

18th. On the south side of the abovementioned Gallilee is Bede's Altar, above which the following lines inscribed on a tablet originally hung, but is now preserved in the library at Durham.

Inscriptio tabulae quae nuper appensa erat juxta Bedae aram in Capella Beatae Mariae Dunelmi.

BEDA

Dei famulus et presbyter

Vir non minus sanctitate quam scientia,

VENERABILIS

Hic jacet.

Qui natus in territorio monasterii

Girwicensis quod nunc Jaro dicitur

Cum esset annorum septem datus Abbati BENEDICTO et deinde

CEOLFRIDO ibidem educandus, cunctumque ex eo vitae tempus

In ejusd. Monasterii habitatione peragens omnem meditandis

Scripturis operam dedit, atque inter observantiam disciplinae regularis

Et quotidianam cantandi in ecclesia curam

Semper

Aut discere, aut docere, aut scribere

Solebat.

Decimo nono autem vitae suae anno disconatum; et tricesimo

Presbyteratum, utrumque a S. Johanne Beverlaco, Archiepiscop. Eborum

Suscepit

VIR OMNI LAUDE MAJOR

De quo doctissimi illorum temporum homines hoc elogium protulerant,

Anglum in extremo orbis angulo natum

Ingenio suo univertum orbem superasse

Quippe qui omnium pene scientiarum et universae theologiae arcana

Penetravit sicut opera ejus et volumina multa orbi Christiano notissima

Abunde testantur.

Quae etiam illo adhuc vivente tanti nominis erant et auctoritatis ut ex ejus

Homiliis multa sacris lectionibus sunt addita et ubique in ecclesiastico

Officia publice et solenniter recitata.

Constat eum aliquando discipulos habuisse celebratissimos pra-

elara Paulo post ecclesiae lumina ALCUINUM Caroli Magni

Regis praecipientem & CLAUDIUM atque CLEMENTEM

Qui primi Lutetiae docuerunt et Galliam bonis artibus

Illustrarunt.

Obiit in monasterii Girwicensis A. D. DCCXXIII, aetate suae LIX,

Die quo Ascensionis Domini memoria celebratur

Et ibidem sepultus fuit.

Sed postea huc Dunelmum primo cum capite regis OSWALDI,

Et corpore S. CUTHBERTI

Deinde in Galileam et feretro per HUGONEM episcopum

Constructo ossa ejus sunt translata,

Epitaphium de eodem istud circumfertur

Haec sunt insulae BEDAE VENERABILIS ossa.

J. S.

To the EDITOR of the EUROPEAN MAGAZINE.

A Few CURSORY REMARKS on the "REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF LITERATURE IN ENGLAND," inserted in the Magazine for July 1793.

SIR,

A Correspondent in your last seems to think that "Literature is on the wane" in this country—an assertion which, if it may not be considered "as no small temerity to venture," ought at least to excite such sensations in every reader's mind as one naturally feels when honour is attacked;—for that every one's honour (who has any regard for Literature) is in some degree concerned on such an occasion

cannot be doubted. Without therefore pretending to enter into a *logical refutation* of the "Reflections" in question, I will also venture to make a few remarks on the subject, which have occurred to me as I read them. I would however observe, that as the mentioning names of *Autors* might be productive of a second "war between the *antients* and *moderns*," I am full as unwilling (and I dare say much

much more unprepared) to engage on one side as your correspondent can be on the other.

That there may be *some parts* of literature which are not in such vigour as they *have* been, will not be denied, but that literature in *general*, that is to say, the major part of its distinct branches, is "on the wane," I hope is not, nor likely to be the case. "That this is a reading age cannot well be denied," and that the kind of reading *now in vogue* is very different from that of a century back will likewise readily be granted. It is also true that the literary compositions of the present day are what is called *much lighter* than those of an older date; but that they contain either less amusement or real instruction and information, cannot be so easily admitted. A century or two ago the *rage* for learning, in whatever shape it appeared, was universal, and it had the charm of *novelty* to recommend it. Such treasures as lay hid beneath the ancient classic mines were as yet but dimly discovered in this country; and people in general having at the same time more leisure than the important and daily increasing concerns of trade and commerce will at present admit of, were stimulated to get possession of them by means of a toilsome though becoming diligence, which was eventually repaid with a satisfaction which is ever the result of literary research. But the same knowledge (or rather a wonderful improvement of it) has been since that time diffused in a variety of more modern forms, and the *Classics* of our own and other neighbouring countries have added (if the expression may be allowed) *oil* to the flame of ancient literature, which has caused it to burn with increased and brighter splendor, and to illuminate thousands, who otherwise would never have felt its cheering influence. With regard to that "deep and solid learning" which your correspondent fears is "on the decline," it must be confessed, that the *subjects* of those "*erudite researches*" which constituted the characters of men of letters formerly, have been nearly exhausted by their ingenuity. There are yet productions of modern (and some *living* authors) which evince that there is no want of the *fruits* which a "vigorous cultivation" of learning must produce. As to historic compositions we have surely no reason to complain; every reader will be reminded of names which in that department of literature have shed a lustre which not only eclipses that of their predecessors, but will also distinguish their country and the present age in a manner which will be the admiration of posterity. And if to the "es-

sential requisites" of history possessed by former historians, they have added those "elegancies of language" which (notwithstanding the "*smoothness of periods, quaintness of expression, &c.*") are certainly ornaments of a very attractive, not to say *necessary* nature;—surely that can be no *diminution* of the celebrity which they have so justly acquired. The operation of the most salutary medicines is not impeded by the elegance of form which they are sometimes administered in; and the *nuda veritas*, though acceptable in *any shape*, is no less so when *decently* decorated.

