said to have upwards of forty figurative phrases to denote excessive drinking. Language of this sort generally implies, that the public abhorrence of such crimes is not so strong as it ought to be: and I am not certain, whether even our morals might not be improved, if we were to call these and such like crimes by their proper names, murder, adultery, drunkenness, gluttony; names, that not only express our meaning, but also betoken our disapprobation. — As to writing, it cannot be denied, that even Pope himself, in the excellent version just now quoted, has some-

times,

times, for the sake of his numbers, or for fear of giving offence by too close an imitation of Homer's simplicity, employed tropes and figures too quaint or too solemn for the occasion. And the finical style is in part characterised by the writer's dislike to literal expressions, and affectedly substituting in their stead unnecessary tropes and figures. With these authors, a man's only child must always be his *only hope*, a country-maid becomes a *rural beauty*, or perhaps a *nymph of the groves*; if flattery sing at all, it must be a *fyren song*; the shepherd's flute dwindles into an *oaten reed*, and his crook is exalted into a *scepter*; the *silver lillies* rise from their *golden beds*, and *languish* to the *complaining gale*. A young woman, though a good Christian, cannot make herself agreeable without *sacrificing to the Graces*; nor hope to do any execution among the *gentle swains*, till a whole legion of *Cupids*, armed with *flames* and *darts*, and other weapons, begin to discharge from her eyes their formidable artillery. For the sake of variety, or of the verse, some of these figures may now and then find a place in a poem; but in prose, unless very sparingly used, they favour of affectation.

3. Tropes and Figures promote brevity; and brevity, united with perspicuity, is always agreeable. An example or two will be given in the next paragraph. Sentiments thus delivered, and imagery thus painted, are readily apprehended by the mind, make a strong impression upon the fancy, and remain long in the memory: whereas too many words, even when the meaning is good, never fail to bring disgust and weariness. They argue a debility of mind which hinders the author from seeing his thoughts in one distinct point of view; and they also encourage a suspicion, that there is something faulty or defective in the matter. In the poetic style, therefore, which is addressed to the fancy and passions, and intended to make a vivid, a pleasing, and a perma-

nent

nent impressiion, brevity, and consequently tropes and figures, are indispensable. And a language will always be the better suited to poetical purposes, the more it admits of this brevity;—a character which is more conspicuous in the Greek and Latin than in any modern tongue, and much less in the French than in the Italian or English.

4. Tropes and Figures contribute to strength or energy of language, not only by their conciseness, but also by conveying to the fancy ideas that are easily comprehended, and make a strong impressiion. We are powerfully affected with what we see, or feel, or hear. When a sentiment comes enforced or illustrated by figures taken from objects of sight, or touch, or hearing, one thinks, as it were, that one sees, or feels, or hears, the thing spoken of; and thus, what in itself would perhaps be obscure, or is merely intellectual, may be made to seize our attention and interest our passions almost as effectually as if it were an object of outward sense. When Virgil calls the Scipios *thunderbolts of war*, he very strongly expresses in one word, and by one image, the rapidity of their victories, the noise their achievements made in the world, and the ruin and consternation that attended their irresistible career. — When Homer calls Ajax *the bulwark of the Greeks*, he paints with equal brevity his vast size and strength, the difficulty of prevailing against him, and the confidence wherewith his countrymen reposed on his valour — When Solomon says of the strange woman, or harlot, that “her feet go *down* to “death,” he lets us know, not only that her path ends in destruction, but also, that they who accompany her will find it easy to go forwards to ruin, and difficult to return to their duty. — Satan’s enormous magnitude, and refulgent appearance, his perpendicular ascent through a region of darkness, and the incon-

ceivable rapidity of his motion, are all painted out to our fancy by Milton, in one very short similitude,

Sprung upward, like — a pyramid of fire * :

To take in the full meaning of which figure, we must imagine ourselves in chaos, and a vast luminous body rising upward, near the place where we are, so swiftly as to appear a continued track of light, and lessening to the view according to the increase of distance, till it end in a point, and then disappear; and all this must be supposed to strike our eye at one instant. — Equal to this in propriety, though not in magnificence, is that allegory of Gray,

The paths of glory lead but to the grave :

Which presents to the imagination a wide plain, where several roads appear, crowded with glittering multitudes, and issuing from different quarters, but drawing nearer and nearer as they advance, till they terminate in the dark and narrow house, where all their glories enter in succession, and disappear for ever. — When it is said in scripture, of a good man who died, that he *fell asleep*, what a number of ideas are at once conveyed to our imagination, by this beautiful and expressive figure! As a labourer, at the close of day, goes to sleep, with the satisfaction of having performed his work, and with the agreeable hope of awaking in the morning of a new day, refreshed and chearful; so a good man, at the end of life, resigns himself calm and contented to the will of his Maker, with the sweet reflection of ha-

* Par. Lost, book 2. vers. 1013.

ving endeavoured to do his duty, and with the transporting hope of soon awaking in the regions of light, to life and happiness eternal. The figure also suggests, that to a good man the transition from life to death is even in the sensation no more painful, than when our faculties melt away into the pleasing insensibility of sleep. — Satan flying among the stars is said by Milton to “*Sail*” between worlds and worlds;” which has an elegance and force far superior to the proper word *Fly*. For by this allusion to a ship, we are made to form a lively idea of his great size, and to conceive of his motion, that it was equable and majestic. — Virgil uses a happy figure to express the size of the great wooden horse, by means of which the Greeks were conveyed into Troy: “*Equum divina Palladis arte ædificant.*” — Milton is still bolder when he says,

Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
Himself to sing, and *build the lofty rhyme* *.

The phrase, however, though bold, is emphatical; and gives a noble idea of the durability of poetry, as well as of the art and attention requisite to form a good poem. — There are hundreds of tropical expressions in common use, incomparably more energetic than any proper words of equal brevity that could be put in their place. A cheek *burning* with blushes, is a trope which at once describes the colour as it appears to the beholder, and the

* In the Latin phrase *Condere carmen*, which Milton no doubt had in his view, the verb is of more general signification, than the English verb *to build*; and therefore the figure is bolder in English than Latin. It may even be doubted, whether *Condere carmen* be at all figurative; for *Condere* is resolved by R. Stephanus into *Simul dare*. *Condere carmen*, *condere poema*, *condere historiam*, occur in Cicero and Pliny; but Milton's phrase is much too daring for English prose.

glowing heat as it is felt by the person blushing. *Chilled* with despondence, *petrified* with astonishment, *thunderstruck* with disagreeable and unexpected intelligence, *melted* with love or pity, *dissolved* in luxury, *hardened* in wickedness, *softening* into remorse, *inflamed* with desire, *tossed* with uncertainty, &c. — every one is sensible of the force of these and the like phrases, and that they must contribute to the energy of composition.

5. Tropes and Figures promote strength of expression, and are in poetry peculiarly requisite, because they are often more *natural*, and more *imitative*, than proper words. In fact, this is so much the case, that it would be impossible to imitate the language of passion without them. It is true, that when the mind is agitated, one does not run out into allegories, or long-winded similitudes, or any of the figures that require much attention and many words, or that tend to withdraw the fancy from the object of the passion. Yet the language of many passions must be figurative, notwithstanding; because they rouse the fancy, and direct it to objects congenial to their own nature, which diversify the language of the speaker with a multitude of allusions. The fancy of a very angry man, for example, presents to his view a train of disagreeable ideas connected with the passion of anger, and tending to encourage it; and if he speak without restraint during the paroxysm of his rage, those ideas will force themselves upon him, and compel him to give them utterance. “Infernal monster! (he will say) — my blood boils at him; he has used me like a dog; never was man so injured as I have been by this barbarian. He has no more sense of propriety than a stone. His countenance is diabolical, and his soul as ugly as his countenance. His heart is cold and hard, and his resolutions dark and bloody,” &c. This speech is wholly figurative. It is made up of *metaphors* and *hyperboles*, which, with the *prosopopeia* and *apostrophe*, are the most passionate of all the figures. —

Lear,

Lear, driven out of doors by his unnatural daughters, in the midst of darkness, thunder, and tempest, naturally breaks forth (for his indignation is just now raised to the very highest pitch) into the following violent exclamation against the crimes of mankind, in which almost every word is figurative.

Tremble thou wretch,
That hast within thee undivulged crimes
Unwhipt of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
Thou perjured, and thou similar of virtue,
That art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
That under covert, and convenient seeming,
Hast practised on man's life. Close pent-up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and cry
These dreadful summoners grace.

— The vehemence of material love, and sorrow from the apprehension of losing her child, make the Lady Constance utter a language that is strongly figurative, though quite suitable to the condition and character of the speaker. The passage is too long for a quotation, but concludes thus :

O Lord ! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son,
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world,
My widow-comfort, and my sorrow's cure *.

— Similar to this, and equally expressive of conjugal love, is that beautiful hyperbole in Homer ; where Andromache, to dissuade her husband from going out to the battle, tells him, that she had now no mother, father, or brethren, all her kindred

* King John.

being dead, and her native country desolate ; and then tenderly adds,

But while my Hector yet survives, I see
My father, mother, brethren, all in thee *.

As the passions that agitate the soul, and rouse the fancy, are apt to vent themselves in tropes and figures, so those that depress the mind adopt for the most part a plain diction without any ornament. For to a dejected mind, wherein the imagination is generally inactive, it is not probable, that any great variety of ideas will present themselves ; and when these are few and familiar, the words that express them must be simple. As no author equals Shakspeare in boldness or variety of figures, when he copies the style of those violent passions that stimulate the fancy ; so, when he would exhibit the human mind in a dejected state, no uninspired writer excels him in simplicity. The same Lear whose resentment had impaired his understanding, while it broke out in the most boisterous language, when, after some medical applications, he recovers his reason, his rage being now exhausted, his pride humbled, and his spirits totally depressed, speaks in a style than which nothing can be imagined more simple, or more affecting :

Pray, do not mock me ;
I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upward, and, to deal plainly with you,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man,
Yet I am doubtful ; for I am mainly ignorant

* Iliad, book 6.

What place this is, and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments ; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. — *

—— Desdemona, ever gentle, artless, and sincere, shocked at the unkindness of her husband, and overcome with melancholy, speaks in a style so beautifully simple, and so perfectly natural, that one knows not what to say in commendation of it :

My mother had a maid call'd Barbara ;
She was in love, and he she loved proved mad,
And did forsake her. She had a song of willow ;
An old thing it was, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it. That song to-night
Will not go from my mind ; I have much to do,
But to go hang my head all at one side,
And sing it like poor Barbara †.

Sometimes

* King Lear, act 4. scene 7.

† Othello, act 4. scene 3. This charming passage, translated into the *finical style*, which, whatever be the subject or speaker, must always be descriptive, enigmatical, and full of figures, would perhaps run thus :

Even now, sad Memory to my thought recalls
The nymph Dione, who, with pious care,
My much-loved mother, in my vernal years,
Attended : blooming was the maiden's form,
And on her brow Discretion sat, and on
Her rosy cheek a thousand Graces play'd.
O luckless was the day, when Cupid's dart,
Shot from a gentle swain's alluring eye,
First thrill'd with pleasing pangs her throbbing breast !
That gentle swain, ah ! gentle now no more,
(Horrid to tell !), by sudden phrensy driven,

Sometimes the imagination, even when exerted to the utmost, takes in but few ideas. This happens when the attention is totally engrossed by some very great object; admiration being one of those emotions that rather suspend the exercise of the faculties, than push them into action. And here too the simplest language is the most natural; as when Milton says of the Deity, that he sits "high-throned above all height." And as this simplicity is more suitable to that one great exertion which occupies the speaker's mind, than a more elaborate imagery or language would have been; so has it also a more powerful effect in fixing and elevating the imagination of the hearer: for, to introduce other thoughts for the sake of illustrating what cannot be illustrated, could an-

Ran howling to the wild : blood-tinctured fire
 Glared from his haggard eyeballs, and on high
 The hand of Horror raised his ragged hair,
 And cold sweat bathed his agonizing frame.
 What didst thou then, Dione ! ill-star'd maid !
 What couldst thou do ! — From morn to dewy eve,
 From Eve till rosy-finger'd Morn appear'd,
 In a sad song, a song of ancient days,
 Warbling her wild woe to the pitying winds,
 She sat ; the weeping willow was her theme,
 And well the theme accorded with her woe ;
 Till Fate suppress'd at length th' unfinish'd lay.
 Thus on Meander's flowery mantled side
 The dying cygnet sings, and singing dies.

I hope my young readers are all wiser ; but I believe there was a time, when I should have been tempted to prefer this flashy tinsel to Shakespeare's fine gold. I do not say, that in themselves these lines are all bad, though several of them are ; and in some sorts of composition the greater part might perhaps be pardonable ; but I say, that, considered in relation to the character and circumstances of Demodemon, they are all unnatural, and therefore not poetical.

fewer no other purpose, than to draw off the attention from the principal idea. In these and the like cases, the fancy left to itself will have more satisfaction in pursuing at leisure its own speculations, than in attending to those of others; as they who see for the first time some admirable object, would chuse rather to feast upon it in silence, than to have their thoughts interrupted by a long description from another person, informing them of nothing but what they see before them, are already acquainted with, or may easily conceive. — On these principles, I cannot but think, that Milton's elaborate account of the creation of light *, excellent as it is in many particulars, is yet far less striking to the mind, than that famous passage of Moses, so justly admired by Longinus for its sublimity, “ And God said, Let there be light; and “ there was light.” When I contemplate the idea suggested by these few simple words, I fancy myself encompassed with the darkness of chaos; that I hear the Almighty Word, and at the same instant see light diffused over all the immensity of nature. Here an object, the greatest surely that can be imagined, the whole illuminated universe starts at once into view. And the fancy seems to be assisted not a little by the shortness and simplicity of the phrase, which hint the instantaneousness of the effect, and the facility wherewith the First Cause operates in producing a work so unutterably beautiful, and so astonishingly great.

* Let there be light, God said; and forthwith light
Ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure,
Sprung from the deep, and from her native east
To journey through the aery gloom began,
Sphered in a radiant cloud; for yet the sun
Was not; she in a cloudy tabernacle
Sojourn'd the while.

Parad. Lost, vii. 244.

But to return from this digression, which was only intended to show, that though some thoughts and emotions require a figurative, others as naturally adopt a simple, style: — I remarked, that the *hyperbole*, *prosopopeia*, and *apostrophe*, are among the most passionate figures. This deserves illustration.

I. A very angry man is apt to think the injury he has just received greater than it really is; and, if he proceed immediately to retaliate by word or deed, seldom fails to exceed the due bounds, and to become injurious in his turn. The fond parent looks upon his child as a prodigy of genius and beauty; and the romantic lover will not be persuaded that his mistress has nothing supernatural either in her mind or person. Fear, in like manner, not only magnifies its object when real, but even forms an object out of nothing, and mistakes the fictions of fancy for the intimations of sense. — No wonder then, that they who speak according to the impulse of passion should speak *hyperbolically*: that the angry man should exaggerate the injury he has received, and the vengeance he is going to inflict; that the sorrowful should magnify what they have lost, and the joyful what they have obtained; that the lover should speak extravagantly of the beauty of his mistress, the coward of the dangers he has encountered, and the credulous clown of the miracles performed by the juggler. In fact, these people would not do justice to what they feel, if they did not say more than the truth. The valiant man, on the other hand, as naturally adopts the diminishing hyperbole, when he speaks of danger; and the man of sense, when he is obliged to mention his own virtue or ability; because it appears to him, or he is willing to consider it, as less than the truth, or at best as inconsiderable. Contempt uses the same figure; and therefore, Petruchio, affecting that passion, affects also the language of it:

Thou

Thou liest, thou thread, thou thimble,
 Thou yard, three quarters, half yard, quarter, nail,
 Thou flea, thou nit, thou winter-cricket, thou !
 Braved in mine own house with a skein of thread !
 Away, thou rag, thou quantity, thou remnant * !

For some passions consider their objects as important, and others as unimportant. Of the former sort are anger, love, fear, admiration, joy, sorrow, pride ; of the latter are contempt and courage. These may be said to subdue the mind to the object ; and these, to subdue the object to the mind. And the former, when violent, always magnify their objects ; whence the hyperbole called Amplification, or *Auxesis* ; and the latter as constantly diminish theirs ; and give rise to the hyperbole called *Meiosis*, or Diminution. — Even when the mind cannot be said to be under the influence of any violent passion, we naturally employ the same figure, when we would impress another very strongly with any idea. He is a walking shadow ; he is worn to skin and bone ; he has one foot in the grave, and the other following ; — these and the like phrases are proved to be natural by their frequency. — By introducing great ideas, the hyperbole is further useful in poetry, as a source of the sublime ; but, when employed injudiciously, is very apt to become ridiculous. Cowley makes Goliath as big as the hill down which he was marching † ; and tells us, that when he came into the valley, he seemed to fill it, and to overtop the neighbouring mountains, (which, by the by, seems rather to lessen the mountains and vallies, than to magnify the giant) ; nay, he adds, that the sun started back when he saw the splendor of his arms. This poet seems to have thought, that the figure in question could never be sufficiently enormous ; but Quintilian would have taught him, “ Quamvis

* Taming of the Shrew, act 4. scene 1.

† Davidcis, book 3.

“ omnis hyperbole ultra fidem, non tamen esse debet ultra modum.” The reason is, that this figure, when excessive, betokens, rather absolute infatuation, than intense emotion ; and resembles the efforts of a ranting tragedian, or the ravings of an enthusiastic declaimer, who, by putting on the gestures and looks of a lunatic, satisfy the discerning part of their audience, that, instead of feeling strongly, they have no rational feelings at all. In the wildest energies of nature there is a modesty, which the imitative artist will be careful never to overstep.

2. That figure, by which things are spoken of as if they were persons, is called *Prosopopeia*, or Personification. It is a bold figure, and yet is often natural. Long acquaintance recommends to some share in our affection even things inanimate, as a house, a tree, a rock, a mountain, a country ; and were we to leave such a thing, without hope of return, we should be inclined to address it with a farewell, as if it were a percipient creature. Nay, we find that ignorant nations have actually worshipped such things, or considered them as the haunt of certain powerful beings. Dryads and Hamadryads were by the Greeks and Romans supposed to preside over trees and groves ; river-gods and nymphs over streams and fountains ; little deities, called *Lares* and *Penates*, were believed to be the guardians of hearths and houses. In Scotland there is hardly a hill remarkable for the beauty of its shape, that was not in former times thought to be the habitation of fairies. Nay modern as well as ancient superstition has appropriated the waters to a peculiar sort of demon or goblin, and peopled the very regions of death, the tombs and charnel-houses, with multitudes of ghosts and phantoms. — Besides, when things inanimate make a strong impression upon us, whether agreeable or otherwise, we are apt to address them in terms of affection or dislike. The sailor blesses the plank that brought him ashore from the shipwreck ; and the passionate man,
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and sometimes even the philosopher, will say bitter words to the stumbling-block that gave him a fall. — Moreover, a man agitated with any interesting passion, especially of long continuance, is apt to fancy that all nature sympathises with him. If he has lost a beloved friend, he thinks the sun less bright than at other times; and in the sighing of the winds and groves, in the lowings of the herd, and in the murmurs of the stream, he seems to hear the voice of lamentation. But when joy or hope predominate, the whole world assumes a gay appearance. In the contemplation of every part of nature, of every condition of mankind, of every form of human society, the benevolent and the pious man, the morose and the chearful, the miser and the misanthrope, finds occasion to indulge his favourite passion, and sees, or thinks he sees, his own temper reflected back in the actions, sympathies, and tendencies of other things and persons. Our affections are indeed the medium through which we may be said to survey ourselves, and every thing else; and whatever be our inward frame, we are apt to perceive a wonderful congeniality in the world without us. And hence, the fancy, when roused by real emotions, or by the pathos of composition, is easily reconciled to those figures of speech that ascribe sympathy, perception, and the other attributes of animal life, to things inanimate, or even to notions merely intellectual. — Motion, too, bears a close affinity to action, and affects our imagination nearly in the same manner; and we see a great part of nature in motion; and by their sensible effects are led to contemplate energies innumerable. These conduct the rational mind to the Great First Cause; and these, in times of ignorance, disposed the vulgar to believe in a variety of subordinate agents employed in producing those appearances that could not otherwise be accounted for. Hence an endless train of fabulous deities, and of witches, demons, fairies, genii; which, if they prove our reason

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son weak and our fancy strong, prove also, that Personification is natural to the human mind; and that a right use of this figure may have a powerful effect, in fabulous writing especially, to engage our sympathy in behalf of things as well as persons. for nothing (as was before observed) can give lasting delight to a moral being, but that which awakens sympathy, and touches the heart: and though it be true, that we sympathise in some degree even with inanimate things, yet what has, or is supposed to have, life, calls forth a more sincere and more permanent fellow-feeling — Let it be observed further, that to awaken our sympathetic feelings, a lively conception of their object is necessary. This indeed is true of almost all our emotions; their keenness is in proportion to the vivacity of the perceptions that excite them. Distress that we see is more affecting than what we only hear of*; a perusal of the gayest scenes in a comedy does not rouse the mind so effectually, as the presence of a cheerful companion; and the death of a friend is of greater energy in producing seriousness, and the consideration of our latter end, than all the pathos of Young. Of descriptions addressed to the fancy, those that are most vivid and picturesque will generally be found to have the most powerful influence over our affections†; and those that exhibit persons engaged in action, and adorned with visible *insignia*, give a brisker impulse to the faculties, than such as convey intellectual ideas only, or images taken from still life. No abstract notion of Time, or of Love, can be so striking to

1. 101. line 1

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 180.

† I say *generally*; for it is not always so. Descriptions of very great or terrible objects have sometimes a greater effect upon the mind, when expressed with some degree of obscurity, where “more is meant than meets the ear,” than if they had been pictured out in the most lively manner. See part 1. chap. 5. § 4.

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the fancy, as the image of an old man accoutered with a scythe, or of a beautiful boy with wings and a bow and arrows; and no physiological account of Frenzy could suggest so vivid an idea, as the poet has given us in that exquisite portrait,

And moody Madness laughing wild, amid severest woe.

And for this reason partly it is, that the Epic poet, in order to work the more effectually upon our passions and imagination, refers the secret springs of human conduct, and the vicissitudes of human affairs, to the agency of personified causes; that is, to the machinery of gods and goddesses, angels, demons, magicians, and other powerful beings. And hence, in all sublime poetry, life and motion, with their several modes and attributes, are liberally bestowed on those objects wherewith the author intends that we should be strongly impressed: scenes perfectly inanimate, and still tending rather to diffuse a languor over the mind, than to communicate to our internal powers those lively energies, without which a being essentially active can never receive complete gratification. — Lastly, some violent passions are peculiarly inclined to change things into persons. The horrors of his mind haunted Orestes in the shape of furies. Conscience in the form of the murdered person, stares the murderer in the face, and often terrifies him to distraction. The superstitious man, travelling alone in the dark, mistakes a white stone for a ghost, a bush for a demon, a tree waving with the wind for an enormous giant brandishing a hundred arms. The lunatic and enthusiast converse with persons who exist only in their own distempered fancy: and the glutton, and the miser, if they were to give utterance to all their thoughts, would often, I dare say, speak, the one of his gold, the other of his belly, not only as a person, but as a god, — the object of his warmest love, and most devout regard. —

More:

More need not be said to prove, that Personification is natural, and may frequently contribute to the pathos, energy, and beauty of poetic language.

3. *Apostrophe*, or a sudden diversion of speech from one person to another person or thing, is a figure nearly related to the former. Poets sometimes make use of it, in order to help out their verse, or merely to give variety to their style: but on those occasions it is to be considered as rather a trick of art, than an effort of nature. It is most natural, and most pathetic, when the person or thing to whom the apostrophe is made, and for whose sake we give a new direction to our speech, is in our eyes eminently distinguished for good or evil, or raises within us some sudden and powerful emotion, such as the hearer would acquiesce in, or at least acknowledge to be reasonable. But this, like the other pathetic figures, must be used with great prudence. For if, instead of calling forth the hearer's sympathy, it should only betray the levity of the speaker, or such wanderings of his mind as neither the subject nor the occasion would lead one to expect, it will then create disgust, instead of approbation. — The orator, therefore, must not attempt the passionate apostrophe, till the minds of the hearers be prepared to join in it. And every audience is not equally obsequious in this respect. In the forum of ancient Rome that would have passed for sublime and pathetic, which in the most respectable British auditories would appear ridiculous. For our style of public speaking is cool and argumentative, and partakes less of enthusiasm than the Roman did, and much less than the modern French or Italian. Of British eloquence, particularly that of the pulpit, the chief recommendations are gravity and simplicity. And it is vain to say, that our oratory *ought* to be more vehement: for that matter depends on causes, which it is not only inexpedient, but impossible to alter; namely, on the character and spirit of the people, and
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their

their rational notions in regard to religion, policy, and literature. The exclamations of Cicero would weigh but little in our parliament; and many of those which we meet with in French sermons would not be more effectual if attempted in our pulpit. To see one of our preachers, who the moment before was a cool reasoner, a temperate speaker, an humble Christian, and an orthodox divine, break out into a sudden apostrophe to the immortal powers, or to the walls of the church, tends to force a smile, rather than a tear, from those among us who reflect, that there is nothing in the subject, and should be nothing in the orator, to warrant such wanderings of fancy, or vehemence of emotion. If he be careful to cultivate a pure style, and a grave and graceful utterance, a British clergyman, who speaks from conviction the plain unaffected words of truth and soberness, of benevolence and piety, will, if I mistake not, convey more pathetic, as well as more permanent, impressions to the heart, and be more useful as a Christian teacher, than if he were to put in practice all the attitudes of Roscius, and all the tropes and figures of Cicero.

But where the language of passion and enthusiasm is permitted to display itself, whatever raises any strong emotion, whether it be animated or inanimate, absent or present, sensible or intellectual, may give rise to the apostrophe. A man in a distant country, speaking of the place of his birth, might naturally exclaim, "O my dear native land, shall I never see thee more!" Or, when some great misfortune befalls him, "Happy are ye, O my parents, that ye are not alive to see this." — We have a beautiful apostrophe in the third book of the *Eneid*, where Eneas, who is telling his story to Dido, happening to mention the death of his father, makes a sudden address to him as follows:

—— hic, pelagi tot tempestatibus actus,
 Heu, genitorem, omnis curæ casusque levamen,
 Amitto Anchisen ; — hic me, pater optime, fessum
 Deferis, heu, tantis nequicquam crepte periclis !

This apostrophe has a pleasing effect. It seems to intimate, that the love which the hero bore his father was so great, that when he mentioned him, he forgot every thing else ; and, without minding his company, one of whom was a queen, suddenly addressed himself to that which, though present only in idea, was still a principal object of his affection. An emotion so warm and so reasonable cannot fail to command the sympathy of the reader. — When Michael, in the eleventh book of *Paradise Lost*, announces to Adam and Eve the necessity of their immediate departure from the garden of Eden, the poet's art in preserving the decorum of the two characters is very remarkable. Pierced to the heart at the thought of leaving that happy place, Eve, in all the violence of ungovernable sorrow, breaks forth into a pathetic apostrophe to Paradise, to the flowers she had reared, and to the nuptial bower she had adorned. Adam makes no address to the walks, the trees, or the flowers of the garden, the loss whereof did not so much afflict him ; but, in his reply to the Archangel, expresses, without a figure, his regret for being banished from a place where he had so oft been honoured with a sensible manifestation of the Divine Presence. The use of the apostrophe in the one case, and the omission of it in the other, not only gives a beautiful variety to the style, but also marks that superior elevation and composure of mind, by which the poet had all along distinguished the character of Adam. — One of the finest applications of this figure that is any where to be seen, is in the fourth book of the same Poem ; where the author, catching by sympathy the devotion of our first parents, suddenly drops his

his narrative, and joins his voice to theirs in adoring the Father of the universe.

Thus at their shady lodge arrived, both stood,
Both turn'd, and under open sky adored
The God that made both sky, air, earth, and heaven,
Which they beheld, the moon's resplendent globe,
And starry pole : — Thou also mad'st the night,
Maker Omnipotent, and thou the day,
Which we in our appointed work employ'd
Have finish'd. —

Milton took the hint of this fine contrivance from a well-known passage of Virgil :

Hic juvenum chorus, ille senum ; qui carmine laudes
Herculeas et facta ferant ; —
——— ut duros mille labores
Rege sub Eurytheo, fatis Junonis iniquæ
Pertulerit : — Tu nubigenas, invicte, bimembres
Hylæum Pholoumque manu ; tu Cresia mactas
Prodigia. — *

The beauty arising from diversified composition is the same in both, and very great in each. But every reader must *feel*, that the figure is incomparably more affecting to the mind in the imitation, than in the original. So true it is, that the most rational emotions raise the most intense fellow-feeling ; and that the apostrophe is then the most emphatical, when it displays those workings of human affection, which are at once ardent, and well-founded.

* See a similar instance, Tasso Gier. lib. 18. st. 14.

A full discussion of the present topic would require a methodical and more particular account of the several tropes and figures, their congruity to human emotions, and their effects in composition. But these few remarks will perhaps be thought to prove with sufficient evidence, the utility of figurative expression in making language more *pleasing* and more *natural*. I shall therefore only add, that tropes and figures, particularly the *metaphor*, *similitude*, and *allegory*, are further useful in beautifying language, by suggesting, together with the thoughts essential to the subject, an endless variety of agreeable images, for which there would be no place, if writers were always to confine themselves to the *proper* names of things. And this beauty and variety, judiciously applied, is so far from distracting, that it tends rather to fix, the attention, and captivate the heart of the reader, by giving light, and life, and pathos to the whole composition.

II. The end of Poetry, above all other literary arts, is to please by imitating nature. I have now shown, that by tropes and figures language may be made more natural and more pleasing, than it could be without them. It follows, that tropes and figures are more necessary to poetry, than to any other mode of writing: — which is the second point proposed to be illustrated in this section.

The same point might be proved from other considerations. Language, as shown already, is then natural, when it is suitable to the supposed condition of the speaker. Figurative language is peculiarly suitable to the supposed condition of the poet; because figures are suggested by the fancy; and the fancy of him who composes poetry is more employed, than that of any other author. Of all historical, philosophical, and theological researches, the object is *real* truth, which is fixed and permanent. The aim of rhetorical declamation (according to Cicero) is *apparent* truth; which, being less determinate, leaves the fancy of the speaker

more

more free, gives greater scope to the inventive powers, and supplies the materials of a more figurative phraseology. But the poet is subject to no restraints, but those of verisimilitude; which is still less determinate than rhetorical truth. He seeks not to convince the judgement of his reader by arguments of either real or apparent cogency; he means only to please and interest him, by an appeal to his sensibility and imagination. His own imagination is therefore continually at work, ranging through the whole of real and probable existence, "glancing from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven," in quest of images and ideas suited to the emotions he himself feels, and to the sympathies he would communicate to others. And, consequently, figures of speech, the offspring of excursive fancy, must (if he speak according to what he is supposed to think and feel, that is, according to his supposed condition) tincture the language of the poet more than that of any other composer. So that, if figurative diction be unnatural in geometry, because all wanderings of fancy are unsuitable, and even impossible, to the geometrician, while intent upon his argument; it is, upon the same principle, perfectly natural, and even unavoidable in poetry; because the more a poet attends to his subject, and the better qualified he is to do it justice, the more active will his imagination be, and the more diversified the ideas that present themselves to his mind. — Besides, the true poet addresses himself to the passions and sympathies of mankind; which, till his own be raised, he cannot hope to do with success. And it is the nature of many passions, though not of all, to increase the activity of imagination; and an active imagination naturally vents itself in figurative language; nay, unless restrained by a correct taste, has a tendency to exceed in it; — of which Bishop Taylor, and Lord Verulam, two geniuses different in kind, but of the highest order, are memorable examples.

I said, that “the poet seeks not to convince the judgement of his reader by arguments of either real or apparent cogency.” — I do not mean, that in poetry argument has no place. The most legitimate reasoning, the soundest philosophy, and narratives purely historical, may appear in a poem, and contribute greatly to the honour of the author, and to the importance of his work. All this we have in *Paradise Lost*. — I mean, that what distinguishes *pure* poetry from other writing, is its aptitude, not to sway the judgement by reasoning, but to please the fancy, and move the passions, by a lively imitation of nature. Nor would I exclude poetical embellishment from history, or even from philosophy. Plato’s *Dialogues* and Addison’s *Moral Essays* abound in poetic imagery; and Livy and Tacitus often amuse their readers with poetical description. In like manner, though Geometry and Physics be different sciences; — though abstract ideas be the subject, and pure demonstration or intuition the evidence, of the former; and though the material universe, and the informations of sense, be the subject and the evidence of the latter; — yet have these sciences been united by the best philosophers, and very happy effects resulted from the union. — In one and the same work, poetry, history, philosophy, and oratory, may doubtless be blended; nay, these arts have all been actually blended in one and the same work, not by Milton only, but also by Homer, Virgil, Lucan, and Shakespeare. Yet still these arts are different; — different in their ends, and principles, and in the faculties of the mind to which they are respectively addressed: and it is easy to perceive, when a writer employs one, and when another.

III. A reason why tropes and figures are more necessary in some sorts of poetry, than in others, it is not difficult to assign. This depends on the condition of the supposed speaker, particularly on the state of his imagination and passions. When the soul

pines

pires with sorrow, or languishes in love, it keeps its view more steadily fixed on one or a few ideas, than when it is possessed with enthusiasm, or agitated by jealousy, revenge, indignation, anxiety, or any other turbulent emotion. In the former case it is inactive; in the latter, restless;

— Magno curarum fluctuat æstu,
Atque animum nunc huc celerem, nunc dividit illuc,
In partesque rapit varias, perque omnia versat;

and therefore in the one case it will be occupied by few ideas, and in the other by many. The style, therefore, of the amorous or mournful elegy, in order to be imitative of the language of sorrow or desponding love, must be simpler, and less diversified by figures, than that of the dithyrambic song, or of any other poem in which the speaker is supposed to be greatly agitated.

I have heard the finest Ode in the world blamed for the boldness of its figures, and for what the critic was pleased to call obscurity. He had, I suppose, formed his taste upon Anacreon and Waller, whose Odes are indeed very simple, and would have been very absurd, if they had not been simple. But let us recollect the circumstances of Anacreon, (considered as the speaker of his own poetry), and of Gray's Welsh Bard. The former warbles his lays, reclining on a bed of flowers, dissolved in tranquillity and indolence, while all his faculties seem to be engrossed by one or a few pleasurable objects. The latter, just escaped from the massacre of his brethren, under the complicated agitations of grief, revenge, and despair; and surrounded with the scenery of rocks, mountains, and torrents, stupendous by nature, and now rendered hideous by desolation, imprecates perdition upon the bloody Edward; and, seized with prophetic enthusiasm, foretells in the most alarming strains, and typifies by the most dreadful images,

images, the disasters that were to overtake his family and descendants. If perspicuity and simplicity be natural in the songs of Anacreon, as they certainly are, a figurative style and desultory composition are no less natural in this inimitable performance of Gray. And if real prophecy must always be so obscure, as not to be fully understood till it is accomplished, because otherwise it would interfere with the free agency of man, that poem which imitates the style of prophecy, must also, if natural, be to a certain degree obscure; not indeed in the images or words, but in the allusions. And it is in the allusions only, not in the words or images, (for these are most emphatical and picturesque), that the poem partakes of obscurity; and even its allusions will hardly seem obscure to those who are acquainted with the history of England. Those critics, therefore, who find fault with this poem, because it is not so simple as the songs of Anacreon, or the love-verses of Shenstone and Waller, may as well blame Shakespeare, because Othello does not speak in the sweet and simple language of Desdemona. Horace has no where attempted a theme of such animation and sublimity, as this of Gray; and yet Horace, like his master Pindar, is often bold in his transitions, and in the style of many of his odes extremely figurative. But this we not only excuse, but applaud, when we consider, that in those odes the assumed character of the speaker is enthusiast, which in all its operations is somewhat violent, and must therefore give a peculiar vehemence both to thought and to language.

On what principle, then, it may be said, are we to look for simplicity and exact arrangement, in the style of an Epic poem? Why is not the language of the Iliad and Æneid as figurative as that of Pindar? — To this I answer, first, That the assumed character of the Epic poet is calm inspiration, the effects whereof upon the mind must be supposed to be very different from those

produced by enthusiasm or prophetic rapture ; regularity and composure being as essential to the former, as wildness and vehemence are to the latter : and, secondly, That a very figurative style continued through a long work becomes tiresome ; and therefore, that all poems of great length ought to be methodical in the plan, and simple in the execution. Abrupt transition, boldness of figure, and thoughts elevated almost to extravagance, may please in a short poem ; as the dainties of a banquet, and the splendour of a triumph, may amuse for a day : but much feasting destroys health, and perpetual glare and tumult stupify the senses ; and the high lyric style continued through many pages would fatigue the attention, confound the judgement, and bewilder the fancy.

C H A P. II.

Of the Sound of Poetical Language.

IT is folly to prefer sound to sense. Yet the ear, like every other perceptive faculty, is capable of gratification ; and therefore to the sound of words some regard is to be had, even in prose. For ill-sounding language can never be agreeable, either to the hearer or to the speaker ; and of different modifications of well-sounding language some will be found to be more agreeable than others. It is the business of the poet to make his style as agreeable, and consequently as pleasing to the ear, as the nature of the subject will allow. And to the harmony of language it behoves him, more than any other writer, to attend ; as it is more especially his concern to render his work pleasurable. In fact

we find, that no poet was ever popular who did not possess the art of harmonious composition.

What I have to say on the subject of Poetical Harmony may be referred to one or other of these heads : Sweetness, Measure, and Imitation.

I. In order to give *sweetness* to language, either in verse or prose, all words of harsh sound, difficult pronunciation, or unwieldy magnitude, are to be avoided as much as possible, unless when they have in the sound something peculiarly emphatical; and words are to be so placed in respect of one another, as that discordant combinations may not result from their union. But in poetry this is more necessary than in prose; poetical language being understood to be an imitation of natural language improved to that perfection which is consistent with probability. To poetry, therefore, a greater latitude must be allowed than to prose, in expressing, by tropes and figures of pleasing sound, those ideas whereof the proper names are in any respect offensive, either to the ear or to the fancy *.

II. How far versification or *regular measure* may be essential to this art, has been disputed by critical writers; some holding it to be indispensably necessary, and some not necessary at all. Without recapitulating what has been said by others, I shall only deliver my own opinion, which, if I mistake not, will be found consistent with the principles already established.

First, then, I am of opinion, that to poetry verse is not essential. In a prose work, we may have the fable, the arrangement, and a great deal of the pathos, and language, of poetry; and such a work is certainly a poem, though perhaps not a perfect one. For how absurd would it be to say, that by changing the

* See part 2. chap. 1. sect. 3. § I. 1. 2.

position only of a word or two in each line, one might divest Homer's Iliad of the poetical character ! At this rate, the arts of poetry and versification would be the same ; and the rules in Despauter's Grammar, and the moral distichs ascribed to Cato, would be as real poetry as any part of Virgil. In fact, some very ancient poems, when translated into a modern tongue, are far less poetical in verse than in prose ; the alterations necessary to adapt them to our numbers being detrimental to their sublime simplicity ; of which any person of taste will be sensible, who compares our common prose-version of Job, the Psalms, and Song of Solomon, with the best metrical paraphrase of those books that has yet appeared *. Nay, in many cases, Comedy will be more poetical, because more pleasing and natural, in prose, than in verse. By versifying Tom Jones and The Merry Wives of Windsor, we should spoil the two finest Comic poems, the one Epic, the other Dramatical, now in the world.

But, secondly, Though verse be not essential to poetry, it is necessary to the perfection of all poetry that admits of it. Verse is

* Madame Dacier, zealous to vindicate her Homer, seems to carry the encomium on prose-translation rather too far, when she exclaims, "Ouy, je ne crains point de le dire, et je pourrois le prouver, les pöetes traduits en vers cessent d'etre pöetes." — But she is right in what she says a little after : "En fait de traduction, il y a *souvent* dans la prose une précision, une beauté, et une force, dont la pöésie ne peut approcher. Les livres des Prophetes, et les Pseaumes, dans la vulgate meme, sont pleins de passages, que le plus grand pöete du monde ne scauroit rendre en vers, sans leur faire perdre de leur majesté, et de leur énergie."

