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ESSAYS:
FOR THE
POETRY AND MUSIC,
ON

AS THEY AFFECT THE MIND;

LAUGHTER, AND LUDICROUS COMPOSITION;

ON THE
UTILITY OF CLASSICAL LEARNING.

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EDINBURGH:

Printed for EDWARD and CHARLES DILLY, in London;
and WILLIAM CREECH, Edinburgh.

M.D.C. LXXVIII.

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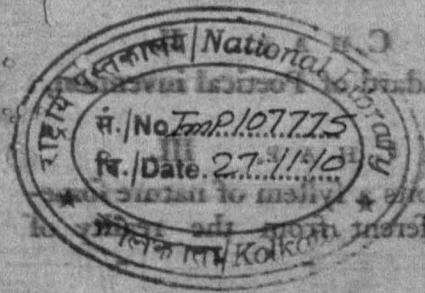
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AN
ESSAY
ON
POETRY
AND
MUSIC,
AS THEY AFFECT THE MIND.

THE following Essays, (which were read in a private literary society many years ago), having been seen and approved of by some learned persons in England, are now published at their desire. In writing them out for the press, considerable amendments were made, and new observations added; and hence one or two slight anachronisms have arisen, which, as they affect not the sense, it was not thought necessary to guard against.

THE rules of every useful art be divided into two kinds. Some are necessary to the accomplishment of the end proposed by the artist, and are therefore denominated Essential Rules; while others, called Ornamental or Mechanical, have no better foundation than the practice of some great performer, whom it has become the fashion to imitate. The latter are to be learned from the commandments of the artist, or by observing his work.

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AS THEY AFFECT THE MIND.
Written in the year 1762.

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works; the former may be investigated upon the principles of reason and philosophy.

These two classes of rules, however different, have often been confounded by critical writers, without any material injury to art, or any great inconvenience, either to the artist, or to his disciple. For frequently it happens, that fashion and philosophy coincide; and that an artist gives the law in his profession, whose principles are as just as his performance is excellent. Such has been the fate of POETRY in particular. Homer, whom we consider as the founder of this art, because we have none more ancient to refer to, appears, in the structure of his two poems, to have proceeded upon a view of things equally comprehensive and rational: nor had Aristotle, in laying down the philosophy of the art, any thing more to do, than to trace out the principles of his contrivance. What the great critic has left on this subject, proves Homer to have been no less admirable as a philosopher than as a poet; possessed not only of unbounded imagination, and all the powers of language, but also of a most exact judgement, which could at once propose a noble end, and devise the very best means of attaining it.

An art, thus founded on reason, could not fail to be durable. The propriety of the Homeric mode of invention has been acknowledged by the learned in all ages; every real improvement which particular brats

AND MUSIC

es of the art may have received since his time, has been conducted upon his principles; and poets, who never heard of his name, have, merely by their own good sense, been prompted to tread the path, which he, guided by the same internal monitor, had trod before them. And hence, notwithstanding its apparent licentiousness, true Poetry is a thing perfectly rational and regular; and nothing can be more strictly philosophical, than that part of criticism may and ought to be, which unfolds the general characters that distinguish it from other kinds of composition.

Whether the following discourse will in any degree justify this last remark, is submitted to the reader. It aspires to little other praise, than that of plain language and familiar illustration; disclaiming all paradoxical opinions and refined theories, which are indeed showy in the appearance, and not of difficult invention, but have no tendency to diffuse knowledge, or enlighten the human mind; and which, in matters of taste that have been canvassed by mankind these two thousand years, would seem to be peculiarly incongruous.

The train of thought that led me into this inquiry was suggested by a conversation many years ago, in which I had taken the freedom to offer an opinion different from what was maintained by the company, but warranted, as I then thought, and still think,

by

by the greatest authorities and the best reasons. It was pleaded against me, that taste is capricious, and criticism variable; and that the rules of Aristotle's Poetics, being founded in the practice of Sophocles and Homer, ought not to be applied to the poems of other ages and nations. I admitted the plea, as far as these rules are local and temporary; but asserted, that many of them, being founded in nature, were indispensable, and could not be violated without such impropriety, as, though overlooked by some, would always be offensive to the greater part of readers, and obstruct the general end of poetical composition: and that it would be no less absurd, for a poet to violate the essential rules of his art, and justify himself by an appeal from the tribunal of Aristotle, than for a mechanic to construct an engine on principles inconsistent with the laws of motion, and excuse himself by disclaiming the authority of Sir Isaac Newton.

The characters that distinguish poetry from other works of literature, belong either to the SUBJECT, or to the LANGUAGE: so that this discourse naturally resolves itself into two parts. — What we have to say on Music will be found to belong to the first.

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WHEN we affirm, that every art or contrivance which has a meaning must have an end, we only repeat an identical proposition: and when we say, that the essential or indispensable rules of an art are those that direct to the accomplishment of the end proposed by the artist, we repeat a definition whereof it would be capitious to controvert the propriety. And therefore, before we can determine any thing in regard to the essential rules of this art, we must form an idea of its **END** or **DESTINATION**.

the subject, or to the language; to that this discourse naturally resolves itself into two parts. — What we have to say on Music will be found to belong to the first.

CHAP-

PART

CHAPTER I.

Of the end of Poetical Composition.

THAT one end of Poetry, in its first institution, and in every period of its progress, must have been, TO GIVE PLEASURE, will hardly admit of any doubt. If men first employed it to express their adoration of superior and invisible beings, their gratitude to the benefactors of mankind, their admiration of moral, intellectual, or corporeal excellence, or, in general, their love of what was agreeable in their own species, or in other parts of Nature; they must be supposed to have endeavoured to make their poetry *pleasing*; because, otherwise, it would have been unsuitable to the occasion that gave it birth, and to the sentiments it was intended to enliven. Or if, with Horace, we were to believe, that it was first used as a vehicle to convey into savage minds the principles of government and civility*; still

* The honour of civilizing mankind, is by the poets ascribed to poetry, (*Hor. Ar. Poet. Vers. 391.*); — by the orator, to Oratory, (*Cicero, de Orat. lib. 1. § 33.*); — and by others to philosophy, (*Cicero, de Orat. lib. 1.*

we must allow, that one chief thing attended to in its composition must have been, to give it charms sufficient to engage the ear and captivate the heart of an unthinking audience. In latter times, the true poet, though in choosing materials he never lost sight of utility, yet in giving them form, (and it is the *form* chiefly that distinguishes poetry from other writings), has always made the entertainment of mankind his principal concern. Indeed, we cannot conceive, that, independently on this consideration, men would ever have applied themselves to arts so little necessary to life, and withal so difficult, as music, painting, and poetry. Certain it is, that a poem, containing the most important truths, would meet with a cold reception, if destitute of those graces of sound, invention, and language, whereof the sole end and aim is, to give pleasure.

