

upon the truth. And we are disgusted with his insincerity, when, in defiance even of verisimilitude, he puts long elaborate orations in the mouth of those, of whom we know, either from the circumstances that they could not, or from more authentic records that they did not, make any such orations; as Dionysius of Halicarnassus has done, in the case of Volumnia haranguing her son Coriolanus, and Flavius Josephus in that of Judah addressing his brother as viceroy of Egypt. From what these historians relate, one would conjecture, that the Roman matron had studied at Athens under some long-winded rhetorician, and that the Jewish patriarch must have been one of the most flowery orators of antiquity. But the fictitious part of history, or of story-telling, ought never to take up much room; and must be highly blameable when it leads into any mistake either of facts or of characters.

Now, why do historians take the liberty to embellish their works in this manner? One reason, no doubt, is, that they may display their talents in oratory and narration; but the chief reason, as hinted already, is, to render their composition more agreeable. It would seem, then, that something more pleasing than real nature, or something which shall add to the pleasing qualities of real nature, may be devised by human fancy. And this may certainly be done. And this it is the poet's business to do. And when

is in any degree done by the historian, the narrative becomes in that degree poetical. The possibility of thus improving upon nature must be obvious to every one. When we look at a landscape, we can fancy a thousand additional embellishments. Mountains steeper and more picturesque; rivers more copious, more limpid, and more beautifully winding; smoother and wider lawns; vallies more richly diversified; caverns and rocks more gloomy and more stupendous; ruins more majestic; buildings more magnificent; oceans more varied with islands, more splendid with shipping, or more agitated by storm, than any we have ever seen, it is easy for human imagination to conceive. Many things in art and nature exceed expectation; but nothing sensible transcends, or equals, the capacity of thought — a striking evidence of the dignity of the human soul. The finest woman in the world appears to every eye, susceptible of improvement, except perhaps to that of her lover. No wonder, then, if in poetry events can be exhibited more compact, and of more pleasing variety, than those delineated by the historian; and scenes of inanimate nature more dreadful or more lovely, and human characters more sublime and more exquisite both in good and evil. Yet still let nature supply the ground-work and materials, as well as the standard, of poetical fiction. The most expert painters

use a layman, or other visible figure, to direct their hand and regulate their fancy. Homer himself founds his two poems on authentic tradition; and Tragic as well as Epic poets have followed the example. The writers of romance too are ambitious to interweave true adventures with their fables; and, when it can be conveniently done, to take the outlines of their plan from real life. Thus the tale of Robinson Crusoe is founded on an incident that actually befel one Alexander Selkirk, a sea-faring man, who lived several years alone in the island of Juan Fernandes; Smollet is thought to have given us several of his own adventures in the history of Roderick Random; and the chief characters in Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews, and Pamela, are said to have been copied from real originals. — Dramatic Comedy, indeed, is for the most part purely fictitious; for if it were to exhibit real events as well as present manners, it would become too personal to be endured by a well-bred audience, and degenerate into downright abuse; which appears to have been the case with the *old comedy* of the Greeks *. — But, in general, hints taken from real existence will be found to give no little grace and stability to fiction, even in the most fanciful poems. Those hints, however, may be improved by

* Compare Hor. lib. 1. sat. 4. vers. 1. — 5. with Arist. Poet. vers. 281. — 285.

the poet's imagination, and set off with every probable ornament that can be devised, consistently with the design and genius of the work; — or, in other words, with the sympathies that the poet means to awaken in the mind of his reader. For mere poetical ornament, when it fails to interest the affections, is not only useless but improper; all true poetry being addressed to the heart, and intended to give pleasure by raising or soothing the passions; — the only effectual way of pleasing a rational and moral creature. And therefore I would take Horace's maxim to be universal in poetry; “Non satis est, pulchra esse poemata; *dulcia* sunt;” “It is not enough that poems be beautiful; let them also be *affecting*.” — for that this is the meaning of the word *dulcia* in this place, is admitted by the best interpreters, and is indeed evident from the context*.

That the sentiments and feelings of percipient beings, when expressed in poetry, should call forth our affections, is natural enough; but can descriptions of inanimate things also be made affecting? Certainly they can: and the more they affect, the more they please us; and the more poetical we allow them to be. Virgil's Georgic is a noble specimen (and indeed the noblest in the world) of this sort of poetry. His admiration of external nature gains upon a read-

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 95. — 100.

er of taste, till it rises to perfect enthusiasm. The following observations will perhaps explain this matter.

Every thing in nature is complex in itself, and bears innumerable relations to vother things, and may therefore be viewed in an endless variety of lights, and consequently described in an endless variety of ways. Some descriptions are good, and others bad. An historical description, that enumerates all the qualities of any object, is certainly good, because it is true; but may be as uninteresting as a logical definition. In poetry no uninteresting description is good, however conformable to truth; for here we expect not a complete enumeration of qualities, (the chief end of the art being to please), but only such an enumeration as may give a lively and interesting idea. It is not memory, or the knowledge of rules, that can qualify a poet for this sort of description; but a peculiar liveliness of fancy and sensibility of heart, the nature whereof we may explain by its effects; but we cannot lay down rules for the attainment of it.

When our mind is occupied by any emotion, we naturally use words, and meditate on things, that are suitable to it, and tend to encourage it. If a man were to write a letter when he is very angry, there would probably be something of vehemence or bitterness in the style, even though the person to whom he wrote were not the object

of his anger. The same thing holds true of every other strong passion or emotion; while it predominates in the mind, it gives a peculiarity to our thoughts, as well as to our voice, gesture, and countenance; and hence we expect, that every personage introduced in poetry should see things through the medium of his ruling passion, and that his thoughts and language should be tinged accordingly. A melancholy man walking in a grove, attends to those things that flit and encourage his melancholy; the sighing of the wind in the trees, the murmuring of waters, the darkness and solitude of the shades: a chearful man in the same place, finds many subjects of chearful meditation, in the singing of birds, the brisk motions of the babling stream, and the liveliness and variety of the verdure. Persons of different characters, contemplating the same thing, as a Roman triumph, for instance, feel different emotions, and turn their view to different objects. One is filled with wonder at such a display of wealth and power; another exults in the idea of conquest, and pants for military renown; a third, stunned with clamour, and harassed with confusion, wishes for silence, security, and solitude; one melts with pity to the vanquished, and makes many a sad reflection upon the insignificance of worldly grandeur, and the uncertainty of human things; while the buffoon, and perhaps the philosopher, considers the whole as a vain piece

piece of pageantry, which, by its solemn procedure, and by the admiration of so many people, is only rendered the more ridiculous:—and each of these persons would describe it in a way suitable to his own feelings, and tending to raise the same in others. We see in Milton's *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, how a different cast of mind produces a variety in the manner of conceiving and contemplating the same rural scenery. In the former of these excellent poems, the author personates a chearful man, and takes notice of those things in external nature that are suitable to chearful thoughts, and tend to encourage them; in the latter, every object described is serious and solemn, and productive of calm reflection and tender melancholy: and I should not be easily persuaded, that Milton wrote the first under the influence of sorrow, or the second under that of gladness.—We often see an author's character in his works; and if every author were in earnest when he writes, we should oftener see it. Thomson was a man of piety and benevolence, and a warm admirer of the beauties of nature; and every description in his delightful poem on the Seasons tends to raise the same laudable affections in his reader. The parts of nature that attract his notice are those which an impious or hardhearted man would neither attend to nor be affected with, at least in the same manner. In Swift we see a turn of mind very different

different from that of the amiable Thomson; little relish for the sublime or beautiful, and a perpetual succession of violent emotions. All his pictures of human life seem to show, that deformity and meanness were the favourite objects of his attention, and that his soul was a constant prey to indignation, disgust, and other gloomy passions arising from such a view of things. And it is the tendency of almost all his writings (though it was not always the author's design) to communicate the same passions to his reader: inasmuch, that, notwithstanding his erudition, and knowledge of the world, his abilities as a popular orator and man of business, the energy of his style, the elegance of some of his verses, and his extraordinary talents in wit and humour, there is reason to doubt, whether by studying his works any person was ever much improved in piety or benevolence.