Préface a l' Iliade de Mad. Dacier, p. 39.

to poetry, what colours are to painting *. A painter might display great genius, and draw masterly figures with chalk or ink; but if he intend a perfect picture, he must employ in his work as many colours as are seen in the object he imitates. Or, to adopt a beautiful comparison of Demosthenes, quoted by Aristotle †, “ Verfication is to poetry what bloom is to the human countenance.” A good face is agreeable when the bloom is gone; and good poetry may please without verfification; harmonious numbers may fet off an indifferent poem, and a fine bloom indifferent features: but, without verse, poetry is incomplete; and beauty is not perfect, unless to sweetness and regularity of feature there be superadded,

The bloom of young desire, and purple light of love.

If numbers are necessary to the perfection of the higher poetry, they are no less so to that of the lower kinds, to Pastoral, Song, and Satire, which have little besides the language and verfification to distinguish them from prose; and which some ancient authors are unwilling to admit to the rank of poems; — though I think it too nice a scruple, both because such writings are commonly termed Poetical, and also because there is, even in them, something that may not improperly be considered as an imitation of nature.

* Horace seems to hint at the same comparison, when, after specifying the several sorts of verse suitable to Epic, Elegiac, Lyric, and Dramatic Poetry, he adds,

Descriptas servare vices, *operumque colores*,

Cur ego, si nequeo ignoroque, Poeta salutor ?

Ar. Poet. vers. 86.

† Aristot. Rhetor. lib. 3. cap. 4.

That

That the rhythm and measures of verse are naturally agreeable; and therefore, that by these poetry may be made more pleasing than it would be without them, is evident from this, that children and illiterate people, whose admiration we cannot suppose to be the effect of habit or prejudice, are exceedingly delighted with them. In many proverbial sayings, where there is neither rhyme nor alliteration *, rhythm is obviously studied. Nay, the use of rhythm in poetry is universal; whereas alliteration and rhyme, tho' relished by some nations, are not much sought after by others. And we need not be at a loss to account for the agreeableness of proportion and order, if we reflect, that they suggest the agreeable ideas of contrivance and skill, at the same time that they render the connection of things obvious to the understanding, and imprint it deeply on the memory †. Verse, by promoting distinct and easy remembrance, conveys ideas to the mind with energy, and enlivens every emotion the poet intends to raise in the reader or hearer. Besides, when we attend to verses, after hearing one or two, we become acquainted with the measure, which therefore we always look for in the sequel. This perpetual interchange of hope and gratification is a source of delight; and to this in part is owing the pleasure we take in the rhymes of modern poetry. And hence we see, that though an incorrect rhyme, or untuneable verse, be in itself, and compared with an important sentiment, a very trifling matter; yet it is no trifle in regard to its effects on the hearer; because it brings disappointment, and so gives a temporary shock to the mind, and interrupts the current of the affections; and because it suggests the disagreeable ideas of negligence or want of skill on the part of

* See Essay on Laughter, chap. 2. sect. 3.

† On the effects of Rhythm in music, see above, part 1. chap. 6. sect. 2. § 4.

the author. And therefore, as the public ear becomes more delicate, the negligence will be more glaring, and the disappointment more intensely felt; and correctness of rhyme and of measure will of course be the more indispensable. In our tongue, rhyme is more necessary to Lyric, than to Heroic poetry. The reason seems to be, that in the latter the ear can of itself perceive the boundary of the measure, because the lines are all of equal length nearly, and every good reader makes a short pause at the end of each; whereas, in the former, the lines vary in length; and therefore the rhyme is requisite to make the measure and rhythm sufficiently perceptible. Custom too may have some influence. English Odes without rhyme are uncommon; and therefore have something awkward about them, or something at least to which the public ear is not yet thoroughly reconciled.

Moreover, in poetry, as in music, Rhythm is the source of much pleasing variety; of variety tempered with uniformity, and regulated by art: inasmuch, that, notwithstanding the likeness of one hexameter verse to another, it is not common, either in Virgil or in Homer, to meet with two contiguous hexameters, whose rhythm is exactly the same. And though all English heroic verses consist of five feet, among which the Iambic predominates; yet this measure, in respect of rhythm alone, is susceptible of more than thirty varieties. And let it be remarked further, that different kinds of verse, by being adapted to different subjects and modes of writing, give variety to the poetic language, and multiply the charms of this pleasing art.

What has formerly been shown to be true in regard to style, will also in many cases hold true of versification, "that it is " then *natural*, when it is adapted to the *supposed condition* of the " speaker." — In the Epopee, the poet assumes the character of calm inspiration; and therefore his language must be elevated, and his numbers majestic and uniform. A peasant speaking in
heroic

heroic or hexameter verse is no improbability here ; because his words are supposed to be transmitted by one who will of his own accord give them every ornament necessary to reduce them into dignified measure ; as an eloquent man, in a solemn assembly, recapitulating the speech of a clown, would naturally express it in pure and perspicuous language. The uniform heroic measure will suit any subject of dignity, whether narrative or didactic, that admits or requires uniformity of style. — In Tragedy, where the imitation of real life is more perfect than in Epic poetry, the uniform magnificence of Epic numbers might be improper ; because the heroes and heroines are supposed to speak in their own persons, and according to the immediate impulse of passion and sentiment. Yet even in Tragedy, the versification may be both harmonious and dignified ; because the characters are taken chiefly from high life, and the events from a remote period ; and because the higher poetry is permitted to imitate nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection, in which it might be. The Greeks and Romans considered their hexameter as too artificial for Dramatic poetry, and therefore in tragedy, and even in comedy, made use of the Iambic, and some other measures that came near the cadence of conversation : we use the Iambic both in the epic and dramatic poem ; but, for the most part, it is, or ought to be, much more elaborate in the former, than in the latter. — In Dramatic Comedy, where the manners and concerns of familiar life are exhibited, Verse would seem to be unnatural, except it be so like the sound of common discourse, as to be hardly distinguishable from it. Custom, however, may in some countries determine otherwise ; and against custom, in these matters, it is vain to argue. — The professed enthusiasm of the dithyrambic poet renders wildness, variety, and a sonorous harmony of numbers peculiarly suitable to his odes. The love-sonnet, and Anacreontic song, will be less various,

rious, more regular, and of a softer harmony; because the state of mind expressed in it has more composure. — Philosophy can scarce go further in this investigation, without deviating into whim and hypothesis. The particular sorts of verse, to be adopted in the lower species of poetry, are determined by fashion chiefly, and the practice of approved authors.

III. The origin and principles of imitative harmony, or of that artifice by which the sound is made, as Pope says, “an echo to the sense,” may be explained in the following manner.

It is pleasing to observe the uniformity of nature in all her operations. Between moral and material beauty and harmony, between moral and material deformity and dissonance, there obtains a very striking analogy. The visible and audible expressions of almost every virtuous emotion are agreeable to the eye and the ear, and those of almost every criminal passion disagreeable. The looks, the attitudes, and the vocal sounds, natural to benevolence, to gratitude, to compassion, to piety, are in themselves graceful and pleasing; while anger, discontent, despair, and cruelty bring discord to the voice, deformity to the features, and distortion to the limbs. That flowing curve, which painters know to be essential to the beauty of animal shape, gives place to a multiplicity of right lines and sharp angles in the countenance and gesture of him who knits his brows, stretches his nostrils, grinds his teeth, and clenches his fist; whereas devotion, magnanimity, benevolence, contentment, and good-humour, soften the attitude, and give a more graceful swell to the outline of every feature. Certain vocal tones accompany certain mental emotions. The voice of sorrow is feeble and broken, that of despair boisterous and incoherent; joy assumes a sweet and sprightly note, fear a weak and tremulous cadence; the tones of love and benevolence are musical and uniform, those of rage

loud and dissonant; the voice of the sedate reasoner is equable and grave, but not unpleasant; and he who declaims with energy employs many varieties of modulation suited to the various emotions that predominate in his discourse.

But it is not in the language of passion only, that the human voice varies its tone, or the human face its features. Every striking sentiment, and every interesting idea, has an effect upon it. One would esteem that person no adept in Narrative eloquence, who should describe with the very same accent, swift and slow motion, extreme labour and easy performance, agreeable sensation and excruciating pain; who should talk of the tumult of a tempestuous ocean, the roar of thunder, the devastations of an earthquake, or an Egyptian pyramid tumbling into ruins, in the same tone of voice wherewith he describes the murmur of a rill, the warbling of the harp of Eolus, the swinging of a cradle, or the descent of an angel. Elevation of mind gives dignity to the voice. From Achilles, Sarpedon, and Othello, we should as naturally expect a manly and sonorous accent, as a nervous style and majestic attitude. Coxcombs and bullies, while they assume airs of importance and valour, affect also a dignified articulation.

Since the tones of natural language are so various, Poetry, which imitates the language of nature, must also vary its tones; and, in respect of sound as well as of meaning, be framed after that model of ideal perfection, which the variety and energy of the human articulate voice render probable. This is the more easily accomplished, because, in every language, there is between the sound and sense of certain words a perceptible analogy; which, though not so accurate as to lead a foreigner from the sound to the signification *, is yet accurate enough to show, that,

* There is in Tasso's *Gierusalemme Liberata* a famous stanza, of which Rousseau

that, in forming such words, regard has been had to the imitative qualities of vocal sound. Such, in English, are the words yell, crash, crack, hiss, roar, murmur, and many others.

All the particular laws that regulate this sort of imitation, as far as they are founded in nature, and liable to the cognizance of philosophy, depend on the general law of style above mentioned. Together with the other circumstances of the supposed speaker, the poet takes into consideration the tone of voice suitable to the ideas that occupy his mind, and thereto adapts the sound of his language, if it can be done consistently with ease and elegance of

says, that a good ear and sincere heart are alone sufficient to enable one to judge of it. The imitative harmony and the poetry are indeed admirable; but I doubt whether a person who understands neither Italian nor Latin could even guess at the meaning from the sound. I have attempted it in English, but am sensible of my inability to do it justice.

Chiama gli habitator de l'ombre eterne
Il rauco suon de la tartarea tromba :
Tremar le spaciose atre caverne,
Et l'aer cieco a quel rumor rimbomba ;
Ne stridendo così da le superne
Regioni del cielo il folgor piomba ;
Ne sì Scoffa giamai trema la terra,
Quando i vapori in sen gravida ferra.

Can. 4. st. 4.

To call the tribes that roam the Stygian shores,
The hoarse Tartarean trump in thunder roars ;
Hell through her trembling caverns starts aghast,
And Night's black void rebellows to the blast :
Far less the peal that rends th' ethereal world,
When bolts of vengeance from on high are hurl'd ;
Far less the shock that heaves earth's tottering frame,
When its torn entrails spout th' imprison'd flame.

expression.

expression. But when this imitative harmony is too much sought after, or words appear to be chosen for sound rather than sense, the verse becomes finical and ridiculous *.

Words by their sound may imitate sound; and quick or slow articulation may imitate quick or slow motion. Hence, by a proper choice and arrangement of words, the poet may imitate, *Sounds* that are, Sweet with dignity (a), — Sweet and tender (b), —
Loud

* Such is Ronfard's affected imitation of the song of the sky-lark :

Elle quindée du zephire
Sublime en l'air vire et revire,
Et y declique un joli cris,
Qui rit, guérit, et tire l'ire
Des esprits mieux que je n'écris.

This is as ridiculous as that line of Ennius,

Tum tuba terribili fonitu taratantara dixit :

Or as the following verses of Swift;

The man with the kettle-drum enters the gate,
Dub dub a dub dub : the trumpeters follow,
Tantara tantara; while all the boys hollow.

(a) No sooner had th' Almighty ceas'd, than all
The multitude of angels, with a shout
Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
As from blest voices uttering joy; heaven rung
With jubilee, and loud hofannas fill'd
The eternal regions. —

Par. Lost, book 3.

See also the night-storm of thunder, lightening, wind, and rain, in Virg. Georg. lib. 1. vers. 328.—334.

(b) Et longum, formosæ, vale, vale, inquit, Iola.
Formosam resonare doces Amarillida silvas.

Virg. Ecl. 3.

Virg. Ecl. 1.

Loud (c), — and Harsh (d); — and *Motions* that are, Slow in consequence of dignity (e), — Slow in consequence of difficulty (f),

See also the simile of the nightingale, *Geor.* lib. 4. vers. 511. And see that wonderful couplet describing the wailings of the owl, *Æneid.* IV. 462.

(c) ————— vibratus ab æthere fulgor
Cum sonitu venit, et ruere omnia visa repente,
Tyrrhenusque tubæ mugire per æthera clangor;
Suspiciunt; iterum atque iterum fragor intonat ingens. *Æneid.* 8:

See also the storm in the first book of the *Eneid*, and in the fifth of the *Odyssey*, — and the stanza already quoted from *Tasso*.

(d) The hoarse rough verse should like the torrent roar. *Pope:*

————— On a sudden open fly,
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,
Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate.
Harsh thunder. ————— *Par. Lost*, II. 879.

See also *Homer's Iliad*, lib. 3. vers. 363. and *Clarke's* annotation.

(e) See an exquisite example in *Gray's Progress of Poesy*; the conclusion of the third stanza.

(f) And when up ten steep slopes you've drag'd your thighs. *Pope.*
Just brought out this, when scarce his tongue could stir. *Pope.*
————— The huge leviathan:
Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait,
Tempest the ocean. *Par. Lost*, VII. 411:

See the famous description of *Sisyphus* rolling the stone, *Odys.* lib. 11. vers. 592. See *Quintil. Inst. Orat.* lib. 9. cap. 4. § 4. compared with *Paradise Lost*, book 2. vers. 1022.

— Swift

— Swift and noisy (*g*), — Swift and smooth (*b*), — Uneven and abrupt (*k*), — Quick and joyous (*m*). An unexpected pause in the verse may also imitate a sudden failure of strength (*n*), or interruption of motion (*o*), or give vivacity to an image or thought, by fixing our attention longer than usual upon the word that

(*g*) Quadrupedante putrem fonitu quatit ungula campum. *Æneid.*

Αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ τὰ πηδόνδε κυλινδρετο λάας ἀναιδής. *Odysseus. II.*

See also Virg. *Æneid.* lib. 1. vers. 83.—87.

(*b*) See wild as the winds o'er the desert he flies. *Pope.*

Ille volat, simul arva fuga, simul æquora verrens. *Virg.*

Ῥηιδι τ' ἐπειτα πέλει, χαλεπὴ περ ἔσται. *Hesiod.*

(*k*) Πολλὰ δ' ἀνὰ τὰ κατὰ παρατὰ τε δοχμὰ τ' ἤλθεν. *Hom.*

The last shriek'd, started up, and shriek'd again. *Anonym.*

(*m*) Let the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks found,
To many a youth, and many a maid,
Dancing in the chequer'd shade. *Milton's Allegro.*

See also Grays Progress of Poesy, Stanza 3.

(*n*) Ac velut in somnis oculos ubi languida preffit
Nocte quies, nequicquam avidos extendere cursus
Velle videmur: — et in mediis conatibus ægri.
Succidimus. — *Æneid. 12.*

See also Virg. *Georg.* lib. 3. vers. 515. 516.

(*o*) For this, before to night thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stiches that shall pen thy breath up: Urchins
Shall exercise upon thee. — Prospero to Caliban in *the Tempest*.

See Pope's *Iliad*, XIII. 199.

precedes

precedes it (*p*). — Moreover, when we describe great bulk, it is natural for us to articulate slowly even in common discourse; and therefore a line of poetry that requires a slow pronunciation, or seems longer than it should be, may be used with good effect in describing vastness of size (*q*). — Sweet and smooth numbers are most proper, when the poet paints agreeable objects, or gentle energy (*r*); and harsher sounds when he speaks of what is ugly, violent, or disagreeable (*s*). This too is according to the nature of

(*p*) ————— How often from the steep
Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard
Celestial voices, to the midnight air,
Sole, — or responsive to each other's note,
Singing their great Creator? —————

Par. Lost, b. 4.

And over them triumphant Death his dart
Shook, — but delay'd to strike.

Id.

See also Hom. Odyss. lib. 9. vers. 290.

(*q*) Thus stretch'd out, huge in length, the arch fiend lay.

Par. Lost.

Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum. *Virg. Æneid. 3.*

Et magnos membrorum artus, magna ossa, lacertosque
Eruit, atque ingens media consistit arena.

Æneid. 5. vers. 422.

(*r*) Hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata, Lycori,
Hic nemus, hic ipso tecum consumerer ævo.

Virg. Ecl. 10.

The dumb shall sing, the lame his crutch forego,
And leap, exulting like the bounding roe.

Pope's Messiah.

See Milton's description of the evening, *Par. Lost*, book 4. vers. 598.—609.

Ye gentle gales, beneath my body blow,
And softly lay me on the waves below.

Pope's Sappho.

(*s*) Stridenti stipula miserum disperdere carmen.

Virg. Ecl. 3.

Immo

of common language ; for we generally employ harsher tones of voice to express what we dislike, and more melodious notes to describe the objects of love, complacency, or admiration. Harsh numbers however should not be frequent in poetry. For in this art, as in music, concord and melody ought always to predominate. And we find in fact, that good poets can occasionally express themselves somewhat harshly, when the subject requires it, and yet preserve the sweetness and majesty of poetical diction. — Further, the voice of complaint, pity, love, and all the gentler affections is mild and musical, and should therefore be imitated in musical numbers ; while despair, defiance, revenge, and turbulent emotions in general, assume an abrupt and sonorous cadence. Dignity of description (*t*), solemn vows (*u*), and all sentiments that proceed from a mind elevated with great ideas (*v*), require a correspondent pomp of language and versification. — Lastly : An irregular or uncommon movement in the verse may sometimes be of use, to make the reader conceive an image in a particular manner. Virgil describing horses running over rocky heights at

Immo ego Sardois videar tibi amarior herbis;
Horridior rusco, projecta vilis alga.

Virg. Ecl. 7.

Neu patriæ validas in viscera vertite vires.

Virg. Æneid. 6.

See also Milton's description of the Lazar-house in *Paradise Lost*, book 11. vers. 477.—492.

(*t*) See *Virg. Geor. I.* 328. and *Homer, Virgil, and Milton, passim.* See also *Dryden's Alexander's Feast*, and *Gray's Odes.*

(*u*) See *Virg. Æneid. IV.* 24.

(*v*) Examples are frequent in the great authors. See *Othello's* exclamation :

——— O now for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind ! &c.

Act. 3. scene 3.

full

full speed, begins the line with two dactyls, to imitate rapidity, and concludes it with eight long syllables (*vv*); which is a very unusual measure, but seems well adapted to the thing expressed, namely, to the descent of the animal from the hills to the low ground. At any rate, this extraordinary change of the rhythm, may be allowed to bear some resemblance to the animal's change of motion, as it would be felt by a rider, and as we may suppose it is felt by the animal itself.

Other forms of imitative harmony, and many other examples, besides those referred to in the margin, will readily occur to all who are conversant in the writings of the best versifiers, particularly Homer, Virgil, Milton, Lucretius, Spenser, Dryden, Shakespeare, Pope, and Gray.

I must not conclude without remarking, in justice to the Greek and Latin poets, that, from our ignorance of the ancient pronunciation, we are but incompetently skilled in their numbers; and that there may be, and probably are, in Homer and Virgil, many imitative harmonies whereof we are not sensible at all. The *quantity* of Greek and Latin syllables we know well enough; but it is a notorious fact, that in cases innumerable our pronunciation of them is contrary to what we know to be right. Thus, in reading the following line of Horace,

Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetæ,

every body pronounces the first syllable of *volunt* long, and the

(*vv*) Saxa per, et scopulos, et depressas convalles, *Geor.* III. 276. Milton seems to have imitated this movement, when he says,

——— Eternal wrath
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.

See above, Part. I. chap. 6. sect. 1.

last short; and yet every body knows, that the first is short, and the last long. All regular hexameters begin with a long syllable; yet how often do the best readers introduce them with a short one!

When we read this line, by which Virgil meant both to describe and to imitate slow motion,

Et sola in ficca secum spatatur arena *,

we make only five or six of the syllables long; and yet in this line there are no fewer than ten long syllables. Must it not then to a Roman ear have appeared more imitative, than it does to ours?

In each of those admirable hexameters, so descriptive of great size,

Et magnos membrorum artus, magna ossa, lacertosque.

Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.

there are eleven long syllables according to the ancient pronunciation, and only six or seven according to the modern. If, then, there be any natural suitability in the slow rhythm of these lines, (and Virgil certainly thought there was), must not that have been more observable anciently than it is now?

In the English tongue, the foot Spondeus, consisting of two long syllables, is not frequent, there being generally one short syllable, or more, for each long syllable. And as our accented or emphatic syllables are all long, and as we give emphasis to the Greek and Latin syllables in the same way almost as to our own, we seldom preserve in our pronunciation the rhythm of the an-

* Georg. i. 389.

cient poetry, and are (I think) most apt to lose it in those verses that abound in the Spondeus. The Dactyl, of one long and two short syllables, is very common in English; and it sometimes happens, though not often, that in pronouncing an hexameter of Dactyls we do preserve the true rhythm tolerably well. Of such an hexameter I take the rhythm to be the same with the following:

Multitudes rush'd all at once on the plain with a thundering uproar.

And according to this rhythm, nearly, we do in fact pronounce the last line of Homer's celebrated description of Sisyphus *. But this line of Virgil, whose measure and motion are exactly the same, the moderns pronounce differently, at least in the first three feet:

Quadrupedante putrem fonitu quatit ungula campum.

Of this other line of Virgil, describing loud found,

Suspiciunt; iterum atque iterum fragor intonat ingens,

the rhythm is still the same, after making the necessary *elisions*; and if the reader pronounce it so, his ear will perhaps inform him, that it is more imitative than he at first imagined.

* <i>Εὐρυπύκτου</i>	<i>πυκτὸν ποταμὸν</i>	<i>πυκτὸν ποταμὸν</i>	<i>πυκτὸν ποταμὸν</i>	<i>πυκτὸν ποταμὸν</i>	<i>πυκτὸν ποταμὸν</i>
Multitudes	rush'd all at	once on the	plain with a	thundering	uproar.
Quadrupede-	dante pu-	trem foni-	tu quatit	ungula	campum.
Suspici-	unt ite-	r' atqu' ite-	rum fragor	intonat	ingens.

In the beginning of the *Æneid*, Eolus, at Juno's desire, sends out his winds to destroy the Trojan fleet. Neptune rebukes them for invading his dominions without his leave; and is just going to denounce a threatening, or inflict a punishment, when he recollects, that it was proper to calm his waters, before he did any thing else :

Quos ego — sed motos præstat componere fluctus.

The interrupted threat is a dactyl; — the remainder of the line goes off in spondees. By this transition from a quick to a slow rhythm, is it not probable, that the poet intended to imitate the change of Neptune's purpose? But this is lost in our pronunciation, though in the ancient I believe it must have been observable. — One instance more, and I quit the subject.

When Dido, that fatal morning on which she put a period to her life, saw that Eneas and his Trojans were actually gone, she at first broke forth into frantic denunciations of revenge and ruin; but soon checks herself, as if exhausted by her passion, when she reflects, that her ravings were all in vain. “ Unhappy “ Dido! (says she), thy evil destiny is now come upon thee*.” This change of her mind from tempest to a momentary calm (for she immediately relapses into vengeance and distraction) is finely imitated in the poet's numbers. The words I have translated form a line of Spondees, whose slow and soft motion is a striking contrast to the abrupt and sonorous rapidity of the pre-

* Infelix Dido! nunc te fata impia tangunt. *Æneid*, iv. 596. — If we read *facta impia*, with the Medicean Manuscript, the Rhythm is still the same, and the sense not materially different: “ Unhappy Dido! now are the consequences of thy “ broken vows come upon thee.”

ceding and following verses. This beauty, too, is in a great measure lost in our pronunciation; for we give only five or six long syllables to a line which really contains eleven.——Are these remarks too refined? Those readers will hardly think so, who have studied Virgil's versification; which is artful and apposite to a degree that was never equalled or attempted by any other poet.

In the course of these observations on the *sound* of Poetical Language, I am not conscious of having affirmed any thing which does not admit of proof. Some of the proofs, however, I was obliged to leave out; as they would have led me into long disquisitions, relating rather to the peculiarities of Latin and English verse, than to the general characters of the Poetic Art. These proofs may possibly find a place hereafter in *A Treatise of versification and English prosody*, which I began some years ago, but have not yet finished.

T H E E N D.

A N
E S S A Y
O N

LAUGHTER and LUDICROUS COMPOSITION.



A N
E S S A Y
O N

LAUGHTER and LUDICROUS COMPOSITION.

Written in the year 1764.

*Ego vero omni de re facetius puto posse ab homine non inurbano,
quam de ipsis facetiis, disputari.*

Cicero.

C H A P. I.

Introduction. The Subject proposed. Opinions of Philosophers, — I. Aristotle — II. Hobbes — III. Hutcheson — IV. Akenfide.

OF Man, it is observed by Homer, that he is the most wretched, and, by Addison and others, that he is the merriest animal in the whole creation: and both opinions are plausible, and both perhaps may be true. If, from the acuteness and delicacy of his perceptive powers, from his remembrance of the past, and his anticipation of what is to come,

come, from his restless and creative fancy, and from the various sensibilities of his moral nature, Man be exposed to many evils, both imaginary and real, from which the brutes are exempted, he does also from the same sources derive innumerable delights, that are far beyond the reach of every other animal. That our pre-eminence in pleasure should thus, in some degree, be counterbalanced by our pre-eminence in pain, was necessary to exercise our virtue, and wean our hearts from sublunary enjoyment; and that beings thus beset with a multitude of sorrows should be supplied from so many quarters with the means of comfort, is suitable to that benign economy which characterises every operation of nature.

When a brute has gratified those few appetites that minister to the support of the species, and of the individual, he may be said to have attained the summit of happiness, above which a thousand years of prosperity could not raise him a single step. But for Man, her favourite child, Nature has made a more liberal provision. He, if he have only guarded against the necessities of life, and indulged the animal part of his constitution, has experienced but little of that felicity whereof he is capable. To say nothing at present of his moral and religious gratifications, is he not furnished with faculties that fit him for receiving pleasure from almost every part of the visible universe? Even to those persons, whose powers of observation are confined within a narrow circle, the exercise of the necessary arts may open inexhaustible sources of amusement, to alleviate the cares of a solitary and laborious life. Men of more enlarged understanding, and more cultivated taste, are still more plentifully supplied with the means of innocent delight. For such, either from acquired habit, or from innate propensity, is the soul of man, that there is hardly any thing in art or nature from which we may not derive gratification. What is great, overpowers with pleasing astonishment;

what is little, may charm by its nicety of proportion, or beauty of colour; what is diversified, pleases by supplying a series of novelties; what is uniform, by leading us to reflect on the skill displayed in the arrangement of its parts; order and connection gratify our sense of propriety; and certain forms of *irregularity* and *unsuitableness* raise within us that agreeable emotion whereof LAUGHTER is the outward sign.

RISIBILITY, considered as one of the characters that distinguish man from the inferior animals, and as an instrument of harmless, and even of profitable recreation, to every age, condition, and capacity, of human creatures, must be allowed to be not unworthy of the philosopher's notice. Whatever is peculiar to rational nature, must be an object of some importance to a rational being; and Milton has observed, that

Smiles from reason flow,
To brute denied : —

— Whatever may be employed as a means of discountenancing vice, folly, or falsehood, is an object of importance to a moral being; and Horace has remarked,

Ridiculum acri
Fortius et melius magnas plerumque fecat res *.

Let this apology suffice at present for my choice of a subject. Even this apology might have been spared: for nothing is below the attention of philosophy, which the Author of Nature has been pleased to establish.

* — Ridicule shall frequently prevail,
And cut the knot when staver reasons fail.

Francis.

In tracing out the cause of Laughter, I mean rather to illustrate than to confute the opinions of those who have already written on the same subject. The investigation has been several times attempted; nor is the cause altogether unknown. Yet, notwithstanding former discoveries, the following Essay may perhaps be found to contain something new; to throw light on certain points of criticism that have not been much attended to; and even to have some merit (if I execute my purpose) as a familiar example of philosophical induction carried on with a strict regard to fact, and without any previous bias in favour of any theory.

To provoke Laughter, is not essential either to Wit or to Humour. For though that unexpected discovery of resemblance between ideas supposed dissimilar, which is called *Wit*, and that comic exhibition of singular characters, sentiments, and imagery, which is denominated *Humour*, do frequently raise laughter, they do not raise it always. Addison's Poem to Sir Godfrey Kneller, in which the British kings are likened to heathen gods, is exquisitely witty, and yet not laughable. Pope's Essay on Man abounds in serious wit; and examples of serious humour are not uncommon in Fielding's History of Parson Adams, and in Addison's Account of Sir Roger de Coverly. Wit, when the subject is grave, and the allusion sublime, raises admiration instead of laughter: and if the comic singularities of a good man appear in circumstances of real distress, the imitation of those singularities, in the Epic or Dramatic Comedy, will form a species of humour, which, if it should force a smile, will draw forth a tear at the same time. An inquiry, therefore, into the distinguishing characters of Wit and Humour, has no necessary connection with the present subject. I did, however, once intend to have touched upon them in the conclusion of this Discourse: but Dr Campbell's masterly disquisition concerning that matter, in the first part of his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, makes it improper for me to attempt

tempt it. I was favoured with a perusal of that work in manuscript, when I had finished the three first chapters of this Essay for the press; and was agreeably surpris'd to find my notions, in regard to the cause or object of Laughter, so fully warranted by those of my very learned and ingenious friend. And it may not perhaps be improper to inform the public, that neither did he know of my having undertaken this argument, nor I of his having discuss'd that subject, till we came mutually to exchange our papers, for the purpose of knowing one another's sentiments in regard to what we had written.

Some authors have treated of Ridicule, without marking the distinction between *Ridiculous* and *Ludicrous* ideas. But I presume the natural order of proceeding in this Inquiry, is to begin with ascertaining the nature of what is *purely Ludicrous*. Things *ludicrous* and things *ridiculous* have this in common, that both excite laughter; but the former excite pure laughter, the latter excite laughter mixed with disapprobation or contempt*. My design is, to analyse and explain that quality in things or ideas, which makes them provoke *pure Laughter*, and entitles them to the name of *Ludicrous* or *Laughable*.

When certain objects, qualities, or ideas, occur to our senses, memory, or imagination, we smile or laugh at them, and expect that other men should do the same. To smile on certain occasions, is not less *natural*, than to weep at the sight of distress, or cry out when we feel pain.

There are different kinds of Laughter. As a boy, passing by night through a church-yard, sings or whistles in order to conceal his fear even from himself; so there are men, who, by forcing a smile, endeavour sometimes to hide from others, and from

* *Ridiculus proprie dicitur qui in rebus turpibus ridetur.*

Festus.

themselves too perhaps, their malevolence or envy. Such laughter is unnatural. The sound of it offends the ear; the features distorted by it seem horrible to the eye. A mixture of hypocrisy, malice, and cruel joy, thus displayed on the countenance, is one of the most hateful sights in nature, and transforms the "human face divine" into the visage of a fiend.—— Similar to this is the smile of a wicked person pleasing himself with the hope of accomplishing his evil purposes. Milton gives a striking picture of it, in that well-known passage :

He ceased ; for both seem'd highly pleas'd, and Death
Grin'd horrible a ghastly smile, to hear
His famine should be fill'd, and blest'd his maw
Destin'd to that good hour. —

But enough of this. Laughter that makes man a fiend or monster, I have no inclination to analyse. My inquiries are confined to "that species of laughter, which is at once natural and innocent."

Of this there are two sorts. The laughter occasioned by tickling or gladness is different from that which arises on reading the Tale of a Tub. The former may be called *Animal* Laughter : the latter (if it were lawful to adopt a new word, which has become very common of late) I should term *Sentimental*.—— Smiles admit of similar divisions. Not to mention the scornful, the envious, the malevolent smile, I would only remark, that of the innocent and agreeable smile there are two sorts. The one proceeds from the risible emotion, and has a tendency to break out into laughter. The other is the effect of good humour, complacency, and tender affection. This last sort of smile renders a countenance amiable in the highest degree. Homer ascribes it to Venus,

Venus, in an epithet *, which Dryden and Pope, after Waller, improperly translate *laughter-loving*; an idea that accords better with the character of a romp or hoyden, than with the goddess of love and beauty.

Animal laughter admits of various degrees; from the gentle impulse excited in a child by moderate joy, to that terrifying, and even mortal convulsion, which has been known to accompany an unexpected change of fortune. This passion may, as well as joy and sorrow, be communicated by sympathy †; and I know not, whether the entertainment we receive from the playful tricks of kittens, and other young animals, may not in part be resolved into something like a fellow-feeling of their vivacity. — Animal and Sentimental laughter are frequently blended; but it is easy to distinguish them. The former is often excessive; the latter never, unless heightened by the other. The latter is always pleasing, both in itself and in its cause; the former may be painful in both. But their principal difference is this: — the one always proceeds from a sentiment or emotion, excited in the mind, in consequence of certain objects or ideas being presented to it, of which emotion we may be conscious even when we suppress laughter; — the other arises, not from any sentiment, or perception of ludicrous ideas, but from some bodily feeling, or sudden impulse, on what is called the animal spirits, proceeding, or seeming to proceed, from the operation of causes purely material. — The present inquiry regards that species that is here distinguished by the name of *Sentimental Laughter*.

* Φιλομυΐδης.

† Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 101.

The pleasing emotion *, arising from the view of ludicrous ideas, is known to every one by experience, but, being a simple feeling, admits not of definition. It is to be distinguished from the laughter that generally attends it, as sorrow is to be distinguished from tears; for it is often felt in a high degree by those who are remarkable for gravity of countenance. Swift seldom laughed; notwithstanding his uncommon talents in wit and humour, and the extraordinary delight he seems to have had in surveying the ridiculous side of things. Why this agreeable emotion should be accompanied with laughter as its outward sign, or sorrow express itself by tears, or fear by trembling and paleness, I cannot ultimately explain, otherwise than by saying, that such is the appointment of the Author of Nature.—All I mean by this inquiry is, to determine, WHAT IS PECULIAR TO THOSE THINGS WHICH PROVOKE LAUGHTER;—OR, RATHER, WHICH RAISE IN THE MIND THAT PLEASING SENTIMENT OR EMOTION WHEREOF LAUGHTER IS THE EXTERNAL SIGN.

I. Philosophers have differed in their opinions concerning this matter. Aristotle, in the fifth chapter of his Poetics, observes of Comedy, that “it imitates those vices or meannesses only which “partake of the ridiculous:—now the Ridiculous (says he) “consists in some fault or turpitude not attended with great pain, “and not destructive.” It is clear, that Aristotle here means to characterise, not laughable qualities in general, (as some have thought), but the objects of Comic Ridicule only; and in this view the definition is just, however it may have been overlooked or despised by Comic writers. Crimes and misfortunes are

* This emotion I sometimes call the *Risible Emotion*, and sometimes the *Ludicrous Sentiment*; terms that may be sufficiently intelligible, though perhaps they are not according to strict analogy.

often in modern plays, and were sometimes in the ancient, held up as objects of public merriment; but if poets had that reverence for nature which they ought to have, they would not shock the common sense of mankind by so absurd a representation. I wish our writers of comedy and romance would in this respect imitate the delicacy of their ancestors, the honest and brave savages of old Germany, of whom the historian says, “Nemo vitia ridet; nec corrumpere et corrumpi seculum vocatur*.” — The definition from Aristotle does not, however, suit the general nature of ludicrous ideas; for it will appear by and by, that men laugh at that in which there is neither fault nor turpitude of any kind.

II. The theory of Mr Hobbes would hardly have deserved notice, if Addison had not spoken of it with approbation in the forty-seventh paper of the *Spectator*. “The passion of laughter” (says Mr Hobbes) is nothing else, but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly. For men (continues he) laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonour.” Addison justly observes, after quoting these words, that “according to this account, when we hear a man laugh excessively, instead of saying, that he is very merry, we ought to tell him, that he is very proud.” It is strange, that the elegant author should be aware of this consequence, and yet admit the theory; for so good a judge of human nature could not be ignorant, that Laughter is not considered as a sign of pride; persons of singular gravity being often suspected of that vice, but great laughers seldom or never. When we see a man attentive to the innocent

* Tacitus, de moribus Germanorum, cap. 19.

humours of a merry company, and yet maintain a fixed solemnity of countenance, is it natural for us to think, that he is the humblest, and the only humble person, in the circle?

Another writer in the *Spectator*, N^o 249. remarks, in confirmation of this theory, that the *vainest* part of mankind are most addicted to the passion of laughter. Now, how can this be, if the *proudest* part of mankind are also most addicted to it, unless we suppose vanity and pride to be the same thing? But they are certainly different passions. The proud man despises other men, and derives his chief pleasure from the contemplation of his own importance: the vain man stands in need of the applause of others, and cannot be happy without it. Pride is apt to be reserved and sullen; vanity is often affable, and officiously obliging. The proud man is so confident of his merit, and thinks it so obvious to all the world, that he will scarce give himself the trouble to inform you of it: the vain man, to raise your admiration, scruples not to tell you, not only the whole truth, but even a great deal more. In the same person these two passions may, no doubt, be united: but some men are too proud to be vain, and some vain men are too conscious of their own weakness to be proud. Be all this, however, as it will, we have not as yet made any discovery of the cause of laughter; in regard to which, I apprehend that the vain are not more intemperate than other people; and I am sure that the proud are much less so.

The instances brought by Addison, in favour of this theory of Mr Hobbes;—of “great men formerly keeping in their retinue
“a person to laugh at, who was by profession a fool;—of
“Dutchmen being diverted with the sign of the gaper;—of the
“mob entertaining themselves with Jack Puddings, whose humour lies in committing blunders;—and of the amusement
“that

“ that some people find in making as many April fools as possible * :” — these instances, I say, may prove the truth of the distich, quoted by our author from Dennis, who translates it from Boileau,

Thus one fool lolls his tongue out at another,
And shakes his empty noddle at his brother.

— But I cannot see how they should prove, that laughter is owing to pride, or to a sense of our superiority over the ludicrous object. Great men are as merry now when they do not keep professed jesters, as they were formerly when they did. The gaper may be a common sign at Amsterdam, as the Saracen’s head is in England, without being the standing jest of the country, or indeed any jest at all. The Jack Pudding is considered, even by the mob, as more rogue than fool; and they who attend the stage of the itinerant physician, do for the most part regard both the master and the servant as persons of extraordinary abilities. And as to the wag who amuses himself on the first of April with telling lies, he must be shallow indeed, if he hope by so doing to acquire any superiority over another man, whom he knows to be wiser and better than himself; for on these occasions, the greatness of the joke, and the loudness of the laugh, are, if I rightly remember, in exact proportion to the sagacity of the person imposed on. What our author, in the same paper, says of Butts in conversation, makes rather against his theory than for it. No man, who has any pretensions to good manners, to common understanding, or even to common humanity, will ever think of making a butt of that person who has neither sense nor spirit to defend himself. Sir John Falstaff would not have excelled so much in this character, if he had not equally excelled in

* See Spectator, Number 47.

warding off and retorting raillery. The truth is, the butt of the company is generally known to be one of the wittiest and best-humoured persons in it; so that the mirth he may diffuse around him cannot be supposed to arise from his apparent inferiority.

If Laughter arose from pride, and that pride from a sudden conception of some present eminency in ourselves, compared with others, or compared with ourselves as we were formerly; it would follow, — that the wise, the beautiful, the strong, the healthy, and the rich, must giggle away a great part of their lives, because they would every now and then become suddenly sensible of their superiority over the foolish, the homely, the feeble, the sickly, and the poor; — that one would never recollect the transactions of one's childhood, or the absurdity of one's dreams, without merriment; — that in the company of our equals we should always be grave; — and that Sir Isaac Newton must have been the greatest wag of his time.

