

illustration of which he promises to devote himself upon some future occasion. The philosophical writings of Mr Stewart, however, are characterized by another remarkable excellence. He never indulges in any speculation which you do not at once pronounce to be sound and incontrovertible,—he keeps constantly in view this great principle, that his object ought to be to employ facts of universal notoriety as means of developing those processes of thought of which such facts may be regarded as the best indications; and while you admire, therefore, the splendour and richness of his eloquence, and perceive that he is a man of the most enlightened views, you also feel this most pleasing conviction, that you may trust yourself to his guidance with the most assured confidence, that he will lead you only to such views as are sanctioned by the universal consent of mankind. This, together with his tendency to indulge in most delightful anticipations of the future progress of the human mind, forms, in fact, as it appears to us, the peculiar charm of this author's philosophy,—and it is pleasing to think, that such qualities, as they are in reality superior to all others, (even when these others have a greater show of exterior splendour,) are also those which awaken most permanently the universal admiration and applause of mankind.

We have already said, that we think the illustrations of the very able author whose work we are now reviewing, are often extended to an undue length. There is, however, another error akin to this, and of still more dangerous consequence, into which, as it seems to us, he is apt to be betrayed. Dr Brown is no doubt a man of infinite ingenuity, but it is also plain, that he has infinite pleasure in displaying his ingenuity. He is hence extremely apt to prefer what is commonly, though we believe erroneously, called the ingenious side of a question. He does not set the same value with Mr Stewart upon a common fact as illustrative of a hidden operation of mind, but he prefers rather to unravel the subject by the help merely of his superior metaphysical acuteness; and has no objection to venture on speculations which we think his enlightened predecessors would instantly have abandoned as

not sufficiently consonant to sound reason, and to the universal feelings of the human mind. We by no means intend to say, that Dr Brown is what we commonly call an unsound philosopher. We believe him to be a man of the very best views on all the great subjects of morals and religion,—and we have often admired the peculiarly sublime descriptions in which he delights to paint the immensity of that universal kingdom of which, with all enlightened thinkers, he habitually considers this “home and rejoicing place of man” to be but a part. We think only that where mere metaphysics are concerned, he is fond of an opportunity of displaying his subtlety without much regard either to the universal feelings of mankind upon the subject, or to the practical tendency of those peculiar opinions which he may happen to be inculcating. We are afraid, however, that this may eventually be of the greatest disadvantage not only to his own lasting fame, but to the permanent utility of any work he may compose; and recollecting the hint which he has given of his intention to review at some future period the whole intellectual nature of man, we cannot conclude without expressing our most serious conviction, that, gifted as this author appears to us to be with metaphysical talents, which never have been surpassed, he will fail in accomplishing the purpose for which those talents were given him; if he permits himself to be seduced by a fondness for abstruse singularities, from eventually producing a work which shall be as remarkable for the solidity of its foundations, as for the rare and exquisite texture of its materials, and which shall not merely awaken the wonder of his contemporaries, but be of essential advantage to the future history of the science which he cultivates.

THOUGHTS ON TASTE.

TASTE is nothing but the different degrees of excellence, in the works of art, which are perceived by the human mind. This definition will be found in the following passage from the works of a French philosopher. “A French philosopher has observed, that the taste of a nation is the result of its genius, and that the taste of a nation is the result of its genius.”

Milton as barbarians, on the score of certain technical improprieties, with assuring you, that “he (Voltaire) had a great deal of taste.” It is their phrase, *Il avoit beaucoup du goût*. To which the proper answer is, that that might be; but that he did not shew it in this case; as the overlooking great and countless beauties, and being taken up only with petty or accidental blemishes, shews as little strength of understanding as it does refinement or elevation of taste. The French author, indeed, allows of Shakespeare, that “he had found a few pearls on his enormous dunghill.” But there is neither truth nor proportion in this sentence, for his works are (to say the least)

“Rich as the oozy bottom of the sea,
With sunken wrack and sunless treasures.”

Genius is the power of producing excellence: taste is the power of perceiving the excellence thus produced in its several sorts and degrees, with all their force, refinement, distinctions, and connections. In other words, taste (as it relates to the productions of art) is strictly the power of being properly affected by works of genius. It is the proportioning admiration to power, pleasure to beauty: it is entire sympathy with the finest impulses of the imagination, not antipathy, not indifference to them. The eye of taste may be said to reflect the impressions of real genius, as the even mirror reflects the objects of nature, in all their clearness and lustre, instead of distorting or diminishing them;

“Or like a gate of steel,
Fronting the sun, receives and renders
back
His figure and his heat.”

