

" Affix thy signet here! and think not I,  
 Who ever on thy footsteps will attend,  
 Have always such a form; 'twas meant to try  
 If thou wert firm and steadfast in thine end.  
 Now to dissolve the spell!"—then suddenly  
 The Demon's features vanish'd—and the fiend  
 To wond'ring Faustus did at once appear  
 A handsome, gallant, well-dress'd cavalier.

All this he did to chain his victim faster:  
 For thus he thought, like Shakspeare's Caliban,  
 Since for awhile I've got another master,  
 Why let the *old one* get another man:  
 So my black scaly coat I'd better cast here,  
 And take a shape as decent as I can:"  
 No sooner thought than done, for fiends' disguises  
 Are made as quickly as the wish arises.

While night melts into morning, we shall make  
 A pause to part the Cantos, *One*, and *Two*;  
 Next month the subject we again shall take,  
 And Faust again shall meet the reader's view;  
 For some materials we have got to rake  
 Together, and to versify anew,  
 Whate'er we find our subject to illuminate.  
 Then farewell all,—while we retire to ruminate.

R.

## NOTES.

*Marlow's old play has got a cut on wood.*

Vide the original quarto edition of 1616, where, on the title-page, may be seen Lucifer appearing to Faustus in his study. The "French translation" mentioned in the next line was taken from the elaborate Dutch and German editions, and was printed in 8vo. about the end of the last century.

*The Persians write, and some their tales believe,  
 That magic powers the Jewish monarch aided.*

For farther information on this subject, the reader is referred to *D'Herbelot's Bibliothèque Orientale*, article *Salomon*; where it is set forth that the Temple was erected by spirits, and by the assistance of Candaule, Queen of Saba. There are also some particulars of their magical messenger, a nondescript fowl, called *Houppé*!

## GENERAL LITERATURE; AND THE CAUSES THAT INFLUENCE THE REVOLUTIONS OF OPINION.

LITERATURE, in it's more enlarged sense, may be defined, *that entire mass of information which is circulated through society, and originally acquired through the media of reason and observation.* Information, however, in the sense which we would here annex to it, must be carefully distinguished from knowledge; that is, we must distinguish what we are taught, which is often but supposed knowledge, from that of which we have ourselves clear and distinct perceptions;—we must distinguish reasoning from reason, opinion from certainty, and probable conclusions from demonstra-

tive evidence. It is certain that the knowledge of truth is the great object of literature, and so far as this object is attained, so far literature and knowledge go hand in hand; but it is equally certain, that in the pursuits of literature, we take, not unfrequently, a random excursion, and outstep, not only the modesty of nature, but, in some instances, transgress against the most obvious perceptions of common sense; and while true knowledge advances, with slow, but undeviating pace, in the footsteps of truth, we engraft on the overgrown trunk of literature, opinions as visionary and fantastic as

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the "airy nothing" of the poet, to which, however, we give "a local habitation and a name."

In a more confined sense, literature may be defined, that very limited portion of real knowledge which man has attained in the sciences: that knowledge which is capable of being demonstrated, and which is unmingled with supposititious truth, or ideal certainty. But as the cases are innumerable in which we shall ever be at a loss to know where certainty ends, and where probability begins, this definition of literature can only be adopted by beings who rank higher in the scale of mental intelligence than man.

As, then, the definition of literature cannot properly be confined to the precise limits of our real knowledge, inasmuch as these precise limits can never be ascertained, it necessarily follows, that it is as much composed of opinion, belief, probability, conjecture, and speculative theories, as it is of science, or of a clear and distinct knowledge, or perception of things. But opinion, belief, probability, conjecture, &c. all imply doubt; so that literature is as much composed of doubt as it is of science. Literature, then, properly divides itself into *doubt* and *science*: but the doubtful part of literature must eternally vary till it is resolved into certainty; for while ever we doubt, we are liable to alter our opinion, and the revolutions of opinion necessarily produce corresponding revolutions in literature. The doubtful part, however, can never be entirely resolved into certainty, because the nature of some doubts will not admit of it, as will presently appear; and though some things, which are as yet doubtful, may hereafter be rendered evident, yet, as an infinity of doubts will still remain, the general aspect of literature must vary from age to age, still taking it's "form and pressure" from the opinions and sentiments of the times. Hence it is, that though truth be the same in all ages, literature is not less exposed to the revolutions of opinion, than empire is to the revolutions of time. Every age and every clime introduce it to us under a different aspect; and though some of it's features are too stubborn and unbending to yield either to the caprice of opinion, or the novelty of fashion-