That the passion of laughter, though not properly the effect of pride, does, however, arise from a conception of some small fault or turpitude, or at least from some fancied inferiority, in the ludicrous object, has been asserted by several writers. One would indeed be apt at first hearing to reply, that we often smile at a witty performance or passage, — such as Butler's allusion to a boiled lobster, in his picture of the morning *, — when we are so far from conceiving any inferiority or turpitude in the author, that we greatly admire his genius, and wish ourselves possessed of

* The sun had long since in the lap
Of Thetis taken out his nap,
And, like a lobster boil'd, the morn
From black to red began to turn.

that very turn of fancy which produced the drollery in question. — “But as we may be betrayed into a momentary belief, that
 “Garrick is really Abel Drugger; so, it is said, we may ima-
 “gine a transient inferiority, either real or assumed, even in a
 “person whom we admire; and that, when we smile at Butler’s
 “allusion, we for a moment conceive him to have assumed the
 “character of one who was incapable to discern the impropriety
 “of such an odd union of images. — We smile at the logic,
 “wherewith Hudibras endeavours to solace himself, when he is
 “set in the stocks,

As beards, the nearer that they tend
 To th’ earth, grow still more reverend;
 And cannons shoot the higher pitches,
 The lower you let down their breeches,
 I’ll make this present abject state

Advance me to a greater height.

“Here, it is said, that the laugh arises from our supposing the
 “author to assume for a moment the character of one who,
 “from his ignorance of the nature of things, and of the rules
 “of analogical reasoning, does not perceive, that the case he ar-
 “gues *from* is totally unlike the case he argues *to*, nor, confe-
 “quently, that the argument is a sophism. — If we smile at the
 “ass, in the fable, fawning upon his master, in imitation of the
 “spaniel; or at the frog puffing and swelling to stretch himself
 “to the size of the ox, it is (we are told) because we perceive
 “something singularly defective in the passions or sentiments of
 “those animals. And a respectable friend, who entertains us
 “with a merry story, is said to do so, either by assuming a mo-
 “mentary inferiority, or by leading our thoughts to some thing
 “in which we seem to discern some small fault or turpitude.”

In proof of this, it is further affirmed, "That we never smile
 " at *fortuitous* combinations of ideas, qualities, or events, but at
 " those combinations only that seem to require the agency of
 " some directing mind : — whence it is inferred, that where-ever
 " the ludicrous quality appears, a certain mental character is
 " supposed to exert itself; and that this character must needs im-
 " ply inferiority, because, from our being so often tempted to
 " smile by the tricks of buffoons and brute animals, it would
 " seem to be consistent neither with superiority nor with equa-
 " lity."

This theory is more subtle than solid. Let us look back to the
 analogical argument which Butler puts in the mouth of his hero,
 and which every person who has the feelings of a man must allow
 to be laughable. Why is it so? Because (say they) it leads us
 to discover some turpitude or deficiency in the author's under-
 standing. Is this deficiency, then, in the hero Hudibras, or in
 Butler the poet? Is it real, or is it assumed? It matters not
 which; for, though we knew that an idiot had accidentally writ-
 ten it, or that a wrong-headed enthusiast had seriously spoken it,
 the reasoning would still be ludicrous. Is then a trifling argu-
 ment from analogy a laughable object, whether advanced seri-
 ously or in jest? If this be the case, it must be owned, that
 the sentiments of mortal men are strangely perverted in these latter
 times; for that many a volume of elaborate controversy, instead of
 disposing the gentle reader to slumber by its darkness and dullness,
 ought to have "set the table in a roar" by its vain and sophistical
 analogies.

Further, I deny not, that all performances in wit and humour
 are connected with a mind, and lead our thoughts to the per-
 former as naturally as any other effect to its cause. But do we
 not sometimes laugh at fortuitous combinations, in which, as no
 mental energy is concerned in producing them, there cannot be
 either

either fault or turpitude? Could not one imagine a set of people jumbled together by accident, so as to present a laughable group to those who know their characters? If Pope and Colley Cibber had been so squeezed by a croud in the playhouse, as to be compelled to sit with their heads contiguous, and the arm of one about the neck of the other, expressing at the same time in their looks a mutual antipathy and reluctance, I believe the sight would have been entertaining enough, especially if believed to be accidental. — Our coffeehouse-politicians were lately betrayed into a simile, by one Papirius Curfor, a wag who read the newspapers quite across the page, without minding the space that distinguishes the columns, and so pretended to light upon some very amusing combinations. These were no doubt the contrivance of Papirius himself; but, supposing them to have been accidental, and that the printer had without design neglected to separate his columns, I ask, whether they would have been less ridiculous? The joke I shall allow to be as wretched as you please: but we are not now talking of the *delicacies* of wit or humour, (which will be touched upon in the sequel), but of those combinations of ideas that provoke laughter. And here let me beg of the critic, not to take offence at the familiarity of these examples. I shall apologize for them afterwards. Meantime he will be pleased to consider, that my subject is a familiar one, and the phenomenon I would account for as frequent among clowns and children as among philosophers.

III. Hutcheson has given another account of the ludicrous quality. He seems to think, that “it is the contrast or opposition of dignity and meanness that occasions laughter.” Granting this to be true, (and how far this is true will appear by and by), I would observe, in the first place, what the ingenious author seems to have been aware of, that there may be a mixture of meanness and dignity, where there is nothing ludicrous. A city, considered

considered as a collection of low and lofty houses, is no laughable object. Nor was that personage either ludicrous or ridiculous, whom Pope so justly characterises,

The greatest, wisest, meanest, of mankind.

— But, secondly, cases might be mentioned, of laughter arising from a group of ideas or objects, wherein there is no discernible opposition of meanness and dignity. We are told of the dagger of Hudibras, that

It could scrape trenchers, or chip bread,
'Toast cheese or bacon, though it were
To bait a mouse-trap, 'twould not care ;
'Twould make clean shoes, or in the earth
Set leeks and onions, and so forth.

The humour of the passage cannot arise from the meanness of these offices compared with the dignity of the dagger, nor from any opposition of meanness and dignity in the offices themselves, they being all equally mean ; and must therefore be owing to some other peculiarity in the description. — We laugh, when a droll mimics the solemnity of a grave person ; here dignity and meanness are indeed united ; but we laugh also (though not so heartily perhaps) when he mimics the peculiarities of a fellow as insignificant as himself, and displays no opposition of dignity and meanness. — The levities of Sancho Pança opposed to the solemnity of his master, and compared with his own schemes of preferment, form an entertaining contrast : but some of the vagaries of that renowned squire are truly laughable, even when his preferment and his master are out of the question. — We do not perceive any contrast of meanness and dignity in Mistress Quickly,

Quickly, Sir Toby in *Twelfth Night*, the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, or Autolycus in the *Winter's Tale*; yet they are all ludicrous characters: Dr Harrison in Fielding's *Amelia* is never mean, but always respectable; yet there is a dash of humour in him, which often betrays the reader into a smile. — Men laugh at puns; the wisest and wittiest of our species have laughed at them; Queen Elizabeth, Cicero, and Shakespeare, laughed at them; clowns and children laugh at them; and most men, at one time or other, are inclined to do the same: — but in this sort of low wit, is it an opposition of meanness and dignity that entertains us? Is it not rather a mixture of sameness and diversity, — sameness in the sound, and diversity in the signification?

IV. Akenfide, in the third book of his excellent Poem, treats of Ridicule at considerable length. He gives a detail of ridiculous characters; ignorant pretenders to learning, — boastful soldiers, and lying travellers, — hypocritical churchmen, — conceited politicians, — old women that talk of their charms and virtue, — ragged philosophers who rail at riches, — *virtuosi* intent upon trifles, — romantic lovers, — wits wantonly satirical, — fops that out of vanity affect to be diseased and profligate, — dastards who are ashamed or afraid without reason, — and fools who are ignorant of what they ought to know. These characters may no doubt be set in such a light as to move at once our *laughter* and *contempt*, and are therefore truly *ridiculous*, and fit objects of comic satire: but the author does not distinguish between what is *laughable* in them and what is *contemptible*; so that we have no reason to think, that he meant to specify the qualities peculiar to those things that provoke *pure laughter*. — Having finished the detail of characters, he makes some general remarks on the cause of ridicule; and explains himself more fully in a prose definition illustrated by examples. The definition, or rather description, is in these words. “ That which makes ob-
jects

“jects ridiculous, is some ground of admiration or esteem connected with other more general circumstances comparatively worthless or deformed; or it is some circumstance of turpitude or deformity connected with what is in general excellent or beautiful: the inconsistent properties existing either in the objects themselves, or in the apprehension of the person to whom they relate; belonging always to the same order or class of being; implying sentiment and design; and exciting no acute or vehement emotion of the heart.” — Whatever account we make of this definition, which to those who acquiesce in the foregoing reasonings may perhaps appear not quite satisfactory, there is in the poem a passage that deserves particular notice, as it seems to contain a more exact account of the ludicrous quality, than is to be found in any of the theories above mentioned. This passage will be quoted in the next chapter.

C H A P. II.

Laughter seems to arise from the view of things incongruous united in the same assemblage; I. By Juxta-position; II. As Cause and Effect; III. By Comparison founded on Similitude; or, IV. United so as to exhibit an opposition of Meanness and Dignity.

HOWEVER imperfect these Theories may appear, there is none of them destitute of merit: and indeed the most fanciful philosopher seldom frames a theory, without consulting nature, in

in some of her mere obvious appearances. Laughter very frequently arises from the view of dignity and meanness united in the same object; sometimes, no doubt, from the appearance of assumed inferiority *, as well as of small faults and unimportant turpitudes; and sometimes, perhaps, though rarely, from that sort of pride, which is described in the passage quoted from Mr Hobbes by Addison.

All these accounts agree in this, that the cause of laughter is something compounded; or something that disposes the mind to form a comparison, by passing from one object or idea to another. That this is in fact the case, cannot be proved *a priori*; but this holds in all the examples hitherto given, and will be found to hold in all that are given hereafter. May it not then be laid down as a principle, that “Laughter arises from the view of two or more objects or ideas, disposing the mind to form a comparison?” According to the theory of Hobbes, this comparison would be between the ludicrous object and ourselves; according to those writers who misapply Aristotle’s definition, it would seem to be formed between the ludicrous object and other things or persons in general; and if we incline to Hucheson’s theory, which is the best of the three, we shall think that there is a comparison of the parts of the ludicrous object, first with one another, and secondly with ideas or things extraneous.

Further: Every appearance that is made up of parts, or that leads the mind of the beholder to form a comparison, is not ludicrous. The body of a man or woman, of a horse, a fish, or a

* Pope, Arbuthnot, and Swift, in some of their most humorous pieces, assume the character, and affect the ignorance, of Grubstreet writers; and from this circumstance part of the humour of such papers will perhaps be found to arise. “Valde hæc ridentur (says Cicero) quæ a prudentibus, quasi per dissimulationem non intelligendi, subabsurde falseque dicuntur.” De Orat. II. 68.

bird, is not ludicrous, though it consists of many parts ; — and it may be compared to many other things without raising laughter : but the picture described in the beginning of the Epistle to the Pisces, with a man's head, a horse's neck, feathers of different birds, limbs of different beasts, and the tail of a fish, would have been thought ludicrous eighteen hundred years ago, if we believe Horace, and in certain circumstances would no doubt be so at this day. It would seem then, that “ the parts of a laugh-
“ able assemblage must be in some degree unsuitable and hetero-
“ geneous.”

Moreover : Any one of the parts of the Horatian monster, a human head, a horse's neck, the tail of a fish, or the plumage of a fowl, is not ludicrous in itself ; nor would those several parts be ludicrous, if attended to in succession, without any view to their union. For to see them disposed on different shelves of a museum, or even on the same shelf, no body would laugh, except perhaps the thought of uniting them were to occur to his fancy, or the passage of Horace to his memory. It seems to follow, “ that the incongruous parts of a laughable idea or object
“ must either be combined so as to form an assemblage, or must
“ be supposed to be so combined.”

May we not then conclude, that “ Laughter arises from the
“ view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous
“ parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex
“ object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation
“ from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of
“ them ?” The lines from Akenfide, formerly referred to, seem to point at the same doctrine :

Where-e'er the power of Ridicule displays
Her quaint-eyed visage, *some incongruous form,*
Some stubborn dissonance of things combined,
Strikes on the quick observer,

And,

And, to the same purpose, the learned and ingenious Dr Gerard, in his *Essay on Taste*: “The sense of Ridicule is gratified by an
“inconsistence and dissonance of circumstances in the same ob-
“ject, or in objects nearly related in the main; or by a simili-
“tude or relation unexpected between things on the whole oppo-
“site and unlike.”

And therefore, instead of saying with Hucheson, that the cause or object of laughter is an “opposition of dignity and mean-
“ness;” — I would say, in more general terms, that it is, “an
“opposition of suitableness and unsuitableness, or of relation
“and the want of relation, united, or supposed to be united, in
“the same assemblage.” — Thus the offices ascribed to the dagger of Hudibras seem quite heterogeneous; but we discover a bond of connection among them, when we are told, that the same weapon could occasionally perform them all. — Thus, even in that mimicry, which displays no opposition of dignity and meanness, we perceive the actions of one man joined to the features and body of another; that is, a mixture of unsuitableness, or want of relation, arising from the difference of persons, with congruity and similitude, arising from the sameness of the actions. — Thus, at first view, the dawn of the morning, and a boiled lobster, seem utterly incongruous, unlike, and (as Biondello says of Petruchio’s stirrups) “of no kindred;” but when a change of colour from black to red is suggested, we recognize a likeness, and consequently a relation, or ground of comparison.

And here let it be observed in general, that, the greater the number of incongruities that are blended in the same assemblage, the more ludicrous it will probably be. If, as in the last example, there be an opposition of dignity and meanness, as well as of likeness and dissimilitude, the effect of the contrast will be more powerful, than if only one of these oppositions had appeared in the ludicrous idea. — The sublimity of Don Quixote’s mind

contrasted and connected with his miserable equipage, forms a very comical exhibition; but when all this is still further connected and contrasted with Sancho Pança, the ridicule is heightened exceedingly. Had the knight of the lions been better mounted and accoutred, he would not have made us smile so often; because, the hero's mind and circumstances being more adequately matched, the whole group would have united fewer inconsistencies, and reconciled fewer incongruities. No particular in this equipment is without its use. The ass of Sancho and the horse of his master; the knight tall and raw-boned, the squire fat and short; the one brave, solemn, generous, learned, and courteous, the other not less remarkable for cowardice, levity, selfishness, ignorance, and rusticity; the one absurdly enamoured of an ideal mistress, the other ridiculously fond of his ass; the one devoted to glory, the other enslaved to his belly: — it is not easy, out of two persons, to make up a more multifarious contrast. Butler has however combined a still greater variety of uncouth and jarring circumstances in Ralpho and Hudibras: but the picture, though more elaborate, is less natural. Yet this argues no defect of judgement. His design was, to make his hero not only ludicrous, but contemptible; and therefore he jumbles together, in his equipage and person, a number of mean and disgusting qualities, pedantry, ignorance, nastiness, and extreme deformity. But the knight of La Mancha, though a ludicrous, was never intended for a contemptible personage. He often moves our pity, he never forfeits our esteem; and his adventures and sentiments are generally interesting: which could not have been the case, if his story had not been natural, and himself endowed with great as well as good qualities. To have given him such a shape, and such weapons, arguments, boots, and breeches, as Butler has bestowed on his champion, would have destroyed that solemnity, which is so striking a feature in
Don

Don Quixote; and Hudibras, with the manners and person of the Spanish hero, would not have been that paltry figure, which the English poet meant to hold up to the laughter and contempt of his countrymen. — Sir Launcelot Greaves is of Don Quixote's kindred, but a different character. Smollet's design was, not to expose him to ridicule; but rather to recommend him to our pity and admiration. He has therefore given him youth, strength, and beauty, as well as courage, and dignity of mind, has mounted him on a generous steed, and arrayed him in an elegant suit of armour. Yet, that the history might have a comic air, he has been careful to contrast and connect Sir Launcelot with a squire and other associates of very dissimilar tempers and circumstances.

What has been said of the cause of laughter does not amount to an exact description, far less to a logical definition: there being innumerable combinations of congruity and inconsistency, of relation and contrariety, of likeness and dissimilitude, which are not ludicrous at all. If we could ascertain the peculiarities of these, we should be able to characterise with more accuracy the general nature of ludicrous combination. But before we proceed to this, it would be proper to evince, that of the present theory thus much at least is true, that though every incongruous combination is not ludicrous, every ludicrous combination is incongruous.

It is only by a detail of facts or examples, that any theory of this sort can be either established or overthrown. By such a detail, the foregoing theories have been, or may be, shown to be ill-founded, or not sufficiently comprehensive. A single instance of a laughable object, which neither unites, nor is supposed to unite incongruous ideas, would likewise show the insufficiency of the present: nor will I undertake to prove, (for indeed I cannot), that no such instance can be given. A complete enumeration of
ludicrous

ludicrous objects it would be vain to attempt : and therefore we can never hope to ascertain, beyond the possibility of doubt, that common quality which belongs to all ludicrous ideas that are, or have been, or may be imagined. All that can be done in a case of this kind is to prove, by a variety of examples, that the theory now proposed is more comprehensive, and better founded, than any of the foregoing.

Many are the modes of combination by which incongruous qualities may be presented to the eye, or to the fancy, so as to provoke laughter : and of incongruity itself, as of falsehood, the forms may be diversified without end. An *exact arrangement* of ludicrous examples is therefore as unattainable as a *complete enumeration*. Something, however, of this sort we must attempt, to avoid running into confusion.

I. One of the simplest modes of combination, is that which arises from *Contiguity*. Things incongruous are often laughable, when united as parts of a system, or simply *when placed together*. — That dialogue of Erasimus, called *Abfurda*, which looks like a conversation between two deaf men, seems to be an attempt to raise laughter, by the mere juxtaposition of unconnected sentences. But the attempt is rather unsuccessful ; this sort of cross-purposes being too obvious, and too little surprising, to yield entertainment.

1. Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, all admit, that bodily singularities may be laughable* ; and, according to the first of these authors, that is a ridiculous countenance, in which there is deformity and distortion without distress. Any feature, particularly one of the middle features, a nose, a mouth, or a chin, uncommonly large, may, when attended with no inconvenience, tempt one to smile ; as appears from the effect of caricatura in

* Arist. Poet. § 5. ; Cicero de Orat. ii. 239. ; Quint. Inst. Or. vi. 3.

painting. We read in the *Spectator* *, of a number of men with long chins, whom a wag at Bath invited to dine with him ; and are told, that a great deal of mirth passed on the occasion. Here was a collection of incongruities related not only by mutual similitude, but also by juxtaposition ; a circumstance that would naturally heighten the ludicrous effect. Yet here was no mixture of dignity and meanness ; and the meeting, if it had been accidental, would not have been less laughable.

2. A country-dance of men and women, like those exhibited by Hogarth in his *Analysis of Beauty*, could hardly fail to make a beholder merry, whether he believed their union to be the effect of design, or of accident. Most of those persons have incongruities of their own, in their shape, dress, or attitude, and all of them are incongruous in respect of one another ; thus far the assemblage displays contrariety or want of relation : and they are all united in the same place, and in the same dance ; and thus far they are mutually related. And if we suppose the two elegant figures removed, which might be done without lessening the ridicule, we should not easily discern any contrast of dignity and meanness in the group that remains.

3. Almost the same remarks might be made on *The Enraged Musician*, another piece of the same great master, of which a witty author quaintly says, that it *deafens* one to look at it. This extraordinary group forms a very comical mixture of incongruity and relation ; — of incongruity, owing to the dissimilar employments and appearances of the several persons, and to the variety and dissonance of their respective noises ; — and of relation, owing to their being all united in the same place, and for the same purpose, of tormenting the poor fiddler. From the various sounds co-operating to this one end, the piece becomes more

* Number 371.

laughable, than if their meeting were conceived to be without any particular destination; for the greater the number of relations, as well as of contrarieties, that take place in any ludicrous assemblage, the more ludicrous it will generally appear. Yet though this group comprehends not any mixture of meanness and dignity, it would, I think, be allowed to be laughable to a certain degree, merely from the juxtaposition of the objects, even though it were supposed to be accidental.

Groups of this sort, if accurately described, are no doubt entertaining, when expressed in words, as well as when presented to the eye by means of colour. But it would require many words to do justice to so great a variety of things and persons; which therefore could not be apprehended by the mind, but gradually and in succession; and hence the jarring coincidences of the whole would be less discernible in a poetical description, than in a print or picture. The ludicrous effect, that arises from the mere *contiguity* of the objects, may therefore be better exemplified by visible assemblages delineated by the painter, than by such as are conveyed to the mind by verbal description *. Yet even
by

* But it does not follow, that Painting is a more copious source of Ridiculous emotion, than those arts are which affect the mind by means of language. Painting is no doubt more lively in description than Poetry: and, by presenting a whole composition to the eye at once, may strike the mind with a more diversified and more emphatical impulse. What we see, too, we apprehend more easily than what we only conceive from narration:

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,
Quam quæ sunt oculis subiecta fidelibus, et quæ
Ipse sibi tradit spectator.

But the descriptive powers of painting are subject to many limitations. It cannot mark the progress of action or thought, because it exhibits the events of one instant

by this vehicle, burlesque combinations may be suggested to the fancy, which in part derive the ludicrous character from the *juxta-position* of the component parts. Take an example or two.

4. “ If a man (says the *Tatler*, speaking of the utility of advertisements) has pains in his head, colics in his bowels, or spots in his cloaths, he may there meet with proper cures and remedies. If a man would recover a wife, or a horse that is stolen or strayed; if he wants new sermons, electuaries, or asses milk, or any thing else, either for his body or his mind, this is the place to look for them in *.”

5. He sung of Taffy Welch, and Sawney Scot,
Lillibullero, and the Irish trot;
The bower of Rosamond, and Robin Hood,
And how the grafs now grows where Troy town stood;
Then he was seiz'd with a religious qualm,
And on a sudden sung the hundredth psalm †.

6. Incongruous ideas, related by contiguity, do sometimes acquire a closer connection, and may become more laughable, when

stant of time; nor has it any expression for intellectual notions, nor for those calmer affections of the soul that produce no visible change on the body. But Poetry can describe every energy of mind, and phenomenon of matter; and every variety, however minute, of character, sentiment, and passion, as it appears in each period of its progress. And innumerable combinations, both of sublime and of ludicrous ideas there are, which the pencil cannot trace out, but which are easily conveyed to the mind by speech or writing.

* *Tatler*, Numb. 224.

† *Gay's Pastorals*. See *Rape of the Lock*, ii. 105. — 110.

their names being made equally dependent upon one and the same verb, confer on it two or more incongruous significations.

“ It is observable, (says Pope of Prince Eugene), that this general is a great taker of snuff, as well as of towns *.”

An opposition of dignity and meanness, or of greatness and littleness, is no doubt observable in these examples. Yet description may sometimes be laughable, when the ideas or phrases are related by juxta-position only, and imply no perceptible contrast of dignity and meanness. Swift's Inventory of his household-stuff, “An oaken broken elbow-chair, “A caudle-cup without an “ ear,” &c. is truly laughable; at least we are sure that he thought it so: the *various* and *dissimilar* articles specified in it are

* Key to the Lock. — In all wit of this sort, when laughter is intended, it will perhaps be necessary to blend greatness with littleness, or to form some other glaring contrast. Ovid and Cowley are fond of these quaint conceits, but seldom raise a smile by them, and surely did not intend any.

Confiliis non curribus utere nostris.

Metamorph. lib. 2.

And not my chariot, but my counsel take.

Addison.

But now the early birds began to call

The morning forth: uprose the Sun and Saul.

Davidis.

“ A horse (says a certain serious, but flowery author) may throw his rider, and “ at once dash his body against the stones, and his soul into the other world.”

Such witticism in a serious work is offensive to a reader of taste, (see Hurd's Commentary on the Epistle to Augustus, vers. 97.); — and we are not apt to laugh at that which offends us. To the author it is probably the object of admiration, and we seldom laugh at what we greatly admire.

similar and uniform in this one respect, that they are all worn out, imperfect, or useless; but their meanness is without any mixture of dignity. — Sancho's Proverbs often provoke a smile; not because some are low and others elevated, but because, though *unconnected* both with the subject and with one another, they happen to be spoken *at the same time*, and absurdly applied to the same purpose. — I have heard that mirth may be promoted amongst idle people by the following expedient. On the top of a page of paper, one of the company writes a line, which he covers with a book; another adds a second, and conceals it in the same manner; and thus the paper goes from hand to hand, till it be full, no body knowing what the others have written: then the covering is taken off, and the whole read over, as if it were a continued discourse. Here the principal bond of union is juxtaposition; and yet, though united by this alone, and though accidentally united, the incongruities may be laughable; though no doubt the joke would be heightened, if there should also happen to be a mixture of meanness and dignity. And the same thing will be found to hold true of those musical contrivances called *medleys*.

7. Even when art is not used to disunite them, human thoughts under no restraint are apt to become ridiculously wild and incongruous. When his mind unbends itself in a reverie, and, without attending to any particular object, permits the ideas to appear and glide away according to the caprice of undirected fancy, the gravest philosopher would be shy of giving permanence to such a jumble by speech or writing*; lest by its odd incongruities it should raise a laugh at his expence, and show that his thoughts were not quite so regular as he wished the world to believe. We need not then wonder, that, when persons of

* See the *Spectator*, Numb. 225.

light minds are made to *think aloud* upon the stage, their rhapsodies should prove so entertaining. Juliet's *Nurse*, and *Mrs Quickly*, are characters of this sort. And we meet with many such in real life; whose ravings are laughable, even when they exhibit no mixture of meanness and dignity, and when mere *juxta-position* is the chief bond of union among their ideas.

II. The mind naturally considers as part of the same assemblage, and joins together in one view, those objects that appear in the relation of *cause and effect*. Hence when things, in other respects *unrelated* or *incongruous*, are found or supposed to be *thus related*, they sometimes provoke laughter.

1. "Really, Madam, (says Filch in the *Beggar's opera*), I fear "I shall be cut off in the flower of my youth; so that every "now and then, since I was *pumpt*, I have thoughts of taking up "and going to sea." — It is the cause of this resolution that makes it ludicrous. One sort of water suggests another to the thief's fancy; and the fresh-water pump puts him in mind of a similar implement belonging to ships. There is something unexpected, and incongruous, in the thought, and at the same time an appearance of natural connection.

2. There is a sort of Ironical Reasoning, not easily described, which would seem to derive the ludicrous character from a surprising mixture of Plausibility and Absurdity: and which, on account of the real disagreement, though seeming affinity, of the conclusion considered as the *effect*, with the premises considered as the *cause*, may not improperly be referred to this head; though perhaps, from the real *dissimilitude*, and unexpected appearance of *likeness*, in the circumstances whereon the argument is founded, it might with equal propriety be referred to the following. Several humorous examples of this kind of sophistry may be seen in that excellent English ballad called *The tippling Philosophers*. Hudibras also abounds in it. Such are the lines already quoted,

in

in which he draws comfort from the disaster of being fet in the stocks; and such are those well-known passages, that prove morality to be a crime, and Honour to lodge in that part of the human body where it is most liable to be wounded by a kick*.

3. A cause and effect extremely inadequate to each other form a ludicrous combination. We smile at the child (in *Quarles's Emblems*) attempting to blow out the sun with a pair of bellows. Nor is it much less ridiculous to see heroes, in a tragedy or opera, breathing their last in a long-winded similitude, or musical cadence. The tailor of Laputa, taking measure for a suit of cloaths with a quadrant; the wise men of Lagado carrying vast loads of *things* about with them, that they might converse together without impairing their lungs by the use of speech; and several of the other projects recorded in the same admirable satire †, are ludicrous in the highest degree, from the utter disproportion of the effect to the cause. The same remark may be made upon that part of Sir John Enville's complaint, where he says, (speaking of his lady), "She dictates to me in my own business, "sets me right in point of trade; and, if I disagree with her about any of my ships at sea, wonders that I will dispute with her, when I know very well that her great-grandfather was a flag-officer ‡." — Violent anger occasioned by slight injury makes a man ridiculous; we *despise* his levity, and *laugh* at his absurdity. All excessive passion, when it awakens not sympathy, is apt to provoke laughter; nor do we heartily sympathise with any malevolent, nor indeed with any violent emotions, till we know their cause, or have reason to think them well founded. With such as we have no experience of, we rarely sympathise;

* See *Hudibras*, part 2. canto 3. vers. 1065; and part 3. canto 1. vers. 1290.

† *Gulliver's voyage to Laputa*.

‡ *Spectator*, Numb. 299.

and the view of them in others, especially when immoderate, gives rise to merriment. The distress of the miser when his hoard is stolen, and the transport wherewith he receives it back, though the most intense feelings of which he is capable, are more apt to move our laughter, than our sorrow or joy : and in the *Aulularia* of Plautus, a great deal of comic ridicule is founded on this circumstance. — Ranting in tragedy is laughable, because we know the cause to be inadequate to the effect ; and because a distorted imitation of nature implies a contrast of likeness and dissimilitude : but the opposite fault of insipidity, either in acting or in writing, unless accompanied with something peculiarly absurd, is not laughable ; because it does not rouse the attention, and has not that *uncommonness*, which (as will be shown hereafter) generally belongs to ludicrous combination. This difference in the effects of theatrical impropriety is hinted at by Horace :

—— Male si mandata loqueris,
Aut dormitabo, aut ridebo *. ——

— Immoderate fear in another, when there seems to be no sufficient cause for it, and when we ourselves are at ease ; like that of Sir Hugh Evans, when he is going to fight the French Doctor, is highly ridiculous ; both because it is excessive, and because it produces a conflict of discordant passions, and an unconnected effusion of words †.

4. An

* Ar. Poet. vers. 105.

† “ Pless my soul ! how full of cholers I am, and trempling of mind ! I shall
“ be glad if he have deceived me. How melancholies I am ? I will knog his
“ urnals about his knave’s costard, when I have good opportunities for the orke.
“ Pless

4. An emotion that ought to be important venting itself in frivolous language, or insipid behaviour, would no doubt make us smile, if it did not occasion disappointment, or some other powerful feeling subversive of laughter. When Blackmore, in his Paraphrases of Holy Writ, shows, by the meanness of his words and figures, that, instead of having an adequate sense of the dignity of the subject, his mind was wandering after the most paltry conceits; our laughter is prevented by our indignation. Or if ever we are betrayed into a smile by such a couplet as the following,

On thee, O Jacob, I thy jealous God
Vast heaps of heavy mischief will unload *,

it must be in some unguarded moment, when, our disgust being less keen than it ought to be, the ludicrous emotion is permitted to operate.

5. Every body knows, that hyperbole is a source of the sublime; and it is equally true, that amplification is a source of humour. But as that which is intrinsically mean cannot be made great, so neither can real excellence be rendered laughable, by mere amplification. A coxcomb, by exaggerating the charms of a beautiful woman, may make himself ridiculous, but will hardly make them so. But a deformity of feature, that is ludicrous in a low degree, may by exaggeration be made more ludicrous: witness Falstaff's account of Bardolph's fiery-coloured face †.

"Pless my soul! *To shallow rivers, to whose falls Melodious birds sing madrigals;*
" (singing) — *To shallow — Mercy on me! I have a great disposition to cry.*
" *When as I fate in Pabilon,*" &c. *Merry Wives of Windsor, act 3. sc. 1.*

* Blackmore's Song of Moses.

† First part of King Henry IV. act 3. sc. 3.

The following is a Grecian conceit; and so highly valued by Strada, that he takes the trouble to explain it in a copious paraphrase.

In vain to wipe his nose old Proclus tries;
That mafs his most expansive grasp defies:
Sneezing he fays not, “Bless me;” so remote
His nostril from his ear, he hears it not *.

Strobilus, in the play, ridicules the miser, by faying, “That he faved the parings of his nails, and used to exclaim, that he was undone when he faw the fmoke of his fire efcaping through the chimney †.” But the most profligate wag that ever appeared in modern comedy could not make the moral or intellec-

* This epigram appears to more advantage in the Greek, on account of the great fimlicity of the expreffion.

Οὐ δύναται τῇ χειρὶ Προκλος τιν ῥιν' ἀπομυθεῖν,
Τῆς ῥινος γὰρ ἔχει τιν χεῖρα μικροτέραν.
Οὐδὲ λέγει Ζεῦ σῶσον, ἔαν παρῇ· ὃ γὰρ ἀκούει
Τῆς ῥινος, πολὺ γὰρ τῆς ἀκοῆς ἀπεχει.

See Strada. *Pistis Suburranus*. — Longinus gives this example of a Ludicrous hyperbole.

Ἄγρον ἐσχ' ἐλαττω γῆν ἔχοντ' ἄρ' ἐπισολῆς
Λακωνικῆς. —————

De Subl. sect. 37.

“He was owner of a field not so large as a Lacedemonian epistle;” — which sometimes consisted of no more than two or three words. Vide Quintil. Orat. Inst. lib. 8. cap. 3. & 6. Greek and Latin, we see, may be quoted on trifling as well as important subjects.

† Plaut. *Aulul.* act 2. sc. 4.

tual

tual virtues of a good man ridiculous, merely by magnifying them; though, by misrepresenting, or by connecting her with ludicrous imagery, he might no doubt raise a momentary smile at the expence even of Virtue herself.

Humorous Amplification will generally be found to imply a mixture of plausibility and absurdity, or of likeness and dissimilitude. Butler's hero speaks in very hyperbolical terms of the acute feelings occasioned by kicking and cudgelling :

Some have been beaten, till they know
What wood the cudgel's of, by the blow ;
Some kick'd, until they can feel, whether
A shoe be Spanish or neat's leather *.

The fact is impossible;—hence the *want of relation* between the cause and the pretended effect. Yet when we reflect, that the qualities of wood and leather are perceived by sense, and that some of them may be perceived by the touch or feeling, there appears something like plausibility in what is said;—and hence the *seeming relation* between the pretended effect and the cause. And an additional incongruity presents itself, when we compare the seriousness of the speaker with the absurdity of what is spoken. — When Smollet, in one of his novels, describing violent fear, says, “ He stared like the gorgon's head, with his mouth wide open, and each particular hair crawling and twining like an animated serpent,” he raises the portrait far above nature; but at the same time gives it an apparent plausibility, from the effect which fear is supposed to have in making the hair stand on end. — It is, I confess, an awkward thing, to comment upon these and the like passages : and I am afraid, the reader may be tempt-

* Hudibras, part 2. canto 1. vers. 221.

ed to say of the ludicrous quality in the hands of one who thus analyses it, that,

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

But I hope it will be considered, that I have no other way of explaining my subject in a satisfactory manner. One cannot lay open the elementary parts of any animal or vegetable system, without violating its outward beauty.

As hyperboles are very common, being used by all persons on almost all occasions *, it might be supposed, that, by the frequency of this figure, mirth could easily be promoted in conversation, and a character for humour acquired, with little expence of thought, and without any powers of genius. But that would be a mistake. Familiar hyperboles excite neither laughter nor astonishment. All ludicrous and all sublime exaggeration, is characterised by an uncommonness of thought or language. And laughable appearances in general, whether exhibited to the senses or to the fancy, will for the most part be found to imply something unexpected, and to produce some degree of surprise.

III. Laughter often arises from the discovery of unexpected *likeness* between objects apparently *dissimilar*: and the greater the apparent dissimilitude, and new-discovered resemblance, the greater will be the surprise attending the discovery, the more striking the opposition of contrariety and relation, and the more lively the risible emotion. All men, and all children, have a tendency to mark resemblances; hence the allegories, similes, and metaphors, so frequent in common discourse: but readily to find out similitudes that are not obvious, and were never found out before, is

* See Essay on Poetry, part 2. chap. 1. sect. 3. § 5.

no ordinary talent. The person possessed of it is called a man of *wit*; especially if at the same time he possess that other talent of conveying his meaning in concise, perspicuous, and natural language. For I agree with Locke, that “Wit consists chiefly in the
 “ assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness
 “ and variety wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy *:” — And I also agree with Pope, that
 “ an easy delivery, as well as perfect conception;” — and with Dryden, that “propriety of words as well as of thought,” is necessary to the formation of true wit. Images and comparisons, conveyed in obscure terms, or in too many words, have little effect upon the mind, because they oblige us to take up time in collecting all the parts of the idea; which must lessen our surprise, and abate the vivacity of the consequent emotion: and if the language, instead of being natural, were quaint and elaborate, we should be disgusted, from an opinion, that the whole was the effect of art, rather than the instantaneous effort of a playful imagination.

It is a rule in serious writing, that similitudes should be neither too obvious, nor too remote. If too obvious, they offend by their insignificancy, give a mean opinion of the author’s inventive powers, and afford little variety, because they suggest that only which the reader supposes himself to be already acquainted with. If too remote, they distract the reader’s attention; and they show, that the author’s fancy is wandering from his subject, and therefore that he himself is not suitably affected with it; — a fault which we blame in a serious writer, as well as in a public speaker or player. Familiar allusions, such as every body may make every day, are to be avoided in humorous composition also;

* Essay on Human Understanding, book 2. chap. 11. § 2.

not only because they are insignificant, yield no variety, and give a mean idea of the author, but likewise because they have not incongruity enough to be ludicrous * : — for when we have been long accustomed to compare certain things together, or to view them as united in the same assemblage, the one so constantly introduces the other into the mind, that we come to look upon them as congenial. — But in ludicrous writing, comparisons, if the point of resemblance be clearly expressed, and the thing alluded to sufficiently known, can scarce be too remote : for here the author is not supposed to be in earnest, and therefore we allow full scope to his fancy ; and here the more remote the comparison, the more heterogeneous are the objects compared, and the greater the contrast of congruity and unsuitableness.

Persons who would pass for wits are apt affectedly to interlard their ordinary discourse with similitudes ; which, however, unless they are uncommon, as well as apposite, will only betray the barrenness of the speaker's fancy. Fielding ridicules this sort of pedantry, in a dialogue between a bad poet and a player. “ Plays
“ (says the man of rhyme) are like trees, which will not grow

* Swift's Song of Similes, *My passion is as mustard strong*, &c. will perhaps occur to the reader as an exception. And it is true of that humorous piece, that most of the comparisons are not only common, but even proverbial. But then there is, in the way of applying them, a species of novelty, that shows a lively and singular turn of fancy in the author, and occasions an agreeable surprise to the reader : and the mutual relation, owing to the juxtaposition, of so many dissonant ideas and incongruous proverbs, cannot fail to heighten greatly the ludicrous effect. Common, or even proverbial, allusions may successfully enough be introduced into burlesque, when they surprise by the peculiarity of their application. In this case, though familiar in themselves, they are remote in regard to the subject, and apparently incongruous ; and may therefore raise our opinion of the author's wit : as a clock made with the tools of a blacksmith would evidence uncommon dexterity in the artist.

“ without

“ without nourishment ; but, like mushrooms, they shoot up
 “ spontaneously, as it were, in a rich soil. The muses, like vines,
 “ may be pruned, but not with a hatchet. The town, like a peevish
 “ child, knows not what it desires, and is always best pleased
 “ with a rattle *.”

As some comparisons add to the beauty and sublimity of serious composition, so others may heighten the ludicrous effect of wit and humour. In what respects the former differ from the latter, will be seen afterwards. At present I shall only specify the several classes of ludicrous similitudes, and give an example or two in each, with a view to illustrate my theory.

1. One mean object may be compared to another mean object in such a way as to provoke laughter. In this case, as there is no opposition of meanness and dignity, it will be proper, in order to make the combination sufficiently incongruous, that the thing alluded to, if familiar in itself, be remote in regard to the subject, and such as one would not be apt to think of, on such an occasion.

“ I do remember him (says Falstaff, speaking of Justice Shallow) at Clement’s Inn, like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring. When he was naked, he was for all the world like a forked radish, with a head fantastically carved upon it with a knife †.”