To take a pride and pleasure in nothing but defects (and those perhaps of the most paltry obvious, and mechanical kind) is the mark of a vulgar mind. To take a pride and pleasure in nothing but defects (and those perhaps of the most paltry obvious, and mechanical kind) is the mark of a vulgar mind. To take a pride and pleasure in nothing but defects (and those perhaps of the most paltry obvious, and mechanical kind) is the mark of a vulgar mind.

most common-place and prejudiced admirer of these authors knows, as well as Voltaire can tell him, that it is a fault to make a sea-port (we will say) in Bohemia, or to introduce artillery and gunpowder in the war in Heaven. This is common to Voltaire, and the merest English reader: there is nothing in it either way. But what he differs from us in, and, as it is supposed, greatly to his advantage, and to our infinite shame and mortification, is, that this is all that he perceives, or will hear of in Milton or Shakespeare, and that he either knows, or pretends to know, nothing of that prodigal waste, or studied accumulation of grandeur, truth, and beauty, which are to be found in each of these authors. Now, I cannot think, that, to be dull and insensible to so great and such various excellence,—to have no feeling in unison with it, no latent suspicion of the treasures hid beneath our feet, and which we trample upon with ignorant scorn, to be cut off as by a judicial blindness, from that universe of thought and imagination that shifts its wondrous pageant before us, to turn aside from the throng and splendour of airy shapes that fancy weaves for our dazzled sight, and to strut and vapour over a little pettifogging blunder in geography or chronology, which a school-boy, or a village pedagogue, would be ashamed to insist upon, is any proof of the utmost perfection of taste, but the contrary. At this rate, it makes no difference whether Shakespeare wrote his works or not, or whether the critic, who “damns him into everlasting redemption” for a single slip of the pen, ever read them;—he is absolved from all knowledge, taste, or feeling, of the different excellencies, and inimitable creations of the poet's pen,—from any sympathy with the wanderings and the fate of Imogen, the beauty and tenderness of Desdemona, the thoughtful abstraction of Hamlet; his soliloquy on life may never have given him a moment's pause, or touched his breast with one solitary reflection;—the Witches in Macbeth may “lay their choppy fingers on their skinny lips,” without his having any sensation in his pulse, or any sympathy with their strange prophecies. To be dull and insensible to so great and such various excellence,—to have no feeling in unison with it, no latent suspicion of the treasures hid beneath our feet, and which we trample upon with ignorant scorn, to be cut off as by a judicial blindness, from that universe of thought and imagination that shifts its wondrous pageant before us, to turn aside from the throng and splendour of airy shapes that fancy weaves for our dazzled sight, and to strut and vapour over a little pettifogging blunder in geography or chronology, which a school-boy, or a village pedagogue, would be ashamed to insist upon, is any proof of the utmost perfection of taste, but the contrary. At this rate, it makes no difference whether Shakespeare wrote his works or not, or whether the critic, who “damns him into everlasting redemption” for a single slip of the pen, ever read them;—he is absolved from all knowledge, taste, or feeling, of the different excellencies, and inimitable creations of the poet's pen,—from any sympathy with the wanderings and the fate of Imogen, the beauty and tenderness of Desdemona, the thoughtful abstraction of Hamlet; his soliloquy on life may never have given him a moment's pause, or touched his breast with one solitary reflection;—the Witches in Macbeth may “lay their choppy fingers on their skinny lips,” without his having any sensation in his pulse, or any sympathy with their strange prophecies.