But is it not the end of this art, *to instruct*, as well as *to please*? Verses, that give pleasure only, without profit, — what are they but chiming trifles? And if a poem were to please, and at the same time, instead of improving, to corrupt the mind, would it not deserve to be considered as a poison re-

§ 36. 37.; and *Tusc. Quest. lib. 5. § 5.*) — It is probably a gradual thing, the effect of many co-operating causes; and proceeding rather from favourable accidents, or the special appointment of Heaven, than from the art and contrivance of men.

dered doubly dangerous and detestable by its alluring qualities?—All this is true: and yet pleasure is undoubtedly the immediate aim of all those artifices by which poetry is distinguished from other compositions,—of the harmony, the rhythm, the ornamented language, the compact and diversified fable: for I believe it will be allowed, that a plain treatise, destitute of all these beauties, might be made to convey more instruction than any poem in the world. As writing is more excellent than painting, and speech than music, on account of its superior usefulness; so a discourse, containing profitable information even in a rude style, may be more excellent, because more useful, than any thing in Homer or Virgil: but such a discourse partakes no more of the nature of poetry, than language does of melody, or a manuscript of a picture; whereas an agreeable piece of writing may be poetical, though it yield little or no instruction. To instruct, is an end common to all good writing, to all poetry, all history, all sound philosophy. But of these last the principal end is to instruct; and if this single end be accomplished, the philosopher and the historian will be allowed to have acquitted themselves well: but the poet must do a great deal for the sake of pleasure only; and if he fail to please, he may indeed deserve praise on other accounts, but as a poet he has done nothing.—But do not historians and philosophers, as well as poets,

poets, make it their study to please their readers. They generally do: but the former please, that they may instruct; the latter instruct, that they may the more effectually please. Pleasing, though uninstructional, poetry may gratify a light mind; and what tends even to corrupt the heart may gratify profligates: but the true poet addresses his work, not to the giddy, nor to the worthless, nor to any party, but to mankind; and, if he means to please the *general* taste, must often employ instruction as one of the arts that minister to this kind of pleasure.

The necessity of this arises from a circumstance in human nature, which is to man (as Erasmus in Pope's opinion was to the priesthood) "at once his glory and his shame;" namely, that the human mind, unless when debased by passion or prejudice, never fails to take the side of truth and virtue: — a sad reflection, when it leads us to consider the debasing influence of passion and prejudice; but a most comfortable one, when it directs our view to the original dignity and rectitude of the human soul. To favour virtue, and speak truth, and take pleasure in those who do so, is natural to man; to act otherwise, requires an effort, does violence to nature, and always implies some evil purpose in the agent. The first, like progressive motion, is easy and graceful; the last is unfeeling and difficult, like walking side-ways, or backwards. The one is

so common, that it is little attended to, and when it becomes the object of attention, is always considered as an energy suitable to moral and rational nature; the other has a strangeness in it, that provokes at once our surprise and disapprobation. And hence the virtuous character of the ancient chorus was reconcileable, not only to probability, but to real matter of fact. The dramatic poets of Greece rightly judged, that great persons, like those who appear in tragedy, engaged in any great action, are never without attendants or spectators, or those at least who observe their conduct, and make remarks upon it. And therefore, together with the persons principally concerned, they always introduced attendants or spectators.

Actoris partes chorus, officiumque virile

Defendat.

Ille bonis faveatque, et consiliatur amice,

Et regat iratos, et amet pacare tumentes;

Ille dapas laudet mensæ brevis; ille salubrem

Iussu hunc legeſque, et apertis otia portis;

Ille tegat commissa, Deosque precetur, et oret,

Ut redeat miseris, abeat fortuna superbis.

Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 195.

“Let the chorus, like the player, support a character, and let it act a manly part. Let it favour the good, and give friendly counsel, and restrain the angry, and love to compose the swellings of passion. Let it celebrate the praises of temperance, of salutary justice, of law, and of peace, with open gates: let it be faithful to its trust, and supplicate the Gods, and pray, that fortune may return to the afflicted, and forsake the haughty.”

on the stage, who, by the mouth of one of their number, joined occasionally in the dialogue, and were called the Chorus. That this artifice, though perhaps it might not suit the modern drama, had a happy effect in beautifying the poetry, illustrating the morality, and heightening the probability, of the ancient, is a point, which in my opinion admits of sufficient proof, and has in fact been fully proved by Mr. Mason, in his *Letters*, and admirably exemplified in his *Elfrida* and *Caractacus*; two poems that do honour to the English tongue, and to modern genius. But I do not now enter into any controversy on the subject: I speak of it with a view only to observe, that the propriety of the character assigned to the chorus is founded on that moral propensity above mentioned. For to introduce a company of unprejudiced persons, even of the vulgar, witnessing a great event, and yet not pitying the unfortunate, nor exclaiming against tyranny and injustice, nor rejoicing when the good are successful, nor wishing well to the worthy, would be to feign what seldom or never happens in real life; and what, therefore, in the improved state of things that poetry imitates, must never be supposed to happen.—Sentiments that betray a hard heart, a depraved understanding, unwarrantable pride, or any other moral or intellectual perversity, never fail to give offence, except where they appear to be introduced

as

as examples for our improvement. Poetry, therefore, that is uninstruative, or immoral, cannot please those who retain any moral sensibility, or uprightness of judgement; and must consequently displease the greater part of any regular society of rational creatures. Great wickedness and great genius may have been united in the same person; but it may be doubted, whether corruption of heart and delicacy of taste be at all compatible.

Whenever a writer forgets himself so far, as to give us ground to suspect him even of momentary impiety or hardheartedness, we charge him in the same breath with want of conscience and want of taste; the former being generally, as well as justly, supposed to comprehend the latter. Cowley was an excellent person, and a very witty poet: — but where is the man who would not be ashamed to acknowledge himself pleased with that clause in the following quotation, which implies, that the author, puffed up with an idle conceit of the importance of literary renown, was disposed for a moment to look down with equal contempt upon the brutes and the common people!

What shall I do, to be for ever known,
And make the age to come my own?
I shall like brutes or common people die,
Unless you write my elegy.

Virgil.