He snatch’d his whinyard up, that fled
 When he was falling off his steed,
 As rats do from a falling house ‡.

* See the History of Joseph Andrew’s, book 3. chap. 10. The whole dialogue is exquisitely humorous.

† Second part of K. Henry IV. act 3.

‡ Hudibras.

The reader will think, perhaps, that there is even in these examples something of greatness mixed with meanness, as well as in the following :

Instead of trumpet and of drum,
Which makes the warrior's stomach come,
And whets men's valour sharp, like beer,
By thunder turn'd to vinegar *,

But that mixture is more observable, when,

2. Things important, serious, or great, are ludicrously compared to such as are mean, frivolous, or vulgar. King Arthur, in the tragedy of Tom Thumb, hints at an analogy between two feelings, that were never before thought to have any thing in common.

I feel a sudden pain within my breast,
Nor know I, whether it proceed from love,
Or only the wind-colic. Time must show.

“ Wisdom (says Swift) is a fox, who, after long hunting, will
“ at last cost you the pains to dig out : it is a cheese, which, by
“ how much the richer, has the thicker, the homelier, and the
“ coarser coat, and whereof, to a judicious palate, the maggots
“ are the best : it is a sack-posset, wherein the deeper you go,
“ you will find it the sweeter. Wisdom is a hen, whose cackling
“ we must value and consider, because it is attended with an egg.
“ But then, lastly, Wisdom is a nut, which, unless you chuse
“ with judgement, may cost you a tooth, and pay you with no-
“ thing but a worm †.”

* Hudibras.

† Introduction to the Tale of a Tub.

Musick in general, especially military musick, is an object of great dignity to the serious poet; he describes it with sublime allusions, and in the most harmonious language. Butler, by a contrary artifice, makes one species of it ridiculous.

The kettle-drum, whose fullen dub
Sounds — like the hooping of a tub.

3. Things in themselves ludicrous and mean may become more ludicrous, by being compared to such as are serious or great; and that, first, when the serious object alluded to is mentioned in simple terms, without debasement or exaggeration *; — secondly, when it is purposely degraded by vulgar language and mean circumstances †; — and, thirdly, when it is exhibited in all the pomp of numbers and description ‡. Examples of the two first cases are common in *burlesque*; the third is peculiar to the *mock-heroic* style.

From these remarks it will appear, that the risible emotion may in various ways be raised or increased by comparison and similitude. Metaphor, allegory, and the other tropes and figures founded in resemblance, may in like manner heighten the effect of ludicrous composition.

Without multiplying examples, I shall only observe, of the Allegory in particular, that, provided its design be important and obvious, a great disproportion, in point of dignity, between what it expresses and what it signifies, will not convey any ludicrous idea to a sound mind; unless where an author is at pains to de-

* See Hudibras, part 1. can. 1. vers. 289.

† See Hudibras, part 2. can. 2. vers. 595.

‡ See Dunciad, book 2. vers. 181.

grade his allegory, either by the extreme meanness of the allusion, or by connecting it with something laughable in the circumstances of phraseology. The fables and parables of ancient times, were not intended to raise laughter, but to instruct mankind. Accordingly, those Greek apologues, which are ascribed to Esop, and bear undoubted marks of antiquity, are delivered in the most simple style, and without any effort to draw the reader's attention to ludicrous ideas, except when these make a part of the story *. But some modern fabulists, particularly L'Estrange, are anxious to have their fables considered, not only as instructive allegories, but also as merry tales; and, in order to make them such, frequently employ ludicrous images, and the most familiar diction. Whether this, or the ancient, form of the apologue, deserve the preference, I shall not now inquire. But I could wish, that where the moral was of great importance, and connected with sacred things, we had, in our fables, imitated rather the simplicity of ancient language, than the levity of modern wit. Ridiculous ideas, associated by custom, with religious truths, can have no good effect upon the mind. And in this view, the book called *Scotch Presbyterian eloquence displayed* must ever be held in abhorrence by the friends of religion, even tho' the writer could be vindicated from the charge of wilful and malicious falsehood. And I cannot but think, that, in this view, even the *Tale of a Tub*, notwithstanding its unequalled merit as a piece of humorous writing, is blameable, in the general tenor of

* And when there is any thing laughable in the circumstances, it often appears to greater advantage in the simple Greek, than in the most elaborate modern paraphrase. The reader may compare *Αλώπηξ καὶ Κέφαλος* with *Le Corbeau et le Renard* of Fontaine. The conclusion of the former is remarkably expressive and picturesque, as well as simple : *Οὐδὲ κεφαλὴν ἀνέσας ταῦτα, ὃ χαυνώσῃς τοῖς ἰατρίοις, πῶς γὰρ κρέας, μέγας ἐκκρίνει, &c.*

the allegory, as well as in particular passages. — Are you then one of those gloomy mortals, who think religion an enemy to jocularity? By no means. If I were, I should not now be writing an Essay on Laughter. Christianity is, in my opinion, not merely a friend to cheerfulness, but the only thing in the world which can make a considerate mind rationally and permanently cheerful. But between smiling and sneering, between complacency and contempt, between innocent mirth and unseasonable buffoonry, there seems to me to be a very wide difference.

After what Addison in the *Spectator*, and Dryden in one of his long prefaces, have said against Hudibrastic rhimes, one can hardly venture to affirm, that a smile may sometimes be occasioned by those unexpected coincidences of sound. I confess, however, that I have been entertained with them in Swift and Butler; and should think him a prudish critic who could turn up his nose at the following couplets:

And pulpit, drum ecclesiastic
Was beat with fist, instead of a stick. —
With words far bitterer than wormwood,
That would in Job or Grizel stir mood. —
Though stored with deleterious medicines,
Which whosoever took is dead since. —
There was an ancient sage philosopher,
Who had read Alexander Ross over. —

I grant, that these combinations, considered as wit, have little or no merit. Yet they seem to possess in a certain degree the ludicrous character, and to derive it from the *diversity* of the words and meaning as contrasted with the unexpected *similarity* of the sounds. In ordinary rhimes, the sound, being expected, gives no surprise; and, being common, seems natural, and a thing of

course : but when two or three words, in the end of one line, correspond in sound to two or three syllables of the same word, in the end of another, the *jarring coincidence* is more striking and more surprising. But as they surprise the more, the less they are expected, and the less they seem to be sought for, these rhimes must lose their effect when too frequent. And the same thing must happen, when they are incorrect, on account of the imperfect resemblance, and because every body knows it is an easy matter to bring words together that have some *letters* only in common : and therefore one is rather offended than entertained with the rhyme of this couplet of Prior :

Know then, when Phebus' rays inspect us,
First, Sir, I read, and then I breakfast.

Hudibrastic rhimes can take place only in burlesque* ; such trifling being unsuitable to all serious poetry, and even to the affected solemnity of the mock-heroic.

* Hobbes, partly by a rhyme of this kind, and partly by a misapprehension of Homer's language, has turned into gross burlesque one of the most admired descriptions in all poetry.

Ἦ, ἃ κυανέησιν ἐπ' ὄφρυσι νῦνσε Κρονίων·
 Ἀμβρόσιαι δ' ἄρα χαῖται ἐπεβρώσασατο ἄναξλος
 Κρατος ἀπ' ἀθανάτοιο, μέγαν δ' ἐλελίξεν ὀλύμπον, &c. *Iliad. I. 523.*

This said, with his black brows he to her *nodded*,
 Wherewith displayed were his locks divine ;
 Olympus shook at stirring of his *godhead* ;
 And Thetis from it jump'd into the brine.

The translator shows also his ignorance of the English tongue, in the use he makes of the last word of his third line.

Some

Some critics, taking all their notions from the practice of Greece and Rome, have represented rhyme of every kind as a ridiculous thing. But that cannot be ridiculous, to which we are continually accustomed; which, independent on custom, is in itself almost universally pleasing; and which has acquired additional grace and dignity, by being so much used as an ornament in our most beautiful compositions. Similarity of sound in contiguous verses gives pleasure to all children and illiterate persons, and does not naturally offend the ear of any modern European, however learned. Nay we have reason to think, that something of this sort, in the end or beginning * of words, has in all ages

* A similarity of sound in the *beginning* of contiguous words, or rather in their initial consonants, has of late been called *alliteration*. Some authors speak of it in terms of the utmost contempt and abhorrence; and as if none but fools and fops could take any pleasure in it. And surely when it recurs often, and seems to be the effect of study, it gives a finical appearance to poetry, and becomes offensive. But that many good judges of poetical harmony have been pleased with it, might be made appear by innumerable examples from Lucretius, Spenser, Dryden, and others. Indeed, previous to the influence of custom, it would not be easy to determine, whether a similarity of sound, in the beginning, or in the end, of contiguous words, were likely to produce the more rational, or more durable entertainment. That both alliteration and rhyme, though not equally perhaps, are however naturally, pleasing to the ears of our people, is evident, not only from what may be observed in children and peasants, but also from the composition of many of our old proverbs, in which some of the words seem to have been chosen for the sake of the initial letters; as, Many men many minds, Spare to speak and spare to speed, Money makes the mare to go, Love me little love me long, Manners make the man, &c. — *Christ's kirk on the green*, and most of the old Scotch ballads, abound in alliteration. And some ancient English poems are more distinguished by this, than by any other poetical contrivance. In the works of Langland, even where no regard is had to rhyme, and but little to a rude sort of Anapestic Rhythm, it seems to have been a rule, that three words at least of each line should begin with the same letter:

Death came driving after, and all to dust passed
Kyngès and Kayfars, Knightès and Popes.

been agreeable to all nations whatsoever, the Greeks and Romans not excepted. For to what other *ultimate* principle, than the love of similar final sounds, shall we ascribe the frequent coincidence, in termination, of the Greek and Latin participle and adjective, with the substantive? Homer himself often repeats certain harmonious syllables of similar sound; which he might have avoided, and with which, therefore, as he seems on some occasions rather to seek for than to shun them, we may presume that he was pleased *. It is true, the Greeks and Romans did not admit, in their poetry, those similar endings of lines, which we call Rhime. The reason probably was, that in the classical tongues, on account of their regular structure, like terminations were so frequent, that it required more dexterity, and occasioned a more pleasing suspense to the ear, to keep them separate, than to bring them together. But in the modern tongues the case is different; and therefore rhyme may in them have a good effect, though in Greek and Latin it must have had a bad one. Besides, one end of rhimes in modern poetry, is to distinguish it more effectually from prose: the Greeks and Romans distinguished theirs by the measure, and by the composition, upon which the genius of their languages allowed them to bestow innumerable graces, in respect of arrangement, harmony, and variety, whereof the best modern tongues, from the irregularity of their structure, particularly from their want of inflexion, are but mode-

* Virgil has a few of the same sort,

Cornua velatarum obvertimus antennarum.

Æneid. III.

— formæ magnorum ululare luporum.

Æneid. VII.

I do not find, that the ancient critics have taken any notice of this peculiarity. Their *ἰμοιοτελευτον* seems to have been a coincidence of sound rather in the last words of contiguous clauses, than in the last syllables or letters of contiguous words. See Demet. Phaler., § 281.; and Rollin's Quintilian, lib. 9. cap. 3. § 2.

rately

rately susceptible: and therefore, of rhyme, as a mark of distinction, our poetry may sometimes stand in need, though theirs did not. In fact we find, that Blank verse, except where the want of rhyme is compensated, as it is in Milton, by the harmony and variety of the composition, can never have a good effect in our *heroic* poetry: of which any person may be satisfied, who looks into Trapp's Virgil, or who, by changing a word in each couplet, takes away the rhyme from any part of Pope's Homer. But the structure of the Miltonic numbers is so finely diversified, and so transcendently harmonious, that, in the perusal of Paradise Lost, we have no more reason to regret the want of rhyme, than, in reading the Essay on Man, or Dryden's Fables, to lament that they were not written in blank verse.

IV. Dignity and Meanness united, or supposed to be united, in the same assemblage, form a copious source of ludicrous combination. Innumerable are the examples that might be given on this head, but I shall confine my remarks to a few of the most obvious.

1. Mean sentiments appearing unexpectedly in a serious argument, so as to form what is called an anticlimax, are often productive of laughter. Waller, in a magnificent encomium on the Summer Islands, provokes a smile instead of admiration, by a contrast of this kind.

With candid plantanes, and the juicy pine,
On choicest melons and sweet grapes they dine,
And — with potatoes fat their wanton swine.

2. Mean sentiments, or expressions, in the mouth of those who assume airs of dignity, have the same effect. Dogberry is a memorable instance. — “ Bombard the suburbs of Pera, (says a
“ mad shoemaker who fancies himself the King of Prussia, in one

“ of

“ of Smollet’s novels) — make a defart of Lufatia ; — tell my
 “ brother Henry to pafs the Elbe with fifty fquadrons ; — fend
 “ hither my chief engineer ; — *I’ll lay all the fhoes in my fhop,*
 “ the breach will be practicable in four-and-twenty hours.” —
Diâta factis exequanda, is a maxim in hiftorical writing ; and,
 in common life, it may be laid down as a rule to thofe who with
 to avoid the ridicule of others, that they proportion their beha-
 viour to their accomplifhments.

3. Mean or common thoughts delivered in pompous language,
 form a laughable incongruity ; of which our mock tragedies,
 and too often our ferious ones, afford many examples. Upon
 this principle, the character of Pistol is ftill ludicrous, though the
 race of coxcombs of whom he is the representative, has been long
 extinct. The Splendid Shilling of Philips, in which the Milto-
 nic numbers and phrafeology are applied to a trifling fubject, is
 an exquisite fpecimen of this fort of ridicule ; and no part of it
 more fo, than the following lines :

Not blacker tube, nor of a fhorter fize,
 Smokes Cambro-Briton (verfed in pedigree,
 Sprung from Cadwallader and Arthur, kings
 Full famous in romantic tale) ; when he
 O’er many a craggy hill, and barren cliff,
 Upon a cargo of famed Ceftrian cheefe,
 High-overfadowing rides. —

4. A fublime thought, or folemn expreffion, unexpectedly in-
 troduced in the midft of fomething frivolous, feldom fails to pro-
 voke a fmile, unlefs it betray unfeafonable levity, or want of tafte
 in the author.

My hair I’d powder in the women’s way,
 And drefs, and talk of drefling, more than they.

I'll please the maids of honour, if I can ;

Without black velvet breeches — what is man ! *

5. An important or violent passion, proceeding from a cause apparently trifling, is apt (as was remarked already) to excite laughter in the indifferent spectator. Here is a two-fold incongruity ; a great effect is produced by a small cause, and an important passion by an unimportant object. Sancho Pança clinging in the dark to the wall of a ruin, with the dreadful apprehension that a bottomless gulph was beneath him, while his feet were within a few inches of the firm ground, is as laughable an instance of distress as can well be imagined. Sentiments, too, that partake but little of the nature of passion, are sometimes ludicrous, when they seem more important than the occasion requires. As when Parson Adams, to shew that he was not destitute of money, produces half a guinea, and seriously adds, that ostentation of riches was not his motive for displaying it. A finer piece of humour was never written, than Addison's Journal of the Court of honour in the *Tatler* ; in which every reader perceives the opposition of dignity and meanness : — the latter arising from the insignificance of the causes ; the former from the serious air of the narrative, from the accuracy of detail and minuteness of enquiry in the several examinations, and from the grave deportment of the judge and jury. Indeed, through the whole work, the personage of Isaac Bickerstaff is supported with inimitable pleasantry. The conjurer, the politician, the man of humour, the critic ; the seriousness of the moralist, and the mock dignity of the astrologer ; the vivacities and the infirmities peculiar to old age, are all so blended and contrasted in the censor of Great Britain, as to form a character equally complex and natural, equally laughable and respectable.

* *The Man of Taste*, by the Rev. Mr Bramstone, in Doddley's Collection.

6. To this head may perhaps be referred those passages, whercof the humour results from an elaborate or minute, and at the same time unexpected, illustration of what is obvious or frivolous.

“ *Grumio*. A fire, good Curtis. — *Curtis*. Is my master and
“ his wife coming, Grumio? — *Gru*. O, aye, Curtis, aye; and
“ therefore fire, fire. *Cast on no water* *.”

So when two dogs are fighting in the streets,
With a third dog one of the two dogs meets;
With angry tooth he bites him to the bone,
And this dog smarts for what that dog has done †.

7. Mean circumstances in solemn description, seem ridiculous to those who are sensible of the incongruity, except where the effect of that incongruity is counteracted by certain causes to be specified hereafter. Of this blunder in composition the poetry of Blackmore supplies thousands of examples. The lines on Etna, quoted in the treatise on the Bathos, are well known. By his contrivance, the mountain is made to labour, not with a subterraneous fire and external conflagration, but with a fit of the colic; an idea, that seems to have been familiar to him (for we meet with it in other parts of his work); whether from his being subject to that distemper, or, as a physician, particularly successful in curing it, I cannot say. This poet seems to have had no notion of any thing more magnificent, than the usages of his own time and neighbourhood; which, accordingly, he transfers to the most awful subjects, and thus degrades into burlesque what he meant to raise to sublimity. He tells us, that when creation was finished, there was a great rejoicing in heaven, with fire-works and illuminations, and that the angels threw

* Taming of the Shrew.

† Fielding's *Thom Thumb*.

blazing meteors from the battlements *. To the Supreme Being he most indecently ascribes a variety of mechanical operations ; and represents him as *giving commissions* to *envoys* and *agents* to take care of the *heavenly interests* in the land of Palestine, and employing *pioneers* to make a road for him and his army. Nay he speaks, of *household troops* and *guards*, by whose attendance the court of the Almighty is both *graced* and *defended* †. Indeed the general tenor of this author's sacred poetry is so enormously absurd, as to move the indignation of a reader of taste, and consequently suppress the laughter, that such incongruity could not fail to raise, if the subject were less interesting ‡.

But here it may be asked, What is the characteristic of Meanness ? and what the general nature of those circumstances, sentiments, and allusions, which, by falling below an important subject, have a tendency to become ridiculous. — The following brief remarks will suggest a hint or two for answering this question.

First : Nothing natural is mean, unless it convey a disgusting idea. The picture of Ulysses' dog ||, old and blind, and neglected, is not mean ; but the circumstance of his being covered with vermin should have been omitted, because it is both offensive and unnecessary. The description of Evander's fields and cottages, in Virgil **, so far from being mean, is more beautiful and of greater dignity, than that of the sun's palace in Ovid, because more natural, more pleasing, and more instructive. Even the vices and crimes of mankind, the cunning of Iago, the perfidy of Macbeth, the cruelty of Mezentius, the pride of Agamemnon, the fury of Achilles, may, from the ends to which

* Prince Arthur, p. 50. fourth edition.

† Paraphrases of the Psalms, &c.

‡ See the next chapter.

|| Odyss. lib. 17.

** Æneid. lib. 8.

they operate, and from the moral purposes for which the poet introduces them, acquire dignity sufficient to entitle them to a place in serious poetry of the highest order. Natural views of human character in every condition of life, of human passions even in the most uncultivated minds, and of the external world even where destitute of all ornament, may be rendered both useful and agreeable, and may therefore serve to embellish the most sublime performances ; provided that indelicacy be kept at a distance, and the language elevated to the pitch of the composition.

But, secondly, in judging of this sort of propriety, respect must be had to the notions and manners of the people to whom the work was originally addressed : for, by a change of circumstances, any mode of life, any profession, almost any object, may, without losing its name, forfeit part of its original dignity. Few callings are now held in less esteem, than that of itinerant ballad-singers ; and yet their predecessors the Minstrels were accounted not only respectable but sacred. — If we take our idea of a shepherd from those who keep sheep in this country, we shall have no adequate sense of the propriety of many passages in old authors who allude to that character. Shepherds in ancient times were men of great distinction. The riches, and consequently the power, of many political societies, depended then on their flocks and herds ; and we learn, from Homer, that the sons and favourites of kings, and, from Scripture, that the patriarchs, took upon them the employment of shepherds. This gave dignity to an office, which in those days it required many virtues and great abilities to execute. Those shepherds must have been watchful and attentive in providing accommodation for their flocks ; and strong and valiant, to defend them from robbers and beasts of prey, which in regions of great extent and thinly peopled, would be frequently met with. We find, that David's du-
ty

ty as a shepherd obliged him to encounter a lion and a bear, which he slew with his own hand. In a word, a good shepherd was, in those times, a character in the highest degree respectable both for dignity and virtue. And therefore we need not wonder, that, in holy writ, the most sacred persons should be compared to good shepherds; that kings, in Homer, should be called shepherds of the people*; and that Christian ministers should even now take the name of Pastors, and speak, of the

* A plain and unaffected literal version of Homer, well executed, would be a valuable work. In the perusal indeed it would not be so pleasing as Pope's Translation; nor could it convey any adequate idea of the harmony of the original: but by preserving the figures, allusions, and turns of language, peculiar to the great father of poetry, it would give those who are ignorant of Greek a juster notion of the manners of his age, and of the style of his composition, than can be learned from any translation of him that has yet appeared. — Something of this kind the world had reason to expect from Madame Dacier, but was disappointed. Homer, as dressed out by that Lady, has more of the Frenchman in his appearance, than of the old Grecian. His beard is close-shaved, his hair is powdered, and there is even a little *rouge* upon his cheek. To speak more intelligibly, his simple and nervous diction is often wire-drawn into a flashy and feeble paraphrase, and his imagery as well as harmony sometimes annihilated by abbreviation. Nay to make him the more modish, the good lady is at pains to patch up his style with unnecessary phrases and flourishes in the French taste; which have just such an effect in a translation of Homer, as a bag-wig and snuff-box would have in a picture of Achilles. — The French tongue has a simplicity and a style of figures and phrases peculiar to itself; but is so circumscribed by the mode, that it will hardly admit either the ornaments or the plainness of ancient language. *Shepherd of the people* is a favourite expression of Homer's, and is indeed a beautiful periphrasis: it occurs, I think, twelve times in the first five books of the *Iliad*, and in M. Dacier's prose version of those books, only once. — A celebrated French Translator of Demosthenes makes the orator address his countrymen, not with the manly simplicity of *Ye men of Athens*, but by the Gothic title of *Gentlemen*: which is as real burlesque, and almost as great an anachronism, as that passage of Prior, where Protegenes's maid invites Apelles to drink tea.

souls committed to their care, under the denomination of a flock.

Is then Homer's poetry chargeable with meanness, because it represents Achilles preparing supper for his guests, the princess Nausicaa washing the clothes of the family, Eumeus making his own shoes, Ulysses the wooden frame of his own bed, and the princess of Troy harnessing their father's chariot? By no means. The poet painted the manners as he saw them: and those offices could not in his time be accounted mean, which in his time employed occasionally persons of the highest rank and merit. Nay in these offices there is no intrinsic meanness; they are useful and necessary: and even a modern hero might be in circumstances, in which he would think it a singular piece of good fortune to be able to perform them. Whatever serves to make us independent, will always (in the general opinion of mankind) possess dignity sufficient to raise it far above ridicule, when described in proper language. In Homer's days, society was more unsettled than it is now; and princes and great men, being obliged to be more adventurous, were subject to greater changes of fortune, and as liable to cold, weariness, and hunger, as the meanest of their people. It was necessity that made them acquainted with all the arts of life. Nor was their dignity more affected by the employments above mentioned, than that of a modern prince would be, by riding the great horse, or putting on his own clothes.

Thirdly: Every serious writer or speaker sustains a certain character:—an historian, that of a man who wishes to know the truth of facts, and to record them agreeably; a preacher, that of one who is deeply affected with the truths of religion, and anxious to impress them upon others; and an epic poet is to be considered as a person, contemplating with admiration a series of great events, and employing all the powers of language, harmony, and fiction, to describe them in the most interesting manner:

Now

Now by a peculiar kind of sagacity, either instinctive, or derived from experience, all people of taste know, what thoughts and words and modes of expression are suitable to an author's character, and what are otherwise. If, when he is supposed to be taken up with admiration of some great object, it should appear, from his language, allusions, or choice of circumstances, that his fancy is wandering to things remote from, or disproportioned to, the thoughts that occupy his mind, we are struck with the impropriety; as we should be with the unsuitableness of that man's behaviour, who, while he kneeled, and repeated a prayer, should at the same time employ himself in winding up his watch, counting his money, or adjusting his periwig at a looking-glass.

In general, that is a *mean* circumstance, a *mean* allusion, a *mean* expression, which lessens or debases our idea of what it was intended to embellish or magnify. It always brings disappointment, but not always painful disappointment: for meanness may give rise to jocularities, as well as to contempt, disgust, or indignation.

8. Parodies may be ludicrous, from the opposition between *similarity* of phrase, and *diversity* of meaning, even though both the original and the imitation be serious. The following lines in themselves contain no laughable matter:

Bread was his only food, his drink the brook,
So small a salary did his rector send:
He left his laundresses all he had, a book:
He found in death, 'twas all he wish'd, a friend.

Yet one reads them with a smile, when one recollects the original;

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere ;
 Heaven did a recompense as largely send :
 He gave to Misery all he had, a tear ;
 He gain'd from Heaven, 'twas all he wish'd, a friend.

But in most cases the ridicule of parodies will be greatly heightened, when the original is sublime or serious, and the imitation frivolous or mean. The *Lutrin Dunciad*, and *Rape of the Lock*, abound in examples.

Parodies produce their full effect on those only who can trace the imitation to its original. *Clarissa's* harangue, in the fifth canto of the last-mentioned poem, gives pleasure to every reader ; but to those who recollect that divine speech of *Sarpedon* *, whereof this is an exact parody, it must be entertaining in the highest degree. — Hence it is, that writers of the greatest merit are most liable to be parodied : for if the reader perceive not the relation between the copy and its archetype, the humour of the parody is lost ; and this relation he will not perceive, unless the original be familiar to him. Much of *Lucian's* humour lies in his parodies ; the phraseology and composition of *Demosthenes* in particular he often mimics : and it is reasonable to suppose, that we should be more affected with the humorous writings of the ancients, if we were better acquainted with the authors to whom they occasionally allude. Certain it is, that Parody was much in use among them. *Aristotle* speaks of one *Hegemon* as the inventor of it † ; and justly refers parody in writing, and caricatura in painting, to the same species of imitation, namely, to that in which the original is purposely debased in the copy. *Homer*, *Virgil*, and *Horace*, have been more frequently parodied than any other authors. Of modern performances, *Ham-*

* *Iliad*, xii. vers. 310.—328.

† *Arist. Poet.* sect. 2.

let's and Cato's soliloquies, and Gray's Elegy in a country church-yard, have been distinguished in this way. These mock imitations are honourable to the original authors, because tacit acknowledgements of their popularity : — but I cannot applaud those wits who take the same freedom with the phraseology of Scripture, as Doddsley has done in his burlesque chronicle of the kings of England. I do not think that he meant any harm ; but it is unwise to annex ludicrous ideas to language that should ever be accounted sacred.

9. The Ludicrous Style may be divided into two sorts, the *Mock-heroic*, and (taking the word in a strict sense) the *Burlesque*. Of the former the Dunciad is a standard, and Hudibras of the latter. A mixture of dignity and meanness is discernible in both. In the first, mean things are made ludicrous by dignity of language and versification ; and therefore parodies or imitations of the style and numbers, of sublime poetry, have a very good effect. Thus Homer's Iliad is the prototype of the *Batrachomyomachia* *, Paradise Lost of the *Splendid Shilling*, and Virgil of the Dunciad. Solemnity is the character assumed by the mock-heroic poet ; he considers little things as great, and describes them accordingly. — The *burlesque* author is a buffoon by profession. Great things, when he has occasion to introduce them, he considers as little ; and degrades them by mean words and colloquial phrases, by allusions to the manners and business of low life, and by a peculiar levity or want of dignity in the construction of his numbers. Ancient facts and customs are sometimes burlesqued by modern phraseology † ; as the statue of Cesar or Alexander would

* The Battle of the Frogs and Mice.

† Witness the following description of a Roman Triumph, in Hudib. p. 2. c. 2.

— As the Aldermen of Rome,
Their foes at training overcome,

would be, by a modern dress; — by that dress, which is too familiar to our eye to command respect, and which we see every day worn by men of all characters, both good and bad, both important and insignificant. — Yet the statue of a modern hero in the dress of Alexander or Cesar would not be ludicrous; — partly, because we are accustomed to see the best statues in ancient dresses; partly, because those dresses have more intrinsic beauty than the modern; partly, because we have never seen them applied to any purpose but that of adorning the images of great men; and partly, no doubt, because what bears the stamp of antiquity does naturally command veneration.

In accoutering ancient heroes for the modern stage, it were to be wished, that some regard were had to *Costume* and probability. Cato's wig is famous. We have seen Macbeth dressed in scarlet and gold, with a full-bottom'd periwig, which, on his usurping the sovereignty, was forthwith decorated with two additional tails. Nothing could guard such incongruity from the ridicule of those who know any thing of ancient manners, but either the transcendent merit of the actor and of the play, or the force of habit, which, as will appear by and by, has a powerful influence in suppressing risible emotions. — But is it not as absurd to make Cato and Macbeth speak English, as to dress them in periwigs? No: the former practice is justified upon the plea of necessity; but it can never be necessary to equip an ancient hero with a modern ornament which in itself is neither natural nor

Well mounted in their best array,
Upon a car, and who but they!
And followed by a world of tall lads,
That merry ditties troll'd and ballads,
Did ride with many a good morrow,
Crying, Hey for our town, through the borough.

graceful.

graceful. I admit, that the 'exact Roman dress would not suit the British stage: but might not something be contrived in its stead, which would gratify the unlearned part of the audience, without offending the rest? If such a reformation shall ever be attempted, I hope care will be taken to avoid the error of those painters, who, by joining in one piece the fashions of different centuries, incur the charge of anachronism, and exhibit such figures on their canvas, as never appeared upon earth. I have in my eye a portrait, in other respects of great merit, of the late Marischal Keith; who appears habited in a suit of old Gothic armour, with ruffles of the present fashion at his wrists, a bag-wig on his head, and a musket in his hand. Alexander the Great, in a hat and feather, wielding a tomahawk, or snapping a pistol at the head of Clytus, would scarce be a greater impropriety. — But to return:

These two styles of writing, the *Mock-heroic* and the *Burlesque*, are not essential either to wit or to humour. A performance may be truly laughable, in which the *language* is perfectly serious and *adequate*. And as the pathos that results from incident is more powerful than what arises merely from vehemence of expression, so an humorous tale, delivered with a grave look and serious phraseology, like Pope's "Narrative of the phrenzy of John Dennis," or Arbuthnot's "Account of what passed in London on "occasion of Whiston's prophecy," may be more ludicrous than either the *Burlesque* or *Mock-heroic* style could have made it. That a grave face heightens the effect of a merry story, has indeed been often observed; and, if we suppose laughter to arise from an unexpected coincidence of relation and contrariety, is easily accounted for.

10. Mean sentiments, or unimportant phrases, delivered in heroic verse, are sometimes laughable, from the solemnity of the

measure, and the opposite nature of the language and subject. Gay thought the following couplet ludicrous :

This is the ancient hand and eke the pen,
Here is for horses hay, and meat for men.

But this, if continued, would lose its effect, by raising disgust, an emotion of greater authority than laughter. Nothing is less laughable than a dull poem ; but flashes of extreme absurdity may give an agreeable impulse to the spirits of the reader. Extreme absurdity is particularly entertaining in a short performance, where the author seriously meant to do his best ; 'as in epitaphs and love-letters written by illiterate persons. Here, if there is no apparent opposition of dignity and meanness, there may be other kinds of Risible incongruity ; — a vast disproportion between the intention and execution, between the seriousness of the author and the insignificance of his work ; besides the many odd contrasts in the work itself, — of mean phrases and sentiments aspiring to importance, of sounding words with little signification, of inconsistent or unrelated expressions placed contiguously, of sentences that seem to promise much but end in nothing ; not to mention those blunders in writing, and solecisms in language, that sometimes give a ludicrous air to what had a very solemn destination.

Modern language, adapted to those measures of poetry that are peculiar to Greek and Latin, will likewise appear ridiculous to such as are acquainted with the classic authors ; on account of the unusual contrast of modern words and ancient rhythm. Hence the ludicrous awkwardness of an English hexameter. It looks as if a man were to walk the street, or come into a room, with the pace of a trotting horse. Between the movement, and that which moves, there is a manifest incongruity. Sir Philip Sidney attempted to introduce the hexameter into the English tongue, and
has

has exemplified it in his *Arcadia*; but it suits not the genius of the language, and has never been adopted by any person who understood the true principles of English numbers. — Wallis, finding that the first verse of the common prose version of the second psalm was by accident an hexameter, has reduced the whole into that measure; but the sound is extremely uncouth. And Watts's English Sapphic ode on the Last Day, notwithstanding the awful subject, has something in the cadence that almost provokes a smile.

There is a poem well known in North Britain, which to a Scotchman who understands Latin is abundantly entertaining. It was written in the beginning of the last century, by the famous Drummond of Hawthornden. The measure is hexameter, the numbers Virgilian, and the language Latin mixed with Broad Scotch. Nothing can be more ludicrous than such a jumble. It is dignity and meanness in the extreme; — dignity of sound, and meanness of words and ideas. I shall not give a specimen; as the humour is local, and rather coarse, and the images, tho' strong, not quite delicate.

II. On some of the principles above mentioned, one might explain the ludicrous character of a certain class of absurdities to be met with in very respectable authors, and proceeding from a superabundance of wit, and the affectation of extraordinary refinement. It is not uncommon to say, of a person who is old, or has long been in danger from a disease supposed mortal, that "he has one foot in the grave and the other following." A certain author, speaking of a pious old woman, is willing to adopt this proverbial amplification, but by his efforts to improve it, presents a very laughable idea to his reader, when he says, that "she had one foot in the grave, and the other — among the stars." — The following verses (spoken by Cortez on his arrival in America) were once no doubt thought very fine; but the

reader who attends to the imagery will perceive that they are very absurd, and somewhat ridiculous :

On what new happy climate are we thrown,
So long kept secret, and so lately known ?
As if our old world modestly withdrew,
And here in private had brought forth a new *.

Here, besides the jumble of incongruous ideas, there is on the part of the author a violent and solemn effort ending in a frivolous performance.

The pedantic solemnity of the elder grave-digger, in *Hamlet*, makes the absurdity of what he says doubly entertaining ; and the ridicule is yet further heightened by the seriousness of his companion, who listens to his nonsense, and thinks himself instructed by it. “ For here lies the point, (says the Clown), if I “ drown myself wittingly, it argues an act ; and an act hath “ three branches ; it is to act, to do, and to perform. Argal, she “ drowned herself wittingly. — *Other Clown*. Nay, but hear “ you, Goodman Delver. — *Clown*. Give me leave. Here lies “ the water, good ; here stands the man, good : if the man go “ to this water, and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he “ goes ; mark you that. But if the water come to him, and “ drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not “ guilty of his own death, shortens not his own life. — *Other “ Clown*. But is this law ? — *Clown*. Aye, marry is it : crown- “ er’s quest law.”

Cicero and Quintilian both observe, that an absurd answer, whether casual or intentional, may give rise to laughter † ; a re-

* Dryden’s Indian Emperor.

† Cic. de Orat. lib. 2. § 68. ; Quint. Inst. Orat. lib. 6. cap. 3.

mark which Erasmus had in view, perhaps, when he wrote his dialogue called *Absurda*. In this case, the mere juxtaposition of unsuitable ideas may, as already hinted, form the ludicrous quality. But if laughter is ever raised by a pertinent answer proceeding from the mouth of one from whom nothing but absurdity was expected, it would seem to be in part occasioned by the surprising disproportion of the cause to the effect, of the intellectual weakness of the speaker to the propriety of what is spoken. “How shameful is it that you should fall asleep? (said a dull preacher to his drowsy audience); what, that poor creature (pointing to an idiot who was leaning on a staff and staring at him) is both awake and attentive! Perhaps, Sir, replied the fool, I should have been asleep too, if I had not been an idiot.”

Whatever restraint good-breeding or good-nature may impose upon his company, the imperfect attempts of a foreigner to speak a language he is not master of, must be allowed to be somewhat ludicrous; for they are openly laughed at by children and clowns; and Shakespeare and Moliere have not disdained to make them the objects of comic ridicule. Nor would Aristotle, if we may judge from his definition of Comic Ridicule, have blamed them for it. In the person who speaks with the intelligence and figure of a man, and the incapacity of a child, there is something like an opposition of dignity and meanness; as well as of similarity and dissimilitude, in what he says compared with what he should say: there is too a disproportion between the performance and the effort; and there may be blunders that pervert the meaning. — Those solecisms, vulgarly called *Bulls*, are of different characters, and cannot perhaps be referred to any one class of laughable absurdity. If, as often happens, they disguise real nonsense with an appearance of sense, and proceed from apparent seriousness though real want of consideration in the speaker, their

ludicrous

ludicrous nature may be explained on the principles already specified.

12. In language, there are three sorts of phraseology. — 1. Some words and phrases, being always necessary, are used by people of all conditions, and find a place in every sort of writing. These form the bulk of every language; and cannot be said to possess in themselves either meanness or dignity. In the sublimest compositions they are not ungraceful; in works of humour, and in familiar discourse, they may be employed with propriety; and, from the universality of their application, they have the advantage of being understood by all who speak the language to which they belong. — 2. Other expressions have a peculiar dignity, because found only in the more elevated compositions, or spoken only by persons of learning and distinction, and on the more solemn occasions of life. Such are the words and phrases peculiar to scripture and religion; such are those that in all polite languages constitute what is called the poetical dialect*; and such are most words of foreign original, which, tho' naturalized, are not in familiar use. — 3. There are also certain phrases and words, which may properly enough be called *mean*; because used chiefly by persons of no learning or breeding, or by others on familiar occasions only†, or in order to express what is trifling

* See Essay on Poetry, part 2. chap. 1. sect. 2.

* Castalio's Translation of the Old Testament does great honour to his learning, but not to his taste. The quaintness of his Latin style betrays a deplorable inattention to the simple majesty of his original. In the Song of Solomon he is particularly injudicious; debasing the magnificence of the language and subject by *Diminutives*, which, though expressive of *familiar endearment*, he should have known to be destitute of dignity, and therefore improper on solemn occasions. This incongruous mixture, of sublime ideas and words comparatively mean, has a very

trifling or contemptible. Such are trite proverbs; colloquial oaths, and forms of compliment; the ungrammatical phrases of conversation; the dialect peculiar to certain trades; the jargon of beggars, thieves, gamblers, and fops; foreign and provincial barbarisms, and the like. These, if intelligible, may be introduced in *burlesque* writing with good effect, as in *Hudibras* and the *History of John Bull*; but ought never to find a place in serious writing; nor even in the *Mock-heroic*, except perhaps in a short characteristical speech, like that of Sir Plume in the *Rape of the Lock* *; nor indeed in any literary work where elegance is expected. This *Cant* style, as it is sometimes called, was very prevalent in England in the latter part of the last century; having been brought in by the courtiers of Charles the Second, who, to show their contempt for the solemn character that had distinguished the preceding period, ran into the opposite extreme, and affected profligacy of manners, profaneness of talk, and a loose ungrammatical vulgarity of expression. L'Esrange is full of it, not only in his Fables, where burlesque may be pardonable, but even in his Translations of Josephus and Tacitus †. Eachard, by a si-

bad effect, and degrades the noblest poetry almost to the level of burlesque. “Mea columbula, ostende mihi tuum vulticulum; fac ut audiam tuam voculam; nam et voculam venustulam, et vulticulum habes lepidulum. — Cerviculam habes Davidicæ turris similem. — Cervicula quasi eburnea turricula. — Utinam esses mihi quasi fraterculus, qui meæ mammas materculæ fuxisses. — Venio in meos hortulos, fororcula mea sponsa. — Ego dormio, vigilante meo corculo,” &c.

* See canto 4. vers. 127.

