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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MISCELLANEOUS PIECES, IN PROSE ***

Transcriber's Note

Footnotes have been moved the end of paragraphs.

Variant spelling and irregular punctuation are retained.

The changes that have been made are listed at the [end](#) of the book.

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES,

IN

P R O S E,

BY

JOHN AIKIN, M. D.

AND

ANNA LÆTITIA BARBAULD.

THE THIRD EDITION.

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C O N T E N T S.

	Page
<i>ON the Province of Comedy</i>	1
<i>The Hill of Science, a Vision</i>	27
<i>On Romances, an Imitation</i>	39
<i>Seláma, an Imitation of Ossian</i>	47
<i>Against Inconsistency in our Expectations</i>	59
<i>The Canal and the Brook, an Apologue</i>	79
<i>On Monastic Institutions</i>	88
<i>On the Pleasure derived from Objects of Terror; with Sir Bertrand, a Fragment</i>	119
<i>On the Heroic Poem of Gondibert</i>	138
<i>An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which excite agreeable Sensations; with a Tale</i>	190
<i>Essay on Devotional Taste</i>	220

[Pg 1]

O N T H E

P R O V I N C E

O F

C O M E D Y.

VARIOUS are the methods which art and ingenuity have invented to exhibit a picture of human life and manners. These have differed from each other, both in the mode of representation, and in the particular view of the subject which has been taken. With respect to the first, it is universally allowed that the dramatic form is by far the most perfect. The circumstance of leaving every character to display itself in its own proper language, with all the variations of tone and gesture which distinguish it from others, and which mark every emotion of the mind; and the scenic delusions of dress, painting, and machinery, contribute to stamp such an appearance of reality upon dramatic representations as no other of the imitative arts can attain. Indeed, when in their perfection, they can scarcely be called imitations, but the very things themselves; and real nature would perhaps appear less perfect than her counterfeit.

[Pg 2]

THE Drama has from early antiquity been distinguished into the two grand divisions of Tragedy and Comedy. It would seem that the general character of these was universally understood and agreed on, by the adoption of the terms *tragic* and *comic*, derived from them, into the language of every civilized people. The former of these is, we know, constantly applied to objects of terror and distress; the latter, to those of mirth and pleasantry. There is, however, a more comprehensive distinction of our feelings, which it is proper first to consider.

[Pg 3]

WHEN we examine the emotions produced in our minds by the view of human actions, we shall observe a division into the *serious*, and the *ludicrous*. I do not think it necessary to define or analyse feelings with which all are well acquainted. It is enough to observe that serious emotions are produced by the display of all the great passions which agitate the soul, and by all those actions, which are under the jurisdiction of the grand rules of religion and morality; and that ludicrous emotions are excited by the improprieties and inconsistencies of conduct or judgment in smaller matters; such as the effects of false taste, or trifling passions. When we now apply the words *tragic* and *comic*, we shall at once perceive that the former can relate solely to such subjects as occasion *serious*, and the latter to such as occasion *ludicrous* emotions.

[Pg 4]

Now, although the practice of writers has frequently introduced ludicrous parts into the composition called a Tragedy, and serious parts into that called a Comedy, yet it has ever been understood that what constitutes the essential and invariable character of each is something which is expressed by the terms *tragic* and *comic*, and comes under the head of *serious* or *ludicrous* emotions. Referring therefore to a future consideration, the propriety of introducing serious parts in a Comedy, I shall now lay down the character of Comedy as a *dramatic composition, exhibiting a ludicrous picture of human life and manners*.

[Pg 5]

THERE are two sources of ludicrous emotions which it is proper here to distinguish. One of these arises from *character*, the other from *incident*. The first is attached and appropriated to the person, and makes a part, as it were, of his composition. The other is merely accidental, proceeding from awkward situations, odd and uncommon circumstances, and the like, which may happen indifferently to every person. If we compare these with regard to their dignity and utility,

we shall find a further difference; since that proceeding from *character* belongs to a very respectable part of knowledge, that of human manners; and has for its end the correction of foibles: whereas that proceeding from *incident* is mean and trivial in its origin, and answers no other purpose than present mirth. 'Tis true, it is perfectly natural to be pleased with risible objects, even of the lowest kind, and a fastidious aversion to their exhibition may be accounted mere affected nicety; yet, since we rank Comedy among the higher and more refined species of composition, let us assign it the more honourable office of exhibiting and correcting the ludicrous part of *characters*; and leave to Bartholomew Fair the ingenious contrivances of facetious drollery, and handicraft merriment.

[Pg 6]

THE following sources may be pointed out from whence comic character is derived.

NATIONS, like individuals, have certain leading features which distinguish them from others. Of these there are always some of a ludicrous cast which afford matter of entertainment to their neighbours. Comedy has at all times made very free with national peculiarities; and, although the ridicule has often been conducted in a trivial and illiberal manner, by greatly overcharging the picture, and introducing idle and unjust accusations, yet I think we need not go so far as entirely to reject this sort of ludicrous painting; since it may be as important to warn against the imitation of foreign follies, as those of our own growth. Indeed, when a Frenchman or Irishman is brought upon our stage merely to talk broken English, or make bulls, there can be no plea either of wit or utility to excuse the illiberal jest: but, when the nicer distinctions of national character are exposed with a just and delicate ridicule, the spectacle may be both entertaining and instructive. Amidst the tribe of foreign valets to be met with on the English theatre, I would instance CANTON in the *Clandestine Marriage*, as an admirable example of true national character, independent on language and grimace. The obsequiousness and attentive flattery of the servile Swiss-Frenchman are quite characteristic, as well as the careless insolence and affected airs of BRUSH the English footman^[1]. O'FLAHERTY, the Irish soldier of fortune in the *West Indian*, is an example of similar merit; much more so, I think, than the character from which the piece has its title.

[Pg 7]

[Pg 8]

[Pg 9]

[1] I AM concerned to observe an instance of illiberal national ridicule without any merit of composition to palliate it, from a respectable dramatic writer, which is also rendered much more obnoxious by the circumstances. M. Voltaire's *Ecossaise* was purposely written to exhibit a worthy English character; marked, indeed, with some whimsical peculiarities, but distinguished by a strong spirit of benevolence. It was impossible to expose national foibles more gently than by combining them with national virtues. When this Piece was brought on our stage under the title of the *English Merchant*, a French valet was inserted among the *personæ dramatis*, characterised by nothing but his false English, and for no other end but to be exhibited as a scoundrel!

ALTHOUGH some part of the character of a nation is pretty uniform and constant, yet its manners and customs in many points are extremely variable. These variations are the peculiar modes and fashions of the age; and hence the age, as well as the nation, acquires a distinguishing character. Fashion, in general, usurps a dominion only over the smaller and less important part of manners; such as dress, public diversions, and other matters of taste. The improprieties of fashion are therefore of the absurd and ludicrous kind, and consequently fit subjects of comic ridicule. There is no source of Comedy more fertile and pleasing than this; and none in which the end of reformation is likely to be so well answered. An extravagant fashion is exhibited upon the stage with such advantage of ridicule, that it can scarcely stand long against it; and I make no doubt that Moliere's *Marquis de Mascarille*, and Cibber's *Lord Foppington*, had a considerable share in reforming the prevailing foppery of the times. Fashion has also too much interfered in some more serious matters, as the sentiments and studies of the age. Here too Comedy has made its attacks; and the *Alchemist*, the *Virtuoso*, the *Antiquary*, the *Belle Esprit*, have in their turns undergone the ridicule of the stage, when their respective pursuits, by being fashionable, were carried to a fanciful extravagance. It is well known that Moliere, in his comedies of the *Femmes Sçavantes*, and the *Precieuses Ridicules*, was as successful against the pedantry and pretensions to wit which infected the French nation, and particularly the ladies, at that period, as Cervantes in his attack upon knight-errantry.

[Pg 10]

[Pg 11]

THERE is another point of national or fashionable folly in which Comedy might be very useful; yet the attempt has been found dangerous; and perhaps the subject is too delicate for the stage, considering the abuses to which it is liable. I mean popular superstition, and priestcraft. Moliere, who with impunity had attacked every other species of folly, was almost ruined by exposing a hypocrite and a devotee; and the licentious ridicule of Dryden, and others of that age, was generally aimed, not only against superstition, but religion. The *Spanish Friar*, however, is an instance in which, with exquisite humour, the ridicule can hardly be blamed as improper; and it certainly did more hurt to Roman Catholic superstition than he could ever remedy by his scholastic *Hind and Panther*. How far the *Minor* comes under the same description, would, probably, be a subject of dispute.

[Pg 12]

PARTICULAR ranks and professions of men have likewise characteristical peculiarities which are capable of being placed in a ludicrous view; and Comedy has made frequent use of this source of ridicule. In exposing professional, as well as national absurdities, great illiberality and unfairness have been shewn; both, probably, from the same cause; a want of sufficient acquaintance with the whole characters, and taking a judgment of them from a few external circumstances. Yet, upon the whole, good effects may have arisen even from this branch of Comedy; since, by attacking a profession on a side where it was really weak, the members of it have been made sensible of, and have reformed those circumstances which rendered them ridiculous. A good-natured physician can never be angry at Moliere's most laughable exhibitions of the faculty,

[Pg 13]

when he reflects that the follies ridiculed, though exaggerated in the representation, had a real existence; and, by being held up to public derision, have been in a great measure reformed. The professors of law, being necessarily confined to forms and rules, have not been able to benefit so much from the comic ridicule of which they have enjoyed an equally plentiful share.

BESIDES the arrangements which nation and profession make of mankind, there are certain natural classes formed from the diversities of personal character. Although the varieties of temper and disposition in men are infinite, so that no two persons probably ever existed in whom there was an exact conformity, yet there are certain leading features of character which produce a general resemblance among numerous individuals. Thus the proud man, the vain, the sanguine, the splenetic, the suspicious, the covetous, the lavish, and so forth, are a sort of abstract characters which divide the whole human race amongst them. Now there are, belonging to all these, objects of ridicule which it has been the business of Comedy to exhibit; and though, perhaps, no one individual of each class perfectly resembled the person held to view on the stage, yet if all the circumstances exhibited are contained in the general character, it appears sufficiently natural. The *Miser* of Moliere is not a picture of any one miser who ever lived, but of a miser considered as forming a class of human characters. As these general classes, however, are few in number, they must be soon exhausted by the writers of Comedy, who have been obliged, for the sake of variety, to exhibit those peculiarities which are more rare and singular. Hence have been derived many pictures of that character which we call an *humourist*; by which is meant a character distinguished by certain ludicrous singularities from the rest of mankind. The humourist is not without those marks of distinction which he may acquire, like others, from rank, profession, or temper of mind; but all these are displayed in him after a manner peculiarly his own, and dashed with his leading oddities. A love of what is uncommon and out of the way has often occasioned such extravagance in the representation of these characters as to disgust from their want of probability; but, where a due moderation is observed, and the peculiarities, though unusual, are such as really exist in nature, great entertainment may be derived from their exhibition. Of this kind are the admirable *Misanthrope* and *Malade Imaginaire* of Moliere; and the *Old Bachelor* and *Sir Sampson Legend* of Congreve.

FROM hence it appears but a small gradation to the exhibition of individuals upon the stage; and yet the difference is important and essential. That which marks out the distinction between individuals of the same species is something entirely uncommunicable; therefore the rational end of Comedy, which is the reformation of folly, cannot take place in personal ridicule; for it will not be alledged that reforming the person himself is the object. Nor can it scarcely ever be just to expose an individual to the ridicule of the stage; since folly, and not vice, being the proper subject of that ridicule, it is hardly possible any one can deserve so severe a punishment. Indeed the exposing of folly can scarcely be the plea; for all the common, or even the rarer kinds of folly lie open to the attack of Comedy under fictitious characters, by means of which the failing may be ridiculed without the person. Personal ridicule must therefore turn, as we find it always has done, upon bodily imperfections, awkward habits, and uncouth gestures; which the low arts of mimicry inhumanly drag forth to public view, for the mean purpose of exciting present merriment. In the best hands, personal Comedy would be a degradation of the stage, and an unwarrantable severity; but in the hands it would be likely, if encouraged, to fall into, it would prove an intolerable nuisance. I should therefore, without hesitation, join those who utterly condemn this species of comic ridicule. It is also to be considered, that the author shews his talents to disadvantage, and cannot lay any basis of future fame, in this walk. For the resemblance which depends so much upon mimicry is lost upon those of the audience who are not acquainted with the original, and upon every one who only reads the piece. Mr. Foote's works will aptly exemplify this matter; in which the fund of genuine Comedy, derived from happy strokes upon the manners of the times, and uncommon, but not entirely singular characters, will secure a lasting admiration, when the mimicry which supported the parts of *Squintum* and *Cadwallader* is despised or forgotten.

HAVING thus attempted to trace the different sources of what I conceive the essential part of true Comedy, the *ridicule derived from character*; it remains to say somewhat of the mixture of additional matter which it has received as a composition.

DURING a considerable period of modern literature, *wit* was a commodity in great request, and frequently to be met with in all kinds of composition. It was no where more abundant than in Comedy, the genius of which it appeared peculiarly to suit, from its gaiety and satirical smartness. Accordingly, the language of Comedy was a string of repartees, in which a thought was bandied about from one to another, till it was quite run out of breath. This made a scene pass off with great vivacity; but the misfortune was, that distinction of character was quite lost in the contest. Every personage, from the lord to the valet, was as witty as the author himself; and, provided good things enow were said, it was no matter from whom they came. Congreve, with the greatest talents for true comic humour, and the delineation of ludicrous characters, was so over-run with a fondness for brilliancy, as frequently to break in upon consistency. Wit is an admirable ornament of Comedy, and, judiciously applied, is a high relief to humour, but should never interfere with the more essential parts.

WE are now, however, happily free from all manner of danger of an inundation of wit. No Congreve arises to disturb the sententious gravity, and calm simplicity of modern Comedy. A moralist may congratulate the age on hearing from the theatre compositions as pure, serious and delicate, as are given from the pulpit. When we consider how much wit and humour, at the time they were most prevalent, were perverted to vicious purposes, we may rejoice at the sacrifice; yet we may be allowed to feel a regret at the loss of an amusement which might, certainly, have

been reconciled with innocence; nay, might perhaps have pleaded utility beyond what is substituted in its room. *Sentimental Comedy*, as it is called, contains but very faint discrimination of character, and scarcely any thing of ridicule. Its principal aim is to introduce elegant and refined sentiment, particularly of the benevolent cast; and to move the heart by tender and interesting situations. Hence they are, in general, much more affecting than our modern Tragedies, which are formed upon nearly the same plan, but labour under the disadvantage of a formal, stately stile, and manners removed too far from the rank of common life. One would not, perhaps, wish altogether to banish from the stage pieces so moral and innocent; yet it is a pity they are not distinguished by some appropriated name from a thing they so little resemble as true Comedy.

[Pg 22]

I FEAR, a view of modern manners in other respects will scarcely allow us to flatter ourselves that this change in the theatre chiefly proceeds from improved morality. It may, perhaps, be more justly attributed to a false delicacy of taste, which renders us unable to bear the representation of low life; and to a real deficiency in genius. With respect to the first, genuine Comedy knows no distinction of rank, but can as heartily enjoy a humourous picture in the common walks of life, where indeed the greatest variety is to be found, as in the most cultivated and refined. Some have placed the distinction between Farce and Comedy in the rank from whence the characters are taken; but, I think, very improperly. If there is any real distinction besides the length of the pieces, I should take it from the different source of the humour; which in Farce is mere ludicrous incident, but in Comedy, ridiculous character. This criterion, however, will not at all agree with the titles under which each species has already appeared.

[Pg 23]

As to the other cause, deficiency of genius, it too plainly appears in many other productions. Cold correctness has laid her repressing hand upon imagination, and damped all her powers. The example of the ancients has been thought to justify the gravity and simplicity of modern Comedy. But, great as they were in many qualities of the mind, in those of wit and humour they were still more defective than even ourselves in the present age. They, who would eagerly catch at a wretched pun, or a meager piece of plot, were certainly with-held from witticism and drollery by want of invention, not justness of taste. I admire, in the pure Latin of Terence, the elegant sentiment, and still more the knowledge of the human heart, with which he abounds; but I would not on that account compare his genius, at least in Comedy, with Moliere and Congreve.

[Pg 24]

Lenibus atque utinam scriptis adjuncta foret vis
Comica -----

Moral sentiment is the cheapest product of the mind. Novels, and magazines, and even newspapers, are full of it; but wit and humour threaten to leave us with Chesterfield and Sterne.

STILL, however, I would hope the state of Comedy is not desperate. The *Clandestine Marriage* exhibits an example of comic merit, as various and perfect as perhaps any piece in our language. All the sources of ludicrous character have contributed to it. National ridicule appears in Canton, and professional in Sterling. Lord Ogleby is an excellent humourist. Mrs. Heidleberg and her niece, besides a comic pettishness of temper, have plenty of fashionable follies, modified by city vulgarism. Even the lovers of tender sentiment have their share in the entertainment; and I by no means would object to its occasional introduction, when, as it were, offering itself from the circumstances. Then, besides Mr. Foote's comic theatre, we have several pieces, which, though ranged under the list of Farces, contain true and original Comedy. Of these we may instance the *Citizen*, *Polly Honeycomb*, *the Upholsterer*, *the Apprentice*, and *the Oxonian in Town*. It is a mistake to suppose that the matter of Comedy can ever fail. Though general characters may be exhausted, yet the prevailing follies and fashions of the times, with the singularities starting up in particular ranks and orders of men, must constantly supply food for the ridicule of the stage. This is lawful game; and the pursuit of it is well worthy the encouragement of the public, so long as it is unattended with the licentiousness which disgraced the wit of the last age. Let ridicule be sacred to the interests of good sense and virtue; let it never make a good character less respectable, nor a bad one less obnoxious; but let us not resign its use to common-place maxim, and insipid sentiment.

[Pg 25]

[Pg 26]

[Pg 27]

THE
H I L L O F S C I E N C E,
A V I S I O N.

IN that season of the year when the serenity of the sky, the various fruits which cover the ground, the discoloured foliage of the trees, and all the sweet, but fading graces of inspiring autumn, open the mind to benevolence, and dispose it for contemplation; I was wandering in a beautiful and romantic country, till curiosity began to give way to weariness; and I sat me down on the fragment of a rock overgrown with moss, where the rustling of the falling leaves, the

[Pg 28]

dashing of waters, and the hum of the distant city, soothed my mind into the most perfect tranquillity, and sleep insensibly stole upon me, as I was indulging the agreeable reveries which the objects around me naturally inspired.

I IMMEDIATELY found myself in a vast extended plain, in the middle of which arose a mountain higher than I had before any conception of. It was covered with a multitude of people, chiefly youth; many of whom pressed forwards with the liveliest expression of ardour in their countenance, though the way was in many places steep and difficult. I observed, that those who had but just begun to climb the hill, thought themselves not far from the top; but as they proceeded, new hills were continually rising to their view; and the summit of the highest they could before discern, seemed but the foot of another, till the mountain at length appeared to lose itself in the clouds. As I was gazing on these things with astonishment, my good Genius suddenly appeared. 'The mountain before thee,' said he, 'is the HILL OF SCIENCE. On the top is the temple of Truth, whose head is above the clouds, and whose face is covered with a veil of pure light. Observe the progress of her votaries; be silent, and attentive.'

[Pg 29]

I SAW that the only regular approach to the mountain was by a gate, called the gate of languages. It was kept by a woman of a pensive and thoughtful appearance, whose lips were continually moving, as though she repeated something to herself. Her name was MEMORY. On entering this first enclosure, I was stunned with a confused murmur of jarring voices, and dissonant sounds; which increased upon me to such a degree, that I was utterly confounded, and could compare the noise to nothing but the confusion of tongues at Babel. The road was also rough and stony, and rendered more difficult by heaps of rubbish, continually tumbled down from the higher parts of the mountain; and by broken ruins of ancient buildings, which the travellers were obliged to climb over at every step; insomuch that many, disgusted with so rough a beginning, turned back, and attempted the mountain no more: while others, having conquered this difficulty, had no spirits to ascend further, and sitting down on some fragment of the rubbish, harangued the multitude below with the greatest marks of importance and self-complacency.

[Pg 30]

ABOUT half way up the hill, I observed on each side the path a thick forest covered with continual fogs, and cut out into labyrinths, cross alleys, and serpentine walks, entangled with thorns and briars. This was called the *wood of error*: and I heard the voices of many who were lost up and down in it, calling to one another, and endeavouring in vain to extricate themselves. The trees in many places shot their boughs over the path, and a thick mist often rested on it; yet never so much but that it was discernable by the light which beamed from the countenance of Truth.

[Pg 31]

IN the pleasantest part of the mountain were placed the bowers of the Muses, whose office it was to cheer the spirits of the travellers, and encourage their fainting steps with songs from their divine harps. Not far from hence were the *fields of fiction*, filled with a variety of wild flowers springing up in the greatest luxuriance, of richer scents and brighter colours than I had observed in any other climate. And near them was the *dark walk of allegory*, so artificially shaded, that the light at noon-day was never stronger than that of a bright moon-shine. This gave it a pleasingly romantic air for those who delighted in contemplation. The paths and alleys were perplexed with intricate windings, and were all terminated with the statue of a Grace, a Virtue, or a Muse.