able sentiment, either to the overthrow of states, or the revolutions of empire; yet the *total ensemble* presents a different configuration in each succeeding century, marked with eternally varying, but still associating shades. This diversity of aspect, however, is more strongly marked, when produced by the reverses of political power, than when it arises from the discovery of new truths, the negation of old opinions, or the restless versatility of the mind. All who are acquainted with the revolutions of Grecian and Roman literature, are also acquainted with the marked character of these revolutions; but if Greece and Rome had never experienced the vicissitudes of power, they would not still have escaped witnessing the revolutions of literature. Could the eloquence of Demosthenes have rekindled, in the breasts of his countrymen, the drooping ardour of that patriotic virtue, which shone with such peerless lustre at the battle of Marathon, and the straits of Thermopylae; could it have baffled the crafty policy of Philip, and the military genius of Alexander; yet the revolutions of Grecian literature would not have been less certain, and inevitable, though less obvious to the perceptions of grosser intellects. The causes which induced the decline of Roman literature are nearly similar, but the consequences of this decline proved infinitely more fatal to the dominion of intellect. Greece, it is true, saw the republic of letters and of liberty perish together; but though Grecian literature was no more, her arts and sciences long survived the downfall of her power, and the extinction of her liberties. She ceased, indeed, to exult in her literary superiority: to her the surrounding nations could appear no longer barbarous; nor was it longer granted her, to view, with hallowed enthusiasm, the great Demosthenes, that idol of her adoration, that only pillar of her remaining strength, and the brightest star in the galaxy of her fame, thunder in her Capitol, and revive the slumbering energies of her declining virtues. But though the sun of her glory had descended in clouds and darkness, that have never since been streaked with the dawn of returning light, yet she saw—and by the memory of her great fame could still linger amid the

retreats of slavery, and dispel, for a moment, the indurating influence of barbarous innovations, she would have exulted in the prospect. She saw her arts and sciences transported to a foreign clime, and flourish beneath the auspices of a more favored race.

*Grecia capta feram victorem cepit et artes  
Intulit agneat Latio.*

The decline of the Grecian, was not, therefore, marked with such lamentable consequences as followed the decline of Roman literature. Then only it was, "that dullness resumed her ancient right," and extended her leaden influence over all the regions of the globe. The sciences were without a shelter: the Muses had no retreat, save when they were occasionally wooed by some heaven-taught bard, to whom they communicated a double portion of their influence amid the wild seclusions of rural retirement. But if the annals of literature had never chronicled such sudden and striking vicissitudes in the history of mind, if an eternal peace had gained over consenting nations to her hallowed controul, and left the votaries of science to advance in their sublime course, with unrestricted pace; if we could behold in reality, what the enthusiastic St. Pierre beheld in visions of ideal bliss, "a happy and peaceable society, living in eternal concord, — all guided by the same maxims, — all happy in the universal happiness diffused around them," yet literature, so far from moving in the direct road to perfection, would veer about like the winds of heaven, and prove herself the offspring of man, by being constant only in her inconstancy.