And thus we see, how the compositions of an ingenious author may operate upon the heart, whatever be the subject. The affections that prevail in the author himself direct his attention to objects congenial, and give a peculiar bias to his inventive powers, and a peculiar colour to his language. Hence

* For part of this remark we have his own authority, often in his letters, and very explicitly in the Latin Epitaph which he composed for himself: — “ubi saya
“indignatio ulterius cor lacerare nequit.” See his last will and testament.

his

his work, as well as face, if Nature is permitted to exert herself freely in it, will exhibit a picture of his mind, and awaken correspondent sympathies in the reader. When these are favourable to virtue, which they always ought to be, the work will have that *sweet pathos* which Horace alludes to in the passage above mentioned; and which we so highly admire, and so warmly approve, even in those parts of the *Georgic* that describe inanimate nature.

Horace's account of the matter in question differs not from what is here given. "It is not enough," says he, "that poems be beautiful; let them be affecting, and agitate the mind with whatever passions the poet wishes to impart. The human countenance, as it smiles on those who smile, accompanies also with sympathetic tears those who mourn. If you would have me weep, you must first weep yourself; then, and not before, shall I be touched with your misfortunes. — For nature *first* makes the emotions of our mind correspond with our circumstances, infusing real joy, sorrow, or resentment, according to the occasion; and *afterwards* gives the true pathetic utterance to the voice and language *." — This doctrine, which concerns the orator and the player no less than the poet, is strictly philosophical,

* Ar. Poet. vers. 99. — 111.

equally applicable to dramatic, to descriptive, and indeed to every species of imitative poetry. The poet's sensibility must of all engage him warmly in his subject, in every part of it; otherwise he will be in vain to interest the readers. If he would paint external nature, as Virgil and Thomson have done, so as to make her amiable to others, he must first be enamoured of her himself; if he would have his heroes and heroines speak the language of love or sorrow, devotion or courage, ambition or anger, benevolence or pity, his heart must be susceptible of those emotions, and in some degree feel them, as long at least as he employs himself in framing words for them; being assured, that

He best shall paint them who can feel them most.*

The true poet, therefore, must not only study nature, and know the reality of things; but must also possess fancy, to invent additional decorations; judgement, to direct him in the choice of such as accord with verisimilitude; and sensibility, to enter with ardent emotions into every part of his subject, so as to transfuse into his work a pathos and energy sufficient to raise corresponding emotions in the reader.

"The historian and the poet," says Ari-

* Pope's *Eloisa*, vers. 366.

nd it is imagination, regulated by knowledge, that enables him to form it.

In the beginning of life, and while experience is confined to a small circle, we admire every thing, and are pleased with very moderate excellence. A peasant thinks the hall of his landlord the finest apartment in the universe, listens with rapture to the strolling ballad-singer, and wonders at the rude wooden cuts that adorn his ruder compositions. A child looks upon his native village as a town; upon the brook that runs by, as a river; and upon the meadows and hills in the neighbourhood, as the most spacious and beautiful that can be. But when, after long absence, he returns in his declining years, to visit, once before he die, the dear spot that gave him birth, and those scenes whereof he remembers rather the original charms than the exact proportions, how is he disappointed to find every thing so debased, and so diminished! The hills seem to have sunk into the ground, the brook to be dried up, and the village to be forsaken of its people; the parish-church, stripped of all its fancied magnificence, is become low, gloomy, and narrow, and the fields are now only the miniature of what they were. Had he never left this spot, his notions might have remained the same as at first; and had he travelled but a little way from it, they would not perhaps have received any material enlargement. It seems then to be from

Observation of many things of the same or similar kinds, that we acquire the talent of forming ideas more perfect than the real objects that lie immediately around us; and these ideas we may improve gradually more and more, according to the vivacity of our mind, and extent of our experience, till at last we come to raise them to a degree of perfection superior to any thing to be found in real life. There cannot, I dare say, be any mystery in this doctrine; for we think and speak to the same purpose every day. Thus nothing is more common than to say, that such an artist excels all we have ever known in his profession, and yet that we can still conceive a superior performance. A moralist, by bringing together into one view the separate virtues of many persons, is enabled to lay down a system of duty more perfect than any he has ever seen exemplified in human conduct. Whatever be the emotion the poet intends to raise in his reader, whether admiration or terror, joy or sorrow; and whatever be the object he would exhibit, whether Venus or Tiphone, Achilles or Therites, a palace or a pile of ruins, a dance or a battle; he generally copies an idea of his own imagination; considering each quality as it is found to exist in several individuals of a species; and thence forming an assemblage more or less perfect in its kind, according to the purpose to which he means to apply it.

Hence

Since it would appear, that the ideas of
 are rather general than singular; in-
 collected from the examination of a
 species or class of things, than copied from
 individual. And this, according to Ari-
 stotle, is in fact the case, at least for the
 most part; whence that critic determines,
 that Poetry is something more exquisite and
 more philosophical than history.* The hi-
 storian may describe Bucephalus, but the
 poet delineates a war-horse; the former must
 have seen the animal he speaks of, or received
 authentic information concerning it, if he
 mean to describe it historically; for the lat-
 ter it is enough that he has seen several ani-
 mals of that sort. The former tells us, what
 Alcibiades actually did and said; the latter,
 what such a species of human character as
 that which bears the name of Achilles would
 probably do or say in certain given circum-
 stances. *Whatever be the end of the poet's conduct.*
 It is indeed true, that the poet may, and
 often does, copy after individual objects.
 Homer, no doubt, took his characters from
 the life; or at least, in forming them, was
 careful to follow tradition as far as the na-
 ture of his plan would allow. But he pro-
 bably took the freedom to add or heighten
 some qualities, and take away others; to
 make Achilles, for example, stronger, per-
 haps, and more impetuous, and more emi-
 nent, according to the purpose to which he

* Poetic. sect. 9.

nent for filial affection, and Hector more patriotic and more amiable, than he really was. If he had not done this, or something like it, his work would have been rather a history than a poem; would have exhibited men and things as they were, and not as they might have been; and Achilles and Hector would have been the names of individual and real heroes; whereas, according to Aristotle, they are rather to be considered as two distinct modifications or species of the heroic character. — Shakspeare's account of the cliffs of Dover comes so near the truth, that we cannot doubt of its having been written by one who had seen them: but he who takes it for an exact historical description, will be surprised when he comes to the place, and finds those cliffs not half so lofty as the poet had made him believe. An historian would be to blame for such amplification; because, being to describe an individual precipice, he ought to tell us just what it is; which if he did, the description would suit that place, and perhaps no other in the whole world. But the poet means only to give an idea of what such a precipice may be; and therefore his description may perhaps be equally applicable to many such chalky precipices on the sea-shore.

This method of copying after general ideas formed by the artist from observation of many individuals, distinguishes the Italian, and all the sublime painters, from the Dutch, and

their

air imitators. These give us bare nature, with the imperfections and peculiarities of individual things or persons; but those give nature improved as far as probability and the sign of the piece will admit. Teniers and Hogarth draw faces, and figures, and dresses, from real life, and present manners; and therefore their pieces must in some degree lose the effect, and become awkward, when the present fashions become obsolete. — Raphael and Reynolds take their models from general nature, avoiding, as far as possible, (at least in all their great performances), those peculiarities that derive their beauty from mere fashion; and therefore their works must give pleasure, and appear elegant, as long as men are capable of forming general ideas, and of judging from them. The last-mentioned incomparable artist is particularly observant of children, whose looks and attitudes, being less under the control of art and local manners, are more characteristic of the species, than those of men and women. This field of observation has supplied him with many fine figures, particularly that most exquisite one of Comedy, struggling for and winning (for who could resist her!) the affections of Garrick: — a figure which could never have occurred to the imagination of a painter who had confined his views to grown persons looking and moving in all the formality of polite life: — a figure which in all ages and countries would be pronounced

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ced natural and engaging;—whereas those human forms that we see every day bowing, and courtesying, and strutting, and turning out their toes, *secundum artem*, and dressed in ruffles, and wigs, and flounces, and hoop-petticoats, and full-trimmed suits, would appear elegant no further than the present fashions are propagated, and no longer than they remain unaltered.