[Pg 32]

AFTER I had observed these things, I turned my eyes towards the multitudes who were climbing the steep ascent, and observed amongst them a youth of a lively look, a piercing eye, and something fiery and irregular in all his motions. His name was GENIUS. He darted like an eagle up the mountain, and left his companions gazing after him with envy and admiration: but his progress was unequal, and interrupted by a thousand caprices. When Pleasure warbled in the valley, he mingled in her train. When Pride beckoned towards the precipice, he ventured to the tottering edge. He delighted in devious and untried paths; and made so many excursions from the road, that his feebler companions often outstripped him. I observed that the Muses beheld him with partiality; but Truth often frowned and turned aside her face. While Genius was thus wasting his strength in eccentric flights, I saw a person of a very different appearance, named APPLICATION. He crept along with a slow and unremitting pace, his eyes fixed on the top of the mountain, patiently removing every stone that obstructed his way, till he saw most of those below him who had at first derided his slow and toilsome progress. Indeed there were few who ascended the hill with equal and uninterrupted steadiness; for, beside the difficulties of the way, they were continually solicited to turn aside by a numerous crowd of Appetites, Passions, and Pleasures, whose importunity, when they had once complied with, they became less and less able to resist; and, though they often returned to the path, the asperities of the road were more severely felt, the hill appeared more steep and rugged, the fruits which were wholesome and refreshing, seemed harsh and ill-tasted, their sight grew dim, and their feet tript at every little obstruction.

[Pg 33]

[Pg 34]

I SAW, with some surprize, that the Muses, whose business was to cheer and encourage those who were toiling up the ascent, would often sing in the bowers of Pleasure, and accompany those who were enticed away at the call of the Passions. They accompanied them, however, but a little way, and always forsook them when they lost sight of the hill. Their tyrants then doubled their chains upon the unhappy captives, and led them away without resistance to the cells of Ignorance, or the mansions of Misery. Amongst the innumerable seducers, who were endeavouring to draw away the votaries of Truth from the path of Science, there was one so little formidable in her appearance, and so gentle and languid in her attempts, that I should scarcely have taken notice of her, but for the numbers she had imperceptibly loaded with her chains. INDOLENCE (for so she was called), far from proceeding to open hostilities, did not attempt to turn their feet out of the path, but contented herself with retarding their progress; and the purpose

[Pg 35]

she could not force them to abandon, she persuaded them to delay. Her touch had a power like that of the Torpedo, which withered the strength of those who came within its influence. Her unhappy captives still turned their faces towards the temple, and always hoped to arrive there; but the ground seemed to slide from beneath their feet, and they found themselves at the bottom before they suspected that they had changed their place. The placid serenity which at first appeared in their countenance, changed by degrees into a melancholy languor, which was tinged with deeper and deeper gloom as they glided down the *stream of insignificance*; a dark and sluggish water, which is curled by no breeze, and enlivened by no murmur, till it falls into a dead sea, where the startled passengers are awakened by the shock, and the next moment buried in the gulph of oblivion.

[Pg 36]

OF all the unhappy deserters from the paths of Science, none seemed less able to return than the followers of Indolence. The captives of Appetite and Passion could often seize the moment when their tyrants were languid or asleep to escape from their enchantment; but the dominion of Indolence was constant and unremitted, and seldom resisted till resistance was in vain.

[Pg 37]

AFTER contemplating these things, I turned my eyes towards the top of the mountain, where the air was always pure and exhilarating, the path shaded with laurels and other ever-greens, and the effulgence which beamed from the face of the Goddess seemed to shed a glory round her votaries. Happy, said I, are they who are permitted to ascend the mountain!—but while I was pronouncing this exclamation with uncommon ardour, I saw standing beside me a form of diviner features and a more benign radiance. Happier, said she, are those whom VIRTUE conducts to the mansions of Content!—What, said I, does Virtue then reside in the vale?—I am found, said she, in the vale, and I illuminate the mountain. I cheer the cottager at his toil, and inspire the sage at his meditation. I mingle in the crowd of cities, and bless the hermit in his cell. I have a temple in every heart that owns my influence; and to him that wishes for me I am already present. Science may raise you to eminence, but I alone can guide you to felicity! While the Goddess was thus speaking, I stretched out my arms towards her with a vehemence which broke my slumbers. The chill dews were falling around me, and the shades of evening stretched over the landscape. I hastened homeward, and resigned the night to silence and meditation.

[Pg 38]

O N

[Pg 39]

R O M A N C E S,
A N I M I T A T I O N .

OF all the multifarious productions which the efforts of superior genius, or the labours of scholastic industry, have crowded upon the world, none are perused with more insatiable avidity, or disseminated with more universal applause, than the narrations of feigned events, descriptions of imaginary scenes, and delineations of ideal characters. The celebrity of other authors is confined within very narrow limits. The Geometrician and Divine, the Antiquary and the Critic, however distinguished by uncontested excellence, can only hope to please those whom a conformity of disposition has engaged in similar pursuits; and must be content to be regarded by the rest of the world with the smile of frigid indifference, or the contemptuous sneer of self-sufficient folly. The collector of shells and the anatomist of insects is little inclined to enter into theological disputes: the Divine is not apt to regard with veneration the uncouth diagrams and tedious calculations of the Astronomer: the man whose life has been consumed in adjusting the disputes of lexicographers, or elucidating the learning of antiquity, cannot easily bend his thoughts to recent transactions, or readily interest himself in the unimportant history of his contemporaries: and the Cit, who knows no business but acquiring wealth, and no pleasure but displaying it, has a heart equally shut up to argument and fancy, to the batteries of syllogism, and the arrows of wit. To the writer of fiction alone, every ear is open, and every tongue lavish of applause; curiosity sparkles in every eye, and every bosom is throbbing with concern.

[Pg 40]

[Pg 41]

It is, however, easy to account for this enchantment. To follow the chain of perplexed ratiocination, to view with critical skill the airy architecture of systems, to unravel the web of sophistry, or weigh the merits of opposite hypotheses, requires perspicacity, and presupposes learning. Works of this kind, therefore, are not so well adapted to the generality of readers as familiar and colloquial composition; for few can reason, but all can feel; and many who cannot enter into an argument, may yet listen to a tale. The writer of Romance has even an advantage over those who endeavour to amuse by the play of fancy; who, from the fortuitous collision of dissimilar ideas produce the scintillations of wit; or by the vivid glow of poetical imagery delight the imagination with colours of ideal radiance. The attraction of the magnet is only exerted upon similar particles; and to taste the beauties of Homer, it is requisite to partake his fire; but every one can relish the author who represents common life, because every one can refer to the originals from whence his ideas were taken. He relates events to which all are liable, and applies to passions which all have felt. The gloom of solitude, the languor of inaction, the corrosions of disappointment, and the toil of thought, induce men to step aside from the rugged road of life,

[Pg 42]

[Pg 43]

and wander in the fairy land of fiction; where every bank is sprinkled with flowers, and every gale loaded with perfume; where every event introduces a hero, and every cottage is inhabited by a Grace. Invited by these flattering scenes, the student quits the investigation of truth, in which he perhaps meets with no less fallacy, to exhilarate his mind with new ideas, more agreeable, and more easily attained: the busy relax their attention by desultory reading, and smooth the agitation of a ruffled mind with images of peace, tranquillity, and pleasure: the idle and the gay relieve the listlessness of leisure, and diversify the round of life by a rapid series of events pregnant with rapture and astonishment; and the pensive solitary fills up the vacuities of his heart by interesting himself in the fortunes of imaginary beings, and forming connections with ideal excellence.

It is, indeed, no ways extraordinary that the mind should be charmed by fancy, and attracted by pleasure; but that we should listen with complacency to the groans of misery, and delight to view the exacerbations of complicated anguish, that we should choose to chill the bosom with imaginary fears, and dim the eyes with fictitious sorrow, seems a kind of paradox of the heart, and can only be credited because it is universally felt. Various are the hypotheses which have been formed to account for the disposition of the mind to riot in this species of intellectual luxury.

Some have imagined that we are induced to acquiesce with greater patience in our own lot, by beholding pictures of life, tinged with deeper horrors, and loaded with more excruciating calamities; as, to a person suddenly emerging out of a dark room, the faintest glimmering of twilight assumes a lustre from the contrasted gloom. Others, with yet deeper refinement, suppose that we take upon ourselves this burden of adscititious sorrows, in order to feast upon the consciousness of our own virtue. We commiserate others, say they, that we may applaud ourselves; and the sigh of compassionate sympathy is always followed by the gratulations of self-complacent esteem. But surely they who would thus reduce the sympathetic emotions of pity to a system of refined selfishness, have but ill attended to the genuine feelings of humanity. It would, however, exceed the limits of this paper, should I attempt an accurate investigation of these sentiments.

But, let it be remembered, that we are more attracted by those scenes which interest our passions, or gratify our curiosity, than those which delight our fancy: and, so far from being indifferent to the miseries of others, we are, at the time, totally regardless of our own. And let not those on whom the hand of Time has impressed the characters of oracular wisdom, censure with too much acrimony productions which are thus calculated to please the imagination, and interest the heart. They teach us to think, by inuring us to feel: they ventilate the mind by sudden gusts of passion; and prevent the stagnation of thought, by a fresh infusion of dissimilar ideas.

S E L Á M A;

A N

I M I T A T I O N O F O S S I A N.

WHAT soft voice of sorrow is in the breeze? what lovely sun-beam of beauty trembling on the rock? Its bright hair is bathed in showers; and it looks faint and dim, through its mist on the rushy plain. Why art thou alone, maid of the mournful look? The cold dropping rain is on the rocks of Torléna, the blast of the desert lifts thy yellow locks. Let thy steps be in the hall of shells, by the blue winding stream of Clutha: let the harp tremble beneath thy fingers; and the sons of heroes listen to the music of songs.

SHALL my steps be in the hall of shells, and the aged low in the dust? The father of Seláma is low behind this rock, on his bed of wither'd leaves: the thistle's down is strewed over him by the wind, and mixes with his grey hair. Thou art fallen, chief of Etha! without thy fame; and there is none to revenge thy death. But thy daughter will sit, pale, beside thee, till she sinks, a faded flower, upon thy lifeless form. Leave the maid of Clutha, son of the stranger! in the red eye of her tears!

How fell the car-borne Connal, blue-eyed mourner of the rock. Mine arm is not weakened in battle; nor my sword without its fame.

CONNAL was a fire in his youth, that lighten'd through fields of renown: but the flame weakly glimmered through grey ashes of age. His course was like a star moving through the heavens: it walketh in brightness, but leaveth no track behind; its silver path cannot be found in the sky. The strength of Etha is rolled away like a tale of other years; and his eyes have failed. Feeble and dark, he sits in his hall, and hears the distant tread of a stranger's steps; the haughty steps of Tonthormo, from the roar of Duvranno's echoing stream. He stood in the hall like a pillar of darkness, on whose top is the red beam of fire: wide rolled his eyes beneath the gloomy arch of his bent brow; as flames in two caves of a rock, over-hung with the black pine of the desert. They had rolled on Seláma, and he asked the daughter of Connal. Tonthormo! breaker of shields! thou art a meteor of death in war, whose fiery hair streams on the clouds, and the nations are withered beneath its path. Dwell, Tonthormo! amidst thy hundred hills, and listen to thy torrent's

roar; but the soft sigh of the virgins is with the chief of Crono; Hidallan is the dream of Seláma, the dweller of her secret thoughts. A rushing storm in war, a breeze that sighs over the fallen foe; pleasant are thy words of peace, and thy songs at the mossy brook. Thy smiles are like the moonbeams trembling on the waves. Thy voice is the gale of summer that whispers among the reeds of the lake, and awakens the harp of Moilena with all its lightly-trembling strings. Oh that thy calm light was around me! my soul should not fear the gloomy chief of Duvranno. He came with his stately steps.—My shield is before thee, maid of my love! a wall of shelter from the lightning of swords. They fought. Tonthormo bends in all his pride, before the arm of youth. But a voice was in the breast of Hidallan, shall I slay the love of Seláma? Seláma dwells in thy dark bosom, shall my steel enter there? Live, thou storm of war! He gave again his sword. But, careless as he strode away, rage arose in the troubled thoughts of the vanquish'd. He mark'd his time, and sidelong pierced the heart of the generous son of Semo. His fair hair is spread on the dust, his eyes are bent on the trembling beam of Clutha. Farewel, light of my soul! They are closed in darkness. Feeble wast thou then, my father! and in vain didst thou call for help. Thy grey locks are scatter'd, as a wreath of snow on the top of a wither'd trunk; which the boy brushes away with his staff; and careless singeth as he walks. Who shall defend thee, my daughter! said the broken voice of Etha's chief. Fair flower of the desert! the tempest shall rush over thee; and thou shalt be low beneath the foot of the savage son of prey. But I will wither, my father, on thy tomb. Weak and alone I dwell amidst my tears, there is no young warrior to lift the spear, no brother of love! Oh that mine arm were strong! I would rush amidst the battle. Seláma has no friend!

[Pg 51]

BUT Seláma has a friend, said the kindling soul of Reuthamir. I will fight thy battles, lovely daughter of kings; and the sun of Duvranno shall set in blood. But when I return in peace, and the spirits of thy foes are on my sword, meet me with thy smiles of love, maid of Clutha! with thy slow-rolling eyes. Let the soft sound of thy steps be heard in my halls, that the mother of Reuthamir may rejoice. Whence, she will say, is this beam of the distant land? Thou shalt dwell in her bosom.

[Pg 52]

[Pg 53]

My thoughts are with him who is low in the dust, son of Cormac! But lift the spear, thou friend of the unhappy! the light of my soul may return.

HE strode in his rattling arms. Tall, in a gloomy forest, stood the surly strength of Duvranno. Gleaming behind the dark trees was his broad shield; like the moon when it rises in blood, and the dusky clouds sail low, and heavy, athwart its path. Thoughts, like the troubled ocean, rush'd over his soul, and he struck, with his spear, the sounding pine. Starting, he mix'd in battle with the chief of woody Morna. Long was the strife of arms; and the giant sons of the forest trembled at their strokes. At length Tonthormo fell—The sword of Reuthamir wav'd, a blue flame, around him. He bites the ground in rage. His blood is poured, a dark red stream, into Oithona's trembling waves. Joy brighten'd in the soul of Reuthamir; when a young warrior came, with his forward spear. He moved in the light of beauty; but his words were haughty and fierce. Is Tonthormo fallen in blood, the friend of my early years? Die, thou dark-soul'd chief! for never shall Seláma be thine, the maid of his love. Lovely shone her eyes, through tears, in the hall of her grief, when I stood by the chief of Duvranno, in the rising strife of Clutha.

[Pg 54]

RETIRE, thou swelling voice of pride! thy spear is light as the taper reed. Pierce the roes of the desert; and call the hunter to the feast of songs, but speak not of the daughter of Connal, son of the feeble arm! Seláma is the love of heroes.

[Pg 55]

TRY thy strength with the feeble arm, said the rising pride of youth. Thou shalt vanish like a cloud of mist before the sun, when he looks abroad in the power of his brightness, and the storms are rolled away from before his face.

BUT thou thyself didst fall before Reuthamir, in all thy boasting words. As a tall ash of the mountain, when the tempest takes its green head and lays it level on the plain.

COME from thy secret cave, Seláma! thy foes are silent and dark. Thou dove that hidest in the clefts of the rocks! the storm is over and past. Come from thy rock, Seláma! and give thy white hand to the chief who never fled from the face of glory, in all its terrible brightness.

[Pg 56]

She gave her hand, but it was trembling and cold, for the spear was deep in her side. Red, beneath her mail, the current of crimson wandered down her white breast, as the track of blood on Cromla's mountains of snow, when the wounded deer slowly crosses the heath, and the hunters cries are in the breeze. Blest be the spear of Reuthamir! said the faint voice of the lovely, I feel it cold in my heart. Lay me by the son of Semo. Why should I know another love? Raise the tomb of the aged, his thin form shall rejoice, as he sails on a low-hung cloud, and guides the wintry storm. Open your airy halls, spirits of my love!

AND have I quench'd the light which was pleasant to my soul? said the chief of Morna. My steps moved in darkness, why were the words of strife in thy tale? Sorrow, like a cloud, comes over my soul, and shades the joy of mighty deeds. Soft be your rest in the narrow house, children of grief! The breeze in the long whistling grass shall not awaken you. The tempest shall rush over you, and the bulrush bow its head upon your tomb, but silence shall dwell in your habitation; long repose, and the peace of years to come. The voice of the bard shall raise your remembrance in the distant land, and mingle your tale of woe with the murmur of other streams. Often shall the harp send forth a mournful sound, and the tear dwell in the soft eyes of the daughters of Morna.

[Pg 57]

SUCH were the words of Reuthamir, while he raised the tombs of the fallen. Sad were his steps towards the towers of his fathers, as musing he cross'd the dark heath of Lena, and struck, at times, the thistle's beard.

[Pg 58]

AGAINST INCONSISTENCY IN OUR EXPECTATIONS.

“WHAT is more reasonable, than that they who take pains for any thing, should get most in that particular for which they take pains? They have taken pains for power, you for right principles; they for riches, you for a proper use of the appearances of things: see whether they have the advantage of you in that for which you have taken pains, and which they neglect: If they are in power, and you not, why will not you speak the truth to yourself, that you do nothing for the sake of power, but that they do every thing? No, but since I take care to have right principles, it is more reasonable that I should have power. Yes, in respect to what you take care about, your principles. But give up to others the things in which they have taken more care than you. Else it is just as if, because you have right principles, you should think it fit that when you shoot an arrow, you should hit the mark better than an archer, or that you should forge better than a smith.”

[Pg 60]

CARTER’S EPICTETUS.

As most of the unhappiness in the world arises rather from disappointed desires, than from positive evil, it is of the utmost consequence to attain just notions of the laws and order of the universe, that we may not vex ourselves with fruitless wishes, or give way to groundless and unreasonable discontent. The laws of natural philosophy, indeed, are tolerably understood and attended to; and though we may suffer inconveniences, we are seldom disappointed in consequence of them. No man expects to preserve orange-trees in the open air through an English winter; or when he has planted an acorn, to see it become a large oak in a few months. The mind of man naturally yields to necessity; and our wishes soon subside when we see the impossibility of their being gratified. Now, upon an accurate inspection, we shall find, in the moral government of the world, and the order of the intellectual system, laws as determinate fixed and invariable as any in Newton’s Principia. The progress of vegetation is not more certain than the growth of habit; nor is the power of attraction more clearly proved than the force of affection or the influence of example. The man therefore who has well studied the operations of nature in mind as well as matter, will acquire a certain moderation and equity in his claims upon Providence. He never will be disappointed either in himself or others. He will act with precision; and expect that effect and that alone from his efforts, which they are naturally adapted to produce. For want of this, men of merit and integrity often censure the dispositions of Providence for suffering characters they desire to run away with advantages which, they yet know, are purchased by such means as a high and noble spirit could never submit to. If you refuse to pay the price, why expect the purchase? We should consider this world as a great mart of commerce, where fortune exposes to our view various commodities, riches, ease, tranquillity, fame, integrity, knowledge. Every thing is marked at a settled price. Our time, our labour, our ingenuity, is so much ready money which we are to lay out to the best advantage. Examine, compare, choose, reject; but stand to your own judgment; and do not, like children, when you have purchased one thing, repine that you do not possess another which you did not purchase. Such is the force of well-regulated industry, that a steady and vigorous exertion of our faculties, directed to one end, will generally insure success. Would you, for instance, be rich? Do you think that single point worth the sacrificing every thing else to? You may then be rich. Thousands have become so from the lowest beginnings by toil, and patient diligence, and attention to the minutest articles of expence and profit. But you must give up the pleasures of leisure, of a vacant mind, of a free unsuspecting temper. If you preserve your integrity, it must be a coarse-spun and vulgar honesty. Those high and lofty notions of morals which you brought with you from the schools must be considerably lowered, and mixed with the baser alloy of a jealous and worldly-minded prudence. You must learn to do hard, if not unjust things; and for the nice embarrassments of a delicate and ingenuous spirit, it is necessary for you to get rid of them as fast as possible. You must shut your heart against the Muses, and be content to feed your understanding with plain, household truths. In short, you must not attempt to enlarge your ideas, or polish your taste, or refine your sentiments; but must keep on in one beaten track, without turning aside either to the right hand or to the left. “But I cannot submit to drudgery like this—I feel a spirit above it.” ’Tis well: be above it then; only do not repine that you are not rich.

[Pg 61]

[Pg 62]

[Pg 63]

[Pg 64]

[Pg 65]

Is knowledge the pearl of peace? That too may be purchased—by steady application, and long solitary hours of study and reflection. Bestow these, and you shall be wise. “But (says the man of letters) what a hardship is it that many an illiterate fellow who cannot construe the motto of the arms on his coach, shall raise a fortune and make a figure, while I have little more than the common conveniences of life.” *Et tibi magna satis!*—Was it in order to raise a fortune that you consumed the sprightly hours of youth in study and retirement? Was it to be rich that you grew pale over the midnight lamp, and distilled the sweetness from the Greek and Roman spring? You have then mistaken your path, and ill employed your industry. “What reward have I then for all my labours?” What reward! A large comprehensive soul, well purged from vulgar fears, and perturbations, and prejudices; able to comprehend and interpret the works of man—of God. A rich, flourishing, cultivated mind, pregnant with inexhaustible stores of entertainment and reflection. A perpetual spring of fresh ideas; and the conscious dignity of superior intelligence. Good heaven! and what reward can you ask besides?

