

language he is not master of, must be allowed to be somewhat ludicrous; for they are openly laughed at by children and clowns; and Shakespeare and Moliere have not disdained to make them the objects of comic ridicule. Nor would Aristotle, if we may judge from his definition of Comic Ridicule, have blamed them for it. In the person who speaks with the intelligence and figure of a man, and the incapacity of a child, there is something like an opposition of dignity and meanness, as well as of similarity and dissimilitude, in what he says compared with what he should say: there is too a disproportion between the performance and the effort; and there may be blunders that pervert the meaning. — Those solecisms, vulgarly called *Bulls*, are of different characters, and cannot perhaps be referred to any one class of laughable absurdity. If, as often happens, they disguise real nonsense with an appearance of sense, and proceed from apparent seriousness though real want of consideration in the speaker, their ludicrous nature may be explained on the principles already specified.

12. In language, there are three sorts of phraseology. — 1. Some words and phrases, being always necessary, are used by people of all conditions, and find a place in every sort of writing. These form the bulk of every language; and cannot be said to possess in themselves either meanness or dignity. In

the sublimest compositions they are not ungraceful; in works of humour, and in familiar discourse, they may be employed with propriety; and, from the universality of their application, they have the advantage of being understood by all who speak the language to which they belong. — 2. Other expressions have a peculiar dignity, because found only in the more elevated compositions, or spoken only by persons of learning and distinction, and on the more solemn occasions of life. Such are the words and phrases peculiar to scripture and religion; such are those that in all polite languages constitute what is called the poetical dialect*; and such are most words of foreign original, which, though naturalized, are not in familiar use. — 3. There are also certain phrases and words, which may properly enough be called *mean*; because used chiefly by persons of no learning or breeding, or by others on familiar occasions only †, or in order to express

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

† Castalio's Translation of the Old Testament does great honour to his learning, but not to his taste. The quaintness of his Latin style betrays a deplorable inattention to the simple majesty of his original. In the Song of Solomon he is particularly injudicious; debasing the magnificence of the language and subject by *Diminutives*, which, tho' expressive of *familiar endearment*, he should have known to be destitute of dignity, and therefore improper on solemn occasions. This incongruous mixture,

prefs what is trifling or contemptible. Such are trite proverbs; colloquial oaths, and forms of compliment; the ungrammatical phrases of conversation; the dialect peculiar to certain trades; the jargon of beggars, thieves, gamblers, and fops; foreign and provincial barbarisms, and the like. These, if intelligible, may be introduced in *burlesque* writing with good effect, as in *Hudibras* and the *History of John Bull*; but ought never to find a place in serious writing; nor even in the *Mock-heroic*, except perhaps in a short characteristical speech, like that of Sir Plume in the *Rape of the Lock**; nor indeed in any literary work where elegance is expected. This *Cant* style, as it is sometimes called, was very prevalent in England in the latter part of the last century; having been brought in by the courtiers of Charles the Second, who, to show their contempt for the solemn character that had distinguished the preceding period, ran into the opposite extreme,

of sublime ideas and words comparatively mean, has a very bad effect, and degrades the noblest poetry almost to the level of burlesque. "Mea columbula, ostende mihi
 " tuum vulticulum; fac ut audiam tuam voculam; nam
 " et voculam venustulam, et vulticulum habes lepidulum.
 " — Cerviculam habes Davidicæ turris similem. — Cervicula quasi eburnea turricula. — Utinam esles mihi
 " quasi fraterculus, qui meæ mammas materculæ suxisses.
 " — Venio in meos hortulos, sororeculæ mea sponsa. —
 " Ego dormio, vigilante meo corculo," &c.

* See canto 4. vers. 127.

and affected profligacy of manners, profaneness of talk, and a loose ungrammatical vulgarity of expression. L'Estrange is full of it, not only in his Fables, where burlesque may be pardonable, but even in his Translations of Josephus and Tacitus *. Eachard, by a similar indiscretion, has transformed the elegant Terence into a writer of farce and buffoonery. Nay, Dryden himself, in one or two instances, and perhaps in more, has burlesqued both Homer and Virgil, by interlarding his Translations with this beggarly dialect †. And some imprudent divines

* He makes the grave and sublime Tacitus speak of some gentlemen, "who had feathered their nests in the civil war between Cesar and Pompey;" and tells us, that the Emperor Vitellius was *lugged out of his hole* by those who came to kill him.

† So heavy a charge against so great an author ought not to be advanced without proof. — In Dryden's version of the first book of the Iliad, Jupiter addresses Juno in these words:

*My household curse, my lawful plague, the spy
Of Jove's designs, his other squinting eye.*

Homer, in the same book, says, "The Gods were troubled in the palace of Jove, when Vulcan, the renowned artificer, began to address them in these words, with a view to sooth his beloved mother, the white-arm'd Juno:" — which Dryden thus versifies:

*The limping smith observed the sadden'd feast,
And hopping here and there, himself a jest,*

Put

vines have employed it, where it is most pernicious, and absolutely intolerable, even in religion itself.

Rutherford's

*Put in his word, that neither might offend,
To Jove obsequious, yet his mother's friend.*

Homer has been blamed, not without reason, for degrading his Gods into mortals; but Dryden has degraded them into blackguards. He concludes the book in a strain of buffoonery as gross as any thing in Hudibras:

*Drunken at last, and drowsy, they depart
Each to his house, adorn'd with labour'd art
Of the lame architect. The thundering God,
Even he withdrew to rest, and had his load;
His swarming head to needful sleep apply'd,
And Juno lay unheeded by his side.*

The passage literally rendered is no more than this. "Now, when the shining light of the sun was gone down, the other gods being inclined to slumber, departed to their several homes, to where Vulcan, the lame deity, renowned for ingenious contrivance, had built for each a palace. And Olympian Jove, the thunderer, went to the bed where, when sweet sleep came upon him, he was accustomed to repose. Thither ascending, he resigned himself to rest; and near him Juno, distinguished by the golden throne."—It is said, that Dryden once intended to translate the whole Iliad. Taking this first book for a specimen, I am glad, both on Homer's account and on his own, that he did not. It is tainted throughout with a dash of burlesque, (owing not only to his choice of words, but also to his paraphrases and additions), and with so much of the profane cant of his age, that if we were to judge of the poet by the translator, we should imagine the Iliad to have been partly designed for a satire upon the clergy.

Rutherford's Letters, well known in North Britain, are notorious in this way; not so much for the rudeness of the style in general, for that might be pardoned in a Scotch writer who lived one hundred and twenty years ago, as for the allusions and figures, which are inexcuseably gross and groveling. A reader who is unacquainted with the character of Rutherford might imagine, that those letters must have been written with a view to ridicule every thing that is sacred. And though there is reason to believe the author had no bad meaning, one cannot without horror see religion profaned by a phraseology which one would sooner expect

Virgil, in his ninth Eclogue, puts these words in the mouth of an unfortunate shepherd.

O Lycida, vivi pervenimus, advena nostri,
Quod nunquam veriti sumus, ut possessor agelli
Diceret, Hæc mea sunt, veteres migrate coloni.
Nunc victi, tristes, quoniam fors omnia versat,
Hos illi (quod nec bene vertat!) mittimus hædos.

It is strange that Dryden did not perceive the beautiful simplicity of these lines. If he had, he would not have written the following ridiculous translation.

— O Lycidas, at last
The time is come I never thought to see,
(Strange revolution for my farm and me),
When the grim captain in a surly tone
Cries out, Pack up, ye rascals, and be gone.
Kick'd out, we set the best face on't we could,
And these two kids, appease his angry mood,
I bear; of which the furies give him good.

from

from a profligate clown in an alehouse, than from a clergyman. Such performances are very detrimental to true piety; they pervert the ignorant, and encourage the profaneness of the scoffer. Nor let it be said, that they make religious truth intelligible to the vulgar: rather say, that they tend to make it appear contemptible. Indeed a preacher, who affects a display of metaphysical learning, or interlards his composition with terms of art or science, or with uncommon words derived from the Greek and Latin, must be little understood by unlettered hearers: but that is a fault which every preacher who has the instruction of his people at heart, and is master of his language and subject, will carefully and easily avoid. For between plainness and meanness of expression there is a very wide difference. Plain words are universally understood, and may be used in every argument, and are especially requisite in all writings addressed to the people. Mean language has no standard, is different in different places, and is applicable to burlesque arguments only. Gulliver's Travels, or the Drapers Letters, are intelligible in every part of England; but the dialects of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Somersetshire, are hardly understood beyond the limits of these provinces. A sermon in Broad Scotch would now seem ridiculous to a Scotch peasant, and withal be less intelligible than one of Swift's or Atterbury's.