I have heard it disputed, whether a portrait ought to be habited according to the fashion of the times, or in one of those dresses which, on account of their elegance, or having been long in use, are affected by great painters, and therefore called picturesque. The question may be determined upon the principles here laid down. If you wish to have a portrait of your friend, that shall always be elegant, and never aukward, chuse a picturesque dress. But if you mean to preserve the remembrance of a particular suit of cloaths, without minding the ridiculous figure which your friend will probably cut in it a hundred years hence, you may array his picture according to the fashion. The history of dresses may be worth preserving: but who would have his image set up, for the purpose of hanging a coat or periwig upon it, to gratify the curiosity of antiquarian tailors or wigmakers?

There is, in the progress of human society, as well as of human life, a period to which it is of great importance for the
higher

higher order of poets to attend; and from which they will do well to take their characters, and manners, and the era of their events; I mean, that wherein men are raised above savage life, and considerably improved by arts, government, and conversation; it not advanced so high in the ascent towards politeness, as to have acquired a habit of disguising their thoughts and passions, and of reducing their behaviour to the uniformity of the mode. Such was the period which Homer had the good fortune (as a poet) to live in, and to celebrate. This is the period at which the manners of men are most picturesque, and their adventures most romantic. This is the period when the appetites, unperverted by luxury, the powers, unenervated by effeminacy, and the thoughts disengaged from artificial restraint, will, in persons of similar dispositions and circumstances, operate in nearly the same way; and when, consequently, the characters of particular men will approach to the nature of poetical or general ideas, and, if well imitated, give pleasure to the whole, or at least to a great majority of mankind. But a character tinged with the fashions of polite life would not be so generally interesting. Like a human figure adjusted by a modern dancing-master, and dressed by a modern tailor, it may have a good effect in satire, comedy, or farce; but if introduced into the higher poetry, it would be admired by

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those only who had learned to admire nothing but present fashions, and by them no longer than the present fashions lasted; and to all the rest of the world would appear awkward, unaffecting, and perhaps ridiculous. But Achilles and Sarpedon, Diomedes and Hector, Nestor and Ulysses, as drawn by Homer, must in all ages, independently on fashion, command the attention and admiration of mankind. These have the qualities that are universally known to belong to human nature; whereas the modern fine gentleman is distinguished by qualities that belong only to a particular age, society, and corner of the world. I speak not of moral or intellectual virtues, which are objects of admiration to every age; but of those outward accomplishments, and that particular temperature of the passions, which form the most perceptible part of a human character. — As, therefore, the politician, in discussing the rights of mankind, must often allude to an imaginary state of nature; so the poet who intends to raise admiration, pity, terror, and other important emotions, in the generality of mankind, especially in those readers whose minds are most improved, must take his pictures of life and manners, rather from the heroic period we now speak of, than from the ages of refinement; and must therefore (to repeat the maxim of Aristotle) “exhibit things, not as they are, but as they might be.”

If,

If, then, there be any nations who entertain such a partiality in favour of one system of artificial manners, that they cannot endure any other system, either artificial or natural; may we not fairly conclude, that in those nations Epic poetry will not flourish? How far this may account for any peculiarities in the taste and literature of a neighbouring nation *, is submitted to the reader. — Were a man so perverted by nature, or by habit, as to think no state of the human body graceful, but what depends on lace and fringe, powder and pomatum, buckram and whalebone, I should not wonder, if he beheld with dissatisfaction the naked majesty of the Apollo Belvidere, or the flowing simplicity of robe that arrays a Cicero or Flora. But if one of his favourite figures were to be carried about the world in company with these statues, I believe the general voice of mankind would not ratify his judgement. Homer's simple manners may disgust a Terrasson, or a Chesterfield; but will always please the universal taste, because they are more picturesque in themselves, than any form of artificial manners can be,

* Je me souviens, que lorsqu'il je consultai, sur ma Henriade, feu M. de Malezieux, homme qui joignait une grande imagination à une littérature immense, il me dit : Vous enterprenez un ouvrage qui n'est pas fait pour notre nation; LES FRANÇAIS N'ONT PAS BESOIN D'ÉPIQUE.

Voltaire. *Essai sur la poésie épique, chap. 9.*

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and more suitable to those ideas of human life which are most familiar to the human mind.

Let it not be thought, that I have any partiality to the tenets of those philosophers who recommend the manners of the heroic period, or even of the savage state, as better in a moral view, than those of our own time; nor that I mean any reflection upon the virtue or good sense of the age, when I speak disrespectfully of some fashionable articles of external decoration. Our dress and attitudes are not perhaps so graceful as they might be: but that is not our fault, for it depends on causes which are not in our power:—that affects not the virtue of any good man, and no degree of outward elegance will ever reform the heart of a bad one: and that is no more a proof of our ill taste, than the roughness of our language, or the coldness of our climate. As a moralist, one would estimate the things of this life by their influence on the next; but I here speak as a critic, and judge of things according to their effects in the fine arts. Poetry, as an instrument of pleasure, gives the preference to those things that have most variety, and operate most powerfully on the passions; and, as an art that conveys instruction rather by example than by precept, must exhibit evil as well as good, and vicious as well as virtuous characters. That savages, and heroes like those of Homer, may sleep sound-
er;

en; and eat and drink, and perhaps fight, with a keener appetite, than modern Europeans; that they may excel us in strength, swiftness, and many sorts of manual dexterity; in a word, that they may be *finer animals* than we; and further, that, being subject to fewer restraints both from virtue and from delicacy, they may display a more animated picture of the undisguised energies of the human soul. I am very willing to allow: but I hold, that the manners of polished life are beyond comparison more favourable to that benevolence, piety, and self-government, which are the glory of the Christian character, and the highest perfection of our nature, as rational and immortal beings. The former state of mankind I would therefore prefer as the best subject of Epic and Tragic Poetry: but for supplying the means of real happiness here, and of eternal felicity hereafter, every man of reflection, unless blinded by hypothesis, or by prejudice, must give the preference to the latter.

CHAP.

To conceive the idea of a good man, and to invent and describe a poetical character, are two very different things, how-

The subject continued. Of Poetical Characters.

HORACE seems to think, that a competent knowledge of moral philosophy will fit an author for assigning the suitable qualities and duties to each poetical personage *. The maxim may be true, as far as mere morality is the aim of the poet; but cannot be understood to refer to the delineation of poetical characters in general: for a thorough acquaintance with all the moral philosophy in the world would not have enabled Blackmore to paint such a personage as Homer's Achilles, Shakespeare's Othello, or the Satan of Paradise Lost. To a competency of moral science, there must be added an extensive knowledge of mankind, a warm and elevated imagination, and the greatest sensibility of heart, before a genius can be formed equal to so difficult a task. Horace is indeed so sensible of the danger of introducing a new character in poetry, that he even discourages the attempt, and advises the poet

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 309. — 316.
rather

rather to take his persons from the ancient authors, or from tradition *.