[Pg 66]

“BUT is it not some reproach upon the œconomy of Providence that such a one, who is a mean

dirty fellow, should have amassed wealth enough to buy half a nation?" Not in the least. He made himself a mean dirty fellow for that very end. He has paid his health, his conscience, his liberty for it; and will you envy him his bargain? Will you hang your head and blush in his presence because he outshines you in equipage and show? Lift up your brow with a noble confidence, and say to yourself, I have not these things, it is true; but it is because I have not sought, because I have not desired them; it is because I possess something better. I have chosen my lot. I am content and satisfied.

[Pg 67]

YOU are a modest man—You love quiet and independence, and have a delicacy and reserve in your temper which renders it impossible for you to elbow your way in the world, and be the herald of your own merits. Be content then with a modest retirement, with the esteem of your intimate friends, with the praises of a blameless heart, and a delicate ingenuous spirit; but resign the splendid distinctions of the world to those who can better scramble for them.

The man whose tender sensibility of conscience and strict regard to the rules of morality makes him scrupulous and fearful of offending, is often heard to complain of the disadvantages he lies under in every path of honour and profit. "Could I but get over some nice points, and conform to the practice and opinion of those about me, I might stand as fair a chance as others for dignities and preferment." And why can you not? What hinders you from discarding this troublesome scrupulosity of yours which stands so grievously in your way? If it be a small thing to enjoy a healthful mind, found at the very core, that does not shrink from the keenest inspection; inward freedom from remorse and perturbation; unsullied whiteness and simplicity of manners; a genuine integrity

[Pg 68]

Pure in the last recesses of the mind;

if you think these advantages an inadequate recompence for what you resign, dismiss your scruples this instant, and be a slave-merchant, a parasite, or—what you please.

[Pg 69]

If these be motives weak, break off betimes;

and as you have not spirit to assert the dignity of virtue, be wise enough not to forego the emoluments of vice.

I MUCH admire the spirit of the ancient philosophers, in that they never attempted, as our moralists often do, to lower the tone of philosophy, and make it confident with all the indulgences of indolence and sensuality. They never thought of having the bulk of mankind for their disciples; but kept themselves as distinct as possible from a worldly life. They plainly told men what sacrifices were required, and what advantages they were which might be expected.

[Pg 70]

Si virtus hoc una potest dare, fortis omissis
Hoc age deliciis ---- ---- ----

If you would be a philosopher these are the terms. You must do thus and thus: There is no other way. If not, go and be one of the vulgar.

THERE is no one quality gives so much dignity to a character as consistency of conduct. Even if a man's pursuits be wrong and unjustifiable, yet if they are prosecuted with steadiness and vigour, we cannot withhold our admiration. The most characteristic mark of a great mind is to choose some one important object, and pursue it through life. It was this made Cæsar a great man. His object was ambition; he pursued it steadily, and was always ready to sacrifice to it every interfering passion or inclination.

THERE is a pretty passage in one of Lucian's dialogues, where Jupiter complains to Cupid that though he has had so many intrigues, he was never sincerely beloved. In order to be loved, says Cupid, you must lay aside your ægis and your thunder-bolts, and you must curl and perfume your hair, and place a garland on your head, and walk with a soft step, and assume a winning obsequious deportment. But, replied Jupiter, I am not willing to resign so much of my dignity. Then, returns Cupid, leave off desiring to be loved—He wanted to be Jupiter and Adonis at the same time.

[Pg 71]

It must be confessed, that men of genius are of all others most inclined to make these unreasonable claims. As their relish for enjoyment is strong, their views large and comprehensive, and they feel themselves lifted above the common bulk of mankind, they are apt to slight that natural reward of praise and admiration which is ever largely paid to distinguished abilities; and to expect to be called forth to public notice and favour: without considering that their talents are commonly very unfit for active life; that their eccentricity and turn for speculation disqualifies them for the business of the world, which is best carried on by men of moderate genius; and that society is not obliged to reward any one who is not useful to it. The Poets have been a very unreasonable race, and have often complained loudly of the neglect of genius and the ingratitude of the age. The tender and pensive Cowley, and the elegant Shenstone, had their minds tingured by this discontent; and even the sublime melancholy of Young was too much owing to the stings of disappointed ambition.

[Pg 72]

THE moderation we have been endeavouring to inculcate will likewise prevent much mortification and disgust in our commerce with mankind. As we ought not to wish in ourselves, so neither should we expect in our friends contrary qualifications. Young and sanguine, when we enter the world, and feel our affections drawn forth by any particular excellence in a character, we immediately give it credit for all others; and are beyond measure disgusted when we come to discover, as we soon must discover, the defects in the other side of the balance. But nature is

[Pg 73]

much more frugal than to heap together all manner of shining qualities in one glaring mass. Like a judicious painter she endeavours to preserve a certain unity of stile and colouring in her pieces. Models of absolute perfection are only to be met with in romance; where exquisite beauty and brilliant wit, and profound judgment, and immaculate virtue, are all blended together to adorn some favourite character. As an anatomist knows that the racer cannot have the strength and muscles of the draught-horse; and that winged men, gryffons, and mermaids must be mere creatures of the imagination; so the philosopher is sensible that there are combinations of moral qualities which never can take place but in idea. There is a different air and complexion in characters as well as in faces, though perhaps each equally beautiful; and the excellencies of one cannot be transferred to the other. Thus if one man possesses a stoical apathy of soul, acts independent of the opinion of the world, and fulfils every duty with mathematical exactness, you must not expect that man to be greatly influenced by the weakness of pity, or the partialities of friendship: you must not be offended that he does not fly to meet you after a short absence; or require from him the convivial spirit and honest effusions of a warm, open, susceptible heart. If another is remarkable for a lively active zeal, inflexible integrity, a strong indignation against vice, and freedom in reproving it, he will probably have some little bluntness in his address not altogether suitable to polished life; he will want the winning arts of conversation; he will disgust by a kind of haughtiness and negligence in his manner, and often hurt the delicacy of his acquaintance with harsh and disagreeable truths.

[Pg 74]

[Pg 75]

WE usually say—that man is a genius, *but* he has some whims and oddities—such a one has a very general knowledge, *but* he is superficial; &c. Now in all such cases we should speak more rationally did we substitute *therefore* for *but*. He is a genius, *therefore* he is whimsical; and the like.

[Pg 76]

IT is the fault of the present age, owing to the freer commerce that different ranks and professions now enjoy with each other, that characters are not marked with sufficient strength: the several classes run too much into one another. We have fewer pedants, it is true, but we have fewer striking originals. Every one is expected to have such a tincture of general knowledge as is incompatible with going deep into any science; and such a conformity to fashionable manners as checks the free workings of the ruling passion, and gives an insipid sameness to the face of society, under the idea of polish and regularity.

THERE is a cast of manners peculiar and becoming to each age, sex, and profession; one, therefore, should not throw out illiberal and common-place censures against another. Each is perfect in its kind. A woman as a woman: a tradesman as a tradesman. We are often hurt by the brutality and sluggish conceptions of the vulgar; not considering that some there must be to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, and that cultivated genius, or even any great refinement and delicacy in their moral feelings, would be a real misfortune to them.

[Pg 77]

LET us then study the philosophy of the human mind. The man who is master of this science, will know what to expect from every one. From this man, wise advice; from that, cordial sympathy; from another, casual entertainment. The passions and inclinations of others are his tools, which he can use with as much precision as he would the mechanical powers; and he can as readily make allowance for the workings of vanity, or the bias of self-interest in his friends, as for the power of friction, or the irregularities of the needle.

[Pg 78]

[Pg 79]

THE

CANAL AND THE BROOK.

A N A P O L O G U E.

A DELIGHTFULLY pleasant evening succeeding a sultry summer-day, invited me to take a solitary walk; and leaving the dust of the highway, I fell into a path which led along a pleasant little valley watered by a small meandering brook. The meadow-ground on its banks had been lately mown, and the new grass was springing up with a lively verdure. The brook was hid in several places by shrubs that grew on each side, and intermingled their branches. The sides of the valley were roughened by small irregular thickets; and the whole scene had an air of solitude and retirement, uncommon in the neighbourhood of a populous town. The Duke of Bridgewater's canal crossed the valley, high raised on a mound of earth, which preserved a level with the elevated ground on each side. An arched road was carried under it, beneath which the brook that ran along the valley was conveyed by a subterraneous passage. I threw myself upon a green bank, shaded by a leafy thicket, and resting my head upon my hand, after a welcome indolence had overcome my senses, I saw, with the eyes of fancy, the following scene.

[Pg 80]

THE firm-built side of the aqueduct suddenly opened, and a gigantic form issued forth, which I soon discovered to be the *Genius of the Canal*. He was clad in a close garment of a russet hue. A mural crown, indented with battlements, surrounded his brow. His naked feet were discoloured with clay. On his left shoulder he bore a huge pick-ax; and in his right hand he held certain

[Pg 81]

instruments, used in surveying and levelling. His looks were thoughtful, and his features harsh. The breach through which he proceeded, instantly closed; and with a heavy tread he advanced into the valley. As he approached the brook, the *Deity of the Stream* arose to meet him. He was habited in a light green mantle, and the clear drops fell from his dark hair, which was encircled with a wreath of water lily, interwoven with sweet scented flag. An angling rod supported his steps. The Genius of the Canal eyed him with a contemptuous look, and in a hoarse voice thus began:

[Pg 82]

"HENCE, ignoble rill! with thy scanty tribute to thy lord, the Mersey; nor thus waste thy almost exhausted urn in lingering windings along the vale. Feeble as thine aid is, it will not be unacceptable to that master stream himself; for, as I lately crossed his channel, I perceived his sands loaded with stranded vessels. I saw, and pitied him, for undertaking a task to which he is unequal. But thou, whose languid current is obscured by weeds, and interrupted by mishapen pebbles; who lovest thyself in endless mazes, remote from any sound, but thy own idle gurgling; how canst thou support an existence so contemptible and useless? For me, the noblest child of art, who hold my unremitting course from hill to hill, over vales and rivers; who pierce the solid rock for my passage, and connect unknown lands with distant seas; wherever I appear I am viewed with astonishment, and exulting commerce hails my waves. Behold my channel thronged with capacious vessels for the conveyance of merchandise, and splendid barges for the use and pleasure of travellers; my banks crowned with airy bridges and huge warehouses, and echoing with the busy sounds of industry. Pay then the homage due from sloth and obscurity to grandeur and utility."

[Pg 83]

"I READILY acknowledge," replied the Deity of the Brook, in a modest accent, "the superior magnificence and more extensive utility of which you so proudly boast; yet, in my humble walk, I am not void of a praise, less shining, but not less solid than yours. The nymph of this peaceful valley, rendered more fertile and beautiful by my stream; the neighbouring sylvan deities, to whose pleasure I contribute, will pay a grateful testimony to my merit. The windings of my course, which you so much blame, serve to diffuse over a greater extent of ground the refreshment of my waters; and the lovers of nature and the Muses, who are fond of straying on my banks, are better pleased that the line of beauty marks my way, than if, like yours, it were directed in a straight, unvaried line. They prize the irregular wildness with which I am decked, as the charms of beauteous simplicity. What you call the weeds which darken and obscure my waves, afford to the botanist a pleasing speculation of the works of nature; and the poet and painter think the lustre of my stream greatly improved by glittering through them. The pebbles which diversify my bottom, and make these ripples in my current, are pleasing objects to the eye of taste; and my simple murmurs are more melodious to the learned ear, than all the rude noises of your banks, or even the music that resounds from your stately barges. If the unfeeling sons of wealth and commerce judge of me by the mere standard of usefulness, I may claim no undistinguished rank. While your waters, confined in deep channels, or lifted above the valleys, roll on, a useless burden to the fields, and only subservient to the drudgery of bearing temporary merchandises, my stream will bestow unvarying fertility on the meadows, during the summers of future ages. Yet I scorn to submit my honours to the decision of those, whose hearts are shut up to taste and sentiment. Let me appeal to nobler judges. The philosopher and poet, by whose labours the human mind is elevated and refined, and opened to pleasures beyond the conception of vulgar souls, will acknowledge that the elegant deities who preside over simple and natural beauty, have inspired them with their charming and instructive ideas. The sweetest and most majestic bard that ever sung, has taken a pride in owning his affection to woods and streams; and while the stupendous monuments of Roman grandeur, the columns which pierced the skies, and the aqueducts which poured their waves over mountains and valleys, are sunk in oblivion, the gently winding Mincius still retains his tranquil honours. And when thy glories, proud Genius! are lost and forgotten; when the flood of commerce, which now supplies thy urn, is turned into another course, and has left thy channel dry and desolate; the softly-flowing Avon shall still murmur in song, and his banks receive the homage of all who are beloved by Phoebus and the Muses."

[Pg 84]

[Pg 85]

[Pg 86]

[Pg 87]

[Pg 88]

O N

MONASTIC INSTITUTIONS.

I HAPPENED the other day to take a solitary walk amongst the venerable ruins of an old Abbey. The stillness and solemnity of the place were favourable to thought, and naturally led me to a train of ideas relative to the scene; when, like a good protestant, I began to indulge a secret triumph in the ruin of so many structures which I had always considered as the haunts of ignorance and superstition.

[Pg 89]

YE are fallen, said I, ye dark and gloomy mansions of mistaken zeal, where the proud priest and lazy monk fattened upon the riches of the land, and crept like vermin from their cells to spread their poisonous doctrines through the nation, and disturb the peace of kings. Obscure in their origin, but daring and ambitious in their guilt! See how the pure light of heaven is clouded by the

dim glass of the arched window, stained with the gaudy colours of monkish tales and legendary fiction; fit emblem how reluctantly they admitted the fairer light of truth amidst these dark recesses, and how much they have debased its genuine lustre! The low cells, the long and narrow aisles, the gloomy arches, the damp and secret caverns which wind beneath the hollow ground, far from impressing on the mind the idea of the God of truth and love, seem only fit for those dark places of the earth in which are the habitations of cruelty. These massy stones and scattered reliques of the vast edifice, like the large bones and gigantic armour of a once formidable ruffian, produce emotions of mingled dread and exultation. Farewel, ye once venerated seats! enough of you remains, and may it always remain, to remind us from what we have escaped, and make posterity for ever thankful for this fairer age of liberty and light.

[Pg 90]

SUCH were for a while my meditations; but it is cruel to insult a fallen enemy, and I gradually fell into a different train of thought. I began to consider whether something might not be advanced in favour of these institutions during the barbarous ages in which they flourished; and though they have been productive of much mischief and superstition, whether they might not have spread the glimmering of a feeble ray of knowledge, through that thick night which once involved the western hemisphere.

[Pg 91]

AND where, indeed, could the precious remains of classical learning, and the divine monuments of ancient taste, have been safely lodged amidst the ravages of that age of ferocity and rapine which succeeded the desolation of the Roman empire, except in sanctuaries like these, consecrated by the superstition of the times beyond their intrinsic merit? The frequency of wars, and the licentious cruelty with which they were conducted, left neither the hamlet of the peasant nor the castle of the baron free from depredation; but the church and monastery generally remained inviolate. There Homer and Aristotle were obliged to shroud their heads from the rage of gothic ignorance; and there the sacred records of divine truth were preserved, like treasure hid in the earth in troublesome times, safe, but unenjoyed. Some of the barbarous nations were converted before their conquests, and most of them soon after their settlement in the countries they over-ran. Those buildings which their new faith taught them to venerate, afforded a shelter for those valuable manuscripts, which must otherwise have been destroyed in the common wreck. At the revival of learning, they were produced from their dormitories. A copy of the pandect of Justinian, that valuable remain of Roman law, which first gave to Europe the idea of a more perfect jurisprudence, and gave men a relish for a new and important study, was discovered in a monastery of Amalphi. Most of the classics were recovered by the same means; and to this it is owing, to the books and learning preserved in these repositories, that we were not obliged to begin anew, and trace every art by slow and uncertain steps from its first origin. Science, already full grown and vigorous, awaked as from a trance, shook her pinions, and soon soared to the heights of knowledge.

[Pg 92]

[Pg 93]

NOR was she entirely idle during her recess; at least we cannot but confess that what little learning remained in the world was amongst the priests and religious orders. Books, before the invention of paper, and the art of printing, were so dear, that few private persons possessed any. The only libraries were in convents; and the monks were often employed in transcribing manuscripts, which was a very tedious, and at that time a very necessary task. It was frequently enjoined as a penance for some slight offence, or given as an exercise to the younger part of the community. The monks were obliged by their rules to spend some stated hours every day in reading and study; nor was any one to be chosen abbot without a competent share of learning. They were the only historians; and though their accounts be interwoven with many a legendary tale, and darkened by much superstition, still they are better than no histories at all; and we cannot but think ourselves obliged to them for transmitting to us, in any dress, the annals of their country.

[Pg 94]

THEY were likewise almost the sole instructors of youth. Towards the end of the tenth century, there were no schools in Europe but the monasteries, and those which belonged to episcopal residences; nor any masters but the Benedictines. It is true, their course of education extended no further than what they called the seven liberal arts, and these were taught in a very dry and uninteresting manner. But this was the genius of the age, and it should not be imputed to them as a reproach that they did not teach well, when no one taught better. We are guilty of great unfairness when we compare the school-men with the philosophers of a more enlightened age: we should contrast them with those of their own times; with a high-constable of France who could not read; with kings who made the sign of the cross in confirmation of their charters, because they could not write their names; with a whole people without the least glimmering of taste or literature. Whatever was their real knowledge, there was a much greater difference between men of learning, and the bulk of the nation, at that time, than there is at present; and certainly, some of the disciples of those schools who, though now fallen into disrepute, were revered in their day by the names of the subtle, or the angelic doctors, shewed an acuteness and strength of genius, which, if properly directed, would have gone far in philosophy; and they only failed because their enquiries were not the objects of the human powers. Had they exercised half that acuteness on facts and experiments, they had been truly great men. However, there were not wanting some, even in the darkest ages, whose names will be always remembered with pleasure by the lovers of science. Alcuin, the preceptor of Charlemagne, the first who introduced a taste for polite literature into France, and the chief instrument that prince made use of in his noble endeavours for the encouragement of learning; to whom the universities of Soissons, Tours and Paris owe their origin: the historians, Mathew Paris, William of Malmesbury; Savanarola; the elegant and unfortunate Abelard; and, to crown the rest, the English Franciscan, Roger Bacon.

[Pg 95]

[Pg 96]

[Pg 97]

It may be here observed, that forbidding the vulgar tongue in the offices of devotion, and in

reading the scriptures, though undoubtedly a great corruption in the Christian Church, was of infinite service to the interests of learning. When the ecclesiastics had locked up their religion in a foreign tongue, they would take care not to lose the key. This gave an importance to the learned languages; and every scholar could not only read, but wrote and disputed in Latin, which without such a motive would probably have been no more studied than the Chinese. And at a time when the modern languages of Europe were yet unformed and barbarous, Latin was of great use as a kind of universal tongue, by which learned men might converse and correspond with each other.

[Pg 98]

INDEED the monks were almost the only set of men who had leisure or opportunity to pay the least attention to literary subjects. A learned education (and a very little went to that title) was reckoned peculiar to the religious. It was almost esteemed a blemish on the savage and martial character of the gentry, to have any tincture of letters. A man, therefore, of a studious and retired turn, averse to quarrels, and not desirous of the fierce and sanguinary glory of those times, beheld in the cloister a peaceful and honourable sanctuary; where, without the reproach of cowardice, or danger of invasion, he might devote himself to learning, associate with men of his own turn, and have free access to libraries and manuscripts. In this enlightened and polished age, where learning is diffused through every rank, and many a merchant's clerk possesses more real knowledge than half the literati of that æra, we can scarcely conceive how gross an ignorance overspread those times, and how totally all useful learning might have been lost amongst us, had it not been for an order of men, veiled with peculiar privileges, and protected by even a superstitious degree of reverence.

[Pg 99]

THUS the Muses, with their attendant arts, in strange disguise indeed, and uncouth trappings, took refuge in the peaceful gloom of the convent. Statuary carved a madonna or a crucifix; Painting illuminated a missal; Eloquence made the panegyric of a saint; and History composed a legend. Yet still they breathed, and were ready, at any happier period, to emerge from obscurity with all their native charms and undiminished lustre.

[Pg 100]

BUT there were other views in which those who devoted themselves to a monastic life might be supposed useful to society. They were often employed either in cultivating their gardens, or in curious mechanical works; as indeed the nuns are still famous for many elegant and ingenious manufactures. By the constant communication they had with those of their own order, and with their common head at Rome, they maintained some intercourse between nations at a time when travelling was dangerous, and commerce had not, as now, made the most distant parts of the globe familiar to each other: and they kept up a more intimate bond of union amongst learned men of all countries, who would otherwise have been secluded from all knowledge of each other. A monk might travel with more convenience than any one else; his person was safer, and he was sure of meeting with proper accommodations. The intercourse with Rome must have been peculiarly favourable to these northern nations; as Italy for a long time led the way in every improvement of politeness or literature: and if we imported their superstition, we likewise imported their manufactures, their knowledge, and their taste. Thus Alfred sent for Italian monks, when he wanted to civilize his people, and introduce amongst them some tincture of letters. It may likewise be presumed that they tempered the rigour of monarchy. Indeed they, as well as the sovereigns, endeavoured to enslave the people; but subjection was not likely to be so abject and unlimited where the object of it was divided, and each showed by turns that the other might be opposed. It must have been of service to the cause of liberty to have a set of men, whose laws, privileges, and immunities the most daring kings were afraid to trample on; and this, before a more enlightened spirit of freedom had arisen, might have its effect in preventing the states of christendom from falling into such entire slavery as the Asiatics.