Few things in language have a more debasing influence than provincial barbarisms; because we seldom hear them, except from illiterate people, and on familiar occasions*. Hence, upon the principles here laid down, it might be presumed *a priori*, that to those who thoroughly understand them, they would be apt to appear ludicrous; especially when either the subject, or the condition of the speaker, gave ground to expect a more polite style. And this is so much the case, that in North Britain it is no uncommon thing to see a man obtain a character for jocularity, merely by speaking the vulgar broad Scotch. To write in that tongue, and yet

There is an obvious difference between dialect and pronunciation. A man may be both learned and well-bred, and yet never get the better of his national accent. This may make his speech ungraceful, but will not render it ridiculous. It becomes ridiculous only when it is debased by those vulgarities that convey a mean idea of the speaker. Every Scotchman of taste is ambitious to avoid the solecisms of his native dialect. And this by care and study he may do, and be able, even in familiar discourse, to command such a phraseology as, if committed to writing, would be allowed to be pure English. He may too so far divest himself of his national accent as to be perfectly intelligible, wherever the English language is understood. But the niceties of English pronunciation he cannot acquire, without an early and long residence among English people who speak well. It is however to be hoped, that in the next century this will not be so difficult. From the attention that has of late been paid to the study of the English tongue, the Scots have greatly improved both their pronunciation and their style within these last thirty years.

write

write seriously, is now impossible; such is the effect of *mean* expressions applied to an *important* subject: so that if a Scotch merchant, or man of business, were to write to his countryman in his native dialect, the other would conclude that he was in jest. Not that this language is *naturally* more ridiculous than others. While spoken and written at the court of Scotland, and by the most polite persons in the kingdom, it had all the dignity that any other tongue, equally scanty and uncultivated, could possess; and was a dialect of English, as the Dutch is of German, or the Portuguese of Spanish; that is, it was a language derived from and like another, but subject to its own laws, and regulated by the practice of those who writ and spoke it. But, for more than half a century past, it has, even by the Scots themselves, been considered as the dialect of the vulgar; the learned and polite having, for the most part, adopted the English in its stead; — a preference justly due to the superior genius of that noble language, and the natural effect of the present civil constitution of Great Britain. And now, in Scotland, there is no such thing as a standard of the native tongue; nothing passes for good language, but what is believed to be English; every county thinks its own speech preferable to its neighbour's, without entertaining any partiality for that of the chief town: and the populace of Edinburgh speak

a dialect not more intelligible, nor less disagreeable, to a native of Buchan, than the dialect of Buchan is to a native of Edinburgh.

The greater part of Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* is written in a broad Scotch dialect. The sentiments of that piece are natural, the circumstances interesting; the characters well drawn, well distinguished, and well contrasted; and the fable has more probability than any other pastoral drama I am acquainted with. To an Englishman, who had never conversed with the common people of Scotland, the language would appear only antiquated, obscure, or unintelligible; but to a Scotchman who thoroughly understands it, and is aware of its vulgarity, it appears *ludicrous*; from the contrast between *meannefs* of phrase, and *dignity* or *seriousness* of sentiment. This gives a farcical air even to the most affecting parts of the poem; and occasions an impropriety of a peculiar kind, which is very observable in the representation. And accordingly, this play, with all its merit, and with a strong national partiality in its favour, has never given general satisfaction upon the stage.

I have finished a pretty full enumeration of examples; but am very far from supposing it so complete, as to exhibit every species of ludicrous absurdity. Nor am I certain, that the reader will be pleased with my arrangement, or even admit that all my ex-
amples

amples have the ludicrous character. But slight inaccuracies, in an inquiry so little connected with practice, will perhaps be overlooked as not very material; especially when it is considered, that the subject, though familiar, is both copious and delicate, and tho' frequently spoken of by philosophers in general terms, has never before been attempted, so far as I know, in the way of induction. At any rate, it will appear from what has been said, that the theory here adopted is plausible at least; and that the philosophy of Laughter is not wholly unsusceptible of method. And they who may think fit to amuse themselves at any time with this speculation, whatever stress they may lay upon my reasoning, will perhaps find their account in my collection of examples. And, provided they substitute a more perfect theory of their own in its stead, I shall not be offended, if by means of these very examples they should find out and demonstrate the imperfection of mine;

which is very obvious in this play, with all its merit, and with a strong national bias, in its favour, has never given general satisfaction upon the stage.

I have finished a pretty full composition, which, I have thought, but am very far from supposing, may be of any use to the reader. I have not, however, been able to complete it, as I have been obliged to leave it unfinished. I have not, however, been able to complete it, as I have been obliged to leave it unfinished. I have not, however, been able to complete it, as I have been obliged to leave it unfinished.

CHAP.

C H A P. III.

Limitations of the preceding doctrine. Incongruity not Ludicrous, I. When customary and common; nor, II. When it excites any powerful emotion in the beholder, as, 1. Moral Disapprobation, 2. Indignation or Disgust, 3. Pity, or, 4. Fear; III. Influence of Good-breeding upon Laughter; IV. Of Similitudes, as connected with this subject; V. Recapitulation.

THAT an opposition of relation and contrariety is often discernible in those things which we call Ludicrous, seems now to be sufficiently proved. But does every such opposition or mixture of contrariety and relation, of suitableness and incongruity, of likeness and dissimilitude, provoke laughter? This requires further disquisition.

I. If an old Greek or Roman were to rise from his grave, and see the human head and shoulders overshadowed with a vast periwig; or were he to contemplate the native hairs of

a fine gentleman arranged in the present form*, part standing erect, as if their owner were beset with hobgoblins, and part by means of grease and meal consolidated into paste: he could hardly fail to be struck with the appearance; and I question, whether the features even of Heraclitus himself, or of the younger Cato, would not relax a little upon the occasion. For in this absurd imitation of nature, we have likeness coupled with dissimilitude, and imaginary grace with real deformity, and inconvenience sought after with eagerness, and at considerable expence. Yet in these fashions they who are accustomed to them do not perceive any thing ridiculous. Nay, were we to see a fine lady dressed according to the mode still extant in some old pictures, with her tresses all hanging about her eyes, in distinct and equal portions, like a bunch of candles, and twisted into a hundred strange curls, we should certainly think her a laughable phenomenon; though the same object two centuries ago would have been gazed at with admiration and delight. There are few incongruities to which *custom* will not reconcile us †.

Nay,

* In the year 1764.

† In the age of James the First, when fashion had consecrated the *Pun* and *Paronomasia*, the hearers of a quibbling preacher, were, I doubt not, both attentive and serious; as the universal prevalence of witicism,

Nay, so wonderfully ductile is the taste of some people, that, in the various revolutions of fashion, they find the same thing *charming* while in vogue, which when obsolete is altogether *frightful*. — Incongruity, therefore, in order to be ludicrous, must be in some measure uncommon.

To this it will be objected, that those ludicrous passages in books, that have been many times laughed at by the same person, do not entirely lose their effect by the fre-

even on solemn occasions, would almost annihilate its ludicrous effect. But it may be doubted, whether any audience in Great Britain would now maintain their gravity, if they were to be entertained with such a sermon, as *Sulton's Caution for the Credulous*; from which, for the reader's amusement, I transcribe the following passages: — "Here I have undertaken one who hath over-
" taken many, a *Machiavillian*, (or rather a *matchless*
" *villain*), one that professeth himself to be a *friend*,
" when he is indeed a *fiend*. — His greatest *amity* is but
" dissimbled *enmity*. — His *Ave* threatens a *va*; and
" therefore listen not to his treacherous *Ave*, but hear-
" ken unto Solomon's *Cave*; and though he speaketh
" favourably, believe him not. — Though I call him
" but a *plain* flatterer, (for I mean to deal very *plainly*
" with him), some compare him to a devil. If he be
" one, these words of Solomon are a *spell* to *expel* this
" devil. — *Wring* not my words, to *wrong* my meaning;
" I go not about to crucify the *sons*, but the *sins* of
" men. — Some flatter a man for their own private be-
" nefit: — this man's heart thou hast in thy pocket; for
" if thou *find* in *thy purse* to give him presently, he will
" *find* in *his heart* to love thee everlastingly." *A Cau-*
" *tion for the Credulous*. By Edw. Sulton, Preacher. quar-
" ter. pp. 44. Aberdeen printed, 1629. Edinburgh reprint-
" ed, 1696.