* The learned and amiable Dr Hurd has omitted these two lines in his late edition of Cowley's poems. I wish some

Virgil, describing a plague among the beasts, gives the following picture, which has every excellence that can belong to descriptive poetry; and of which Scaliger, with a noble enthusiasm, declares, that he would rather be the author, than first favourite to Cyrus or Ctesus:

Ecce autem duro fumans sub vomere taurus.
Concidit, et mixtum spumis vomit ore cruorem,
Extremosque ciet gemitus. It tristis arator,
Mærentem abjungens fraterna morte juvenem,
Atque opere in medio defixa relinquit aratra:

Which Dryden thus renders:

The steer, who to the yoke was bred to bow,
(Studious of tillage, and the crooked plow)
Falls down and dies; and, dying, spews a flood
Of foamy madness mixed with clotted blood.
The clown, *who cursing Providence refines*,
His mournful fellow from the team disjoins;
With many a groan forsakes his fruitless care,
And in th' unfinish'd furrow leaves the share.

some editor of Dryden would expunge the last part of the following sentence, which, as it now stands, is a reproach to humanity. "One is for raking in Chaucer
" for antiquated words, which are never to be revived,
" but when sound or significancy is wanting in the present language: but many of his deserve not this redemption; any more than the crouds of men who daily die or are slain for sixpence in a battle, merit to be restored to life, if a wish could revive them."

Postscript to Virgil.

Not

Not to insist upon the misrepresentation of Virgil's meaning in the first couplet, I would only appeal to the reader, whether, by debasing the charming simplicity of *It tristis arator* with his blasphemous paraphrase, Dryden has not destroyed the beauty of the passage *. Such is the opposition between good poetry

* Examples of bad writing might no doubt be produced, on almost any occasion, from Quarles and Blackmore; but as no body reads their works, no body is liable to be misled by them. It would seem, therefore, more expedient to take such examples from authors of merit, whose beauties too often give a sanction to their blemishes. For this reason it is, that I have, both here and in other places, taken the liberty to speak of Dryden with disapprobation. But as I would not be thought insensible to the merit of an author, to whom every lover of English poetry is deeply indebted, I beg leave, once for all, to deliver at large my opinion of that great genius.

There is no modern writer, whose style is more distinguishable. Energy and ease are its chief characters. The former is owing to a happy choice of expressions, equally emphatical and plain: the latter to a laudable partiality in favour of the idioms and radical words of the English tongue; the native riches and peculiar genius whereof are perhaps more apparent in him, than in any other of our poets. In Dryden's more correct pieces, we meet with no affectation of words of Greek or Latin etymology, no cumbersome pomp of epithets, no drawing circumlocutions, no idle glare of images, no blunderings round about a meaning: his English is pure and simple, nervous and clear, to a degree which Pope has never exceeded, and not always equalled. Yet, as I have elsewhere remarked, his attachment to the vernacular idiom, as well as the fashion of his age, often betrays him into a vulgarity, and even meanness, of expression, which is particularly observable in his translations.

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poetry and bad morality! So true it is, that the bard who would captivate the heart must

tions of Virgil and Homer, and in those parts of his writings where he aims at pathos or sublimity. In fact, Dryden's genius did not lead him to the sublime or pathetic. Good strokes of both may doubtless be found in him; but they are momentary, and seem to be accidental. He is too witty for the one, and too familiar for the other. That he had no adequate relish for the majesty of *Paradise Lost*, is evident to those who have compared his opera called *The State of Innocence* with that immortal poem; and that his taste for the true pathetic was imperfect, too manifestly appears from the general tenor of his Translations, as well as Tragedies. His Virgil abounds in lines and couplets of the most perfect beauty; but these are mixed with others of a different stamp: nor can they who judge of the original by this translation, ever receive any tolerable idea of that uniform magnificence of sound and language, that exquisite choice of words, and figures and that sweet pathos of expression and of sentiment, which characterise the Mantuan Poet. — In delineating the more familiar scenes of life, in clothing plain moral doctrines with easy and graceful versification, in the various departments of Comic Satire, and in the spirit and melody of his Lyric poems, Dryden is inferior to none of those who went before him. He exceeds his master Chaucer in the first: in the three last he rivals Horace; the style of whose epistles he has happily imitated in his *Religio Laici*, and other didactic pieces; and the harmony and elegance of whose odes he has proved that he could have equalled, if he had thought proper to cultivate that branch of the poet's art. Indeed, whether we consider his peculiar significance of expression, or the purity of his style; the sweetness of his lyric, or the ease and perspicuity of his moral poems; the sportive severity of his satire, or his talents in wit and humour; Dryden, on every point of genius, (I do not say taste), seems to bear a closer affinity to Horace, than to any other ancient or

must sing in unison to the voice of conscience:
— and that *instruction* (taking the word in no
unwarrantable

modern author. For energy of words, vivacity of description, and apposite variety of numbers, his *Fest of Alexander* is superior to any ode of Horace or Pindar now extant.

Dryden's verse, though often faulty, has a grace, and a spirit, peculiar to itself. That of Pope is more correct, and perhaps upon the whole more harmonious; but it is in general more languid, and less diversified. Pope's numbers are sweet but elaborate; and our sense of their energy is in some degree interrupted by our attention to the art displayed in their contexture: Dryden's are natural and free; and, while they communicate their own sprightly motion to the spirits of the reader, hurry him along with a gentle and pleasing violence, without giving him time either to animadvert on their faults, or to analyse their beauties. Pope excels in solemnity of sound; Dryden, in an easy melody, and boundless variety of rhythm. In this last respect I think I could prove, that he is superior to all other English poets, Milton himself not excepted. Till Dryden appeared, none of our writers in rhyme of the last century approached in any measure to the harmony of Fairfax and Spenser. Of Waller it can only be said, that he is not harsh; of Denham and Cowley, if a few couplets were struck out of their works, we could not say so much. But in Dryden's hands, the English rhiming couplet assumed a new form; and seems hardly susceptible of any further improvement. One of the greatest poets of this century, the late and much-lamented Mr Gray of Cambridge, modestly declared to me, that if there was in his own numbers any thing that deserved approbation, he had learned it all from Dryden.

Critics have often stated a comparison between Dryden and Pope, as poets of the same order, and who differed only in degree of merit. But, in my opinion, the merit of the one differs considerably in *kind* from that of the other. Both were happy in a sound judgement and

most

unwarrantable latitude) is one of the means that must be employed to render poetry agreeable.