† He makes the grave and sublime Tacitus speak of some gentlemen, “who had feathered their nests in the civil war between Cesar and Pompey;” and tells us, that the Emperor Vitellius was *lugged out of his hole* by those who came to kill him.

milar indiscretion, has transformed the elegant Terence into a writer of farce and buffoonery. Nay, Dryden himself, in one or two instances, and perhaps in more, has burlesqued both Homer and Virgil, by interlarding his Translations with this beggarly dialect *. And some imprudent divines have employed it, where it

* So heavy a charge against so great an author ought not to be advanced without proof. — In Dryden's version of the first book of the Iliad, Jupiter addresses Juno in these words :

*My household curse, my lawful plague, the spy
Of Jove's designs, his other squinting eye.*

Homer, in the same book, says, "The Gods were troubled in the palace of Jove, " when Vulcan, the renowned artificer, began to address them in these words, " with a view to sooth his beloved mother, the white-arm'd Juno : " — which Dryden thus verifies :

*The limping smith observed the fadden'd feast,
And hopping here and there, himself a jest,
Put in his word, that neither might offend,
To Jove obsequious, yet his mother's friend.*

Homer has been blamed, not without reason, for degrading his Gods into mortals; but Dryden has degraded them into blackguards. He concludes the book in a strain of buffoonery as gross as any thing in Hudibras :

*Drunken at last, and drowsy, they depart
Each to his house, adorn'd with labour'd art
Of the lame architect. The thundering God,
Even he withdrew to rest, and had his load;
His sweeming head to needful sleep apply'd,
And Juno lay unheeded by his side.*

The passage literally rendered is no more than this. " Now, when the shining
" light of the sun was gone down, the other gods being inclined to slumber, de-
" parted

it is most pernicious, and absolutely intolerable, even in religion itself.

Rutherford's Letters, well known in North Britain, are notorious in this way; not so much for the rudeness of the style in

“ parted to their several homes, to where Vulcan, the lame deity, renowned for
 “ ingenious contrivance, had built for each a palace. And Olympian Jove, the
 “ thunderer, went to the bed where, when sweet sleep came upon him, he was
 “ accustomed to repose. Thither ascending, he resigned himself to rest; and near
 “ him Juno, distinguished by the golden throne.” — It is said, that Dryden once
 intended to translate the whole Iliad. Taking this first book for a specimen, I am
 glad, both on Homer's account and on his own, that he did not. It is tainted
 throughout with a dash of burlesque, (owing not only to his choice of words, but
 also to his paraphrases and additions), and with so much of the profane cant
 of his age, that if we were to judge of the poet by the translator, we should i-
 magine the Iliad to have been partly designed for a satire upon the clergy.

Virgil, in his ninth Eclogue, puts these words in the mouth of an unfortunate shepherd.

O Lycida, vivi pervenimus, advena nostri,
 Quod nunquam veriti sumus, ut possessor agelli
 Diceret, Hæc mea sunt, veteres migrate coloni.
 Nunc victi, tristes, quoniam fors omnia versat,
 Hos illi (quod nec bene vertat!) mittimus hædos.

It is strange that Dryden did not perceive the beautiful simplicity of these lines. If he had, he would not have written the following ridiculous translation.

—— O Lycidas, at last
 The time is come I never thought to see,
 (Strange revolution for my farm and me),
 When the *grim captain* in a furly tone
 Cries out, *Pack up, ye rascals, and be gone.*
Kick'd out, we set the best face on't we could,
 And these two kids, t'appease his angry mood,
 I bear; of which *the furies give him good.*

general, for that might be pardoned in a Scotch writer who lived one hundred and twenty years ago, as for the allusions and figures, which are inexcusably gross and groveling. A reader who is unacquainted with the character of Rutherford might imagine, that those letters must have been written with a view to ridicule every thing that is sacred. And though there is reason to believe the author had no bad meaning, one cannot without horror see religion profaned by a phraseology which one would sooner expect from a profligate clown in an alehouse, than from a clergyman. Such performances are very detrimental to true piety; they pervert the ignorant, and encourage the profaneness of the scoffer. Nor let it be said, that they make religious truth intelligible to the vulgar: rather say, that they tend to make it appear contemptible. Indeed a preacher, who affects a display of metaphysical learning, or interlards his composition with terms of art or science, or with uncommon words derived from the Greek and Latin, must be little understood by unlettered hearers: but that is a fault which every preacher who has the instruction of his people at heart, and is master of his language and subject, will carefully and easily avoid. For between plainness and meanness of expression there is a very wide difference. Plain words are universally understood, and may be used in every argument, and are especially requisite in all writings addressed to the people. Mean language has no standard, is different in different places, and is applicable to burlesque arguments only. Gulliver's Travels, or the Drapers Letters, are intelligible in every part of England; but the dialects of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Somersetshire, are hardly understood beyond the limits of these provinces. A sermon in Broad Scotch would now seem ridiculous to a Scotch peasant, and wical be less intelligible than one of Swift's or Atterbury's.

Few

Few things in language have a more debasing influence than provincial barbarisms; because we seldom hear them, except from illiterate people, and on familiar occasions *. Hence, upon the principles here laid down, it might be presumed *a priori*, that to those who thoroughly understand them, they would be apt to appear ludicrous; especially when either the subject, or the condition of the speaker, gave ground to expect a more polite style. And this is so much the case, that in North Britain it is no uncommon thing to see a man obtain a character for jocularitv, merely by speaking the vulgar broad Scotch. To write in that tongue, and yet write seriously, is now impossible; such is the effect of *mean* expressions applied to an *important* subject: so that if a Scotch merchant, or man of business, were to write to his countryman in his native dialect, the other would conclude that he was in jest. Not that this language is *naturally* more ridiculous than others. While spoken and written at the court of Scotland, and by the most polite persons in the kingdom, it had all the dignity

* There is an obvious difference between dialect and pronunciation. A man may be both learned and well-bred, and yet never get the better of his national accent. This may make his speech ungraceful, but will not render it ridiculous. It becomes ridiculous only when it is debased by those vulgarities that convey a mean idea of the speaker. Every Scotchman of taste is ambitious to avoid the solecisms of his native dialect. And this by care and study he may do, and be able, even in familiar discourse, to command such a phraseology as, if committed to writing, would be allowed to be pure English. He may too so far divest himself of his national accent as to be perfectly intelligible, where ever the English language is understood. But the niceties of English pronunciation he cannot acquire, without an early and long residence among English people who speak well. It is however to be hoped, that in the next century this will not be so difficult. From the attention that has of late been paid to the study of the English tongue, the Scots have greatly improved both their pronunciation and their style within these last thirty years.

that any other tongue, equally scanty and uncultivated, could possess; and was a dialect of English, as the Dutch is of German, or the Portuguese of Spanish; that is, it was a language derived from and like another, but subject to its own laws, and regulated by the practice of those who writ and spoke it. But, for more than half a century past, it has, even by the Scots themselves, been considered as the dialect of the vulgar; the learned and polite having, for the most part, adopted the English in its stead; — a preference justly due to the superior genius of that noble language, and the natural effect of the present civil constitution of Great Britain. And now, in Scotland, there is no such thing as a standard of the native tongue; nothing passes for good language, but what is believed to be English; every county thinks its own speech preferable to its neighbour's, without entertaining any partiality for that of the chief town: and the populace of Edinburgh speak a dialect not more intelligible, nor less disagreeable, to a native of Buchan, than the dialect of Buchan is to a native of Edinburgh.

The greater part of Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* is written in a broad Scotch dialect. The sentiments of that piece are natural, the circumstances interesting; the characters well drawn, well distinguished, and well contrasted; and the fable has more probability than any other pastoral drama I am acquainted with. To an Englishman, who had never conversed with the common people of Scotland, the language would appear only antiquated, obscure, or unintelligible; but to a Scotchman who thoroughly understands it, and is aware of its vulgarity, it appears *ludicrous*; from the contrast between *meannefs* of phrase, and *dignity* or *seriousness* of sentiment. This gives a farcical air even to the most affecting parts of the poem; and occasions an impropriety of a peculiar kind, which is very observable in the representation. And accordingly, this play, with all its merit, and with a strong national

tional partiality in its favour, has never given general satisfaction upon the stage.

I have finished a pretty full enumeration of examples; but am very far from supposing it so complete, as to exhibit every species of ludicrous absurdity. Nor am I certain, that the reader will be pleased with my arrangement, or even admit that all my examples have the ludicrous character. But slight inaccuracies, in an inquiry so little connected with practice, will perhaps be overlooked as not very material; especially when it is considered, that the subject, though familiar, is both copious and delicate, and though frequently spoken of by philosophers in general terms, has never before been attempted, so far as I know, in the way of induction. At any rate, it will appear from what has been said, that the theory here adopted is plausible at least; and that the philosophy of Laughter is not wholly unfusceptible of method. And they who may think fit to amuse themselves at any time with this speculation, whatever stress they may lay upon my reasoning, will perhaps find their account in my collection of examples. And, provided they substitute a more perfect theory of their own in its stead, I shall not be offended, if by means of these very examples they should find out and demonstrate the imperfection of mine.

CHAP.

C H A P. III.

Limitations of the preceding doctrine. Incongruity not Ludicrous, I. When customary and common; nor, II. When it excites any powerful emotion in the beholder, as, 1. Moral Disapprobation, 2. Indignation or Disgust, 3. Pity, or, 4. Fear; III. Influence of Good-breeding upon Laughter; IV. Of Similitudes, as connected with this subject; V. Recapitulation.

THAT an opposition of relation and contrariety is often discernible in those things which we call Ludicrous, seems now to be sufficiently proved. But does every such opposition or mixture of contrariety and relation, of suitableness and incongruity, of likeness and dissimilitude, provoke laughter? This requires further disquisition.

I. If an old Greek or Roman were to rise from his grave, and see the human head and shoulders overshadowed with a vast periwig; or were he to contemplate the native hairs of a fine gentleman arranged in the present form *, part standing erect, as if their owner were beset with hobgoblins, and part by means of

* In the year 1764.

grease and meal consolidated into paste: he could hardly fail to be struck with the appearance; and I question, whether the features even of Heraclitus himself, or of the younger Cato, would not relax a little upon the occasion. For in this absurd imitation of nature, we have likeness coupled with dissimilitude, and imaginary grace with real deformity, and inconvenience sought after with eagerness, and at considerable expence. Yet in these fashions they who are accustomed to them do not perceive any thing ridiculous. Nay, were we to see a fine lady dressed according to the mode still extant in some old pictures, with her tresses all hanging about her eyes, in distinct and equal portions, like a bunch of candles, and twisted into a hundred strange curls, we should certainly think her a laughable phenomenon; though the same object two centuries ago would have been gazed at with admiration and delight. There are few incongruities to which *custom* will not reconcile us *. Nay, so wonderfully ductile is the taste of some people, that, in the various revolutions of fashion, they

* In the age of James the First, when fashion had consecrated the *Pun* and *Paronomasia*, the hearers of a quibbling preacher, were, I doubt not, both attentive and serious; as the universal prevalence of witticism, even on solemn occasions, would almost annihilate its ludicrous effect. But it may be doubted, whether any audience in Great Britain would now maintain their gravity, if they were to be entertained with such a sermon, as *Sulton's Caution for the Credulous*; from which, for the reader's amusement, I transcribe the following passages:—
 “ Here I have *undertaken* one who hath *overtaken* many, a *Machiavillian*, (or rather a *matchless villian*), one that professeth himself to be a *friend*, when he is indeed a *fiend*. — His greatest *amity* is but dissimbled *enmity*. — His *Ave* threatens a *væ*; and therefore listen not to his treacherous *Ave*, but hearken unto Solomon's *Cave*; and though he speaketh favourably, believe him not. — Though I call him but a *plain* flatterer, (for I mean to deal very *plainly* with him), some compare him to a devil. If he be one, these words of Solomon: —
 “ are a *spell* to *expel* this devil. — *Wring* not my words, to *wrong* my meaning; —

they find the same thing *charming* while in vogue, which when obsolete is altogether *frightful*. — Incongruity, therefore, in order to be ludicrous, must be in some measure uncommon.

To this it will be objected, that those ludicrous passages in books, that have been many times laughed at by the same person, do not entirely lose their effect by the frequency of their appearance. But many circumstances concur to perpetuate the agreeable effect of those passages. We forget them in the intervals of reading, and thus they often become almost new to us : — when we read them a second or third time, the remembrance of the former emotion may serve to heighten the present ; — when we read them in company, or hear them read, our emotions are enforced by sympathy ; — and all this while the wit or humour remains the same, unimpaired and unaffected by accidental associations. — Whereas, on the other hand, there are many circumstances that tend in time to obliterate, or at least to soften, what at first might seem ridiculous in modes of conversation or dress. For things are not always agreeable or disagreeable in proportion to their intrinsic beauty or deformity ; much will depend on extraneous and accidental connections : and, as men who live in society do daily acquire new companions, by whom their manners are in some degree tinctured ; so whatever is driven about in the tide of human affairs is daily made a part of some new assemblage, and daily contracts new qualities from those things that chance associates with it. A vast periwig is in itself perhaps somewhat ridiculous ; but the person who wears it may be a ve-

“ I go not about to crucifie the *sins*, but the *sins* of men. — Some flatter a man
 “ for their own private benefit : — this man’s heart thou hast in thy pocket ; for
 “ if thou *find* in thy *purse* to give him presently, he will *find* in his *heart* to love
 “ thee everlastingly.” *A Caution for the Credulous.* By Edw. Sulton, Preacher.
quarto. pp. 44. Aberdeen printed, 1629. Edinburgh reprinted, 1696.

nerable character. These two objects, being constantly united, derive new qualities from each other: — the wig may at first raise a smile at the expence of the wearer, but the wearer will at last render even his wig respectable. The fine lady may have a thousand charms, every one of which is more than sufficient to make us fond of the little irregularities of her temper, and much more to reconcile us to any awkward disposition of her ringlets or apparel. And the fine gentleman, whose hair in its economy so little resembles that of Milton's Adam*, may be, what no ungracefulness of shape or feature will ever expose to ridicule, a faithful friend, a valiant foldier, an agreeable companion, or a dutiful son. — Our natural love of society, the various and substantial pleasures we derive from that source, and our proneness to imitation, not to mention the power of custom, soon reconcile us to the manners of those with whom we live; and therefore cannot fail to recommend their external appearance.

All the nations in Europe, and perhaps all the nations on earth, are, in some particulars of dress or deportment, mutually ridiculous to one another; and to the vulgar of each nation, or to those who have never been from home, nor conversed with strangers, the peculiarities of foreign behaviour are most apt to appear ludicrous. Persons who, by travel or extensive acquaintance, are become familiar with foreign manners, see nothing ridiculous in them: and it is therefore reasonable, that a disposition to laugh at the dress and gestures of a stranger (provided these be unaffected on his part) should be taken for a mark of rusticity, as well as of ill-nature. Tragedies written in rhyme, or

* ——— hyacinthin locks

Round from his parted forelock manly hung

Clustering, but not beneath his shoulders broad.

Paradise Lost, book 4.

pronounced in Recitative, may be thought ridiculous, when one has seen but little of them; but it is easy to give a reason why they should be highly and seriously interesting in France and Italy. That cannot be ludicrous, that must, on the contrary, be the object of admiration, to which we have been accustomed to annex ideas of festivity and leisure, of beauty and magnificence, which we have always heard spoken of as a matter of universal concern, and with which from our infancy we have been acquainted.

May we not, then, set it down, as a character of Ludicrous absurdity, that it is in some degree *new and surprising*? Witticisms that appear to be studied give offence, instead of entertainment: and nothing sets off a merry tale to so great advantage as an unpromising simplicity of style and manner. By virtue of this negative accomplishment, men of moderate talents have been known to contribute more to the mirth of the company, than those could ever do, who, with superior powers of genius, were more artful in their language, and more animated in their pronunciation. Conciseness, too, when we intend a laughable conclusion, is an essential requisite in telling a story; nor should any man attempt to be diffuse in humorous narrative, but he whose wit and eloquence are very great. A joke is always the worse for being expected: the longer it is withheld after we are made to look for it, the more will its volatile spirit lose by evaporation. The greatest masterpieces in ludicrous writing would become insipid, if too frequently perused; *decies repetita placebit* is a character that belongs to few of them: and I believe every admirer of Cervantes and Fielding would purchase at a considerable price the pleasure of reading Tom Jones and Don Quixote for the first time. It is true, a good comedy, well performed, may entertain the same person for many successive evenings; but some varieties are always expected, and do generally take place, in each new representation;

sentation; and though the wit and the business of every scene should come at last to be distinctly remembered, there will still be something in the art of the player, which one would wish to see repeated.

II. But as every surprising incongruity is not ludicrous, we must pursue our speculations a little further.

I. A more striking absurdity there is not in the whole universe, than a vitious man. His frame and faculties are human: his moral nature, originally inclined to rectitude, is sadly perverted, and applied to purposes not less unsuitable to humanity, than dancing is to a bear, or a sword and snuff-box to a monkey. He judges of things, not by their proper standard, nor as they are in themselves, but as they appear through the medium of his own variable and artificial appetites; as the clown is said to have applied his candle to the sun-dial to see how the night went. He overlooks and loses real good, in order to attain that of which he knows not whether it be good, or whether it be attainable; like the dog in the fable, losing the substance by catching at a shadow. He justifies his conduct to his own mind, by arguments whereof he sees the fallacy; like the thief endeavouring to enrich himself by stealing out of his own pocket. He purposes to take up and reform, whenever his appetites are fully gratified; like the rustic, whose plan was, to wait till the water of the river should run by, and then pass over dry-shod. He attempts what is beyond his reach, and is ruined by the attempt; like the frog that burst by endeavouring to blow herself up to the size of an ox. — In a word, more blunders and absurdities, than ever the imitators of Esop ascribed to the beasts, or Joe Millar to the Scots and Irish, might easily be traced out in the conduct of the wicked man. And yet Vice, however it may *surprise* by its novelty or enormity, is by no means an object of laughter, even to those who perceive in it all the absurdities I have specified. We

pity, and in some cases we abhor, the perpetrator; but our mind must be depraved like his own, if we laugh at him.

But can pity, abhorrence, and risibility, be excited by the same object, and at the same time? Can the painful passions of hatred and horror, and the pleasurable feeling that accompanies laughter, exist at one and the same instant in a well-informed mind? Can that amuse and delight us by its absurdity, which our moral principle, armed with the authority of Heaven, declares to be shameful, and worthy of punishment? It is impossible: emotions, so different in their nature, and so unequal in power, cannot dwell together; the weaker must give place to the stronger. And which is the weaker? — moral disapprobation, or the ludicrous sentiment? Are the pleasures of wit and humour a sufficient counterpoise to the pangs of a wounded spirit? Are a jest and a generous action equally respectable? In affliction, in sickness, at the hour of death, which is the better comforter, an approving conscience, or a buffoon? — the remembrance of a well-spent life, or of our connections with a witty society? — The glow-worm and the sun are not less susceptible of comparison. — It would seem then, that those absurdities in ourselves or others, which provoke the disapprobation of the moral faculty, cannot be ludicrous; because in a sound mind they give rise to emotions inconsistent with, and far more powerful than, that whereof laughter is the outward indication.

But what do you say of those *Comedies* and *Satires*, which put us out of conceit with our vices, by exposing them to laughter? Such performances, surely cannot be all unnatural; and if they are not, may not vice be made a ludicrous object? — Our follies, and vices of less enormity, may, I grant, be exhibited in very laughable colours; and if we can be prevailed on to see them in a *ridiculous* light, that is, both to *laugh at* and to *despise* them, our reformation may be presumed to be in some forwardness:

ness : and hence the utility of *ridicule*, as an instrument of moral culture. — But if we only *laugh at* our faults, without *despising* them, that is, if they appear *ludicrous* only, and not *ridiculous*, it is to be feared, that we shall be more inclined to love than to hate them : and hence the imperfection of those writings, in which human follies are made the subject of mere pleasantry and amusement. — I cannot admit, that to a sound mind undisguised immorality can ever cease to be disgustful ; though I allow, that the guilty person may possess qualities sufficient to render him agreeable upon the whole. This indeed happens too often in life ; and it is this that makes bad company so fatally ensnaring. This too, the Comic Muse, laying aside the character of a moralist, and assuming that of a pimp, has too often introduced upon the stage. But, however profligate a poet may be, we are not to suppose, that downright wickedness can ever in itself be a laughable object to any decent assembly of rational beings. The *Provoked Wife*, the *Old Bachelor*, the *Beggar's Opera*, are dangerous plays no doubt, and scandalously immoral ; but it is the wit and the humour, not the villany, of Brute, Belmour, and Macheath, that makes the audience merry ; and Vanburgh, Congreve, and Gay, are blameable, not because they have made beastliness, robbery, lying, and adultery, ludicrous, (for that I believe was not in their power), but because they adorn their respective reprobates with engaging qualities to seduce others into imitation. — But may not criminal adventures be so disguised and misrepresented, as to extort a smile even from a man of good principles ? This may be, no doubt ; for, as the forms of falsehood are infinite, it is not easy to say, how many strange things may be affected by misrepresentation. While the moral faculty is inactive or neuter, the ludicrous sentiment may operate ; but to have a just sense of the enormity of a crime, and at the same time to laugh at it, seems impossible, or at least unnatural : — and therefore,

we may venture to repeat, that moral disapprobation is a more powerful emotion than laughter; and consequently, that both, as their natures are inconsistent, cannot at the same time prevail in a well-informed mind. “They are fools who laugh at sin;” — and, whatever may be the practice of profligates, or of good men under the influence of a temporary infatuation, the common feelings of mankind do not warrant so gross an impropriety.

As to *Satire*, we must observe, that it is of two sorts, the Comic and the Serious; that human foibles are the proper objects of the former, and vices and crimes of the latter; and that it ought to be the aim of the satirist to make those ridiculous, and these detestable. I know not how it comes to pass, that the Comic Satire should be so much in vogue; but I find that the generality of critics are all for the moderation and smiling graces of the courtly Horace, and exclaim against the vehemence and vindictive zeal of the unmannerly Juvenal. They may as well blame Sophocles for not adopting the style of Aristophanes, and insist that Cicero should have arraigned Verres in the language of Anacreon. Nor do Horace and Juvenal admit of comparison in this respect*; any more than a chapter of the Tale of a Tub can be compared with one of the Saturday papers in the Spectator. These poets had different views, and took different subjects; and therefore it was right that there should be a difference in their manner of writing. Had Juvenal made a jest of the crimes of his contemporaries, all the world would have called him a bad writer and a bad man. And had Horace, with the severity of Juvenal, attacked the impertinence of coxcombs, the

* Nor indeed in any respect. Different in their views, and in their subjects, they differ no less in style. That of Horace (in his satires) is indeed superlatively elegant, but easy, familiar, and apparently artless. The style of Juvenal is elaborate, harmonious, vehement, poetical, and often sublime.

pedantry of the Stoics, the fastidiousness of luxury, and the folly of avarice, he would have proved himself ignorant of the nature of things, and even of the meaning of his own precept :

——— Adfit

Regula, peccatis quæ pænas irroget æquas,
Ne scutica dignum horribili sectere flagello *.

That neither Horace nor Juvenal ever endeavoured to make us laugh at crimes, I will not affirm ; but for every indiscretion of this kind they are to be condemned, not imitated. And this is not the general character of their satire. Horace laughed at the follies and foibles of mankind ; so far he did well. But Juvenal (if his indecencies had died with himself) might, as a moral satirist, be said to have done better. Fired with honest indignation at the unexampled degeneracy of his age ; and, disdaining that tameness of expression and servility of sentiment, which in some cases are infallible marks of a dastardly soul, he dragged Vice from the bower of pleasure and from the throne of empire, and exhibited her to the world, not in a ludicrous attitude, but in her genuine form ; a form of such loathsome ugliness, and hideous distortion, as cannot be viewed without horror.

We repeat therefore, that wickedness is no object of laughter ; the disapprobation of conscience, and the ludicrous sentiment, being emotions inconsistent in their nature, and very unequal in power. In fact, the latter emotion is generally weak, and never

* Let rules be fix'd that may our rage contain,
And punish faults with a proportion'd pain :
And do not slay him, who deserves alone
A whipping for the fault that he has done.

Creech.

should

should be strong ; while the former in every mind ought to be, and in every sound mind is, the most powerful principle of the human constitution.

2. Further : When sacred things are profaned by meanness of allusion and language, the incongruity will not force a smile from a well-disposed person, except it surprise him in an unguarded moment. I could quote, from Blackmore and Rutherford, thoughts as incongruous as any that ever disgraced literature, but which are too shocking to raise any other emotions than horror and indignation. From an author far more respectable I shall give one instance, to show how debasing it is, even to a great genius, to become a flatterer.

False heroes, made by flattery so,
Heaven can strike out, like sparkles, at a blow ;
But, ere a prince is to perfection brought,
He costs Omnipotence a second thought :
With toil and sweat,
With hardening cold and forming heat,
The Cyclops did their work repeat,
Before th' impenetrable shield was wrought, &c. *

Anger too is generally, while it lasts, a preservative against risible impressions ; whence great laughers are supposed to be good-natured. While all England laughed at the heroes of the *Dunciad*, Colley Cibber and his brethren were, I dare say, perfectly serious. And if the gravity of Edmund Curll was overcome by that "account of his poisoning," which no other person's gravity could ever withstand, he must have possessed a great deal of philosophy or of insensibility. Socrates, in the Athenian theatre, joining in the laugh that Aristophanes had raised against

* Dryden's *Threnodia Augustalis*.

him, is spoken of by old authors as a singular instance of self-command: which I mention, not with a view to compare the sage with the bookseller, but to show, that anger and laughter were supposed to have the same influence on each other two thousand years ago, which they are found to have at this present time.

3. Even pity alone is, for the most part, of power sufficient to controul risibility. To one who could divest himself of that affection, a wooden leg might perhaps appear ludicrous; from the striking contrast of incongruity and similitude; — and in fact we find that Butler has made both himself and his readers merry with an implement of this sort that pertained to the expert Crowdero; and that Smollet has taken the same freedom, for the same purpose, with his friend Lieutenant Hatchway. But he who forgets humanity so far, as to smile at such a memorial of misfortune in a living person, will be blamed by every good man. We expect, because from experience we know it is natural, that pity should prevail over the ludicrous emotion.

“ Many a Scotch Presbyterian (says Hutcheson, in his *Reflections upon Laughter*) has been put to it to preserve his gravity, upon hearing the application of Scripture made by his countryman Dr Pitcairn, as he observed a croud in the streets about a mason, who had fallen along with his scaffold, and was overwhelmed with the ruins of the chimney which he had been building, and which fell immediately after the fall of the poor mason: Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours, and their works follow them.”

— For the honour of the learned physician's memory, I hope the story is not true. Such wantonness of impiety, and such barbarity of insult, is no object of laughter, but of horror. And I confess, I should have no good opinion of any Presbyterian, or

of any person, who could find it difficult to preserve his gravity on hearing it told.

4. Fear is a passion, which would I think on almost any occasion repress laughter. To conceal one's fear, one might feign a laugh; and any passion in extreme may produce a similar convulsion: but nobody laughs at that which makes him seriously afraid, however incongruous its appearance may be. A friend of mine dreamed that he saw the devil, and awoke in a great fright. He described the phantasm very minutely; and sure a more ridiculous one was never imagined; but, instead of laughter, his countenance betrayed every symptom of horror; for the dream had made a strong impression, nor could he for many months think of it without uneasiness. It is strange, that the common people, who are so much afraid of the devil, should fancy him to be of a ludicrous figure, with horns, a tail, and cloven feet, united to the human form. Sir Thomas Brown, with no little plausibility, derives this conceit from the Rabbins*. But the Romans, from their ascribing unaccountable fear to the agency of Pan, whose supposed figure was the same, appear to have been possessed with a similar superstition, in whatever way they came by it. Satyrs, however, were believed to be merry beings; always piping and dancing, and frisking about, cracking their jokes, and throwing themselves into antic attitudes; and indeed when they are introduced in a picture, they generally convey somewhat of a ludicrous impression, as the sight of such an animal, supposed to be harmless, could hardly fail to do.

III. Good-breeding lays many restraints upon laughter, and upon all other emotions that display themselves externally. And this leads me to speak of those refinements in wit and humour,

* *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, book 5. chap. 21.

which

which take place in society, according as mankind improve in polite behaviour.

Lord Froth, in the play called the Double Dealer *, and Lord Chesterfield, in a book of letters which some think might have borne the same appellation, declaim vehemently against laughter: — “there is nothing more unbecoming a person of quality, than to laugh; ’tis such a vulgar thing; every body can laugh.” Influenced by a doctrine of so high authority, many of my readers may, I am afraid, have been inclined to think hardly of me, for analysing vulgar witticisms, and inquiring into the nature of a phenomenon, which can no longer show its face in genteel company. And therefore it may be proper for me to say a word or two in defence, first of myself, and secondly of my subject.

In behalf of myself I can only plead, that Laughter, however unfashionable, is a real and a natural expression of a certain human emotion, or inward feeling; and has been so, for any thing I know to the contrary, ever since the days of Adam; that therefore it is as liable to the cognizance of philosophy, as any other natural fact; and that we are to judge of it, rather from its unrestrained energies, than from the appearances it may assume under the control of affectation or delicacy. The foot of a Chinese beauty is whiter, no doubt, and prettier, than that of a Scotch highlander; yet I would advise those who are curious to know the parts and proportions of that limb, to contemplate the clown rather than the lady. To be master of one’s own temper, is a most desirable thing; and much more pleasant it is, to live with such as are so, than among those who, without caution or disguise, speak, and look, and act, according to the impulse of passion: but the philosopher who would analyse anger, pride,

* Act 1. scene 4.

jealousy, or any other violent emotion, will do well to take its phenomena rather from the latter than from the former. Just so, in tracing out the cause of laughter, I did not think it necessary or expedient to confine my observation to those pleasantries which the *sentimental* critic would honour with a fimper: it suited my purpose better to attend to examples, which, whether really laughed at or no, the generality of mankind would acknowledge to be laughable.

That all men are not equally inclined to laughter; and that some may be found, who rarely indulge in it themselves, and actually dislike it in others, cannot be denied. But they are greatly mistaken, who suppose this character to be the effect of good-breeding, or peculiar to high life. In the cottage you will find it, as well as in the drawing room. Nor is profuse laughter peculiar to low life: it is a weakness incident to all stations; though I believe, that among the *wiser* sort, both of clowns and of quality, it may be less common.

But the present inquiry does not so much regard laughter itself, as that pleasurable emotion or sentiment, whereof laughter is the outward sign, and which may be intensely felt by those who do not laugh at all; even as the person who never weeps may yet be very tender-hearted. Nay as the keenest and most rational sorrow is not the most apt to express itself in tears; so the most admirable performances in wit and humour are not perhaps the most laughable; admiration being one of those powerful emotions that occasionally engross the whole soul, and suspend the exercise of its faculties. — And therefore, whatever judgement the reader may have formed concerning the lawfulness, expediency, or propriety, of this visible and audible convulsion called Laughter; my account of the cause of that internal emotion which generally gives rise to it, may be allowed to be pardonable, if it shall be found to be just. Nor does Lord
Chesterfield,

Chesterfield, as I remember, object to this emotion, nor to a smile as the outward expression of it, so long as the said smile is not suffered to degenerate into an open laugh.

Good-breeding is the art of pleasing those with whom we converse. Now we cannot please others, if we either show them what is displeasing in ourselves, or give them reason to think that we perceive what is displeasing in them. Every emotion, therefore, that would naturally arise from bad qualities in us, or from the view of them in others, and all those emotions in general which our company may think too violent, and cannot sympathise with, nor partake in, good-breeding requires that we suppress. Laughter, which is either too profuse or too obstreperous, is an emotion of this kind: and therefore, a man of breeding will be careful not to laugh much longer, or much oftener than others; nor to laugh at all, except where it is probable, that the jest may be equally relished by the company. — These, and other restraints peculiar to polished life, have, by some writers, been represented as productive of fraud, hypocrisy, and a thousand other crimes, from which the honest, open, undesigning savage is supposed to be entirely free. But, were this a fit place for stating the comparison, we could easily prove, that the restraints of good-breeding render society comfortable, and, by suppressing the outward energy of intemperate passions, tend not a little to suppress those passions themselves: while the unbridled liberty of savage life gives full play to every turbulent emotion, keeps the mind in continual uproar, and disqualifies it for those improvements and calm delights, that result from the exercise of the rational and moral faculties.

But to return. The more we are accustomed to any set of objects, the greater delicacy of discernment we acquire in comparing them together, and estimating their degree of excellence. By studying many pictures one may become a judge of painting:

by attending to the ornaments and proportions of many buildings, one acquires a taste in architecture; by practising music, we improve our sense of harmony; by reading many poems, we learn to distinguish the good from the bad. In like manner, by being conversant in works of wit and humour, and by joining in polite conversation, we refine our taste in ridicule, and come to undervalue those homelier jokes that entertain the vulgar. What improves individuals will in time improve nations. Plautus abounds in pleasantries that were the delight of his own and of the following age, but which, at the distance of one hundred and fifty years, Horace scruples not to censure for their inurbanity *. And we find not a few even in Shakespeare (notwithstanding the great superiority of his genius) at which a critic of these days would be less inclined to laugh, than to shake his head. Nay in the time of Charles the Second, many things passed upon the English stage for excellent humour, which would now be intolerable. — And thus it is, that we are enabled to judge of the politeness of nations, from the delicacy of their Comic writers; and of the breeding and literature of individual men, from their turn of humour, from their favourite jokes and stories, and from the very sound, duration, and frequency, of their laughter.

The conversation of the common people, though not so smooth, nor so pleasing, as that of the better sort, has more of the wildness and strong expression of nature. The common people speak and look what they think, bluster and threaten when they are angry, affect no sympathies which they do not feel; and when offended are at no pains to conceal their dissatisfaction. They laugh when they perceive any thing ludicrous, without much deference to the sentiments of their company; and, ha-

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 270.—275.

ving little relish for delicate humour, because they have been but little used to it, they amuse themselves with such pleasantries as in the higher ranks of life would offend by its homeliness. Yet may it be ludicrous notwithstanding? as those passions in a clown or savage may be natural, which in the polite world men are very careful to suppress.

IV. Tropes and Figures introduce into serious writing a variety of disproportionate images; which however do not provoke laughter, when they are so contrived as to raise some other emotion of greater authority. To illustrate this by examples taken from every species of trope and figure, is not necessary, and would be tedious. I shall confine my remarks to the Similitude or Comparifon; which is a very common figure, and contributes, more perhaps than any other, to render language emphatical, picturesque, and affecting to the fancy.

Every Similitude implies two things; the idea to be illustrated, which I call the *principal idea*; and the object alluded to, for the purpose of illustration. Now if between these two there be a considerable inequality; if the one be mean and the other dignified, or if the one be of much greater dignity than the other; there may be reason to apprehend (supposing our theory just) that, by their appearing in one assemblage, a mixture of relation and contrariety may be produced, sufficient to render the comparifon ludicrous; — of relation, arising from the likeness, — of contrariety, arising from the disproportion. And that this is often the case, we have seen already. — But when Homer compares a great army to a flight of cranes, Hector to a rock, Ajax to an afs, and Ulysses covered with leaves to a bit of live coal raked up among embers, the similitudes, for all their incongruity, are quite serious; at least they convey no Ridiculous impression to a reader of taste when perusing the poem. By attending

a little to this matter, we shall perhaps be able to throw new light on our argument.

Similitudes, ranged according to their connection with the present subject, are distinguishable into three classes. 1. One sublime or dignified object may be likened to another that is more sublime, or more dignified. 2. An object comparatively mean may be likened to one that is sublime. 3. An object comparatively sublime may be likened to one that is mean.

1. If one great or dignified object is likened to another that is greater or more dignified, as when Homer compares Achilles in arms to the moon, to a comet, to the sun, and to a god *, our admiration is evidently heightened, and the principal idea improved, by the comparison. But that which we greatly admire we seldom laugh at in any circumstances, and perhaps never, when, together with admiration, it infuses into the soul that sweet and elevating astonishment which attends the perception of those objects or ideas that we denominate sublime. The emotion inspired by the view of sublimity is also in itself more powerful than that which gives rise to laughter; at least in all minds that are not weak by nature, nor depraved by habit. No person of a sound mind ever laughed the first time he raised his eyes to contemplate the inside of St Paul's cupola: nor, in performing any of the solemn offices of his function, would a judge, a magistrate, or a clergyman, be excused, if he were to give way to laughter. In vain would he plead, that his mind was at that moment struck with a ludicrous conceit, or with the recollection of a merry story: we should say, that thoughts of a higher nature *ought* to have restrained him; — an idea which would not occur to us, if we were not conscious of the natural subordination of the risible propensity. — An object not absolutely mean

* Iliad, xix.

is rendered sublime in some degree, by association with a sublime idea. A *Pibroch* *, which in every other country would appear a jumble of unmeaning sounds, may communicate sublime impressions to a highlander of Scotland; not so much because he understands its modulation, as because it conveys to his mind the elevating ideas of danger, and courage, and armies, and military service. And let me take this opportunity to observe, that, in like manner, a thing not ludicrous in itself may occasion laughter, when it conveys to the mind any ludicrous idea related to it by custom, or by any other associating principle. It can hardly be said, that the braying of an ass is in itself more ludicrous (though perhaps it may be more dissonant) than the neigh of a horse; yet one may be inclined to smile when one hears it, by its bringing to mind the other qualities of that sluggish animal, with which the wags of both ancient and modern times have often made themselves merry. And hence it is, that men of lively fancy, especially if they have been accustomed to attend to the laughable side of things, are apt to smile at that in which others neither perceive, nor can imagine any thing ridiculous.

2. An object comparatively mean is often likened to one that is sublime: in which case it may require great address in the poet to maintain the majesty of Epic or Didactic composition. Simi-

* A *Pibroch* is a species of tune peculiar, I think, to the highlands and western isles of Scotland. It is performed on a bagpipe, and differs totally from all other music. Its rhythm is so irregular, and its notes, especially in the quick movement, so mixed and huddled together, that a stranger finds it almost impossible to reconcile his ear to it, so as to perceive its modulation. Some of these *Pibrochs*, being intended to represent a battle, begin with a grave motion resembling a march; then gradually quicken into the onset; run off with noisy confusion, and turbulent rapidity, to imitate the conflict and pursuit; then swell into a few flourishes of triumphant joy; and perhaps close with the wild and slow wailings of a funeral procession.

litudes of this kind, if very disproportionate, are not to be hazarded, while the principal idea retains its primitive meanness. The poet must first employ all his powers of harmony and language, to adorn and dignify it, by interesting the affections of his reader: a branch of the poetic art, which, as I have elsewhere observed *, is universal in its application, and may give life and pathos to mere descriptions of external nature, as well as to the most sublime efforts of the Epic or Tragic Muse.

In the art of conferring dignity upon objects comparatively mean, Virgil excels all poets whatever. By a tenderness of sentiment irresistibly captivating; by a perpetual series of the most pleasing, picturesque, and romantic imagery; by the most affecting digressions; and by a propriety, beauty, and sweetness of language, peculiar to himself, and unattainable by all others; he makes his way to the heart of his readers, whatever be the subject: and so prepares them for allusions and similitudes, which in the hand of an ordinary poet might appear even ridiculously inadequate; but which, by his management, give an air of grandeur to the meanest things described in his divine Georgic. The very mouse that undermines the threshing-floor, he renders an animal of importance. For his bees we are interested, as for a commonwealth of reasonable creatures. He compares them in one place to the Cyclops forging thunder. Yet, inadequate and even ludicrous as the comparison must appear when it is thus mentioned, it has no such effect as it appears in the poem. The reader is already so prepossessed and elevated with those ideas of dignity that adorn the subject, that he is more disposed to admire, than to laugh or cavil.

Mr John Philips had a happy talent in the Mock-Heroic, but was not equally fortunate in serious poetry. In his *Cyder*, he en-

* Essay on Poetry and Music, part 1. chap. 3.

deavours, in imitation of Virgil, to raise the subject by sublime allusions; but is apt to bring them in too abruptly, and before he has given sufficient importance to the principal idea. Nor has he any pretensions to that sweetness and melody of style, which intoxicate the readers of the Mantuan poet, and prepare them for any impression he is pleased to convey. And hence the language of Philips often takes the appearance of bombast; and some of his comparisons, instead of raising admiration by their greatness, tend rather to provoke a smile by their incongruity.

