

and a half, like the sun. If this was the opinion of Pythagoras, we must confess, that by changing the relation and distances of the planets, we have greatly deranged his system. In short, he affirmed that every thing in the world was harmony. This idea pleased the imagination of Descartes, and Mr. Bernardin de St. Pierre revived it. Pythagoras discovered this harmony between different beings, by the combination of numbers; but it is not known whether these numbers were the signs or the principles of things. He was the first who admitted the sphericity of the earth, and the existence of antipodes. He was acquainted with the obliquity of the ecliptic, and first shewed how the moon borrowed her light from the sun. Antonio de Dominis, in explaining the phenomena of the rainbow, has done nothing, as we may say, but repeat what Pythagoras had advanced before him. To this philosopher we are indebted also for the knowledge of several stars. For the time in which he lived, he was a very great geometrician. It was he who discovered that beautiful proposition, respecting the square of the hypotenuse. Every person in the least acquainted with the mathematics, knows what is meant by the hypotenuse, the largest side of a right-angled triangle, or that which is opposite to the right angle. Pythagoras found that a square constructed upon this side, was equal to the squares constructed upon the other two; an important discovery, the full utility of which he readily comprehended, since, as is said, he immediately offered up a hecatomb through gratitude.

His reputation procured him a multitude of disciples, but he was remarkably severe in his choice. He first examined their gestures, their manner of laughing, their gait, and above all, the features of the young candidates; an excellent method, for the worthless, notwithstanding all their art, almost always betray their inclinations by their looks. He af-

terwards put them upon a state of probation for several years, and silence was one of the first restraints which he imposed on them. His disciples never eat flesh or fish, but vegetables and herbs, the only food which, according to Pythagoras, did not render the genius dull. The authority of their chief in this respect was considered as a sovereign law; and for this reason, when they disputed, or were in a state of uncertainty respecting any point, it was sufficient to repeat these words, *the master has said so*. They then reasoned no farther, and submitted without any appeal. The Pythagoreans had all their wealth in common, and entertained for each other the tenderest friendship. It is related that a Pythagorean, being about to die, and having nothing to pay for the expences of his sickness, ordered his host to fix up a paper which he gave him. This paper contained the history of his latter days, and a symbol of Pythagoras. Some time after another Pythagorean, having read this bill, paid the host for every thing he had advanced. There are associations among us, the members of which are no strangers to circumstances of the same kind.

The learned have had many, but fruitless disputes, on abstinence from beans; a point of doctrine which Pythagoras, as is said, borrowed from the Egyptians. The most ingenious opinion that has been advanced on this subject, is, that under this emblem he interdicted his disciples from seeking after dignities and great places; for at elections and trials, sentence was pass'd, and suffrages were given by beans. This was one of the great secrets of the Pythagoreans. We are even assured, that two women, attached to this sect, having been interrogated, and closely pressed on this subject, one of them suffered herself to be killed rather than speak, and the other cut out her tongue, lest she might have the weakness to yield to temptation. It however appears probable, according to the opinion

opinion of Aristonnes, that Pythagoras readily eat beans, and that he found them very good.

Pythagoras left several works, which

he forbid to be made public. Plato found means to procure them, and paid at the rate of upwards of eight hundred pounds sterling for them.

REFLECTIONS UPON TRAGEDY, AND THE CHOICE OF SUBJECTS.

BY MR. DUCRAY DU MINIL.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

AN Italian author says, "If tragedy, to distinguish it from comedy, ought to be the representation of some terrible action, made to rouse sensibility, it may be easily seen, that a tragedy which contains neither an amorous intrigue, nor a marriage, but some atrocious deed, the cause of the greatest revolution that ever happened in the greatest empire of the world, is very far different from all the French tragedies, and mounted, if I may use the expression, upon a bulk much higher and much nobler than the rest."