Literature, as we have already observed, is that entire mass of information gained from reason and observation. But reasoning is often substituted for reason, and its deductions set down as lessons of unerring wisdom, nor is the acumen of observation always inaccessible to error. The information, however, collected from these two sources, are circulated through society, and pass for knowledge, and this current knowledge is denoted with the appellation of literature. But while man is ever liable to deduce false consequences from just premises, or just consequences from false premises, assumed

as true ones, and while the spirit of true enquiry has ever courage to expose and detect these imaginary conclusions, literature must, unavoidably, take part in the contest, and without waiting to examine the pretensions of either, she invariably adopts the maxim, *Vox populi, vox Dei*, and forms her judgment by that of the public. The decision made by the public passes for truth; and though it should even happen to be erroneous, its decision will, notwithstanding, continue to be received by the learned, till it is more successfully combated by succeeding writers.

There are, indeed, a few, who always judge for themselves, uninfluenced by public opinion, or by the dogmas and tenets of those who have gone before them, even though antiquity seems to give them a sort of prescriptive right to their assent. But their assent is not to be gained by the authority of names, the canons of the schools, nor the supposed orthodoxy of established opinion. They believe, and with truth, that all men have the same access to the fountains of science that our ancestors had: that knowledge imbibed at the fountain head, is purer and more unmixed than what is collected from streams far removed from the parent source; that the triumph of intellect is not yet complete, nor the dominion of truth as yet established; and that as the mind is capable of an eternal progress to perfection, we should not retard this progress by receiving, as orthodox, whatever time seems to have sanctioned, or authority to have confirmed, as this would be, to leave literature where we found it, and remain content with that fund of knowledge which has been already prepared for us. As the creation would immediately rush into its original chaos, if the Creator did not continue to give efficacy to those laws which keep rebellious elements in their appointed stations, so would man fall back into the state of nature, and with him literature would sink into that original barbarity from which it was redeemed. If those few who esteem the certainty of things, not by the authority of the names by which this certainty is confirmed, but by those original principles of reason by which it is established, were withdrawn from the world, "All

the elements of science exist in the state of nature, and it differs from the state of civilization only in suffering these elements to be confounded with each other, so that one element cannot be distinguished from another. The ancient chaos, in like manner, contained all the elements of creation, but they were similarly mingled and confounded; and the laws of nature which dissolved this monstrous association of jarring elements, and which still retain them in their proper distinct places, thereby producing the harmony of creation, may not unaptly be compared to those laws which analyze and separate the jarring and sluggish elements of science, and reduce each to its proper abode. This produces in the moral, what the harmonic laws of nature produce in the physical world. But those to whom we are indebted for it, view these elements not as they exist in the minds of other men, but as they exist in their natural chaos, whence they compel them to retire, and associate with elements of kindred mould. Aware, however, that this labour exceeds individual might, they facilitate their enquiries, by availing themselves of such aids as those who have been in the field before them have so opportunely furnished. They distinguish, however, authority from certainty, nor believe a thing to be true because Newton, Locke, or Descartes, has asserted it, unless they find their assertion expresses the thing as it is, not as they suppose it to be. In order to trace the conformity of the assertion with the thing asserted, they travel the same road with these celebrated authors, knowing that if they had themselves confounded truth with authority, they would never have acquired those intellectual treasures that have given celebrity to their names. Accordingly, if they find them tripping in their way, or assuming as true what should have been proved, they reject whatever is founded on these assumptions, notwithstanding the authority of the names by which it has obtained credence with the world. But as the paths of science are often too dark and intricate for man,—as he can often only peep through the gloom in which many of her secrets repose, and where many of them shall slumber in eternal silence, and there form the most accurate observation