[Pg 101]

[Pg 102]

SUCH an order would in some degree check the excessive regard paid to birth. A man of mean origin and obscure parentage saw himself excluded from almost every path of secular preferment, and almost treated as a being of an inferior species by the high and haughty spirit of the gentry; but he was at liberty to aspire to the highest dignities of the church; and there have been many who, like Sextus V. and cardinal Wolsey, have by their industry and personal merit alone raised themselves to a level with kings.

[Pg 103]

IT should likewise be remembered that many of the orders were charitable institutions; as the *knights of faith and charity* in the thirteenth century, who were associated for the purpose of suppressing those bands of robbers which infested the public roads in France; the *brethren of the order of the redemption*, for redeeming slaves from the Mahometans; the *order of St. Anthony*, first established for the relief of the poor under certain disorders; and the *brethren and sisters of the pious and christian schools*, for educating poor children. These supplied the place of hospitals and other such foundations, which are now established on the broader basis of public benevolence. To bind up the wounds of the stranger, was peculiarly the office of the inhabitants of the convent; and they often shared the charities they received. The exercise of hospitality is still their characteristic, and must have been of particular use formerly, when there were not the conveniences and accommodations for travelling which we now enjoy. The learned stranger was always sure of an agreeable residence amongst them; and as they all understood Latin, they served him for interpreters, and introduced him to a sight of whatever was curious or valuable in the countries which he visited. They checked the spirit of savage fierceness, to which our warlike ancestors were so prone, with the mildness and sanctity of religious influences; they preserved some respect to law and order, and often decided controversies by means less bloody than the sword, though confessedly more superstitious.

[Pg 104]

A PROOF that these institutions had a favourable aspect towards civilization, may be drawn from a late history of Ireland. "Soon after the introduction of christianity into that kingdom," says Dr.

[Pg 105]

Leland, "the monks fixed their habitations in deserts, which they cultivated with their own hands, and rendered the most delightful spots in the kingdom. These deserts became well policed cities, and it is remarkable enough, that to the monks we owe so useful an institution in Ireland as the bringing great numbers together into one civil community. In these cities the monks set up schools, and taught, not only the youth of Ireland, but the neighbouring nations; furnishing them also with books. They became umpires between contending chiefs, and when they could not confine them within the bounds of reason and religion, at least terrified them by denouncing divine vengeance against their excesses."

[Pg 106]

LET it be considered too, that when the minds of men began to open, some of the most eminent reformers sprung from the bosom of the church, and even of the convent. It was not the laity who began to think. The ecclesiastics were the first to perceive the errors they had introduced. The church was reformed from within, not from without; and like the silk-worm, when ripened in their cells to maturer vigour and perfection, they pierced the cloud themselves had spun, and within which they had so long been enveloped.

AND let not the good protestant be too much startled if I here venture to insinuate, that the monasteries were schools of some high and respectable virtues. Poverty, chastity, and a renunciation of the world, were certainly intended in the first plan of these institutions; and though, from the unavoidable frailty of human nature, they were not always observed, certain it is, that many individuals amongst them have been striking examples of the self-denying virtues: and as the influence they acquired was only built upon the voluntary homage of the mind, it may be presumed such an ascendancy was not originally gained without some species of merit. The fondness for monkery is easily deduced from some of the best principles in the human heart. It was indeed necessity, that in the third century first drove the christians to shelter themselves from the Decian persecution in the solitary deserts of Thebais, but the humour soon spread, and numbers under the name of hermits, or eremites, secluded themselves from the commerce

[Pg 107]

of mankind, choosing the wildest solitudes, living in caves and hollows of the rocks, and subsisting on such roots and herbs as the ground afforded them. About the fourth century they were gathered into communities, and increased with surprising rapidity. It was then that, by a great and sudden revolution, the fury of persecution had ceased, and the governing powers were become friendly to christianity. But the agitation of men's minds did not immediately subside with the storm. The christians had so long experienced the necessity of resigning all the enjoyments of life, and were so detached from every tie which might interfere with the profession of their faith, that upon a more favourable turn of affairs they hardly dared open their minds to pleasurable emotions. They thought the life of a good man must be a continual warfare between mind and body; and having been long used to see ease and safety on the one side, and virtue on the other, no wonder if the association was so strong in their minds, as to suggest the necessity of voluntary mortification, and lead them to inflict those sufferings upon themselves, which they no longer apprehended from others. They had continually experienced the amazing effects of christianity in supporting its followers under hardship, tortures, and death; and they thought little of its influence in regulating the common behaviour of life, if it produced none of those great exertions they had been used to contemplate. They were struck with the change from heathen licentiousness to the purity of the gospel; and thought they could never be far enough removed from that bondage of the senses which it had just cost them so violent a struggle to escape. The minds of men were working with newly-received opinions, not yet mellowed into a rational faith; and the young converts, astonished at the grandeur and sublimity of the doctrines which then first entered their hearts with irresistible force, thought them worthy to engross their whole attention. The mystic dreams of the Platonist mingled with the enthusiasm of the martyr; and it soon became the prevailing opinion, that silence, solitude, and contemplation, were necessary for the reception of divine truth. Mistaken ideas prevailed of a purity and perfection far superior to the rules of common life, which was only to be attained by those who denied themselves all the indulgences of sense; and thus the ascetic severities of the cloister succeeded in some degree to the philosophic poverty of the Cynic school, and the lofty virtues of the Stoic porch.

[Pg 108]

INDEED, it is now the prevailing taste in morals to decry every observance which has the least appearance of rigour; and to insist only on the softer virtues. But let it be remembered, that self-command and self-denial are as necessary to the practice of benevolence, charity, and compassion, as to any other duty; that it is impossible to live to others without denying ourselves; and that the man who has not learned to curb his appetites and passions is ill qualified for those sacrifices which the friendly affections are continually requiring of him. The man who has that one quality of self-command will find little difficulty in the practice of any other duty; as, on the contrary, he who has it not, tho' possessed of the gentlest feelings, and most refined sensibilities, will soon find his benevolence sink into a mere companionable easiness of temper, neither useful to others nor happy for himself. A noble enthusiasm is sometimes of use to show how far human nature can go. Though it may not be proper, or desirable, that numbers should seclude themselves from the common duties and ordinary avocations of life, for the austerer lessons of the cloister, yet it is not unuseful that some should push their virtues to even a romantic height; and it is encouraging to reflect in the hour of temptation, that the love of ease, the aversion to pain, every appetite and passion, and even the strongest propensities in our nature, have been controuled; that the empire of the mind over the body has been asserted in its fullest extent; and that there have been men in all ages capable of voluntarily renouncing all the world offers, voluntarily suffering all it dreads, and living independent, and unconnected with it. Nor was it a small advantage, or ill calculated to support the dignity of science, that a learned man might be respectable in a coarse gown, a leathern girdle, and bare-footed. Cardinal Ximenes preserved the

[Pg 109]

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[Pg 110]

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[Pg 111]

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[Pg 112]

[Pg 113]

severe simplicity of a convent amidst the pomp and luxury of palaces; and to those who thus thought it becoming in the highest stations to affect the appearance of poverty, the reality surely could not be very dreadful.

THERE is yet another light in which these institutions may be considered. It is surely not improper to provide a retreat for those who, stained by some deep and enormous crime, wish to expiate by severe and uncommon penitence those offences which render them unworthy of freer commerce with the world. Repentance is never so secure from a relapse as when it breaks off at once from every former connection, and entering upon a new course of life, bids adieu to every object that might revive the idea of temptations which have once prevailed. In these solemn retreats, the stillness and acknowledged sanctity of the place, with the striking novelty of every thing around them, might have great influence in calming the passions; might break the force of habit, and suddenly induce a new turn of thinking. There are likewise afflictions so overwhelming to humanity, that they leave no relish in the mind for any thing else than to enjoy its own melancholy in silence and solitude; and to a heart torn with remorse, or opprest with sorrow, the gloomy severities of La Trappe are really a relief. Retirement is also the favourite wish of age. Many a statesman, and many a warrior, sick of the bustle of that world to which they had devoted the prime of their days, have longed for some quiet cell, where, like cardinal Wolsey, or Charles the Fifth, they might shroud their grey hairs, and lose sight of the follies with which they had been too much tainted.

[Pg 114]

[Pg 115]

THOUGH there is, perhaps, less to plead for immuring beauty in a cloister, and confining that part of the species who are formed to shine in families and sweeten society, to the barren duties and austere discipline of a monastic life; yet circumstances might occur, in which they would, even to a woman, be a welcome refuge. A young female, whom accident or war had deprived of her natural protectors, must, in an age of barbarism, be peculiarly exposed and helpless. A convent offered her an asylum where she might be safe, at least, if not happy; and add to the consciousness of unviolated virtue the flattering dreams of angelic purity and perfection. There were orders, as well amongst the women as the men, instituted for charitable purposes, such as that of the *Virgins of love*, or *Daughters of mercy*, founded in 1660, for the relief of the sick poor; with others for instructing their children. These must have been peculiarly suited to the softness and compassion of the sex, and to this it is no doubt owing, that still, in catholic countries, ladies of the highest rank often visit the hospitals and houses of the poor; waiting on them with the most tender assiduity, and performing such offices as our protestant ladies would be shocked at the thoughts of. We should also consider, that most of the females who now take the veil, are such as have no agreeable prospects in life. Why should not these be allowed to quit a world which will never miss them? It is easier to retire from the public, than to support its disregard. The convent is to them a shelter from poverty and neglect. Their little community grows dear to them. The equality which subsists among these sisters of obscurity, the similarity of their fate, the peace, the leisure they enjoy, give rise to the most endearing friendships. Their innocence is shielded by the simplicity of their life from even the idea of ill; and they are flattered by the notion of a voluntary renunciation of pleasures, which, probably, had they continued in the world, they would have had little share in.

[Pg 116]

[Pg 117]

AFTER all that can be said, we have reason enough to rejoice that the superstitions of former times are now fallen into disrepute. What might be a palliative at one time, soon became a crying evil in itself. When the fuller day of science began to dawn, the monkish orders were willing to exclude its brightness, that the dim lamp might still glimmer in their cell. Their growing vices have rendered them justly odious to society, and they seem in a fair way of being for ever abolished. But may we not still hope that the world was better than it would have been without them; and that he, who knows to bring good out of evil, has made them, in their day, subservient to some useful purposes. The corruptions of christianity, which have been accumulating for so many ages, seem to be now gradually clearing away, and some future period may perhaps exhibit our religion in all its native simplicity.

[Pg 118]

So the pure limpid stream, when foul with stains
Of rushing torrents, and descending rains;
Works itself clear, and as it runs refines,
Till by degrees the floating mirror shines;
Reflects each flower that on its borders grows,
And a new heaven in its fair bosom shews.

[Pg 119]

ON THE

P L E A S U R E

DERIVED FROM

OBJECTS OF TERROR;

S I R B E R T R A N D,

A F R A G M E N T.

THAT the exercise of our benevolent feelings, as called forth by the view of human afflictions, should be a source of pleasure, cannot appear wonderful to one who considers that relation between the moral and natural system of man, which has connected a degree of satisfaction with every action or emotion productive of the general welfare. The painful sensation immediately arising from a scene of misery, is so much softened and alleviated by the reflex sense of self-approbation attending virtuous sympathy, that we find, on the whole, a very exquisite and refined pleasure remaining, which makes us desirous of again being witnesses to such scenes, instead of flying from them with disgust and horror. It is obvious how greatly such a provision must conduce to the ends of mutual support and assistance. But the apparent delight with which we dwell upon objects of pure terror, where our moral feelings are not in the least concerned, and no passion seems to be excited but the depressing one of fear, is a paradox of the heart, much more difficult of solution. [Pg 120]

THE reality of this source of pleasure seems evident from daily observation. The greediness with which the tales of ghosts and goblins, of murders, earthquakes, fires, shipwrecks, and all the most terrible disasters attending human life, are devoured by every ear, must have been generally remarked. Tragedy, the most favourite work of fiction, has taken a full share of those scenes; "it has sapt full with horrors," and has, perhaps, been more indebted to them for public admiration than to its tender and pathetic part. The ghost of Hamlet, Macbeth descending into the witches' cave, and the tent scene in Richard, command as forcibly the attention of our souls as the parting of Jaffier and Belvidera, the fall of Wolsey, or the death of Shore. The inspiration of *terror* was by the ancient critics assigned as the peculiar province of tragedy; and the Greek and Roman tragedians have introduced some extraordinary personages for this purpose: not only the shades of the dead, but the furies, and other fabulous inhabitants of the infernal regions. Collins, in his most poetical ode to Fear, has finely enforced this idea. [Pg 121]

Tho' gentle Pity claim her mingled part,
Yet all the thunders of the scene are thine.

THE old Gothic romance and the Eastern tale, with their genii, giants, enchantments, and transformations, however a refined critic may censure them as absurd and extravagant, will ever retain a most powerful influence on the mind, and interest the reader, independently of all peculiarity of taste. Thus the great Milton, who had a strong bias to these wildnesses of the imagination, has, with striking effect, made the stories "of forests and enchantments drear," a favourite subject with his *Penseroso*; and had undoubtedly their awakening images strong upon his mind when he breaks out, [Pg 122]

Call up him that left half-told
The story of Cambuscan bold; &c.

How are we then to account for the pleasure derived from such objects? I have often been led to imagine that there is a deception in these cases; and that the avidity with which we attend is not a proof of our receiving real pleasure. The pain of suspense, and the irresistible desire of satisfying curiosity, when once raised, will account for our eagerness to go quite through an adventure, though we suffer actual pain during the whole course of it. We rather choose to suffer the smart pang of a violent emotion than the uneasy craving of an unsatisfied desire. That this principle, in many instances, may involuntarily carry us through what we dislike, I am convinced from experience. This is the impulse which renders the poorest and most insipid narrative interesting when once we get fairly into it; and I have frequently felt it with regard to our modern novels, which, if lying on my table, and taken up in an idle hour, have led me through the most tedious and disgusting pages, while, like Pistol eating his leek, I have swallowed and execrated to the end. And it will not only force us through dulness, but through actual torture—through the relation of a Damien's execution, or an inquisitor's act of faith. When children, therefore, listen with pale and mute attention to the frightful stories of apparitions, we are not, perhaps, to imagine that they are in a state of enjoyment, any more than the poor bird which is dropping into the mouth of the rattlesnake; they are chained by the ears, and fascinated by curiosity. This solution, however, does not satisfy me with respect to the well-wrought scenes of artificial terror which are formed by a sublime and vigorous imagination. Here, though we know before-hand what to expect, we enter into them with eagerness, in quest of a pleasure already experienced. This is the pleasure constantly attached to the excitement of surprise from new and wonderful objects. A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch; and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced, of "forms unseen, and mightier far than we," our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. Passion and fancy co-operating, elevate the soul to its [Pg 124]

[Pg 125]

highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement.

HENCE, the more wild, fanciful, and extraordinary are the circumstances of a scene of horror, the more pleasure we receive from it; and where they are too near common nature, though violently borne by curiosity through the adventure, we cannot repeat it, or reflect on it, without an over-balance of pain. In the *Arabian Nights* are many most striking examples of the terrible, joined with the marvellous: the story of Aladdin, and the travels of Sinbad, are particularly excellent. The *Castle of Otranto* is a very spirited modern attempt upon the same plan of mixed terror, adapted to the model of Gothic romance. The best conceived, and the most strongly worked-up scene of mere natural horror that I recollect, is in Smolett's *Ferdinand Count Fathom*; where the hero, entertained in a lone house in a forest, finds a corpse just slaughtered in the room where he is sent to sleep, and the door of which is locked upon him. It may be amusing for the reader to compare his feelings upon these, and from thence form his opinion of the justness of my theory. The following fragment, in which both these manners are attempted to be in some degree united, is offered to entertain a solitary winter's evening.

[Pg 126]

[Pg 127]

..... AFTER this adventure, Sir Bertrand turned his steed towards the wolds, hoping to cross these dreary moors before the curfew. But ere he had proceeded half his journey, he was bewildered by the different tracks, and not being able, as far as the eye could reach, to espy any object but the brown heath surrounding him, he was at length quite uncertain which way he should direct his course. Night overtook him in this situation. It was one of those nights when the moon gives a faint glimmering of light through the thick black clouds of a lowering sky. Now and then she suddenly emerged in full splendor from her veil; and then instantly retired behind it, having just served to give the forlorn Sir Bertrand a wide extended prospect over the desolate waste. Hope and native courage a while urged him to push forwards, but at length the increasing darkness and fatigue of body and mind overcame him; he dreaded moving from the ground he stood on, for fear of unknown pits and bogs, and alighting from his horse in despair, he threw himself on the ground. He had not long continued in that posture when the sullen toll of a distant bell struck his ears—he started up, and, turning towards the sound, discerned a dim twinkling light. Instantly he seized his horse's bridle, and with cautious steps advanced towards it. After a painful march, he was stopt by a moated ditch surrounding the place from whence the light proceeded; and by a momentary glimpse of moon-light he had a full view of a large antique mansion, with turrets at the corners, and an ample porch in the center. The injuries of time were strongly marked on every thing about it. The roof in various places was fallen in, the battlements were half demolished, and the windows broken and dismantled. A draw-bridge, with a ruinous gate-way at each end, led to the court before the building. He entered, and instantly the light, which proceeded from a window in one of the turrets, glided along and vanished; at the same moment the moon sunk beneath a black cloud, and the night was darker than ever. All was silent. Sir Bertrand fastened his steed under a shed, and approaching the house, traversed its whole front with light and slow footsteps. All was still as death. He looked in at the lower windows, but could not distinguish a single object through the impenetrable gloom. After a short parley with himself, he entered the porch, and seizing a massy iron knocker at the gate, lifted it up, and hesitating, at length struck a loud stroke. The noise resounded through the whole mansion with hollow echoes. All was still again. He repeated the strokes more boldly, and louder—another interval of silence ensued. A third time he knocked, and a third time all was still. He then fell back to some distance, that he might discern whether any light could be seen in the whole front. It again appeared in the same place, and quickly glided away as before. At the same instant, a deep sullen toll sounded from the turret. Sir Bertrand's heart made a fearful stop—He was a while motionless; then terror impelled him to make some hasty steps towards his steed; but shame stopt his flight; and, urged by honour, and a resistless desire of finishing the adventure, he returned to the porch; and, working up his soul to a full steadiness of resolution, he drew forth his sword with one hand, and with the other lifted up the latch of the gate. The heavy door, creaking upon its hinges, reluctantly yielded to his hand—he applied his shoulder to it, and forced it open—he quitted it, and stept forward—the door instantly shut with a thundering clap. Sir Bertrand's blood was chilled—he turned back to find the door, and it was long ere his trembling hands could seize it—but his utmost strength could not open it again. After several ineffectual attempts, he looked behind him, and beheld, across a hall, upon a large staircase, a pale bluish flame, which cast a dismal gleam of light around. He again summoned forth his courage, and advanced towards it—It retired. He came to the foot of the stairs, and, after a moment's deliberation, ascended. He went slowly up, the flame retiring before him, till he came to a wide gallery—The flame proceeded along it, and he followed in silent horror, treading lightly, for the echoes of his footsteps startled him. It led him to the foot of another staircase, and then vanished. At the same instant, another toll sounded from the turret—Sir Bertrand felt it strike upon his heart. He was now in total darkness, and, with his arms extended, began to ascend the second staircase. A dead cold hand met his left hand, and firmly grasped it, drawing him forcibly forwards—he endeavoured to disengage himself, but could not—he made a furious blow with his sword, and instantly a loud shriek pierced his ears, and the dead hand was left powerless in his—He dropt it, and rushed forwards with a desperate valour. The stairs were narrow and winding, and interrupted by frequent breaches, and loose fragments of stone. The staircase grew narrower and narrower, and at length terminated in a low iron grate. Sir Bertrand pushed it open—it led to an intricate winding passage, just large enough to admit a person upon his hands and knees. A faint glimmering of light served to shew the nature of the place. Sir Bertrand entered—A deep hollow groan resounded from a distance through the vault—He went forwards, and proceeding

[Pg 128]

[Pg 129]

[Pg 130]

[Pg 131]

[Pg 132]

[Pg 133]

beyond the first turning, he discerned the same blue flame which had before conducted him. He followed it. The vault, at length, suddenly opened into a lofty gallery, in the midst of which a figure appeared, completely armed, thrusting forwards the bloody stump of an arm, with a terrible frown and menacing gesture, and brandishing a sword in his hand. Sir Bertrand undauntedly sprung forwards; and, aiming a fierce blow at the figure, it instantly vanished, letting fall a massy iron key. The flame now rested upon a pair of ample folding doors at the end of the gallery. Sir Bertrand went up to it, and applied the key to a brazen lock. With difficulty he turned the bolt. Instantly the doors flew open, and discovered a large apartment, at the end of which was a coffin rested upon a bier, with a taper burning on each side of it. Along the room, on both sides, were gigantic statues of black marble, attired in the Moorish habit, and holding enormous sabres in their right hands. Each of them reared his arm, and advanced one leg forwards as the knight entered; at the same moment, the lid of the coffin flew open, and the bell tolled. The flame still glided forwards, and Sir Bertrand resolutely followed, till he arrived within six paces of the coffin. Suddenly, a lady in a shroud and black veil rose up in it, and stretched out her arms towards him; at the same time, the statues clashed their sabres, and advanced. Sir Bertrand flew to the lady, and clasped her in his arms—she threw up her veil, and kissed his lips; and instantly the whole building shook as with an earthquake, and fell asunder with a horrible crash. Sir Bertrand was thrown into a sudden trance, and, on recovering, found himself seated on a velvet sofa, in the most magnificent room he had ever seen, lighted with innumerable tapers, in lustres of pure crystal. A sumptuous banquet was set in the middle. The doors opening to soft music, a lady of incomparable beauty, attired with amazing splendor, entered, surrounded by a troop of gay nymphs, more fair than the Graces. She advanced to the knight, and, falling on her knees, thanked him as her deliverer. The nymphs placed a garland of laurel upon his head, and the lady led him by the hand to the banquet, and sat beside him. The nymphs placed themselves at the table, and a numerous train of servants entering, served up the feast; delicious music playing all the time. Sir Bertrand could not speak for astonishment: he could only return their honours by courteous looks and gestures. After the banquet was finished, all retired but the lady, who, leading back the knight to the sofa, addressed him in these words:

[Pg 134]

[Pg 135]

[Pg 136]

[Pg 137]

[Pg 138]

ON THE
HEROIC POEM
OF
GONDIBERT.