quency

quency of their appearance. But many circumstances concur to perpetuate the agreeable effect of those passages. We forget them in the intervals of reading, and thus they often become almost new to us : — when we read them a second or third time, the remembrance of the former emotion may serve to heighten the present ; — when we read them in company, or hear them read, our emotions are enforced by sympathy ; — and all this while the wit or humour remains the same, unimpaired and unaffected by accidental associations. — Whereas, on the other hand, there are many circumstances that tend in time to obliterate, or at least to soften, what at first might seem ridiculous in modes of conversation or dress. For things are not always agreeable or disagreeable in proportion to their intrinsic beauty or deformity ; much will depend on extraneous and accidental connections : and, as men who live in society do daily acquire new companions, by whom their manners are in some degree tinged ; so whatever is driven about in the tide of human affairs is daily made a part of some new assemblage, and daily contracts new qualities from those things that chance associates with it. A vast periwig is in itself perhaps somewhat ridiculous ; but the person who wears it may be a venerable character. These two objects, being constantly united, derive new qualities from each other : — the wig may at first

raise a smile at the expence of the wearer, but the wearer will at last render even his wig respectable. The fine lady may have a thousand charms, every one of which is more than sufficient to make us fond of the little irregularities of her temper, and much more to reconcile us to any awkward disposition of her ringlets or apparel. And the fine gentleman, whose hair in its economy so little resembles that of Milton's Adam *, may be, what no ungracefulness of shape or feature will ever expose to ridicule, a faithful friend, a valiant foldier, an agreeable companion, or a dutiful son. — Our natural love of society, the various and substantial pleasures we derive from that source, and our proneness to imitation, not to mention the power of custom, soon reconcile us to the manners of those with whom we live; and therefore cannot fail to recommend their external appearance.

All the nations in Europe, and perhaps all the nations on earth, are, in some particulars of dress or deportment, mutually ridiculous to one another; and to the vulgar of each nation, or to those who have never been from home, nor conversed with strangers, the peculiarities of foreign behaviour are

* ——— hyacinthin locks

Round from his parted forelock manly hung
Clustering, but not beneath his shoulders broad.

• • • *Paradise Lost, book 4.*

• • • • •
most

most apt to appear ludicrous. Persons who, by travel or extensive acquaintance, are become familiar with foreign manners, see nothing ridiculous in them : and it is therefore reasonable, that a disposition to laugh at the dress and gestures of a stranger (provided these be unaffected on his part) should be taken for a mark of rusticity, as well as of ill-nature. Tragedies written in rhyme, or pronounced in Recitative, may be thought ridiculous, when one has seen but little of them ; but it is easy to give a reason why they should be highly and seriously interesting in France and Italy. That cannot be ludicrous, that must, on the contrary, be the object of admiration, to which we have been accustomed to annex ideas of festivity and leisure, of beauty and magnificence, which we have always heard spoken of as a matter of universal concern, and with which from our infancy we have been acquainted.

May we not, then, set it down, as a character of Ludicrous absurdity, that it is in some degree *new and surprising* ? Witticisms that appear to be studied give offence, instead of entertainment : and nothing sets off a merry tale to so great advantage as an unpromising simplicity of style and manner. By virtue of this negative accomplishment, men of moderate talents have been known to contribute more to the mirth of the company, than those could ever do, who, with superior powers of genius, were more artful in
 . . . their

their language, and more animated in their pronunciation. Conciseness, too, when we intend a laughable conclusion, is an essential requisite in telling a story; nor should any man attempt to be diffuse in humorous narrative, but he whose wit and eloquence are very great. A joke is always the worse for being expected: the longer it is withheld after we are made to look for it, the more will its volatile spirit lose by evaporation. The greatest masterpieces in ludicrous writing would become insipid, if too frequently perused; *decies repetita placebit* is a character that belongs to few of them: and I believe every admirer of Cervantes and Fielding would purchase at a considerable price the pleasure of reading Tom Jones and Don Quixote for the first time. It is true, a good comedy, well performed, may entertain the same person for many successive evenings; but some varieties are always expected, and do generally take place, in each new representation; and though the wit and the business of every scene should come at last to be distinctly remembered, there will still be something in the art of the player, which one would wish to see repeated.

II. But as every surprising incongruity is not ludicrous, we must pursue our speculations a little further.

I. A more striking absurdity there is not in the whole universe, than a vitious man. His frame and faculties are human: his mo-

ral

ral nature, originally inclined to rectitude, is sadly perverted, and applied to purposes not less unfuitable to humanity, than dancing is to a bear, or a sword and snuff-box to a monkey. He judges of things, not by their proper standard, nor as they are in themselves, but as they appear through the medium of his own variable and artificial appetites; as the clown is said to have applied his candle to the sun-dial to see how the night went. He overlooks and loses real good, in order to attain that of which he knows not whether it be good, or whether it be attainable; like the dog in the fable, losing the substance by catching at a shadow. He justifies his conduct to his own mind, by arguments whereof he sees the fallacy; like the thief endeavouring to enrich himself by stealing out of his own pocket. He purposes to take up and reform, whenever his appetites are fully gratified; like the rustic, whose plan was, to wait till the water of the river should run by, and then pass over dry-shod. He attempts what is beyond his reach, and is ruined by the attempt; like the frog that burst by endeavouring to blow herself up to the size of an ox. — In a word, more blunders and absurdities, than ever the imitators of Esop ascribed to the beasts, or Joe Millar to the Scots and Irish, might easily be traced out in the conduct of the wicked man. And yet Vice, however it may *surprise* by its novelty or enormity, is by

by no means an object of laughter, even to those who perceive in it all the absurdities I have specified. We pity, and in some cases we abhor, the perpetrator; but our mind must be depraved like his own, if we laugh at him. ••

But can pity, abhorrence, and risibility, be excited by the same object, and at the same time? Can the painful passions of hatred and horror, and the pleasurable feeling that accompanies laughter, exist at one and the same instant in a well-informed mind? Can that amuse and delight us by its absurdity, which our moral principle, armed with the authority of Heaven, declares to be shameful, and worthy of punishment? It is impossible: emotions, so different in their nature, and so unequal in power, cannot dwell together; the weaker must give place to the stronger. And which is the weaker? — moral disapprobation, or the ludicrous sentiment? Are the pleasures of wit and humour a sufficient counterpoise to the pangs of a wounded spirit? Are a jest and a generous action equally respectable? In affliction, in sickness, at the hour of death, which is the better comforter, an approving conscience, or a buffoon? — the remembrance of a well-spent life, or of our connections with a witty society? — The glow-worm and the sun are not less susceptible of comparison. — It would seem then, that those absurdities in ourselves or others, which provoke the dis-

approbation

approbation of the moral faculty, cannot be ludicrous; because in a sound mind they give rise to emotions inconsistent with, and far more powerful than, that whereof laughter is the outward indication.

But what do you say of those *Comedies* and *Satires*, which put us out of conceit with our vices, by exposing them to laughter? Such performances, surely cannot be all unnatural; and if they are not, may not vice be made a ludicrous object? — Our follies, and vices of less enormity, may, I grant, be exhibited in very laughable colours; and if we can be prevailed on to see them in a *ridiculous* light, that is, both to *laugh at* and to *despise* them, our reformation may be presumed to be in some forwardness: and hence the utility of *ridicule*, as an instrument of moral culture. — But if we only *laugh at* our faults, without *despising* them, that is, if they appear *ludicrous* only, and not *ridiculous*, it is to be feared, that we shall be more inclined to love than to hate them: and hence the imperfection of those writings, in which human follies are made the subject of mere pleasantry and amusement. — I cannot admit, that to a sound mind undisguised immorality can ever cease to be disgusting; tho' I allow, that the guilty person may possess qualities sufficient to render him agreeable upon the whole. This indeed happens too often in life; and it is this that makes bad company so fatally ensnaring. This too, the

Comic Muse, laying aside the character of a moralist, and assuming that of a pimp, has too often introduced upon the stage. But, however profligate a poet may be, we are not to suppose, that downright wickedness can ever in itself be a laughable object to any decent assembly of rational beings. The *Provoked Wife*, the *Old Bachelor*, the *Beggar's Opera*, are dangerous plays no doubt, and scandalously immoral; but it is the wit and the humour, not the villany, of Brute, Belmour, and Macheath, that makes the audience merry; and Vanburgh, Congreve, and Gay, are blameable, not because they have made beastliness, robbery, lying, and adultery, ludicrous, (for that I believe was not in their power), but because they adorn their respective reprobates with engaging qualities to seduce others into imitation. — But may not criminal adventures be so disguised and misrepresented, as to extort a smile even from a man of good principles? This may be, no doubt; for, as the forms of falsehood are infinite, it is not easy to say, how many strange things may be affected by misrepresentation. While the moral faculty is inactive or neuter, the ludicrous sentiment may operate; but to have a just sense of the enormity of a crime, and at the same time to laugh at it, seems impossible, or at least unnatural: — and therefore, we may venture to repeat, that moral disapprobation is a more powerful emotion than laughter; and consequently,

consequently, that both, as their natures are inconsistent, cannot at the same time prevail in a well-informed mind. "They are fools who laugh at sin;" — and, whatever may be the practice of profligates, or of good men under the influence of a temporary infatuation, the common feelings of mankind do not warrant so gross an impropriety.