For

most comprehensive mind. Wit, and humour, and learning too, they seem to have possessed in equal measure; or, if Dryden may be thought to have gone deeper in the sciences, Pope must be allowed to have been the greater adept in the arts. [The diversities in point of correctness and delicacy, which arose from their different ways of life, I do not now insist upon. But, setting these aside, if Dryden founds any claim of preference on the originality of his manner, we shall venture to affirm, that Pope may found a similar claim, and with equal justice, on the perfection of his taste; and that, if the critical writings of the first are more voluminous, those of the second are more judicious; if Dryden's inventions are more diversified, those of Pope are more regular, and more important. Pope's style may be thought to have less simplicity, less vivacity, and less of the purity of the mother-tongue; but is at the same time more uniformly elevated, and less debased by vulgarity, than that of his great master;—and the superior variety that animates the numbers of the latter, will perhaps be found to be compensated by the steadier and more majestic modulation of the former. Thus far their merits would appear to be pretty equally balanced.—But if the opinion of those critics be true, who hold that the highest regions of Parnassus are appropriated to pathos and sublimity, Dryden must after all confess, that he has never ascended so far as his illustrious imitator: there being nothing in the writings of the first so deeply pathetic as the *Epistle of Eloise*, or the *Elegy on the Unfortunate Lady*; nor so uniformly sublime as the *Essay on Man*, or the *Pastoral of the Messiah*. This last is indeed but a selection and imitation of choice passages; but it bespeaks a power of imitation, and a taste in selection, that Dryden does not seem to have possessed. To all which may I not be permitted to add, what I think I could prove, that the pathos of Homer is frequently improved

For by instruction I do not here understand merely the communication of moral and physical truth. Whatever tends to raise those human affections that are favourable to truth and virtue, or to repress the opposite passions, will always gratify and improve our moral and intellectual powers, and may properly enough be called *instructive*.
 by Pope, and that of Virgil very frequently debased by Dryden?

The writings of Dryden are stamped with originality, but are not always the better for that circumstance. Pope is an imitator professedly, and of choice; but to most of those whom he copies he is at least equal, and to many of them superior: and it is pleasing to observe, how he rises in proportion to his originals. Where he follows Denham, Buckingham, Roscomon, and Rochester, in his *Windsor forest*, *Essay on Criticism*, and poem on *Silence*, he is superior indeed, but does not soar very high above them. When he versifies Chaucer, he catches, as by instinct, the ease, simplicity, and spirit of Dryden, whom he there emulates. In the *Rape of the Lock* he outshines Boileau, as much as the sylphs that flutter round Belinda exceed in sprightliness and luminous beauty those mechanical attendants of the goddess of luxury, who knead up plumpness for the chin of the cañon, and pound vermilion for the cheek of the monk*. His *Eloisa* is beyond all comparison more sublime and more interesting than any of Ovid's letter-writing ladies. His imitations of Horace equal their archetypes in elegance, and often surpass them in energy and fire. In the lyric style, he was no match for Dryden: but when he copies the manner of Virgil, and borrows the thoughts of Isaiah, Pope is superior not only to himself, but to almost all other poets.

* See *Rape of the Lock*, canto 2, vers. 55; and *Lutrin*, chant. 1, vers. 100.



All poetry, therefore, is intitled to this epithet, not only which imparts knowledge we had not before; but also which awakens our pity for the sufferings of our fellow-creatures; prompts a taste for the beauties of nature animated or inanimate; makes vice appear the object of indignation or ridicule; inculcates a sense of our dependence upon Heaven; fortifies our minds against the evils of life; or promotes the love of virtue and wisdom, either by delineating their native charms, or by setting before us in suitable colours the dreadful consequences of imprudent and immoral conduct. There are few good poems of length, that will not be found in one or more, or perhaps in several of these respects, to promote the instruction of a reader of taste. Even the poem of Lucretius, notwithstanding its absurd philosophy, (which, when the author gives way to it, divests him for a time of the poetical, and even of the rational, character), abounds in sentiments of great beauty and high importance; and in such delightful pictures of nature, as must inflame the enthusiasm where-with a well-informed mind contemplates the wonders and glories of creation. Who can attend to the execrable designs of Iago, to Macbeth's progress through the several stages of guilt and misery, to the ruin that overtakes the impious and tyrannical Mezentius, to the thoughts and machinations of Satan and his angels in Paradise Lost, without paying

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ing a fresh tribute of praise to virtue, and renewing his resolutions to persevere in the paths of innocence and peace! Nay the machinery of Homer's deities, which in many parts I abandon as indefensible, will, if I mistake not, generally appear, where-ever it is really pleasing, to have somewhat of an useful tendency. I speak not now of the importance of machinery, as an instrument of the sublime and of the marvellous, necessary to every epic poem; but of Homer's use of it in those passages where it is supposed by some to be unnecessary. And in these, it often serves to set off a simple fact with allegorical decoration, and, of course, by intersting us more in the fable, to impress upon us more effectually the instruction conveyed in it. And sometimes it is to be considered, as nothing more than a personification of the attributes of the divinity, or the operations of the human soul. And, in general, it teaches emphatically this important lesson, that Providence ever superintends the affairs of men; that injustice and impiety are peculiarly obnoxious to divine vengeance; and that a proper attention to religious and moral duty, never fails to recommend both nations and individuals to the divine favour.

But if instruction may be drawn from the speeches and behaviour of Milton's devils, of Shakespeare's Macbeth, and of Virgil's Mezentius, why is Cowley blamed for a phrase, which at worst implies only a slight
fally

fally of momentary pride? I answer, that to speak seriously the language of intemperate passion, is one thing; to imitate or describe it another. By the former, one can never merit praise or esteem; by the latter one may merit much praise, and do much good. In the one case, we recommend intemperate passions by our example; in the other, we may render them odious, by displaying their absurdity and consequences. To the greater part of his readers an author cannot convey either pleasure or instruction, by delivering sentiments as his own, which contradict the general conscience of mankind.

Well; but Dryden, in the passage lately quoted and censured, does not deliver his own sentiments, but only describes those of another: why then should he be blamed for making the unfortunate plowman irreligious? Why? Because he misrepresents his author's meaning; and (which is worse) counteracts his design. The design of the Latin poet was, not to expatiate on the punishment due to blasphemy or atheism, but to raise pity, by describing the melancholy effects of a plague so fatal to the brute creation:—a theme very properly introduced in the conclusion of a poem on the art of rearing and preserving cattle. Now, had Virgil said, as Dryden has done, that the farmer who lost his work-beast was a blasphemer, we should not have pitied him at all. But Virgil says only,

ly, that "the sorrowful husbandman went, and yoked the surviving bullock, and left his plough fixed in the middle of the unfinished furrow;"—and by this pregnant and picturesque brevity, affects us a thousand times more, than he could have done by recapitulating all the sentiments of the poor farmer in the form of a soliloquy:—as indeed the view of the scene, as Virgil has drawn it, with the emphatic silence of the sufferer, would have been incomparably more moving, than a long speech from the plowman, fraught with moral reflections on death, and disappointment, and the uncertainty of human things. For to a poem mere morality is not so essential as accurate description; which, however, in matters of importance, must have a moral tendency, otherwise the human affections will take part against it.