ers, where fairies couch in the Midsummer Night's Dream, may never once have steeped his senses in repose. Nor will it avail Milton to "have built high towers in Heaven," nor to have brought down heaven upon earth, nor that he has made Satan rear his giant form before us, "majestic though in ruin," or decked the bridal-bed of Eve with beauty, or clothed her with innocence, "likest heaven," as she ministered to Adam, and his angel guest. Our critic knows nothing of all this, of beauty or sublimity, of thought or passion, breathed in sweet or solemn sounds, with all the magic of verse "in tones and numbers hit;" he lays his finger on the map, and shews you, that there is no sea-port for Shakespeare's weather-beaten travellers to land at in Bohemia, and takes out a list of mechanical inventions, and proves that gunpowder was not known till long after Milton's battle of the angels; and concludes, that every one who, after these profound and important discoveries, finds anything to admire in these two writers, is a person without taste, or any pretensions to it. By the same rule, a thorough-bred critic might prove that Homer was no poet, and the Odyssey a vulgar performance, because Ulysses makes a pun on the name of Noman. Or some other disciple of the same literal school might easily set aside the whole merit of Racine's *Athalie*, or Moliere's *Ecole des Femmes*, and pronounce these *chef-d'œuvres* of art barbarous and Gothic, because the characters in the first address one another (absurdly enough) as *Monsieur* and *Madame*, and because the latter is written in rhyme, contrary to all classical precedent. These little false measures of criticism may be misapplied and retorted without end, and require to be eked out by national antipathy or political prejudice to give them currency and weight. Thus it was in war-time that the author of the "Friend" ventured to lump all the French tragedies together as a smart collection of epigrams, and that the author of the "Excursion," a poem, being portioned of a large poem to

* Why is the word portion here used, as if it were a portion of Scripture?

* These strains that once did swell in Elysian fields.

He takes a portion with judicious care.

(Critic's Secretary's Office.)

be named the Recluse," made bold to call Voltaire a dull prose-writer—with impunity. Such pitiful quackery is a cheap way of setting up for exclusive taste and wisdom, by pretending to despise what is most generally admired, as if nothing could come up to or satisfy that ideal standard of excellence, of which the person bears about the select pattern in his own mind. "Not to admire any thing" is as bad a test of wisdom as it is a rule for happiness. We sometimes meet with individuals who have formed their whole character on this maxim, and who ridiculously affect a decided and dogmatical tone of superiority over others, from an uncommon degree both of natural and artificial stupidity. They are blind to painting—deaf to music—indifferent to poetry; and they triumph in the catalogue of their defects as the fault of these arts, because they have not sense enough to perceive their own want of perception. To treat any art or science with contempt, is only to prove your own incapacity and want of taste for it: to say that what has been done best in any kind is good for nothing, is to say that the utmost exertion of human ability is not equal to the lowest, for the productions of the lowest are worth something, except by comparison with what is better. When we hear persons exclaiming that the pictures at the Marquis of Stafford's, or Mr Angerstein's, or those at the British Gallery, are a heap of trash, we might tell them that they betray in this a want not of taste only, but of common sense, for that these collections contain some of the finest specimens of the greatest masters, and that *that* must be excellent in the productions of human art, beyond which human genius, in any age or country, has not been able to go. Ask these

Now, Mr Wordsworth's poems, though not profane, yet neither are they sacred, to deserve this solemn style, though some of his admirers have gone so far as to compare them for primitive, patriarchal simplicity, to the historical parts of the Bible. Much has been said of the merits and defects of this large poem, which is "a portion of a larger;"—perhaps Thomson's rule has been a double bar to its success. Now as to the poet's pretensions, can he really merit the language of approbation which is lavished upon him?—but really, cannot

very fastidious critics what it is that they do like, and you will soon find, from tracing out the objects of their secret admiration, that their pretended disdain of first-rate excellence is owing either to ignorance of the last refinements of works of genius, or envy at the general admiration which they have called forth. I have known a furious Philippic against the faults of shining talents and established reputation subside into complacent approbation of dull mediocrity, that neither tasked the kindred sensibility of its admirer beyond its natural inertness, nor touched his self-love with a consciousness of inferiority; and that, by never attempting original beauties, and never failing, gave no opportunity to intellectual ingratitude to be plausibly revenged for the pleasure or instruction it had reluctantly received. So there are judges who cannot abide Mr Kean, and think Mr Young an incomparable actor, for no other reason than because he never shocks them with an idea which they had not before. The only excuse for the overdelicacy and supercilious indifference here described, is when it arises from an intimate acquaintance with, and intense admiration of, other and higher degrees of perfection and genius. A person whose mind has been worked up to a lofty pitch of enthusiasm in this way, cannot perhaps descend to notice, or be much delighted with inferior beauties; but then neither will he dwell upon, and be preposterously offended with, slight faults. So that the ultimate and only conclusive proof of taste is even here not indifference, but enthusiasm; and before a critic can give himself airs of superiority for what he despises, he must first lay himself open to reprisals, by telling us what he admires. There we may fairly join issue with him. Without this indispensable condition of all true taste, absolute stupidity must be more than on a par with the most exquisite refinement; and the most formidable drawback of all would be the most impenetrable blockhead. Thus, if we know that Voltaire's contempt of Shakespeare arose from his idolatry of Racine, this may excuse him in a national point of view; but he has no longer any advantage over us; and we must equally despise as well as we can for Mr Wordsworth's not al-