he can of the dark individualities that move before him, they know, before hand, that their predecessors could not, at all times, arrive at certainty, and that, consequently, unless they have a more exquisite faculty of discriminating objects in the dark than those who led the way, they must trust to the views which they have taken in these dark retreats, whether these views have seized upon truth, or only grasped, in her stead, the unbodied phantom of reality. But though certainty is not always attainable, yet it is only these men that can depend on the knowledge which they have acquired, because it is they, alone, that know what part of it depends on demonstration, what on moral certainty, and what on probability or opinion. Those who toil in treasuring up the researches of other men, without examining the sources whence they were collected, may indeed possess much knowledge, but it is that species of knowledge that rests on principles with which its possessor is totally unacquainted:—When they are wrong, they imagine they are right—when they are right, they know not wherefore.—It is to those men alone, who examine for themselves, and who are not content with being told where truth resides till they have first gone and visited her abode, that science owes her existence, and literature whatever approaches she makes to the perfection of science. Such men, however, are much less in number than is generally imagined; for though many of those who think themselves entitled to rank in the literary world imagine they always judge for themselves, or, at least, do not coincide with the judgment of others, unless it quadrates with their own reason, yet were they to analyze the grounds on which their judgments are formed, they would often find it difficult to resolve the substratum of their knowledge into its component parts, and they would be obliged to acknowledge, that they thought so and so, or judged so and so, without knowing why. The judgments and opinions adopted by most readers, are the result of impressions made on their minds, at one time or other, by works more calculated to please than to instruct, and which are generally read for no other object; and as the

mind is more apt to give credence to what is pleasing, than to what is rigid and severe, agreeable to that just observation of Cæsar, *Fere libenter homines, id quod volunt, credunt*: these pleasing, but delusive sentiments, insensibly gain upon the mind, which is seldom prepared to resist their influence, for we are seldom disposed to quarrel with those who amuse us, and there produce a species of unobserved conviction, even before we know that we are convinced. It would seem to be a principle in human nature, which, though it must have been given for a benevolent purpose, is the source of many errors, to believe, that whatever is agreeable to our feelings is also true; so that instead of giving an agreeable proposition a fair examination, our feelings will not permit us to examine it at all. We treat it like a beautiful woman whom we are disposed to forgive, even when her conduct is most liable to censure; whereas we treat rigid truths that clash with our feelings and propensities like a deformed female, whom we always wish out of our sight, however great may be her virtues or her merits. There is, indeed, a class of readers, and this class is, perhaps, not less numerous than the former, who determine the truth of every proposition in books of taste and science, as well as the general merit of such works, by the judgments already passed upon them by the reviewers. Those who judge for themselves are comparatively few; and those whose judgments can be relied upon, are

*rix totidem quot  
Theberna porta rel divitis oclis Nilii.*

This, it is true, cannot argue against the utility of reviews. They serve to confirm the judgments and opinions of those who are qualified to judge of literary works; and if they differ from them in some points, and have truth on their side, they open to the latter a new train of reasoning which escaped them at first, while they suffer nothing from them, if they should even praise or censure unjustly;—for a man of judgment will not resign his opinion to adopt that of a reviewer, until he first examines the grounds on which the reviewer has decided. The man of judgment cannot, therefore, suffer from the errors of criticism; and the man of

no judgment is safer in the hands of the reviewers than if left to himself,—they prevent him twenty times from going wrong for once that they mislead him,—and perhaps even then he is not misled by them, as he would have probably adopted an erroneous sentiment of his own, if he were not under their guidance.

But if those few writers, who may be properly termed the pillars of literature and science, will not admit truth on the authority of uninvestigated antiquity, how much less will they feel disposed to yield to the opinions and judgments of their own times, knowing, that an opinion which has commanded the assent of ages is more likely to bear the test of examination, than the opinion which is only of yesterday. It is idle, indeed, to dispute the merit of works of taste, when this merit has been once decided on by the public—the antiquity of such works is the best commentary on their excellence. Mankind will never be pleased with works of taste, unless the sentiments which they convey are found to associate with their natural feelings and sympathies; and the great object of every writer on subjects of taste, is neither to adopt nor admit into his work, any sentiment, notion, or opinion, but what is in perfect unison with those by which mankind are already governed, or which, at least, bears so kindred, and so obvious a relation to them, that it's force is instantaneously recognized. When a writer, then, gives the public satisfaction, it clearly demonstrates, that he has consulted their prejudices, and natural biases; for if he had not, they could not possibly be pleased, and if he has done so, his merit is in proportion to the pleasure which he has given, and the invention, or, more properly, the ingenuity, which he has displayed in discovering the sources whence these pleasures were collected. What is called invention, in poetry, and which Pope justly considers to be the grand characteristic of genius, is not, strictly, what that term means, in it's general acceptance. To invent properly means, to frame or fashion something that did not exist before;—but this was not the invention of Homer and Milton; they introduced nothing into their poems, the existence of which was not already known, or the possibility of it's exist-