But what do you say to the tragedy of *Venice preserved*, in which our pity and other benevolent emotions are engaged in behalf of those whom the moral faculty disapproves? Is not the poetry, for this very reason, immoral? And yet, is it not pathetic and pleasing? How then can you say, that something of a moral or instructive tendency is necessary to make a poem agreeable?—In answer to this, let it be observed,—first, That it is natural for us to sympathise with those who suffer, even when they suffer justly; which, however, implies an

ny liking to their crimes, or that our moral sentiments are at all perverted, but which, on the contrary, by quickening our sense of the misery consequent upon guilt, may be useful in confirming good principles, and improving the moral sensibility of the mind: — secondly, That the most pleasing and most pathetic parts of the play in question are those which relate to an amiable lady, with whose distress, as well as with her husband's on her account, we rationally sympathise, because that arises from their mutual affection: — thirdly, That the conspirators give a plausible colour to their cause, and exert a greatness of mind, which takes off our attention from their crimes, and leaves room for the tender emotions to operate occasionally in their favour: — and fourthly, That the merit of this play, like that of *the Orphan*, lies rather in the beauty of particular passages, than in the general effect of the whole; and that, if in any part the author has endeavoured to interest our kind affections in opposition to conscience, his poetry will there be found to be equally unpleasing and un-instructive.

But may not agreeable affections arise in the mind, which partake neither of vice nor of virtue; such as joy, and hope, and those emotions that accompany the contemplation of external beauty, or magnificence? And, if pastorals and songs, and Anacreontic odes, awaken these agreeable affections, may not

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such

such poems be pleasing, without being instructive? This may be, no doubt. And for this reason, among others, I take instruction to be only a secondary end of poetry. But it is only by short poems, as songs and pastorals, that these agreeable affections indifferently alike to vice and virtue, are excited, without any mixture of others. For moral sentiments are to prevail in the human mind, that no affection can long subsist there, without intermingling with them, and being assimilated to their nature. Nor can a piece of real and pleasing poetry be extended to any great length, without operating, directly or indirectly, either on those affections that are friendly to virtue, or on those sympathies that quicken our moral sensibility, and prepare us for virtuous impressions. In fact, man's true happiness is derived from the moral part of his constitution; and therefore we cannot suppose, that any thing which affects not his moral part, should be lastingly and generally agreeable. We sympathise with the pleasure one takes in a feast, where there is friendship, and an interchange of good offices; but not with the satisfaction an epicure finds in devouring a solitary banquet. A short Anacreontic we may relish for its melody and sparkling images; but a long poem, in order to be pleasing, must not only charm the ear and the fancy, but also touch the heart and exercise the conscience.

Still

Still perhaps it may be objected to these reasonings, That Horace, in a well-known epistle, declares the end of poetry to be twofold, to please, or to instruct; whereas I maintain, that the ultimate end of this art is to please; instruction being only one of the means (and not always a necessary one) by which that ultimate end is to be accomplished. This interpretation of Horace has indeed been admitted by some modern critics: but it is erroneous; for the passage, rightly understood, will not appear to contain any thing inconsistent with the present doctrine. The author is there stating a comparison between the Greek and Roman writers, with a view to the poetry of the stage; and, after commending the former for their correctness, and for the liberal spirit wherewith they conducted their literary labours, and blaming his countrymen for their inaccuracy and avarice, he proceeds thus: "The ends proposed by our dramatic poets (or by poets in general) are, to please, to instruct, or to do both. When instruction is your aim, let your moral sentences be expressed with brevity, that they may be readily understood, and long remembered; where you mean to please, let your fictions be conformable to truth, or probability. The elder part of your audience (or readers) have no relish for poems that give
 ••••• A prodesse volunt, aut delectare poemæ.

“pleasure only without instruction; nor
 “the younger for such writings as give in-
 “struction without pleasure. He only can
 “secure the universal suffrage in his favour,
 “who blends the useful with the agreeable,
 “and delights at the same time that he in-
 “structs the reader. Such are the works
 “that bring money to the bookfeller, that
 “pass into foreign countries, and perpetuate
 “the author’s name through a long suc-
 “cession of ages *.” — Now, what is the
 meaning of all this? What, but that to the
perfection of dramatic poetry (or, if you
 please, of poetry in general) both sound mo-
 rals and beautiful fiction are requisite. But
 Horace never meant to say, that instruction,
 as well as pleasure, is necessary to give to a-
 ny composition the *poetical character*: or he
 would not in another place have celebrated,
 with so much affection and rapture, the
 melting strains of Sappho, and the playful
 genius of Anacreon †; — two authors tran-
 scendently sweet, but not remarkably in-
 structive. We are sure, that pathos, and
 harmony, and elevated language, were, in
 Horace’s opinion, essential to poetry ‡; and
 of these decorations no body will affirm, that
 instruction is the end, who considers that the

* Hor. *Ar. Pect.* 333. — 347.

† Hor. *Carm. lib. 4. ode 9.*

‡ Hor. *Sat. lib. 1. sat. 4. vers. 40.*

most instructive books in the world are written in plain prose. Let this therefore be established as a truth in criticism; That the end of poetry is, not to please; Verses, if pleasing, may be poetical, though they convey little or no instruction; but verses, whose sole merit is, that they convey instruction, are not poetical. Instruction, however, especially in poems of length, is necessary to their perfection, because they would not be perfectly agreeable without it.

CHAP. II.

Of the Standard of Poetical Invention.

HOMER'S beautiful description of the heavens and earth, as they appear in a calm evening by the light of the moon and stars, concludes with this circumstance, "And the heart of the shepherd is glad." Madame Dacier, from the turn she gives to the passage in her version, seems to think, and Pope, in order perhaps to make out his couplet, insinuates, that the gladness of the

* Iliad, b. 8. vers. 555.

Shepherd is owing to his sense of the utility of those luminaries. And this may in part be the case; but this is not in Homer; nor is it a necessary consideration. It is true, that in contemplating the material universe, they who discern the causes and effects of things must be more rapturously entertained, than those who perceive nothing but shape and size, colour and motion. Yet, in the mere outside of Nature's works, (if I may so express myself), there is a splendour and a magnificence to which even untutored minds cannot attend, without great delight.