As to *Satire*, we must observe, that it is of two sorts, the Comic and the Serious; that human foibles are the proper objects of the former, and vices and crimes of the latter; and that it ought to be the aim of the satirist to make those ridiculous, and these detestable. I know not how it comes to pass, that the Comic *Satire* should be so much in vogue; but I find that the generality of critics are all for the moderation and smiling graces of the courtly Horace, and exclaim against the vehemence and vindictive zeal of the unmannerly Juvenal. They may as well blame Sophocles for not adopting the style of Aristophanes, and insist that Cicero should have arraigned Verres in the language of Anacreon. Nor do Horace and Juvenal admit of comparison in this respect*; any more

* Nor indeed in any respect. Different in their views, and in their subjects, they differ no less in style. That of Horace (in his satires) is indeed superlatively elegant, but easy, familiar, and apparently artless. The style of Juvenal is elaborate, harmonious, vehement, poetical, and often sublime.

than a chapter of the Tale of a Tub can be compared with one of the Saturday papers in the Spectator. These poets had different views, and took different subjects; and therefore it was right that there should be a difference in their manner of writing. Had Juvenal made a jest of the crimes of his contemporaries, all the world would have called him a bad writer and a bad man. And had Horace, with the severity of Juvenal, attacked the impertinence of coxcombs, the pedantry of the Stoics, the fastidiousness of luxury, and the folly of avarice, he would have proved himself ignorant of the nature of things, and even of the meaning of his own precept:

——— Adfit

Regula, peccatis quæ pænas irroget æquas,
Ne scutica dignum horribili sectere flagello *.

That neither Horace nor Juvenal ever endeavoured to make us laugh at crimes, I will not affirm; but for every indiscretion of this kind they are to be condemned, not imitated. And this is not the general character of their satire. Horace laughed at the

* Let rules be fix'd that may our rage contain,
And punish faults with a proportion'd pain:
And do not slay him, who deserves alone
A whipping for the fault that he has done.

Greech.

follies

follies and foibles of mankind; so far he did well. But Juvenal (if his indecencies had died with himself) might, as a moral satirist, be said to have done better. Fired with honest indignation at the unexampled degeneracy of his age; and, disdaining that tameness of expression and servility of sentiment, which in some cases are infallible marks of a dastardly soul, he dragged Vice from the bower of pleasure and from the throne of empire, and exhibited her to the world, not in a ludicrous attitude, but in her genuine form; a form of such loathsome ugliness, and hideous distortion, as cannot be viewed without horror.

We repeat therefore, that wickedness is no object of laughter; the disapprobation of conscience, and the ludicrous sentiment, being emotions inconsistent in their nature, and very unequal in power. In fact, the latter emotion is generally weak, and never should be strong; while the former in every mind ought to be, and in every sound mind is, the most powerful principle of the human constitution.

2. Further: When sacred things are profaned by meanness of allusion and language, the incongruity will not force a smile from a well-disposed person, except it surprise him in an unguarded moment. I could quote, from Blackmore and Rutherford, thoughts as incongruous as any that ever disgraced literature, but which are too shocking to raise any

any other emotions than horror and indignation. From an author far more respectable I shall give one instance, to show how debasing it is, even to a great genius, to become a flatterer.

False heroes, made by flattery so,
Heaven can strike out, like sparkles, at a blow;
But, ere a prince is to perfection brought,
He costs Omnipotence a second thought:
With toil and sweat,
With hardening cold and forming heat,
The Cyclops did their work repeat,
Before th' impenetrable shield was wrought,
&c. *

Anger too is generally, while it lasts, a preservative against risible impressions; whence great laughers are supposed to be good-natured. While all England laughed at the heroes of the Dunciad, Colley Cibber and his brethren were, I dare say, perfectly serious. And if the gravity of Edmund Curll was overcome by that "account of his poisoning," which no other person's gravity could ever withstand, he must have possessed a great deal of philosophy or of insensibility. Socrates, in the Athenian theatre, joining in the laugh that Aristophanes had raised against him, is spoken of by old authors as a singular instance of self-command; which I mention, not with a view to compare the sage with

* Dryden's *Threnodia Augustalis*.

the

the bookfeller, but to show, that anger and laughter were supposed to have the same influence on each other two thousand years ago, which they are found to have at this present time.

3. Even pity alone is, for the most part, of power sufficient to controul risibility. To one who could divest himself of that affection, a wooden leg might perhaps appear ludicrous; from the striking contrast of incongruity and similitude; — and in fact we find that Butler has made both himself and his readers merry with an implement of this sort that pertained to the expert Crowdero; and that Smollet has taken the same freedom, for the same purpose, with his friend Lieutenant Hatchway. But he who forgets humanity so far, as to smile at such a memorial of misfortune in a living person, will be blamed by every good man. We expect, because from experience we know it is natural, that pity should prevail over the ludicrous emotion.

“ Many a Scotch Presbyterian (says Hutcheson, in his *Reflections upon Laughter*)
 “ has been put to it to preserve his gravity,
 “ upon hearing the application of Scripture
 “ made by his countryman Dr Pitcairn, as
 “ he observed a croud in the streets about
 “ a mason, who had fallen along with his
 “ scaffold, and was overwhelmed with the
 “ ruins of the chimney which he had been
 “ building, and which fell immediately af-
 “ ter

“ter the fall of the poor mason: Blessed
 “are the dead which die in the Lord, for
 “they rest from their labours, and their
 “works follow them.” — For the honour of
 the learned physician’s memory, I hope the
 story is not true. Such wantonness of im-
 piety, and such barbarity of insult, is no
 object of laughter, but of horror. And I
 confess, I should have no good opinion of
 any Presbyterian, or of any person, who
 could find it difficult to preserve his gravity
 on hearing it told.

4. Fear is a passion, which would I think
 on almost any occasion repress laughter. To
 conceal one’s fear, one might feign a laugh;
 and any passion in extreme may produce a
 similar convulsion: but nobody laughs at
 that which makes him seriously afraid, how-
 ever incongruous its appearance may be. A
 friend of mine dreamed that he saw the de-
 vil, and awoke in a great fright. He descri-
 bed the phantasm very minutely; and sure
 a more ridiculous one was never imagined;
 but, instead of laughter, his countenance be-
 trayed every symptom of horror; for the
 dream had made a strong impression, nor
 could he for many months think of it with-
 out uneasiness. It is strange, that the com-
 mon people, who are so much afraid of the
 devil, should fancy him to be of a ludicrous
 figure, with horns, a tail, and cloven feet,
 united to the human form. Sir Thomas
 Brown, with no little plausibility, derives
 this

this conceit from the Rabbins *. But the Romans, from their ascribing an accountable fear to the agency of Pan, whose supposed figure was the same, appear to have been possessed with a similar superstition, in whatever way they came by it. Satyrs, however, were believed to be merry beings; always piping and dancing, and frisking about, cracking their jokes, and throwing themselves into antic attitudes; and indeed when they are introduced in a picture, they generally convey somewhat of a ludicrous impression, as the sight of such an animal, supposed to be harmless, could hardly fail to do.

III. Good-breeding lays many restraints upon laughter, and upon all other emotions that display themselves externally. And this leads me to speak of those refinements in wit and humour, which take place in society, according as mankind improve in polite behaviour.

Lord Froth, in the play called the Double Dealer †, and Lord Chesterfield, in a book of letters which some think might have borne the same appellation, declaim vehemently against laughter: — “there is nothing more unbecoming a person of quality, than to laugh; ’tis such a vulgar thing; every

* Pseudodoxia Epidemica, book 5. chap. 21.
 † Act 1. scene 4.
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"body can laugh." Influenced by a doctrine of so high authority, many of my readers may, I am afraid, have been inclined to think hardly of me, for analysing vulgar witticisms, and inquiring into the nature of a phenomenon, which can no longer show its face in genteel company. And therefore it may be proper for me to say a word or two in defence, first of myself, and secondly of my subject.