A PERSON engaged in the pursuit of literary fame must be severely mortified on observing the very speedy neglect into which writers of high merit so frequently fall. The revolution of centuries, the extinction of languages, the vast convulsions which agitate a whole people, are causes which may well be submitted to in overwhelming an author with oblivion; but that in the same country, with little variation of language or manners, the delights of one age should become utter strangers in the next, is surely an immaturity of fate which conveys reproach upon the inconstancy of national taste. That noble band, the English poets, have ample reason for complaining to what unjust guardians they have entrusted their renown. While we crown the statue of Shakespeare as the prince of dramatic poets, shall we forget the works, and almost the names of his contemporaries who possessed so much of a kindred spirit? Shall the Italian *Pastor Fido* and *Amyntas* stand high in our estimation, and the *Faithful Shepherdess*, the most beautiful pastoral that a poet's fancy ever formed, be scarcely known amongst us? Shall we feel the fire of heroic poetry in translations from Greece and Rome, and never search for it in the native productions of our own country?

[Pg 139]

[Pg 140]

THE capital work of Sir *William D'Avenant*, which I now desire to call forth from its obscurity, may well be considered as in a state of oblivion, since we no where meet with allusions to it, or quotations from it, in our modern writers; and few, I imagine, even of the professed students in English classics, would think their taste discredited by confessing that they had never read GONDIBERT. A very learned and ingenious critic, in his well-known *discourse upon poetical imitation*, has, indeed, taken notice of this poem; but, though he bestows all due praise upon its author, yet the purpose for which it is mentioned being to instance an essential error, we cannot suppose that his authority has served to gain it more readers. Having very judiciously laid it down as a general observation, that writers, by studiously avoiding the fancied disgrace of imitation, are apt to fall into improper method, forced conceits, and affected expression; he proceeds to introduce the work in question after the following manner: "And, that the reader may not suspect me of asserting this without experience, let me exemplify what has been here said in the case of a very eminent person, who, with all the advantages of art and nature that could be required to adorn the true poet, was ruined by this single error. The person I mean was SIR WILLIAM D'AVENANT, whose *Gondibert* will remain a perpetual monument of the mischiefs which

[Pg 141]

must ever arise from this affectation of originality in lettered and polite poets.”

A CONSIDERABLE degree of deference is undoubtedly due to a critic of such acknowledged taste and abilities; yet, since it appears to me, that in this instance he writes under the influence of system and learned prejudice, I shall venture to canvass the principles upon which he supports his censure.

[Pg 142]

THE *method* of Gondibert is first objected to by Dr. Hurd, and upon two accounts. First, that the compass of the poem is contracted from the limits of the ancient epic, to those of the dramatic form; and by this means, pursuing a close accelerated plot, the opportunity is lost of introducing digressive ornaments, and of giving that minuteness of description which confers an air of reality. Now, since the author sets out with disavowing the common rules of epic poetry, it is certainly unjust to try him by those rules. That effects are not produced which he never designed to produce, can be no matter of blame; we have only to examine the justness of the design itself. It is wrong to expect incompatible qualities as well in compositions as in men. A work cannot at the same time possess force and diffusiveness, rapidity and minuteness.

[Pg 143]

EVERY one who has read Homer without prejudice, will, I doubt not, confess that the effects which should result from the great events of the story are much broken and impeded by that very minuteness of description, and frequency of digression which D’avenant is blamed for rejecting. The mind, warmed by an interesting narration, either in history, poetry, or romance, requires the writer to keep up with its exertions, and cannot bear him to flag in his pace, or turn aside in pursuit of other objects. The proper end of epic poetry, according to Dr. Hurd, is *admiration*. This, I imagine, would by no means have been allowed by our author, who seems rather to have placed it in interesting the passions, inculcating noble sentiments, and informing the understanding: nor does it answer the idea of Horace, who praises Homer for his moral lessons, for teaching

[Pg 144]

— Quid sit pulcrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non.

However, a due limitation of subject, and something of rapidity in pursuing it, appear very necessary to the production of a considerable effect, of what kind soever; and a pompous display of foreign circumstances must always debilitate more than adorn. It appears an extremely bad compliment to an epic poem, to say that its chief beauty lies in the episodes. Indeed, epic poetry, as existing in the models of antiquity, or their copies, by no means, I think, deserves the title given by critics, of the highest species of poetical composition. The tedious compass of the subject, the necessity of employing so large a share of the work in the relation of trifling occurrences for the sake of connexion, and the frequency of interruptions from collateral matter, inevitably cause both the poet’s exertions and the reader’s attention to intermit; and it is no wonder that Homer, and Virgil too, sometimes nod over their labours. The author of Gondibert seems to have been sensible of these inconveniences, and upon fair comparison of the epic and dramatic form, to have preferred the latter, as capable of more spirit, and uniform dignity. We shall find, however, in reviewing the poem, that he has by no means restricted himself so narrowly as to preclude all ornamental deviations; and though they may not deserve the title of episodes, yet in his short and unfinished piece, they have all the desirable effect of a pleasing variety.

[Pg 145]

[Pg 146]

THE second objection which Dr. Hurd brings against the *method* of this poem, is the rejection of all supernatural agency, or what constitutes the *machinery* of the ancient epic poem. But for this the critic himself offers a vindication, when he commends the author for not running into the wild fables of the Italian romances, “which had too slender a foundation in the serious belief of his age to justify a relation to them.” Now, by making this *belief* an essential rule of propriety with respect to the machinery, an author in an enlightened period, such as that of D’avenant, is, in effect, prohibited from its use altogether; for the abstracted nature of a pure and philosophical religion renders it utterly unfit for the purposes of poetical fiction. The works of such Christian poets as have attempted to form a system of machinery upon the ideas of saints, angels, and tutelary spirits, will sufficiently prove that their religion, even with a mixture of popular superstition, was ill calculated to assist their imagination. Two writers, whom one would little expect to meet upon the same ground, Sir Richard Blackmore and Mons. Voltaire, have given instances of the same faulty plan in this respect; and nothing in the good Knight’s epic labours can more deserve the attack of ridicule, than the divine mission in the *Henriade* for instructing his Majesty in the sublime mysteries of transubstantiation.

[Pg 147]

It was a very just charge which Plato brought against Homer, that he had greatly contributed to debase religion by the unworthy and absurd representations he has given of the celestial beings, both with respect to their power and their justice; and this is a fault which the poet must always in some measure be guilty of, when he too familiarly mixes divine agency with human events. Nor does it appear more favourable to the greatness of the human personages that they are on all occasions so beholden to the immediate interposition of divine allies. The refined and judicious Virgil, though he has tolerably kept up the dignity of his Deities, has yet very much lowered his heroes from this cause. When we see Æneas, the son of a Goddess, aided by a God, and covered with celestial armour, with difficulty vanquishing the gallant Turnus, we conclude, that without such odds, the victory must have fallen on the other side. Under such a system of supernatural agency, there was no other way of exalting a man than making him, like Diomed, war against the Gods, or, like Cato, approve a cause which they had unjustly condemned. Surely, a “*sober* intermixture of religion” can never be attributed to the ancient epic. The poem of Gondibert is, indeed, without all this mixture of religious machinery, whether it be termed sober or extravagant. Human means are brought to accomplish human ends; and Cowley, in his

[Pg 148]

[Pg 149]

recommendatory lines prefixed to the work, has thus expressed his approbation of this part of the plan.

Methinks heroic poesie till now
Like some fantastique fairy-land did show;
Gods, Devils, Nymphs, Witches, and Giant's race,
And all but Man, in man's best work had place.
Thou, like some worthy Knight, with sacred arms
Dost drive the Monsters thence, and end the charms:
Instead of these dost Men and Manners plant,
The things which that rich soil did chiefly want.

WE shall see hereafter, that the author has not neglected to introduce *religious sentiment*, and that of a more noble and elevated kind than can easily be paralleled in poetry. [Pg 150]

BUT as the poet, in the critic's opinion, did too much in banishing every thing supernatural in the events, so he did too little in retaining the fantastic notions of love and honour in the characters of his piece, which were derived from the same source of fiction and romance. There is, however, an essential difference between the cases. Artificial sentiments, however unnatural at first, may, from the operation of particular causes, become so familiar as to be adopted into the manners of the age. Instances of fashion in sentiment are almost as frequent as of fashion in dress. It is certain that the romantic ideas of love and honour did in fact prevail in a high degree during a considerable period of the later ages, owing to causes which the same ingenious critic has in a very curious manner investigated, in his *letters on Chivalry and Romance*. They gave the leading tone to all polished manners; and gallantry was as serious a principle in the Italian courts, as love to their country in the states of Greece or old Rome. Supernatural agency in human events, on the other hand, however commonly pretended, or firmly believed, would never approach one step nearer to reality. After all, the author of *Gondibert* could not intend to reduce his poem to mere history; but he chose to take a poetical licence in the dignity and elevation of his sentiments, rather than in the marvellousness of its events. He thought he might attribute to the exalted personages of courts and camps the same nobleness of mind which himself, a courtier and a soldier, possessed. If his work be allowed less grand and entertaining from the want of such ornaments as those of his predecessors are decorated with, it will yet be difficult to shew how, at his time, they could have been applied consistently with good sense and improved taste. [Pg 151]

So much in vindication of the general *method* of Sir W. D'avenant's poem. With respect to its *execution*, the justice of Dr. Hurd's censure cannot be controverted. That his sentiments are frequently far-fetched and affected, and his expression quaint and obscure, is but too obviously apparent; and these faults, together with the want of harmony in versification, will sufficiently account for the neglect into which the work is fallen, though interesting in its story, and thick sown with beauties. Readers who take up a book merely for the indolent amusement of a leisure hour, cannot endure the labour of unharbouring a fine thought from the cover of perplexed expression. The *pleasure* arising from a flowing line, or a rounded period, is more engaging to them, because more easily enjoyed, than that from a sublime or witty conception. The author's faulty *execution*, however, arose from a source directly contrary to the "dread of imitation." Imitation itself led him to it; for almost all the models of polite literature existing in his own country, and indeed in the other polished nations of Europe, were characterized by the very same vitiation of taste. Among our own writers, it is sufficient to instance Donne, Suckling and Cowley, for this constant affectation of wit and uncommon sentiment, and for a consequent obscurity of expression. Yet all these, and Sir W. D'avenant, perhaps, in a more eminent degree than the rest, had for great occasions, above the temptation of trifling, a majestic and nervous simplicity, both of sentiment and expression; which, with our more refined taste and language, we have never been able to equal. [Pg 153]

I SHOULD now hope that the reader would set out with me upon a nearer inspection of this poem, with the general *idea* of its being the work of an elevated genius, pregnant with a rich store of free and noble sentiment, fashioned by an intimate commerce with the great world, and boldly pursuing an original, but not an unskilful plan. [Pg 154]

THE measure chosen for this poem is that which we now almost confine to elegy. This choice does not appear very judicious; for, although our elegiac stanza possesses a strength and fulness which renders it not unsuitable to heroic subjects, yet, in a piece of considerable length, every returning measure must become tiresome from its frequent repetitions. And this is not the worst effect of returning stanzas, in a long work. The necessity of comprizing a sentence within the limits of the measure is the tyranny of Procrustes to thought. For the sake of a disagreeable uniformity, expression must constantly be cramped or extended. In general, the latter expedient will be practised, as the easiest; and thus both sentiment and language will be enfeebled by unmeaning expletives. This, indeed, in some measure, is the effect of rhyme couplets; and still more of the Latin hexameter and pentameter. In our author, a redundancy of thought, running out into parentheses, seems to have been produced, or at least encouraged by the measure. But I think he has generally preserved a force and majesty of expression. [Pg 155]

It would have been highly injudicious for one who has rejected all poetical machinery, to have begun his poem with the ancient form of invoking a Muse. Indeed, in all modern writers this invocation appears little better than an unmeaning ceremony, practised by rote from ancient custom; and very properly makes a part of the *receipt for an epic poem* humourously laid down after the exact model of mechanical imitation, in the *Spectator*. Our author, with simple and unaffected dignity, thus opens at once into his subject: [Pg 156]

Of all the Lombards, by their trophies known,
Who sought fame soon, and had her favour long,
King ARIBERT best seem'd to fill the throne,
And bred most business for heroick song.

THIS conquering monarch, we are soon acquainted, was blest with an only child, the heroine of the story, [Pg 157]

Recorded RHODALIND! whose high renown
Who miss in books not luckily have read;
Or vex'd with living beauties of their own
Have shunn'd the wise records of lovers dead.

DESCRIPTIONS of female beauty have engaged the powers of poets in every age, who have exhausted all nature for imagery to heighten their painting; yet the picture has ever been extremely faint and inadequate. Our poet judiciously confines his description of Rhodalind to the qualities of her mind, contenting himself with general praises, though in the high-flown gallantry of the times, of her personal charms.

Her looks like empire shew'd, great above pride;
Since pride ill counterfeits excessive height:
But Nature publish'd what she fain would hide,
Who for her deeds, not beauty, lov'd the light.

To make her lowly mind's appearance less,
She us'd some outward greatness for disguise;
Esteem'd as pride the cloyst'ral lowliness,
And thought them proud who even the proud despise.

[Pg 158]

Oppressors big with pride, when she appear'd,
Blush'd, and believ'd their greatness counterfeit;
The lowly thought they them in vain had fear'd;
Found virtue harmless, and nought else so great.

Her mind (scarce to her feeble sex a-kin)
Did as her birth, her right to empire show;
Seem'd careless outward, when employ'd within;
Her speech, like lovers watch'd, was kind and low.

THE court of Aribert could not want men of high rank and accomplishments to pay their devotions at such a shrine. Among these, "OSWALD the great, and greater GONDIBERT" moved in the most exalted sphere of renown. These noble personages are characterized and contrasted with so masterly a hand, that it would be an injury not to transcribe the whole. [Pg 159]

In courts, prince Oswald costly was and gay,
Finer than near vain kings their fav'rites are!
Outshin'd bright fav'rites on their nuptial day;
Yet were his eyes dark with ambitious care.

Duke Gondibert was still more gravely clad,
But yet his looks familiar were, and clear;
As if with ill to others never sad,
Nor tow'rds himself could others practise fear.

The Prince could, porpoise-like, in tempests play,
And in court storms on ship-wreck'd greatness feed;
Not frighted with their fate when cast away,
But to their glorious hazards durst succeed.

The Duke would lasting calms to courts assure,
As pleasant gardens we defend from winds;
For he who bus'ness would from storms procure,
Soon his affairs above his manage finds.

Oswald in throngs the abject people sought
With humble looks; who still too late will know
They are ambition's quarry, and soon caught
When the aspiring eagle stoops so low.

[Pg 160]

The Duke did these by steady virtue gain;
Which they in action more than precept taste;
Deeds shew the good, and those who goodness feign
By such ev'n through their vizards are outfac't.

Oswald in war was worthily renown'd;
Though gay in courts, coarsely in camps could live;
Judg'd danger soon, and first was in it found;
Could toil to gain what he with ease did give.

Yet toils and dangers through ambition lov'd,
Which does in war the name of virtue own:
But quits that name when from the war remov'd,
As rivers theirs when from their channels gone.

The Duke (as restless as his fame in war)
With martial toil could Oswald weary make,
And calmly do what he with rage did dare,
And give so much as he might deign to take.

Him as their founder cities did adore;
The court he knew to steer in storms of state;
In fields, a battle lost he could restore,
And after force the victors to their fate.

[Pg 161]

OF these great rivals, Gondibert was he whom the king had destined for his son-in-law, and the heir of his throne; and Rhodalind too, in the privacy of her own breast, had made the same choice. This is related in a manner little inferior to Shakespear's famous description of concealed love.

Yet sadly it is sung, that she in shades,
Mildly as mourning doves, love's sorrows felt;
Whilst in her secret tears, her freshness fades,
As roses silently in lymbecks melt.

GONDIBERT, however, though of a nature by no means unsusceptible of the tender passion, had not as yet felt it for a particular object; and Oswald, who stood forth as the public suitor to the princess, was incited by no other motive than ambition. Not Rhodalind herself (says the poet)

[Pg 162]

Could he affect, but shining in her throne.

HIS cause was powerfully pleaded with the princess by his sister Gartha, with whom we are next brought acquainted. A bold, full, majestic beauty; and a corresponding mind, high, restless, and aspiring, are her distinguishing features. The prince and duke were urged on to ambitious pursuits by their respective armies, which, just returned from conquest, lay encamped, the one at Brescia, and the other at Bergamo. That of Gondibert was composed of hardy youth whom he had selected from his father's camp, and educated in martial discipline under his own inspection. Temperance, chastity, vigilance, humanity, and all the high virtues of chivalry, remarkably distinguish these young soldiers from those of later times. Beauty, indeed, commanded no less regard amongst them than in a modern camp; but it was an object of passion, and not of appetite; and was the powerful engine in their education which inspired them with noble and exalted sentiments. This is an idea on which our author, true to the principles of chivalry, very frequently enlarges, and always with peculiar force and dignity. In the present instance it is thus finely expressed:

[Pg 163]

But, though the Duke taught rigid discipline,
He let them beauty thus at distance know;
As priests discover some more sacred shrine,
Which none must touch, yet all to it may bow.

When thus, as suitors, mourning virgins pass
Thro' their clean camp, themselves in form they draw,
That they with martial reverence may grace
Beauty, the stranger, which they seldom saw.

They vail'd their ensigns as it by did move,
Whilst inward, as from native conscience, all
Worship'd the poet's darling godhead, Love;
Which grave philosophers did Nature call.

[Pg 164]

INDEED, the influence of this passion in its purest and most exalted state during the course of education, is a subject that might, perhaps, shine as much in the hands of a moralist as of a poet.

THE soldiers of Oswald were his father's brave veterans, in whose arms he had been bred. The story thus opened, and our attention awakened to the expectation of important events, the first canto is closed.

THE second canto introduces us to a solemn annual hunting, held by Duke Gondibert in commemoration of a great victory gained on this day by his grandsire. His train was adorned by many gallant and noble persons, the friends of his family, and commanders in his army. The hunting, which is described with much poetical spirit, terminates in a combat. As Gondibert and his party are returning weary homeward, an ancient ranger hastily brings the tidings that Oswald, who had lain in ambush with a body of chosen horse, is advancing upon them. The Duke, rejecting all counsels of flight, prepares to receive his foes; and with an account of their principal leaders, and the order of their march, the canto concludes.

[Pg 165]

A PARLEY between the chiefs now succeeds, in which the character of each is well preserved. Oswald warmly accuses his rival for usurping his claims on the princess and the kingdom. Gondibert defends himself with temper, and disavows all ambitious designs. The other disdains accommodation; and the conference ends in a generous agreement to decide their differences in single fight.

WHEN every thing is prepared for the combat, Hubert, the brother of Oswald, steps forth with a general challenge to the opposite party. This is instantly accepted, and serves for a prelude to so many others, that a general engagement seems likely to ensue; when Oswald reproves their disobedient ardour: and, upon Hubert's insisting to share his fate from the rights of brotherhood, it is at length decided that three persons of each party should enter the lists along with their generals. The duel then comes on, in the fourth canto; in which Oswald, Hubert, Paradine and Dargonet, are severally matched with Gondibert; Hurgonil, the lover of Orna, the Duke's sister; and Arnold and Hugo, generous rivals in Laura. Descriptions of battle are so frequent in epic poetry, that scarcely any circumstances of variety are left to diversify them. Homer and his imitators have attempted novelty in the multiplicity of their combats by every possible variation of weapon, posture, and wound. They considered the human body with anatomical nicety; and dwelt with a savage pleasure upon every idea of pain and horror that studied butchery could excite. I shall leave it to the professed admirers of antiquity to determine under what head of poetical beauty such objects are to be ranged. The terrible is certainly a principal source of the sublime; but a slaughter-house or a surgery would not seem proper studies for a poet. D'avenant has drawn little from them. His battles are rendered interesting chiefly by the character and situation of the combatants. When Arnold, the favoured lover of Laura, is slain by Paradine, Hugo, who had overthrown his antagonist, springs to avenge his rival, with these truly gallant expressions:

[Pg 166]

[Pg 167]

Vain conqueror, said Hugo then, return!
Instead of laurel, which the victor wears,
Go gather cypress for thy brother's urn,
And learn of me to water it with tears.