Not that all peasants, or all philosophers, are equally susceptible of these charming impressions. It is strange to observe the callousness of some men, before whom all the glories of heaven and earth pass in daily succession, without touching their hearts, elevating their fancy, or leaving any durable remembrance. Even of those who pretend to sensibility, how many are there to whom the lustre of the rising or setting sun; the sparkling concave of the midnight-sky; the mountain-forest tossing and roaring to the storm, or warbling with all the melodies of a summer-evening; the sweet interchange of hill and dale, shade and sunshine, grove, lawn, and water, which an extensive landscape offers to the view; the scenery of the ocean, so lovely, so majestic, and so tremendous, and the many pleasing varieties of the animal and vegetable kingdom, could never afford

d so much real satisfaction, as the steams
noise of a ballroom, the insipid fiddling
squeaking of an opera, or the vexations
wranglings of a card-table! But
ut some minds there are of a different
e; who, even in the early part of life,
receive from the contemplation of Nature a
species of delight which they would hardly
exchange for any other; and who, as avarice
and ambition are not the infirmities of
that period, would, with equal sincerity and
rapture, exclaim,
I care not, Fortune, what you me deny;
You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace;
You cannot shut the windows of the sky,
Through which Aurora shows her brightening face;
You cannot bar my constant feet to trace
The woods and lawns by living stream at eve *.

Such minds have always in them the seeds
of true taste, and frequently of imitative ge-
nius. At least, though their enthusiastic or
visionary turn of mind (as the man of the
world would call it) should not always in-
cline them to practise poetry or painting, we
need not scruple to affirm, that without some
portion of this enthusiasm, no person ever
became a true poet or painter. For he who
would imitate the works of Nature, must
first accurately observe them; and accurate

observation

observation is to be expected from those only who take great pleasure in it.

To a mind thus disposed no part of creation is indifferent. In the crowded city, and howling wilderness; in the cultivated province, and solitary isle; in the flowery lawn, and craggy mountain; in the murmur of the rivulet, and in the uproar of the ocean; in the radiance of summer, and gloom of winter; in the thunder of heaven, and in the whisper of the breeze; he still finds something to rouse or to sooth his imagination, to draw forth his affections, or to employ his understanding. And from every mental energy that is not attended with pain, and even from some of those that are, as moderate terror and pity, a sound mind derives satisfaction; exercise being equally necessary to the body and the soul, and to both equally productive of health and pleasure.

This happy sensibility to the beauties of Nature should be cherished in young persons. It engages them to contemplate the Creator in his wonderful works; it purifies and harmonizes the soul, and prepares it for moral and intellectual discipline; it supplies an endless source of amusement; it contributes even to bodily health; and, as a strict analogy subsists between material and moral beauty, it leads the heart by an easy transition from the one to the other; and thus recommends virtue for its transcendent loveliness,

is, and makes vice appear the object of attempt and abomination. An intimate acquaintance with the best descriptive poets, infer, Milton, and Thomson, but above with the divine Georgic, joined to some dexterity in the art of drawing, will promote this amiable sensibility in early years; for then the face of Nature has novelty superadded to its other charms, the passions are not pre-engaged, the heart is free from care, and the imagination warm and romantic.

But, not to insist longer on those ardent emotions that are peculiar to the enthusiastic disciple of Nature, may it not be affirmed of all men, without exception, or at least of all the enlightened part of mankind, that they are gratified by the contemplation of things natural, as opposed to unnatural? Monstrous sights please but for a moment, if they please at all; for they derive their charm from the beholder's amazement, which is quickly over. I have read indeed of a man of rank in Sicily*, who chuses to adorn his villa with pictures and statues of most unnatural deformity; but it is a singular instance: and one would not be much more surpris'd to hear of a person living without food, or growing fat by the use of poison. To say of any thing, that it is *contrary to nature*, denotes censure and disgust on the part of the speaker; as the epithet *natural*

* See Mr Brydone's Tour in Sicily, letter 24.

intimates an agreeable quality, and seems for the most part to imply, that a thing is as it ought to be, suitable to our own taste, and congenial with our own constitution. Think, with what sentiments we should peruse a poem, in which Nature was totally misrepresented, and principles of thought and of operation supposed to take place, repugnant to every thing we had seen or heard of: — in which, for example, avarice and coldness were ascribed to youth, and prodigality and passionate attachment to the old; in which men were made to act at random, sometimes according to character, and sometimes contrary to it; in which cruelty and envy were productive of love, and beneficence and kind affection of hatred; in which beauty was invariably the object of dislike, and ugliness of desire; in which society was rendered happy by atheism, and the promiscuous perpetration of crimes, and justice and fortitude were held in universal contempt. Or think, how we should relish a painting, where no regard was had to the proportions, colours, or any of the physical laws, of Nature: — where the ears and eyes of animals were placed in their shoulders; where the sky was green, and the grass crimson; where trees grew with their branches in the earth, and their roots in the air; where men were seen fighting after their heads were cut off, ships sailing on the land, lions entangled in cobwebs, sheep preying on dead carcases, fishes

esporting in the woods, and elephants
king on the sea. Could such figures and
binations give pleasure, or merit the ap-
pellation of sublime or beautiful? Should
we hesitate to pronounce their author mad?
and are the absurdities of madmen proper
subjects either of amusement or of imitation
to reasonable beings?

—Let it be remarked too, that though we
distinguish our internal powers by different
names, because otherwise we could not speak
of them so as to be understood, they are all
but so many energies of the same individual
mind; and therefore it is not to be supposed,
that what contradicts any one leading facul-
ty should yield permanent delight to the
rest. That cannot be agreeable to reason,
which conscience disapproves; nor can that
gratify imagination, which is repugnant to
reason. — Besides, belief and acquiescence
of mind are pleasant, as distrust and disbelief
are painful; and therefore, that only can
give solid and general satisfaction, which has
something of plausibility in it; something
which we conceive it possible for a rational
being to believe. But no rational being can
acquiesce in what is obviously contrary to
nature, or implies palpable absurdity.

