of merit: and indeed the moſt fanciful philoſopher ſeldom frames a theory, without conſulting nature, in ſome of her more obvious appearances. Laughter very frequently ariſes from the view of dignity and meanneſs united in the ſame object; ſometimes, no doubt, from the appearance of aſſumed inferiority *, as well as of ſmall faults and unimportant turpitudes; and ſometimes, perhaps, though rarely, from that ſort of pride, which is deſcribed in the paſſage quoted from Mr Hobbes by Addiſon.

All theſe accounts agree in this, that the cauſe of laughter is ſomething compounded; or ſomething that diſpoſes the mind to form a compariſon, by paſſing from one object or idea to another. That this is in fact the caſe, cannot be proved *a priori*; but this holds in all the examples hitherto given, and will be found to hold in all that are given hereafter. May it not then be laid down as a principle, that "Laughter "ariſes from the view of two or more ob-"jects or ideas, diſpoſing the mind to form "a compariſon?" According to the theory

* Pope, Arbuthnot, and Swift, in ſome of their moſt humourous pieces, aſſume the character, and affect the ignorance, of Grubſtreet writers; and from this circumſtance part of the humour of ſuch papers will perhaps be found to ariſe. "Valde hæc ridentur (ſays Ci-"cero) quæ a prudentibus, quaſi per diſſimulationem "non intelligendi, ſubabſurde falſeque dicuntur." De Orat. II. 68.

of Hobbes, this compariſon would be between the ludicrous object and ourſelves; according to thoſe writers who miſapply Ariſtotle's definition, it would ſeem to be formed between the ludicrous object and other things or perſons in general; and if we incline to Hucheſon's theory, which is the beſt of the three, we ſhall think that there is a compariſon of the parts of the ludicrous object, firſt with one another, and ſecondly with ideas or things extraneous.

Further: Every appearance that is made up of parts, or that leads the mind of the beholder to form a compariſon, is not ludicrous. The body of a man or woman, of a horſe, a fiſh, or a bird, is not ludicrous, though it conſiſts of many parts; — and it may be compared to many other things without raiſing laughter: but the picture deſcribed in the beginning of the Epiſtle to the Piſoes, with a man's head, a horſe's neck, feathers of different birds, limbs of different beaſts, and the tail of a fiſh, would have been thought ludicrous eighteen hundred years ago, if we believe Horace, and in certain circumſtances would no doubt be ſo at this day. It would ſeem then, that "the "parts of a laughable aſſemblage muſt be in "ſome degree unſuitable and heterogeneous."

Moreover: Any one of the parts of the Horatian monſter, a human head, a horſe's neck, the tail of a fiſh, or the plumage of a fowl, is not ludicrous in itſelf; nor

would

would thoſe ſeveral parts be ludicrous, if attended to in ſucceſſion, without any view to their union. For to ſee them diſpoſed on different ſhelves of a muſeum, or even on the ſame ſhelf, no body would laugh, except perhaps the thought of uniting them were to occur to his fancy, or the paſſage of Horace to his memory. It ſeems to follow, "that "the incongruous parts of a laughable idea "or object muſt either be combined ſo as to "form an aſſemblage, or muſt be ſuppoſed "to be ſo combined."

May we not then conclude, that "Laugh-"ter ariſes from the view of two or more "inconſiſtent, unſuitable, or incongruous "parts or circumſtances, conſidered as u-"nited in one complex object or aſſem-"blage, or as acquiring a ſort of mutual re-"lation from the peculiar manner in which "the mind takes notice of them?" The lines "from Akenſide, formerly referred to, ſeem "to point at the ſame doctrine:

> Where-e'er the power of Ridicule diſplays
> Her quaint-eyed viſage, *ſome incongruous form,*
> *Some ſtubborn diſſonance of things combined,*
> Strikes on the quick obſerver.

And, to the ſame purpoſe, the learned and ingenious Dr Gerard, in his *Eſſay on Taſte*: "The ſenſe of Ridicule is gratified by an "inconſiſtence and diſſonance of circum-"ſtances in the ſame object, or in objects

"nearly related in the main; or by a ſimili-"tude or relation unexpected between things "on the whole oppoſite and unlike."

And therefore, inſtead of ſaying with Hucheſon, that the cauſe or object of laughter is an "oppoſition of dignity and mean-"neſs;"—I would ſay, in more general terms, that it is, "an oppoſition of ſuit-"ableneſs and unſuitableneſs, or of rela-"tion and the want of relation, united, or "ſuppoſed to be united, in the ſame aſſem-"blage."—Thus the offices aſcribed to the dagger of Hudibras ſeem quite heterogeneous; but we diſcover a bond of connection among them, when we are told, that the ſame weapon could occaſionally perform them all.—Thus, even in that mimicry, which diſplays no oppoſition of dignity and meanneſs, we perceive the actions of one man joined to the features and body of another; that is, a mixture of unſuitableneſs, or want of relation, ariſing from the difference of perſons, with congruity and ſimilitude, ariſing from the ſameneſs of the actions.—Thus, at firſt view, the dawn of the morning, and a boiled lobſter, ſeem utterly incongruous, unlike, and (as Biondello ſays of Petruchio's ſtirrups) "of no kindred;" but when a change of colour from black to red is ſuggeſted, we recognize a likeneſs, and conſequently a relation, or ground of compariſon.

And here let it be obſerved in general, that,

that, the greater the number of incongruities that are blended in the ſame aſſemblage, the more ludicrous it will probably be. If, as in the laſt example, there be an oppoſition of dignity and meanneſs, as well as of likeneſs and diſſimilitude, the effect of the contraſt will be more powerful, than if only one of theſe oppoſitions had appeared in the ludicrous idea. — The ſublimity of Don Quixote's mind contraſted and connected with his miſerable equipage, forms a very comical exhibition; but when all this is ſtill further connected and contraſted with Sancho Pança, the ridicule is heightened exceedingly. Had the knight of the lions been better mounted and accoutred, he would not have made us ſmile ſo often; becauſe, the hero's mind and circumſtances being more adequately matched, the whole group would have united fewer inconſiſtencies, and reconciled fewer incongruities. No particular in this equipment is without its uſe. The aſs of Sancho and the horſe of his maſter; the knight tall and raw-boned, the ſquire fat and ſhort; the one brave, ſolemn, generous, learned, and courteous, the other not leſs remarkable for cowardice, levity, ſelfiſhneſs, ignorance, and ruſticity; the one abſurdly enamoured of an ideal miſtreſs, the other ridiculouſly fond of his aſs; the one devoted to glory, the other enſlaved to his belly: — it is not eaſy, out of two perſons, to make up a more multifarious contraſt.

Butler

Butler has however combined a ſtill greater variety of uncouth and jarring circumſtances in Ralpho and Hudibras: but the picture, though more elaborate, is leſs natural. Yet this argues no defect of judgement. His deſign was, to make his hero not only ludicrous, but contemptible; and therefore he jumbles together, in his equipage and perſon, a number of mean and diſguſting qualities, pedantry, ignorance, naſtineſs, and extreme deformity. But the knight of La Mancha, though a ludicrous, was never intended for a contemptible perſonage. He often moves our pity, he never forfeits our eſteem; and his adventures and ſentiments are generally intereſting; which could not have been the caſe, if his ſtory had not been natural, and himſelf endowed with great as well as good qualities. To have given him ſuch a ſhape, and ſuch weapons, arguments, boots, and breeches, as Butler has beſtowed on his champion, would have deſtroyed that ſolemnity, which is ſo ſtriking a feature in Don Quixote: and Hudibras, with the manners and perſon of the Spaniſh hero, would not have been that paltry figure, which the Engliſh poet meant to hold up to the laughter and contempt of his countrymen. — Sir Launcelot Greaves is of Don Quixote's kindred, but a different character. Smollet's deſign was, not to expoſe him to ridicule; but rather to recommend him to our pity and admiration. He has therefore given him

youth,

youth, ſtrength, and beauty, as well as courage, and dignity of mind, has mounted him on a generous ſteed, and arrayed him in an elegant ſuit of armour. Yet, that the hiſtory might have a comic air, he has been careful to contraſt and connect Sir Launcelot with a ſquire and other aſſociates of very diſſimilar tempers and circumſtances.

What has been ſaid of the cauſe of laughter does not amount to an exact deſcription, far leſs to a logical definition: there being innumerable combinations of congruity and inconſiſtency, of relation and contrariety, of likeneſs and diſſimilitude, which are not ludicrous at all. If we could aſcertain the peculiarities of theſe, we ſhould be able to characteriſe with more accuracy the general nature of ludicrous combination. But before we proceed to this, it would be proper to evince, that of the preſent theory thus much at leaſt is true, that though every incongruous combination is not ludicrous, every ludicrous combination is incongruous.

It is only by a detail of facts or examples, that any theory of this ſort can be either eſtabliſhed or overthrown. By ſuch a detail, the foregoing theories have been, or may be, ſhown to be ill-founded, or not ſufficiently comprehenſive. A ſingle inſtance of a laughable object, which neither unites, nor is ſuppoſed to unite incongruous ideas, would likewiſe ſhow the inſufficiency of the preſent: nor will I undertake to prove, (for indeed I cannot),

cannot), that no ſuch inſtance can be given. A complete enumeration of ludicrous objects it would be vain to attempt: and therefore we can never hope to aſcertain, beyond the poſſibility of doubt, that common quality which belongs to all ludicrous ideas that are, or have been, or may be imagined. All that can be done in a caſe of this kind is to prove, by a variety of examples, that the theory now propoſed is more comprehenſive, and better founded, than any of the foregoing.