The rules of true tragedy are contained in these few words. The springs which set the grand passions of the soul in motion, if we except love, an engine so often employed, are, without doubt, politics and ambition. Fanaticism, also, may cause very great revolutions; but I except this motive, which is always violent, always sanguinary, and which can only cool peoples zeal for religion, the first, the most sacred, and the most respectable of the duties of men.

These, then, are the springs which must be employed in tragedy, if one wishes to deviate from the beaten track, and to produce grand effects. What can be more insipid, and less marked with novelty, than those pieces in which love is the sole passion of all the heroes, and which, for the greater part, whatever the scene of action may be, contain nothing but a marriage either concerted, crossed, or dissolved? Our great modern

geniuses have already said every thing that can be written on that subject. We must, therefore, deviate from their manner, if we wish to acquire reputation, or to be handed down to posterity; if we copy them, in a servile manner, we expose ourselves to a comparison which must always be disadvantageous to us.

Who has treated of love with more spirit and sensibility than Racine? Who has painted it with more force and grandeur than Corneille? And who has given it more fury and violence than Crebillon? If it be true that delicacy, impetuosity, and jealousy, are the characteristics of love, and if it be true that vengeance or generosity are its effects, who knew better than these three writers to represent it under those different points of view, and to describe its different affections?

It must indeed be allowed, as is the common opinion, that this passion is so general, and so varied, according to the different objects who are exposed to it, that it seems to be inexhaustible, and that it exhibits a multitude of pictures, each of which has its peculiar shades, tints and coloring; but the principal traits in those pictures will always be the same, and the design will be monotonous; in a word, it will be the same subject, delineated by twenty painters: there will be nothing peculiar to each, but the details; the masses will be common to all.

It may, however, be objected, that if we banish love from our tragedies, we

we shall never see women in them, or they will only perform very trifling parts. What will become of us, if we banish from our pleasures that amiable sex, who are formed to inspire tenderness, move and captivate us, and who make us share in the sentiments of those heroes who sacrifice their lives for them, or detest the cruelty of those tyrants who oppress them? Why banish women from our dramatic works? Why should we expel love entirely? This, indeed, is not to be wished; let it only be, subordinate to the principal interest, and the end I have in view will be answered. If we open the books of every age, and search the annals of empires and republics, we shall there find that women have always been the most considerable agents. More ambitious and more violent, but less prudent than the men, they have almost always occasioned the greatest revolutions. Others, without causing the fall of their kingdoms, have governed them with the greatest wisdom; and some have exercised acts of justice or severity, which might afford matter for a thousand tragedies. The celebrated Elizabeth, if we except her amours with the Earl of Essex, and some others, whose merit was not equal to that of this queen, have given proofs of the most heroic courage, and of the most intrepid firmness. Has not Russia had some valorous empresses; and at Rome, where the women were subordinate to their husbands, did they not distinguish themselves by instances of courage, patriotism and greatness of soul? It is these heroines that ought to be produced upon the stage: we should then have bold characters, well delineated.

The death of Cæsar, and that of Philoctetes, are the only two modern tragedies in which there are no women. They are, however, no less interesting; the first, above all, is so; but this is not to be given as a model. It would be too difficult, and perhaps it might become tiresome.

It remains now to speak of the subjects which ought to be chosen;

for the greater number of those exhibited on the stage for some years past are only subjects of inventions, or *amplification*. It cannot be denied, that a subject of invention, if it be interesting, and well treated, must afford pleasure; but many qualities must be united in it. Historical events, when treated in a languid manner, speak at least to our remembrance, whereas fabulous subjects speak only to the imagination; the first is the real figure, the second is only the mask.