In behalf of myself I can only plead, that Laughter, however unfashionable, is a real and a natural expression of a certain human emotion, or inward feeling; and has been so, for any thing I know to the contrary, ever since the days of Adam; that therefore it is as liable to the cognizance of philosophy, as any other natural fact; and that we are to judge of it, rather from its unrestrained energies, than from the appearances it may assume under the control of affectation or delicacy. The foot of a Chinese beauty is whiter, no doubt, and prettier, than that of a Scotch highlander; yet I would advise those who are curious to know the parts and proportions of that limb, to contemplate the clown rather than the lady. To be master of one's own temper, is a most desirable thing; and much more pleasant it is, to live with such as are so, than among those who, without caution or disguise, speak, and look, and act, according to the impulse of passion: but the philosopher who would analyse anger,

ger, pride, jealousy, or any other violent emotion, will do well to take its phenomena rather from the latter than from the former. Just so, in tracing out the cause of laughter, I did not think it necessary or expedient to confine my observation to those pleasantries which the *sentimental* critic would honour with a simper: it suited my purpose better to attend to examples, which, whether really laughed at or no, the generality of mankind would acknowledge to be laughable.

That all men are not equally inclined to laughter; and that some may be found, who rarely indulge in it themselves, and actually dislike it in others, cannot be denied. But they are greatly mistaken, who suppose this character to be the effect of good-breeding, or peculiar to high life. In the cottage you will find it, as well as in the drawing room. Nor is profuse laughter peculiar to low life: it is a weakness incident to all stations; though I believe, that among the *wiser* sort, both of clowns and of quality, it may be less common.

But the present inquiry does not so much regard laughter itself, as that pleasurable emotion or sentiment, whereof laughter is the outward sign, and which may be intensely felt by those who do not laugh at all; even as the person who never weeps may yet be very tender-hearted. Nay as the keenest and most rational sorrow is not the most apt to express itself in tears; so the most admirable

able performances in wit and humour are not perhaps the most laughable; admiration being one of those powerful emotions that occasionally engross the whole soul, and suspend the exercise of its faculties. — And therefore, whatever judgement the reader may have formed concerning the lawfulness, expediency, or propriety, of this visible and audible convulsion called Laughter; my account of the cause of that internal emotion which generally gives rise to it, may be allowed to be pardonable, if it shall be found to be just. Nor does Lord Chesterfield, as I remember, object to this emotion, nor to a simile as the outward expression of it, so long as the said simile is not suffered to degenerate into an open laugh.

Good-breeding is the art of pleasing those with whom we converse. Now we cannot please others, if we either show them what is unpleasing in ourselves, or give them reason to think that we perceive what is unpleasing in them. Every emotion, therefore, that would naturally arise from bad qualities in us, or from the view of them in others, and all those emotions in general which our company may think too violent, and cannot sympathise with, nor partake in, good-breeding requires that we suppress. Laughter, which is either too profuse or too obstreperous, is an emotion of this kind: and therefore, a man of breeding will be careful not to laugh much longer, or much oftener than
others;

others ; nor to laugh at all, except where it is probable, that the jest may be equally relished by the company. — These, and other restraints peculiar to polished life, have, by some writers, been represented as productive of fraud, hypocrisy, and a thousand other crimes, from which the honest, open, undesigning savage is supposed to be entirely free. But, were this a fit place for stating the comparison, we could easily prove, that the restraints of good-breeding render society comfortable, and, by suppressing the outward energy of intemperate passions, tend not a little to suppress those passions themselves : while the unbridled liberty of savage life gives full play to every turbulent emotion, keeps the mind in continual uproar, and disqualifies it for those improvements and calm delights, that result from the exercise of the rational and moral faculties.

But to return. The more we are accustomed to any set of objects, the greater delicacy of discernment we acquire in comparing them together, and estimating their degree of excellence. By studying many pictures one may become a judge of painting ; by attending to the ornaments and proportions of many buildings, one acquires a taste in architecture ; by practising music, we improve our sense of harmony ; by reading many poems, we learn to distinguish the good from the bad. In like manner, by being conversant in works of wit and humour,

and by joining in polite conversation, we refine our taste in ridicule, and come to undervalue those homelier jokes that entertain the vulgar. What improves individuals will in time improve nations. Plautus abounds in pleasantries that were the delight of his own and of the following age, but which, at the distance of one hundred and fifty years, Horace scruples not to censure for their inurbanity*. And we find not a few even in Shakespeare (notwithstanding the great superiority of his genius) at which a critic of these days would be less inclined to laugh, than to shake his head. Nay in the time of Charles the Second, many things passed upon the English stage for excellent humour, which would now be intolerable. — And thus it is, that we are enabled to judge of the politeness of nations, from the delicacy of their Comic writers; and of the breeding and literature of individual men, from their turn of humour, from their favourite jokes and stories, and from the very sound, duration, and frequency, of their laughter.

The conversation of the common people, though not so smooth, nor so pleasing, as that of the better sort, has more of the wildness and strong expression of nature. The common people speak and look what they think, bluster and threaten when they are angry, affect no sympathies which they do

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 270. — 275.

not feel, and when offended are at no pains to conceal their dissatisfaction. They laugh when they perceive any thing ludicrous, without much deference to the sentiments of their company ; and, having little relish for delicate humour, because they have been but little used to it, they amuse themselves with such pleasantries as in the higher ranks of life would offend by its homeliness. Yet may it be ludicrous notwithstanding ? as those passions in a clown or savage may be natural, which in the polite world men are very careful to suppress.

IV. Tropes and Figures introduce into serious writing a variety of disproportionate images ; which, however, do not provoke laughter, when they are so contrived as to raise some other emotion of greater authority. To illustrate this by examples taken from every species of trope and figure, is not necessary, and would be tedious. I shall confine my remarks to the Similitude or Comparison ; which is a very common figure, and contributes, more perhaps than any other, to render language emphatical, picturesque, and affecting to the fancy.

Every Similitude implies two things ; the idea to be illustrated, which I call the *principal idea* ; and the object alluded to, for the purpose of illustration. Now if between these two there be a considerable inequality ; if the one be mean and the other dignified, or if the one be of much greater dignity than

the

the other; there may be reason to apprehend (supposing our theory just) that, by their appearing in one assemblage, a mixture of relation and contrariety may be produced, sufficient to render the comparison ludicrous; — of relation, arising from the likeness, — of contrariety, arising from the disproportion. And that this is often the case, we have seen already. — But when Homer compares a great army to a flight of cranes, Hector to a rock, Ajax to an ass, and Ulysses covered with leaves to a bit of live coal raked up among embers, the similitudes, for all their incongruity, are quite serious; at least they convey no risible impression to a reader of taste when perusing the poem. By attending a little to this matter, we shall perhaps be able to throw new light on our argument.

Similitudes, ranged according to their connection with the present subject, are distinguishable into three classes. 1. One sublime or dignified object may be likened to another that is more sublime, or more dignified. 2. An object comparatively mean may be likened to one that is sublime. 3. An object comparatively sublime may be likened to one that is mean.

1. If one great or dignified object is likened to another that is greater or more dignified, as when Homer compares Achilles in arms to the moon, to a comet, to the sun,
 2. and

and to a god *, our admiration is evidently heightened, and the principal idea improved, by the comparison. But that which we greatly admire we seldom laugh at in any circumstances, and perhaps never, when, together with admiration, it infuses into the soul that sweet and elevating astonishment which attends the perception of those objects or ideas that we denominate sublime. The emotion inspired by the view of sublimity is also in itself more powerful than that which gives rise to laughter; at least in all minds that are not weak by nature, nor depraved by habit. No person of a sound mind ever laughed the first time he raised his eyes to contemplate the inside of St Paul's cupola: nor, in performing any of the solemn offices of his function, would a judge, a magistrate, or a clergyman, be excused, if he were to give way to laughter. In vain would he plead, that his mind was at that moment struck with a ludicrous conceit, or with the recollection of a merry story: we should say, that thoughts of a higher nature *ought* to have restrained him; — an idea which would not occur to us, if we were not conscious of the natural subordination of the risible propensity. — An object not absolutely mean is rendered sublime in some degree, by asso-