To conceive the idea of a good man, and to invent and support a great poetical character, are two very different things, however they may seem to have been confounded by some late critics. The first is easy to any person sufficiently instructed in the duties of life; the last is perhaps of all the efforts of human genius the most difficult; so very difficult, that, though attempted by many, Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton, are almost the only authors who have succeeded in it. But characters of perfect virtue are not the most proper for poetry. It seems to be agreed, that the Deity should not be introduced in the machinery of a poetical fable. To ascribe to him words and actions of our own invention, is in my judgement very unbecoming; nor can a poetical description, that is known to be, and must of necessity be, infinitely inadequate, ever satisfy the human mind †. Poetry, according to the

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 119. — 130.

† It is somewhat amusing to observe, what different ideas our poets have entertained of the manner of speaking that may be most suitable to the Divine Nature. Milton ascribes to him that mode of reasoning which in his own age was thought to be the most sacred and most important. Cowley, in his *Dauides*, introduces the Deity speaking in the Alexandrine measure; from an opinion, no doubt, that a line of six feet has more dignity

the best critics, is an imitation of action; and therefore poetical character, though elevated, should still partake of passions and frailties of humanity. If it were not for the vices of some principal personages, the *Iliad* would not be either so interesting or so moral: — the most moving and most eventful parts of the *Æneid* are those that describe the effects of unlawful passion*: —

the
 nity than one of five. Brown, on the contrary, in *The Cure of Saul*, supposes him to speak in rhyming verses of three syllables. And the author of *Pre-existence, a Poem*, in Doddsley's Collection, thinks it more congruous, that the Supreme Being should "set wide the fate of things," in a speech "majestically long, repugnant to all princes customs here," &c.

* The destruction of Troy, the war with Turnus, and the despair and death of Dido, are here alluded to. That the first was owing to criminal passion, is well known. On the fate of Turnus and Dido, I beg leave to offer a few remarks.

1. Turnus is a brave and gallant young prince: but his disobedience to the will of Jupiter, as repeatedly declared by oracles and prodigies whereof he could not misunderstand the meaning, (*Æneid*, vii. vers. 104. & 596.), in persisting to urge his claim to Lavinia, whom Fate had destined to be the wife of his rival, engages him in the war which concludes with his death. We pity his fall, of which, however, himself, with his dying breath, acknowledges the justice. Had he been less amiable, we should have been less interested in his fate; had he been more virtuous, the poet must either have omitted the Italian war altogether, or brought it about by means less probable perhaps, and less honourable to the Trojans, and consequently to Rome. Piety to the gods is every where recommended by Virgil as the first and

instructive tragedy in the world, *Macbeth*, is founded in crimes of

human virtue, to which all other duties and all other affections are to give place, when they happen to be inconsistent.

2. The loves of *Eneas* and *Dido* are criminal on both sides. By connecting himself with this unfortunate queen, with whom he knew that he could not, without disobedience to the will of Heaven, remain, he is guilty, not only of impiety, but also of a temporary neglect of duty to his people as their leader and sovereign: and she, in obtruding herself upon the Trojan prince, violates the most solemn vows, and acts a part of which she could not be ignorant, that it was incompatible with his destiny; for he had told her from the first, that he was appointed by Fate to settle his Trojans in Italy, and to marry a wife of that country. *Æneid. ii. 781.* — *Dido* has many great and many amiable qualities: yet the Poet blends in her character some harsh ingredients; with a view, no doubt, partly to reconcile us in some measure to her sad catastrophe, but chiefly to make her appear in the eyes of his countrymen an adequate representative of that people, who had so long been the object of their jealousy and hatred. Her passion for *Eneas* is disrespectful to the gods, injurious to that prince and his followers; and indecent in itself: she is somewhat libertine in her religious principles; a shocking circumstance in a lady, and which to our pious poet must have been peculiarly offensive: and her behaviour, when *Eneas* is going to leave her, though suitable to a haughty princess under the power of a passion more violent than delicate, is not at all what we should expect from that softness of nature, and gentleness of affection, without which no woman can be truly amiable. If we except her wish for a young *Eneas*, there is hardly one sentiment of feminine tenderness, in all her threats, complaints, and expostulations. Pride, self-condemnation, and revenge, engross her whole soul, and extinguish every other thought; and she concludes her life, by imprecating with cool,

dreadful enormity: — and if Milton taken into his plan the fall of ou

but dreadful solemnity, perdition upon the fugitive Trojan, and misery upon his people, and their descendants, for ever.

Virgil has been blamed for some things in the conduct of this part of the poem; I know not with what good reason. He was not obliged to give moral perfection to his characters. That of Eneas, if it had been less perfect, might perhaps have made the poem more animated; but then it would not have suited the poet's main design of reconciling the Romans to the person and government of Augustus, of whom Eneas is to be considered as the poetical type. This hero does indeed, in attaching himself to Dido, act inconsistently with his pious and patriotic character; but his fault is human, and not without circumstances of alleviation: and we must not estimate the morality of an action by its consequences, except where they might have been foreseen. But he is no sooner reprimanded by Mercury for his transgression, than he returns to his duty, notwithstanding his liking to the country, and his love for the lady, which now seems to be more delicate, than hers for him. — But is not Dido's fault also human, and attended also with alleviating circumstances? — and if so, is not her punishment greater than her crime? — Granting all this, it will not follow, that Virgil is to blame. Poetry, if strict retributive justice were always to be expected in it, would not be an imitation of human life; and, as all its great events would be anticipated, and exactly such as we wish for, could melt or surprise us no longer. In fact, unlawful love has, in every age, been attended with worse consequences to the weaker, than to the stronger sex; not because it is less unlawful in the one than in the other; but that the former may be guarded by the strongest motives of interest, as well as of honour and duty; and the latter restrained by every principle, not only of conscience, but also of generosity and compassion. Our poet assigns to Dido, in the shades below, one of the least

as well as their state of innocence, his poem must have wanted much of its

uncomfortable situations in the *region of mourning*; and, according to his system, (see the *Essay* part 3. chap. 2.) after undergoing the necessary pains of purification, she was to pass into Elysium, and enjoy the pleasures of that happy place for a thousand years; and afterwards to be sent back to earth to animate another body, and thus have another opportunity of rising to virtue and happiness by a suitable behaviour.

Those incidents, and those only, are blameable in a poem, which either hurt the main design, or are in themselves unnatural, insipid, or immoral. The episode of Dido, as Virgil has given it, is perfectly consonant with his main design; for it sets his hero in a new light, and raises our idea of his personal accomplishments; and must have been particularly interesting to the Romans, as it accounts for their jealousy of Carthage, one of the most important events in all their history. Unnatural or insipid this episode cannot be called; for it is without doubt the finest piece of poetry in the world: the whole description of Dido's love, in every period of its progress, from its commencement to its lamentable conclusion, is sublime, and harmonious, natural, pathetic, and picturesque, to a degree which was never equalled, and never can be surpassed. And who will object to the morality of that fable, which recommends piety and patriotism as the most indispensable duties of a sovereign; and paints, in the most terrifying colours, the fatal effects of female imprudence, of opposition to the will of Heaven, of the violation of solemn vows, and the gratification of criminal desires?

As to the part that Venus and Juno take in this affair, against which I have heard some people exclaim;—It is to be considered as a poetical figure, of sufficient probability in the days of Virgil; and only signifies, that Dido was enamoured in this unhappy amour, first by her love, and then by her ambition. See her conference with her sister in the beginning of the fourth book. —The reader who loves Virgil as much as I wish him to do, will not be offended at the length of this note.

pathos, and could not have been (now is) such a treasure of important ledge, as no other uninspired writer ever comprehended in so small a compass. — true, like truth, is uniform and un-
 able. We may anticipate the part a good man will act in any given circumstances; and therefore the events that depend on such a man must be less surprising than those that proceed from passion; the vicissitudes whereof it is frequently impossible to foresee. From the violent temper of Achilles, in the Iliad, spring many great incidents; which could not have taken place, if he had been calm and prudent like Ulysses, or pious and patriotic like Eneas: — his rejection of Agamemnon's offers, in the ninth book, arises from the violence of his resentment; — his yielding to the request of Patroclus, in the sixteenth, from the violence of his friendship (if I may so speak) counteracting his resentment; and his restoring to Priam the dead body of Hector, in the twenty-fourth, from the violence of his affection to his own aged father, and his regard to the command of Jupiter, counteracting, in some measure, both his sorrow for his friend, and his thirst of vengeance. — Besides, except where there is some degree of vice, it pains us too exquisitely to see misfortune; and therefore Poetry would cease to have a pleasurable influence over our tender passions, if it were to exhibit virtuous characters only. And as,

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evil is necessary to our moral progress, and the possibility of error to our moral improvement; so bad or mixed characters are useful in poetry, to give to the good such opposition as puts them upon displaying and exercising their virtue.