lowing us to laugh at the wit of Voltaire, by laughing now and then at the only author whom he is known to understand and admire!

(To be continued.)

THOMSON'S UNPUBLISHED POEMS.

MR EDITOR,

I OBSERVE, in the last Number of the *Literary Gazette*, a letter respecting some juvenile poems of Thomson, which, it seems, have been lately discovered, and which are said to be preparing for publication, "together with such other original and interesting particulars as may be procured illustrative of the subject."

From the puffing mode in which this "discovery" was previously announced in several of the London journals, I had been led to anticipate nothing better than a piece of arrant book-making,—conjoined with that obtrusive and indelicate disregard for the sacred fame of departed genius, which has so frequently disgraced this gossiping age. The pieces which accompany the above "Letter," by way of specimen, (no doubt the choicest of the collection,) have more than confirmed my suspicions; indeed, I have no hesitation in ranking them among the very worst verses I have ever read. They are at once coarse, incorrect, and prosaic. Yet the possessor of them, or his agent, remarks, with much complacency, that "these samples display sufficient sparks of poetical genius and humour to justify the pieces being submitted to the world, without incurring the least risk of injuring the fame of the illustrious bard by whose hand they were penned."

We may readily allow, that the publication of a few wretched verses is not sufficient to injure the reputation of the author of "The Seasons," and "Castle of Indolence;" his fame, which even the dead weight of his "Liberty" could not shake, can never

* A French teacher, in reading Titus and Berenice with an English pupil, used to exclaim, in captures, at the best passages, "What have you in Shakespeare equal to this?" This showed that he had a taste for Racine, and a power of appreciating his beauties, though he might not be an equal taste for Shakespeare.

wet on its lower side, while the upper was dry; the glass being, in this situation, sufficiently cold to condense the vapour of water heated by the earth, but not enough so to condense the watery vapour of the atmosphere.

But we will not deprive our philosophical readers of a great feast by giving them any more broken morsels. We are sure that no one fond of such inquiries will begin the Essay on Dew, without going on delighted to the end.

We shall now give a short account of Dr Wells's equally beautiful experiments on Single and Double Vision—a subject which has long been a stumbling-block to philosophers. He controverts the opinion first broached by Aguilonius, and adopted by Dechales, Porterfield, Dr Smith of Cambridge, and Dr Reid of Glasgow, that an object is seen single by both eyes, because it is seen by each of them in the same external place, in consequence of an original law of perception: And if we may venture an opinion on a subject so abstruse, we think he has succeeded in making good his ground. We cannot, however, afford room to detail his masterly arguments, which are equally interesting to the metaphysician and the natural philosopher. The experiments are so simple, that most of them may be easily repeated without much apparatus. For example,

“Take three strings of different colours, as red, yellow, and green, and fasten, by means of a pin, one end of each to the same point of a table. Place now their loose ends in such a manner, that when you look at the pin with both eyes, the visual base being parallel to the edge of the table, the red string may lie in the axis of the right eye, the green in that of the left, and the yellow in the common axis. When things are thus disposed, and both eyes directed to the pin, the red and green strings, instead of appearing separate, each in one of the optic axes, and inclined to the visual base, or edge of the table, will now be seen occupying but one place, either together or successively, and at right angles to the visual base or edge of the table: in short, exactly in the situation, which the yellow string in reality possesses; and the yellow string, instead of appearing single in the common axis, and perpendicular to the visual base, will now be seen as two, each inclined to the base; that seen by the right eye, apparently occupying the place in reality possessed by the green string, and that

seen by the left eye, the place of the red string.” p. 41.

Another very elegant experiment, with strings of different colours, will be sufficient, we think, to tempt our optical readers to peruse the whole.