Many are the modes of combination by which incongruous qualities may be preſented to the eye, or to the fancy, ſo as to provoke laughter: and of incongruity itſelf, of as falſehood, the forms may be diverſified without end. An *exact arrangement* of ludicrous examples is therefore as unattainable as a *complete enumeration*. Something, however, of this ſort we muſt attempt, to avoid running into confuſion.

I. One of the ſimpleſt modes of combination, is that which ariſes from *Contiguity*. Things incongruous are often laughable, when united as parts of a ſyſtem, or ſimply *when placed together*. —— That dialogue of Eraſmus, called *Abſurda*, which looks like a converſation between two deaf men, ſeems to be an attempt to raiſe laughter, by the mere juxta-poſition of unconnected ſentences. But the attempt is rather unſucceſsful; this ſort of croſs-purpoſes being too obvious, and too little ſurpriſing, to yield entertainment.

2 1. A-

1. Ariſtotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, all admit, that bodily ſingularities may be laughable *; and, according to the firſt of theſe authors, that is a ridiculous countenance, in which there is deformity and diſtortion without diſtreſs. Any feature, particularly one of the middle features, a noſe, a mouth, or a chin, uncommonly large, may, when attended with no inconvenience, tempt one to ſmile; as appears from the effect of caricatura in painting. We read in the Spectator †, of a number of men with long chins, whom a wag at Bath invited to dine with him; and are told, that a great deal of mirth paſſed on the occaſion. Here was a collection of incongruities related not only by mutual ſimilitude, but alſo by juxta-poſition; a circumſtance that would naturally heighten the ludicrous effect. Yet here was no mixture of dignity and meanneſs; and the meeting, if it had been accidental, would not have been leſs laughable.

2. A country-dance of men and women, like thoſe exhibited by Hogarth in his *Analyſis of Beauty*, could hardly fail to make a beholder merry, whether he believed their union to be the effect of deſign, or of accident. Moſt of thoſe perſons have incongrui-

* Ariſt. Poet. § 5.; Cicero de Orat. ii. 239.; Qu. Inſt. Or. vi. 3.

† Number 371.

ties of their own, in their ſhape, dreſs, or attitude, and all of them are incongruous in reſpect of one another; thus far the aſſemblage diſplays contrariety or want of relation: and they are all united in the ſame place, and in the ſame dance; and thus far they are mutually related. And if we ſuppoſe the two elegant figures removed, which might be done without leſſening the ridicule, we ſhould not eaſily diſcern any contraſt of dignity and meanneſs in the group that remains.

3. Almoſt the ſame remarks might be made on *The Enraged Muſician*, another piece of the ſame great maſter, of which a witty author quaintly ſays, that it *deafens* one to *look* at it. This extraordinary group forms a very comical mixture of incongruity and relation; — of incongruity, owing to the diſſimilar employments and appearances of the ſeveral perſons, and to the variety and diſſonance of their reſpective noiſes; — and of relation, owing to their being all united in the ſame place, and for the ſame purpoſe, of tormenting the poor fiddler. From the various ſounds co-operating to this one end, the piece becomes more laughable, than if their meeting were conceived to be without any particular deſtination; for the greater the number of relations, as well as of contrarieties, that take place in any ludicrous aſſemblage, the more ludicrous it will generally appear. Yet though this group comprehends

prehends not any mixture of meanneſs and dignity, it would, I think, be allowed to be laughable to a certain degree, merely from the juxta-poſition of the objects, even though it were ſuppoſed to be accidental.

Groups of this ſort, if accurately deſcribed, are no doubt entertaining, when expreſſed in words, as well as when preſented to the eye by means of colour. But it would require many words to do juſtice to ſo great a variety of things and perſons; which therefore could not be apprehended by the mind, but gradually and in ſucceſſion; and hence the jarring coincidencies of the whole would be leſs diſcernible in a poetical deſcription, than in a print or picture. The ludicrous effect, that ariſes from the mere *contiguity* of the objects, may therefore be better exemplified by viſible aſſemblages delineated by the painter, than by ſuch as are conveyed to the mind by verbal deſcription *. Yet even by

* But it does not follow, that Painting is a more copious ſource of Riſible emotion, than thoſe arts are which affect the mind by means of language. Painting is no doubt more lively in deſcription than Poetry: and, by preſenting a whole compoſition to the eye at once, may ſtrike the mind with a more diverſified and more emphatical impulſe. What we ſee, too, we apprehend more eaſily than what we only conceive from narration:

Segnius irritant animos demiſſa per aurem,
Quam quæ ſunt oculis ſubjecta fidelibus, et quæ
Ipſe ſibi tradit ſpectator.

by this vehicle, burleſque combinations may be ſuggeſted to the fancy, which in part derive the ludicrous character from the *juxtapoſition* of the component parts. Take an example or two.

4. "If a man (ſays the *Tatler*, ſpeaking "of the utility of advertiſements) has pains "in his head, colics in his bowels, or ſpots "in his cloaths, he may there meet with "proper cures and remedies. If a man "would recover a wife, or a horſe that is "ſtolen or ſtrayed; if he wants new ſermons, electuaries, or aſſes milk, or any "thing elſe, either for his body or his mind, "this is the place to look for them in *."

5. He ſung of Taffy Welch, and Sawney Scot,
Lillibullero, and the Iriſh trot;
The bower of Roſamond, and Robin Hood,
And how the graſs now grows where Troy town ſtood;

But the deſcriptive powers of painting are ſubject to many limitations. It cannot mark the progreſs of action or thought, becauſe it exhibits the events of one inſtant of time; nor has it any expreſſion for intellectual notions, nor for thoſe calmer affections of the ſoul that produce no viſible change on the body. But Poetry can deſcribe every energy of mind, and phenomenon of matter; and every variety, however minute, of character, ſentiment, and paſſion, as it appears in each period of its progreſs. And innumerable combinations, both of ſublime and of ludicrous ideas there are, which the pencil cannot trace out, but which are eaſily conveyed to the mind by ſpeech or writing.

* Tatler, Numb. 224.

Then

Then he was ſeiz'd with a religious qualm,
And on a ſudden ſung the hundredth pſalm *.

6. Incongruous ideas, related by contiguity, do ſometimes acquire a cloſer connection, and may become more laughable, when their names being made equally dependent upon one and the ſame verb, confer on it two or more incongruous ſignifications.

" It is obſervable, (ſays Pope of Prince " Eugene), that this general is a great taker " of ſnuff, as well as of towns †."

An

* Gay's Paſtorals. See *Rape of the Lock*, ii. 105. to 110.

† Key to the Lock. —— In all wit of this ſort, when laughter is intended, it will perhaps be neceſſary to blend greatneſs with littleneſs, or to form ſome other glaring contraſt. Ovid and Cowley are fond of theſe quaint conceits, but ſeldom raiſe a ſmile by them, and ſurely did not intend any.

Conſiliis non curribus utere noſtris.
Metamorph. lib. 2.

And not my chariot, but my counſel take. *Addiſon.*

But now the early birds began to call
The morning forth: uproſe the Sun and Saul.
Davideis.

" A horſe (ſays a certain ſerious, but flowery author) " may throw his rider, and at once daſh his body againſt " the ſtones, and his ſoul into the other world."

Such witticiſm in a ſerious work is offenſive to a reader of taſte, (ſee Hurd's Commentary on the Epiſtle to Auguſtus,

An oppoſition of dignity and meanneſs, or of greatneſs and littleneſs, is no doubt obſervable in theſe examples. Yet deſcription may ſometimes be laughable, when the ideas or phraſes are related by juxta-poſition only, and imply no perceptible contraſt of dignity and meanneſs. Swift's Inventory of his houſehold-ſtuff, "An oaken broken elbow-"chair, "A caudle-cup without an ear," &c. is truly laughable; at leaſt we are ſure that he thought it ſo: the *various* and *diſſimilar* articles ſpecified in it are *ſimilar* and *uniform* in this one reſpect, that they are all worn out, imperfect, or uſeleſs; but their meanneſs is without any mixture of dignity.—— Sancho's Proverbs often provoke a ſmile; not becauſe ſome are low and others elevated, but becauſe, though *unconnected* both with the ſubject and with one another, they happen to be ſpoken *at the ſame time*, and abſurdly applied to the ſame purpoſe. —— I have heard that mirth may be promoted amongſt idle people by the following expedient. On the top of a page of paper, one of the company writes a line, which he covers with a book; another adds a ſecond, and conceals it in the ſame manner; and thus the paper goes from hand to hand, till it be full,

guſtus, verſ. 97.); — and we are not apt to laugh at that which offends us. To the author it is probably the object of admiration, and we ſeldom laugh at what we greatly admire.

no

no body knowing what the others have written: then the covering is taken off, and the whole read over, as if it were a continued diſcourſe. Here the principal bond of union is juxta-poſition; and yet, though united by this alone, and though accidentally united, the incongruities may be laughable; though no doubt the joke would be heightened, if there ſhould alſo happen to be a mixture of meanneſs and dignity. And the ſame thing will be found to hold true of thoſe muſical contrivances called *medleys*.

7. Even when art is not uſed to diſunite them, human thoughts under no reſtraint are apt to become ridiculouſly wild and incongruous. When his mind unbends itſelf in a reverie, and, without attending to any particular object, permits the ideas to appear and glide away according to the caprice of undirected fancy, the graveſt philoſopher would be ſhy of giving permanence to ſuch a jumble by ſpeech or writing *; leſt by its odd incongruities it ſhould raiſe a laugh at his expence, and ſhow that his thoughts were not quite ſo regular as he wiſhed the world to believe. We need not then wonder, that, when perſons of light minds are made to *think aloud* upon the ſtage, their rhapſodies ſhould prove ſo entertaining. Juliet's *Nurſe*, and *Mrs Quickly*, are characters of this ſort. And we meet with many ſuch

* See the *Spectator*, Numb. 225.

in

in real life; whoſe ravings are laughable, even when they exhibit no mixture of meanneſs and dignity, and when mere *juxta-poſition* is the chief bond of union among their ideas.