All those personages, however, in whose fortune the poet means that we should be interested, must have agreeable and admirable qualities to recommend them to our regard. And perhaps the greatest difficulty in the art lies in suitably blending those faults, which the poet finds it expedient to give to any particular hero, with such moral, intellectual, or corporeal accomplishments, as may engage our esteem, pity, or admiration, without weakening our hatred of vice, or love of virtue. In most of our novels, and in many of our plays, it happens unluckily, that the hero of the piece is so captivating, as to incline us to be indulgent to every part of his character, the bad as well as the good. But a great master knows how to give the proper direction to human sensibility, and, without any perversion of our faculties, or any confusion of right and wrong, to make the same person the object of very different emotions, of pity and hatred, of admiration and horror. Who does not esteem and admire Macbeth, for his courage and generosity? who does not pity him when beset with all the terrors of a pregnant imagination, superstitious temper, and
awakened.

- awakened conscience? who does not
 him as a monster of cruelty, treacher
 ingratitude? His good qualities, b
 ing us near to him, make us, as i
 eye-witnesses of his crime, and give us a
 low-feeling of his remorse; and, therefore,
 his example cannot fail to have a powerful
 effect in cherishing our love of virtue, and
 fortifying our minds against criminal im-
 pressions: whereas, had he wanted those good
 qualities, we should have kept aloof from
 his concerns, or viewed them with a super-
 ficial attention; in which case his example
 would have had little more weight, than
 that of the robber, of whom we know no-
 thing, but that he was tried, condemned,
 and executed. — Satan, in *Paradise Lost*, is a
 character drawn and supported with the
 most consummate judgement. The old fu-
 ries and demons, Hecate, Tisiphone, Alecto,
 Megara, are objects of unmixed and unmi-
 gated abhorrence; Tityus, Enceladus, and
 their brethren, are remarkable for nothing
 but impiety, deformity, and vastness of
 size; Pluto is, at best, an insipid personage;
 Mars, a hairbrained ruffian; Tasso's infer-
 nal tyrant, an ugly and overgrown mon-
 ster: — but in the Miltonic Satan, we are
 forced to admire the majesty of the ruined
 archangel, at the same time that we detest
 the unconquerable depravity of the fiend.
 But, of all poetical characters, the Achilles
 of

* seems to me the most exquisite
 cention, and the most highly finish-
 utility of this character in a mo-
 obvious; for it may be consider-
 ed as the source of all the morality of the
 Iliad. Had not the generous and violent
 temper of Achilles determined him to patro-
 nise the augur Calchas in defiance of Aga-
 memnon, and afterwards, on being affront-
 ed by that vindictive commander, to aban-
 don for a time the common cause of Greece;
 — the fatal effects of dissension among con-
 federates, and of capricious and tyrannical
 behaviour in a sovereign, would not have
 been the leading moral of Homer's poetry;
 nor could Hector, Sarpedon, Eneas, Ulysses,
 and the other amiable heroes, have been
 brought forward to signalize their virtues,
 and recommend themselves to the esteem and
 imitation of mankind.

They who form their judgement of Achil-
 les from the imperfect sketch given of him.

* I say, the Achilles of Homer. Latter authors have
 degraded the character of this hero, by supposing every
 part of his body invulnerable except the heel. I know
 not how often I have heard this urged as one of Homer's
 absurdities; and indeed the whole Iliad is one continued
 absurdity, on this supposition. But Homer all along
 makes his hero equally liable to wounds and death with
 other men. Nay, to prevent all mistakes in regard to
 this matter, (if those who cavil at the poet would but
 read his work), he actually wounds him in the right
 arm, by the lance of Asteropæus, in the battle near
 the river Scamander. See Il. xxi. vers. 161. — 168.

by

by Horace in the *Art of Poetry* * ; consider him only as a hateful competitor, anger, revenge, fierceness, obstinacy, pride, can never enter into the view, nor be suitably affected with his narration. All these vices are no doubt, in some degree, combined in Achilles; but they are tempered with qualities of a different sort, which render him a most interesting character, and of course make the Iliad a most interesting poem. Every reader abhors the faults of this hero; and yet, to an attentive reader of Homer, this hero must be the object of esteem, admiration, and pity; for he has many good as well as bad affections, and is equally violent in all: — nor is he possessed of a single vice or virtue, which the wonderful art of the poet has not made subservient to the design of the poem, and to the progress and catastrophe of the action; so that the hero of the Iliad, considered as a poetical personage, is just what he should be, neither greater nor less, neither worse nor better. — He is every where distinguished by an abhorrence of oppression, by a liberal and elevated mind, by a passion for glory, and by a love of truth, freedom, and sincerity. He is for the most part attentive to the duties of religion; and, except to those who have injured him, courteous and kind: he is affectionate to his tu-

* vers. 121. 122.

nix; and not only pities the misfortune of his enemy Priam, but in the most generous manner administers to him the consolation that poor Homer's theology could give. Though no admirer of the cause in which his evil destiny compels him to engage, he is warmly attached to his native land; and, ardent as he is in vengeance, he is equally so in love to his aged father Peleus, and to his friend Patroclus. He is not luxurious like Paris, nor clownish like Ajax; his accomplishments are princely, and his amusements worthy of a hero. Add to this, as an apology for the vehemence of his anger, that the affront he had received was (according to the manners of that age) of the most atrocious nature; and not only unprovoked, but such as, on the part of Agamemnon, betrayed a brutal insensibility to merit, as well as a proud, selfish, ungrateful, and tyrannical disposition. And though he is often inexcusably furious; yet it is but justice to remark, that he was not naturally cruel*; and that his wildest outrages were such as in those rude times might be expected from a violent man of invincible strength and valour, when exasperated by

* See *Iliad* xxi. 300. and xxiv. 483. — 673. — In the first of these passages, Achilles himself declares that before Patroclus was slain, he often spared the lives of his enemies, and took pleasure in doing it. It is strange that this should be left out in Pope's Translation.

injury, and frantic with sorrow.—
hero's claim to the admiration of man is indisputable. Every part of his character is sublime and astonishing. In his person is the strongest, the swiftest, and most beautiful of men:—this last circumstance, however, occurs not to his own observation, being too trivial to attract the notice of so great a mind. The Fates had put it in his power, either to return home before the end of the war, or to remain at Troy:—if he chose the former, he would enjoy tranquillity and happiness in his own country to a good old age; if the latter, he must perish in the bloom of his youth:—his affection to his father and native country, and his hatred to Agamemnon, strongly urged him to the first; but a desire to avenge the death of his friend determines him to accept the last, with all its consequences. This at once displays the greatness of his fortitude, the warmth of his friendship, and the violence of his sanguinary passions: and it is this that so often and so powerfully recommends him to the pity, as well as admiration, of the attentive reader.—But the magnanimity of this hero is superior, not only to the fear of death, but also to prodigies, and those too of the most tremendous import. I allude to the speech of his horse Xanthus, in the end of the nineteenth book, and to his behaviour on that occasion; and I shall take the liberty to expatiate a little upon that incident, with

to vindicate Homer, as well as to illustrate the character of Achilles.