Poetry, therefore, and indeed every art
whose end is to please, must be natural; and
if so, must exhibit real matter of fact, or
something like it; that is, in other words,
E 2 must

must be, either according to truth, or according to verisimilitude. And though every part of the material universe abounds in objects of pleasurable contemplation, yet nothing in nature so powerfully touches our hearts, or gives so great variety of exercise to our moral and intellectual faculties, as man. Human affairs and human feelings are universally interesting. There are many who have no great relish for the poetry that delineates only irrational or inanimate beings; but to that which exhibits the fortunes, the characters, and the conduct of men, there is hardly any person who does not listen with sympathy and delight. And hence, to imitate human action, is considered by Aristotle as essential to this art; and must be allowed to be essential to the most pleasing and most instructive part of it, I mean to epic and dramatic composition. Mere descriptions, however beautiful, and moral reflections, however just, become tiresome, where our passions are not occasionally awakened by some event that concerns our fellow-men. Do not all readers of taste receive peculiar pleasure from those little tales or episodes, with which Thomson's descriptive poem on the Seasons is here and there enlivened? and are they not sensible, that the thunder-storm would not have been half so interesting without the tale of the two lovers*; nor the

* Summer, vers. 1175.

vest-scene, without that of Palemon and
vinia *; nor the driving snows, without
that exquisite picture of a man perishing a-
mong them †? It is much to be regretted,
that Young did not employ the same artifice
to animate his Night-Thoughts. Sentiments
and descriptions may be regarded as the pilas-
ters, carvings, gildings, and other decora-
tions of the poetical fabric; but human
actions are the columns and the rafters, that
give it stability and elevation. Or, changing
the metaphor, we may consider these as the
soul which informs the lovely frame, while
those are little more than the ornaments of
the body.

Whether the pleasure we take in things
natural, and our dislike to what is the re-
verse, be the effect of habit or of constitu-
tion, is not a material inquiry. There is
nothing absurd in supposing, that between
the soul, in its first formation, and the rest
of nature, a mutual harmony and sympathy
may have been established, which experience
may indeed confirm, but no perverse habits
could entirely subdue. As no sort of edu-
cation could make man believe the contrary
of a self-evident axiom, or reconcile him to
a life of perfect solitude; so I should ima-
gine, that our love of nature and regularity
might still remain with us in some degree,

* Autumn, vers. 177.

† Winter, vers. 276.

though we had been born and bred in the Sicilian villa above mentioned, and never heard any thing applauded but what deserved censure, nor censured but what merited applause. Yet habit must be allowed to have a powerful influence over the sentiments and feelings of mankind. Objects to which we have been long accustomed, we are apt to contract a fondness for; we conceive them readily, and contemplate them with pleasure; nor do we quit our old tracts of speculation or practice, without reluctance and pain. Hence in part arises our attachment to our own professions, our old acquaintance, our native soil, our homes, and to the very hills, streams, and rocks in our neighbourhood. It would therefore be strange, if man, accustomed as he is from his earliest days to the regularity of nature, did not contract a liking to her productions, and principles of operation.

Yet we neither expect nor desire, that every human invention, where the end is only to please, should be an exact transcript of real existence. It is enough, that the mind acquiesce in it as probable, or plausible, or such as we think might happen without any direct opposition to the laws of Nature:—or, to speak more accurately, it is enough, that it be consistent, either, first, with general experience; or, secondly, with popular opinion; or, thirdly, that it be consistent

th itself, and connected with probable
stances.

If a human invention be consistent
general experience, we acquiesce in it
sufficiently probable! *Particular* expe-
riences, however, there may be, so uncom-
mon and so little expected, that we should
not admit their probability, if we did not
know them to be true. No man of sense
believes, that he has any likelihood of being
enriched by the discovery of hidden treasure;
or thinks it probable, on purchasing a lot-
tery-ticket, that he shall gain the first prize;
and yet great wealth has actually been ac-
quired by such good fortune. But we should
look upon these as poor expedients in a play
or romance for bringing about a happy cas-
tastrophe. We expect that fiction should
be more consonant to the *general* tenor of
human affairs; in a word, that not possibi-
ty, but probability, should be the standard
of poetical invention.

Secondly: Fiction is admitted as conform-
able to this standard, when it accords with
received opinions. These may be erroneous,
but are not often *apparently* repugnant to na-
ture. On this account, and because they are
familiar to us from our infancy, the mind
readily acquiesces in them, or at least yields
them that degree of credit which is ne-
cessary to render them pleasing. Hence the
fairies, ghosts, and witches of Shakespear,
are admitted as probable beings; and angels
obtain

obtain a place in religious pictures, though we know that they do not now appear in the scenery of real life. Even when a popular opinion has long been exploded, and has become repugnant to universal belief, the fictions built upon it are still admitted as natural, because they were accounted such by the people to whom they were first addressed; whose sentiments and views of things we are willing to adopt, when, by the power of pleasing description, we are introduced into their scenes, and made acquainted with their manners. Hence we admit the theology of the ancient poets, their Elysium and Tartarus, Scylla and Charybdis, Cyclops and Circe, and the rest of those "beautiful wonders" (as Horace calls them) which were believed in the heroic ages; as well as the demons and enchantments of Tasso, which may be supposed to have obtained no small degree of credit among the Italians of the sixteenth century, and are suitable enough to the notions that prevailed universally in Europe not long before *. In fact, when

Poetry

* In the fourteenth century, the common people of Italy believed, that the poet Dante actually went down to hell; that the *Inferno* was a true account of what he saw there; and that his fallow complexion, and stunted beard, (which seemed by its growth and colour to have been too near the fire), were the consequence of his passing so much of his time in that hot and smoky region. See *Vicende della letteratura del Sig. G. Denina*, cap. 4. — Sir John Mandeville's Book of Travels, writ-

try is in other respects true; when it
 es an accurate display of those parts of na-
 e about which we know that men in all
 es must have entertained the same opinion,
 mean those appearances in the visible crea-
 on, and those feelings and workings of
 the human mind, which are obvious to all
 mankind; — when Poetry, I say, is thus far
 according to nature, we are very willing to
 be indulgent to what is fictitious in it, and
 to grant a temporary allowance to any system
 of fable which the author pleases to adopt;
 provided that he lay the scene in a distant
 country, or fix the date to a remote period.
 This is no unreasonable piece of complai-
 sance: we owe it both to the poet and to
 ourselves; for without it we should neither
 form a right estimate of his genius, nor re-
 ceive from his works that pleasure which
 they were intended to impart. Let him,
 however, take care, that his system of fable
 be such, as his countrymen and contempo-
 raries (to whom his work is immediately
 addressed) might be supposed capable of
 yielding their assent to; for otherwise we
 should not believe him to be in earnest; and
 let him connect it as much as he can with
 ten not long after, was not only ratified by the Pope,
 after having been compared with the *Mappe Mundi* of
 that time, but, what is more strange, seems to have
 been seriously believed by that adventurous knight him-
 self, though a man of considerable learning, and no
 despicable taste. See the *Genealogy of the Book.*

probable circumstances, and make it appear in a series of events consistent with itself.