“When a red string was placed in the axis of the right eye, and a green one in that of the left, I said that they both appeared in the common axis. But this is not the only phenomenon to be observed with respect to their apparent number in this experiment. For as the red string is also seen by the left eye, and the green by the right, two other strings become visible, beside that in the common axis, the apparent positions of both of which will be found to be the same with those which ought to follow, from the principles we have laid down. Should now a yellow string be placed between the two former, as in the proof of the second proposition, its appearance to the right eye will bisect the space between the appearances of the red and green strings to that eye; and the like will be true with respect to the appearances of the three strings to the left eye.” p. 44.

So that, objects situated in any line drawn through the mutual intersection of the optic axes to the visual base, do not appear to be in that line, but in another, drawn through the same intersection, to a point in the visual base distant half this base from the similar extremity of the former line towards the left, if the objects be seen by the right eye, but towards the right if seen by the left eye; and this holds quite generally.

The Letter to Lord Kenyon, here for the first time published, though formerly printed for private distribution, is upon a local subject—the terms of admission, into the Faculty of Physicians in London, and might be supposed, on that account, to have no general interest. But we have read it with much pleasure, and we think that it must be interesting to all bodies of literary men, particularly those of the medical profession, as it contains many minute details concerning the state of medical practice in London. Our author has also, in this letter, made many sensible observations on the laws and politics of Britain, which show that his knowledge was by no means confined to his own profession.

With all the merits of these productions, however, we are not sure

that this book is likely to be popular, except among men of science, because experiments and sound philosophy, although very engagingly brought forward in it, take up pages which lighter readers would have liked better if they had contained more wonders of the species, which we shall now briefly lay before them, as a *finale* to our very meagre abstract of its contents.

Account of a Female of the White Race of Mankind, part of whose Skin resembles that of a Negro.

Hannah West, now (1814) in the twenty-third year of her age, was born of English parents in a village in Sussex, about three miles distant from the sea. Her parents had nothing peculiar. Her mother is still alive, and has black hair, hazel eyes, and a fair skin without any mark. Hannah was her only child by her first husband; but her mother has had eleven children by a second marriage, all without any blackness of the skin. The young woman is rather above the middle size, of full habit, and has always enjoyed good health. Her hair is light brown and very soft, her eyes faint blue, her nose prominent and a little aquiline, her lips thin, the skin of her face, neck, and right hand, very fair. In every respect, indeed, she is very unlike a negro; it is, consequently, very singular that the whole of her left shoulder, arm, forearm, and hand, should be of the genuine negro colour, except a small stripe of white skin about two inches broad, which commences a little below the elbow, and runs up to the arm-pit, joining the white skin of the trunk of the body. Dr Wells adds a great many other circumstances respecting this singular female, and gives, in his philosophizing manner, several ingenious reasonings concerning the difference in colour among the human species, to which, as we cannot spare room for detailing them, we refer those who are curious about such speculations. R.

THOUGHTS ON TASTE.*

INSTEAD of making a disposition to find fault a proof of taste, I would

* This Essay is a conclusion of some thoughts on the same subject, in our Number for October 1812.

reverse the rule, and estimate every one's pretensions to taste by the degree of their sensibility to the highest and most various excellence. An indifference to less degrees of excellence is only excusable, as it arises from a knowledge and admiration of higher ones; and a readiness in the detection of faults should pass for refinement only as it is owing to a quick sense and impatient love of beauties. In a word, true taste consists in sympathy, not in antipathy; and the rejection of what is bad is only to be accounted a virtue when it implies a preference of and attachment to what is better.

There is a certain point, which may be considered as the highest point of perfection at which the human faculties can arrive in the conception and execution of certain things: to be able to reach this point in reality is the greatest proof of genius and power; and I imagine that the greatest proof of taste is given in being able to appreciate it when done. For instance, I have heard (and I can believe) that Madame Catalani's manner of singing “Hope told a flattering tale,” was the perfection of singing; and I cannot conceive that it would have been the perfection of taste to have thought nothing at all of it. There was, I understand, a sort of fluttering of the voice and a breathless palpitation of the heart, (like the ruffling of the feathers of the robin-redbreast,) which completely gave back all the uneasy and thrilling voluptuousness of the sentiment; and I contend that the person on whom not a particle of this expression was lost, (or would have been lost, if it had even been finer,) into whom the tones of sweetness or tenderness sink deeper and deeper as they approach the farthest verge of ecstasy or agony, he who has an ear attuned to the trembling harmony, and a heart “pierceable” by pleasure's finest point, is the best judge of music,—not he who remains insensible to the matter himself, or, if you point it out to him, asks, “What of it?” I fancied that I had a triumph some time ago over a critic and connoisseur in music, who thought little of the minuet in Don Giovanni; but the same person redeemed his pretensions to musical taste in my opinion by saying of some passage in Mozart, “This