— In the same manner, as a picture of a man in a ridiculous posture, or a picture of a man in a ridiculous posture, is rendered more ridiculous by the addition of a ridiculous expression. *Iliad, xix.*

ciation with a sublime idea. A *Pibroch* *, which in every other country would appear a jumble of unmeaning sounds, may communicate sublime impressions to a highlander of Scotland; not so much because he understands its modulation, as because it conveys to his mind the elevating ideas of danger, and courage, and armies, and military service. And let me take this opportunity to observe, that, in like manner, a thing not ludicrous in itself may occasion laughter, when it conveys to the mind any ludicrous idea related to it by custom, or by any other associating principle. It can hardly be said, that the braying of an ass is in itself more ludicrous (though perhaps it may be more dissonant) than the neigh of a horse; yet one may be inclined to smile when one hears it, by its bringing to mind the other qualities of that sluggish animal, with which the wags

* A *Pibroch* is a species of tune peculiar, I think, to the highlands and western isles of Scotland. It is performed on a bagpipe, and differs totally from all other music. Its rhythm is so irregular, and its notes, especially in the quick movement, so mixed and huddled together, that a stranger finds it almost impossible to reconcile his ear to it, so as to perceive its modulation. Some of these *Pibrochs*, being intended to represent a battle, begin with a grave motion resembling a march; then gradually quicken into the onset; run off with noisy confusion, and turbulent rapidity, to imitate the conflict and pursuit; then swell into a few flourishes of triumphant joy; and perhaps close with the wild and slow wailings of a funeral procession.

of both ancient and modern times have often made themselves merry. And hence it is, that men of lively fancy, especially if they have been accustomed to attend to the laughable side of things, are apt to smile at that in which others neither perceive, nor can imagine any thing ridiculous.

2. An object comparatively mean is often likened to one that is sublime: in which case it may require great address in the poet to maintain the majesty of Epic or Didactic composition. Similitudes of this kind, if very disproportionate, are not to be hazarded, while the principal idea retains its primitive meanness. The poet must first employ all his powers of harmony and language, to adorn and dignify it, by interesting the affections of his reader: a branch of the poetic art, which, as I have elsewhere observed *, is universal in its application, and may give life and pathos to mere descriptions of external nature, as well as to the most sublime efforts of the Epic or Tragic Muse.

In the art of conferring dignity upon objects comparatively mean, Virgil excels all poets whatever. By a tenderness of sentiment irresistibly captivating; by a perpetual series of the most pleasing, picturesque, and romantic imagery; by the most affecting di-

* Essay on Poetry and Music, part 1. chap. 3.

gressions; and by a propriety, beauty, and sweetness of language, peculiar to himself, and unattainable by all others; he makes his way to the heart of his readers, whatever be the subject: and so prepares them for allusions and similitudes, which in the hand of an ordinary poet might appear even ridiculously inadequate; but which, by his management, give an air of grandeur to the meanest things described in his divine Georgic. The very mouse that undermines the threshing-floor, he renders an animal of importance. For his bees we are interested, as for a commonwealth of reasonable creatures. He compares them in one place to the Cyclops forging thunder. Yet, inadequate and even ludicrous as the comparison must appear when it is thus mentioned, it has no such effect as it appears in the poem. The reader is already so prepossessed and elevated with those ideas of dignity that adorn the subject, that he is more disposed to admire, than to laugh or cavil.

Mr John Philips had a happy talent in the Mock-Heroic, but was not equally fortunate in serious poetry. In his *Cyder*, he endeavours, in imitation of Virgil, to raise the subject by sublime allusions; but is apt to bring them in too abruptly, and before he has given sufficient importance to the principal idea. Nor has he any pretensions to that sweetness and melody of style, which intoxicate the readers of the Mantuan poet, and
prepare

prepare them for any impression he is pleased to convey. And hence the language of Philips often takes the appearance of bombast; and some of his comparisons, instead of raising admiration by their greatness, tend rather to provoke a smile. By their incongruity.

The apple's outward form
Delectable the witless swain beguiles,
Till, with a writhen mouth and spattering noise,
He tastes the bitter morsel, and rejects
Disrelish'd. Not with less surprise, than when
Embattled troops with flowing banners pass
Through flowery meads delighted, nor distrust
The smiling surface; whilst the cavern'd ground,
With grain incentive stored, by sudden blaze
Bursts fatal, and involves the hopes of war
In fiery whirls; full of victorious thoughts,
Torn and dismember'd, they aloft expire.

Had Virgil been to dignify this surprise by a magnificent allusion, he would not have degraded the principal idea by low images, (like those signified by the words *writhen mouth* * and *spattering noise*); but would

* This very *writhen mouth* seems to be an allusion to Virgil;

At fapor indicium faciet manifestus, et ora
Tristitia tentantum sensu torquetur amaror.

Georg. ii. 247.

— but it is to a part of Virgil, where simplicity is more studied than elevation.

have

have employed all his art to raise it to such elevation as might make the disproportionate greatness of the object alluded to less observable *. — Thomson has imitated Virgil's manner with much better skill, in that beautiful passage of *his* Autumn †, too long for a quotation, where he compares a hive of bees suffocated with brimstone to a city swallowed up by an earthquake.

In the Mock-Epic, where ridicule is often raised by exaggerating similitudes, care is taken to introduce the pompous comparison, while the principal idea appears in all its native insignificance; and sometimes the ridicule is heightened by a dash of bombast, or by a trifling circumstance unexpectedly in-

* In the third Georgic, Virgil, speaking of the method of training steers to the plough and waggon, is at pains to dignify the subject by elegant language; but his figures are apposite, and not at all too lofty for the occasion:

Tu quos ad *studium* atque usum formabis agrestem
Jam vitulos *hortare*, viamque insiste domandi,
Dum faciles *animi juvenum*, dum mobilis ætas, &c.
Vers. 163.

Dryden, in his translation, wants to rise to higher elegance by means of bolder figures, which, however, being ill-chosen and ill-prepared, give a ludicrous air to the whole passage. He speaks of *sending the calf to school*, of forming his mind with *moral precepts*, and instructing him in husbandry, before he is perverted by *bad example*.

† Autumn, vers. 1179.

roduced

troduced in the middle of affected solemnity.

But, in judging of similitudes in all serious writing, it is necessary to attend to the point of likeness on which the comparison turns: for two things may resemble each other in one particular, which in all others are very unlike; and therefore a similitude may, to an inattentive reader, appear incongruous, which is really proper and adequate. Those critics who blame Virgil for the simile of the Cyclops above mentioned, would do well to consider, that, though there be no resemblance between a bee and a huge one-eyed giant, in the size and frame of their bodies, and as little between their respective employments and manufactures, there may, however, be a resemblance between them in other things. The cyclops are eager to have the thunderbolt forged; the bees may be as eager in their way to fill their cells with honey: — the art of thunder-making employs a number of hands, each of whom has his particular department; and this also holds true of bees employed in the business of the hive. Now it is on account of their similarity in these two respects *, that the poet compares them; and in these two respects they certainly may be compared. But I allow, that, in serious writing, a similitude of this kind ought not to be attempted, but by an author of the very first rank; and

* See Virg. Geor. iv. 176.

therefore,

therefore, though I vindicate Virgil, I think it extremely hazardous to imitate him. And I am aware of the truth of part of the following remark of Pope, which I quote at length, (though some expressions in it do not perfectly coincide with the foregoing reasonings), because it seems to me to throw light on the present subject. “ The use of the
 “ grand style on little subjects is not only
 “ ludicrous, but a sort of transgression against the rules of proportion and mechanics : it is using a vast force to lift a
 “ feather. I believe it will be found a just
 “ observation, that the low actions of life
 “ cannot be put into a figurative style without being ridiculous ; but things natural
 “ can. Metaphors raise the latter into dignity, as we see in the Georgics ; but
 “ throw the former into ridicule, as in the Lutrin. I think this may very well be accounted for : laughter implies censure ;
 “ inanimate and irrational beings are not objects of censure ; and therefore they may
 “ be elevated as much as you please, and no
 “ ridicule follows : but when rational beings are represented above their real character, it becomes ridiculous in art, because it is vicious in morality. The bees
 “ in Virgil, were they rational beings, would
 “ be ridiculous by having their actions and
 “ manners represented on a level with creatures so superior as men ; since it would
 “ imply

“ imply folly or pride, which are the proper
 “ objects of ridicule *.”

3. A similitude may imply an incongruous assemblage, when an object comparatively sublime is likened to one that is mean. Homer and Virgil compare heroes, not only to beasts, but even to things inanimate, without raising a smile by the contrast. And the reason, as given already, is, that in these similitudes there is something which either takes off our attention from the incongruity, or raises within us an emotion more powerful than this of laughter.