once immediately recognized; they did not invent manners, characters, sentiments, opinions, prejudices, biases, or propensities, that were never heard of before their own time; but justly considered the greatest excellence to which they could arrive, consisted in keeping as close to the reigning and popular sentiments, characters, and manners, as the nicest investigation of human nature would enable them. In describing a great character, for instance, they took all their ideas of human excellence from whatever accomplishments, or personal qualifications, they found most admired among their countrymen. They were not solicitous of knowing whether the character they had sketched was such as truth and virtue required at their hands,—satisfied with painting truth, virtue, and all other qualities of the mind, agreeable to the ideas which they knew were formed of them by those for whom they wrote, without stopping to examine, whether these ideas were correct, or agreeable to universal truth and virtue, or not. Accordingly, Homer has given us many traits of character which he would never have sketched, had he written in less barbarous times—but his great object was, to give his heroes those virtues which were most admired, instead of those which ought to be most admired. A poet of the nineteenth century would not think it honorable to the hero of his poem to be represented as a butcher,—and yet Homer represents Achilles killing a sheep to entertain Priam,—which was also fleas'd and dressed by his two friends. That these manners are too gross for the nineteenth century, is evident, when Pope deemed them too gross for his own time; for instead of making Achilles kill the sheep, as Homer does, he assigns that task to his two friends, not reflecting, as Lord Kames judiciously remarks, “that from a lively picture of ancient manners proceeds one of the capital pleasures we have in reading Homer.” Hector is represented dragging the dead body of Patroclus after stripping him of his armour, and threatens to give his mangled corpse as a prey to the dogs of Troy, while Hector himself is served in the same manner by Achilles. These and a thousand other traits of barbarous ferocity, shew that Homer, with all his barbarism, feigned nothing that had

not already either a virtual or a possible existence. He gave his heroes neither virtues nor vices of which he knew his countrymen incapable. The merit of works of taste does not, therefore, depend on our ideas of right and wrong, of truth and error, for a writer of taste may offend against every principle of right reason, while he finds mankind offend along with him. And it does not, therefore, affect the progress of literature, so far as this progress is connected with the advancement of truth. The progress of truth, however, should be the great concern of all who look to the general interests of literature. While ever we continue to advance in the knowledge of things, we also continue to establish and secure the dominion of intellect; and in securing this dominion, we also secure the interests of genius and taste, which cannot flourish out of it. It avails but little to possess natural genius and taste, in a soil where the knowledge of things is not cultivated,—because they can never emerge from their original obscurity. But wherever rigid science flourishes, taste and genius must grow up to maturity, as in its natural soil. It is, therefore, to those who have laboriously, but profitably, toiled in pursuit of rigid truth,—of those first principles, or elements of knowledge, on which all that is valuable in literature and science is necessarily founded,—that the world is indebted for the progress of both. The force of their writings, however, do not always appear in their own age, because truth is not always so attractive as the alluring representations of ingenious error, neither is she so obtrusive and self-sufficient in forcing herself on the public gaze. But—*Magna est veritas et prevalebit*: however sophistry and casuistry may flourish for a time, like all plants that come quickly to maturity, they soon perish—while truth continues to fix itself stronger and deeper wherever it has taken root: and though the writers to whom we are indebted for it may be eclipsed, for a moment, by usurped reputations, yet their writings will be placed by posterity among those works that keep the elements of knowledge in their proper places, and prevent them from rushing into lawless anarchy and chaos. Literature contains, in itself, the seeds of its own destruction: bad taste,