The apple's outward form

Delectable the witless swain beguiles,

Till, with a writhen mouth and spattering noise,

He tastes the bitter morsel, and rejects

Disrelish'd. Not with less surprise, than when

Embattled troops with flowing banners pass

Through flowery meads delighted, nor distrust

The smiling surface; whilst the cavern'd ground,

With grain incentive stored, by sudden blaze

Bursts fatal, and involves the hopes of war

In fiery whirls; full of victorious thoughts,

Torn and dismember'd, they aloft expire.

Had Virgil been to dignify this surprise by a magnificent allusion, he would not have degraded the principal idea by low images, (like those signified by the words *writhen mouth** and

* This very *writhen mouth* seems to be an allusion to Virgil;

At sapor indicium faciet manifestus, et ora

Tristitia tentantumi sensu torquetur amaror.

Georg. ii. 247.

— but it is to a part of Virgil, where simplicity is more studied than elevation.

spattering noise); but would have employed all his art to raise it to such elevation as might make the disproportionate greatness of the object alluded to less observable *. — Thomson has imitated Virgil's manner with much better skill, in that beautiful passage of his Autumn †, too long for a quotation, where he compares a hive of bees suffocated with brimstone to a city swallowed up by an earthquake.

In the Mock-Epic, where ridicule is often raised by exaggerating similitudes, care is taken to introduce the pompous comparison; while the principal idea appears in all its native insignificance; and sometimes the ridicule is heightened by a dash of bombast, or by a trifling circumstance unexpectedly introduced in the middle of affected solemnity.

But, in judging of similitudes in all serious writing, it is necessary to attend to the point of likeness on which the comparison turns: for two things may resemble each other in one particular, which in all others are very unlike; and therefore a similitude may, to an inattentive reader, appear incongruous, which is real-

† In the third Georgic, Virgil, speaking of the method of training steers to the plough and waggon, is at pains to dignify the subject by elegant language; but his figures are apposite, and not at all too lofty for the occasion:

Tu quos ad *studium* atque usum formabis agrestem
 Jam vitulos *hortare*, viamque insiste domandi,
 Dum faciles *animi juvenum*, dum mobilis ætas, &c. *Vers.* 163.

Dryden, in his translation, wants to rise to higher elegance by means of bolder figures, which, however, being ill-chosen and ill-prepared, give a ludicrous air to the whole passage. He speaks of *sending the calf to school*, of forming his mind with *moral precepts*, and instructing him in husbandry, before he is perverted by *bad example*.

‡ Autumn, *vers.* 1170.

ly proper and adequate. Those critics who blame Virgil for the simile of the Cyclops above mentioned, would do well to consider, that, though there be no resemblance between a bee and a huge one-eyed giant, in the size and frame of their bodies, and as little between their respective employments and manufactures, there may, however, be a resemblance between them in other things. The cyclops are eager to have the thunderbolt forged; the bees may be as eager in their way to fill their cells with honey : — the art of thunder-making employs a number of hands, each of whom has his particular department; and this also holds true of bees employed in the business of the hive. Now it is on account of their similarity in these two respects *, that the poet compares them; and in these two respects they certainly may be compared. But I allow, that, in serious writing, a similitude of this kind ought not to be attempted, but by an author of the very first rank; and therefore, though I vindicate Virgil, I think it extremely hazardous to imitate him. And I am aware of the truth of part of the following remark of Pope, which I quote at length, (though some expressions in it do not perfectly coincide with the foregoing reasonings), because it seems to me to throw light on the present subject. “ The use of the grand style on
“ little subjects is not only ludicrous, but a sort of transgression
“ against the rules of proportion and mechanics : it is using a
“ vast force to lift a feather. I believe it will be found a just
“ observation, that the low actions of life cannot be put into a
“ figurative style without being ridiculous ; but things natural
“ can. Metaphors raise the latter into dignity, as we see in the
“ Georgics ; but throw the former into ridicule, as in the Lu-
“ trin. I think this may very well be accounted for : laughter
“ implies censure ; inanimate and irrational beings are not objects

* See Virg. Geor. iv. 176.

“ of censure; and therefore they may be elevated as much as you
 “ please, and no ridicule follows: but when rational beings are
 “ represented above their real character, it becomes ridiculous in
 “ art, because it is vitious in morality. The bees in Virgil, were
 “ they rational beings, would be ridiculous by having their ac-
 “ tions and manners represented on a level with creatures so supe-
 “ rior as men; since it would imply folly or pride, which are the
 “ proper objects of ridicule *.”

3. A similitude may imply an incongruous assemblage, when an object comparatively sublime is likened to one that is mean. Homer and Virgil compare heroes, not only to beasts, but even to things inanimate, without raising a smile by the contrast. And the reason, as given already, is, that in these similitudes there is something which either takes off our attention from the incongruity, or raises within us an emotion more powerful than this of laughter.

First, the quality that occasions the comparison may be in both objects so adequate, so similar, and so striking, as to take off our attention from the incongruity of the assemblage, or even to remove from the comparison, when attentively considered, every incongruous appearance. Had Homer likened Paris to a horse, because he was good-natured and docile; Ajax to an ass, because he was dull; and Achilles to a lion, because of his long yellow hair; the allusions would probably have been ludicrous. But he likens Paris to a pampered horse †, because of his wantonness, swiftness, and luxurious life; Ajax to an ass ‡, because he is said to have been as much superior to the assault of the Trojans, as that animal is to the blows of children; and Achilles to a lion ||, on account of his strength, fierceness, and impetuosity. Hector

* Pope's Postscript to the *Odyssæy*.

† *Iliad*, vi.

‡ *Iliad*, xi.

|| *Iliad*, xx.

he compares to a rock tumbling from the top of a mountain *, because while he moved he was irresistible, and when he stopped immovable; qualities not more conspicuous in the hero, than in the stone. Milton likens Satan to a whale †; not because the one spouts salt water, as the other is vulgarly supposed to breathe out sulphureous fire, but because of his enormous size: and, to lessen the incongruity, if any should be supposed to remain, the poet is at great pains to raise our idea of the whale's magnitude:

Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam
The pilot of some small night-founder'd skiff
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixed anchor in his scaly rhind,
Moors by his side. —

But, secondly, it may happen, even in the higher poetry, that the compared qualities shall present an incongruous association, to the disadvantage of the principal idea. In this case, as there is an opposition, of greatness in the principal idea, and meanness in the object alluded to, it will be somewhat difficult to maintain true Epic dignity. It may, however, be done, by blending with the description of the mean object some interesting circumstance, to take off the attention from the incongruity, and fix it on something important or serious. Ulysses, going to sleep, covered over with leaves, after swimming out naked from a shipwreck, is compared by Homer to a bit of live coal preserved by a peasant in a heap of embers:

As some poor peasant, fated to reside
Remote from neighbours, in a forest wide,

* Iliad, xiii.

† Par. Lost, book 1.

Studious to save what human wants require,
 In embers heap'd preserves the seeds of fire;
 Hid in dry foliage thus Ulysses lies,
 Till Pallas pour'd soft slumber on his eyes *.

This simile, when we attend to the point of likeness, will be found to have sufficient propriety; the resemblance being obvious, between a man almost deprived of life, and a brand almost extinguished; between the foliage that defends Ulysses from cold, and probably from death, during the night, and the embers that keep alive the seeds of fire: yet if dressed up by a genius like Butler, it might assume a ludicrous appearance, from the disproportionate nature of the things compared. But Homer, with great delicacy, draws off the reader's attention to the peasant's solitary dwelling on the extremity of a frontier, where he had no neighbours to assist him in renewing his fire, if by any accident it should go out. — The poet is less delicate on another occasion, when he likens the same hero, tossing in his bed, and sleepless through desire to be avenged on the plunderers of his household, to a man employed “in broiling on a great fire a stomach full of fat and blood, and often turning it, because he is impatient to have it roasted †.” This image is unpleasing and despicable; and the comparison must appear ridiculous to a modern reader: — though Boileau pleads, that the viand here mentioned was esteemed a great delicacy by the ancients; though Eustathius seems to think, that a low similitude might in this place very well suit the beggarly condition of Ulysses; and though, in the opinion of Mons. Dacier, the bag stuffed with fat and blood might, in Homer's days, convey a religious, and consequently an important, idea.

* Odyss. lib. 5.

† Odyss. xx.

When the object alluded to is pleasing in itself, and the description elegant, we are apt to overlook the incongruity of a similitude, even where the disproportion is very great; the ludicrous emotion being as it were suppressed by our admiration of the poetry, or the littleness of the object compensated by its beauty. That famous passage in Virgil, where Amata, roaming up and down, from the agitation of her mind, and the impulse of a demon, is compared to a top whipped about by boys, has been called fustian by some critics, and burlesque by others *. In my opinion it is neither. The propriety in point of likeness is undeniable. The object alluded to, though in itself void of dignity, is however pleasing; and receives elevation from the poetry, which

* Demetrius Phalereus observes, that "Elegance of language, by exciting admiration, makes the ridiculous disappear;" and adds, "that to express a ludicrous sentiment in fine language is like dressing an ape in fine cloaths. The words of Sappho, (continues he), when Beauty is her theme, are sweet and beautiful; as in her poems on Love, on Air, and on the Halcyon. Indeed all the beauties of language, and some of them of her own invention, are interwoven with Sappho's poetry. But the Rustic Bridegroom, and the Porter at the Wedding, she has ridiculed in a different style; using very mean expressions, and a choice of words less suitable to poetry than to prose." *Demet. Phal.* § 166. 167. 168. — An ape dressed in fine cloaths does not cease to be ludicrous: and in the Mock-Heroic poem, where the subject is contemptible or mean, great elegance, or even magnificence, of diction, may heighten the ridicule; of which, the *Lutrin*, the *Dunciad*, the *Rape of the Lock*, and the *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, abound in examples. — But it is probable, that Demetrius is here speaking of *Burlesque*, and that Sappho's poem on the wedding was of that character; — something perhaps resembling the *Ballad*, said to be written by James I. King of Scotland, and commonly known by the name of *Christ's Kirk on the Green*. And it is true, that in *Burlesque* writing, as distinguished from the *Mock-Heroic*, vulgarity of expression is almost indispensable. See above, chap. 2. sect. iv. 9. 10. 11.

is finished in Virgil's best manner, and is indeed highly picturesque, and very beautiful *.

What has been said on the subject of Similitudes, when applied to the present purpose, amounts to this: "Incongruity does not appear ludicrous, when it is so qualified, or circumstanced, as to raise in the mind some emotion more powerful than that of Laughter."

V. If, then, it be asked, WHAT IS THAT QUALITY IN THINGS, WHICH MAKES THEM PROVOKE THAT PLEASING EMOTION OR SENTIMENT WHEREOF LAUGHTER IS THE EXTERNAL SIGN? I answer, IT IS AN UNCOMMON MIXTURE OF RELATION AND CONTRARIETY, EXHIBITED, OR SUPPOSED TO BE UNITED, IN THE SAME ASSEMBLAGE. If again it be asked, WHETHER SUCH A MIXTURE WILL ALWAYS PROVOKE LAUGHTER? my answer is, IT WILL ALWAYS, OR FOR THE MOST PART, EXCITE THE RISIBLE EMOTION, UNLESS WHEN THE PERCEPTION OF IT IS ATTENDED WITH SOME OTHER EMOTION OF GREATER AUTHORITY.

It cannot be expected, that I should give a complete list of those emotions that do commonly, in a sound mind, bear down this ludicrous emotion. Several of them have been specified in the course of this inquiry. We have seen, from the examples given, that moral disapprobation, pity, fear, disgust, admiration, are among the number; to which every person, who attends to

* *Ceu quondam torto volitans sub verbere turbo,
Quem pueri magno in gyro vacua atria circum,
Intenti ludo exercent; ille actus habena
Curvatis fertur spatiis: stupet infcia supra
Impubesque manus, mirata volubile buxum.
Dant animos plagæ, &c.*

Æneid, vii. 378.

what passes in his own mind, may perhaps be able to add several others.

I am well aware, that the comparative strength of our several emotions is not the same in each individual. In some the more serious affections are so prevalent, that the risible disposition operates but seldom, and with a feeble impulse: in some, the latter predominates so much, that the others are scarce able to counteract its energy. It is hardly possible to arrive at principles so comprehensive as to include the peculiarities of every individual. These are sometimes so inconsistent with the general law of the species, that they may be considered as deviations from the ordinary course of nature. In tracing *Sentimental Laughter* to its first principles, I have examined it, only as it is found to operate, for the most part, in the generality of mankind.

C H A P. IV.

An attempt to account for the superiority of the moderns in Ludicrous Writing.

IT seems to be generally acknowledged, that the moderns are superior to the ancient Greeks and Romans, in every sort of Ludicrous Writing. If this be indeed the case, it is a fact that deserves the attention of those authors who make Wit, or Humour, the subject of their inquiry; since the same reasonings that account for this fact must throw light on the philosophy of laughter. But by those people who argue for argument's sake, probable reasons might be urged, to show, that we are not competent judges of the ancient humour, and therefore cannot

be certain of the superiority of the modern. Were I to defend this side of the question, the following should be my arguments.

Every thing that gives variety to the thoughts, the manners, and employments of men, must also tend to diversify their conversations and compositions in general, and their wit and humour in particular. Accordingly we find, that almost every profession in life has a turn of humour, as well as of thinking and acting, peculiar in some degree to itself. The soldier, the seaman, the mechanic, the husbandman, is more amused by the conversation of people of his own trade, than by that of others : and a species of wit shall be highly relished in one club or society, which in another would be but little attended to. We need not wonder, then, that in the humour of each country there should be some peculiar character, to the forming of which, not only the language and manners, but even the climate and soil, must contribute, by giving a peculiar direction to the pursuits and thoughts of the inhabitants. Nor need we wonder, that each nation should be affected most agreeably with its own wit and humour. For, not to mention the prejudice that one naturally entertains in favour of what is one's own, a native must always understand, better than foreigners can, the relations, contrarieties, and allusions, implied in what is ludicrous in the speech and writings of his countrymen.

Shakespeare's humour will never be adequately relished in France, nor that of Moliere in England : and translations of ludicrous writings are seldom popular, unless they exhibit something of the manners and habits of thinking, as well as the language, of the people to whom they are addressed. Echard's Terence, from having adopted such a multitude of our cant phrases, and proverbial allusions, is perhaps more generally relished in Great Britain, than a more literal and more elegant version would have been. Sancho Pança diverts us more in Motteux's *Don Qui-*
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xote, than in Jervas's Translation, or Smollet's; because he has more of the English clown, and less of the Spaniard, in the former, than in the latter. And a certain French author, to render his Translation of Tom Jones more acceptable to his countrymen, and to clear it of what he foolishly calls English phlegm, has greatly abridged that incomparable performance, and, in my opinion, expunged some of the finest passages; those conversation-pieces, I mean, which tend more immediately to the elucidation of the characters, than to the progress of the story.

May there not, then, in ancient authors, be many excellent strokes of wit and humour, which we misapprehend, merely because we cannot adequately relish? The dialogues of the Socratic philosophers abound in pleasantry, which is no doubt entertaining to a modern reader, but which does not at all come up to those expectations that one would be apt to form of it from the high encomiums of Cicero, and other ancient critics: and may not this be partly imputed to our not sufficiently understanding the Socratic dialogues? To us nothing appears more paltry in the execution, than the ridicule with which Aristophanes persecuted Socrates: and yet we know, that it operated with wonderful energy on the Athenians, who, for refinement of taste, and for wit and humour, were distinguished among all the nations of antiquity. Does not this amount to a presumption, that we are no competent judges of the humour of that profligate comedian?

Let it be remarked, too, that the sphere most favourable to wit and humour is that which is occupied by the middle and lower ranks of mankind; persons in high stations being obliged to maintain a reserve unfriendly to risible emotion, and to reduce their behaviour to an artificial uniformity, which does indeed answer many important purposes, but which, for the most part, disqualifies them for filling any eminent place in humorous description.

tion. Now we are much in the dark in regard to the manners that prevailed among the Greeks and Romans of the lower sort : and there must have been, in their ludicrous writings, as there are in ours, many nice allusions to trifling customs, to the news of the day, and to characters and incidents too inconsiderable to be minded by the historian, which none but persons living at the time, and in a particular place, could ever comprehend ; — as the writers of those days had no notion of the modern practice of illustrating their own works with marginal annotations. Many authors, too, are lost ; and with them has probably perished (as we remarked already) the ludicrous effect of innumerable parodies and turns of expression, to be met with in Aristophanes, Plautus, Lucian, Horace, and other witty ancients. It is at least certain, that there are in Shakespeare many parodies and allusions, the propriety of which we cannot estimate, as the authors, customs, and incidents, referred to, are already forgotten.

From the causes now hinted at, works of wit and humour would appear to be less permanent in their effects, and more liable to become obscure, than any other literary compositions. Commentaries are now necessary to make *Hudibras* and the *Dunciad* thoroughly intelligible : and what a mysterious rhapsody would the *Rape of the Lock* be to those, who, though well instructed in the language of Hooker and Spenser, had never heard of snuff or coffee, watches or hoop-petticoats, beaus or lap-dogs, toilettes or card-tables ! But the reasonings of Euclid and Demosthenes, the moral and natural paintings of Homer and Virgil, the pathos of *Eloisa's Epistle to Abelard*, the descriptions of Livy and Tacitus, can never stand in need of commentaries to explain them, so long as the Greek, Latin, and English languages are tolerably understood ; because they are founded in those suggestions of human reason, and those appearances in the moral and material world, which are always the same, and with
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which every intelligent observer must in every age be acquainted.

I would not insinuate, that all sorts of Ludicrous writing are equally liable to lose their effect, and be misunderstood. Those must preserve their relish unimpaired through ages, which allude, — to our more permanent follies and absurdities; like Horace's picture of an intrusive coxcomb, and the greater part of the satire which he levels at pedantry and avarice; — or to writings transcendently excellent; like the Virgilian cento of Ausonius, the Splendid Shilling of Philips, and the *Batrachomyomachia* erroneously ascribed to Homer; — or to customs or opinions universally known; such as Lucian's ridicule of the Pagan Theology, and that inimitable raillery on the abuses of learning which is contained in the memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus. — I mean only to say, that Ludicrous writing in general is extremely subject to the injuries of time; and that, therefore, the wit and humour of the ancient Greeks and Romans might have been far more exquisite, than we at present have any positive reason to believe.

Such would be my plan of declamation, if I were to controvert the common opinion of our superiority to the ancients in Ludicrous writing. But I am not anxious to dispute this point; being satisfied, that the common opinion is true; and that, considering the advantages in this respect which the moderns enjoy, the case cannot well be otherwise.

Modern Ridicule, compared with the ancient, will be found to be, first, *more copious*, and, secondly, *more refined*.

I. The superior *COPIOUSNESS* of the former may be accounted for, if we can show, that to us many sources of wit and humour are both open and obvious, which to the ancients were utterly unknown. It is indeed reasonable to suppose, that they may have been acquainted with many ludicrous objects, whereof we are ignorant; but that we must be acquainted with many
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more, of which they were ignorant, will hardly be questioned by those who admit, that laughter arises from incongruous and unexpected combinations of ideas; and that our fund of ideas is more ample and more diversified than that of the Greeks and Romans, because our knowledge is more extensive both of men and of things. Far be it from me, to undervalue the attainments of that illustrious part of the human race. The Greeks and Romans are our masters in all polite learning; and their knowledge is to ours, what the foundation is to a superstructure. Our superiority, where we have any, is the consequence of our being posterior in time, and enjoying the benefit of their discoveries and example, as well as the fruits of our own industry. At any rate, the superiority I now contend for is such as the warmest admirer of the ancients may admit, without disrespect to their memory, or injury to their reputation.

To compare the late acquisitions in knowledge with the ancient discoveries, would far exceed the bounds of a short Essay, and is not necessary at present. All I mean to do, is to make a few brief remarks on the subject, with a view to account for the superior *copiousness* of modern ridicule.

That in most branches of philosophy, and natural history, the moderns have greatly the advantage of the ancients, is undeniable. Hence we derive an endless multitude of notions and ideas unknown to antiquity, which, by being differently combined and compared, give rise to innumerable varieties of that species of ludicrous association which is called Wit. Every addition to literature enlarges the sphere of wit, by supplying new images, and new opportunities of tracing out unexpected similitude: nor would the author of *Hudibras* have excelled so much in this talent, if he had not been distinguished by uncommon acquisitions in learning, as well as by a singular turn of fancy. One cannot read a canto of his extraordinary Poem, without discovering his
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ability in both these respects; or a page, without being struck with some jocular allusion, which could not have occurred to the wits of Greece or Rome, because it depends on ideas with which they were unacquainted.

The moderns are also better instructed in all the varieties of human manners. They know what the ancients were, and what they themselves are; and their improvements, in commerce, geography, and navigation, have wonderfully extended their knowledge of mankind within the two last centuries. They have seen, by the light of history, the greatest and politest nations gradually swallowed up in the abyss of barbarism, and again by slow degrees emerging from it. Their policy and spirit of adventure have made them well acquainted with many nations whose very existence was anciently unknown; and it is now easier to sail round the globe, than it then was to explore the coasts of the Mediterranean sea. Hence, I shall not say that we have acquired any superior knowledge of those faculties essential to human nature, which constitute the foundation of moral science: but hence it is clear, that we derive a very great variety of those ideas of the characters and circumstances of mankind, which by their different arrangements and colourings, form that species of ludicrous combination which is called Humour.

To be somewhat more particular: Certain forms of government are familiar to the moderns, of which the ancients knew almost nothing. I mention only the Feudal System; the influence whereof has in latter times wrought so amazing a change on the affairs and manners of Europe. Other invaders have satisfied themselves with introducing their laws and customs gradually into a conquered province: but the subverters of the Roman empire, all at once, with a rapidity equal to that wherewith they marched and fought, gave new forms to society, new

analogies to language, and a new direction to the thoughts and passions of men. Ideas of political subordination, such as had never occurred to the most fanciful projectors of Greece and Rome, now took possession of the human mind, and obliterated all the philosophy of the ancient republican. — One of the most immediate effects of this system was, to make a separation between the different orders of men, and to subject human intercourse to the rules of a more complex economy : — this would be the natural consequence of instituting the several gradations of vassalage, and annexing high prerogatives to the condition of a superior. In a republic, the citizens must often meet together upon the footing of equality and mutual independence ; and, having nearly the same purposes in view, and enjoying the same privileges, will contract similar habits of thinking, and be animated with similar passions, and marked with a sameness of character, or at least of external deportment. In a despotic empire, where all the subjects are equally insignificant and hopeless, and where to remain undistinguished is the best and almost the only security, picturesque diversities of genius and disposition are still less to be expected. But in a feudal state, where the primitive spirit of freedom predominates, the orders of men, on account of their vast inequality, must form themselves into separate societies, which, while their respective privileges and pretensions keep them active, mutual jealousy or ambition will prompt to make a figure, each in its own particular sphere, and by means peculiar to itself. — It has been remarked, that varieties of character are more perceptible in England, than in other countries : and I submit to the reader, whether this may not be accounted for, on the principles here specified. Were the country-gentlemen of England to live in towns, or to meet frequently in a common *forum*, or in any other way to form one large society, their peculiarities would disappear, and their behaviour (like that

that of citizens in a republic) would become externally uniform, or nearly so; and if they were not conscious of their own independence and privileges, they would not have the courage to think for themselves, but would probably be (like many of their neighbours) imitators of one another, or insipid followers of the fashion. Let me not be supposed to insinuate, that variety of *genius* and *temper* is peculiar to any one form of government: — different characters I am sensible that there always will be, where-ever there are different men: — my meaning is, that the *manners* of individuals, and those outward circumstances of life that supply materials for wit and humour, are liable to be more diversified by some forms of government than by others, and by free governments of the feudal form more perhaps than by any other. — The laughable peculiarities that distinguish Don Quixote, Parson Adams, Sir Roger de Coverley, Squire Western, and many other heroes of the Comic Romance, are such as men could not be supposed to acquire, if they did not live secluded in some degree from the general intercourse of society. We smile, when sailors use at land the language of the sea, when learned pedants interlard ordinary discourse with Greek and Latin idioms, when coxcombs bring abroad into the world the dialect and gesticulations of their own club, and, in general, when a man expresses himself on all subjects in figures of speech suggested by what belongs to his own profession only. Now what but habits contracted in a narrow society could produce these peculiarities? And does not this prove, that ludicrous qualities are incident to men who live detached in a narrow society, and, therefore, that the feudal, or any other, form of government, that tends to keep the different orders of men separate, must be favourable to wit and humour, and so enlarge the sphere of ludicrous writing? — A general acquaintance with mankind, produces a facility of doing what is conformable to general manners, and wears off those improprieties and strange habits that divert by their singularity.

But whatever account the reader may make of these reasonings, this at least he must allow, that from the feudal government arose one institution, I mean Chivalry, which gave occasion to Cervantes to invent a species of writing, as fertile of humour, (and of wit, too, if Hudibras be an imitation of it) as any that ever appeared in the world. Need we wonder, then, that the modern ridicule should be more *copious* than the ancient?

Religious Controversy is in modern times a never-failing source of wit and humour. But in the days of Greece and Rome there was no such thing; the Pagan superstitions being too absurd to admit of controversy. From this source we derive many witty passages in the writings of Chaucer, Erasmus, Pascal, and others; and it is to this we are indebted for Hudibras and The Tale of a Tub, two of the most laughable (I wish I could say the most salutary) pieces of ridicule that ever were written. It may seem surprising, that things so serious and awful, as superstition and enthusiasm, should lie open to the attack of the wit and buffoon, as well as of the satirist. Indeed, if we estimate them by their effects in society, and their power over the human mind, they would seem worthy to be reckoned among the most tremendous phenomena in nature. And so they are, no doubt; and, for this reason, may be made the ground-work of tragedy, serious satire, rhetorical invective, and other sublime compositions. But when we consider them as they are in themselves, and with a view to the causes whence they frequently arise, the arguments by which they are supported, and the strange vagaries into which they have led rational beings, we must be struck with something ludicrous in their appearance; particularly, with the vast disproportion, between their real and imaginary dignity; between their genuine effects, and those that, previously to experience, we should be inclined to expect from them. And thus it is, that superstition and enthusiasm, while they appear in the light, not
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of crimes, but of infirmities, may very well be made the subject of Comic Ridicule. But let the torch of wit be brandished against them with discretion superior to that of the Dean of St Patrick's; lest, while it is employed to dispel the gloom, that by investing the shrine of these demons conceals their deformity, it should be permitted to dart sacrilegious fire into the neighbouring sanctuary of religion.

Gallantry (by which I here understand those generous and respectful attentions we pay to the Fair Sex) contributes in many ways both to the *copiousness* and to the *refinement* of wit and humour. Nor is there evidence, that this mode of politeness at all subsisted in Greece or Rome, at least in its present form. There, the women, secluded from general conversation, were known only by their domestic virtues, or by crimes that exposed them to public abhorrence; while the nicer discriminations of the female character, which supply materials for comic writing, were little attended to:—nor could they, in that sequestered condition, ever arrive at those improvements in taste, address, and delicacy, which may be communicated by modern education, and which in a modern youth may excite a purer and more interesting attachment than ever animated a Greek or Roman lover. In fact, there is nothing in modern manners more characteristic than this Gallantry, and few things that would surprise an ancient more. It bespeaks, on the part of the men, a mixture, of tenderness and respect, of deference and esteem, which the politest gallant of antiquity never thought of; and of familiarity and reserve, confidence and caution, on the part of the women, which the Greek and Roman ladies, confined to the society of their own sex, and intimidated by a rigorous economy that rendered their state little better than servitude, could have neither inclination nor opportunity to acquire.

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The old Germans, (as we learn from Tacitus *), and those warriors of the north who invaded the Roman empire, were on all occasions attended by their women; whom, if they did not love with romantic fondness, they esteemed for their friendly counsels and faithful service, and sometimes considered as oracles, by whom the gods gave intimation of future events †. But in the more genial regions of Asia, the sexes lived on a very different footing. Without a grain of esteem on either side, the men regarded the women with sentiments of untender, though passionate love; and the women, secluded from public view, and cut off from the means of rational improvement, were insipid and submissive, as

* Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum*. — Thucydides was of opinion, that she is the best woman, of whom there is least speech, either to her praise or dispraise; and that the name of a lady of honour ought always, like her body, to be kept at home, and never permitted to go abroad. This doctrine, which conveys no comfortable idea of the Grecian economy in regard to the Fair Sex, is warmly controverted by the gallant and good-natured Plutarch; who, in his treatise of the virtues of women, contends, “that virtue always deserves honour where-ever it is found, but especially when it is the work of a feeble agent; and that, therefore, female virtue is peculiarly worthy of praise, that not only their own sex, but men also, may profit by the example.” — Many female characters of high virtue are indeed celebrated by ancient historians and poets; and innumerable testimonies in their favour might be cited from the Greek and Roman authors. Yet still the general treatment of women at Rome, but especially in Greece, was such as we should not scruple to call tyrannical and cruel; as partaking much of the Asiatic severity, little of the Gothic and German confidence, and nothing at all of the liberality, gentleness, and affectionate homage, of modern gallantry.

† I know not, whether it proceeded from the respect the northern nations paid their women, or to what other cause it was owing; but it is surely very singular, and what, on Mr Harris’s principles, (see *Hermes*, p. 45.), could not be easily accounted for, that in the Saxon and some other northern languages, the Sun should be of the feminine gender, and the Moon masculine. See Hickes’s *The-saurus*.

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slaves must be under the rod of tyranny. Modern gallantry comprehends every thing that is agreeable in these two modes of domestic intercourse; avoiding the slavish and unmanly principles of the latter, and whatever favours of harshness in the former. With all due regard to external charms, it is still more sensible of moral and intellectual beauty; and while it favours the enthusiasm, and disavows the jealousy, of the enamoured Asiatic, it exalts and refines those sentiments of rational esteem which we inherit from our free-born ancestors of the north. In a word, the superiority, vested by law in the male sex, is now amply compensated to the female, by that tender complaisance, with which they are treated in all polite nations; and which, from the use they make of it in improving society, and enlivening conversation, it appears that they so justly deserve.

Is it not obvious, that this gallantry tends to enlarge the sphere of Comic writing? By admitting us to the conversation of the fair sex, it brings us acquainted with an entire class of characters, wherein, though we must discern every sort of human excellence, we may also trace out (since nothing sublunary is perfect) a variety of those little faults and absurdities, which Aristotle, had he known them, would have allowed to be fit objects of Comic Ridicule. But neither Aristotle, nor any other ancient, can vie with the moderns, in knowledge of the female character. We see nothing of it, or next to nothing, in the comedies or satires of Greece and Rome. Whereas, in the writings of Fielding, Young, Pope, and Shakespeare, not to mention the French and Italian authors, the freaks and foibles of the female world supply a rich fund of humorous entertainment.

Further: Considering the form of intercourse now subsisting between the sexes, so different from that which anciently prevailed, and their different pursuits and accomplishments thence resulting; is there not reason to suppose, that the passions where-
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with they inspire each other should also be different? Romantic Love seems to be almost peculiar to the latter ages. This passion may perhaps be traced up to that spirit of courtesy and adventure which arose from circumstances peculiar to feudal government, distinguished all the institutions of chivalry, gave birth and form to the old romance, and consequently to the new, and to this day influences in a perceptible degree the customs and manners of Europe. More delicate and more generous than the Greek or Roman loves, this passion is also more interesting, and may of course be presumed to be more powerful. Shakespeare, and the author of Robinson Crusoe, have indeed shown, that even in modern times this passion is not essential, either in tragedy or in romance, to form an affecting fable: but the generality of late writers, if we may judge of their opinions by their practice, seem to think otherwise; and that to every sort of fictitious narrative, from an Epic poem to a Pastoral, from Amadis de Gaul to the last published novel, a love-story is as ornamental and necessary, as leaves to a tree, or a mistress to a knight-errant.

As romantic love in its natural and regular procedure, is now become so copious a source of joy and sorrow, hope and fear, triumph and disappointment, we might reasonably conclude, that in its more whimsical forms and vagaries it could scarce fail to supply materials for laughter. And that this is the case, nobody in the least acquainted with modern life or modern literature needs be informed. I mention not its laughable extravagancies, as they appear in Don Quixote, Sir Roger de Coverley, and other heroes on record; and far be it from me to specify on this occasion any of the various forms of female prudery and coquetry, of which I always think with the most profound reverence. But the reader would wonder at me, if I did not remark, that to affectations and follies, which I fear are imputable to this gentle passion,

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passion, we owe an endless train of fops, coxcombs, beaux, male-coquets, cicisbeos, and dangles; a breed of animals unknown to the ancients; and which, if they were but as harmless as they are contemptible, might be allowed to rank with the most ridiculous things on the face of the earth.

Other causes for the superior copiousness of modern ridicule I shall only hint at; as illustration is not necessary to render their effects obvious to the reader.

We have a far greater variety of authors to allude to, in the way of parody and burlesque, than the ancients had; for we have both ancient authors and modern: and to an excessive admiration of the former some late wits have ascribed the origin of a new species of ludicrous character, whereof we have several strong outlines in the travelling physician in *Peregrine Pickle*, and a finished portrait in the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. There was indeed, in the days of Horace *, a sort of character not unlike this; a set of critics, who, despising the literary productions of their own time, were perpetually extolling the ancient Roman authors, and tracing out divine beauties of style in writings that were become almost unintelligible. But these critics are rather to be ranked with those of our antiquarians who prefer Chaucer and Langland to Dryden and Milton, and, like Pope's Parish-clerk, take a kindly affection even to the black letter in which the former are printed. The taste of such men may be singular; but as their labours are often highly useful in illustrating ancient history, it would not be possible, without violent misrepresentation, to make them so ridiculous, as Pope and Arbuthnot have made the elder and younger Scriblerus.

It may also be remarked, that our customs in regard to dress change more frequently than the Greek or Roman did. Whe-

* Hor. Epist. ad Augustum, vers. 19. — 27.

ther this be owing to our improvements in commerce, and superior zeal for varieties of manufacture, or to a bad taste in dress, which must always be changing, because it has no fixed principle; or to the influence of the feudal manners; or to the luxuries peculiar to opulent monarchy, — I do not now inquire: — but a certain fact it is, that the Greek and Roman dresses were in a great degree permanent, while ours are liable to endless variety and alteration. A circumstance this, that may at first view seem unconnected with the present subject; but to which the admirers of the *Rape of the Lock*, *Spectator*, and *Tatler*, are indebted for some of the finest humour that ever was written.

Commerce, and all the arts connected with it, are more successfully cultivated by modern, than they were by ancient nations. Hence a variety of new employments, which, by dividing mankind into separate professions and societies, multiply human characters, and enlarge the sphere of humour. And hence, as was observed, an infinite number of new objects and ideas, that extend the bounds of wit, by suggesting new sources of comparison, and ludicrous arrangement. — The art of Printing, too, by diffusing literature, has made the characters of mankind better known, and raised up a greater variety of authors, whose different pursuits and adventures yield materials for that mode of ludicrous writing, in which the *Dunciad* may be considered as the most capital performance.

To a full examination of the present topic, it would be further necessary, to give a critical analysis of our most celebrated works in wit and humour, and of the human characters displayed in them; and to inquire, from what external causes the laughable peculiarities in each character arise; and how far the same or similar causes could take place in ancient times. But this I leave as a theme to amuse the leisure of future critics; and shall conclude

clude with a remark or two on the superior REFINEMENT of modern ridicule.

II. If modern ridicule be more *copious* than the ancient, of which there seems to be sufficient proof, it must also, according to the natural progress of things, be more *refined*. For, as was hinted already, the more conversant we are among pleasurable objects of any particular class, the more sagacious we become in estimating their comparative excellence, and our taste of course becomes more delicate. When a savage or clown sees a picture for the first time, his wonder is raised to the highest pitch, even tho' the merit of the piece be but small : — he never beheld any thing so admirable ; he can conceive nothing beyond it. Make him gradually acquainted with a number of pictures, and engage him to fix his attention upon each, and you shall see him of his own accord begin to form comparisons ; to discover beauties in one, which are not in another, or not in the same degree ; and at last, perhaps, to find out imperfections in the best, and to conceive something in the art still better than he has ever seen. — Homely jokes delight the vulgar, because their knowledge of ludicrous combination is limited. Let this knowledge be extended ; let them hear varieties of conversation, or read the works of witty authors, and their taste will improve of itself : and those jokes will at length appear despicable, which formerly they mistook for excellent. That the humour of Addison and Pope should be more refined than that of Lucian and Horace, that Swift should be more delicate than Rabelais, and Foote than Aristophanes, is therefore not more surprising, than that the man of observation, who has made the tour of Europe, should be a better judge of elegance in building and furniture, than he who has never travelled beyond the frontier of his native province.

But, if this progress towards perfection of taste hold universally, why, it may be said, do not we excel the ancients in our

taste of books and writing in general ; since it is plain, that in this respect also we have more experience than they ? I answer : If all the books we have, the new as well as old, had been written in a good taste, and we as attentive readers as the ancients were, it is not absurd to suppose, that our taste in writing might have been more perfect than theirs. But we have such numbers of books to read, and so many of them trifling, and so many unskilfully written, that we are apt to lose the habit of attentive study, and even to contract a liking to inelegant or faulty composition. For inattention long indulged settles into a habit ; and the same susceptibility of nature, which in time reconciles some men to the relish of tobacco and strong liquors, may also gradually admit a depravation in the mental taste of those to whom deformity and impropriety have long been familiar. — I supposed the clown, the savage, and the traveller, attentive to what they saw ; and I did not suppose every thing they saw to be bad in its kind. Had every thing been bad, or they inattentive, it would have been impossible for them, in the case I mentioned, ever to acquire a taste in painting, building, or furniture : and were a man never to hear any but coarse and vulgar jokes, I question whether his taste in ridicule would ever improve, though he were to hear them by hundreds and thousands every day. — And therefore I admit, that the progress above mentioned, towards perfection of taste, holds, not universally, but only in certain circumstances ; and that the superior *refinement* of modern ridicule cannot be accounted for, from its superior *copiousness*, unless we can prove it to have received cultivation from the influence of other causes peculiar to the condition of men in modern times.

And, in order to prove this, I observe, secondly, That what we call the point of honour (though in many respects blameable) has, in conjunction with a spirit of courtesy derived from the same

same Feudal origin, tended greatly in these latter times to check intemperate passion, and regulate human speech. And nothing, perhaps, has more effectually softened conversation, by discountenancing indelicacy, and by promoting good humour, gentle manners, and a desire to please, than the society of the fair sex; an acquisition whereof neither the sages of Greece and Rome, nor the voluptuaries of Asia, ever knew the value; and for which Europe is indebted to the refinements peculiar to modern gallantry. Nor is it only by studying to avoid whatever might be offensive to female delicacy, that we derive improvement from our amiable partners in social life. They set us an example, from which it is our own fault if we receive no benefit. The liveliness of their fancy, the purity of their taste, and the unstudied ease of their elocution, give to modern conversation an elegance and a variety, which the Socratic school itself would have been proud to take for a model.

My third remark is, That political institutions have also an effect on ludicrous writing, as on every thing else in which that political creature Man is concerned. The mirth of a savage, when he gives way to it, is mere madness; as his sorrow approaches for the most part to despair. But savages are little addicted to jocularity: their looks, their songs, and their music are solemn; they are continually engrossed by emotions more powerful than this of laughter; — a necessary effect of their violent temper, and of their needy and perilous condition. Wit and humour, and those nicer improvements of speech that minister to pleasure rather than necessity, seldom appear among a people, till public peace be tolerably secure. And as monarchy is, of all governments, the least liable to either external assault, or intestine commotion, and leaves the subject most at leisure for both private business and private amusement; it would seem of course more favourable to every species of comic writing, than any of the

the republican forms; in which important affairs, and consequently important emotions, must ever be present to the sober-minded citizen. And where persons of all ranks, and those ranks very different, often meet in society, and the public welfare depends on their living on good terms with one another, each within the sphere of his own prerogative, (a state of things not to be looked for in Democracy or Despotism, but very compatible with limited monarchy), — politeness of behaviour must needs take place; while the great find it for their interest to please the people; and the people, to recommend themselves to the favour of the great. This general politeness, which is one distinguishing characteristic of monarchy, and which the example of a court is alone sufficient to make fashionable, must ever be unfriendly to rudeness of speech, and must therefore refine wit and humour, while it polishes conversation. Now it is observable, that in modern times Monarchy gives the law to those parts of the world that aspire to a literary character, as Republican government did of old. Does not this, added to the former consideration, account in some measure for the superior refinement of the modern wit and humour?