For (thirdly) if this be the case, we shall admit his story as probable, or at least as natural, and consequently be interested in it, even though it be not warranted by general experience, and derive but slender authority from popular opinion. Caliban, in the Tempest, would have shocked the mind as an improbability, if we had not been made acquainted with his origin, and seen his character displayed in a series of consistent behaviour. But when we are told, that he sprung from a witch and a demon, a connection not contrary to the laws of Nature, as they were understood in Shakespeare's time, and find his manners conformable to his descent, we are easily reconciled to the fiction. In the same sense, the Lilliputians of Swift may pass for probable beings; not so much because we know that a belief in pygmies was once current in the world, (for the true ancient pygmy was at least thrice as tall as those whom Gulliver visited), but because we find, that every circumstance relating to them accords with itself, and with their supposed character. It is not the size of the people only that is diminutive; their country, seas, ships, and towns, are all in exact proportion; their theological and political principles, their passions, manners, customs, and all the parts of their conduct, betray a levity and littleness perfectly suitable:

and so simple is the whole narration, apparently so artless and sincere, that I did not much wonder, if it had imposed (as I have been told it has) upon some persons of no contemptible understanding, the same degree of credit may perhaps for the same reasons be due to his giants. But when he grounds his narrative upon a contradiction to nature; when he presents us with rational brutes, and irrational men; when he tells us of horses building houses for habitation, milking cows for food, riding in carriages, and holding conversations on the laws and politics of Europe; nor all his genius (and he there exerts it to the utmost) is able to reconcile us to so monstrous a fiction: we may smile at some of his absurd exaggerations; we may be pleased with the energy of style, and accuracy of description, in particular places; and a malevolent heart may triumph in the satire; but we can never relish it as a fable, because it is at once unnatural and self-contradictory. Swift's judgement seems to have forsaken him on this occasion*: he wallows in nastiness and brutality;

* There are improprieties in this narrative, which one would think a very slight attention to nature might have prevented; and which, without heightening the satire, serve only to aggravate the absurdity of the fable. *Haydnbnms* are horses in perfection, with the addition of reason and virtue. Whatever, therefore, takes away from their perfection as horses, without adding to

brutality; and the general run of his satire is downright detraction. Lucian's *True History* is a heap of extravagancies—put together without order or unity, nor any other apparent design, than to ridicule the language and manner of grave authors. His ravings, which have no better right to the name of Fable, than a hill of rubbish has to that of Palace, are destitute of every colour of plausibility. Animal trees, ships sailing in the sky, armies of monstrous things travelling between the sun and moon on a pavement, &c. &c. &c. — that the Tragic poet, because their rational and moral accomplishments, must be repugnant to the author's design, and ought not to have found a place in his narration. Yet he makes his be-loyed quadrupeds dwell in houses of their own building, and use warm food and the milk of cows as a delicacy: though these luxuries, supposed attainable by a nation of horses, could contribute no more to their perfection, than brandy and imprisonment would to that of a man. — Again, did Swift believe, that religious ideas are natural to a reasonable being, and necessary to the happiness of a moral one? I hope he did. Yet has he represented his *houghbrians*, as patterns of moral virtue, as the greatest masters of reason, and withal as completely happy, without any religious ideas, or any views beyond the present life. In a word, he would make stupidity consistent with mental excellence, and unnatural appetites with animal perfection. These, however, are small matters, compared with the other absurdities of this abominable tale. — But when a Christian Divine can set himself deliberately to trample upon that nature, which he knows to have been made but a little lower than the angels, and to have been assumed by One far more exalted than they; we need not be surpris'd if the same perverse habits of thinking which harden his heart, should also debase his judgement.

ment

nt of cobwebs, rival nations of men
inhabiting woods and mountains in a whole
ly, — are liker the dreams of a bedlamite,
in the inventions of a rational being.

If we were to prosecute this subject any
farther, it would be proper to remark, that
in some kinds of poetical invention a stricter
probability is required than in others; —
that, for instance, Comedy, whether Drama-
tic or Narrative*, must seldom deviate from
the ordinary course of human affairs, because
it exhibits the manners of real, and even of
familiar life; — that the Tragic poet, because
he imitates characters more exalted, and ge-
nerally refers to events little known, or long
since past, may be allowed a wider range;
but must never attempt the marvellous fic-
tions of the Epic Muse, because he addresses
his work, not only to the passions and ima-
gination of mankind, but also to their eyes
and ears, which are not easily imposed on,
and refuse to be gratified with any represen-
tation that does not come very near the
truth; — that the Epic Poem may claim still
ampler privileges, because its fictions are not
subject to the scrutiny of any outward sense,
and because it conveys information in regard
both to the highest human characters, and
the most important and wonderful events,

* Fielding's *Tom Jones*, *Amelia*, and *Joseph Andrews*,
are examples of what I call the Epic or Narrative Com-
edy: perhaps the *Comic Epopee* is a more proper term.

and

and also to the affairs of unseen worlds, and superior beings. Nor would it be improper to observe, that the several species of Comic, of Tragic, of Epic composition, are not confined to the same degree of probability; for that Farce may be allowed to be less probable than the regular Comedy; the Masque, than the regular Tragedy; and the Mixed Epic, such as *The Fairy Queen*, and *Orlando Furioso*, than the pure Epopee of *Homer*, *Virgil*, and *Milton*. — But this part of the subject seems not to require further illustration. Enough has been said, to show, that nothing unnatural can please; and that therefore Poetry, whose end is to please, must be ACCORDING TO NATURE.

And if so, it must be, either according to real nature, or according to nature somewhat different from the reality.

CHAP. III.

Poetry exhibits a system of nature somewhat different from the reality of things.

TO exhibit real nature is the business of the historian; who, if he were strictly to confine himself to his own sphere, would never

ver record even the minutest circumstance, any speech, event, or description, which was not warranted by sufficient authority. It has been the language of critics in every age that the historian ought to relate nothing as true which is false or dubious, and to conceal nothing material which he knows to be true. But I doubt whether any writer of profane history has ever been so scrupulous. Thucydides himself, who began his history when that war began which he records, and who set down every event soon after it happened, according to the most authentic information, seems however to have indulged his fancy not a little in his harangues and descriptions, particularly that of the plague of Athens: and the same thing has been practised, with greater latitude, by Livy and Tacitus, and more or less by all the best historians, both ancient and modern. Nor do I blame them for it. By these improved or invented speeches, and by the heightenings thus given to their descriptions, their work becomes more interesting, and more useful; nobody is deceived, and historical truth is not materially affected. A medium is however to be observed in this, as in other things. When the historian lengthens a description into a detail of fictitious events, as Voltaire has done in his account of the battle of Fontenoy, he loses his credit with us, by raising a suspicion that he is more intent upon a pretty story, than upon