II. The mind naturally conſiders as part of the ſame aſſemblage, and joins together in one view, thoſe objects that appear in the relation of *cauſe and effect*. Hence when things, in other reſpects *unrelated* or *incongruous*, are found or ſuppoſed to be *thus related*, they ſometimes provoke laughter.

1. "Really, Madam, (ſays Filch in the "*Beggar's opera*), I fear I ſhall be cut off "in the flower of my youth; ſo that every "now and then, ſince I was *pumpt*, I have "thoughts of taking up and going *to ſea*." ——It is the cauſe of this reſolution that makes it ludicrous. One ſort of water ſuggeſts another to the thief's fancy; and the freſh-water pump puts him in mind of a ſimilar implement belonging to ſhips. There is ſomething unexpected, and incongruous, in the thought, and at the ſame time an appearance of natural connection.

2. There is a ſort of Ironical Reaſoning, not eaſily deſcribed, which would ſeem to derive the ludicrous character from a ſurpriſing mixture of Plauſibility and Abſurdity: and which, on account of the real diſagreement, though ſeeming affinity, of the concluſion conſidered as the *effect*, with the premiſſes conſidered as the *cauſe*, may not

improperly be referred to this head; though perhaps, from the real *diſſimilitude*, and unexpected appearance of *likeneſs*, in the circumſtances whereon the argument is founded, it might with equal propriety be referred to the following. Several humorous examples of this kind of ſophiſtry may be ſeen in that excellent Engliſh ballad called *The tippling Philoſophers*. Hudibras alſo abounds in it. Such are the lines already quoted, in which he draws comfort from the diſaſter of being ſet in the ſtocks; and ſuch are thoſe well-known paſſages, that prove morality to be a crime, and Honour to lodge in that part of the human body where it is moſt liable to be wounded by a kick *.

3. A cauſe and effect extremely inadequate to each other form a ludicrous combination. We ſmile at the child (in *Quarles's Emblems*) attempting to blow out the ſun with a pair of bellows. Nor is it much leſs ridiculous to ſee heroes, in a tragedy or opera, breathing their laſt in a long-winded ſimilitude, or muſical cadence. The tailor of Laputa, taking meaſure for a ſuit of cloaths with a quadrant; the wiſe men of Lagado carrying vaſt loads of *things* about with them, that they might converſe together without impairing their lungs by the uſe of ſpeech; and ſeveral of the other projects recorded

* See Hudibras, part 2. canto 1. verſ. 1065; and part 3. canto 1. verſ. 1200.

in the ſame admirable ſatire *, are ludicrous in the higheſt degree, from the utter diſproportion of the effect to the cauſe. The ſame remark may be made upon that part of Sir John Enville's complaint, where he ſays, (ſpeaking of his lady), "She dictates to me "in my own buſineſs, ſets me right in point "of trade; and, if I diſagree with her about "any of my ſhips at ſea, wonders that I "will diſpute with her, when I know very "well that her great-grandfather was a "flag-officer †." —— Violent anger occaſioned by ſlight injury makes a man ridiculous; we *deſpiſe* his levity, and *laugh* at his abſurdity. All exceſſive paſſion, when it awakens not ſympathy, is apt to provoke laughter; nor do we heartily ſympathiſe with any malevolent, nor indeed with any violent emotions, till we know their cauſe, or have reaſon to think them well founded. With ſuch as we have no experience of, we rarely ſympathiſe; and the view of them in others, eſpecially when immoderate, gives riſe to merriment. The diſtreſs of the miſer when his hoard is ſtolen, and the tranſport wherewith he receives it back, though the moſt intenſe feelings of which he is capable, are more apt to move our laughter, than our ſorrow or joy: and in the *Aulularia* of Plautus, a great deal of comic ridicule is found-

* Gulliver's voyage to Laputa.

† Spectator, Numbi 299.

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ed on this circumſtance. ——Ranting in tragedy is laughable, becauſe we know the cauſe to be inadequate to the effect; and becauſe a diſtorted imitation of nature implies a contraſt of likeneſs and diſſimilitude: but the oppoſite fault of inſipidity, either in acting or in writing, unleſs accompanied with ſomething peculiarly abſurd, is not laughable; becauſe it does not rouſe the attention, and has not that *uncommonneſs*, which (as will be ſhown hereafter) generally belongs to ludicrous combination. This difference in the effects of theatrical impropriety is hinted at by Horace:

——Male ſi mandata loqueris,
Aut *dormitabo*, aut *ridebo* *. ——

—Immoderate fear in another, when there ſeems to be no ſufficient cauſe for it, and when we ourſelves are at eaſe; like that of Sir Hugh Evans, when he is going to fight the French Doctor, is highly ridiculous; both becauſe it is exceſſive, and becauſe it produces a conflict of diſcordant paſſions, and an unconnected effuſion of words †.

4. An

* Ar. Poet. verſ. 105.

† "Pleſs my ſoul! how full of cholers I am, and "trempling of mind! I ſhall be glad if he have de- "ceived me. How melancholies I am? I will knog "his urinals about his knave's coſtard, when I have good

4. An emotion that ought to be important venting itſelf in frivolous language, or inſipid behaviour, would no doubt make us ſmile, if it did not occaſion diſappointment, or ſome other powerful feeling ſubverſive of laughter. When Blackmore, in his Paraphraſes of Holy Writ, ſhows, by the meanneſs of his words and figures, that, inſtead of having an adequate ſenſe of the dignity of the ſubject, his mind was wandering after the moſt paltry conceits; our laughter is prevented by our indignation. Or if ever we are betrayed into a ſmile by ſuch a couplet as the following,

> On thee, O Jacob, I thy jealous God
> Vaſt heaps of heavy miſchief will unload *,

it muſt be in ſome unguarded moment, when, our diſguſt being leſs keen than it ought to be, the ludicrous emotion is permitted to operate.

5. Every body knows, that hyperbole is a ſource of the ſublime; and it is equally true, that amplification is a ſource of humour. But as that which is intrinſically mean can-

" opportunities for the orke. Pleſs my ſoul! *To ſballow* " *rivers, in whoſe falls Melodious birds ſing madrigals*; " (ſinging) — *To ſballow* — Mercy on me! I have a " great diſpoſition to cry. *When as I ſate in Pabilon*," &c. *Merry Wives of Windſor, act* 3. *ſc.* 1.

* Blackmore's Song of Moſes.

not

not be made great, ſo neither can real excellence be rendered laughable, by mere amplification. A coxcomb, by exaggerating the charms of a beautiful woman, may make himſelf ridiculous, but will hardly make them ſo. But a deformity of feature, that is ludicrous in a low degree, may by exaggeration be made more ludicrous: witneſs Falſtaff's account of Bardolph's fiery-coloured face *. The following is a Grecian conceit; and ſo highly valued by Strada, that he takes the trouble to explain it in a copious paraphraſe.

In vain to wipe his noſe old Proclus tries;
That maſs his moſt expanſive graſp defies:
Sneezing he ſays not, "Bleſs me;" ſo remote
His noſtril from his ear, he hears it not. †

Strobilus,

* Firſt part of King Henry IV. act 3. ſc. 3.

† This epigram appears to more advantage in the Greek, on account of the great ſimplicity of the expreſſion.

Ου δυναται τη χειρι Προκλος την ῥιν ἀπομυσσειν,
Τῆς ῥινος γαρ ἐχει την χειρα μακροτεραν.
Οὐδε λέγει Ζευ σῶσον, ἐαν πταρῃ· ὐ γαρ ἀκουει
Τῆς ῥινος, πολυ γαρ τῆς ἀκοῆς ἀπιχει.

See Strada. *Piſtor Suburranus.* —— Longinus gives this example of a Ludicrous hyperbole.

Ἄγροι ἰσχ' ἑκαττω γῆν ἐχοντ' ἀρ' ἐπισκῆς
Λακωνικῆς. —— *De Subl. ſect.* 37.

" He

Strobilus, in the play, ridicules the miſer, by ſaying, "That he ſaved the parings of "his nails, and uſed to exclaim, that he "was undone when he ſaw the ſmoke of his "fire eſcaping through the chimney *." But the moſt profligate wag that ever appeared in modern comedy could not make the moral or intellectual virtues of a good man ridiculous, merely by magnifying them; though, by miſrepreſenting, or by connecting her with ludicrous imagery, he might no doubt raiſe a momentary ſmile at the expence even of Virtue herſelf.

Humorous Amplification will generally be found to imply a mixture of plauſibility and abſurdity, or of likeneſs and diſſimilitude. Butler's hero ſpeaks in very hyperbolical terms of the acute feelings occaſioned by kicking and cudgelling:

Some have been beaten, till they know
What wood the cudgel's of, by the blow;
Some kick'd, until they can feel, whether
A ſhoe be Spaniſh or neat's leather †.

"He was owner of a field not ſo large as a Lacedemo-"nian epiſtle;"—which ſometimes conſiſted of no more than two or three words. Vide Quintil. Orat. Inſt. lib. 8. cap. 3. & 6. Greek and Latin, we ſee, may be quoted on trifling as well as important ſubjects.

* Plaut. Aulul. act 2. ſc. 4.

† Hudibras, part 2. canto 1. verſ. 221.