false sentiment, and inconclusive reasoning, belong not more to one age or nation than another. They are the growth of every age, nor is there any period in which their influence is more to be dreaded, than when that last polish is bestowed upon literature which it is capable of receiving from the exquisite touch of taste and genius. It is easier for a writer of ordinary merit to distinguish himself by vitiating taste, and opposing excellence, than by attempting to improve it; for how can he improve beauties which he cannot discern. Literature, like the ivory, after receiving the last polish, is only dulled by the unskilful hand that would attempt to render it more transparent. Hence it is, that bad taste and false sentiment are more dangerous when literature has attained it's utmost height, than in it's progress to perfection, and, for similar reasons, more dangerous in those arts that admit of highest perfection, as music, poetry, and painting, than in those which are incapable of such excellence. If, then, science had not endowed a few of her votaries with the faculty of discerning and plucking up the diseased seeds of false taste and sentiment, they would soon corrupt the whole mass of literature, and nothing but intellectual misrule and confusion would ensue.

But notwithstanding all that talent and genius can effect, in exploding error, and expanding the circle or limits of our knowledge, it is certain, that the reign of error, though not destined to be eternal, like that of truth, will, however, be co-existent with the reign of man. In that stock of real or supposed knowledge, which forms the literature of the present day, there are many erroneous doctrines, which the acumen, or the increased experience of future writers may detect and explode. But is it certain, that in supplanting old errors, they will not establish new ones? Is it certain, that he who perceives the fallacy of a theory can also supply it's defects; and that it requires no greater effort of genius to discover truth, than it does to detect error? If it were so, indeed, the critics would, ere now, have brought literature to a degree of perfection which it is, perhaps, destined never to attain. For, unhappily, it is easier to detect a thousand errors, than to discover one

truth of which the world was before ignorant. Error is not always the result of false deductions in reasoning, nor of false perceptions in observation. In examining a question, the logical reasoner may be strictly accurate, in the views which he has taken, in the premises which he has laid down, and in the conclusions which he has deduced from these premises; and he may reduce the result of these conclusions logically and correctly into a general proposition; but this general proposition may still be erroneous, as it regards the question under examination, though the arguments on which it rests cannot be disproved. If he has not examined the question in all its parts, it avails but little, that so far as he has examined it, the views which he has taken are just and accurate; for his general conclusion must be erroneous, as it regards the general question, though it is true as it regards that part of the question which came under his consideration. The question which he has discussed is not, in fact, the question which he proposed to discuss, but another question which he has mistaken for it. He divided the former question into such parts as he thought belonged to it, and drew his conclusions from these supposed parts; but had his penetration been more exquisite, he would have perceived other latent parts, which, though not visible to him, were as necessary to be examined, as those which came under his investigation, before he could arrive at a just conclusion. The conclusion, however, which he made, may appear very specious; it may be embodied in the literature of the age, and pass many years for a logical truth. Some future reasoner, examining the question with a greater degree of attention, or of accuracy, proves it to be erroneous, from discovering some point, hitherto unnoticed, which essentially belonged to the consideration of the question. But, still, it does not follow, that even the latter is right, because he has demonstrated the former to be wrong; for though he has discovered a point that had heretofore eluded the prying acumen of human investigation, he may still want that comprehensive grasp of mind, that knows to place before it all the individual members, or parts of which a question is com-

posed, at the same moment; and if his power consist in describing the minuter and finer elements of a whole, not in arranging these elements in that lucid order which enables the mind to arrive at certainty, he may never be able to fix the just relation which this newly discovered point bears to the other parts of the question, and must, therefore, form his conclusion from the relation which exists between it and some of these parts. Thus, instead of leading mankind from error to truth, he only leads them from one error to another; though the ingenuity of discovering a new point, may serve to give his conclusion an air of demonstrative certainty. Thus it is, that in new-modelling and improving old theories, we sometimes expunge established errors only to gain credence to new ones; and the new theory may be just as fallacious as the old. But though the enquirer after truth should even succeed in determining the just relation which his newly-discovered point bore to all the other parts of the question, yet this might only bring him one step nearer to the truth; for if any parts still remain unnoticed, which essentially belong to a just investigation of the question, his solution, or conclusion, however it may be adopted, for a time, as an orthodox literary canon, is still as liable to be exploded from the common-wealth of literature, as that for which it was substituted; and whenever that happens, it will alter one feature, at least, in the aspect of literature.