This incident is marvellous, no doubt, and is generally condemned even by the admirers of Homer; yet to me, who am no believer in the infallibility of the great poet, seems not only allowable, but useful and important. That this miracle has probability enough to warrant its admission into Homer's poetry, is fully proved by Madame Dacier. It is the effect of Juno's power; which if we admit in other parts of the poem, we ought not to reject in this: and in the poetical history of Greece, and even in the civil history of Rome, there are similar fables, which were once in no small degree of credit. But neither M. Dacier, nor any other of the commentators, (so far as I know), has taken notice of the propriety of introducing it in this place, nor of its utility in raising our idea of the hero. — Patroclus was now slain; and Achilles, forgetting the injury he had received from Agamemnon, and frantic with revenge and sorrow, was rushing to the battle, to satiate his fury upon Hector and the Trojans. This was the critical moment on which his future destiny depended. It was still in his power to retire, and go home in peace to his beloved father and native land, with the certain prospect of a long and happy, though inglorious, life: if he went forward to the battle, he might avenge his friend's death upon the enemy,

but his own must inevitably happen after. This was the decree of Fate concerning him, as he himself very well knew; it would not be wonderful, if such a petuous spirit should forget all this, during the present paroxysm of his grief and rage. His horse, therefore, miraculously gifted by Juno for that purpose, after expressing, in dumb show, the deepest concern for his lord, opens his mouth, and in human speech announces his approaching fate. The fear of death, and the fear of prodigies, are different things; and a brave man, though proof against the one, may yet be overcome by the other. "I have known a soldier (says Addison) that has entered a breach, affrighted at his own shadow; and look pale upon a little scratching at his door, who the day before had marched up against a battery of cannon *." But Achilles, of whom we already knew that he feared nothing human, now shows, what we had not as yet been informed of, and what must therefore heighten our idea of his fortitude, that he is not to be terrified or moved, by the view of certain destruction, or even by the most alarming prodigies. I shall quote Pope's Translation, which in this place is equal, if not superior, to the original.

Then ceas'd for ever, by the Furies tied,
His fateful voice. Th' intrepid chief replied,

* Spectator, Numb. 12.

bated rage : " So let it be !
 and prodigies are lost on me.
 my fate ; — to die, to see no more
 h-loved parents, and my native shore.
 : — when Heaven ordains, I sink in night.—
 Now perish, Troy." He said, and rush'd to fight.

It is equally a proof of rich invention and exact judgement in Homer, that he mixes some good qualities in all his bad characters, and some degree of imperfection in almost all his good ones. — Agamemnon, notwithstanding his pride, is an able general, and a valiant man, and highly esteemed as such by the greater part of the army. — Paris, though effeminate, and vain of his dress and person, is, however, good-natured, patient of reproof, not destitute of courage, and eminently skilled in music, and other fine arts. — Ajax is a huge giant ; fearless rather from insensibility to danger, and confidence in his massy arms, than from any nobler principle ; boastful and rough ; regardless of the gods, though not downright impious * : yet there is in his manner some-

* His natural bluntness appears in that short, but famous address, to Jupiter, in the nineteenth book, when a preternatural darkness hindered him from seeing either the enemy or his own people. The prayer seems to be the effect rather of vexation, than of piety or patriotism. Pope gives a more solemn turn to it, than either Homer's words, or the character of the speaker, will justify.

—— Lord of earth and air !

O King, O Father, hear my humble prayer, &c.

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thing of frankness and blunt sincerity, entitle him to a share in our esteem; is ever ready to assist his countrymen whom he renders good service on perilous emergency. — The character of Helen, in spite of her faults, and of the many calamities whereof she is the guilty cause, Homer has found means to recommend to our pity, and almost to our love; and this he does, without seeking to extenuate the crime of Paris, of which the most respectable personages in the poem are made to speak with becoming abhorrence. She is so full of remorse, so ready on every occasion to condemn her past conduct, so affectionate to her friends, so willing to do justice to every body's merit, and withal so finely accomplished, that she extorts our admiration, as well as that of the Trojan senators. — Menelaus, though sufficiently sensible of the injury he had received, is yet a man of moderation, clemency, and good-nature, a valiant soldier, and a most affectionate brother; but there is a dash of vanity in his composition, and he entertains rather too high an opinion of his own abilities; yet never overlooks or undervalues the merit of others. — Priam would claim unreserved esteem, as well as pity, if it were not for his inexcusable weakness, in gratifying the humour, and by indulgence abetting the crimes, of the most worthless of all his children, to the utter ruin of his people, family, and kingdom.

om. Madame Dacier supposes, that
 and lost his authority, and was obliged
 in with the politics of the times : but
 I find no evidence; on the contrary,
 his unworthy favourite Paris seem to
 have been the only persons of distinction in
 Troy, who were averse to the restoring of
 Helen. Priam's foible (if it can be called by
 so soft a name), however faulty, is not un-
 common, and has often produced calamity
 both in private and public life. The scrip-
 ture gives a memorable instance, in the hi-
 story of the good old Eli. — Sarpedon
 comes nearer a perfect character, than any
 other of Homer's heroes; but the part he
 has to act is short. It is a character, which
 one could hardly have expected in those rude
 times : A sovereign prince, who considers
 himself as a magistrate set up by the people
 for the public good, and therefore bound in
 honour and gratitude to be himself their
 example, and study to excel as much in vir-
 tue, as in rank and authority. — Hector
 is the favourite of every reader; and with
 good reason. To the truest valour he joins
 the most generous patriotism. He abomi-
 nates the crime of Paris : but, not being
 able to prevent the war, he thinks it his
 duty to defend his country, and his father
 and sovereign, to the last. He too, as well
 as Achilles, foresees his own death; which
 heightens our compassion, and raises our idea
 of his magnanimity. In all the relations of
 private

private life, as a son, a father, a husband, a brother, he is amiable in the highest degree, and he is distinguished among all the heroes for tenderness of affection, gentleness of manners, and a pious regard to the duties of religion. One circumstance of his character, strongly expressive of a great and delicate mind, we learn from Helen's lamentation over his dead body, That he was almost the only person in Troy, who had always treated her with kindness, and never uttered one reproachful word to give her pain, nor heard others reproach her without blaming them for it. Some tendency to ostentation (which however may be pardonable in a commander in chief), and temporary fits of timidity, are the only blemishes discoverable in this hero; whose portrait Homer appears to have drawn with an affectionate and peculiar attention. And it must convey a favourable idea of the good old bard, as well as of human nature, to reflect, that the same person who was loved and admired three thousand years ago, as a pattern of heroic excellence and manly virtue, is still an object of admiration and love to the most enlightened nations. This is one striking proof, that, notwithstanding the endless vicissitude to which human affairs are liable, the understanding and moral sentiments of men have continued nearly the same in all ages; and that the faculties whereby we distinguish truth and virtue are as really parts of our original nature, and as little

little obnoxious to the caprice of fashion, as our love of life, our senses of seeing and hearing, or the appetites of hunger and thirst. Rectitude of moral principle, and a spirit of good-nature and humanity, are indeed eminently conspicuous in this wonderful poet; whose works, in whatever light we consider them, as a picture of past ages, as a treasure of moral wisdom, as a specimen of the power of human genius, or as an affecting and instructive display of the human mind, are truly inestimable.

By ascribing so many amiable qualities to Hector, and some others of the Trojans, the poet interests us in the fate of that people, notwithstanding our being continually kept in mind, that they are the injurious party. And by thus blending good and evil, virtue and frailty, in the composition of his characters, he makes them the more conformable to the real appearances of human nature, and more useful as examples for our improvement: and at the same time, without hurting verisimilitude, gives every necessary embellishment to particular parts of his poem, and variety, coherence, and animation, to the whole fable. And it may also be observed, that though several of his characters are complex, not one of them is made up of incompatible parts: all are natural and probable, and such as we think we have met with, or might have met with, in our intercourse with mankind.