The

The fact is impoſſible; — hence the *want of relation* between the cauſe and the pretended effect. Yet when we reflect, that the qualities of wood and leather are perceived by ſenſe, and that ſome of them may be perceived by the touch or feeling, there appears ſomething like plauſibility in what is ſaid; — and hence the *ſeeming relation* between the pretended effect and the cauſe. And an additional incongruity preſents itſelf, when we compare the ſerioufneſs of the ſpeaker with the abſurdity of what is ſpoken. —— When Smollet, in one of his novels, deſcribing violent fear, ſays, " He ſtared like " the gorgon's head, with his mouth wide " open, and each particular hair crawling " and twining like an animated ſerpent," he raiſes the portrait far above nature; but at the ſame time gives it an apparent plauſibility, from the effect which fear is ſuppoſed to have in making the hair ſtand on end. —— It is, I confeſs, an awkward thing, to comment upon theſe and the like paſſages: and I am afraid, the reader may be tempted to ſay of the ludicrous quality in the hands of one who thus analyſes it, that,

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

But I hope it will be conſidered, that I have no other way of explaining my ſubject in a ſatisfactory manner. One cannot lay open the

the elementary parts of any animal or vegetable ſyſtem, without violating its outward beauty.

As hyperboles are very common, being uſed by all perſons on almoſt all occaſions *, it might be ſuppoſed, that, by the frequency of this figure, mirth could eaſily be promoted in converſation, and a character for humour acquired, with little expence of thought, and without any powers of genius. But that would be a miſtake. Familiar hyperboles excite neither laughter nor aſtoniſhment. All ludicrous and all ſublime exaggeration, is characteriſed by an uncommonneſs of thought or language. And laughable appearances in general, whether exhibited to the ſenſes or to the fancy, will for the moſt part be found to imply ſomething unexpected, and to produce ſome degree of ſurpriſe.

III. Laughter often ariſes from the diſcovery of unexpected *likeneſs* between objects apparently *diſſimilar*: and the greater the apparent diſſimilitude, and new-diſcovered reſemblance, the greater will be the ſurpriſe attending the diſcovery, the more ſtriking the oppoſition of contrariety and relation, and the more lively the riſible emotion. All men, and all children, have a tendency to mark reſemblances; hence the allegories, ſimiles, and metaphors, ſo frequent in com-

* See Eſſay on Poetry, part 2, chap. 1. ſect. 3. § 5.

mon diſcourſe: but readily to find out ſimilitudes that are not obvious, and were never found out before, is no ordinary talent. The perſon poſſeſſed of it is called a man of *wit*; eſpecially if at the ſame time he poſſeſs that other talent of conveying his meaning in conciſe, perſpicuous, and natural language. For I agree with Locke, that "Wit conſiſts "chiefly in the aſſemblage of ideas, and put-"ting thoſe together with quickneſs and va-"riety wherein can be found any reſem-"blance or congruity, thereby to make up "pleaſant pictures and agreeable viſions in "the fancy *:"——And I alſo agree with Pope, that "an eaſy delivery, as well as "perfect conception;"—and with Dryden, that "propriety of words as well as of "thought," is neceſſary to the formation of true wit. Images and compariſons, conveyed in obſcure terms, or in too many words, have little effect upon the mind, becauſe they oblige us to take up time in collecting all the parts of the idea; which muſt leſſen our ſurpriſe, and abate the vivacity of the conſequent emotion: and if the language, inſtead of being natural, were quaint and elaborate, we ſhould be diſguſted, from an opinion, that the whole was the effect of art, rather than the inſtantaneous effort of a playful imagination.

* Eſſay on Human Underſtanding, book 2. chap. 11. § 2.

It is a rule in ſerious writing, that ſimilitudes ſhould be neither too obvious, nor too remote. If too obvious, they offend by their inſignificancy, give a mean opinion of the author's inventive powers, and afford little variety, becauſe they ſuggeſt that only which the reader ſuppoſes himſelf to be already acquainted with. If too remote, they diſtract the reader's attention; and they ſhow, that the author's fancy is wandering from his ſubject, and therefore that he himſelf is not ſuitably affected with it; — a fault which we blame in a ſerious writer, as well as in a public ſpeaker or player. Familiar alluſions, ſuch as every body may make every day, are to be avoided in humorous compoſition alſo; not only becauſe they are inſignificant, yield no variety, and give a mean idea of the author, but likewiſe becauſe they have not incongruity enough to be ludicrous *: — for when we have been long

* Swift's Song of Similes, *My paſſion is as muſtard ſtrong, &c.* will perhaps occur to the reader as an exception. And it is true of that humorous piece, that moſt of the compariſons are not only common, but even proverbial. But then there is, in the way of applying them, a ſpecies of novelty, that ſhows a lively and ſingular turn of fancy in the author, and occaſions an agreeable ſurpriſe to the reader: and the mutual relation, owing to the juxta-poſition, of ſo many diſſonant ideas and incongruous proverbs, cannot fail to heighten greatly the ludicrous effect. Common, or even proverbial, alluſions may ſucceſsfully enough be introduced into burleſque,

long accuſtomed to compare certain things together, or to view them as united in the ſame aſſemblage, the one ſo conſtantly introduces the other into the mind, that we come to look upon them as congenial.—— But in ludicrous writing, compariſons, if the point of reſemblance be clearly expreſſed, and the thing alluded to ſufficiently known, can ſcarce be too remote: for here the author is not ſuppoſed to be in earneſt, and therefore we allow full ſcope to his fancy; and here the more remote the compariſon, the more heterogeneous are the objects compared, and the greater the contraſt of congruity and unſuitableneſs.

Perſons who would paſs for wits are apt affectedly to interlard their ordinary diſcourſe with ſimilitudes; which, however, unleſs they are uncommon, as well as appoſite, will only betray the barrenneſs of the ſpeaker's fancy. Fielding ridicules this ſort of pedantry, in a dialogue between a bad poet and a player. "Plays (ſays the man of rhime) are "like trees, which will not grow without "nouriſhment; but, like muſhrooms, they "ſhoot up ſpontaneouſly, as it were, in a

leſque, when they ſurpriſe by the peculiarity of their application. In this caſe, though familiar in themſelves, they are remote in regard to the ſubject, and apparently incongruous; and may therefore raiſe our opinion of the author's wit: as a clock made with the tools of a blackſmith would evidence uncommon dexterity in the artiſt.

" rich ſoil. The muſes, like vines, may be " pruned, but not with a hatchet. The " town, like a peeviſh child, knows not what " it deſires, and is always beſt pleaſed with " a rattle *."

As ſome compariſons add to the beauty and ſublimity of ſerious compoſition, ſo others may heighten the ludicrous effect of wit and humour. In what reſpects the former differ from the latter, will be ſeen afterwards. At preſent I ſhall only ſpecify the ſeveral claſſes of ludicrous ſimilitudes, and give an example or two in each, with a view to illuſtrate my theory.

1. One mean object may be compared to another mean object in ſuch a way as to provoke laughter. In this caſe, as there is no oppoſition of meanneſs and dignity, it will be proper, in order to make the combination ſufficiently incongruous, that the thing alluded to, if familiar in itſelf, be remote in regard to the ſubject, and ſuch as one would not be apt to think of, on ſuch an occaſion.

" I do remember him (ſays Falſtaff, ſpeak- " ing of Juſtice Shallow) at Clement's Inn, " like a man made after ſupper of a cheeſe- " paring. When he was naked, he was for " all the world like a forked radiſh, with a

* See the Hiſtory of Joſeph Andrew's, book 3. chap. 10. The whole dialogue is exquiſitely humorous.

" head

"head fantaſtically carved upon it with a "knife *."

He ſnatch'd his whinyard up, that fled
When he was falling off his ſteed,
As rats do from a falling houſe †.

The reader will think, perhaps, that there is even in theſe examples ſomething of greatneſs mixed with meanneſs, as well as in the following:

Inſtead of trumpet and of drum,
Which makes the warrior's ſtomach come,
And whets men's valour ſharp, like beer,
By thunder turn'd to vinegar ‡,

But that mixture is more obſervable, when,

2. Things important, ſerious, or great, are ludicrouſly compared to ſuch as are mean, frivolous, or vulgar. King Arthur, in the tragedy of Tom Thumb, hints at an analogy between two feelings, that were never before thought to have any thing in common.

I feel a ſudden pain within my breaſt,
Nor know I, whether it proceed from love,
Or only the wind-colic. Time muſt ſhow.

* Second part of K. Henry IV. act 3.

† Hudibras. ‡ Ibid.

"Wiſdom

"Wiſdom (ſays Swift) is a fox, who, after "long hunting, will at laſt coſt you the "pains to dig out: it is a cheeſe, which, "by how much the richer, has the thicker, "the homelier, and the coarſer coat, and "whereof, to a judicious palate, the mag-"gots are the beſt: it is a ſack-poſſet, "wherein the deeper you go, you will find "it the ſweeter. Wiſdom is a hen, whoſe "cackling we muſt value and conſider, be-"cauſe it is attended with an egg. But then, "laſtly, Wiſdom is a nut, which, unleſs "you chuſe with judgement, may coſt you "a tooth, and pay you with nothing but "a worm *."

Muſic in general, eſpecially military muſic, is an object of great dignity to the ſerious poet; he deſcribes it with ſublime alluſions, and in the moſt harmonious language. Butler, by a contrary artifice, makes one ſpecies of it ridiculous.

The kettle-drum, whoſe ſullen dub
Sounds —like the hooping of a tub.

3. Things in themſelves ludicrous and mean may become more ludicrous, by being compared to ſuch as are ſerious or great; and that, firſt, when the ſerious object alluded to is mentioned in ſimple terms, without

* Introduction to the Tale of a Tub.

debaſe-

debaſement or exaggeration *; — ſecondly, when it is purpoſely degraded by vulgar language and mean circumſtances †; — and, thirdly, when it is exhibited in all the pomp of numbers and deſcription ‡. Examples of the two firſt caſes are common in *burleſque*; the third is peculiar to the *mock-heroic* ſtyle.

From theſe remarks it will appear, that the riſible emotion may in various ways be raiſed or increaſed by compariſon and ſimilitude. Metaphor, allegory, and the other tropes and figures founded in reſemblance, may in like manner heighten the effect of ludicrous compoſition.