We may hear authors every day complain of a scarcity of subjects, but let them only open the fourth book of the *Æneid*. They will there find a great abundance, which, by the help of a few alterations, necessary for preserving the exactness of theatrical rules, would open a field for the most sublime and emphatical expressions. If we turn over the history of the sovereigns of the universe, what incidents and plots; what murders, occasioned by love, glory, or ambition? The lives of the eastern emperors seem to be a copious source, from which many interesting subjects might be drawn; and the empire of the Turks might likewise supply a great many. Have we not also the *Kans* of Tartary, the emperors of China, Japan, Pegu, Calicut, &c? all inexhaustible treasures, if authors would give themselves the trouble of making a choice.

It is true that our dramatic authors would be obliged to make considerable researches, both with respect to customs, and the ancient geography of the places in which their scenes happened; but in that they would only imitate the great authors of the *Cid*, *Electra*, *Phædra*, *Rhadamistus*, and *Mahomet*. As these authors were minute in their details, they considered no trouble too great to be exact. A mountain, a river, or even a small stream, would have stopped them, had they not been able to discover their names. Tragedy ought to paint; it ought to be a faithful representation of customs, climates, laws, and dresses, and on that account every care should be employed to be exact.

MEMOIRS

REVIEW OF NEW PUBLICATIONS.

FOREIGN.

MEMOIRS HISTORIQUES ET AUTHENTIQUES SUR LA BASTILLE, &c. *Historical and authentic Memoirs respecting the Bastille; containing a particular account of the imprisonment of upwards of three hundred persons; with notes, letters, reports and trials found in that fortress, arranged in a chronological order, from the year 1475 to the present period, with a plate, representing the Bastille at the time it was taken.* Vol. I and II. Paris 1789.

“ THOSE walls, reared by vengeance and tyranny, are fallen. Those threatening towers, which contained the victims of kingly pride, and the dreadful secrets of despotism, have disappeared. But the impure blood of a few traitors, sacrificed on their ruins, cannot appease the manes of those wretched mortals, who have languished or died in this horrid Tartarus. History, therefore, in their name, must avenge justice and the laws shamefully violated, and humanity outrageously offended. Weak and fanatical kings, ye Sardanapali of France, emerge a moment from the abyss of death, to suffer the greatest of punishments, that of hearing your crimes proclaimed throughout the whole earth! And ye, ye nations of the earth, read these annals of wickedness, this dreadful nomenclature of crimes committed amongst a people the most humane and the most generous, by the most iniquitous and cruel of governments. Read, and ye will thunder with indignation, ye will fully enjoy the humiliation of tyrants.”

Such is the commencement of the preliminary discourse to these memoirs, and such is the picture of the atrocious cruelties related in them. Charles V. caused the Bastille to be

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built, to defend, or rather to restrain the inhabitants of the city of Paris; but the construction of the dungeons in this prison, the care taken to render them pestilential by the privation of air and light, the formidable apparatus of a jail, guarded by insupportable eyes, and merciless vigilance, the terror inspired of receiving poison in ones food, the baskets that turned upon wheels covered with plates of steel, and the perfidious and bitter smiles of examining magistrates, all announce the infernal project of making the Bastille the perpetual abode of vengeance and tyranny. It was at first indeed destined only for state criminals; but was it not sufficient to forge state crimes, in order to increase the number of criminals? To complain of an injustice consequently became a state crime. To cry out against a base and corrupted government, to lament the oppression of the people, or the worthless conduct, incest, or drunkenness of mistresses and favorites; to speak of natural liberty, and liberty of conscience, to doubt of the infallibility of ministers, or of their probity, to have unfilled honor, and a spotless character, to have a pretty wife, who happened to please a minister, or a lieutenant of the police, to displease a clerk in any of the public offices, or a chamber maid at court, all became crimes of state, and were all condemned, in the succession of time, to the Bastille.

The Bastille at first contained only those who had conspired against the state. Louis de Luxembourg, constable of France under Louis XI. being at St. Quentin, obtained a passport from Charles VII. the last duke of Burgundy, to go to Mons, in Hainault, to Emeric, high-bailiff and governor of that place, who was his best friend, but the latter had private orders from Charles to watch so closely that the constable could not escape from Mons.

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