It is not so easy, I should apprehend, to attain those "comfortable and profitable" stations in the Temple of Fame (of which the author of Reflections seems to think so lightly); but when to the voice of his country is added the suffrage of *other nations* in an author's favour, his merits, one would suppose, must be something more than *superficial*. Neither is it, I would hope, oftener the case *now* than it *has been at all times*, that some authors, with very moderate pretensions to fame, enjoy *such* situations, while others, whose works possess "a hundred times more sterling merit," are suffered to "lie neglected in obscurity, or be condemned to oblivion with all the arbitrary fury of false criticism." Criticism has been frequently, for some time, employed to very different purposes, and its pursuits, every one must acknowledge, have been, not to condemn merit *to*, but to rescue it *from* oblivion. In the poetical walk, perhaps, it may be "impossible to mention any in competition with Milton and Dryden;" but it should be remembered, that *such* Poets are not "*every-day* Poets;" they are such as do not even appear in a *century*; yet there are some who upon the whole think the productions of modern times *superior in some*, and little inferior *in any*, of the requisites of poetry to those that appeared in the days of their forefathers. In theology, philosophy, mathematics, &c. &c. the writers of the last and beginning of this century were certainly very eminent. We are nevertheless at present possessed of names which, if they may not be put in competition with their predecessors, are yet sufficient to preserve those branches of science from that "falling off" of which *W.* is so apprehensive. With respect to classical literature, it is not perhaps quite so much cultivated as formerly. Our modern languages have become much more improved and refined, and are now thought capable enough of expressing the different ideas of the poet, the critic, or the philosopher, without having recourse to the more ancient tongues. Another

cause perhaps may be, that the students of universities are too deeply immersed in the profundity of mathematics, or the subtleties of metaphysics, to attend much to the cultivation of classical studies. It is pretty evident, that not hardly one in ten is endowed with faculties adapted to the above studies, nor is it unnatural, if after having them *benumbed*, as it were, in such pursuits, they should often lose a relish for almost any study.

I do not here mean to decry the study of mathematics; every one acknowledges their great importance and utility; and where there is a *natural* propensity to such studies, let it "be pursued with the perseverance of a Newton *." But (notwithstanding what an admirable author † has advanced on this subject) it is pretty evident, not hardly one in ten is endowed with faculties adapted to such intellectual pursuits; and when this is the case, it must become nothing less than an *abuse* of study; nor is it unnatural if it should often, under such circumstances, produce a similar effect on the *mental* capacity, as the *abuse* of *non-naturals* frequently does on the corporeal system.

It is said of the celebrated Dr. Busby, that he was remarkably sagacious at discovering the *genius* and *disposition* of his pupils, "taking care to forward them accordingly." And if (since nobody will surely go quite so far as to say, that mere

"Midnight Oil
"And Mathematics make a sound
Divine ‡")

if, I say, more regard was paid to the *natural abilities and genius* of different students, would it not be not only more agreeable and profitable to *themselves*, but also, in many respects, *more advantageous to society*?

That the learned languages lose any thing by the "diffuse of quotations from them" can hardly be admitted; for, tho' it is not customary at present to quote them to such an extent as the writers of former times, yet we have by no means deviated so far, as entirely to supplant them "by quotations from our own poets, or by French phrases." It is true, that by "a judicious quotation either from *Latin* or *Greek* an author relieves himself, pleases the intelligent mind, and creates a desire in the inquisitive mind to get acquainted with the meaning of it;" but why should not this observation extend also to those ad-

mired authors of England, France, Italy, &c. who by their originality in every sense of the word, have deservedly obtained the title of *Classics*? The diamond of equal size and lustre is surely of the same value, whether dug out of the *antient* or *modern*, the *Grecian* or the *French mine*.

"La docte antiquite fut toujours venerable,
"Je ne la trouve pas, cependant, adorable."

That is to say, though the antient writers are worthy our greatest reverence and esteem, we ought not, however, let our veneration be carried to such a height as to become indifferent to those of more modern times, like the lover, who in adoring his *own* mistress, becomes blind to the charms of *every other beauty*. After all, the *field of science*, which men have ever been in pursuit of, may be regarded as the *beautiful land of promise*, which we see at a distance, and are all wishing to gain; and if by the improvements of "*modern elegance*" we are enabled to arrive there by a *nearer* and *clearer* way than that of our honest plodding ancestors, I do not see why the term "*lightness*," applied as the characteristic of the age, should be thought to convey the idea of "a regard for what is *superficial* and *gaudy*, to the neglect of what is *solid* and *durable*." But whether the present period is or is not distinguished by "a degeneracy of *learning*," it is very possible it may be by a degeneracy of *manners*." "What will not time subdue?" I beg pardon, I ought to have said, *Damnosa quid non imminuit dies?* or, as some will have it, The frailty of human nature increases with every generation. This sad truth has long been acknowledged, and the opinion of one of the *best antient authors* on the same subject is well known, which, to "please the intelligent reader," and possibly to "relieve myself," I beg leave to introduce:

"Ætas parentum pejor avis tulit,
"Nos nequiores, mox daturos
"Progeniem vitiosiorein." HOR.

However, on *this principle*, if we are really worse than our grandfathers and grandmothers were, we must be content to comfort ourselves with the reflection, that we are at least *full as good*, or *better* than our posterity will be!

I am, &c.

Leeds, Aug. 1793.

W. G.

* Personal Nobility, &c.

‡ Vid. A Collection of admirable "*Academical Elegies*," published in the Cambridge Papers, which deserve a better situation.

† Arbuthnot.