And now, notwithstanding the levity of many of these remarks, and the uninteresting title prefixed to them, may we not be permitted to observe in conclusion, that the meek and benevolent spirit of our religion has had a powerful influence in sweetening and refining all the comforts of human society, and Conversation among the rest? — That humility, gentleness, and kind affection, whereof good-breeding ever assumes the outward form, does not Christianity establish in the heart as a permanent principle of indispensable obligation? That generous love of humankind, which prompts the Christian to watch for the good of others, and embrace every opportunity of promoting, not only their welfare, but their virtue, taking care never to offend, and avoiding even the

the appearance of evil, — would not the man of taste acknowledge to be the very perfection and heroism of polite behaviour? Must not the affecting view that true religion exhibits, of all mankind bearing to one another the relation of brethren, impart keenness and activity to those tender sympathies of our social nature, whereof the language of good-breeding is so remarkably expressive? Christianity commands, not the suppression only, but the extinction, of every indelicate thought, arrogant emotion, and malevolent purpose: — would conversation stand in need of any further refinement, if this law were as punctually fulfilled, as it is earnestly recommended? What is more efficacious, than habitual good-humour, in rendering the intercourse of society agreeable, and in keeping at a distance all intemperate passion, and all harshness of sentiment and language? — and of what religion, but the Christian, can we say with truth, that it supplies, in every state of human affairs, a perpetual source of inward consolation? In a word, true Christianity, alone and at once, transforms a barbarian into a man; a brutal, selfish, and melancholy savage, into a kind, a generous, and a cheerful associate.

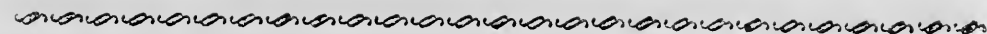
Will it be said, that delicacy of speech and behaviour may be communicated and acquired by the means recommended in some late LETTERS, namely, by external applications, and by the use of certain mechanical phrases, looks, and gestures? As well may the painting of the cheeks and eye-brows be prescribed as a preservative from the rheumatism, and perfumed snuff as an antidote against hunger and thirst. He has learned little of the true interests of human society, and nothing at all of the human mind, who does not know, that without sincerity there could not be either happiness or comfort upon earth; that permanent propriety of conduct has its source in the heart; and that, if all men believed

believed one another to be knaves and hypocrites, politeness of language and attitude, instead of being graceful, would appear as ridiculous, as the chatter of a parrot, or the grin of a monkey. Who, that has the spirit of a man, could take pleasure in professions of good-will, which he knew to be insincere? Who, that is not conscious of some baseness in himself, could seriously imagine, that mankind in general might be rendered susceptible of such pleasure? I speak not now of the immorality of that new system; which, if I were inclined to say of it what I think, would give deeper, as well as louder, tones to my language: I speak only of its absurdity and folly. And absurd, and foolish, in the extreme, as well as wicked, must every system be, that aims to disjoin delicacy from virtue, or virtue from religion.

Let us not imagine, because the influence of religion is not so powerful as it ought to be, that therefore it is not powerful at all. What human creatures would have been at this day, if the light of the gospel had not yet arisen upon the earth, we cannot positively tell: but were this a proper place for explaining the ground of such a conjecture, I think I could demonstrate the reasonableness of supposing, that they must have been, beyond all comparison, more wretched than they are. At a time, when it was debased by the most lamentable superstitions, religion taught courtesy and soberness to the sons of chivalry: a circumstance whereof the salutary effects are still discernible in the manners of Europe. How much greater may we presume its efficacy to be in these days, when it is taught in its purity, and may be understood by all! — But infidels, it may be objected, are as eminent for polite behaviour, as believers. Granting this to be true, which however it is impossible to prove, I would only desire those, who second the objection, to consider, whether the present system of politeness arose among infidels or Christians; whether it would
I have

have arisen at all, if paganism had continued to prevail; whether several of its distinguishing characters be not derived from the Christian religion; whether the light of reason, unaided by the radiance of the gospel, would have dispelled so soon that night of intellectual darkness which followed the subversion of the Roman empire: — and, lastly, whether it be not prudent for a few individuals (unbelievers being still, as I trust, the smaller number in these parts of the world) to conform to the manners of the many, especially when those manners are universally felt and acknowledged to be more agreeable than any other. The influence of true religion, in humanizing society, and refining conversation, is indeed very great. And if so, I could not, consistently with my present plan, overlook it. Nor is it, in my opinion, possible for a philosopher, unless blinded by ignorance, checked by timidity, or led astray by prejudice, to enter into any inquiry relating either to morals or to manners, without paying some tribute of praise to that Divine Institution.

T H E E N D.



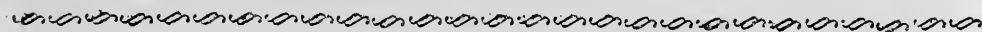
R E M A R K S

ON THE UTILITY OF

CLASSICAL LEARNING.

Ego multos homines excellenti animo ac virtute fuisse, et sine doctrina, naturæ ipsius habitu prope divino, per seipsos et moderatos, et graves, extitisse fateor. Etiam illud adjungo, sæpius ad laudem atque virtutem naturam sine doctrina, quam sine natura valuisse doctrinam. Atque idem ego contendo, cum ad naturam eximiam atque illustrem accesserit ratio quædam confirmatioque doctrinæ, tum illud nescio quid præclarum ac singulare solere existere. — Quod si non hic tantus fructus ostenderetur, et si ex his studiis delectatio sola peteretur; tamen, ut opinor, hanc animi remissionem humanissimam ac liberatissimam judicaretis. — Hæc studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium ac solatium præbent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur.

Cicero pro Archia, cap. 7.



R E M A R K S

ON THE UTILITY OF

CLASSICAL LEARNING.

Written in the year 1769.

THE calumniators of the Greek and Roman Learning have not been few in these latter times. Perrault, La Motte, and Teraſſon, arraigned the taſte of the ancients; and Des Cartes and Malebranche affected to deſpiſe their philoſophy. Yet it ſeemed to be allowed in general, that the ſtudy of the Claſſic Authors was a neceſſary part of polite education. This, however, has of late been not only queſtioned, but denied: and it has been ſaid, that every thing worth preſerving of ancient literature might be more eaſily tranſmitted, both to us and to poſterity, through the channel of the modern languages, than through that of the Greek and Latin. On this ſubject, ſeveral ſlight eſſays have been written; the authors of which ſeem to think, that the human mind, being now arrived

arrived at maturity, may safely be left to itself; and that the Classic authors, those great instructors of former times, are become an incumbrance to the more sprightly genius of the present.

“ For who, that is an adept in the philosophy of Locke and
 “ Newton, can have any need of Aristotle? What useful pre-
 “ cept of the Socratic school has been overlooked by modern
 “ moralists? Is not Geometry as fairly, and as fully displayed
 “ in the French and English tongues, as in the unknown dialects
 “ of Archimedes, Apollonius, and Euclid? Why have recourse
 “ to Demosthenes and Cicero, for examples in an art, which Mas-
 “ sillon, Bourdaloue, and the French academicians, (to say no-
 “ thing of the orators of our own country), have carried to per-
 “ fection? Are we not taught by Voltaire and his Editors,
 “ who, though ignorant of Greek, are well read in Madam Da-
 “ cier’s translations, that Tasso is a better poet than Homer; and
 “ that the sixth and seventh cantoes of the *Henriade* are alone
 “ more valuable than the whole *Iliad* *? What Dramatic poet
 “ of antiquity is to be compared with the immortal Shakespeare?
 “ what satirist with Pope, who to all the fire and elevation of Ju-
 “ venal, joins the wit, the taste, and sententious morality, of
 “ Horace? As to criticism: is there in Aristotle, Dionysius,
 “ Cicero, Quintilian, or Longinus, any thing that is not more
 “ philosophically explained, and better illustrated by examples,
 “ in the writings of Dacier, Rollin, Fencelon, Dryden, and Ad-
 “ dison? — And then, how debasing to an ingenuous mind is
 “ the drudgery and discipline of our public schools! That the
 “ best days of youth should be embittered by confinement, a-
 “ midst the gloom of solitude, or under the scourge of tyranny;
 “ and all for no purpose, but that the memory may be loaded

* See *Le Vicende della Letteratura*, pag. 166.

“ with

“ with the words of two languages that have been dead upwards
 “ of a thousand years : — is it not an absurdity too gross to admit
 “ of exaggeration ? To see a youth of spirit hanging over a mu-
 “ sty folio, his cheek pale with watching, his brow furrowed
 “ with untimely wrinkles, his health gone, and every power of
 “ his soul enervated with anxiety, and stupified with poring up-
 “ on trifles, — what blood boils not with indignation, what
 “ heart melts not with sorrow ! And then the pedant, just bro-
 “ ken loose from his cell, bristling all o’er with Greek, and
 “ puff’d with pride,” as Boileau says ; “ his head so full of words,
 “ that no room is left for ideas ; his accomplishments so highly
 “ prized by himself, as to be intolerable to others ; ignorant of
 “ the history, and untouched with the interests, of his native
 “ country ; — what an useless, what an odious animal ! Who
 “ will say that education is on a right footing, while its tenden-
 “ cy is, to create such a monster ! — Ye parents, listen, and
 “ be wise. Would you have your children healthy, and polite,
 “ and *sentimental* ? Let their early youth be employed in genteel
 “ exercises ; the theatre, the coffeehouse, and the card-table, will
 “ refine their taste, instruct them in public affairs, and produce
 “ habits of attention and contrivance ; and the French authors
 “ will make them men of wit and sprightly conversation, and
 “ give a certain *je ne sçai quoi* of elegance to their whole beha-
 “ viour : — but for Greek and Latin, the study of Gronovius,
 “ Scaliger, and Burman, the accomplishment of Dutch commen-
 “ tators and Jesuits ; — heavens ! what has a man of fashion to
 “ do with it ! ”

Most of the discourses I have heard or read on this side of the question were in a similar style of vague declamation, seasoned with high encomiums on the utility and elegance of the French language and literature, and on the late discoveries in physiology for which we cannot be said to be indebted to any of the sages

of

of Greece and Rome. And how easy is it to declaim on such a topic ! By blending some truth with your falsehood ; by giving to the latter the air of harmless amplification, and by descanting on the abuses of study, as if they were its natural consequences, you may compose a very plausible harangue ; such as could not be fully answered without greater waste of time and patience, than the champion of antiquity would think it worth his while to bestow. And if your doctrine happens to flatter the prejudices, the vanity, or the indolence of the age, you will be regarded by some as a fine writer, of liberal principles, and a manly spirit.

It is however thought by many, who in my opinion are more competent judges, that an early acquaintance with the classics is the only foundation of good learning, and that it is incumbent on all who direct the studies of youth, to have this great object continually before them, as a matter of the most serious concern ; for that a good taste in literature is friendly both to public and to private virtue, and of course tends to promote in no inconsiderable degree the glory of a nation ; and that as the ancients are more or less understood, the principles and the spirit of sound erudition will ever be found to flourish or decay. I shall therefore state as briefly as possible some of the peculiar advantages that seem to me to accompany this sort of study ; with a view to obviate, if I can, certain prejudices, which I am sorry to observe have of late years been gaining ground, at least in the northern part of this island. The subject is copious ; but I doubt whether those adversaries to whom I now address myself would take the trouble to read a long dissertation.

The objections that are most commonly made to the study of the Greek and Latin authors, may perhaps be reduced to four. It is said, first, “ that this mode of education obliges the student

“ to employ too much time in the acquisition of words : — fe-
 “ condly, that when he has acquired these languages, he does
 “ not find, that they repay his toil : — thirdly, that the studies
 “ of a Grammar-school have a tendency to encumber the genius,
 “ and consequently to weaken, rather than improve, the human
 “ mind : — and, lastly, that the classic authors contain many de-
 “ scriptions and doctrines that may seduce the understanding,
 “ inflame the passions, and corrupt the heart.”

I. 1. In answer to the first objection, I would observe, that the plan of study must be very bad, where the student's health is hurt by too close application. Some parents and teachers have thought, that the proficiency of the scholar must be in proportion to the number of hours he employs in conning his task : but that is a great mistake. Experience proves, that three or four hours a-day, properly employed in the grammar-school, have a better effect than nine ; and are sufficient to lay within a few years a good foundation of classical knowledge. Dunces, it is true, would require more time ; but dunces have nothing to do with Greek and Latin : For studies that yield neither delight nor improvement are not only superfluous but hurtful ; because they misemploy those faculties which nature had destined to other purposes. At the same time, therefore, that young men are prosecuting their grammatical studies, they may learn writing, drawing, arithmetic, and the principles of geometry ; and may devote the intervals of leisure to riding, fencing, dancing, and other manly exercises. Idleness is the greatest misfortune incident to early years ; the distempers it breeds in the soul are numberless and incurable. And where children, during their hours of relaxation, are left at their own disposal, they too often make choice of criminal amusement and bad company. At Sparta, the youth were continually under the inspection of those who had authority over them ; their education, says Plutarch, was

one continued exercise of obedience : but it was never said, that the Spartan youth became torpid, or melancholy, or sickly, from want of amusement. Where-ever there is a school, there ought to be, and generally is, a field or area for diversions ; and if the hours that boys in this country spend with one another, that is, in fauntering, and too often in gaming, quarrelling, and swearing, were to be devoted to exercise, under the eye of some person of prudence, their souls and bodies would both be the better for it ; and a great deal of time left for the study of many branches of knowledge, besides what is contained in the grammar, and ancient authors. The misfortune is, that we allot too much of their time, not to play, but to idleness ; and hence it happens, that their classical studies interfere with other necessary parts of education. But certain it is, that their studies and amusements might be made perfectly consistent ; and the culture of the mind promoted at the same time with that of the body. If both these ends are not always accomplished, and but seldom pursued, the blame is to be laid, neither on the teacher, nor on the things that are taught, but on those persons only who have the power of reforming our school-discipline, and want the inclination. At any rate, the blame cannot be laid on the Classic Authors, or on those very useful members of a commonwealth, the compilers of grammars and dictionaries. For the faculties of children might be dissipated by idleness, their manners poisoned by bad company, or their health impaired by injudicious confinement, though Greek and Latin were annihilated.

2. It is another abuse of study, when the hours of attendance in a grammar-school are all employed in the acquisition of words. If a child find nothing but words in the old authors, it must be owing to the stupifying influence of an ignorant teacher. The most interesting part of profane history is delivered by the writers of Greece and Rome. From them also we may learn the purest

purest precepts of uninspired morality, delivered in the most enchanting language, illustrated by the happiest allusions, and enforced by the most pertinent examples, and most emphatical reasoning. Whatever is amusive and instructive in fable, whatever in description is beautiful, or in composition harmonious, whatever can soothe or awaken the human passions, the Greek and Roman authors have carried to perfection. That children should enter into all these beauties, is not to be imagined; but that they may be made to comprehend them so far as to be improved and delighted in a high degree, admits of no doubt. Together with the words, therefore, of these two celebrated languages, they may learn, without any additional expence of time, the principles of history, morality, politics, geography, and criticism; which, when taught in a foreign dialect, will perhaps be found to leave a deeper impression upon the memory, than when explained in the mother tongue. The young student should be equally attentive to the phraseology and to the subject of his lesson; and receive directions for analysing the one, as well as for construing the other. He ought to read his authors, first as a grammarian, secondly as a philosopher, and lastly as a critic; and all this he may do without difficulty, and with delight as well as profit, if care is taken to proportion his task to his years and capacity. Nor let it be supposed, that the first principles of grammar are more intelligible to a young mind, than the rudiments of philosophy and rhetoric. In matters within their sphere, do we not find that children can distinguish between truth and falsehood; perceive the connection of causes and effects; infer an obvious conclusion from plain premises, and even make experiments upon nature for the regulation of their own conduct? And if in music, and drawing, and penmanship, and phraseology, the taste of a child is improvable, why not in composition and style, the cadence of periods, and the harmony

of verse, probability of fable, and accuracy of description? The more we attend to an author's subject, the greater proficiency we shall always make in his language. To understand the subject well, it is necessary to study the words and their connection with a critical eye; whereas, even when his knowledge of the words is very superficial, a scholar or tutor, who attends to nothing else, may think himself sufficiently acquainted with the author's meaning. The mere Grammatical teacher will never be found to have any true taste for his author: if he had, it would be impossible for him to confine himself to verbal remarks: he must give scope to his admiration or disgust, if he really feel those passions; and must therefore communicate to the pupil some portion of his own enthusiasm or sagacity.

3. The mental faculties of children stand as much in need of improvement, and consequently of exercise, as their bodily powers. Nor is it of small importance to devise some mode of discipline for fixing their attention. When this is not done, they become thoughtless and dissipated to a degree that often unfits them for the business of life.

The Greeks and Romans had a just sense of the value of this part of education. The youth of Sparta, when their more violent exercises were over, employed themselves in works of stratagem; which in a state, where wealth and avarice were unknown, could hardly be carried to any criminal excess. When they met together for conversation, their minds were continually exerted in judging of the morality of actions, and the expediency of public measures of government; or in bearing with temper, and retorting with spirit, the sarcasms of good-natured raillery. They were obliged to express themselves, without hesitation, in the fewest and plainest words possible. These institutions must have made them thoughtful, and attentive, and observant both of men and things. And accordingly, their good sense, and penetration,

tration, and their nervous and sententious style, were no less the admiration of Greece, than their sobriety, patriotism, and invincible courage. For the talent of *saying* what we call *good things* they were eminent among all the nations of antiquity. As they never piqued themselves on their rhetorical powers, it was prudent to accustom the youth to silence and few words. It made them modest and thoughtful. With us very sprightly children sometimes become very dull men. For we are apt to reckon those children the sprightliest, who talk the most: and as it is not easy for them to think and talk at the same time, the natural effect of their too much speaking is too little thinking. — At Athens, the youth were made to study their own language with accuracy both in the pronunciation and composition; and the meanest of the people valued themselves upon their attainments in this way. Their orators must have had a very difficult part to act, when by the slightest impropriety they ran the hazard of disgusting the whole audience: and we shall not wonder at the extraordinary effects produced by the harangues of Demosthenes, or the extraordinary care wherewith those harangues were composed, when we recollect, that the minutest beauty in his performance must have been perceived and felt by every one of his hearers. It has been matter of surprise to some, that Cicero, who had so true a relish for the severe simplicity of the Athenian orator, should himself in his orations have adopted a style so diffuse and declamatory. But Cicero knew what he did. He had a people to deal with, who, compared with the Athenians, might be called illiterate*; and to whom Demosthenes would have appeared as cold and uninteresting, as Cicero would have

* Cicero himself acknowledges, that many of the Romans were very incompetent judges of rhetorical merit. — *Hæc turba et barbaria forensis dat locum vel vitiosissimis oratoribus.* De Orat. lib. I. § 118.

seemed pompous and inflated to the people of Athens. In every part of learning the Athenians were studious to excel. Rhetoric in all its branches was to them an object of principal consideration. From the story of Socrates we may learn, that the literary spirit was keener at Athens, even in that corrupted age, than at any period in any other country. If a person of mean condition, and of the lowest fortune, with the talents and temper of Socrates, were now to appear, inculcating virtue, dissuading from vice, and recommending a right use of reason, not with the grimace of an enthusiast, or the rant of a declaimer, but with good humour, plain language, and sound argument, we cannot suppose, that the youth of high rank would pay him much attention in any part of Europe. As a juggler, gambler, or atheist, he might perhaps attract their notice, and have the honour to do no little mischief in some of our clubs of young worthies; but from virtue and modesty, clothed in rags, I fear they would not willingly receive improvement. — The education of the Romans, from the time they began to aspire to a literary character, was similar to that of the Athenians. The children were taught to speak their own language with purity, and made to study and translate the Greek authors. The laws of the twelve tables they committed to memory. And as the talent of public speaking was not only ornamental, but even a necessary qualification, to every man who wished to distinguish himself in a civil or military capacity, all the youth were ambitious to acquire it. The study of the law was also a matter of general concern. Even the children used in their diversions to imitate the procedure of public trials; one accusing, and another defending, the supposed criminal: and the youth, and many of the most respectable statesmen, through the whole of their lives, allotted part of their leisure to the exercise of declaiming on such topics as might come to be debated in the forum, in the senate,

senate, or before the judges. Their domestic discipline was very strict. Some ancient matron, of approved virtue, was appointed to superintend the children in their earliest years; before whom every thing criminal in word or deed was avoided as a heinous enormity. This venerable person was careful both to instil good principles into her pupils, and also to regulate their amusements, and, by preserving their minds pure from moral turpitude, and intellectual depravation, to prepare them for the study of the liberal arts and sciences. — It may also be remarked, that the Greeks and Romans were more accurate students than the moderns are. They had few books, and those they had were not easily come at: what they read, therefore, they read thoroughly. I know not, whether their way of writing and making up their volumes, as it rendered the perusal more difficult, might not also occasion a more durable remembrance. From their conversation-pieces, and other writings, it appears, that they had a singular facility in quoting their favourite authors. Demosthenes is said to have transcribed Thucydides eight times, and to have got a great part of him by heart. This is a degree of accuracy which the greater part of modern readers have no notion of. We seem to think it more creditable to read many books superficially, than to read a few good ones with care; and yet it is certain, that by the latter method we should cultivate our faculties, and increase our stock of real knowledge, more effectually, and perhaps more speedily, than we can do by the former, which indeed tends rather to bewilder the mind, than to improve it. Every man, who pretends to a literary character, must now read a number of books, whether well or ill written, whether instructive or insignificant, merely that he may have it to say, that he has read them. And therefore I am apt to think, that, in general, the Greeks and Romans must have been more improved by their reading, than we are by ours. As books multiply,
knowledge

knowledge is more widely diffused ; but if human wisdom were to increase in the same proportion, what children would the ancients be, in comparison of the moderns ! of whom every subscriber to the circulating library would have it in his power to be wiser than Socrates, and more accomplished than Julius Cæsar !

I mention these particulars of the Greek and Roman discipline, in order to show, that, although the ancients had not so many languages to study as we have, nor so many books to read, they were however careful, that the faculties of their children should neither languish for want of exercise, nor be exhausted in frivolous employment. As we have not thought fit to imitate them in this ; as most of the children of modern Europe, who are not obliged to labour for their sustenance, must either study Greek and Latin, or be idle ; (for as to cards, and some of the late publications of Voltaire, I do not think the study of either half so useful or so innocent as shuttlecock). — I should be apprehensive, that, if Classical Learning were laid aside, nothing would be substituted in its place, and that our youth would become altogether dissipated. In this respect, therefore, namely, as the means of improving the faculties of the human mind, I do not see, how the studies of the Grammar-school can be dispensed with. Indeed, if we were, like the savages, continually employed in searching after the necessaries of life ; or if, like the first Romans, our situation or temper involved us in perpetual war, I should perhaps allow literary improvement of every kind to be little better than a costly superfluity ; and if any one were disposed to affirm, that in such a state men may enjoy a greater share of animal pleasure, than all the ornaments of art and luxury can furnish, I should not be eager to controvert his opinion. But I take for granted, that man is destined for something nobler than mere animal enjoyment ; that a state of continual war or unpolished

lished barbarity is unfavourable to our best interests, as rational, moral, and immortal beings; that competence is preferable to want, leisure to tumult, and benevolence to fury: and I speak of the arts, not of supporting, but of adorning human life; not of rendering men insensible to cold and famine; but of enabling them to bear, without being enervated, and enjoy without being corrupted, the blessings of a more prosperous condition.

4. Much has been said, by some writers, on the impropriety of teaching the ancient languages by book, when the modern tongues are most easily acquired, without the help of grammars or dictionaries, by speaking only. Hence it has been proposed, that children (to whom the study of grammar is conceived to be a grievous hardship) should learn Latin by being obliged to speak it; for that, however barbarous their style may be at first, it will gradually improve; till at length, though with little knowledge of rules, merely by the force of habit, they attain to such a command of that tongue, as an Englishmen may of the French, by residing a few years at Paris. Upon this principle, some projectors have thought of establishing a Latin city, whither children should be sent to learn the language; Montaigne's father made Latin the common dialect of his household*; and many

* *Essais de Montaigne*, liv. 2. chap. 17. — On the subject of obliging children to speak Latin before they have acquired a taste in it, I beg leave to quote the following passage from an author, whose judgement in these matters must be allowed to be of the very highest authority.

“ With this way of good understanding the matter, plain construing, diligent parsing, daily translating, chearful admonishing, and heedful amending of faults, never leaving behind just praise for well-doing, I would have the scholar brought up withal, till he had read and translated over the first book of (Cicero's) *Epistles* chosen out by *Sturmius*, with a good piece of a *Comedy* of

ny philosophers and teachers have laid it down as a rule, that in the grammar-school nothing but Latin or Greek should ever be spoken.

All this, or at least part of it, is very well, if we suppose the sole design of teaching these languages to be, that children may speak and write them as easily and incorrectly, as persons unac-

“ Terence also. — All this while, by mine advice, the child shall use to speak
 “ no Latin. For, as Cicero saith in like matter, with like words, *Loquendo,*
 “ *male loqui discunt.* And that excellent learned man G. Budeus, in his Greek
 “ commentaries, fore complaineth, that when he began to learn the Latin tongue,
 “ use of speaking Latin at the table, and elsewhere, unadvisedly, did bring him
 “ to such an evil choice of words, to such a crooked framing of sentences, that
 “ no one thing did hurt or hinder him more all the days of his life afterward,
 “ both for readiness in speaking, and also good judgement in writing. — In very
 “ deed, if children were brought up in such a house, or such a school, where
 “ the Latin tongue were properly and perfectly spoken, as Tiberius and Caius
 “ Gracchii were brought up in their mother Cornelia’s house; surely then the
 “ daily use of speaking were the best and readiest way to learn the Latin tongue.
 “ But now, commonly in the best schools in England, for words, right choice is
 “ small regarded, true propriety wholly neglected, confusion is brought in, bar-
 “ barousness is bred up so in young wits, as afterwards they be not only marred
 “ for speaking, but also corrupted in judgement, as with much ado, or never at
 “ all, they be brought to the right frame again. — Yet all men covet to have
 “ their children speak Latin, and so do I very earnestly too. We both have
 “ one purpose, we agree in desire, we wish one end; but we differ somewhat
 “ in order and way that leadeth rightly to that end. Other would have them
 “ speak at all adventures: and so they be speaking, to speak, the master careth
 “ not, the scholar knoweth not, what. This is to seem, and not to be; except
 “ it be, to be bold without shame, rash without skill, full of words without wit.
 “ I wish to have them speak so, as it may well appear, that the brain doth go-
 “ vern the tongue, and that reason leadeth forth the talk. — Good understanding
 “ must first be bred in the children; which being nourished with skill, and use
 “ of writing, is the only way to bring them to judgement and readiness in speak-
 “ ing.” Ascham’s Scholemaister, book 1. See also Cicero de Orat. lib. 1. § 150.
 edit. Proust.

acquainted with grammar, and with the rules and models of good composition, do commonly speak and write their mother-tongue. But such a talent, though on some rare occasions in life it might be useful, would not be attended with those certain and more immediate advantages, that one has reason to expect from a regular course of classical study. — For, first, one use of classic learning is, to fill up the leisure hours of life with liberal amusement. Now those readers alone can be adequately charmed with beauty of language, who have attended to the rules of good writing, and even to the niceties of grammar. For the mere knowledge of words gives but little pleasure; and they who have gone no deeper in language cannot even conceive the delight wherewith a man of learning peruses an elegant performance. — Secondly, I apprehend, that, in this way of conversation, unless you add to it the study of grammar, and of the best authors, the practice of many years will not make you a competent master in the language. One must always be something of a grammarian to be able thoroughly to understand any well-written book; but before one can enter into the delicacies of expression that are to be met with in every page of a good Latin or Greek author, one must be an accurate grammarian; the complicated inflexions and syntax of these elegant tongues giving rise to innumerable subtleties of connection, and minute varieties of meaning, whereof the superficial reader, who thinks grammar below his notice, can have no idea. Besides, the words and phrases that belong to conversation, are, comparatively speaking, not very numerous: unless you read poets, orators, historians, and philosophers too, you can never understand a language in its full extent. In English, Latin, Greek, and Italian, and, I believe, in most other cultivated tongues, the poetical and rhetorical styles differ greatly from that of common discourse; and one may be a tolerable proficient in the one, who is very ignorant of the other. — But,

thirdly, I would observe, that the study of a system of grammar, so complex and so perfect as the Greek or Latin, may, with peculiar propriety, be recommended to children; being suited to their understanding, and having a tendency to promote the improvement of all their mental faculties. In this science, abstruse as it is commonly imagined to be, there are few or no difficulties which a master may not render intelligible to any boy of good parts, before he is twelve years old. Words, the matter of this science, are within the reach of every child; and of these the human mind, in the beginning of life, is known to be susceptible to an astonishing degree: and yet in this science there is a subtlety, and a variety, sufficient to call forth all the intellectual powers of the young student. When one hears a boy analyse a few sentences of a Latin author; and show that he not only knows the general meaning, and the import of the particular words, but also can instantly refer each word to its class; enumerate all its terminations, specifying every change of sense, however minute, that may be produced by a change of inflexion or arrangement; explain its several dependencies; distinguish the literal meaning from the figurative, one species of figure from another *, and even

* The elements of Rhetoric should always be taught in conjunction with those of Grammar. The former would make the latter more entertaining; and, by setting the various parts of language in a new light, would give rise to new energies in the mind of the student, and prepare him for relishing the beauties and practising the rules of good writing; thus heightening the pleasure of study, with little or no increase of labour. I doubt not but Butler's flippant remark, that "All a Rhetorician's rules Consist in naming of his tools," may have brought the art into some disrepute. But though this were a true account, (and it must be a poor system of rhetoric of which this is a true account), the art might have its use notwithstanding. Nobody thinks the time lost to a young seaman, which he employs in acquainting himself with the names and uses of the several parts of a ship, and of the other objects that demand the attention of the mariner: nor is the

ven the philosophical use of words from the idiomatical, and the vulgar from the elegant; recollecting occasionally other words and phrases that are synonymous, or contrary, or of different though similar signification; and accounting for what he says, either from the reason of the thing, or by quoting a rule of art, or a classical authority: — one must be sensible, that, by such an exercise, the memory is likely to be more improved in strength and readiness, the attention better fixed, the judgement and taste more successfully exerted, and a habit of reflection and subtle discrimination more easily acquired, than it could be by any other employment equally suited to the capacity of childhood. A year passed in this salutary exercise will be found to cultivate the human faculties more than seven spent in prattling that French which is learned by rote: nor would a complete course of Voltaire yield half so much improvement to a young mind, as a few books of a good Classic author, of Livy, Cicero, or Virgil, studied in this accurate manner.

I mean not to decry the French tongue, which I know to be useful to all, and necessary to many. Far less would I insinuate any thing to discourage the study of our own, which I think the finest in the world; and which to a member of the British

the botanist idle, while he treasures up in his memory the various tribes of vegetables; nor the astronomer, while he numbers the constellations, and learns to call them by their names. In every art there are terms, which must be familiar to those who would understand it, or speak intelligibly about it; and few arts are more complex than literary composition. Besides, though some of the tropes and figures of speech are easily distinguished, others require a more difficult scrutiny, and some knowledge even of the elementary arrangements of philosophy. And the rules for applying the elegancies of language, being founded in the science of human nature, must gradually lead the young rhetorician to attend to what passes in his own mind; which of all the scenes of human observation is the most important, and in the early part of life the least attended to.

empire is of greater importance than all other languages. I only insist on the expediency of improving young minds by a grammatical study of the Classic tongues; these being at once more *regular* and more *diversified* than any of the modern, and therefore better adapted to the purpose of exercising the *judgement* and the *memory* of the scholar. And I maintain, that every language, and indeed every thing, that is taught children, should be accurately taught; being of opinion, that the mind is more improved by a little accurate knowledge, than by an extensive finattering; and that it would be better for a young man to be master of Euclid or Demosthenes, than to have a whole dictionary of arts and sciences by heart. When he has once got a taste of accuracy, he will know the value and the method of it; and, with a view to the same gratification, will habitually pursue the same method, both in science, and in the general conduct of his affairs: — whereas a habit of superficial thinking perverts and enervates the powers of the soul, leaves many of them to languish in total inactivity; and is too apt to make a man fickle and thoughtless, unprincipled and dissipated for life.

I agree with Rousseau, that the aim of education should be, to teach us rather *how* to think, than *what* to think; rather to improve our minds so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with the thoughts of other men. Not that I would discommend the acquisition of good principles, and just notions, from whatever source they are drawn: for indeed the knowledge of the most ingenious man upon earth would be very scanty, if it were all to be derived from himself. Nay, as the parent must in many cases direct the conduct of the child, before the child can discern the reasons of such direction, I am inclined to think, that some important principles of religion and morality may with good success be imprinted on the memory of children, even before they can perfectly understand the arguments by
which

which they may be proved, or the words in which they are expressed. — But still it is true, that a mind prepared by proper discipline for making discoveries of its own, is in a much higher state of cultivation, than that of a mere scholar who knows nothing but what he has been taught. The latter resembles a granary, which may indeed be filled with corn, but can yield no more than it has received; the former may be likened to a fruitful field, which is ever in a condition to bring riches and plenty, and multiplies an hundred fold every grain that has been committed to it. Now this peculiar advantage seems to attend the study of the Classic authors, that it not only stores the mind with useful learning, but also begets a habit of attention, and wonderfully improves both the memory and the judgement.

5. That the grammatical art may be learned as perfectly from an English or French, as from a Greek or Latin grammar, no person will affirm, who attends to the subject, and can state the comparison. Classical learning, therefore, is necessary to grammatical skill. And that the knowledge of grammar tends to purify and preserve language, might be proved, if a proof were requisite, from many considerations. Every tongue is incorrect, while it is only spoken; because men never study it grammatically, till after they have begun to write it, or compose in it. And when brought to its highest perfection, by the repeated efforts, and accumulated refinements, of grammarians, lexicographers, philosophers, etymologists, and of authors in general, how incorrectly is it spoken and written by the unlearned! How easily do ungrammatical phrases, the effect of ignorance and affectation, insinuate themselves into common discourse, and thence into writing! and how difficult is it often found, notwithstanding all the remonstrances of learned men, to extirpate those phrases from the language, or prevail with the public to reform them! Where grammar was accurately studied, language has al-

ways

ways been elegant and durable: witness that of ancient Greece, which, though it underwent considerable alterations, as all living languages must do, retained its purity for more than a thousand years. As grammar is neglected, barbarism must prevail. And therefore, the study of Greek and Latin, being necessary to the perfection of the grammatical art, must also be necessary to the permanence and purity even of the modern tongues, and, consequently, to the preservation of our history, poetry, philosophy, and of every thing valuable in our literature. — Can those who wish well to learning or mankind ever seek to depreciate so important a study? Or will it be said, that the knowledge of grammar is unworthy of a gentleman, or man of business, when it is considered, that the most profound statesmen, the ablest orators, the most elegant writers, and the greatest men, that ever appeared on the stage of public life, of whom I shall only mention Julius Cæsar and Cicero, were not only studious of grammar, but most accurate grammarians *?

6. To all this we may add, that the discipline generally established in schools of learning inures the youth to obedience and subordination; of which it is of infinite consequence to their moral improvement, as well as to the prosperity of their country, that they should early be made sensible. — But is not this discipline often too formal, and too rigorous? And if so, does it not tend to depress the mind, by making it attentive to trifles, and by giving an air of servility to the genius, as well as to the outward behaviour? These questions need no other answer, than the bare recital of a fact, which is obvious to all men; that of all the nations now existing, *that* whose general character partakes the least of finicalness or servility, and which has displayed

* Quintil. Orat. Inst. lib. 1. cap. 4. See also *Of the origin and progress of language*, vol. 2. p. 494.

an elevation of soul, and a spirit of freedom, that is without example in the annals of mankind, is the most remarkable for strictness of discipline in its schools and universities; and seems now to be the only nation upon earth that entertains a proper sense of the unspeakable value of Classic erudition.——A regard to order and lawful authority is as favourable to true greatness of mind, as the knowledge of method is to true genius.

7. Some of my readers will pity, and some probably laugh at me, for what I am going to say in behalf of a practice, which is now in most countries both disused and derided; I mean that of obliging the student to compose some of his exercises in Latin verse. “What! (it will be said), do you, in opposition to the sentiments of antiquity itself, and of all wise men in every age, imagine, that a talent for poetry is to be communicated by rule, or acquired by habit? Or if it could, would you wish to see us transformed into a nation of versifiers? Poetry may have its use; but it will neither fill our warehouses, nor fertilise our soil, neither rig our fleet, nor regulate our finances. It has now lost the faculty of building towns, felling timber, and curing broken bones; and I think it was never famous for replenishing either the pocket, or the belly. No, no, Sir; a garret in Grubstreet, however honourable in your eyes, is not the station to which I intend to breed my son.”

Permit me to ask in my turn, Whether it is in order to make them authors by trade, or for what other purpose it is, that boys have the task enjoined them, of composing themes and translations, and performing those other exercises, to which writing is necessary. I believe it will be allowed, that habits of accurate thinking, and of speaking correctly and elegantly, are useful and ornamental in every station of life. Now Cicero and Quintilian, and many other authors, affirm, that these habits are most effec-

usually acquired by the frequent use of the pen*; not in extracting common places from books †, but in giving permanence and regularity to our own thoughts expressed in our own words. The themes and translations performed by boys in a grammar-school

* Cicero de Orat. lib. 1. § 150. Edit. Proust. Quintil. Inst. Or. lib. 10. cap. 3.

† To enable us to remember what we read, some authors recommend a book of common-places, wherein we are desired to write down, according to a certain artificial order, all those passages that we wish to add to our stock of learning. But other authors, of equal judgement in these matters, have blamed this practice of writing out quotations. It is certain, that when we read with a view to fill up common-places, we are apt to attend rather to particular passages, than to the scope and spirit of the whole; and that, having transcribed the favourite paragraph, we are not solicitous to remember it, as knowing that we may at any time find it in our common-place book. Besides, life is short, and health precious; and if we do not think more than we either write or read, our studies will avail us little. But this practice of continual transcription consumes time, and impairs health, and yet conveys no improvement to the mind, because it requires no thought, and exercises no faculty. Moreover, it inclines us to form ourselves entirely upon the sentiments of other men; and as different authors think differently on many points, it may make us change our opinions so often, that at last we shall come to have no fixed principle at all. — And yet, on the other hand, it must be allowed, that many things occur, both in reading and in experience, which ought not to be forgotten, and yet cannot be preserved, unless committed to writing. Perhaps, then, it is best to follow a middle course; and, when we register facts or sentiments that occur in reading, to throw aside the author from whom we take them, and do it in our own words. In this way writing is profitable, because it is attended with thought and recollection, as well as practice in composition. And when we are so much masters of the sentiments of another man as to be able to express them with accuracy in our own words, then we may be said to have digested them, and made them our own; and then it is, and not before, that our understanding is really improved by them. If we chuse to preserve a specimen of an author's style, or to transcribe any of his thoughts in his own words on account of something that pleases in the expression, there can be no harm in this, provided we do not employ too much time in it.

are the beginnings of this salutary practice; and are known to have a happy effect in forming the judgement, improving the memory, and quickening the invention, of the young student, in giving him a command of words, a correct phraseology, and a habit of thinking with accuracy and method.