Without multiplying examples, I ſhall only obſerve, of the Allegory in particular, that, provided its deſign be important and obvious, a great diſproportion, in point of dignity, between what it expreſſes and what it ſignifies, will not convey any ludicrous idea to a ſound mind; unleſs where an author is at pains to degrade his allegory, either by the extreme meanneſs of the alluſion, or by connecting it with ſomething laughable in the circumſtances of phraſeology. The fables and parables of ancient times, were not intended to raiſe laughter, but to inſtruct mankind. Accordingly, thoſe Greek apo-

* See Hudibras, part 1. can. 1. verſ. 289.

† See Hudibras, part 2. can. 2. verſ. 595.

‡ See Dunciad, book 2. verſ. 181.

logues,

logues, which are aſcribed to Eſop, and bear undoubted marks of antiquity, are delivered in the moſt ſimple ſtyle, and without any effort to draw the reader's attention to ludicrous ideas, except when theſe make a part of the ſtory *. But ſome modern fabuliſts, particularly L'Eſtrange, are anxious to have their fables conſidered, not only as inſtructive allegories, but alſo as merry tales; and, in order to make them ſuch, frequently employ ludicrous images, and the moſt familiar diction. Whether this, or the ancient, form of the apologue, deſerve the preference, I ſhall not now inquire. But I could wiſh, that where the moral was of great importance, and connected with ſacred things, we had, in our fables, imitated rather the ſimplicity of ancient language, than the levity of modern wit. Ridiculous ideas, aſſociated by cuſtom, with religious truths, can have no good effect upon the mind. And in this view, the book called *Scotch Presbyterian eloquence diſplayed* muſt ever be held in abhorrence by the friends of reli-

* And when there is any thing laughable in the circumſtances, it often appears to greater advantage in the ſimple Greek, than in the moſt elaborate modern paraphraſe. The reader may compare Αλώπηξ καὶ Κίραξ with *Le Corbeau et le Renard* of Fontaine. The concluſion of the former is remarkably expreſſive and picturesque, as well as ſimple: Ὁ δὲ κίραξ ἀνὴτας ταῦτα, ὑ χαυνωθεὶς τοῖς ἐπαίνοις, ἵεται τὸ κρέας, μεγάλως ἐκεκραγώς, &c.

gion, even though the writer could be vindicated from the charge of wilful and malicious falſehood. And I cannot but think, that, in this view, even the *Tale of a Tub*, notwithſtanding its unequalled merit as a piece of humorous writing, is blameable, in the general tenor of the allegory, as well as in particular paſſages. —— Are you then one of thoſe gloomy mortals, who think religion an enemy to jocularity? By no means. If I were, I ſhould not now be writing an Eſſay on Laughter. Chriſtianity is, in my opinion, not merely a friend to chearfulneſs, but the only thing in the world which can make a conſiderate mind rationally and permanently chearful. But between ſmiling and ſneering, between complacency and contempt, between innocent mirth and unſeaſonable buffoonery, there ſeems to me to be a very wide difference.

After what Addiſon in the *Spectator*, and Dryden in one of his long prefaces, have ſaid againſt Hudibraſtic rhimes, one can hardly venture to affirm, that a ſmile may ſometimes be occaſioned by thoſe unexpected coincidencies of ſound. I confeſs, however, that I have been entertained with them in Swift and Butler; and ſhould think him a prudiſh critic who could turn up his noſe at the following couplets:

And pulpit, drum eccleſiaſtic
Was beat with fiſt, inſtead of a ſtick. ——

With words far bitterer than wormwood,
That would in Job or Grizel ſtir mood. ——
Though ſtored with deletery medicines,
Which whoſoever took is dead ſince. ——
There was an ancient ſage philoſopher,
Who had read Alexander Roſs over. ——

I grant, that theſe combinations, conſidered as wit, have little or no merit. Yet they ſeem to poſſeſs in a certain degree the ludicrous character, and to derive it from the *diverſity* of the words and meaning as contraſted with the unexpected *ſimilarity* of the ſounds. In ordinary rhimes, the ſound, being expected, gives no ſurpriſe; and, being common, ſeems natural, and a thing of courſe: but when two or three words, in the end of one line, correſpond in ſound to two or three ſyllables of the ſame word, in the end of another, the *jarring coincidence* is more ſtriking and more ſurpriſing. But as they ſurpriſe the more, the leſs they are expected, and the leſs they ſeem to be ſought for, theſe rhimes muſt loſe their effect when too frequent. And the ſame thing muſt happen, when they are incorrect, on account of the imperfect reſemblance, and becauſe every body knows it is an eaſy matter to bring words together that have ſome *letters* only in common: and therefore one is rather offended than entertained with the rhime of this couplet of Prior:

Know

Know then, when Phœbus' rays inſpect us,
Firſt, Sir, I read, and then I breakfaſt.

Hudibraſtic rhimes can take place only in burleſque *; ſuch trifling being unſuitable to all ſerious poetry, and even to the affected ſolemnity of the mock-heroic.

Some critics, taking all their notions from the practice of Greece and Rome, have repreſented rhime of every kind as a ridiculous thing. But that cannot be ridiculous, to which we are continually accuſtomed; which, independent on cuſtom, is in itſelf almoſt univerſally pleaſing; and which has acquired additional grace and dignity, by being ſo much uſed as an ornament in our moſt beautiful compoſitions. Similarity of

* Hobbes, partly by a rhime of this kind, and partly by a miſapprehenſion of Homer's language, has turned into groſs burleſque one of the moſt admired deſcriptions in all poetry.

Ἦ, καὶ κυανέῃσιν ἐπ' ὀφρύσι νεῦσε Κρονίων·
Ἀμβρόσιαι δ' ἄρα χαῖται ἐπερρώσαντο ἄνακτος
Κρατὸς ἀπ' ἀθανάτοιο, μέγαν δ' ἐλέλιξεν Ὄλυμπον, &c.
Iliad I. 528.

This ſaid, with his black brows he to her *nodded*,
Wherewith diſplayed were his locks divine;
Olympus ſhook at ſtirring of his *godhead*;
And Thetis from it jump'd into the brine.

The tranſlator ſhows alſo his ignorance of the Engliſh tongue, in the uſe he makes of the laſt word of his third line.

ſound in contiguous verſes gives pleaſure to all children and illiterate perſons, and does not naturally offend the ear of any modern European, however learned. Nay we have reaſon to think, that ſomething of this ſort, in the end or beginning * of words, has in all

* A ſimilarity of ſound in the *beginning* of contiguous words, or rather in their initial conſonants, has of late been called *alliteration*. Some authors ſpeak of it in terms of the utmoſt contempt and abhorrence; and as if none but fools and fops could take any pleaſure in it. And ſurely when it recurs often, and ſeems to be the effect of ſtudy, it gives a finical appearance to poetry, and becomes offenſive. But that many good judges of poetical harmony have been pleaſed with it, might be made appear by innumerable examples from Lucretius, Spenſer, Dryden, and others. Indeed, previous to the influence of cuſtom, it would not be eaſy to determine, whether a ſimilarity of ſound, in the beginning, or in the end, of contiguous words, were likely to produce the more rational, or more durable entertainment. That both alliteration and rhime, though not equally perhaps, are however naturally, pleaſing to the ears of our people, is evident, not only from what may be obſerved in children and peaſants, but alſo from the compoſition of many of our old proverbs, in which ſome of the words ſeem to have been choſen for the ſake of the initial letters; as, Many men many minds, Spare to ſpeak and ſpare to ſpeed, Money makes the mare to go, Love me little love me long, Manners make the man, &c. — *Chriſt's kirk on the green*, and moſt of the old Scotch ballads, abound in alliteration. And ſome ancient Engliſh poems are more diſtinguiſhed by this, than by any other poetical contrivance. In the works of Langland, even where no regard is had to rhime, and but little to a rude ſort of Anapeſtic Rhythm, it ſeems to have been

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all ages been agreeable to all nations whatſoever, the Greeks and Romans not excepted. For to what other *ultimate* principle, than the love of ſimilar final ſounds, ſhall we aſcribe the frequent coincidence, in termination, of the Greek and Latin participle and adjective, with the ſubſtantive? Homer himſelf often repeats certain harmonious ſyllables of ſimilar ſound; which he might have avoided, and with which, therefore, as he ſeems on ſome occaſions rather to ſeek for than to ſhun them, we may preſume that he was pleaſed *. It is true, the Greeks and Romans did not admit, in their poetry, thoſe ſimilar endings of lines, which we call Rhime. The reaſon probably was, that in the claſſical tongues,

a rule, that three words at leaſt of each line ſhould begin with the ſame letter:

Death came driving after, and all to duſt paſhed
Kynges and Kayſars, Knightes and Popes.

* Virgil has a few of the ſame ſort,

Cornua velatarum obvertimus antennarum.
Æneid. III.

—— formæ magnorum ululare luporum.
Æneid. VII.

I do not find, that the ancient critics have taken any notice of this peculiarity. Their ὁμοιοτέλευτον ſeems to have been a coincidence of ſound rather in the laſt words of contiguous clauſes, than in the laſt ſyllables or letters of contiguous words. See Demet. Phaler. § 281.; and Rollin's Quintilian, lib. 9. cap. 3. § 2.