is a soliloquy equal to any in Hamlet! In hearing the accompaniment in the Messiah of angels' voices to the shepherds keeping watch at night, who has the most taste and delicacy, he who listens in silent rapture to the silver sounds, as they rise in sweetness and soften into distance, drawing the soul from earth to heaven, and making it partaker of the music of the spheres, or he who remains deaf to the summons, and remarks that it is an allegorical conceit?—Which would Handel have been most pleased with, the man who was seen standing at the performance of the Coronation anthem in Westminster Abbey, with his face bathed in tears, and mingling "the drops which sacred joy had engendered" with that ocean of circling sound, or with him who sat with frigid, critical aspect, his heart untouched and his looks unaltered as the marble statue on the wall?—Again, if any one, in looking at Rembrandt's picture of Jacob's Dream, should not be struck with the solemn awe that surrounds it, and with the dazzling flights of angels' wings like steps of golden light, emanations of flame or spirit hovering between earth and sky, and should observe very wisely that Jacob was thrown in one corner of the picture like a bundle of clothes, without power, form, or motion, and should think this a defect, I should say that such a critic might possess great knowledge of the mechanical part of painting, but not an atom of feeling or imagination. † Or who is it that, in

* It is a fashion among the scientific or pedantic part of the musical world to deride Miss Stephens's singing as feeble and insipid. This it is to take things by their contraries. Her excellence does not lie in force or contrast, but in sweetness and simplicity. To give only one instance. Any person who does not feel the beauty of her singing the lines in Antares, "What was my pride is now my shame," &c. in which the notes seem to fall from her lips like languid drops from the bending flower, and her voice softens and dies away with the expiring conflict of passion in her bosom, may console himself with the possession of other faculties, but assuredly he has no ear for music.

† There is a very striking and beautiful picture of this subject by an English landscape painter, (Mr. Adams) in the possession of the Royal Academy. The ap-

looking at the productions of Raphael or Titian, is the person of true taste? He who finds what there is, or who finds what there is not in each? Not he who picks a petty vulgar quarrel with the colouring of Raphael or the drawing of Titian is the true critic and the judicious spectator, but he who broods over the expression of the one till it takes possession of his whole soul, and who dwells on the tones and hues of the other till his eye is saturated with truth and beauty, for by this means he moulds his mind to the study and reception of what is most perfect in form and colour, instead of letting it remain empty, "sweet and garnished," or rather a dull blank, with "knowledge at each entrance quite shut out." He who cavils at the want of drawing in Titian is not the most sensible to it in Raphael; instead of that, he only insists on his want of colouring. He who is offended at Raphael's hardness and monotony is not delighted with the soft, rich pencilling of Titian; he only takes care to find fault with him for wanting that which, if he possessed in the highest degree, he would not admire or understand. And this is easy to be accounted for. First, such a critic has been told what to do, and follows his instructions. Secondly, to perceive the height of any excellence, it is necessary to have the most exquisite sense of that kind of excellence through all its gradations: to perceive the want of any excellence, it is merely necessary to have a negative or abstract notion of the thing, or perhaps only of the name. Or, in other words, any the most crude and mechanical idea of a given quality is a measure of positive deficiency, whereas none but the most refined idea of the same quality can be a standard of superlative merit. To distinguish the finest characteristics of Titian or Ra-

phael, to go along with them in their imitation of Nature, is to be so far like them; to be occupied only with that in which they fell short of others, instead of that in which they soared above them, shows a vulgar, narrow capacity, insensible to any thing beyond mediocrity, and an ambition still more grovelling. To be dazzled by admiration of the greatest excellence, and of the highest works of genius, is natural to the best capacities, and the best natures; envy and dulness are most apt to detect minute blemishes and unavoidable inequalities, as we see the spots in the sun by having its rays blunted by mist or smoke. It may be asked, then, whether mere extravagance and enthusiasm are proofs of taste? And I answer, no, where they are without reason and knowledge. Mere sensibility is not true taste, but sensibility to real excellence is. To admire and be wrapt up in what is trifling or absurd, is a proof of nothing but ignorance or affectation; on the contrary, he who admires most what is most worthy of admiration, (let his raptures or his eagerness to express them be what they may,) shows himself neither extravagant nor "unwise." When Mr. Wordsworth once said that he could read the description of Satan in Milton,