Now, as the design of these exercises is not to make men professed prose-authors, so neither is the practice of versifying intended to make them poets. I do not wish the numbers of versifiers to multiply; I shall, if you please, admit the old maxim, "*Poeta nascitur, non fit*;" and that it would be as easy to soften marble into pincushions as to communicate the art of poetry to one who wants the genius:

— Ego nec studium sine divite vena,

Nec rude quid possit video ingenium. —

The practice in question may, however, in my judgement, be attended with some good effects. — First, though we have for ever lost the true pronunciation of Latin and Greek, yet the less false our pronunciation is, the more agreeable and intelligible it will probably be. Versification, therefore, considered as an exercise for exemplifying and fixing in the mind the rules of prosody, may be allowed to have its use in correcting the pronunciation.

But, secondly, it has a further use, in heightening the charms of poetical composition, by improving our sense of poetical harmony. I have already mentioned amusement as one of the advantages of classic learning. Now good poetry is doubly amusing to a reader who has studied and practised versification; as the shapes and colours, of animal and vegetable nature seem doubly beautiful to the eye of a painter. "I begin," says Pope, speaking of his proficiency in drawing, "to discover beauties that were till now imperceptible to me. Every corner of an eye,

“ or turn of a nose or ear, the smallest degree of light or shade on
 “ a cheek or in a dimple, have charms to distract me *.” For
 the same reason, therefore, that I would recommend drawing to
 him who wishes to acquire a true taste for the beauties of nature,
 I should recommend a little practice in versifying to those who
 would be thoroughly sensible to the charm of poetic numbers.—
 Thirdly, this practice is still more important, as it gradually
 supplies the student with a store of words; thereby facilitating
 the acquisition of the language: and as it accustoms him to exert
 his judgement and taste, as well as memory, in the choice of
 harmonious and elegant expressions. By composing in prose, he
 learns to think and speak methodically; and his poetical exercises,
 under a proper direction, will make the ornaments of language fa-
 miliar to him, and give precision to his thoughts, and a vigorous
 brevity to his style. These advantages may, I presume, be in some
 degree attained, though his verses, unaided by genius, should ne-
 ver rise above mediocrity: if the muses are propitious, his im-
 provement will be proportionably greater.

But is not this exercise too difficult?—and does it not take up
 too much time?—Too much time it ought not to take up; nor
 should it be imposed on those who find it too difficult. But if
 we consult experience, we shall find, that boys of ordinary ta-
 lents are capable of it, and that it never has on any occasion pro-
 ved detrimental to literature. I know several learned men who
 were inured to it in their youth; but I never heard them com-
 plain of its unprofitableness or difficulty: and I cannot think,
 that Grotius or Buchanan, Milton or Addison, Browne or Gray *,
 had

* Pope's Letters to Gay.

* Isaac Hawkins Browne, Esq; author of several excellent poems, particularly
 one in Latin, on the Immortality of the soul; of which Mrs Carter justly says, that it
 does

had ever any reason to lament, as lost, the hours they employed in this exercise. It is generally true, that genius displays itself to the best advantage in its native tongue. Yet is it to be wished, that the talent of writing Latin verse were a little more cultivated among us; for it has often proved the means of extending the reputation of our authors, and consequently of adding something to the literary glories of Great Britain. Boileau is said not to have known that there were any good poets in England, till Addison made him a present of the *Muse Anglicana*. Many of the finest performances of Pope, Dryden, and Milton, have appeared not ungracefully in a Roman dress. And those foreigners must entertain a high opinion of our Pastoral poetry, who have seen the Latin translations of Vincent Bourne, particularly those of the ballads of *Tweedside*, *William and Margaret*, and Rowe's *Despairing beside a clear stream*; of which it is no compliment to say, that in sweetness of numbers, and elegant expression, they are at least equal to the originals, and scarce inferior to any thing in Ovid or Tibullus.

Enough, I hope, has been said to evince the utility of that mode of discipline which for the most part is, and always, in my opinion, ought to be, established in grammar-schools. If the reader admit the truth of these remarks, he will be satisfied, that “the study of the classic authors does not necessarily oblige the student to employ too much time in the acquisition of words:” for that by means of those words the mind may be stored with valuable knowledge; and that the acquisition of them, prudently

does honour to our country. — Mr Gray of Cambridge, the author of the finest odes, and of the finest moral elegy in the world, wrote many elegant Latin poems in his youth, with some of which Mr Mason has lately obliged the public. The Latin poems of Grotius and Buchanan, Milton and Addison, have long been universally known and admired.

conducted,

conducted, becomes to young persons one of the best instruments of intellectual proficiency, which in the present state of human society it is possible to imagine.

II. I need not spend much time in refuting the second objection, "That these languages, when acquired, are not worth the labour." There never was a man of learning and taste, who would not deny the fact. Those persons are most delighted with the ancient writers, who understand them best; and none affect to despise them, but they who are ignorant of their value. — Whether the pleasure and profit arising from the knowledge of the Classic tongues is sufficient to repay the toil of acquiring them, is a point which those only who have made the acquisition are entitled to determine. And they, we are sure, will determine in the affirmative. The admirer of Homer and Demosthenes, Virgil and Cicero, Xenophon and Cæsar, Herodotus and Liyy, will tell us, that he would not for any consideration give up his skill in the language of those authors. Every man of learning wishes, that his son may be learned; and that not so much from a view to pecuniary advantage, as from a desire to have him supplied with the means of useful instruction and liberal amusement. It is true, that habit will make us fond of trifling pursuits, and mistake imaginary for real excellence. The being accustomed to that kind of study, and perhaps also the pride, or the vanity, or simply the consciousness, of being learned, may account for part of the pleasure that attends the perusal of the Greek and Roman writings. But sure it is but a small part which may be thus accounted for. The Greeks were more passionate admirers of Homer and Demosthenes, and the Romans of Virgil and Cicero, than we; and yet were not under the necessity of employing so much time in the study of these authors, nor, consequently, so liable to contract a liking from long acquaintance, or to be proud of an accomplishment

accomplishment which was common to them with all their countrymen.

The knowledge of the classics is the best foundation to the study of Law, Physic, Theology, Rhetoric, Agriculture, and other honourable arts and sciences. In polite nations, and in companies where the rational character is held in any esteem, it has generally been regarded as a recommendatory talent. As a source of recreation, for filling up the intervals of leisure, its importance has been acknowledged by many names of the highest authority. And surely the Muses are more elegant, more instructive, and more pleasing companions, than dogs, horses, gamblers, or sots: and in attending to the wisdom of former ages, we may reasonably be thought to pass our time to better purpose, than in hearing or helping about the censures, calumnies, and other follies, of the present.

III. It has been said, that "school-learning has a tendency to encumber the genius, and, consequently, to weaken rather than improve the mind." Here opens another field for declamation. Who has not heard the learned formality of Ben Jonson opposed to Shakespeare's "native wood-notes wild;" and inferences made from the comparison, very much to the discredit, not of the learned poet only, but of learning itself? Milton, too, is thought by some to have possessed a superfluity of erudition, as well as to have been too ostentatious in displaying it. And the ancients are supposed to have derived great benefit from their not being obliged, as we are, to study a number of languages.

It is true, a man may be so intemperate in reading, as to hurt both his body and his mind. They who always read; and never think, become pedants and changelings. And those who employ the best part of their time in learning languages, are rarely found to make proficiency in art or science. To gain a perfect know-
ledge

ledge even of one tongue, is a work of much labour; though some men have such a talent this way as to acquire, with moderate application, a competent skill in several. Milton, before he was twenty years old, had composed verses in Latin, Italian, and Greek, as well as in English. But the generality of minds are not equal to this; nor is it necessary they should. One may be very sensible of the beauties of a foreign tongue, and may read it with ease and pleasure, who can neither speak it, nor compose in it. And, except where the genius has a facility in acquiring them, and a strong bias to that sort of study, I would not recommend it to a young man to make himself master of many languages. For, surely, to be able to express the same thought in the dialogues of ten different nations, is not the end for which man was sent into the world.

The present objection, as well as the former, is founded on what every man of letters would call a mistake of fact. No person who understands Greek and Latin will ever admit, that these languages can be an incumbrance to the mind. And perhaps it would be difficult to prove, even by a single instance, that genius was ever hurt by learning. Ben Johnson's misfortune was, not that he knew too much, but that he could not make a proper use of his knowledge; a misfortune, which arose rather from a defect of genius or taste, than from a superabundance of erudition. With the same genius, and less learning, he would probably have made a worse figure. — His play of *Catiline* is an ill-digested collection of facts and passages from Sallust. Was it his knowledge of Greek and Latin that prevented his making a better choice? To comprehend every thing the historian has recorded of that incendiary, it is not requisite that one should be a great scholar. By looking into Rose's translation, any man who understands English may make himself master of the whole narrative in half a day. It was Johnson's want of taste, that made him trans-

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fer from the history to the play some passages and facts that suit not the genius of dramatic writing: it was want of taste, that made him dispose his materials according to the historical arrangement; which, however favourable to calm information, is not calculated for working those effects on the passions and fancy, which it is the aim of tragedy to produce. It was the same want of taste, that made him, out of a rigid attachment to historical truth, lengthen his piece with supernumerary events inconsistent with the unity of design, and not subservient to the catastrophe; and it was doubtless owing to want of invention, that he confined himself so strictly to the letter of the story. Had he recollected the advice of Horace, (of which he could not be ignorant, as he translated the whole poem into English verse), he must have avoided some of these faults:

Publica materies privati juris erit, si
Non circa vilem patulumque moraberis orbem,
Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus
Interpres; nec desilies imitator in arctum,
Unde pedem proferre pudor vetat, aut operis lex *.

A little more learning, therefore, or rather a more seasonable application of what he had, would have been of great use to the author on this occasion. — Shakespeare's play of Julius Cæsar is founded on Plutarch's life of Brutus. The poet has adopted many of the incidents and speeches recorded by the historian, whom he had read in Sir Thomas North's translation. But great judgement appears in the choice of passages. Those events and sentiments that either are affecting in themselves, or contribute

* Ar. Poet. vers. 135. See Dr Hurd's elegant commentary and notes.

to the display of human characters and passions, he has adopted ; what seemed unfuitable to the drama is omitted. By reading Plutarch and Sophocles in the original, together with the Poetics of Aristotle and Horace's epistle to the Pisoës, Shakespeare might have made this tragedy better ; but I cannot conceive how such a preparation, had the poet been capable of it, could have been the cause of his making it worse. It is very probable, that the instance of Shakespeare may have induced some persons to think unfavourably of the influence of learning upon genius ; but a conclusion so important should never be inferred from one instance, especially when that is allowed to be extraordinary, and almost supernatural. From the phenomena of so transcendent a genius, we must not judge of human nature in general ; no more than we are to take the rules of British agriculture from what is practised in the Summer Islands. — Nor let it be any objection to the utility of classic learning, that we often meet with men of excellent parts, whose faculties were never improved, either by the doctrine or by the discipline of the schools. A practice which is not indispensably necessary, may yet be highly useful. We have heard of merchants, who could hardly write or read, superintending an extensive commerce, and acquiring great wealth and esteem by the most honourable means : yet who will say, that Writing and Reading are not useful to the merchant ? There have been men eminent both for genius and for virtue, who in the beginning of life were almost totally neglected : yet who will say, that the care of parents, and early habits of virtue and reflection, are not of infinite importance to the human mind ?

Milton was one of the most learned men this nation ever produced. But his great learning neither impaired his judgement, nor checked his imagination. A richer vein of invention, as well as a more correct taste, appears in the *Paradise Lost*, written when

when he was near sixty years of age, than in any of his earlier performances. *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, which were his last works, are not so full of imagery, nor admit so much fancy, as many of his other pieces; but they discover a consummate judgement; and little is wanting to make each of them perfect in its kind. — I am not offended at that profusion of learning which here and there appears in the *Paradise Lost*. It gives a classical air to the poem: it refreshes the mind with new ideas; and there is something, in the very sound of the names of places and persons whom he celebrates, that is wonderfully pleasing to the ear. Admit all this to be no better than pedantic superfluity; yet will it not follow, that Milton's learning did him any harm upon the whole, provided it appear to have improved him in matters of higher importance. And that it did so, is undeniable. This poet is not more eminent for strength and sublimity of genius, than for the art of his composition; which he owed partly to a fine taste in harmony, and partly to his accurate knowledge of the ancients. The style of his numbers has not often been imitated with success. It is not merely the want of rhyme, nor the diversified position of pauses, nor the drawing out of the sense from one line to another; far less is it the mixture of antiquated words and strange idioms, that constitutes the charm of Milton's versification; though many of his imitators, when they copy him in these or in some of these respects, think they have acquitted themselves very well. But one must study the best Classic authors with as much critical skill as Milton did, before one can pretend to rival him in the art of harmonious writing. For, after all the rules that can be given, there is something in this art, which cannot be acquired but by a careful study of the ancient masters, particularly Homer, Demosthenes, Plato, Cicero, and Virgil; every one of whom, or at least the two first and the last, it would be easy to prove, that

Milton has imitated, in the construction of his numbers. — In a word, we have good reason to conclude, that Milton's genius, instead of being overloaded or encumbered, was greatly improved, enriched, and refined, by his learning. At least we are sure this was his own opinion. Never was there a more indefatigable student. And from the superabundance of Classic allusions to be met with in every page of his poetry, we may guess how highly he valued the literature of Greece and Rome, and how frequently he meditated upon it.

Spenser was learned in Latin and Greek, as well as in Italian. But either the fashion of the times, or some deficiency in his own taste, inclined him to prefer the modern to the ancient models. His genius was comprehensive and sublime, his style copious, his sense of harmony delicate : and nothing seems to have been wanting to make him a poet of the highest rank, but a more intimate acquaintance with the classic authors. We may at least venture to say, that if he had been a little more conversant in these, he would not, in his *Shepherd's Calendar*, have debased the tenderness of pastoral with the impure mixture of theological disputation; nor would he have been so intoxicated with the splendid faults of the *Orlando Furioso*, as to construct his *Fairy Queen* on that Gothic model, rather than according to the plan which Homer invented, and which Virgil and Tasso (who were also favourites with our author) had so happily imitated. It is said to be on account of the purity of his style, and the variety of his invention, and not for any thing admirable in his plan, that the Italians in general prefer Ariosto to Tasso * : — and indeed we

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* The Academicians *della Crusca* published criticisms on Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*; but those related chiefly to the language, and were founded in too rigorous a partiality for the Florentine dialect. But "the magnificence of Tasso's

can hardly conceive, how a tale so complex and so absurd, so heterogeneous in its parts, and so extravagant as a whole, should be more esteemed than a simple, probable, perspicuous, and interesting fable. Yet Spenser gave the preference to the former; a fact so extraordinary, considering his abilities in other respects, that we cannot account for it, without supposing it to have been partly the effect of a bias contracted by long acquaintance. And if so, have we not reason to think, that if he had been but equally conversant with better patterns, his taste would have acquired a different and better direction?

Dryden's knowledge of foreign and ancient languages did not prevent his being a perfect master of his own. No author ever had a more exquisite sense of the energy and beauty of English words; though it cannot be denied, that his aversion to words of foreign origin, and his desire on all occasions to do honour to his mother-tongue, betrays him frequently into mean phrases and vulgar idioms. His unhappy circumstances, or rather perhaps the fashion of his age, alike unfriendly to good morals and good writing, did not permit him to avail himself of his great learning so much as might have been expected. The author of *Polymetis* has proved him guilty of many mistakes in regard to the ancient mythology: and I believe it will be allowed, by all his impartial readers, that a little more learning, or something of a more classical taste, would have been of great use to him, as it was to his illustrious imitator.

"so's numbers and diction, together with his great conformity to Epic rules, will for ever overbalance Ariosto's superior gracefulness and rapidity of expression, and greater fertility of invention. The *Jerusalem* will always be the more striking, and the *Orlando* the more pleasing of the two poems."

Baretti on Italy, vol. i. p. 252.

I know not whether any nation ever produced a more singular genius than Cowley. He abounds in tender thoughts, beautiful lines, and emphatical expressions. His wit is inexhaustible, and his learning extensive; but his taste is generally barbarous, and seems to have been formed upon such models as Donne, Martial, and the worst parts of Ovid: nor is it possible to read his longer poems with pleasure, while we retain any relish for the simplicity of ancient composition. If this author's ideas had been fewer, his conceits would have been less frequent; so that in one respect learning may be said to have hurt his genius. Yet it does not appear, that his Greek and Latin did him any harm; for his imitations of Anacreon are almost the only parts of him that are now remembered or read. His Davideis, and his translations of Pindar, are destitute of harmony, simplicity, and every other Classical grace. Had his inclinations led him to a frequent perusal of the most elegant authors of antiquity, his poems would certainly have been the better for it.

It was never said, nor thought, that Swift, Pope, or Addison*,
impaired

* " Mr Addison employed his first years in the study of the old Greek and Roman writers; whose language and manner he caught at that time of life, as strongly as other young people gain a French accent, or a genteel air. An early acquaintance with the Classics is what may be called the good-breeding of poetry, as it gives a certain gracefulness which never forsakes a mind that contracted it in youth, but is seldom or never hit by those who would learn it too late. He first distinguished himself by his Latin compositions, published in the *Muse Anglicana*; and was admired as one of the best authors since the Augustan age, in the two Universities, and the greatest part of Europe, before he was talked of as a poet in town. There is not perhaps any harder task than to tame the natural wildness of wit, and to civilize the fancy. The generality of our old English poets abound in forced conceits and affected phrases; and even those who are said to come the nearest to exactness are but too often fond of unnatural beauties, and aim at something better than perfection. If Mr Addison's
" example

impaired their genius by too close an application to Latin and Greek. On the contrary, we have reason to ascribe to their knowledge of these tongues, that classical purity of style by which their writings are distinguished. All our most eminent philosophers and divines, Bacon, Newton, Cudworth, Hooker, Taylor, Atterbury, Stillingfleet, were profoundly skilled in ancient literature. And every rational admirer of Mr Locke will acknowledge, that if his learning had been equal to his good sense and manly spirit, his works would have been still more creditable to himself, and more useful to mankind.

In writings of wit and humour, one would be apt to think, that there is no great occasion for the knowledge of antiquity; it being the author's chief aim and business, to accommodate himself to the manners of the present time. And if study be detrimental to any faculty of the mind, we might suspect, that a playful imagination, the parent of wit and humour, would be most likely to suffer by it. Yet the history of our first-rate geniuses in this way (Shakespeare always excepted) is a proof of the contrary. There is more learning, as well as more wit, in *Hudibras*, than in any book of the same size now extant. In the *Tale of a Tub*, the *Tatler*, and the *Spectator*, the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, and in many parts of *Fielding*, we discover at once a brilliant wit and copious erudition.

I have confined these brief remarks to English writers. But the same thing might be proved by examples from every literary nation of modern, and even of ancient Europe. For we must

“ example and precepts be the occasion, that there now begins to be a great demand for correctness, we may justly attribute it to his being first fashioned by the ancient models, and familiarized to propriety of thought, and chastity of style.”

Tickel's Account of the life and writings of Addison.

not suppose, that the Greek and Latin authors, because they did not study many languages, were illiterate men. Homer and Virgil were skilled in all the learning of their time. The men of letters in those days were capable of more intense application, and had a greater thirst of knowledge, than the generality of the moderns; and would often, in defiance of poverty, fatigue, and danger, travel into distant lands, and visit famous places and persons, to qualify themselves for instructing mankind. And, however learned we may be in modern writings, our curiosity can hardly fail to be raised in regard to the ancient, when we consider, that the greater part of these were the work, and contain the thoughts of men, who had themselves been engaged in the most eventful scenes of active life; while most modern books contain only the notions of speculative writers, who know but the theory of business, and that but imperfectly, and whose determinations upon the principles of great affairs, and the feelings and sentiments peculiar to active life, are little better than conjecture. — At any rate, may we not affirm, that “without the aid of ancient learning, genius cannot hope to rise to those honours to which it is entitled, nor to reach that perfection to which it naturally aspires?” The exceptions are so few, and so singular, that it is unnecessary to insist upon them.

Were we to consider this matter abstractly, we should be led to the same conclusion. For what is the effect of learning upon a sound mind? Is it not to enlarge our stock of ideas; to ascertain and correct our experimental knowledge; to give us habits of attention, recollection, and observation; and help us to methodise our thoughts, whether acquired or natural, as well as to express them with perspicuity and elegance? This may give a direction to our inventive powers, but surely cannot weaken them. The very worst effect that Classical learning can produce on the intelligent mind, is, that it may sometimes transform an original genius,

genius into an imitator. Yet this happens not often; and when it does happen, we ought not perhaps to complain. Ingenious imitations may be as delightful, and as useful, as original compositions. One would not exchange Virgil's *Georgic* for twenty such poems as Hesiod's *Works and Days*, nor Pope's *Eloisa* for all the *Epistles* of Ovid. The sixth book of the *Eneid*, though an imitation of the eleventh of the *Odyssey*, is incomparably more sublime; and the night-adventure of Diomedes and Ulysses, excellent as it is, must be allowed to be inferior to the episode of Nisus and Euryalus. Several cantos might be mentioned of the *Fairy Queen*, the preservation of which would not compensate the loss of *The Castle of Indolence*: and notwithstanding the merit of Cervantes, I believe there are few Critics in Great Britain, who do not think in their hearts, that Fielding has outdone his master. While the literary world can boast of such imitators as Virgil and Tasso, Boileau and Pope, it has no great reason to lament the scarcity of original writers.

IV. The fourth and last objection to the study of Latin and Greek, "That the Classic authors contain descriptions and doctrines, that tend to seduce the understanding, and corrupt the heart," — is unhappily founded in truth. And indeed, in most languages there are too many books liable to this censure. And, though a melancholy truth, it is however true, that a young man, in his closet, and at a distance from bad example, if he has the misfortune to fall into a certain track of study which at present is not unfashionable, may debase his understanding, corrupt his heart, and learn the rudiments of almost every depravation incident to human nature. But to effect this, the knowledge of modern tongues is alone sufficient. Immoral and impious writing is one of those arts in which the moderns are confessedly superior to the Greeks and Romans.

It does not appear, from what remains of their works, that

any of the old philosophers ever went so far as some of the modern, in recommending irreligion and immorality. The Pagan theology is too absurd to lessen our reverence for the Gospel; but some of our philosophers, as we are pleased to call them, have been labouring hard, and I fear not without success, to make mankind renounce all regard for religious truth, both natural and revealed. Jupiter and his kindred gods may pass for machines in an ancient Epic poem; but in a modern one they would be ridiculous, even in that capacity: a proof, that in spite of the enchanting strains wherein their achievements are celebrated, they have lost all credit and consideration in the world, and that the idolatrous fables of classical poetry can never more do any harm. From the scepticism of Pyrrho, and the Atheism of Epicurus, what danger is now to be apprehended! The language of Empiricus, and the poetry of Lucretius, may claim attention; but the reasonings of both the one and the other are too childish to subvert any sound principle, or corrupt any good heart; and would probably have been forgotten or despised long ago, if some worthy authors of these latter times had not taken pains to revive and recommend them. The parts of ancient science that are, and always have been, studied most, are the Peripatetic and Stoical systems; and these may undoubtedly be read, not only without danger, but even with great benefit both to the heart and to the understanding.

The finest treatises of Pagan morality are indeed imperfect; but their authors are entitled to honour, for a good intention, and for having done their best. Error in that science, as well as in theology, though in us the effect of prejudice and pride, was generally in them the effect of ignorance: and those of them, whose names are most renowned, and whose doctrines are best understood, as Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Antoninus, have probably done, and still may do, service to mankind,

mankind, by the importance of their precepts, by their amiable pictures of particular virtues, and by the pathetic admonitions and apposite examples and reasonings wherewith their morality is enforced. Love to their country; the parental, filial, and conjugal charities; resignation to the Divine will; superiority to the evils of life, and to the gifts of fortune; the laws of justice, the rights of human nature; the dignity of temperance, the baseness of sensuality, the proper direction of fortitude, and a generous, candid, and friendly behaviour, are enjoined in their writings with a warmth of expression, and force of argument, which a Christian moralist might be proud to imitate. — In a word, I think it may be affirmed with confidence, that the knowledge of ancient philosophy and history must contribute to the improvement of the human mind, but cannot now corrupt the heart or understanding of any person who is a friend to truth and virtue.

But what have you to say in vindication of the indecency of the ancient poets, of Aristophanes, Catullus, Ovid, Martial, Petronius, and even of Persius, Juvenal, and Horace? Truly, not a word. I abandon every thing of that sort, whether modern or ancient, to the utmost vengeance of Satire and Criticism; and should rejoice to hear, that from the monuments of human wit all indecency were expunged for ever. Nor is there any circumstance that could attend such a purification, that would make me regret it. The immoral passages in most of the authors now mentioned are but few, and have neither elegance nor harmony to recommend them to any but profligates: — so strict is the connection between virtue and good taste; and so true it is, that want of decency will always in one degree or other betray want of sense. Horace, Persius, Martial, Catullus, and Ovid himself, might give up all their immoralities, without losing any of their wit: — and as to Aristophanes and Petronius, I have never been

able to discover any thing in either, that might not be consigned to eternal oblivion, without the least detriment to literature. The latter, notwithstanding the name which he has, I know not how, acquired, is in every respect (with the reserve of a few tolerable verses scattered through his book) a vile writer; his style harsh and affected; and his argument such as can excite no emotion, in any mind not utterly depraved, but contempt and abhorrence. The wit and humour of the Athenian poet are now become almost invisible, and seem never to have been very conspicuous. The reception he met with in his own time was probably owing to the licentiousness of his manners, and the virulence of his defamation, (qualities which have given a temporary name to more bad poets than one); and for his reputation in latter times, as a classic author, he must have been indebted, not to the poignancy of his wit, or the delicacy of his humour, nor to his powers of invention and arrangement, nor to any natural display of human manners to be found in him, (for of all this merit he seems to be destitute), but solely to the antiquity of his language. In proof of one part of this remark, it may be observed, that Plato in his *Symposium* describes him as a glutton, drunkard, and profligate: and to evince the probability of another part of it, I need only mention the excessive labour and zeal wherewith commentators have illustrated certain Greek and Latin performances, which if they had been written in our days would never have been read, and which cannot boast of any excellence, either in the sentiment or composition.

But do you really think, that such mutilations of the old poets, as you seem to propose, can ever take place? Do you think, that the united authority of all the potentates on earth could annihilate, or consign to oblivion, those exceptionable passages? — I do not: but I think that those passages should never be explained, nor put in the hands of children. And sure, it is not
 necessary

necessary that they should. In some late editions of Horace, the impurities are omitted, and not so much left as a line of asterisks, to raise a boy's curiosity. By the attention of parents and teachers, might not all the poets usually read in schools be printed in the same manner? Might not children be informed, that, in order to become learned, it is necessary to read, not every Greek and Latin book, but those books only that may mend the heart, improve the taste, and enlarge the understanding? Might they not be made sensible of the importance of Bacon's aphorism, "That some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested?" — that is, as the Noble author explains it, "That some are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly with diligence and attention?" — a rule, which, if duly attended to, would greatly promote the advancement of true learning, and the pleasure and profit of the student. Might not a young man be taught to set a proper value on good compositions, and to entertain such contempt for the bad, as would secure him against their influence? All this I cannot but think practicable, if those who superintend education would study to advance the moral as well as intellectual improvement of the scholar; and if teachers, translators, and commentators, would consider, that to explain dulness is foolish, and to illustrate obscenity criminal. And if all this were practised, we should have no reason to complain, of classical erudition, that it has any tendency to seduce the understanding, or inflame the passions. In fact, its inflammatory and seductive qualities would never have been alarming, if commentators had thought more, and written less. But they were unhappily too wise to value any thing beyond the knowledge of old words. To have told them, that it is essential to all good writing to improve as well as inform, and to regulate the affections as well as amuse the fancy
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and enrich the memory ; that wicked books can please none but worthless men, who have no right to be pleased, and that their authors instead of praise deserve punishment ; — would have been to address them in a style, which with all their knowledge of the grammar and dictionary they could not have understood *.

Still I shall be told, that this scheme, though practicable, is too difficult to permit the hope of its being ever put in execution. Perhaps it may be so. And what then ? Because passages that convey improper ideas may be found in some ancient writings, shall we deprive young people of all the instruction and pleasure that attends a regular course of classical study ? Because Horace wrote some poultry lines, and Ovid some worthless poems, must Virgil, and Livy, and Cicero, and Plutarch, and

* It must move the indignation of every person who is not an arrant book-worm, or abandoned debauchee, to observe how industriously Johannes Doufa, and others of that phlegmatic brotherhood, have expounded the indecencies of Greece and Rome, and dragged into light those abominations that ought to have remained in utter darkness for ever. — Mons. Nodot, a critic of the last century, on occasion of having recovered, as he pretends, a part of an ancient manuscript, writes to Mons. Charpentier, Directeur de l'Academie Française, in the following terms. “ J'ai fait, Monsieur, une decouverte tres-avantageuse a l'empire des lettres : et pour ne pas tenir votre esprit en suspens, plein de la joye que je ressens moi-meme, je vous dirai avec precipitation, que j'ai entre mes mains ce qui manquoit de — —. Vous pouvez croire, Monsieur, si aimant cet auteur au point que je fais — &c. Vous appercevrez, Monsieur, dans cet ouvrage des beautés qui vous charmeront. — Je vous prie d'annoncer cette decouverte a vos illustres Academiciens ; elle merite bien, qu'ils la sçachent des premiers. Je suis ravi que la fortune se soit servié de moi, pour rendre a la posterite un ouvrage si precieux,” &c. If the lost Decades of Livy had been recovered, this zealous Frenchman could hardly have expressed himself with more enthusiasm. What then will the reader think when he is told, that this wonderful accession to literature, was no other than Petronius Arbiter ; an author, whom it is impossible to read without intense disgust, and whom, if he be ancient, (which is not certain), I scruple not to call a disgrace to antiquity ?

Homer,

Homer, be consigned to oblivion? I do not here speak of the beauties of the Greek and Latin authors, nor of the vast disproportion there is between what is good in them, and what is bad. In every thing human there is a mixture of evil: but are we for that reason to throw off all concern about human things? Must we set our harvests on fire, or leave them to perish, because a few tares have sprung up with the corn? Because oppression will sometimes take place where-ever there is subordination, and luxury where-ever there is security, are we therefore to renounce all government? — or shall we, according to the advice of certain famous projectors, run naked to the woods, and there encounter every hardship and brutality of savage life, in order to escape from the tooth-ach and rheumatism? If we reject every useful institution that may possibly be attended with inconvenience, we must reject all bodily exercise, and all bodily rest, all arts and sciences, all law, commerce, and society.

If the present objection prove any thing decisive against ancient literature, it will prove a great deal more against the modern. Of classical indecency compared with that of latter times, I do not think so favourably as did a certain critic, who likened the former to the nakedness of a child, and the latter to that of a prostitute; I think there is too much of the last character in both: but that the modern muses partake of it more than the ancient, is undeniable. I do not care to prove what I say, by a detail of particulars; and am sorry to add, that the point is too plain to require proof. And if so, may not an early acquaintance with the best ancient authors, as teachers of wisdom, and models of good taste, be highly useful as a preservative from the sophistries and immoralities that disgrace some of our fashionable moderns? If a true taste for Classic learning shall ever become general, the demand for licentious plays, poems, and novels, will abate in proportion; for it is to the more illiterate
readers

readers that this sort of trash is most acceptable. Study, so ignominious and so debasing, so unworthy of a scholar and of a man, so repugnant to good taste and good manners, will hardly engage the attention of those who can relish the original magnificence of Homer and Virgil, Demosthenes and Cicero.

A book is of some value, if it yield harmless amusement ; it is still more valuable, if it communicate instruction ; but if it answer both purposes, it is truly a matter of importance to mankind. That many of the classic authors possessed the art of blending sweetness with utility, has been the opinion of all men without exception, who had sense and learning sufficient to qualify them to be judges. — Is history instructive and entertaining ? We have from these authors a detail of the most important events unfolded in the most interesting manner. Without the histories they have left us, we should have been both ignorant of their affairs, and unskilled in the art of recording our own : for I think it is allowed, that the best modern histories are those which in form are most similar to the ancient models. — Is philosophy a source of improvement and delight ? The Greeks and Romans have given us, I shall not say the most useful, but I will say the fundamental, part of human science ; have led us into a train of thinking, which of ourselves we should not so soon have taken to ; and have set before us an endless multitude of examples and inferences, which, though not exempt from error, do however suggest the proper methods of observation and profitable inquiry. Let those, who undervalue the discoveries of antiquity, only think, what our condition at this day must have been, if, in the ages of darkness that followed the destruction of the Roman empire, all the literary monuments of Greece and Italy had perished. — Again, is there any thing productive of utility and pleasure, in the fictions of poetry, and in the charms of harmonious composition ? Surely, it cannot be doubted ; nor
will

will they, who have any knowledge of the history of learning, hesitate to affirm, that the modern Europeans are almost wholly indebted for the beauty of their writings both in prose and verse, to those models of elegance that first appeared in Greece, and have since been admired and imitated all over the western world. It is a striking fact, that while in other parts of the earth there prevails a form of language, so disguised by figures, and so darkened by incoherence, as to be quite unsuitable to philosophy, and even in poetry tiresome, the Europeans should have been so long in possession of a style, in which harmony, perspicuity, simplicity, and elegance, are so happily united. That the Romans and modern Europeans had it from the Greeks, is well known; but whence those fathers of literature derived it, is not so apparent, and would furnish matter for too long a digression, if we were here to inquire. — In a word, the Greeks and Romans are our masters in all polite literature; a consideration, which of itself ought to inspire reverence for their writings and genius.

Good translations are very useful; but the best of them will not render the study of the original authors either unnecessary or unprofitable. This might be proved by many arguments.

All living languages are liable to change. The Greek and Latin, though composed of more durable materials than ours, were subject to perpetual vicissitude, till they ceased to be spoken. The former is with reason believed to have been more stationary than any other; and indeed a very particular attention was paid to the preservation of it: yet between Spenser and Pope, Hooker and Sherlock, Raleigh and Smollet, a difference of dialect is not more perceptible, than between Homer and Apollonius, Xenophon and Plutarch, Aristotle and Antoninus. In the Roman authors the change of language is still more remarkable. How different, in this respect, is Ennius from Virgil, Lucilius from

Horace, Cato from Columella, and even Catullus from Ovid! The laws of the Twelve Tables, though studied by every Roman of condition, were not perfectly understood even by antiquarians, in the time of Cicero, when they were not quite four hundred years old. Cicero himself, as well as Lucretius, made several improvements in the Latin tongue; Virgil introduced some new words; and Horace asserts his right to the same privilege; and from his remarks upon it *, appears to have considered the immutability of living language as an impossible thing. It were vain then to flatter ourselves with the hope of permanency to any of the modern tongues of Europe; which, being more ungrammatical than the Latin and Greek, are exposed to more dangerous, because less discernible innovations. Our want of tenses and cases makes a multitude of auxiliary words necessary; and to these the unlearned are not attentive, because they look upon them as the least important parts of language; and hence they come to be omitted or misapplied in conversation, and afterwards in writing. Besides, the spirit of commerce, manufacture, and naval enterprise, so honourable to modern Europe, and to Great Britain in particular, and the free circulation of arts, sciences, and opinions, owing in part to the use of printing, and to our improvements in navigation, cannot fail to render the modern tongues, and especially the English, more variable than the Greek or Latin. Much indeed has been done of late to ascertain and fix the English tongue. Johnson's Dictionary is a most important, and, considered as the work of one man, a most wonderful performance. It does honour to England, and to human genius; and proves, that there is still left among us a force of mind equal to that which formerly distinguished a Stephanus or a Varro. Its influence in diffusing the knowledge

* Hor. *Ar. Poet.* vers. 46.--72.

of the language, and retarding its decline, is already observable :

Si Pergama dextra.

Defendi possent, etiam hac defensa fuissent.

And yet, within the last twenty years, and since this great work was published, a multitude of new words have found their way into the English tongue, and, though both unauthorised and unnecessary, seem likely to remain in it.

In this fluctuating state of the modern languages, and of our own in particular, what could we expect from translations, if the study of Greek and Latin were to be discontinued? Suppose all the good books of antiquity translated into English, and the originals destroyed, or, which is nearly the same thing, neglected. That English grows obsolete in one century; and, in two, that translation must be retranslated. If there were faults in the first, and I never heard of a faultless translation, they must be multiplied tenfold in the second. So that, within a few centuries, there is reason to fear, that all the old authors would be either lost, or so mangled as to be hardly worth preserving. — A system of Geometry, one would think, must lose less in a tolerable translation, than any other science. Political ideas are somewhat variable; moral notions are ambiguous in their names at least, if not in themselves; the abstruser sciences speak a language still more indefinite: but ideas of number and quantity must for ever remain distinct. And yet some late authors have thrown light upon Geometry, by reviving the study of the Greek geometricians. Let any man read a translation of Cicero and Livy, and then study the author in his own tongue; and he shall find himself not only more delighted with the manner, but also more fully instructed in the matter.

Beauty of style, and harmony of verse, would decay at the

first translation, and at the second or third be quite lost. It is not possible for one who is ignorant of Latin to have any adequate notion of Virgil; the choice of his words; and the modulation of his numbers, have never been copied with tolerable success in any other tongue. Homer has been of all poets the most fortunate in a translator; his fable, descriptions, and pathos, and, for the most part, his characters, we find in Pope: but we find not his simplicity, nor his impetuosity, nor that majestic inattention to the more trivial niceties of style, which is so graceful in him, but which no other poet dares imitate. Homer in Greek seems to sing extempore, and from immediate inspiration, or enthusiasm *; but in English his phraseology and numbers are not a little elaborate: which I mention, not with any view to detract from the translator, who truly deserves the highest praise, but to show the insufficiency of modern language to convey a just idea of ancient writing. — I need not enlarge on this subject: it is well known, that few of the great authors of antiquity have ever been adequately translated. No man who understands Plato, Demosthenes, or Xenophon, in the Greek, or Livy, Cicero, and Virgil, in the Latin, would willingly peruse even the best translations of those authors.

If one mode of composition be better than another, which will scarce be denied, it is surely worth while to preserve a standard of that which is best. This cannot be done, but by preserving the original authors; and they cannot be said to be preserved, unless they be studied and understood. Translations are like por-

* “ His poems (says a very learned writer) were made to be recited, or sung to a company; and not read in private, or perused in a book, which few were then capable of doing: and I will venture to affirm, that whoever reads not Homer in this view, loses a great part of the delight he might receive from the poet.” *Blackwell’s Inquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer*, p. 122.

traits. They may give some idea of the lineaments and colour, but the life and the motion they cannot copy; and too often, instead of exhibiting the air of the original, they present us with that only which is most agreeable to the taste of the painter. Abolish the originals, and you will soon see the copies degenerate.

There are in England two excellent styles of poetical composition. Milton is our model in the one; Dryden and Pope in the other. Milton formed himself on the ancients, and on the modern Italians who imitate their ancestors of old Rome. Dryden and Pope took the French poets for their pattern, particularly Boileau, who followed the ancients (of whom he was a passionate admirer) as far as the profane genius of the French tongue would permit. If we reject the old authors, and take these great moderns for our standard, we do nothing more than copy after a copy. If we reject both, and set about framing new modes of composition, our success will probably be no better, than that of the projectors whom Gulliver visited in the metropolis of Balnibarbi.

T H E E N D.

E R R A T A.

Pag. lin.

- 31. 14. *read* any thing at all;
- 79. 2. *read* a degree
- 107. 20. *read* too early
- 116. 8. *read* I suppose
- 183. 8. *read* no existence
- 208. 6. of the note, *dele* ΕΞΕΟΝ
- 438. 6. of the note, *read* I have met
- 474. line last, *read* made me acquainted
- 541. 15. *read* maternal love,
- 544. 28. *read* fine gold
- 624. 3. *read* or phraseology
- 636. 6. *read* princes
- 661. 29. *read* effected
- 671. 4. *for* (?) *insert* (·)
- 736. 13. *read* dialects

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