[Pg 168]

Thy brother lost his life attempting mine;
Which cannot for Lord Arnold's loss suffice:
I must revenge, unlucky Paradine!
The blood his death will draw from Laura's eyes.

We rivals were in Laura; but, tho' she
My griefs derided, his with sighs approv'd,
Yet I, in love's exact integrity,
Must take thy life for killing him she lov'd.

His generosity, however, was fatal both to his foe and himself.

HUBERT, disabled by a wound in his arm, is dishonoured by receiving his life from his conqueror; upon which occasion the poet thus beautifully apostrophises:

O Honour, frail as life, thy fellow flower!
Cherish'd, and watch'd, and hum'rously esteem'd,
Then worn for short adornments of an hour;
And is, when lost, no more than life redeem'd.

THE two chiefs are still left closely engaging; and when Hurgonil approaches to assist his lord, he is warmly commanded to retire. At length, after many mutual wounds, Oswald falls. [Pg 169]

THE death of the Prince at the same time takes off all restraint from his party, and incites them to revenge. Led by the wounded Hubert, old Vasco, and Borgio, they attack the hunters, who, besides the fatigue of the chace, are represented as somewhat inferior in number. A furious battle, the subject of the fifth canto, now ensues. Gondibert shines forth in all the splendor of a hero. By his prowess his friends are rescued, and the opposite leaders overthrown in various separate encounters; and by his military skill the brave veterans of Oswald are defeated. The whole description of the battle is warm and animated.

In Gondibert's generous lamentation over the fallen, every heart must sympathize with the following pathetic tribute to the rival lovers: [Pg 170]

Brave Arnold and his rival strait remove,
Where Laura shall bestrew their hallow'd ground;
Protectors both, and ornaments of love;
This said, his eyes out wept his widest wound.

Tell her now these, love's faithful saints, are gone,
The beauty they ador'd she ought to hide;
for vainly will love's miracles be shewn,
Since lover's faith with these brave rivals dy'd.

Say little Hugo never more shall mourn,
In noble numbers, her unkind disdain;
Who now, not seeing beauty, feels no scorn;
And wanting pleasure, is exempt from pain.

When she with flowers Lord Arnold's grave shall strew,
And hears why Hugo's life was thrown away,
She on that rival's hearse will drop a few,
Which merits all that April gives to May.

THE Duke now draws off his remaining friends towards Bergamo: but on the journey, overcome by fatigue and loss of blood, he falls into a deadly swoon. His attendants, amidst their anxiety and confusion upon this event, are surprised, in the sixth canto, with the approach of a squadron of horse. This, however, proves to be a friendly body, led by old Ulfin, who, after recovering the Duke by a cordial, declares himself to have been a page to his grandsire, and gives a noble relation of the character and exploits of his great master. The rumour of Oswald's attack brought him to the relief of Gondibert; and we have a description, which will be thought too much bordering upon the ludicrous, of the strange confusion among his maimed veterans, who in their haste had seized upon each other's artificial limbs. This unsightly troop, with the deficiencies of hands, arms, legs and eyes, can scarcely, with all the poet's art, be rendered a respectable object. Such instances of faulty judgment are frequent in the writings of an age which was characterized by vigour of imagination rather than correctness of taste. Ulfin leads the Duke to the house of the sage Astragon, where, with the approach of night, the canto and the first book conclude. [Pg 171]

IN the beginning of the second book, the poet carries us with Hurgonil and Tybalt and their noble dead, to Verona. The distant turrets first appearing, and then the great objects opening, one by one; the river, the palace, the temple, and the amphitheatre of Flaminius, form a landscape truly noble and picturesque. The view of the temple gives occasion to one of those elevated religious sentiments which dignify this poem. [Pg 172]

This to soothe heaven the bloody Clephes built;
As if heaven's king so soft and easy were,
So meanly hous'd in heaven, and kind to guilt,
That he would be a tyrant's tenant here.

[Pg 173]

WE have then a lively description of a city morning; with the various and uncertain rumours of the late event, among the people. The rest of the canto is employed in a debate, rather tedious, though intermixed with fine sentiments, concerning the propriety of granting funeral rites to those who had perished in the quarrel.

THE progress of the fatal news is traced in the next canto. Aribert appears sitting in council in all the regal dignity. Tybalt relates the story. The king, in a majestic speech, complains of the toils and cares of empire, and predicts the baneful consequences likely to ensue. A more interesting scene is then disclosed, in which Tybalt declares the melancholy events of the combat to Rhodalind and the other ladies of the court. Great art is shewn in the delicate ambiguity by which they are prepared to receive the tidings. Laura is overpowered by her loss; and, calling on Arnold's name, is conveyed away by her female attendants. This tender scene of sorrow is finely contrasted by the abrupt entrance of Gartha, in all the wild pomp of mingled rage and grief. [Pg 174]

No sooner was the pity'd Laura gone,
But Oswald's sister, Gartha the renown'd,
Enters as if the world was overthrown,
Or in the tears of the afflicted drown'd.

Unconquer'd as her beauty was her mind,
Which wanted not a spark of Oswald's fire;
Ambition lov'd, but ne'er to love was kind;
Vex'd thrones did more than quiet shades desire.

Her garments now in loose neglect she wore,
As suited to her wild dishevell'd hair.

In the fury of her passion she breaks out into execrations against the innocent.

[Pg 175]

Blasted be all your beauties, Rhodalind!
Till you a shame and terror be to sight;
Unwing'd be Love, and slow as he is blind,
Who with your looks poison'd my brother's sight!

At length she mounts her chariot, and flies with the wings of revenge to the veteran camp at Brescia. The terror impressed on the people by her hasty departure is imaged with great sublimity.

She seem'd their city's Genius as she pass'd,
Who, by their sins expell'd, would ne'er return.

THE third canto brings us to Brescia, where Hubert's arrival with the dead body of Oswald excites every emotion of surprize, grief and fury in the breasts of the brave veterans. They spend the night in this storm of contending passions; and at day-break assemble round the tent of Hubert, who by a noble harangue gives additional fire to their revenge. They instantly arm, and demand to be led to Bergamo; when Gartha arrives. She turns their vengeance against the court, where she represents the triumph of Gondibert's faction, and the dishonour cast upon their own. The rage discovered in her countenance, overpowering the symptoms of grief, is painted with amazing grandeur in the following simile:

[Pg 176]

The Sun did thus to threat'ned nature show
His anger red, whilst guilt look'd pale in all,
When clouds of floods did hang about his brow;
And then shrunk back to let that anger fall.

THIS tempest is, however, allayed in the next canto by the arrival of the wife Hermegild; who, though grown aged in war and politics, is possessed with a youthful passion for Gartha. He solemnly binds his services to their party, for the reward of Gartha's love; but persuades them to submit to more cautious and pacific measures. Gartha returns with him to the court; and the funeral of Oswald with Roman rites, "Which yet the world's last law had not forbid," is described in the remaining part of the canto.

[Pg 177]

FROM scenes of rage and tumult the poet then leads us to the quiet shades of philosophy in the house of Astragon. This change is not better calculated for the reader's relief, than for a display of the richness and elevation of the writer's mind. That the friend of Hobbes should despise the learned lumber of the schools will not be thought extraordinary; but that he should distinctly mark out such plans of acquiring knowledge as have since been pursued with the greatest success, may well be deemed a remarkable proof of high and comprehensive genius. In Astragon's domain is a retired building, upon which is written in large letters, GREAT NATURE'S OFFICE. Here sit certain venerable sages, stiled *Nature's Registers*, busied in recording what is brought them by a throng called their *Intelligencers*. These men are diversly employed in exploring the haunts of beasts, of birds, and of fishes, and collecting observations of their manners, their prey, their increase, and every circumstance of their œconomy. Near this place is NATURE'S NURSERY, stocked with every species of plants, of which the several properties and virtues are diligently examined. Is it not striking to find, in the *house of Astragon* so exact a model of the *school of Linnæus*?

[Pg 178]

WE are next led to the CABINET OF DEATH; a receptacle for skeletons and anatomical curiosities of every kind: and from thence, by a pleasing analogy, to the library, or, as it is termed, the MONUMENT OF BANISH'D MINDS. The feelings of his guests on entering this room are thus described:

[Pg 179]

Where, when they thought they saw in well-sought books
Th' assembled souls of all that men held wise,
It bred such awful rev'ence in their looks
As if they saw the bury'd writers rise.

THE poet then goes through a particular survey of the authors, distinguished into their several periods, countries, and professions; in which he exhibits a great extent of learning, and, much more to his honour, a sound and liberal judgment of what is truly valuable in learning. Of this, his account of the polemic divines will be thought no unfavourable specimen.

About this sacred little book did stand
 Unwieldy volumes, and in number great;
 And long it was since any reader's hand
 Had reached them from their unfrequented seat.

For a deep dust (which time does softly shed,
 Where only time does come) their covers bear;
 On which grave spiders streets of webs had spread,
 Subtle, and slight, as the grave writers were.

In these heaven's holy fire does vainly burn,
 Nor warms, nor lights, but is in sparkles spent;
 Where froward authors with disputes have torn
 The garment seamless as the firmament.

If the subjects of this canto appear more noble and elevated than those which usually employ the episodes of heroic poetry, that of the ensuing one must strike with still superior dignity. Having acquainted us with the philosophy of his admired sage, the poet now, by a beautiful kind of allegory, instructs us in his religion. Astragon had dedicated three temples, to PRAYER, to PENITENCE, and to PRAISE. The *Temple of Prayer* is described as a building quite plain, open, and without bells; since nothing should tempt or summon to an office to which our own wants invite us. The duty of *Penitence* being a severity unpleasing to nature, its *temple* is contrived, by its solemn and uncommon appearance, to catch the sense. It is a vast building of black marble, hung with black, and furnished with that "dim religious light" which poets have so finely employed to excite kindred ideas of gloom and melancholy: but none, I think, have painted it with such strength of colouring as our author:

[Pg 181]

Black curtains hide the glass; whilst from on high
 A winking lamp still threatens all the room,
 As if the lazy flame just now would die:
 Such will the sun's last light appear at doom.

A tolling bell calls to the temple; and every other circumstance belonging to it is imagined with great propriety and beauty.

[Pg 182]

BUT the poet's greatest exertions are reserved for his favourite *temple of Praise*. A general shout of joy is the summons to it. The building, in its materials and architecture, is gay and splendid beyond the most sumptuous palace. The front is adorned with figures of all kinds of musical instruments; all, as he most beautifully expresses it,

That joy did e'er invent, or breath inspir'd,
 Or flying fingers touch'd into a voice.

The statues without, the pictures within, the decorations, and the choir of worshippers, are all suited with nice judgment, and described with genuine poetry. This distinguished canto concludes with these noble stanzas, the sum and moral, as it were, of the whole.

[Pg 183]

Praise is devotion fit for mighty minds;
 The diff'ring world's agreeing sacrifice;
 Where heaven divided faiths united finds:
 But prayer in various discord upward flies.

For Prayer the ocean is, where diversly
 Men steer their course, each to a sev'ral coast;
 Where all our interests so discordant be
 That half beg winds by which the rest are lost.

By penitence when we ourselves forsake,
 'Tis but in wise design on piteous heav'n;
 In praise we nobly give what God may take,
 And are without a beggar's blush forgiv'n.

Its utmost force, like powder's, is unknown;
 And tho' weak kings excess of Praise may fear,
 Yet when 'tis here, like powder, dangerous grown,
 Heav'n's vault receives what would the palace tear.

The last thought will be termed, in this cold age, a conceit; and so may every thing that distinguishes wit and poetry from plain sense and prose.

[Pg 184]

The wonders of the *house of Astragon* are not yet exhausted.

To Astragon heaven for succession gave
 One only pledge, and BIRTHA was her name.

THIS maid, her father's humble disciple and assistant, educated in the bosom of rural simplicity, is rendered a more charming object than even the renowned Rhodalind upon her throne.

Courts she ne'er saw, yet courts could have undone
With untaught looks and an unpractis'd heart;
Her nets the most prepar'd could never shun,
For Nature spread them in the scorn of Art.

BUT I check my desire of copying more from this exquisitely pleasing picture. My intention is to excite curiosity, not to gratify it. I hope I have already done enough for that purpose; and since the rest of this unfinished story may be comprized in a short compass, I shall proceed, with but few interruptions, to conclude a paper already swelled to an unexpected bulk.

[Pg 185]

THAT the unpractised BIRTHA should entertain an unresisted passion for the noblest of his sex; and that Gondibert, whose want of ambition alone had secured him from the charms of Rhodalind, should bow to those of his lovely hostess and handmaid, will be thought a very natural turn in the story; upon which, however, the reader may foresee the most interesting events depending. The progress of their love, though scarcely known to themselves, is soon discovered by the sage Astragon. This is expressed by the poet with a very fine turn of a common thought.

[Pg 186]

When all these symptoms he observ'd, he knows,
From Alga, which is rooted deep in seas,
To the high Cedar that on mountains grows,
No sov'reign herb is found for their disease.

THE remainder of this poem, consisting of a third book, written during the author's imprisonment, is composed of several detached scenes, in which the main plot lies ripening for future action. Rivals are raised to BIRTHA. Flattering advances from the court, and more open declarations of love from Rhodalind, are in vain employed to assail the constancy of Gondibert. Various conflicts of passion arise, and interesting situations, well imagined, and painted in lively colours. Much is given, as in the former parts, to the introduction of elevated sentiment; with one example of which I shall finish my quotations. Several well-born youths are placed about the person of Gondibert as his pages, whose education consists of the following great lessons from their lord:

[Pg 187]

But with the early sun he rose, and taught
These youths by growing Virtue to grow great,
Shew'd greatness is without it blindly sought,
A desperate charge which ends in base retreat.

He taught them shame, the sudden sense of ill;
Shame, nature's hasty conscience, which forbids
Weak inclination ere it grows to will,
Or stays rash will before it grows to deeds.

He taught them Honour, Virtue's bashfulness;
A fort so yieldless that it fears to treat;
Like power it grows to nothing, growing less;
Honour, the moral conscience of the great.

He taught them Kindness; soul's civility,
In which, nor courts, nor cities have a part;
For theirs is fashion, this from falshood free,
Where love and pleasure know no lust nor art.

And Love he taught; the soul's stol'n visit made
Tho' froward age watch hard, and law forbid;
Her walks no spy has trac'd, nor mountain staid;
Her friendship's cause is as the loadstone hid.

[Pg 188]

He taught them love of Toil; Toil which does keep
Obstructions from the mind, and quench the blood;
Ease but belongs to us like sleep, and sleep,
Like opium, is our med'cine, not our food.

THE plot is at length involved in so many intricate and apparently unsurmountable difficulties, that it is scarce possible to conceive a satisfactory termination. Perhaps the poet was sensible of a want of power to extricate himself, and chose thus to submit to a voluntary bankruptcy of invention, rather than hazard his reputation by going further. In his postscript, indeed, he excuses himself on account of sickness and approaching dissolution. However disappointed we may be by his abrupt departure from scenes which he has filled with confusion, we ought not to forget the pleasures already received from them. "If (says he to his reader, with more than the spirit of a dying man) thou art one of those who has been warmed with poetic fire, I reverence thee as my judge." From such a judicature, this NOBLE FRAGMENT, would, I doubt not, acquire for him what the critic laments his having lost, "the possession of that true and permanent glory of which his large soul appears to have been full^[2]."

[Pg 189]

[2] Disc. on Poetical Imitation.

A N

E N Q U I R Y

I N T O T H O S E K I N D S O F

D I S T R E S S

W H I C H E X C I T E

A G R E E A B L E S E N S A T I O N S .

IT is undoubtedly true, though a phænomenon of the human mind difficult to account for, that the representation of distress frequently gives pleasure; from which general observation many of our modern writers of tragedy and romance seem to have drawn this inference, that in order to please, they have nothing more to do than to paint distress in natural and striking colours. With this view, they heap together all the afflicting events and dismal accidents their imagination can furnish; and when they have half broke the reader's heart, they expect he should thank them for his agreeable entertainment. An author of this class sits down, pretty much like an inquisitor, to compute how much suffering he can inflict upon the hero of his tale before he makes an end of him; with this difference, indeed, that the inquisitor only tortures those who are at least reputed criminals; whereas the writer generally chooses the most excellent character in his piece for the subject of his persecution. The great criterion of excellence is placed in being able to draw tears plentifully; and concluding we shall weep the more, the more the picture is loaded with doleful events, they go on, telling

[Pg 191]

[Pg 192]

—— of sorrows upon sorrows
Even to a lamentable length of woe.

A monarch once proposed a reward for the discovery of a new pleasure; but if any one could find out a new torture, or non-descript calamity, he would be more entitled to the applause of those who fabricated books of entertainment.

BUT the springs of pity require to be touched with a more delicate hand; and it is far from being true that we are agreeably affected by every thing that excites our sympathy. It shall therefore be the business of this essay to distinguish those kinds of distress which are pleasing in the representation, from those which are really painful and disgusting.

[Pg 193]

THE view or relation of mere misery can never be pleasing. We have, indeed, a strong sympathy with all kinds of misery; but it is a feeling of pure unmixed pain, similar in kind, though not equal in degree, to what we feel for ourselves on the like occasions; and never produces that melting sorrow, that thrill of tenderness, to which we give the name of pity. They are two distinct sensations, marked by very different external expression. One causes the nerves to tingle, the flesh to shudder, and the whole countenance to be thrown into strong contractions; the other relaxes the frame, opens the features, and produces tears. When we crush a noxious or loathsome animal, we may sympathize strongly with the pain it suffers, but with far different emotions from the tender sentiment we feel for the dog of Ulysses, who crawled to meet his long-lost master, looked up, and died at his feet. Extreme bodily pain is perhaps the most intense suffering we are capable of, and if the fellow-feeling with misery alone was grateful to the mind, the exhibition of a man in a fit of the tooth-ach, or under a chirurgical operation, would have a fine effect in a tragedy. But there must be some other sentiment combined with this kind of instinctive sympathy, before it becomes in any degree pleasing, or produces the sweet emotion of pity. This sentiment is love, esteem, the complacency we take in the contemplation of beauty, of mental or moral excellence, called forth and rendered more interesting, by circumstances of pain and danger. Tenderness is, much more properly than sorrow, the spring of tears; for it affects us in that manner, whether combined with joy or grief; perhaps more in the former case than the latter. And I believe we may venture to assert, that no distress which produces tears is wholly without a mixture of pleasure. When Joseph's brethren were sent to buy corn, if they had perished in the desert by wild beasts, or been reduced (as in the horrid adventures of a Pierre de Vaud) to eat one another, we might have shuddered, but we should not have wept for them. The gush of tears breaks forth when Joseph made himself known to his brethren, and fell on their neck, and kissed them. When Hubert prepares to burn out prince Arthur's eyes, the shocking circumstance, of itself, would only affect us with horror; it is the amiable simplicity of the young prince, and his innocent affection to his intended murderer, that draws our tears, and excites that tender sorrow which we love to feel, and which refines the heart while we do feel it.

[Pg 194]

[Pg 195]

[Pg 196]

WE see, therefore, from this view of our internal feelings, that no scenes of misery ought to be exhibited which are not connected with the display of some moral excellence, or agreeable

quality. If fortitude, power, and strength of mind are called forth, they produce the sublime feelings of wonder and admiration: if the softer qualities of gentleness, grace, and beauty, they inspire love and pity. The management of these latter emotions is our present object.

AND let it be remembered, in the first place, that the misfortunes which excite pity must not be too horrid and overwhelming. The mind is rather stunned than softened by great calamities. They are little circumstances that work most sensibly upon the tender feelings. For this reason, a well-written novel generally draws more tears than a tragedy. The distresses of tragedy are more calculated to amaze and terrify, than to move compassion. Battles, torture and death are in every page. The dignity of the characters, the importance of the events, the pomp of verse and imagery interest the grander passions, and raise the mind to an enthusiasm little favourable to the weak and languid notes of pity. The tragedies of Young are in a fine strain of poetry, and the situations are worked up with great energy; but the pictures are in too deep a shade: all his pieces are full of violent and gloomy passions, and so over-wrought with horror, that instead of awakening any pleasing sensibility, they leave on the mind an impression of sadness mixed with terror. Shakespeare is sometimes guilty of presenting scenes too shocking. Such is the trampling out of Gloster's eyes; and such is the whole play of Titus Andronicus. But Lee, beyond all others, abounds with this kind of images. He delighted in painting the most daring crimes, and cruel massacres; and though he has shewn himself extremely capable of raising tenderness, he continually checks its course by shocking and disagreeable expressions. His pieces are in the same taste with the pictures of Spagnolet, and there are many scenes in his tragedies which no one can relish who would not look with pleasure on the slaying of St. Bartholomew. The following speech of Marguerite, in the massacre of Paris, was, I suppose, intended to express the utmost tenderness of affection.

[Pg 197]

[Pg 198]

Die for him! that's too little; I could burn
Piece-meal away, or bleed to death by drops,
Be slay'd alive, then broke upon the wheel,
Yet with a smile endure it all for Guise:
And when let loose from torments, all one wound,
Run with my mangled arms and crush him dead.