From the same extensive views of good and evil, in all their forms and combinations, Homer has been enabled to make each of his characters perfectly distinct in itself, and different from all the rest; infomuch that, before we come to the end of the Iliad, we are as well acquainted with his heroes, as with the faces and tempers of our most familiar friends. Virgil, by confining himself to a few general ideas of fidelity and fortitude, has made his subordinate heroes a very good sort of people; but they are all the same, and we have no clear knowledge of any one of them. Achates is faithful, and Gyas is brave, and Cloanthus is brave; and this is all we can say of the matter*. We see these heroes at a distance, and have some

* I cannot, however, admit the opinion of those who contend, that there is nothing of character in Virgil. Turnus is a good poetical character, but borrowed from Homer, being an Achilles in miniature. Mezentius is well drawn, and of the poet's own invention: — a tyrant, who, together with impiety, has contracted intolerable cruelty and pride; yet intrepid in the field, and graced with one amiable virtue, sometimes found in very rugged minds, a tender affection to a most deserving son. In the good old King Evander, we have a charming picture of simple manners, refined by erudition, and uncorrupted by luxury. Dido has been already analysed. There is nothing, I think, in Camilla, which might not be expected in any female warrior; but the adventures of her early life are romantic and interesting. The circumstance of her being, when an infant, thrown across a river, tied to a spear, is so very singular, that it would seem to have had a foundation in fact, or in tradition. Something similar is related by Plutarch of King Pyrrhus.

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notion of their shape and size; but are not near enough to distinguish their features: and every face seems to exhibit the same faint and ambiguous appearance. But of Homer's heroes we know every particular that can be known. We eat, and drink, and talk, and fight with them: we see them in action, and out of it; in the field, and in their tents and houses: — the very face of the country about Troy, we seem to be as well acquainted with, as if we had been there. Similar characters there are among these heroes, as there are similar faces in every society; but we never mistake one for another. Nestor and Ulysses are both wise, and both eloquent; but the wisdom of the former seems to be the effect of experience; that of the latter, of genius: the eloquence of the one is sweet and copious, but not always to the purpose, and apt to degenerate into story-telling; that of the other is close, emphatical, and persuasive, and accompanied with a peculiar modesty and simplicity of manner. Homer's heroes are all valiant; yet each displays a modification of valour peculiar to himself. One is valiant from principle, another from constitution; one is rash, another cautious; one is impetuous and headstrong, another impetuous, but tractable; one is cruel, another merciful; one is insolent and ostentatious, another gentle and unassuming; one is vain of his person, another of his strength, and a third of his fa-

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mily. — It would be tedious to give a complete enumeration. Almost every species of the heroic character is to be found in Homer.

The *Paradise Lost*, though truly Epic, cannot properly be called an Heroic poem; for the agents in it are not heroes, but beings of a higher order*. Of these the poet's plan did not admit the introduction of many; but most of those whom he has introduced are well characterised. I have already spoken of his Satan, which is the highest imaginable species of the diabolical character. The inferior species are well diversified, and in each variety distinctly marked: one is slothful, another avaricious, a third sophistical, a fourth furious; and though all are impious, some are more outrageously and blasphemously so, than others. — Adam and Eve, in the state of innocence, are characters well imagined, and well supported; and the different sentiments arising from difference of sex, are traced out with inimitable delicacy and philosophical propriety. After the fall, he makes them retain the same characters, without any other change than what the transition from innocence to guilt

* Samson, in the *Agonistes*, is a species of the heroic character not to be found in Homer; distinctly marked, and admirably supported. And Delilah, in the same tragedy, is perhaps a more perfect model of an alluring, insinuating, worthless woman, than any other to be met with in ancient or modern poetry.

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might be supposed to produce : Adam has still that pre-eminence in dignity, and Eve in loveliness, which we should naturally look for in the father and mother of mankind.

— Of the blessed spirits, Raphael and Michael are well distinguished ; the one for affability, and peculiar good-will to the human race ; the other for majesty, but such as commands veneration, rather than fear. — We are sorry to add, that Milton's attempt to soar still higher, only shows, that he had already soared as high, as, without being “ blasted with excess of light,” it is possible for the human imagination to rise.

I have been led further into this subject of poetical characters than I intended to have gone, or than was necessary in the present investigation. For I presume, it was long ago abundantly evident ; — that the end of Poetry is to please, and therefore that the most perfect poetry must be the most pleasing ; — that what is unnatural cannot give pleasure, and therefore that poetry must be according to nature ; — that it must be either according to real nature, or according to nature somewhat different from the reality ; — that if, according to real nature, it would give no greater pleasure than history, which is a transcript of real nature ; — that greater pleasure is, however, to be expected from it, because we grant it superior indulgence, in regard to fiction, and the choice of words ; — and, consequently, that poetry must be,

not.

not according to real nature, but according to nature improved to that degree, which is consistent with probability, and suitable to the poet's purpose *. — And hence it is that we call Poetry, AN IMITATION OF NATURE. — For that which is properly termed *Imitation* has always in it something which is not in the original. If the prototype and transcript be exactly alike; if there be nothing in the one which is not in the other; we may call the latter a representation, a copy, a draught, or a picture, of the former; but we never call it an imitation.

* Cum mundus sensibilis sit anima rationali dignitate inferior, videtur Poesis hæc humanæ naturæ largiri quæ historia denegat; atque animo umbris rerum utcunque satisfacere, cum solida haberi non possint. Si quis enim rem acutius introspeciat, firmum ex Poesi sumitur argumentum, magnitudinem rerum magis illustrem, ordinem magis perfectum, et varietatem magis pulchram, animæ humanæ complacere, quam in natura ipsa, post lapsum, reperiri ullo modo possit. Quapropter, cum res gestæ, et eventus, qui veræ historiæ subiciuntur, non sint ejus amplitudinis, in qua anima humana sibi satisfaciât, præsto est Poesis, quæ facta magis heroica consingat. Cum historia verâ successus rerum, minime pro meritis virtutum et scelerum narret; corrigit eam Poesis, et exitus, et fortunas, secundum merita, et ex lege Nemeseos, exhibet. Cum historia verâ, obvia rerum fatiçate et similitudine, animæ humanæ fastidio sit; reficit eam Poesis, inexpectata, et varia, et vicissitudinum plena canens. Adeo ut Poesis ista non solum ad delectationem, sed etiam ad animi magnitudinem, et ad mores conferat. Quare et merito etiam divinitatis particeps videri possit; quia animum erigit, et in sublime rapit; rerum simulacra ad animi desideria accommodando, non animum rebus (quod ratio facit et historia) submitteudo.

Bacon. De Aug. Scient. pag. 168. Lug. Bat. 1645.

CHAP.

C H A P. V.

Further Illustrations. Of Poetical Arrangement.

IT was formerly remarked, that the events of Poetry must be "more compact, more clearly connected with causes and consequences, and unfolded in an order more flattering to the imagination, and more interesting to the passions," than the events of history commonly are. This may seem to demand some illustration.

I. Some parts of history interest us much; but others so little, that, if it were not for their use in the connection of events, we should be inclined to overlook them altogether. But all the parts of a poem must be interesting:—Great, to raise admiration or terror; unexpected, to give surprise; pathetic, to draw forth our tender affections; important, from their tendency to the elucidation of the fable, or to the display of human character; amusing, from the agreeable pictures of nature they present us with; or of peculiar efficacy in promoting our moral improvement. And therefore, in forming an Epic or Dramatic Fable, from history or tradition,

dition, the poet must omit every event that cannot be improved to one or other of these purposes.

II. Some events are recorded in history, merely because they are true; though their consequences be of no moment, and their causes unknown. But of all poetical events, the causes ought to be manifest, for the sake of probability; and the effects considerable, to give them importance.