The causes, however, which influence the revolutions of opinion, taste, and sentiment in literature, are not solely to be ascribed to the niggard space of human intellect, contracting and expanding itself, according to the varied powers of individual genius, or the varied circumstances of time and place, eagerly grasping, in one age, that knowledge which is wrested from it in another, incapable of exalting itself, in any age, beyond a certain elevation, however favored by the secondary aids of peace, patronage, national prosperity, and that unrestricted freedom, which gives inspiration to the bard, and eloquence to the patriot—that *rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quæ velis et quæ sentias dicere licet*, sometimes dwindling into a degree of fatuity and sottishness, that leave man

little reason to boast of his native superiority over the irrational species. It is certain, however, that though other causes influence the revolutions of opinion, the limited range of the human intellect, and its liability to deception, is the most prominent and operative. The exercise of the reasoning faculties can never attain to the knowledge of many things of which the mind can form infinite conjectures, because it may have innumerable ideas, between which there are certain intermediate relations which can never be discovered; and where the severity of reason can impose no restraint on the excursions of the imagination, opinions will be advanced, and theories formed, which can neither be substantiated nor disproved—Whether the planets be inhabited by beings like us, furnished with five senses, or dissimilarly organized? Whether the use of stars, placed innumerable millions of miles beyond the limits of our system, be to illumine planets of their own, or only to restore to the benighted earth a portion of that light which she has lost in the nocturnal absence of the sun? Whether the soul always thinks? Whether a limited monarchy, or a republic, be best calculated to promote the happiness of mankind? and an infinity of other similar questions, can never be satisfactorily resolved. For though we have clear and distinct ideas of what is understood by men, planets, stars, systems, thought, spirit, monarchy, republic, we have no distinct knowledge of all the relations which the Author of nature has thought proper to establish between some of them, nor of all the possible advantages, disadvantages, difficulties, facilities, and contingencies, that necessarily cling to the other. The government best adapted to an extensive, powerful state, will not equally suit a small state, where there can be neither the same diversity of rank or of property, and where all the people can act in a body. The laws and institutions that are best calculated to promote the happiness of such a state, would never hold together the wheels of government in a rich and powerful state, where justice is warped by private interest, and the glow of patriotism extinguished by the depraving influence of wealth and ambition. The government that would suit the

genius of a mild and peaceable people, would not serve to curb the licentiousness of a bold and ferocious race of men. The government that would suit one age and clime, would not suit another age and clime. As, then, the best form of government in one nation is not the best in another; and as in every nation the best form must always depend on the natural disposition of the people themselves, and their local relations, men may continue to argue for ever on the most perfect system of government without ever agreeing; and whenever men debate the question, I believe it will generally be found, that they are not aware of the intricacy of the subject in which they engage. They should at least recollect, that when they compare different systems of government, they only want to discover which of different imperfect systems is the best; for a perfect system was never established, nor is it, indeed, possible for legislators to form such a system, until they first become acquainted with the human heart, and all the caprices to which it is subject—a science impossible to be attained.

Here, then, is an ample source for the revolutions of opinion:—Wherever the entire of the relations that connect things together cannot be traced, imagination is at liberty to indulge in all the licentiousness of conjecture. Accordingly, we reject many things engrafted on the stock of ancient literature, and posterity will reject many things accredited by us; not that we can prove the ancients were wrong, nor that future ages can prove themselves in the right, but that in matters where reason has not a sufficient clue or data from which, not mere conjectural, but certain, unfailing conclusions can be deduced, she is obliged to give fancy an unlimited rein; and where fools may guess as well as wise men, without a possibility left of proving their error, revolutions of opinion must inevitably ensue.