[Pg 199]

IMAGES like these will never excite the softer passions. We are less moved at the description of an Indian tortured with all the dreadful ingenuity of that savage people, than with the fatal mistake of the lover in the Spectator, who pierced an artery in the arm of his mistress as he was letting her blood. Tragedy and romance-writers are likewise apt to make too free with the more violent expressions of passion and distress, by which means they lose their effect. Thus an ordinary author does not know how to express any strong emotion otherwise than by swoonings or death; so that a person experienced in this kind of reading, when a girl faints away at parting with her lover, or a hero kills himself for the loss of his mistress, considers it as the established etiquette upon such occasions, and turns over the pages with the utmost coolness and unconcern; whereas real sensibility, and a more intimate knowledge of human nature, would have suggested a thousand little touches of grief, which though slight, are irresistible. We are too gloomy a people. Some of the French novels are remarkable for little affecting incidents, imagined with delicacy, and told with grace. Perhaps they have a better turn than we have for this kind of writing.

[Pg 200]

A JUDICIOUS author will never attempt to raise pity by any thing mean or disgusting. As we have already observed, there must be a degree of complacence mixed with our sorrows to produce an agreeable sympathy; nothing, therefore, must be admitted which destroys the grace and dignity of suffering; the imagination must have an amiable figure to dwell upon; there are circumstances so ludicrous or disgusting, that no character can preserve a proper decorum under them, or appear in an agreeable light. Who can read the following description of Polypheme without finding his compassion entirely destroyed by aversion and loathing?

[Pg 201]

————— His bloody hand
Snatch'd two unhappy of my martial band,
And dash'd like dogs against the stony floor,
The pavement swims with brains and mingled gore;
Torn limb from limb, he spreads his horrid feast,
And fierce devours it like a mountain beast,
He sucks the marrow, and the blood he drains,
Nor entrails, flesh, nor solid bone remains.

Or that of Scylla,

In the wide dungeon she devours her food,
And the flesh trembles while she churns the blood.

Deformity is always disgusting, and the imagination cannot reconcile it with the idea of a favourite character; therefore the poet and romance-writer are fully justified in giving a larger share of beauty to their principal figures than is usually met with in common life. A late genius, indeed, in a whimsical mood, gave us a lady with her nose crushed for the heroine of his story; but the circumstance spoils the picture; and though in the course of the story it is kept a good deal out of sight, whenever it does recur to the imagination we are hurt and disgusted. It was an heroic instance of virtue in the nuns of a certain abbey, who cut off their noses and lips to avoid violation; yet this would make a very bad subject for a poem or a play. Something akin to this is

[Pg 202]

the representation of any thing unnatural; of which kind is the famous story of the Roman charity, and for this reason I cannot but think it an unpleasing subject for either the pen or the pencil.

[Pg 203]

POVERTY, if truly represented, shocks our nicer feelings; therefore, whenever it is made use of to awaken our compassion, the rags and dirt, the squalid appearance and mean employments incident to that state must be kept out of sight, and the distress must arise from the idea of depression, and the shock of falling from higher fortunes. We do not pity Belisarius as a poor blind beggar; and a painter would succeed very ill who should sink him to the meanness of that condition. He must let us still discover the conqueror of the Vandals, the general of the imperial armies, or we shall be little interested. Let us look at the picture of the old woman in Otway:

[Pg 204]

— A wrinkled hag with age grown double,
Picking dry sticks, and muttering to herself;
Her eyes with scalding rheum were gall'd and red;
Cold palsie shook her head; her hands seem'd wither'd;
And on her crooked shoulder had she wrapt
The tatter'd remnant of an old strip'd hanging,
Which serv'd to keep her carcase from the cold;
So there was nothing of a piece about her.

Here is the extreme of wretchedness, and instead of melting into pity, we should turn away with disgust, if we were not pleased with it, as we are with a Dutch painting, from its exact imitation of nature. Indeed the author only intended it to strike horror. But how different are the sentiments we feel for the lovely Belvidera! We see none of those circumstances which render poverty an unamiable thing. When the goods are seized by an execution, our attention is turned to *the piles of massy plate, and all the ancient, most domestic ornaments*, which imply grandeur and consequence; or to such instances of their hard fortune as will lead us to pity them as lovers: we are struck and affected with the general face of ruin; but we are not brought near enough to discern the ugliness of its features. Belvidera ruined, Belvidera deprived of friends, without a home, abandoned to the wide world—we can contemplate with all the pleasing sympathy of pity; but had she been represented as really sunk into low life, had we seen her employed in the most servile offices of poverty, our compassion would have given way to contempt and disgust. Indeed, we may observe in real life, that poverty is only pitied so long as people can keep themselves from the effects of it. When in common language we say *a miserable object*, we mean an object of distress which, if we relieve, we turn away from at the same time. To make pity pleasing, the object of it must not in any view be disagreeable to the imagination. How admirably has the author of *Clarissa* managed this point? Amidst scenes of suffering which rend the heart, in poverty, in a prison, under the most shocking outrages, the grace and delicacy of her character never suffers even for a moment; there seems to be a charm about her which prevents her receiving a stain from anything which happens; and *Clarissa*, abandoned and undone, is the object not only of complacence, but veneration.

[Pg 205]

[Pg 206]

I would likewise observe, that if an author would have us feel a strong degree of compassion, his characters must not be too perfect. The stern fortitude and inflexible resolution of a Cato may command esteem, but does not excite tenderness; and faultless rectitude of conduct, though no rigour be mixed with it, is of too sublime a nature to inspire compassion. Virtue has a kind of self-sufficiency; it stands upon its own basis, and cannot be injured by any violence. It must therefore be mixed with something of helplessness and imperfection, with an excessive sensibility, or a simplicity bordering upon weakness, before it raises, in any great degree, either tenderness or familiar love. If there be a fault in the masterly performance just now mentioned, it is that the character of *Clarissa* is so inflexibly right, her passions are under such perfect command, and her prudence is so equal to every occasion, that she seems not to need that sympathy we should bestow upon one of a less elevated character; and perhaps we should feel a livelier emotion of tenderness for the innocent girl whom *Lovelace* calls his *Rose-bud*, but that the story of *Clarissa* is so worked up by the strength of colouring, and the force of repeated impressions, as to command all our sorrow.

[Pg 207]

PITY seems too degrading a sentiment to be offered at the shrine of faultless excellence. The sufferings of martyrs are rather beheld with admiration and sympathetic triumph than with tears; and we never feel much for those whom we consider as themselves raised above common feelings.

[Pg 208]

THE last rule I shall insist upon is, that scenes of distress should not be too long continued. All our finer feelings are in a manner momentary, and no art can carry them beyond a certain point, either in intenseness or duration. Constant suffering deadens the heart to tender impressions; as we may observe in sailors, and others who are grown callous by a life of continual hardships. It is therefore highly necessary, in a long work, to relieve the mind by scenes of pleasure and gaiety; and I cannot think it so absurd a practice as our modern delicacy has represented it, to intermix wit and fancy with the pathetic, provided care be taken not to check the passions while they are flowing. The transition from a pleasurable state of mind to tender sorrow is not so difficult as we imagine. When the mind is opened by gay and agreeable scenes, every impression is felt more sensibly. Persons of a lively temper are much more susceptible of that sudden swell of sensibility which occasions tears, than those of a grave and saturnine cast: for this reason women are more easily moved to weeping than men. Those who have touched the springs of pity with the finest hand, have mingled light strokes of pleasantry and mirth in their most pathetic passages. Very different is the conduct of many novel-writers, who, by plunging us into scenes of distress without end or limit, exhaust the powers, and before the conclusion either render us insensible to

[Pg 209]

[Pg 210]

every thing, or fix a real sadness upon the mind. The uniform stile of tragedies is one reason why they affect so little. In our old plays, all the force of language is reserved for the more interesting parts; and in the scenes of common life there is no attempt to rise above common language: whereas we, by that pompous manner and affected solemnity which we think it necessary to preserve through the whole piece, lose the force of an elevated or passionate expression where the occasion really suggests it.

HAVING thus considered the manner in which fictitious distress must be managed to render it pleasing, let us reflect a little upon the moral tendency of such representations. Much has been said in favour of them, and they are generally thought to improve the tender and humane feelings; but this, I own, appears to me very dubious. That they exercise sensibility, is true; but sensibility does not increase with exercise. By the constitution of our frame our habits increase, our emotions decrease, by repeated acts; and thus a wise provision is made, that as our compassion grows weaker, its place should be supplied by habitual benevolence. But in these writings our sensibility is strongly called forth without any possibility of exerting itself in virtuous action, and those emotions, which we shall never feel again with equal force, are wasted without advantage. Nothing is more dangerous than to let virtuous impressions of any kind pass through the mind without producing their proper effect. The awakenings of remorse, virtuous shame and indignation, the glow of moral approbation—if they do not lead to action, grow less and less vivid every time they recur, till at length the mind grows absolutely callous. The being affected with a pathetic story is undoubtedly a sign of an amiable disposition, but perhaps no means of increasing it. On the contrary, young people, by a course of this kind of reading, often acquire something of that apathy and indifference which the experience of real life would have given them, without its advantages.

[Pg 211]

[Pg 212]

ANOTHER reason why plays and romances do not improve our humanity is, that they lead us to require a certain elegance of manners and delicacy of virtue which is not often found with poverty, ignorance and meanness. The objects of pity in romance are as different from those in real life as our husbandmen from the shepherds of Arcadia; and a girl who will sit weeping the whole night at the delicate distresses of a lady Charlotte, or lady Julia, shall be little moved at the complaint of her neighbour, who, in a homely phrase and vulgar accent, laments to her that she is not able to get bread for her family. Romance-writers likewise make great misfortunes so familiar to our ears, that we have hardly any pity to spare for the common accidents of life: but we ought to remember, that misery has a claim to relief, however we may be disgusted with its appearance; and that we must not fancy ourselves charitable, when we are only pleasing our imagination.

[Pg 213]

It would perhaps be better, if our romances were more like those of the old stamp, which tended to raise human nature, and inspire a certain grace and dignity of manners of which we have hardly the idea. The high notions of honour, the wild and fanciful spirit of adventure and romantic love, elevated the mind; our novels tend to depress and enfeeble it. Yet there is a species of this kind of writing which must ever afford an exquisite pleasure to persons of taste and sensibility; where noble sentiments are mixed with well-fancied incidents, pathetic touches with dignity and grace, and invention with chaste correctness. Such will ever interest our sweetest passions. I shall conclude this paper with the following tale.

[Pg 214]

[Pg 215]

IN the happy period of the golden age, when all the celestial inhabitants descended to the earth, and conversed familiarly with mortals, among the most cherished of the heavenly powers were twins, the offspring of Jupiter, LOVE and JOY. Where they appeared, the flowers sprung up beneath their feet, the sun shone with a brighter radiance, and all nature seemed embellished by their presence. They were inseparable companions, and their growing attachment was favoured by Jupiter, who had decreed that a lasting union should be solemnized between them as soon as they were arrived at maturer years. But in the mean time the sons of men deviated from their native innocence; vice and ruin over-ran the earth with giant strides; and Astrea, with her train of celestial visitants, forsook their polluted abodes. Love alone remained, having been stolen away by Hope, who was his nurse, and conveyed by her to the forests of Arcadia, where he was brought up among the shepherds. But Jupiter assigned him a different partner, and commanded him to espouse sorrow, the daughter of Até. He complied with reluctance; for her features were harsh and disagreeable, her eyes sunk, her forehead contracted into perpetual wrinkles, and her temples were covered with a wreath of cypress and wormwood. From this union sprung a virgin, in whom might be traced a strong resemblance to both her parents; but the sullen and unamiable features of her mother were so mixed and blended with the sweetness of her father, that her countenance, though mournful, was highly pleasing. The maids and shepherds of the neighbouring plains gathered round, and called her PITY. A red-breast was observed to build in the cabin where she was born; and while she was yet an infant, a dove, pursued by a hawk, flew into her bosom. This nymph had a dejected appearance, but so soft and gentle a mien that she was beloved to a degree of enthusiasm. Her voice was low and plaintive, but inexpressibly sweet; and she loved to lie for hours together on the banks of some wild and melancholy stream, singing to her lute. She taught men to weep, for she took a strange delight in tears; and often, when the virgins of the hamlet were assembled at their evening sports, she would steal in amongst them, and captivate their hearts by her tales full of a charming sadness. She wore on her head a garland composed of her father's myrtles twisted with her mother's cypress.

[Pg 216]

[Pg 217]

[Pg 218]

One day, as she sat musing by the waters of Helicon, her tears by chance fell into the fountain;

and ever since, the Muses' spring has retained a strong taste of the infusion. Pity was commanded by Jupiter to follow the steps of her mother through the world, dropping balm into the wounds she made, and binding up the hearts she had broken. She follows with her hair loose, her bosom bare and throbbing, her garments torn by the briars, and her feet bleeding with the roughness of the path. The nymph is mortal, for her mother is so; and when she has fulfilled her destined course upon the earth, they shall both expire together, and LOVE be again united to JOY, his immortal and long-betrothed bride.

[Pg 219]

[Pg 220]

T H O U G H T S
ON THE
DEVOTIONAL TASTE,
ON
S E C T S,
AND ON
ESTABLISHMENTS.

NOTE. This Essay was first printed in 1735, and prefixed to *Devotional Pieces compiled from the Psalms of David*.

IT is observed by a late most amiable and elegant writer, that Religion may be considered in three different views. As a system of opinions, its sole object is truth; and the only faculty that has any thing to do with it is Reason, exerted in the freest and most dispassionate enquiry. As a principle regulating our conduct, Religion is a habit, and like all other habits, of slow growth, and gaining strength only by repeated exertions. But it may likewise be considered as a taste, an affair of sentiment and feeling, and in this sense it is properly called Devotion. Its seat is in the imagination and the passions, and it has its source in that relish for the sublime, the vast, and the beautiful, by which we taste the charms of poetry and other compositions that address our finer feelings; rendered more lively and interesting by a sense of gratitude for personal benefits. It is in a great degree constitutional, and is by no means found in exact proportion to the virtue of a character.

[Pg 221]

It is with relation to this last view of the subject that the observations in this essay are hazarded: for though, as a rule of life, the authority and salutary effects of religion are pretty universally acknowledged, and though its tenets have been defended with sufficient zeal, its affections languish, the spirit of Devotion is certainly at a very low ebb amongst us, and what is surprising, it has fallen, I know not how, into a certain contempt, and is treated with great indifference, amongst many of those who value themselves on the purity of their faith, and who are distinguished by the sweetness of their morals. As the religious affections in a great measure rise and fall with the pulse, and are affected by every thing which acts upon the imagination, they are apt to run into strange excesses; and if directed by a melancholy or enthusiastic faith, their workings are often too strong for a weak head, or a delicate frame; and for this reason they have been almost excluded from religious worship by many persons of real piety. It is the character of the present age to allow little to sentiment, and all the warm and generous emotions are treated as romantic by the supercilious brow of a cold-hearted philosophy. The man of science, with an air of superiority, leaves them to some florid declaimer who professes to work upon the passions of the lower class, where they are so debased by noise and nonsense, that it is no wonder if they move disgust in those of elegant and better-informed minds.

[Pg 222]

[Pg 223]

YET there is a devotion, generous, liberal, and humane, the child of more exalted feelings than base minds can enter into, which assimilates man to higher natures, and lifts him "above this visible diurnal sphere." Its pleasures are ultimate, and, when early cultivated, continue vivid even in that uncomfortable season of life when some of the passions are extinct, when imagination is dead, and the heart begins to contract within itself. Those who want this taste, want a sense, a part of their nature, and should not presume to judge of feelings to which they must ever be strangers. No one pretends to be a judge in poetry or the fine arts, who has not both a natural and a cultivated relish for them; and shall the narrow-minded children of earth, absorbed in low pursuits, dare to treat as visionary, objects which they have never made themselves acquainted with? Silence on such subjects will better become them. But to vindicate the pleasures of

[Pg 224]

devotion to those who have neither taste nor knowledge about them, is not the present object. It rather deserves our enquiry, what causes have contributed to check the operations of religious impressions amongst those who have steady principles, and are well disposed to virtue. [Pg 225]

AND, in the first place, there is nothing more prejudicial to the feelings of a devout heart, than a habit of disputing on religious subjects. Free enquiry is undoubtedly necessary to establish a rational belief; but a disputatious spirit, and fondness for controversy, give the mind a sceptical turn, with an aptness to call in question the most established truths. It is impossible to preserve that deep reverence for the Deity with which we ought to regard him, when all his attributes, and even his very existence, become the subject of familiar debate. Candor demands that a man should allow his opponent an unlimited freedom of speech, and it is not easy in the heat of discourse to avoid falling into an indecent or careless expression; hence those who think seldomer of religious subjects, often treat them with more respect than those whose profession keeps them constantly in their view. A plain man of a serious turn would probably be shocked to hear questions of this nature treated with that ease and negligence with which they are generally discussed by the practised Theologian, or the young lively Academic ready primed from the schools of logic and metaphysics. As the ear loses its delicacy by being obliged only to *hear* coarse and vulgar language, so the veneration for religion wears off by hearing it treated with disregard, though we ourselves are employed in defending it; and to this it is owing that many who have confirmed themselves in the belief of religion, have never been able to recover that strong and affectionate sense of it which they had before they began to enquire, and have wondered to find their devotion grown weaker when their faith was better grounded. Indeed, strong reasoning powers and quick feelings do not often unite in the same person. Men of a scientific turn seldom lay their hearts open to impression. Previously biassed by the love of system, they do indeed attend the offices of religion, but they dare not trust themselves with the preacher, and are continually upon the watch to observe whether every sentiment agrees with their own particular tenets. [Pg 226]

THE spirit of enquiry is easily distinguished from the spirit of disputation. A state of doubt is not a pleasant state. It is painful, anxious, and distressing beyond most others: it disposes the mind to dejection and modesty. Whoever therefore is so unfortunate as not to have settled his opinions in important points, will proceed in the search of truth with deep humility, unaffected earnestness, and a serious attention to every argument that may be offered, which he will be much rather inclined to revolve in his own mind, than to use as materials for dispute. Even with these dispositions, it is happy for a man when he does not find much to alter in the religious system he has embraced; for if that undergoes a total revolution, his religious feelings are too generally so weakened by the shock, that they hardly recover again their original tone and vigour. [Pg 227]

SHALL we mention Philosophy as an enemy to religion? God forbid! Philosophy,

Daughter of Heaven, that slow ascending still
Investigating sure the form of things
With radiant finger points to heaven again.

Yet there is a view in which she exerts an influence perhaps rather unfavourable to the fervor of simple piety. Philosophy does indeed enlarge our conceptions of the Deity, and gives us the sublimest ideas of his power and extent of dominion; but it raises him too high for our imaginations to take hold of, and in a great measure destroys that affectionate regard which is felt by the common class of pious Christians. When, after contemplating the numerous productions of this earth, the various forms of being, the laws, the mode of their existence, we rise yet higher, and turn our eyes to that magnificent profusion of suns and systems which astronomy pours upon the mind—When we grow acquainted with the majestic order of nature, and those eternal laws which bind the material and intellectual worlds—When we trace the footsteps of creative energy through regions of unmeasured space, and still find new wonders disclosed and pressing upon the view—we grow giddy with the prospect; the mind is astonished, confounded at its own insignificance; we think it almost impiety for a worm to lift its head from the dust, and address the Lord of so stupendous a universe; the idea of communion with our Maker shocks us as presumption, and the only feeling the soul is capable of in such a moment is a deep and painful sense of its own abasement. It is true, the same philosophy teaches that the Deity is intimately present through every part of this complicated system, and neglects not any of his works: but this is a truth which is believed without being felt; our imagination cannot here keep pace with our reason, and the sovereign of nature seems ever further removed from us in proportion as we enlarge the bounds of his creation. [Pg 229]

PHILOSOPHY represents the Deity in too abstracted a manner to engage our affections. A Being without hatred and without fondness, going on in one steady course of even benevolence, neither delighted with praises, nor moved by importunity, does not interest us so much as a character open to the feelings of indignation, the soft relentings of mercy, and the partialities of particular affections. We require some common nature, or at least the appearance of it, on which to build our intercourse. It is also a fault of which philosophers are often guilty, that they dwell too much in generals. Accustomed to reduce every thing to the operation of general laws, they turn our attention to larger views, attempt to grasp the whole order of the universe, and in the zeal of a systematic spirit seldom leave room for those particular and personal mercies which are the food of gratitude. They trace the great outline of nature, but neglect the colouring which gives warmth and beauty to the piece. As in poetry it is not vague and general description, but a few striking circumstances clearly related and strongly worked up—as in a landscape it is not such a vast [Pg 231]

extensive range of country as pains the eye to stretch to its limits, but a beautiful, well-defined prospect, which gives the most pleasure—so neither are those unbounded views in which philosophy delights, so much calculated to touch the heart as home views and nearer objects. The philosopher offers up general praises on the altar of universal nature; the devout man, on the altar of his heart, presents his own sighs, his own thanksgivings, his own earnest desires: the former worship is more sublime, the latter more personal and affecting.