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on account of their regular ſtructure, like terminations were ſo frequent, that it required more dexterity, and occaſioned a more pleaſing ſuſpenſe to the ear, to keep them ſeparate, than to bring them together. But in the modern tongues the caſe is different; and therefore rhime may in them have a good effect, though in Greek and Latin it muſt have had a bad one. Beſides, one end of rhimes in modern poetry, is to diſtinguiſh it more effectually from proſe: the Greeks and Romans diſtinguiſhed theirs by the meaſure, and by the compoſition, upon which the genius of their languages allowed them to beſtow innumerable graces, in reſpect of arrangement, harmony, and variety, whereof the beſt modern tongues, from the irregularity of their ſtructure, particularly from their want of inflexion, are but moderately ſuſceptible: and therefore, of rhime, as a mark of diſtinction, our poetry may ſometimes ſtand in need, though theirs did not. In fact we find, that Blank verſe, except where the want of rhime is compenſated, as it is in Milton, by the harmony and variety of the compoſition, can never have a good effect in our *heroic* poetry: of which any perſon may be ſatisfied, who looks into Trapp's Virgil, or who, by changing a word in each couplet, takes away the rhime from any part of Pope's Homer. But the ſtructure of the Miltonic numbers is ſo finely diverſified, and ſo tranſcendently harmonious,

nious, that, in the peruſal of Paradiſe Loſt, we have no more reaſon to regret the want of rhime, than, in reading the Eſſay on Man, or Dryden's Fables, to lament that they were not written in blank verſe.

IV. Dignity and Meanneſs united, or ſuppoſed to be united, in the ſame aſſemblage, form a copious ſource of ludicrous combination. Innumerable are the examples that might be given on this head, but I ſhall confine my remarks to a few of the moſt obvious.

1. Mean ſentiments appearing unexpectedly in a ſerious argument, ſo as to form what is called an anticlimax, are often productive of laughter. Waller, in a magnificent encomium on the Summer Iſlands, provokes a ſmile inſtead of admiration, by a contraſt of this kind.

> With candid plantanes, and the juicy pine,
> On choiceſt melons and ſweet grapes they dine,
> And — with potatoes fat their wanton ſwine.

2. Mean ſentiments, or expreſſions, in the mouth of thoſe who aſſume airs of dignity, have the ſame effect. Dogberry is a memorable inſtance. — "Bombard the ſuburbs "of Pera, (ſays a mad ſhoemaker who fan-"cies himſelf the King of Pruſſia, in one of "Smollet's novels) — make a deſart of Lu-"ſatia; — tell my brother Henry to paſs "the Elbe with fifty ſquadrons; — ſend "hither

"hither my chief engineer; — *I'll lay all "the ſhoes in my ſhop*, the breach will be "practicable in four-and-twenty hours." — *Dicta factis exæquanda*, is a maxim in hiſtorical writing; and, in common life, it may be laid down as a rule to thoſe who wiſh to avoid the ridicule of others, that they proportion their behaviour to their accompliſhments.

3. Mean or common thoughts delivered in pompous language, form a laughable incongruity; of which our mock tragedies, and too often our ſerious ones, afford many examples. Upon this principle, the character of Piſtol is ſtill ludicrous, though the race of coxcombs of whom he is the repreſentative, has been long extinct. The Splendid Shilling of Philips, in which the Miltonic numbers and phraſeology are applied to a trifling ſubject, is an exquiſite ſpecimen of this ſort of ridicule; and no part of it more ſo, than the following lines:

> Not blacker tube, nor of a ſhorter ſize,
> Smokes Cambro-Briton (verſed in pedigree,
> Sprung from Cadwallader and Arthur, kings
> Full famous in romantic tale); when he
> O'er many a craggy hill, and barren cliff,
> Upon a cargo of famed Ceſtrian cheeſe,
> High-overſhadowing rides. ———

4. A ſublime thought, or ſolemn expreſſion, unexpectedly introduced in the midſt of ſomething frivolous, ſeldom fails to pro-

voke a ſmile, unleſs it betray unſeaſonable levity, or want of taſte in the author.

My hair I'd powder in the women's way,
And dreſs, and talk of dreſſing, more than they.
I'll pleaſe the maids of honour, if I can;
Without black velvet breeches—what is man! *

5. An important or violent paſſion, proceeding from a cauſe apparently trifling, is apt (as was remarked already) to excite laughter in the indifferent ſpectator. Here is a two-fold incongruity; a great effect is produced by a ſmall cauſe, and an important paſſion by an unimportant object. Sancho Pança clinging in the dark to the wall of a ruin, with the dreadful apprehenſion that a bottomleſs gulph was beneath him, while his feet were within a few inches of the firm ground, is as laughable an inſtance of diſtreſs as can well be imagined. Sentiments, too, that partake but little of the nature of paſſion, are ſometimes ludicrous, when they ſeem more important than the occaſion requires. As when Parſon Adams, to ſhew that he was not deſtitute of money, produces half a guinea, and ſeriouſly adds, that oſtentation of riches was not his motive for diſplaying it. A finer piece of humour was never written, than Addiſon's Journal

* *The Man of Taſte*, by the Rev. Mr Bramſtone, in Dodſley's Collection.

of the Court of honour in the *Tatler*; in which every reader perceives the oppoſition of dignity and meanneſs: — the latter ariſing from the inſignificance of the cauſes; the former from the ſerious air of the narrative, from the accuracy of detail and minuteneſs of enquiry in the ſeveral examinations, and from the grave deportment of the judge and jury. Indeed, through the whole work, the perſonage of Iſaac Bickerſtaff is ſupported with inimitable pleaſantry. The conjurer, the politician, the man of humour, the critic; the ſerioufneſs of the moraliſt, and the mock dignity of the aſtrologer; the vivacities and the infirmities peculiar to old age, are all ſo blended and contraſted in the cenſor of Great Britain, as to form a character equally complex and natural, equally laughable and reſpectable.

6. To this head may perhaps be referred thoſe paſſages, whereof the humour reſults from an elaborate or minute, and at the ſame time unexpected, illuſtration of what is obvious or frivolous.

" *Grumio.* A fire, good Curtis. — *Curtis.* " Is my maſter and his wife coming, Gru- " mio? — *Gru.* O, aye, Curtis, aye; and " therefore fire, fire. *Caſt on no water* *."

So when two dogs are fighting in the ſtreets,
With a third dog one of the two dogs meets;

* Taming of the Shrew.

With

With angry tooth he bites him to the bone,
And this dog ſmarts for what that dog has done *.

7. Mean circumſtances in ſolemn deſcription, ſeem ridiculous to thoſe who are ſenſible of the incongruity, except where the effect of that incongruity is counteracted by certain cauſes to be ſpecified hereafter. Of this blunder in compoſition the poetry of Blackmore ſupplies thouſands of examples. The lines on Etna, quoted in the treatiſe on the Bathos, are well known. By his contrivance, the mountain is made to labour, not with a ſubterraneous fire and external conflagration, but with a fit of the colic; an idea, that ſeems to have been familiar to him (for we meet with it in other parts of his works); whether from his being ſubject to that diſtemper, or, as a phyſician, particularly ſucceſsful in curing it, I cannot ſay. This poet ſeems to have had no notion of any thing more magnificent, than the uſages of his own time and neighbourhood; which, accordingly, he transfers to the moſt awful ſubjects, and thus degrades into burleſque what he meant to raiſe to ſublimity. He tells us, that when creation was finiſhed, there was a great rejoicing in heaven, with fire-works and illuminations, and that the angels threw blazing meteors from the

* Fielding's Thom Thumb.

battlements *. To the Supreme Being he moſt indecently aſcribes a variety of mechanical operations; and repreſents him as *giving commiſſions* to *envoys* and *agents* to take care of the *heavenly intereſts* in the land of Paleſtine, and employing *pioneers to make a road* for him and his army. Nay he ſpeaks, of *houſehold troops* and *guards*, by whoſe attendance the court of the Almighty is both *graced* and *defended* †. Indeed the general tenor of this author's ſacred poetry is ſo enormouſly abſurd, as to move the indignation of a reader of taſte, and conſequently ſuppreſs the laughter, that ſuch incongruity could not fail to raiſe, if the ſubject were leſs intereſting ‡.

But here it may be aſked, What is the characteriſtic of Meanneſs? and what the general nature of thoſe circumſtances, ſentiments, and alluſions, which, by falling below an important ſubject, have a tendency to become ridiculous.—The following brief remarks will ſuggeſt a hint or two for anſwering this queſtion.

Firſt: Nothing natural is mean, unleſs it convey a diſguſtful idea. The picture of Ulyſſes' dog ‖, old and blind, and neglected,

* Prince Arthur, p. 50. fourth edition.

† Paraphraſes of the Pſalms, &c.

‡ See the next chapter.

‖ Odyſſ. lib. 17.

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is not mean; but the circumſtance of his being covered with vermin ſhould have been omitted, becauſe it is both offenſive and unneceſſary. The deſcription of Evander's fields and cottages, in Virgil*, ſo far from being mean, is more beautiful and of greater dignity, than that of the ſun's palace in Ovid, becauſe more natural, more pleaſing, and more inſtructive. Even the vices and crimes of mankind, the cunning of Iago, the perfidy of Macbeth, the cruelty of Mezentius, the pride of Agamemnon, the fury of Achilles, may, from the ends to which they operate, and from the moral purpoſes for which the poet introduces them, acquire dignity ſufficient to entitle them to a place in ſerious poetry of the higheſt order. Natural views of human character in every condition of life, of human paſſions even in the moſt uncultivated minds, and of the external world even where deſtitute of all ornament, may be rendered both uſeful and agreeable, and may therefore ſerve to embelliſh the moſt ſublime performances; provided that indelicacy be kept at a diſtance, and the language elevated to the pitch of the compoſition.