"Nor seem'd
Less than archangel ruin'd, and the excess
Of glory obscur'd,"

ill he felt a certain faintness come over his mind from a sense of beauty and grandeur, I saw no extravagance in this, but the utmost truth of feeling. When the same author, or his friend Mr. Southey, says, that the Ex-gursion is better worth preserving than the Paradise Lost; this appears to me, I confess, a great piece of impertinence, or an unwarrantable stretch of friendship. Nor do I think the preference given by certain celebrated reviewers, of Mr. Rogers's Human Life over Mr. Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, founded on the true principles of poetical justice; for something is better all, better than nothing.

* We have not received a single copy of the new edition of the Human Life, &c. &c. of Mr. Rogers, which we are very anxious to see, and which we are sure will be a great addition to the works of the author.

To hasten to a conclusion of these desultory observations. The highest taste is shown in habitual sensibility to the greatest beauties; the most general taste is shown in a perception of the greatest variety of excellence. Many people admire Milton, and as many admire Pope, while there are but few who have any relish for both. Almost all the disputes on this subject arise, not so much from false, as from confined taste. We suppose that only one thing can have merit; and that, if we allow it to any thing else, we deprive the favourite object of our critical faith of the honours due to it. We are generally right in what we approve ourselves; for liking proceeds from a certain conformity of objects to the taste; as we are generally wrong in condemning what others admire; for our dislike mostly proceeds from our want of taste for what pleases them. Our being totally senseless to what excites extreme delight in those who have as good a right to judge as we have, in all human probability, implies a defect of faculty in us, rather than a limitation in the resources of nature or art. Those who are pleased with the fewest things, know the least; as those who are pleased with every thing, know nothing. Shakespeare makes Mrs. Quickly say of Falstaff, by a pleasant blunder, that "Carnation was a colour he could never abide." So there

Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads only something. We have long intended to give our readers some quotations from the first of these poets, whose late work we have unaccountably passed over; and we hope yet to do so. We owe likewise an amende honorable to Mr. Wordsworth, who, by the way, has now added a Benjamin to his Bell, and we shall certainly give it him one day or other. These are poets whom it is never too late to take up, because they are among our classics, and we speak of them as we do of Pope or Milton. Who told this lively water that Mr. Southey ever produced the Excursion to the Fenside Lark? He might, perhaps, have said, with truth, some such thing in the garden of the two poets. We wish our country would carry his own principles throughout, and think it a point of duty to observe that of Mr. Rogers's Human Life, &c. &c. is a great addition to the works of the author.

are persons who cannot like Claude, because he is not Salvator Rosa; some who cannot endure Rembrandt, and others who would not cross the street to see a Vandyke; one reader does not like the neatness of Junius, and another objects to the extravagance of Burke; and they are all right, if they expect to find in others what is only to be found in their favourite author or artist, but equally wrong if they mean to say, that each of those they would condemn by a narrow and arbitrary standard of taste, has not a peculiar and transcendent merit of his own. The question is not, whether you like a certain excellence, (it is your own fault if you do not,) but whether another possessed it in a very eminent degree. If he did not, who is there that possessed it in a greater—that ranks above him in that particular? Those who are accounted the best, are the best in their line. When we say that Rembrandt was a master of *chiaro-scuro*, for instance, we do not say that he joined to this the symmetry of the Greek statues, but we mean that we must go to him for the perfection of *chiaro-scuro*, and that a Greek statue has not *chiaro-scuro*. If any one objects to Junius's Letters, that they are a tissue of epigrams, we answer, Be it so; it is for that very reason that we admire them. Again, should any one find fault with Mr. Burke's writings as a collection of rhapsodies, the proper answer always would be, Who is there that has written finer rhapsodies? I know an admirer of Don Quixote who can see no merit in Gil Blas, and an admirer of Gil Blas who could never read through Don Quixote. I myself have great pleasure in reading both these authors, and in that respect think I have an advantage over both these critics. It always struck me as a singular proof of good taste, good sense, and liberal thinking, in an old friend who had Paine's Rights of Man and Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution, bound up in one volume, and who said, that, both together, they made a very good book. To agree with the greatest number of good judges; is to be in the right; and good judges are persons of natural sensibility and acquired knowledge.*

* I apprehend that natural is of more importance than acquired sensibility.