WE are likewise too scrupulous in our public exercises, and too studious of accuracy. A prayer strictly philosophical must ever be a cold and dry composition. From an over-anxious fear of admitting any expression that is not strictly proper, we are apt to reject all warm and pathetic imagery, and, in short, every thing that strikes upon the heart and the senses. But it may be said, 'If the Deity be indeed so sublime a being, and if his designs and manner are so infinitely beyond our comprehension, how can a thinking mind join in the addresses of the vulgar, or avoid being overwhelmed with the indistinct vastness of such an idea?' Far be it from me to deny that awe and veneration must ever make a principal part of our regards to the Master of the universe, or to defend that style of indecent familiarity which is yet more shocking than indifference: but let it be considered that we cannot hope to avoid all improprieties in speaking of such a Being; that the most philosophical address we can frame is probably no more free from them than the devotions of the vulgar; that the scriptures set us an example of accommodating the language of prayer to common conceptions, and making use of figures and modes of expression far from being strictly defensible; and that, upon the whole, it is safer to trust to our genuine feelings, feelings implanted in us by the God of nature, than to any metaphysical subtleties. He has impressed me with the idea of trust and confidence, and my heart flies to him in danger; of mercy to forgive, and I melt before him in penitence; of bounty to bestow, and I ask of him all I want or wish for. I may make use of an inaccurate expression, I may paint him to my imagination too much in the fashion of humanity; but while my heart is pure, while I depart not from the line of moral duty, the error is not dangerous. Too critical a spirit is the bane of every thing great or pathetic. In our creeds let us be guarded; let us there weigh every syllable; but in compositions addressed to the heart, let us give freer scope to the language of the affections, and the overflowing of a warm and generous disposition.

[Pg 233]

[Pg 234]

[Pg 235]

ANOTHER cause which most effectually operates to check devotion, is ridicule. I speak not here of open derision of things sacred; but there is a certain ludicrous style in talking of such subjects, which, without any ill design, does much harm; and perhaps those whose studies or profession lead them to be chiefly conversant with the offices of religion, are most apt to fall in to this impropriety; for their ideas being chiefly taken from that source, their common conversation is apt to be tinctured with fanciful allusions to scripture expressions, to prayers, &c. which have all the effect of a parody, and, like parodies, destroy the force of the finest passage, by associating it with something trivial and ridiculous. Of this nature is Swift's well-known jest of "Dearly beloved Roger," which whoever has strong upon his memory, will find it impossible to attend with proper seriousness to that part of the service. We should take great care to keep clear from all these trivial associations, in whatever we wish to be regarded as venerable.

[Pg 236]

ANOTHER species of ridicule to be avoided, is that kind of sneer often thrown upon those whose hearts are giving way to honest emotion. There is an extreme delicacy in all the finer affections, which makes them shy of observation, and easily checked. Love, Wonder, Pity, the enthusiasm of Poetry, shrink from the notice of even an indifferent eye, and never indulge themselves freely but in solitude, or when heightened by the powerful force of sympathy. Observe an ingenuous youth at a well-wrought tragedy. If all around him are moved, he suffers his tears to flow freely; but if a single eye meets him with a glance of contemptuous indifference, he can no longer enjoy his sorrow; he blushes at having wept, and in a moment his heart is shut up to every impression of tenderness. It is sometimes mentioned as a reproach to Protestants, that they are susceptible of a false shame when observed in the exercises of their religion, from which Papists are free. But I take this to proceed from the purer nature of our religion; for the less it is made to consist in outward pomp and mechanical worship, and the more it has to do with the finer affections of the heart, the greater will be the reserve and delicacy which attend the expression of its sentiments. Indeed, ridicule ought to be very sparingly used; for it is an enemy to every thing sublime or tender: the least degree of it, whether well or ill founded, suddenly and instantaneously stops the workings of passion, and those who indulge a talent that way, would do well to consider, that they are rendering themselves for ever incapable of all the higher pleasures either of taste or morals. More especially do these cold pleasantries hurt the minds of youth, by checking that generous expansion of heart to which their open tempers are naturally prone, and producing a vicious shame, through which they are deprived of the enjoyment of heroic sentiments or generous action.

[Pg 237]

[Pg 238]

[Pg 239]

IN the next place, let us not be superstitiously afraid of superstition. It shews great ignorance of the human heart, and the springs by which its passions are moved, to neglect taking advantage of the impression which particular circumstances, times and seasons, naturally make upon the mind. The root of all superstition is the principle of the association of ideas, by which, objects naturally indifferent become dear and venerable, through their connection with interesting ones. It is true, this principle has been much abused: it has given rise to pilgrimages innumerable, worship of relics, and priestly power. But let us not carry our ideas of purity and simplicity so far as to neglect it entirely. Superior natures, it is possible, may be equally affected with the same truths at all times, and in all places; but we are not so made. Half the pleasures of elegant minds are derived from this source. Even the enjoyments of sense, without it, would lose much of their attraction. Who does not enter into the sentiment of the Poet, in that passage so full of nature and truth:

[Pg 240]

'He that outlives this hour, and comes safe home,
Shall stand on tiptoe when this day is named,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian:
He that outlives this day and sees old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say, To-morrow is St. Crispian.'

But were not the benefits of the victory equally apparent on any other day of the year? Why commemorate the anniversary with such distinguished regard? Those who can ask such a question, have never attended to some of the strongest instincts in our nature. Yet it has lately been the fashion, amongst those who call themselves rational Christians, to treat as puerile, all attentions of this nature when relative to religion. They would

[Pg 241]

Kiss with pious lips the sacred earth
Which gave a Hampden or a Russel birth.

They will visit the banks of Avon with all the devotion of enthusiastic zeal; celebrate the birth-day of the hero and the patriot; and yet pour contempt upon the Christian who suffers himself to be warmed by similar circumstances relating to his Master, or the connection of sentiments of peculiar reverence with times, places, and men which have been appropriated to the service of religion. A wise preacher will not, from a fastidious refinement, disdain to affect his hearers from the season of the year, the anniversary of a national blessing, a remarkable escape from danger, or, in short, any incident that is sufficiently guarded, and far enough removed from what is trivial, to be out of danger of becoming ludicrous.

[Pg 242]

It will not be amiss to mention here, a reproach which has been cast upon devotional writers, that they are apt to run into the language of love. Perhaps the charge would be full as just, had they said that Love borrows the language of Devotion; for the votaries of that passion are fond of using those exaggerated expressions, which can suit nothing below Divinity; and you can hardly address the greatest of all Beings in a strain of more profound adoration, than the lover uses to the object of his attachment. But the truth is, Devotion does in no small degree resemble that fanciful and elevated kind of love which depends not on the senses. Nor is the likeness to be wondered at, since both have their source in the love of beauty and excellence. Both are exceeding prone to superstition, and apt to run into romantic excesses. Both are nourished by poetry and music, and felt with the greatest fervour in the warmer climates. Both carry the mind out of itself, and powerfully refine the affections from every thing gross, low, and selfish.

[Pg 243]

BUT it is time to retire; we are treading upon enchanted ground, and shall be suspected by many of travelling towards the regions of chivalry and old romance. And were it so, many a fair majestic idea might be gathered from those forgotten walks, which would well answer the trouble of transplanting. It must however be owned, that very improper language has formerly been used on these subjects; but there cannot be any great danger of such excesses, where the mind is guarded by a rational faith, and the social affections have full scope in the free commerce and legitimate connections of society.

[Pg 244]

HAVING thus considered the various causes which contribute to deaden the feelings of devotion, it may not be foreign to the subject to enquire in what manner they are affected by the different modes of religion. I speak not of opinions; for these have much less influence upon the heart, than the circumstances which attend particular persuasions. A sect *may* only differ from an establishment, as one absurd opinion differs from another: but there is a character and cast of manners belonging to each, which will be perfectly distinct; and of a sect, the character will vary as it is a rising or a declining sect, persecuted or at ease. Yet while divines have wearied the world with canvassing contrary doctrines and jarring articles of faith, the philosopher has not considered, as the subject deserved, what situation was most favourable to virtue, sentiment, and pure manners. To a philosophic eye, free from prejudice, and accustomed to large views of the great polity carried on in the moral world, perhaps varying and opposite forms may appear proper, and well calculated for their respective ends; and he will neither wish entirely to destroy the old, nor wholly to crush the new.

[Pg 245]

THE great line of division between different modes of religion, is formed by Establishments and Sects. In an infant sect, which is always in some degree a persecuted one, the strong union and entire affection of its followers, the sacrifices they make to principle, the force of novelty, and the amazing power of sympathy, all contribute to cherish devotion. It rises even to passion, and absorbs every other sentiment. Severity of manners imposes respect; and the earnestness of the new proselytes renders them insensible to injury, or even to ridicule. A strain of eloquence, often coarse indeed, but strong and persuasive, works like leaven in the heart of the people. In this state, all outward helps are superfluous, the living spirit of devotion is amongst them, the world sinks away to nothing before it, and every object but one is annihilated. The social principle mixes with the flame, and renders it more intense; strong parties are formed, and friends or lovers are not more closely connected than the members of these little communities.

[Pg 246]

It is this kind of devotion, a devotion which those of more settled and peaceable times can only guess at, which made amends to the first Christians for all they resigned, and all they suffered: this draws the martyr to a willing death, and enables the confessor to endure a voluntary poverty. But this stage cannot last long: the heat of persecution abates, and the fervour of zeal feels a proportional decay. Now comes on the period of reasoning and examination. The principles which have produced such mighty effects on the minds of men, acquire an importance, and become objects of the public attention. Opinions are canvassed. Those who before bore testimony to their

[Pg 247]

religion only by patient suffering, now defend it with argument; and all the keenness of polemical disquisition is awakened on either side. The fair and generous idea of religious liberty, which never originates in the breast of a triumphant party, now begins to unfold itself. To vindicate these rights, and explain these principles, learning, which in the former state was despised, is assiduously cultivated by the sectaries; their minds become enlightened, and a large portion of knowledge, especially religious knowledge, is diffused through their whole body. Their manners are less austere, without having as yet lost any thing of their original purity. Their ministers gain respect as writers, and their pulpit discourses are studied and judicious. The most unfavourable circumstance of this æra is, that those who dissent, are very apt to acquire a critical and disputatious spirit; for, being continually called upon to defend doctrines in which they differ from the generality, their attention is early turned to the argumentative part of religion; and hence we see that sermons, which afford food for this taste, are with them thought of more importance than prayer and praise, though these latter are undoubtedly the more genuine and indispensable parts of public worship. [Pg 248]

THIS then is the second period; the third approaches fast; men grow tired of a controversy which becomes insipid from being exhausted; persecution has not only ceased, it begins to be forgotten; and from the absence of opposition in either kind, springs a fatal and spiritless indifference. That sobriety, industry, and abstinence from fashionable pleasures, which distinguished the fathers, has made the sons wealthy; and, eager to enjoy their riches, they long to mix with that world, a separation from which was the best guard to their virtues. A secret shame creeps in upon them, when they acknowledge their relation to a disesteemed sect; they therefore endeavour to file off its peculiarities, but in so doing they destroy its very being. Connections with the establishment, whether of intimacy, business, or relationship, which formerly, from their superior zeal, turned to the advantage of the sect, now operate against it. Yet these connections are formed more frequently than ever; and those who a little before, soured by the memory of recent suffering, betrayed perhaps an aversion from having any thing in common with the Church, now affect to come as near it as possible; and, like a little boat that takes a large vessel in tow, the sure consequence is, the being drawn into its vortex. They aim at elegance and show in their places of worship, the appearance of their preachers, &c. and thus impolitically awaken a taste it is impossible they should ever gratify. They have worn off many forbidding singularities, and are grown more amiable and pleasing. But those singularities were of use: they set a mark upon them, they pointed them out to the world, and thus obliged persons so distinguished to exemplary strictness. No longer obnoxious to the world, they are open to all the seductions of it. Their minister, that respectable character which once inspired reverence and affectionate esteem, their teacher and their guide, is now dwindled into the mere leader of the public devotions; or, lower yet, a person hired to entertain them every week with an elegant discourse. In proportion as his importance decreases, his salary sits heavy on the people; and he feels himself depressed by that most cruel of all mortifications to a generous mind, the consciousness of being a burden upon those from whom he derives his scanty support. Unhappily, amidst this change of manners, there are forms of strictness, and a set of phrases introduced in their first enthusiasm, which still subsist: these they are ashamed to use, and know not how to decline; and their behaviour, in consequence of them, is awkward and irresolute. Those who have set out with the largest share of mysticism and flighty zeal, find themselves particularly embarrassed by this circumstance. [Pg 250]

WHEN things are come to this crisis, their tendency is evident: and though the interest and name of a sect may be kept up for a time by the generosity of former ages, the abilities of particular men, or that reluctance which keeps a generous mind from breaking old connections; it must, in a short course of years, melt away into the establishment, the womb and the grave of all other modes of religion. [Pg 251]

AN *Establishment* affects the mind by splendid buildings, music, the mysterious pomp of antient ceremonies; by the sacredness of peculiar orders, habits, and titles; by its secular importance; and by connecting with religion, ideas of order, dignity, and antiquity. It speaks to the heart through the imagination and the senses; and though it never can raise devotion so high as we have described it in a beginning sect, it will preserve it from ever sinking into contempt. As, to a woman in the glow of health and beauty, the most careless dress is the most becoming; but when the freshness of youth is worn off, greater attention is necessary, and rich ornaments are required to throw an air of dignity round her person: so while a sect retains its first plainness, simplicity and affectionate zeal, it wants nothing an establishment could give; but that once declined, the latter becomes far more respectable. The faults of an establishment grow venerable from length of time; the improvements of a sect appear whimsical from their novelty. Antient families, fond of rank, and of that order which secures it to them, are on the side of the former. Traders incline to the latter; and so do generally men of genius, as it favours their originality of thinking. An establishment leans to superstition, a sect to enthusiasm; the one is a more dangerous and violent excess, the other more fatally debilitates the powers of the mind; the one is a deeper colouring, the other a more lasting dye; but the coldness and languor of a declining sect produces scepticism. Indeed, a sect is never stationary, as it depends entirely on passions and opinions; though it often attains excellence, it never rests in it, but is always in danger of one extreme or the other; whereas an old establishment, whatever else it may want, possesses the grandeur arising from stability. [Pg 253]

WE learn to respect whatever respects itself; and are easily led to think that system requires no alteration, which never admits of any. It is this circumstance, more than any other, which gives a dignity to that accumulated mass of error, the Church of Rome. A fabric which has weathered many successive ages, though the architecture be rude, the parts disproportionate, and [Pg 254]

overloaded with ornament, strikes us with a sort of admiration, merely from its having held so long together.

THE *minister* of a sect, and of an establishment, is upon a very different footing. The former is like the popular leader of an army; he is obeyed with enthusiasm while he is obeyed at all; but his influence depends on opinion, and is entirely personal: the latter resembles a general appointed by the monarch; he has soldiers less warmly devoted to him, but more steady, and better disciplined. The dissenting teacher is nothing if he have not the spirit of a martyr; and is the scorn of the world, if he be not above the world. The clergyman, possessed of power and affluence, and for that reason chosen from among the better ranks of people, is respected as a gentleman, though not venerated as an apostle; and as his profession generally obliges him to decent manners, his order is considered as a more regular and civilized class of men than their fellow-subjects of the same rank. The dissenting teacher, separated from the people, but not raised above them, invested with no power, entitled to no emoluments, if he cannot acquire for himself authority, must feel the bitterness of dependance. The ministers of the former denomination cannot fall, but in some violent convulsion of the state: those of the latter, when indifference and mutual neglect begin to succeed to that close union which once subsisted between them and their followers, lose their former influence without resource; the dignity and weight of their office is gone for ever; they feel the insignificancy of their pretensions, their spirits sink, and, except they take refuge in some collateral pursuit, and stand candidates for literary fame, they slide into an ambiguous and undecided character; their time is too often sacrificed to frivolous compliances; their manners lose their austerity, without having proportionally gained in elegance; the world does not acknowledge them, for they are not of the world; it cannot esteem them, for they are not superior to the world.

[Pg 256]

[Pg 257]

[Pg 258]

UPON the whole, then, it should seem, that the strictness of a sect (and it can only be respectable by being strict) is calculated for a few finer spirits, who make Religion their chief object. As to the much larger number, on whom she has only an imperfect influence, making them decent if not virtuous, and meliorating the heart without greatly changing it; for all these the genius of an establishment is more eligible, and better fitted to cherish that moderate devotion of which alone they are capable. All those who have not strength of mind to think for themselves, who would live to virtue without denying the world, who wish much to be religious, but more to be genteel—naturally flow into the establishment. If it offered no motives to their minds, but such as are perfectly pure and spiritual, their devotion would not for that be more exalted, it would die away to nothing; and it is better their minds should receive only a tincture of religion, than be wholly without it. Those too, whose passions are regular and equable, and who do not aim at abstracted virtues, are commonly placed to most advantage within the pale of the national faith.

[Pg 259]

ALL the greater exertions of the mind, spirit to reform, fortitude and constancy to suffer, can be expected only from those who, forsaking the common road, are exercised in a peculiar course of moral discipline: but it should be remembered, that these exertions cannot be expected from every character, nor on every occasion. Indeed, religion is a sentiment which takes such strong hold on all the most powerful principles of our nature, that it may easily be carried to excess. The Deity never meant our regards to him should engross the mind: that indifference to sensible objects, which many moralists preach, is not perhaps desirable, except where the mind is raised above its natural tone, and extraordinary situations call forth extraordinary virtues.

[Pg 260]

IF the peculiar advantages of a sect were well understood, its followers would not be impatient of those moderate restraints which do not rise to persecution, nor affect any of their more material interests: for, do they not bind them closer to each other, cherish zeal, and keep up the love of liberty? What is the language of such restraints? Do they not say, with a prevailing voice, Let the timorous and the worldly depart; no one shall be of this persuasion, who is not sincere, disinterested, conscientious. It is notwithstanding proper, that men should be sensible of all their rights, assert them boldly, and protest against every infringement; for it may be of advantage to bear what yet it is unjustifiable in others to inflict.

[Pg 261]

NEITHER would dissenters, if they attended to their real interests, be so ambitious as they generally are, of rich converts. Such converts only accelerate their decline; they relax their discipline, and they acquire an influence very pernicious in societies which ought to breathe nothing but the spirit of equality.

SECTS are always strict in proportion to the corruption of establishments and the licentiousness of the times, and they are useful in the same proportion. Thus the austere lives of the primitive Christians counterbalanced the vices of that abandoned period; and thus the Puritans in the reign of Charles the Second seasoned with a wholesome severity the profligacy of public manners. They were less amiable than their descendants of the present day; but to be amiable was not the object: they were of public utility; and their scrupulous sanctity (carried to excess, themselves only considered) like a powerful antiseptic, opposed the contagion breathed from a most dissolute court. In like manner, that sect, one of whose most striking characteristics is a beautiful simplicity of dialect, served to check that strain of servile flattery and Gothic compliment so prevalent in the same period, and to keep up some idea of that manly plainness with which one human being ought to address another.

[Pg 262]

THUS have we seen that different modes of religion, though they bear little good-will to each other, are nevertheless mutually useful. Perhaps there is not an establishment so corrupt, as not to make the gross of mankind better than they would be without it. Perhaps there is not a sect so eccentric, but that it has set some one truth in the strongest light, or carried some one virtue, before neglected, to its utmost height, or loosened some obstinate and long-rooted prejudice.

[Pg 263]

They answer their end; they die away; others spring up, and take their place. So the purer part of the element, continually drawn off from the mighty mass of waters, forms rivers, which, running in various directions, fertilize large countries; yet, always tending towards the ocean, every accession to their bulk or grandeur but precipitates their course, and hastens their re-union with the common reservoir from which they were separated.

[Pg 264]

IN the mean time, the devout heart always finds associates suitable to its disposition, and the particular cast of its virtues; while the continual flux and reflux of opinions prevents the active principles from stagnating. There is an analogy between things material and immaterial. As, from some late experiments in philosophy it has been found, that the process of vegetation restores and purifies vitiated air; so does that moral and political ferment which accompanies the growth of new sects, communicate a kind of spirit and elasticity necessary to the vigour and health of the soul, but soon lost amidst the corrupted breath of an indiscriminate multitude.

THERE remains only to add, lest the preceding view of Sects and Establishments should in any degree be misapprehended, that it has nothing to do with the *truth* of opinions, and relates only to the influence which the adventitious circumstances attending them may have upon the manners and morals of their followers. It is therefore calculated to teach us candour, but not indifference. Large views of the moral polity of the world may serve to illustrate the providence of God in his different dispensations, but are not made to regulate our own individual conduct, which must conscientiously follow our own opinions and belief. We may see much good in an Establishment, the doctrines of which we cannot give our assent to without violating our integrity; we may respect the tendencies of a Sect, the tenets of which we utterly disapprove. We may think practices useful which we cannot adopt without hypocrisy. We may think all religions beneficial, and believe of one alone that it is true.

[Pg 265]

[Pg 266]

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Transcriber's Note

The following changes have been made:

In the [Contents](#) the page number for "On the Pleasure derived from Objects of Terror; with Sir Bertrand, a Fragment" has been changed from 117 to 119.

[Page 42](#) from: "collison" to "collision" in "from the fortuitous collision"

[Page 64](#) from: "wordly-minded" to "worldly-minded" to: "a jealous and worldly-minded prudence"

[Page 72](#) from: "abilities" to "abilities" in "paid to distinguished abilities"

[Page 97](#) from: "forbiding" to "forbidding" in "forbidding the vulgar tongue"

[Page 131](#) from: "agin" to "again" in "could not open it again"

[Page 132](#) from: "creeking" to "creaking" in "creaking upon its hinges"

[Page 176](#) from: "aditional" to "additional" in "gives additional fire"

[Page 233](#) from: "vastness of such an idea." to "vastness of such an idea?"

[Last page](#) from: "Biogrophical" to "Biographical" in "Biographical Memoirs"

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