But, ſecondly, in judging of this ſort of propriety, reſpect muſt be had to the notions and manners of the people to whom the work was originally addreſſed: for, by a

* Æneid. lib. 8.

change

change of circumſtances, any mode of life, any profeſſion, almoſt any object, may, without loſing its name, forfeit part of its original dignity. Few callings are now held in leſs eſteem, than that of itinerant ballad-ſingers; and yet their predeceſſors the Minſtrels were accounted not only reſpectable but ſacred. — If we take our idea of a ſhepherd from thoſe who keep ſheep in this country, we ſhall have no adequate ſenſe of the propriety of many paſſages in old authors who allude to that character. Shepherds in ancient times were men of great diſtinction. The riches, and conſequently the power, of many political ſocieties, depended then on their flocks and herds; and we learn, from Homer, that the ſons and favourites of kings, and, from Scripture, that the patriarchs, took upon them the employment of ſhepherds. This gave dignity to an office, which in thoſe days it required many virtues and great abilities to execute. Thoſe ſhepherds muſt have been watchful and attentive in providing accommodation for their flocks; and ſtrong and valiant, to defend them from robbers and beaſts of prey, which in regions of great extent and thinly peopled, would be frequently met with. We find, that David's duty as a ſhepherd obliged him to encounter a lion and a bear, which he ſlew with his own hand. In a word, a good ſhepherd was, in thoſe times, a character in the higheſt degree reſpectable both for dignity and virtue.

And

And therefore we need not wonder, that, in holy writ, the moſt ſacred perſons ſhould be compared to good ſhepherds; that kings, in Homer, ſhould be called ſhepherds of the people *; and that Chriſtian miniſters ſhould

* A plain and unaffected literal verſion of Homer, well executed, would be a valuable work. In the peruſal indeed it would not be ſo pleaſing as Pope's Tranſlation; nor could it convey any adequate idea of the harmony of the original: but by preſerving the figures, alluſions, and turns of language, peculiar to the great father of poetry, it would give thoſe who are ignorant of Greek a juſter notion of the manners of his age, and of the ſtyle of his compoſition, than can be learned from any tranſlation of him that has yet appeared. — Something of this kind the world had reaſon to expect from Madame Dacier, but was diſappointed. Homer, as dreſſed out by that Lady, has more of the Frenchman in his appearance, than of the old Grecian. His beard is cloſe-ſhaved, his hair is powdered, and there is even a little *rouge* upon his cheek. To ſpeak more intelligibly, his ſimple and nervous diction is often wire-drawn into a flaſhy and feeble paraphraſe, and his imagery as well as harmony ſometimes annihilated by abbreviation. Nay to make him the more modiſh, the good lady is at pains to patch up his ſtyle with unneceſſary phraſes and flouriſhes in the French taſte; which have juſt ſuch an effect in a tranſlation of Homer, as a bag-wig and ſnuff-box would have in a picture of Achilles. — The French tongue has a ſimplicity and a ſtyle of figures and phraſes peculiar to itſelf; but is ſo circumſcribed by the mode, that it will hardly admit either the ornaments or the plainneſs of ancient language. *Shepherd of the people* is a favourite expreſſion of Homer's, and is indeed a beautiful periphraſis: it occurs, I think, twelve times in the firſt five books of the Iliad, and in M. Dacier's proſe verſion of thoſe books, only once. — A celebrated French Tranſlator of Demoſthenes makes the orator addreſs

ſhould even now take the name of Paſtors, and ſpeak, of the ſouls committed to their care, under the denomination of a flock.

Is then Homer's poetry chargeable with meanneſs, becauſe it repreſents Achilles preparing ſupper for his gueſts, the princeſs Nauſicaa waſhing the clothes of the family, Eumeus making his own ſhoes, Ulyſſes the wooden frame of his own bed, and the princes of Troy harneſſing their father's chariot? By no means. The poet painted the manners as he ſaw them: and thoſe offices could not in his time be accounted mean, which in his time employed occaſionally perſons of the higheſt rank and merit. Nay in theſe offices there is no intrinſic meanneſs; they are uſeful and neceſſary: and even a modern hero might be in circumſtances, in which he would think it a ſingular piece of good fortune to be able to perform them. Whatever ſerves to make us independent, will always (in the general opinion of mankind) poſſeſs dignity ſufficient to raiſe it far above ridicule, when deſcribed in proper language. In Homer's days, ſociety was more unſettled than it is now; and princes and great men, being obliged to be more ad-

dreſs his countrymen, not with the manly ſimplicity of *Ye men of Athens*, but by the Gothic title of *Gentlemen*: which is as real burleſque, and almoſt as great an anachroniſm, as that paſſage of Prior, where Protegenes's maid invites Apelles to drink tea.

venturous, were ſubject to greater changes of fortune, and as liable to cold, wearineſs, and hunger, as the meaneſt of their people. It was neceſſity that made them acquainted with all the arts of life. Nor was their dignity more affected by the employments above mentioned, than that of a modern prince would be, by riding the great horſe, or putting on his own clothes.

Thirdly: Every ſerious writer or ſpeaker ſuſtains a certain character: — an hiſtorian, that of a man who wiſhes to know the truth of facts, and to record them agreeably; a preacher, that of one who is deeply affected with the truths of religion, and anxious to impreſs them upon others; and an epic poet is to be conſidered as a perſon, contemplating with admiration a ſeries of great events, and employing all the powers of language, harmony, and fiction, to deſcribe them in the moſt intereſting manner. Now by a peculiar kind of ſagacity, either inſtinctive, or derived from experience, all people of taſte know, what thoughts and words and modes of expreſſion are ſuitable to an author's character, and what are otherwiſe. If, when he is ſuppoſed to be taken up with admiration of ſome great object, it ſhould appear, from his language, alluſions, or choice of circumſtances, that his fancy is wandering to things remote from, or diſproportioned to, the thoughts that occupy his mind, we are ſtruck with

the impropriety; as we ſhould be with the unſuitableneſs of that man's behaviour, who, while he kneeled, and repeated a prayer, ſhould at the ſame time employ himſelf in winding up his watch, counting his money, or adjuſting his periwig at a looking-claſs.

In general, that is a *mean* circumſtance, a *mean* alluſion, a *mean* expreſſion, which leſſens or debaſes our idea of what it was intended to embelliſh or magnify. It always brings diſappointment, but not always painful diſappointment: for meanneſs may give riſe to jocularity, as well as to contempt, diſguſt, or indignation.

8. Parodies may be ludicrous, from the oppoſition between *ſimilarity* of phraſe, and *diverſity* of meaning, even though both the original and the imitation be ſerious. The following lines in themſelves contain no laughable matter:

Bread was his only food, his drink the brook,
So ſmall a ſalary did his rector ſend:
He left his laundreſs all he had, a book:
He found in death, 'twas all he wiſh'd, a friend.

Yet one reads them with a ſmile, when one recollects the original:

Large was his bounty, and his ſoul ſincere;
Heaven did a recompenſe as largely ſend:
He gave to Miſery all he had, a tear;
He gain'd from Heaven, 'twas all he wiſh'd, a friend.

But

But in moſt caſes the ridicule of parodies will be greatly heightened, when the original is ſublime or ſerious, and the imitation frivolous or mean. The Lutrin Dunciad, and Rape of the Lock, abound in examples.

Parodies produce their full effect on thoſe only who can trace the imitation to its original. Clariſſa's harangue, in the fifth canto of the laſt-mentioned poem, gives pleaſure to every reader; but to thoſe who recollect that divine ſpeech of Sarpedon *, whereof this is an exact parody, it muſt be entertaining in the higheſt degree.—Hence it is, that writers of the greateſt merit are moſt liable to be parodied: for if the reader perceive not the relation between the copy and its archetype, the humour of the parody is loſt; and this relation he will not perceive, unleſs the original be familiar to him. Much of Lucian's humour lies in his parodies; the phraſeology and compoſition of Demoſthenes in particular he often mimics: and it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that we ſhould be more affected with the humourous writings of the ancients, if we were better acquainted with the authors to whom they occaſionally allude. Certain it is, that Parody was much in uſe among them. Ariſtotle ſpeaks of one Hegemon as the inventor of it †; and juſtly refers parody in wri-

* Iliad, xii. verſ. 310.—328.

† Ariſt. Poet. ſect. 2.

ting, and caricatura in painting, to the ſame ſpecies of imitation, namely, to that in which the original is purpoſely debaſed in the copy. Homer, Virgil, and Horace, have been more frequently parodied than any other authors. Of modern performances, Hamlet's and Cato's ſoliloquies, and Gray's Elegy in a country church-yard, have been diſtinguiſhed in this way. Theſe mock imitations are honourable to the original authors, becauſe tacit acknowledgements of their popularity:—but I cannot applaud thoſe wits who take the ſame freedom with the phraſeology of Scripture, as Dodſley has done in his burleſque chronicle of the kings of England. I do not think that he meant any harm; but it is unwiſe to annex ludicrous ideas to language that ſhould ever be accounted ſacred.

9. The Ludicrous Style may be divided into two ſorts, the *Mock-heroic*, and (taking the word in a ſtrict ſenſe) the *Burleſque*. Of the former the Dunciad is a ſtandard, and Hudibras of the latter. A mixture of dignity and meanneſs is diſcernible in both. In the firſt, mean things are made ludicrous by dignity of language and verſification; and therefore parodies or imitations of the ſtyle and numbers, of ſublime poetry, have a very good effect. Thus Homer's Iliad is the prototype of the *Batrachomyomachia* *, Paradiſe Loſt of the *Splendid Shilling*, and Virgil of

* The Battle of the Frogs and Mice.

the

the Dunciad. Solemnity is the character aſſumed by the mock-heroic poet; he conſiders little things as great, and deſcribes them accordingly. — The *burleſque* author is a buffoon by profeſſion. Great things, when he has occaſion to introduce them, he conſiders as little; and degrades them by mean words and colloquial phraſes, by alluſions to the manners and buſineſs of low life, and by a peculiar levity or want of dignity in the conſtruction of his numbers. Ancient facts and cuſtoms are ſometimes burleſqued by modern phraſeology *; as the ſtatue of Ceſar or Alexander would be, by a modern dreſs; — by that dreſs, which is too familiar to our eye to command reſpect, and which we ſee every day worn by men of all characters, both good and bad, both important and inſignificant. — Yet the ſtatue of a modern hero in the dreſs of Alexander or Ceſar would not be ludicrous; — partly, becauſe we are accuſtomed to ſee the beſt ſtatues in ancient

* Witneſs the following deſcription of a Roman Triumph, in Hudib. p. 2. c. 2.