But if literature was exposed to the caprice of opinion only in matters which are, in their own nature, involved in darkness and uncertainty, and where the researches of reason are guided only by a faint and glimmering light, our knowledge would be far more respectable than it is at present, and the march of intel-

lect would so far have extended the powers of the human mind, that we could have little reason to complain of the shortsightedness, and the imperfections of our intellectual faculties. But, unhappily, many other causes combine to obfuscate the sphere of human intelligence, and consequently to retard the progress of literature. False reasoning is not confined to matters where certainty is unattainable, but is more frequently and more ingeniously exercised, where truth, evidence, and demonstration, are placed within our reach. In our various pursuits through life, we have different objects to attain, and different obstacles to surmount in their attainment; and if we want that virtue which scorns to sacrifice truth and honesty on the altars of private interest and self-love, it is certain, that all our reasonings in private, and all our declamations in public, will be tempered and directed by that ruling passion which we wish to indulge, or that individual object which is the guiding star of all our actions. Immorality is the parent of false logic, which it renders instrumental in vitiating the purity of morals, of religion, and philosophy; and may be said to exert its baneful influence over all the regions of science, except physics and mathematics. If these sciences continue to be cultivated, time, no doubt, will bring them to the utmost perfection of which they are capable; for the *vis inertiae* of the one, and the abstract calculations and measurements of the other, can never interfere with the passions, prejudices, or interests of man. He who cultivates such sciences cannot be influenced by interested motives, nor can he render their perversion instrumental to any interested design. He must, therefore, cultivate them, from a pure, disinterested wish of becoming acquainted with the knowledge which they impart, or of rendering this knowledge of practical utility to man. But does the politician study the laws and relative interests of states and nations from the same sacred thirst of knowledge? This, we apprehend, is much to be doubted; for if we consult only our own experience, and the history of past ages, we shall be tempted to attribute the study of political knowledge to less disinterested motives.

If, then, we except physics and mathematics, it is idle, in the other sciences, to expect that literature should ever remain fixed and permanent. What is there certain in metaphysical knowledge, except what is borrowed from religion? This part, though it cannot pretend to demonstrative certainty, is not, however, like the rest, a mere tissue of subtleties, and idle conjectures, equally offensive to good sense and good taste. It is true, we have here, as in all the other sciences, ingenious reasonings, and subtle distinctions: but he who would confound reasoning with reason, would, in very many instances, confound truth with error. Reason is a faculty of the understanding, seldom brought into action: it is the privilege of great and comprehensive minds alone, to exercise reason in the investigation of difficult and important truths, while reasoning is employed by the most arrant fool as well as by the most casuistical sophist. With what propriety, then, does Moliere put the following words into the mouth of Chrysale—

*Raisonner est l'emploi de toute maison,  
Et le raisonnement en bannit la raison.*

But to enter into an investigation of the motives that lead us into error, where truth is attainable, would be, to give a history of the abuses of litera-

ture, an ample subject in itself for a more extended treatise than the present. These motives, combined with those insuperable difficulties that oppose our progress in the abstruse parts of science, leave no hope, that the human mind shall ever slumber in the lap of certainty. Never shall a period arrive, in the history of the human understanding, when posterity shall sit down, content with those literary treasures which have been prepared for them by their ancestors. Subjects that have been a thousand times handled before, will appear to future writers clothed with circumstances, and affected by relations, that escaped the observation of their predecessors; and accordingly they will present them to the world in a new shape, fashioned agreeably to the peculiarity of their own taste, or, what is more probable, suited to the reigning passions, and ephemeral prejudices, of their age and country. It is a question, however, whether the pleasure emanating from the perfection of literature and science, if it were attained, would be more exquisite than that which we already enjoy, in the novelty of new sentiments and opinions; and whether an imperfect being like man, can derive happiness from any thing perfect in it's own nature, and complete in it's own system.