First, the quality that occasions the comparison may be in both objects so adequate, so similar, and so striking, as to take off our attention from the incongruity of the assemblage, or even to remove from the comparison, when attentively considered, every incongruous appearance. Had Homer likened Paris to a horse, because he was good-natured and docile; Ajax to an ass, because he was dull; and Achilles to a lion, because of his long yellow hair; the allusions would probably have been ludicrous. But he likens Paris to a pampered horse †, because of his wantonness, swiftness, and luxurious life; Ajax to an ass ‡, because he is said to have been as much superior to the assault of the

* Pope's Postscript to the *Odyssæy*.

† *Iliad*, vi.

‡ *Iliad*, xi.

Trojans, as that animal is to the blows of children; and Achilles to a lion *, on account of his strength, fierceness, and impetuosity. Hector he compares to a rock tumbling from the top of a mountain †, because while he moved he was irresistible, and when he stopped immoveable; qualities not more conspicuous in the hero, than in the stone. Milton likens Satan to a whale ‡; not because the one spouts salt water, as the other is vulgarly supposed to breathe out sulphureous fire, but because of his enormous size; and, to lessen the incongruity, if any should be supposed to remain, the poet is at great pains to raise our idea of the whale's magnitude :

Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam
The pilot of some small night-founder'd skiff
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixed anchor in his scaly rhind,
Moors by his side. —

But, secondly, it may happen, even in the higher poetry, that the compar'd qualities shall present an incongruous association, to the disadvantage of the principal idea. In this case, as there is an opposition, of greatness in the principal idea, and meanness in the object alluded to, it will be somewhat

* Iliad, xx.

† Iliad, xiii.

‡ Par. Lost, book 1.

difficult to maintain true Epic dignity. It may, however, be done, by blending with the description of the mean object some interesting circumstance, to take off the attention from the incongruity, and fix it on something important or serious. * Ulysses, going to sleep, covered over with leaves, after swimming out naked from a shipwreck, is compared by Homer to a bit of live coal preserved by a peasant in a heap of embers :

As some poor peasant, fated to reside
Remote from neighbours, in a forest wide,
Studious to save what human wants require,
In embers heap'd preserves the seeds of fire ;
Hid in dry foliage thus Ulysses lies,
Till Pallas pour'd soft slumber on his eyes *.

This simile, when we attend to the point of likeness, will be found to have sufficient propriety; the resemblance being obvious, between a man almost deprived of life, and a brand almost extinguished; between the foliage that defends Ulysses from cold, and probably from death, during the night, and the embers that keep alive the seeds of fire : yet if dressed up by a genius like Butler, it might assume a ludicrous appearance, from the disproportionate nature of the things compared. But Homer, with great delicacy, draws off the reader's attention to the pea-

* Odyss. lib. 5.

fant's solitary dwelling on the extremity of a frontier, where he had no neighbours to assist him in renewing his fire, if by any accident it should go out. — The poet is less delicate on another occasion, when he likens the same hero, tossing in his bed, and sleepless through desire to be avenged on the plunderers of his household, to a man employed "in broiling on a great fire a stomach full of fat and blood, and often turning it, because he is impatient to have it roasted *." This image is unpleasing and despicable; and the comparison must appear ridiculous to a modern reader: — though Boileau pleads, that the viand here mentioned was esteemed a great delicacy by the ancients; though Eustathius seems to think, that a low similitude might in this place very well suit the beggarly condition of Ulysses; and though, in the opinion of Mons. Dacier, the bag stuffed with fat and blood might, in Homer's days, convey a religious, and consequently an important, idea.

When the object alluded to is pleasing in itself, and the description elegant, we are apt to overlook the incongruity of a similitude, even where the disproportion is very great; the ludicrous emotion being as it were suppressed by our admiration of the poetry, or the littleness of the object compensated by its beauty. That famous passage in Virgil,

* Odyss. xx.

where

where Amata, roaming up and down, from the agitation of her mind, and the impulse of a demon, is compared to a top whipped about by boys, has been called fustian by some critics, and burlesque by others *. In my opinion it is neither. The propriety in point of likeness is undeniable. The object alluded to, though in itself void of dignity, is however pleasing; and receives elevation

* Demetrius Phalereus observes, that "Elegance of language, by exciting admiration, makes the ridiculous disappear;" and adds, "that to express a ludicrous sentiment in fine language is like dressing an ape in fine cloaths. The words of Sappho, (continues he), when Beauty is her theme, are sweet and beautiful; as in her poems on Love, on Air, and on the Halcyon. Indeed all the beauties of language, and some of them of her own invention, are interwoven with Sappho's poetry. But the Rustic Bridegroom, and the Porter at the Wedding, she has ridiculed in a different style; using very mean expressions, and a choice of words less suitable to poetry than to prose." *Demet. Phal.* § 166. 167. 168. — An ape dressed in fine cloaths does not cease to be ludicrous: and in the Mock-Heroic poem, where the subject is contemptible or mean, great elegance, or even magnificence, of diction, may heighten the ridicule; of which, the *Lutrin*, the *Dunciad*, the *Rape of the Lock*, and the *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, abound in examples. — But it is probable, that Demetrius is here speaking of *Burlesque*, and that Sappho's poem on the wedding was of that character; — something perhaps resembling the Ballad, said to be written by James I. King of Scotland, and commonly known by the name of *Christ's Kirk on the Green*. And it is true, that in *Burlesque* writing, as distinguished from the *Mock-Heroic*, vulgarity of expression is almost indispensable. See above, chap. 2. sect. iv. 9. 10. 11.

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from the poetry, which is finished in Virgil's best manner, and is indeed highly picturesque, and very beautiful *.

What has been said on the subject of Similitudes, when applied to the present purpose, amounts to this: "Incongruity does not appear ludicrous, when it is so qualified, or circumstanced, as to raise in the mind some emotion more powerful than that of Laughter."

V. If, then, it be asked, WHAT IS THAT QUALITY IN THINGS, WHICH MAKES THEM PROVOKE THAT PLEASING EMOTION OR SENTIMENT WHEREOF LAUGHTER IS THE EXTERNAL SIGN? I answer, IT IS AN UNCOMMON MIXTURE OF RELATION AND CONTRARIETY, EXHIBITED, OR SUPPOSED TO BE UNITED, IN THE SAME ASSEMBLAGE. If again it be asked, WHETHER SUCH A MIXTURE WILL ALWAYS PROVOKE LAUGHTER? my answer is, IT WILL ALWAYS, OR FOR THE MOST PART, EXCITE THE RISIBLE EMOTION, UNLESS WHEN THE PERCEPTION OF IT IS ATTENDED WITH SOME OTHER EMOTION OF GREATER AUTHORITY.

* *Ceu quondam torto volitans sub verbere turbo,
Quem pueri magno in gyro vacua atria circum,
Intenti ludo exercent; ille actus habena
Curvatis fertur spatiiis: stupef. infcia supra
Impubesque manus, mirata volubile, buxum.
Dant animos plagæ, &c.* *Æneid, vii. 378.*

It cannot be expected, that I should give a complete list of those emotions that do commonly, in a sound mind, bear down this ludicrous emotion. Several of them have been specified in the course of this inquiry. We have seen, from the examples given, that moral disapprobation, pity, fear, disgust, admiration, are among the number ; to which every person, who attends to what passes in his own mind, may perhaps be able to add several others.

I am well aware, that the comparative strength of our several emotions is not the same in each individual. In some the more serious affections are so prevalent, that the risible disposition operates but seldom, and with a feeble impulse : in some, the latter predominates so much, that the others are scarce able to counteract its energy. It is hardly possible to arrive at principles so comprehensive as to include the peculiarities of every individual. These are sometimes so inconsistent with the general law of the species, that they may be considered as deviations from the ordinary course of nature. In tracing *Sentimental Laughter* to its first principles, I have examined it, only as it is found to operate, for the most part, in the generality of mankind.

C H A P. IV.

An attempt to account for the superiority of the moderns in Ludicrous Writing.

IT seems to be generally acknowledged, that the moderns are superior to the ancient Greeks and Romans, in every sort of Ludicrous Writing. If this be indeed the case, it is a fact that deserves the attention of those authors who make Wit, or Humour, the subject of their inquiry; since the same reasonings that account for this fact must throw light on the philosophy of laughter. But by those people who argue for argument's sake, probable reasons might be urged, to show, that we are not competent judges of the ancient humour, and therefore cannot be certain of the superiority of the modern. Were I to defend this side of the question, the following should be my arguments.