III. A history may be as long as you please; for, while it is instructive and true, it is still a good history. But a poem must not be too long:—first, because to write good poetry is exceedingly difficult, so that a very long poem would be too extensive a work for human life, and too laborious for human ability;—secondly, because, if you would be suitably affected with the poet's art, you must have a distinct remembrance of the whole fable, which could not be, if the fable were very long*;—and, thirdly, because poetry is addressed to the imagination and passions, which cannot long be kept in violent exercise, without working the mind into a disagreeable state, and even impairing the health of the body.—That, by these three peculiarities of the poetical art, its powers of pleasing are heightened, and consequently its end promoted, is too obvious to require proof.

* Aristot. Poet. § 17.

IV. The strength of a passion depends in part on the vivacity of the impression made by its object. Distress which we see, we are more affected with than what we only hear of; and, of several descriptions of an affecting object, we are most moved by that which is most lively. Every thing in poetry, being intended to operate on the passions, must be displayed in lively colours, and set as it were before the eyes: and therefore the poet must attend to many minute, though picturesque circumstances, that may, or perhaps must, be overlooked by the historian. Achilles putting on his armour, is described by Homer with a degree of minuteness, which, if it were the poet's business simply to relate facts, might appear tedious or impertinent; but which in reality answers a good purpose, that of giving us a distinct image of this dreadful warrior: it being the end of poetical description, not only to relate facts, but to paint them; not merely to inform the

* Homer's poetry is always picturesque. Algarotti, after Lucian, calls him the prince of painters. He sets before us the whole visible appearance of the object he describes, so that the painter would have nothing to do but to work after his model. He has more epithets expressive of colour than any other poet I am acquainted with: *black earth, wine-coloured ocean, and even white milk, &c.* This to the imagination of those readers who study the various colourings of nature is highly amusing, however offensive, it may be to the delicacy of certain critics; -- whose rules for the use of epithets if

the judgement, and enrich the memory, but to awaken the passions, and captivate the imagination,

we were to adopt, we should take the palm of poetry from Homer, Virgil, and Milton, and bestow it on those simple rhimers, who, because they have no other merit, must be admired for barrenness of fancy, and poverty of language. — An improper use of epithets is indeed a grievous fault. And epithets become improper: — 1. when they add nothing to the sense; or to the picture; — and still more, when, 2. they seem rather to take something from it; — 3. when by their colloquial meanness they debase the subject. — These three faults are all exemplified in the following lines:

The chariot of the King of kings,
Which *active* troops of angels drew,
On a strong tempest's *rapid* wings,
With *most* amazing swiftness flew.

Tate and Brady.

4. Epithets are improper, when, instead of adding to the sense, they only exaggerate the sound. Homer's πολυφλοισβοιο θαλασσης contains both an imitative sound, and a lively picture: but Thomson gives us nothing but noise, when he says, describing a thunder storm,

Follows the loosen'd aggravated roar,
Enlarging, deepening, mingling, peal on peal,
Crush'd horrible, convulsing heaven and earth.

Summer.

The following line of Pope is perhaps liable to the same objection:

Then rustling, crackling, crashing, thunder down.

Iliad 23.

5. Epithets are faulty, when they overcharge a verse so as to hurt its harmony, and incumber its motion. — 6. When they darken the sense, by crowding too many thoughts

magination. Not that every thing in poetry is to be minutely described, or that every minute

thoughts together. Both these faults appear in this passage:

Her eyes in liquid light luxurious swim,
And languish with unutterable love;
Heaven's warm bloom glows along each brightening limb,
Where fluttering bland the veil's thin mantlings rove.

Lastly, Epithets are improper, when they recur more frequently, than the genius either of the language or of the composition will admit. For some languages are more liberal of epithets than others, the Italian, for instance, than the English; and some sorts of verse require a more perfect simplicity than others, those, for example, that express dejection or composure of mind, than those that give utterance to enthusiasm, indignation, and other ardent emotions.

In general, Epithets, that add to the sense, and at the same time assist the harmony, must be allowed to be ornamental, if they are not too frequent. Nor should those be objected to, which give to the expression either delicacy or dignity. And as these qualities do not at all times depend on the same principle, being in some degree determined by fashion, is there not reason for supposing, that the most exceptionable of Homer's epithets, those I mean which he applies to his persons, might in that remote age have had a propriety, whereof at present we have no conception? The epithets assumed by Eastern kings seem ridiculous to an European; and yet perhaps may appear significant and solemn to those who are accustomed to hear them in the original language. Let it be observed too, that Homer composed his immortal work at a time when writing was not common; when people were rather hearers than readers of poetry, and could not often enjoy the pleasure even of hearing it; and when, consequently, the frequent repetition of certain

minute description must of necessity be a long one. Nothing has a worse effect, than descriptions too long, too frequent, or too minute; — witness the *David* of Cowley — and the reader is never so effectually interested in his subject, as when, by means of a few circumstances well selected, he is made to conceive a great many others. From Virgil's *Pulcherrima Dido*, and the following simile of Diana amidst her nymphs*, our fancy may form for itself as picture of feminine loveliness and dignity more perfect than ever Cowley or Ovid could exhibit in their most elaborate descriptions. Nay, it has been justly remarked by the best critics, that, in the description of great objects, a certain degree of obscurity, not in the language, but in the picture or notion presented to the mind, has sometimes a happy effect in producing admiration, terror, and other emotions connected with the sublime: — as when the witches in *Macbeth* describe the horrors of their employment by calling it in three words, "A deed without a name." — But it is only a great artist, in certain words and phrases, being a help to memory, as well as to the right apprehension of the poet's meaning, would be thought rather a beauty than a blemish. The same thing is observable in some of our old ballads.

* Virg. *Aeneid*. lib. i. vers. 500.

— Demetrius Phalereus § 266 — Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful.

who

who knows when to be brief in description, and when copious; where to light up his landscape with sunshine, and where to cover it with darkness and tempest. To be able to do this, without suffering the narration to languish in its progress, or to run out into an immoderate length; without hurrying us away from affecting objects before our passions have time to operate, or fixing our attention too long upon them, — it will be proper, that the poet confine the action of his poem to a short period of time. But history is subject to no restraints, but those of truth; and, without incurring blame, may take in any length of duration.

V. The origin of nations, and the beginnings of great events, are little known, and seldom interesting; whence the first part of every history, compared with the sequel, is somewhat dry and tedious. But a poet must, even in the beginning of his work, interest the readers, and raise high expectation; not by any affected pomp of style, far less by ample promises or bold professions; but by setting immediately before them some incident, striking enough to raise curiosity, in regard both to its causes and to its consequences. He must therefore take up his story, not at the beginning, but in the middle; or rather, to prevent the work from being too long, as near the end as possible: and afterwards take some proper opportunity to inform us of the preceding events, in the way

of

of narrative, or by the conversation of the persons introduced, or by short and natural digressions.

The action of both the Iliad and Odyſſey begins about fix weeks before its concluſion; although the principal events of the war of Troy are to be found in the former, and the adventures of a ten years voyage, followed by the ſuppreſſion of a dangerous domeſtic enemy, in the latter. One of the firſt things mentioned by Homer in the Iliad, is a plague, which Apollo in anger ſent into the Grecian army commanded by Agamemnon, and now encamped before Troy. Who this Agamemnon was, and who the Grecians were; for what reaſon they had come hither; how long the ſiege had laſted; what memorable actions had been already performed, and in what condition both parties now were:—all this, and much more, we ſoon learn from occaſional hints and converſations interſperſed through the poem.

In the Eneid, which, though it comprehends the tranſactions of ſeven years, opens within a few months of the concluding event, we are firſt preſented with a view of the Trojan fleet at ſea, and no leſs a perſon than Juno intereſting herſelf to raiſe a ſtorm for their deſtruction. This excites a curioſity to know ſomething further: who theſe Trojans were; whence they had come, and whither they were bound; why they had left their own country, and what had befallen them ſince they