— As the Aldermen of Rome,
Their foes at training overcome,
Well mounted in their beſt array,
Upon a carre, and who but they!
And followed by a world of tall lads,
That merry ditties troll'd and ballads,
Did ride with many a good morrow,
Crying, Hey for our town, through the borough.

dreſſes;

dreſſes; partly, becauſe thoſe dreſſes have more intrinſic beauty than the modern; partly, becauſe we have never ſeen them applied to any purpoſe but that of adorning the images of great men; and partly, no doubt, becauſe what bears the ſtamp of antiquity does naturally command veneration.

In accoutering ancient heroes for the modern ſtage, it were to be wiſhed, that ſome regard were had to *Coſtume* and probability. Cato's wig is famous. We have ſeen Macbeth dreſſed in ſcarlet and gold, with a full-bottom'd periwig, which, on his uſurping the ſovereignty, was forthwith decorated with two additional tails. Nothing could guard ſuch incongruity from the ridicule of thoſe who know any thing of ancient manners, but either the tranſcendent merit of the actor and of the play, or the force of habit, which, as will appear by and by, has a powerful influence in ſuppreſſing riſible emotions.—But is it not as abſurd to make Cato and Macbeth ſpeak Engliſh, as to dreſs them in periwigs? No: the former practice is juſtified upon the plea of neceſſity; but it can never be neceſſary to equip an ancient hero with a modern ornament which in itſelf is neither natural nor graceful. I admit, that the exact Roman dreſs would not ſuit the Britiſh ſtage: but might not ſomething be contrived in its ſtead, which would gratify the unlearned part of the audience, without offending the reſt? If ſuch a re-

formation

formation ſhall ever be attempted, I hope care will be taken to avoid the error of thoſe painters, who, by joining in one piece the faſhions of different centuries, incur the charge of anachroniſm, and exhibit ſuch figures on their canvas, as never appeared upon earth. I have in my eye a portrait, in other reſpects of great merit, of the late Mariſchal Keith; who appears habited in a ſuit of old Gothic armour, with ruffles of the preſent faſhion at his wriſts, a bag-wig on his head, and a muſket in his hand. Alexander the Great, in a hat and feather, wielding a tomahawk, or ſnapping a piſtol at the head of Clytus, would ſcarce be a greater impropriety. — But to return:

Theſe two ſtyles of writing, the *Mock-heroic* and the *Burleſque*, are not eſſential either to wit or to humour. A performance may be truly laughable, in which the *language* is perfectly ſerious and *adequate*. And as the pathos that reſults from incident is more powerful than what ariſes merely from vehemence of expreſſion, ſo an humorous tale, delivered with a grave look and ſerious phraſeology, like Pope's "Narrative of the "phrenzy of John Dennis," or Arbuthnot's "Account of what paſſed in London on oc-"caſion of Whiſton's prophecy," may be more ludicrous than either the Burleſque or Mock-heroic ſtyle could have made it. That a grave face heightens the effect of a merry ſtory, has indeed been often obſerved; and,

if we ſuppoſe laughter to ariſe from an unexpected coincidence of relation and contrariety, is eaſily accounted for.

10. Mean ſentiments, or unimportant phraſes, delivered in heroic verſe, are ſometimes laughable, from the ſolemnity of the meaſure, and the oppoſite nature of the language and ſubject. Gay thought the following couplet ludicrous:

> This is the ancient hand and eke the pen,
> Here is for horſes hay, and meat for men.

But this, if continued, would loſe its effect, by raiſing diſguſt, an emotion of greater authority than laughter. Nothing is leſs laughable than a dull poem; but flaſhes of extreme abſurdity may give an agreeable impulſe to the ſpirits of the reader. Extreme abſurdity is particularly entertaining in a ſhort performance, where the author ſeriouſly meant to do his beſt; as in epitaphs and love-letters written by illiterate perſons. Here, if there is no apparent oppoſition of dignity and meanneſs, there may be other kinds of Riſible incongruity;—a vaſt diſproportion between the intention and execution, between the ſeriouſneſs of the author and the inſignificance of his work; beſides the many odd contraſts in the work itſelf, —of mean phraſes and ſentiments aſpiring to importance, of ſounding words with little ſignification, of inconſiſtent or unrelated expreſſions,

preſſions placed contiguouſly, of ſentences that ſeem to promiſe much but end in nothing; not to mention thoſe blunders in writing, and ſoleciſms in language, that ſometimes give a ludicrous air to what had a very ſolemn deſtination.

Modern language, adapted to thoſe meaſures of poetry that are peculiar to Greek and Latin, will likewiſe appear ridiculous to ſuch as are acquainted with the claſſic authors; on account of the unuſual contraſt of modern words and ancient rhythm. Hence the ludicrous awkwardneſs of an Engliſh hexameter. It looks as if a man were to walk the ſtreet, or come into a room, with the pace of a trotting horſe. Between the movement, and that which moves, there is a manifeſt incongruity. Sir Philip Sidney attempted to introduce the hexameter into the Engliſh tongue, and has exemplified it in his *Arcadia*; but it ſuits not the genius of the language, and has never been adopted by any perſon who underſtood the true principles of Engliſh numbers. —— Wallis, finding that the firſt verſe of the common proſe verſion of the ſecond pſalm was by accident an hexameter, has reduced the whole into that meaſure; but the ſound is extremely uncouth. And Watts's Engliſh Sapphic ode on the Laſt Day, notwithſtanding the awful ſubject, has ſomething in the cadence that almoſt provokes a ſmile.

There is a poem well known in North

Britain, which to a Scotchman who underſtands Latin is abundantly entertaining. It was written in the beginning of the laſt century, by the famous Drummond of Hawthornden. The meaſure is hexameter, the numbers Virgilian, and the language Latin mixed with Broad Scotch. Nothing can be more ludicrous than ſuch a jumble. It is dignity and meanneſs in the extreme; — dignity of ſound, and meanneſs of words and ideas. I ſhall not give a ſpecimen; as the humour is local, and rather coarſe, and the images, though ſtrong, not quite delicate.

11. On ſome of the principles above mentioned, one might explain the ludicrous character of a certain claſs of abſurdities to be met with in very reſpectable authors, and proceeding from a ſuperabundance of wit, and the affectation of extraordinary refinement. It is not uncommon to ſay, of a perſon who is old, or has long been in danger from a diſeaſe ſuppoſed mortal, that "he "has one foot in the grave and the other "following." A certain author, ſpeaking of a pious old woman, is willing to adopt this proverbial amplification, but by his efforts to improve it, preſents a very laughable idea to his reader, when he ſays, "that ſhe had one foot in the grave, and "the other — among the ſtars." —— The following verſes (ſpoken by Cortez on his arrival in America) were once no doubt thought very fine; but the reader who attends to the imagery

imagery will perceive that they are very abſurd, and ſomewhat ridiculous:

> On what new happy climate are we thrown,
> So long kept ſecret, and ſo lately known?
> As if our old world modeſtly withdrew,
> And here in private had brought forth a new *.

Here, beſides the jumble of incongruous ideas, there is on the part of the author a violent and ſolemn effort ending in a frivolous performance.

The pedantic ſolemnity of the elder gravedigger, in *Hamlet*, makes the abſurdity of what he ſays doubly entertaining; and the ridicule is yet further heightened by the ſerioufneſs of his companion, who liſtens to his nonſenſe, and thinks himſelf inſtructed by it. "For here lies the point, (ſays the "Clown), if I drown myſelf wittingly, it "argues an act; and an act hath three "branches; it is to act, to do, and to per-"form. Argal, ſhe drowned herſelf wit-"tingly.——*Other Clown.* Nay, but hear "you, Goodman Delver.——*Clown.* Give "me leave. Here lies the water, good; "here ſtands the man, good: if the man "go to this water, and drown himſelf, it "is, will he, nill he, he goes; mark you "that. But if the water come to him, and "drown him, he drowns not himſelf. Ar-

* Dryden's Indian Emperor.

"gal, he that is not guilty of his own death, "ſhortens not his own life.——*Other Clown.* "But is this law?——*Clown.* Aye, marry "is it: crowner's queſt law."

Cicero and Quintilian both obſerve, that an abſurd anſwer, whether caſual or intentional, may give riſe to laughter *; a remark which Eraſmus had in view, perhaps, when he wrote his dialogue called *Abſurda.* In this caſe, the mere juxtapoſition of unſuitable ideas may, as already hinted, form the ludicrous quality. But if laughter is ever raiſed by a pertinent anſwer proceeding from the mouth of one from whom nothing but abſurdity was expected, it would ſeem to be in part occaſioned by the ſurpriſing diſproportion of the cauſe to the effect, of the intellectual weakneſs of the ſpeaker to the propriety of what is ſpoken. "How ſhameful is it "that you ſhould fall aſleep? (ſaid a dull "preacher to his drowſy audience); what, "that poor creature (pointing to an idiot "who was leaning on a ſtaff and ſtaring at "him) is both awake and attentive! Per"haps, Sir, replied the fool, I ſhould have "been aſleep too, if I had not been an i"diot."

Whatever reſtraint good-breeding or good-nature may impoſe upon his company, the imperfect attempts of a foreigner to ſpeak a

* Cic. de Orat. lib. 2. § 68. Quint. Inſt. Orat. lib. 6 cap. 3.

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