Every thing that gives variety to the thoughts, the manners, and employments of men, must also tend to diversify their conversations and compositions in general, and

their wit and humour in particular. Accordingly we find, that almost every profession in life has a turn of humour, as well as of thinking and acting, peculiar in some degree to itself. The foldier, the seaman, the mechanic, the husbandman, is more amused by the conversation of people of his own trade, than by that of others : and a species of wit shall be highly relished in one club or society, which in another would be but little attended to. We need not wonder, then, that in the humour of each country there should be some peculiar character, to the forming of which, not only the language and manners, but even the climate and soil, must contribute, by giving a peculiar direction to the pursuits and thoughts of the inhabitants. Nor need we wonder, that each nation should be affected most agreeably with its own wit and humour. For, not to mention the prejudice that one naturally entertains in favour of what is one's own, a native must always understand, better than foreigners can, the relations, contrarieties, and allusions, implied in what is ludicrous in the speech and writings of his countrymen.

Shakespeare's humour will never be adequately relished in France, nor that of Moliere in England : and translations of ludicrous writings are seldom popular, unless they exhibit something of the manners and habits of thinking, as well as the language, of the people to whom they are addressed.

Echard's Terence, from having adopted such a multitude of our cant phrases, and proverbial allusions, is perhaps more generally relished in Great Britain, than a more literal and more elegant version would have been. Sancho Pança, diverts us more in Motteux's Don Quixote, than in Jervas's Translation, or Smollet's; because he has more of the English clown, and less of the Spaniard, in the former, than in the latter. And a certain French author, to render his Translation of Tom Jones more acceptable to his countrymen, and to clear it of what he foolishly calls English phlegm, has greatly abridged that incomparable performance, and, in my opinion, expunged some of the finest passages; those conversation-pieces, I mean, which tend more immediately to the elucidation of the characters, than to the progress of the story.

May there not, then, in ancient authors, be many excellent strokes of wit and humour, which we misapprehend, merely because we cannot adequately relish? The dialogues of the Socratic philosophers abound in pleasantry, which is no doubt entertaining to a modern reader, but which does not at all come up to those expectations that one would be apt to form of it from the high encomiums of Cicero, and other ancient critics: and may not this be partly imputed to our not sufficiently understanding the Socratic dialogues? To us nothing appears more paltry in the execution, than the ridicule with which

which Aristophanes persecuted Socrates : and yet we know, that it operated with wonderful energy on the Athenians, who, for refinement of taste, and for wit and humour, were distinguished among all the nations of antiquity. Does not this amount to a presumption, that we are no competent judges of the humour of that profligate comedian ?

Let it be remarked, too, that the sphere most favourable to wit and humour is that which is occupied by the middle and lower ranks of mankind ; persons in high stations being obliged to maintain a reserve unfriendly to risible emotion, and to reduce their behaviour to an artificial uniformity, which does indeed answer many important purposes, but which, for the most part, disqualifies them for filling any eminent place in humorous description. Now we are much in the dark in regard to the manners that prevailed among the Greeks and Romans of the lower sort : and there must have been, in their ludicrous writings, as there are in ours, many nice allusions to trifling customs, to the news of the day, and to characters and incidents too inconsiderable to be minded by the historian, which none but persons living at the time, and in a particular place, could ever comprehend ; — as the writers of those days had no notion of the modern practice of illustrating their own works with marginal annotations. • Many authors, too, are lost ; and with them has probably perished (as we

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remarked already) the ludicrous effect of innumerable parodies and turns of expression, to be met with in Aristophanes, Plautus, Lucian, Horace, and other witty ancients. It is at least certain, that there are in Shakespeare many parodies and allusions, the propriety of which we cannot estimate, as the authors, customs, and incidents, referred to, are already forgotten.

From the causes now hinted at, works of wit and humour would appear to be less permanent in their effects, and more liable to become obscure, than any other literary compositions. Commentaries are now necessary to make Hudibras and the Dunciad thoroughly intelligible: and what a mysterious rhapsody would the Rape of the Lock be to those, who, though well instructed in the language of Hooker and Spenser, had never heard of snuff or coffee, watches or hoop-petticoats, beaus or lap-dogs, toilettes or card-tables! But the reasonings of Euclid and Demosthenes, the moral and natural paintings of Homer and Virgil, the pathos of Eloisa's Epistle to Abelard, the descriptions of Livy and Tacitus, can never stand in need of commentaries to explain them, so long as the Greek, Latin, and English languages are tolerably understood; because they are founded in those suggestions of human reason, and those appearances in the moral and material world, which are always the

the same, and with which every intelligent observer must in every age be acquainted.

I would not insinuate, that all sorts of Ludicrous writing are equally liable to lose their effect, and be misunderstood. Those must preserve their relish unimpaired through ages, which allude, — to our more permanent follies and absurdities; like Horace's picture of an intrusive coxcomb, and the greater part of the satire which he levels at pedantry and avarice; — or to writings transcendently excellent; like the Virgilian cento of Ausonius, the Splendid Shilling of Philips, and the *Batrachomyomachia* erroneously ascribed to Homer; — or to customs or opinions universally known; such as Lucian's ridicule of the Pagan Theology, and that inimitable raillery on the abuses of learning which is contained in the memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus. — I mean only to say, that Ludicrous writing in general is extremely subject to the injuries of time; and that, therefore, the wit and humour of the ancient Greeks and Romans might have been far more exquisite, than we at present have any positive reason to believe.

Such would be my plan of declamation, if I were to controvert the common opinion of our superiority to the ancients in Ludicrous writing. But I am not anxious to dispute this point; being satisfied, that the common opinion is true; and that, considering the advantages in this respect which the
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moderns enjoy, the case cannot well be otherwise.

Modern Ridicule, compared with the ancient, will be found to be, first, *more copious*, and, secondly, *more refined*.

I. The superior COPIOUSNESS of the former may be accounted for, if we can show, that to us many sources of wit and humour are both open and obvious, which to the ancients were utterly unknown. It is indeed reasonable to suppose, that they may have been acquainted with many ludicrous objects, whereof we are ignorant; but that we must be acquainted with many more, of which they were ignorant, will hardly be questioned by those who admit, that laughter arises from incongruous and unexpected combinations of ideas; and that our fund of ideas is more ample and more diversified than that of the Greeks and Romans, because our knowledge is more extensive both of men and of things. Far be it from me, to undervalue the attainments of that illustrious part of the human race. The Greeks and Romans are our masters in all polite learning; and their knowledge is to ours, what the foundation is to a superstructure. Our superiority, where we have any, is the consequence of our being posterior in time, and enjoying the benefit of their discoveries and example, as well as the fruits of our own industry. At any rate, the superiority I now contend for is such as the warmest admirer of

of the ancients may admit, without disrespect to their memory, or injury to their reputation.

To compare the late acquisitions in knowledge with the ancient discoveries, would far exceed the bounds of a short Essay, and is not necessary at present. All I mean to do, is to make a few brief remarks on the subject, with a view to account for the superior *copiousness* of modern ridicule.

That in most branches of philosophy, and natural history, the moderns have greatly the advantage of the ancients, is undeniable. Hence we derive an endless multitude of notions and ideas unknown to antiquity, which, by being differently combined and compared, give rise to innumerable varieties of that species of ludicrous association which is called Wit. Every addition to literature enlarges the sphere of wit, by supplying new images, and new opportunities of tracing out unexpected similitude: nor would the author of *Hudibras* have excelled so much in this talent, if he had not been distinguished by uncommon acquisitions in learning, as well as by a singular turn of fancy. One cannot read a canto of his extraordinary Poem, without discovering his ability in both these respects; or a page, without being struck with some jocular allusion, which could not have occurred to the wits of Greece or Rome, because it depends on ideas with which they were unacquainted.

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The moderns are also better instructed in all the varieties of human manners. They know what the ancients were, and what they themselves are; and their improvements, in commerce, geography, and navigation, have wonderfully extended their knowledge of mankind within the two last centuries. They have seen, by the light of history, the greatest and politest nations gradually swallowed up in the abyss of barbarism, and again by slow degrees emerging from it. Their policy and spirit of adventure have made them well acquainted with many nations whose very existence was anciently unknown; and it is now easier to sail round the globe, than it then was to explore the coasts of the Mediterranean sea. Hence, I shall not say that we have acquired any superior knowledge of those faculties essential to human nature, which constitute the foundation of moral science: but hence it is clear, that we derive a very great variety of those ideas of the characters and circumstances of mankind, which by their different arrangements and colourings, form that species of ludicrous combination which is called Humour.

To be somewhat more particular: Certain forms of government are familiar to the moderns, of which the ancients knew almost nothing. I mention only the Feudal System; the influence whereof has, in latter times, wrought so amazing a change on the affairs

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