On the other hand, it must be owned, there are critics whose praise is a libel, and whose recommendation of any work is enough to condemn it. Men of the greatest genius and originality are not always persons of the most liberal and unprejudiced taste; they have a strong bias to certain qualities themselves, are for reducing others to their own standard, and lie less open to the general impressions of things. This exclusive preference of their own peculiar excellencies to those of others, in writers whose merits have not been sufficiently understood or acknowledged by their contemporaries, chiefly because they were not common-place, may sometimes be seen mounting up to a degree of bigotry and intolerance, little short of insanity. There are some critics I have known who never allow an author any merit till all the world "cry out upon him," and others who never allow another any merit that any one can discover but themselves. So there are connoisseurs who spend their lives and waste their breath in extolling sublime passages in obscure writers, and lovers who choose their mistresses for their ugly faces. This is not taste, but affectation. What is popular is not necessarily vulgar; and that which we try to rescue from fatal obscurity, had in general much better remain in it.

M. N.

ON GOOD AND BAD FAIRIES. *

It was by no means a determined case that all fairies were sentenced to perdition. There were, indeed, two classes or orders of these freakish beings, the Gude Fairies, otherwise called the Seelie Court, and the Wicked Wichts, or Unselie Court. The numbers of the former were augmented chiefly by infants, whose parents or guardians were harsh and cruel, by such as fell insensate through wounds, but not dead, in the day of just battle, by persons otherwise worthy, who

Thus, any one, without having ever been at an opera, may judge of opera dancing, only from having seen (with judicious eyes) a stag bound across a lawn, or a tree wave its branches in the air. In all, the general principles of motion are the same.

This communication was sent as one of the notes to Lady Mary O' Craignethan, in our last Number.

sometimes repined at the hardness of their lot, and, in short, by such whose lives were, in general good, but in a moment of unguardedness, fell into deep sin, and especially allowed themselves peevishly to repine against the just awards of Providence. Thus, in the beautiful romance of Orfee and Heurodis, quoted in the notes to the Lady of the Lake, Orfee

— gan behold about all,
And seigh full liggand within the wall,
Of folk that thither were y-brought,
And thought dead, and ne were nought.
Some stood withouten had,
And some none arme's n'ad,
And some through the body had wound,
And some lay wod y-bound,
And some armed on horse sate,
And some astrangled as they ate,
And some war in water adreint,
And some with fire all for-shreint.
Wives there lay on child-bed,
Some dead, and some awed;
And wonder fele there lay besides,
Right as they sleep, their undertides.
Each was thus in this world y-nome,
With fairy thither y-come.

The numbers of the Unselie Court were recruited, for this was the only one that paid teind to hell, by the abstraction of such persons as deservedly fell wounded in wicked war, of such as splenetically commended themselves to evil beings, and of unmarried mothers stolen from childbed. But by far the greater number of recruits, however, were obtained from amongst unbaptized infants; and tender and affectionate parents never failed unceasingly to watch their offspring till it was *sained* with the holy name of God in baptism. This cruel superstition appears the legitimate offspring of the uncharitable judgment of papists concerning unbaptized children.

To pronounce any of the names of the Deity never failed to dissolve a charm, or at least to prevent the fulfilment of the charmer's intentions. It is related of Sir Michael Scott of Balwearie, that, being once about to go on an expedition to France, he conjured up a fiend in the shape of a powerful black horse to bear him on his journey. While they were crossing the channel, Sir Michael's cunning steed asked his rider what it was that the suld wives of Embro said fore they gaed to bed. The sagacious magician immediately retorted,

What is that to thee,
Mount diablest as' see.

Had he blundered out, according to the devil's expectation, with the Lord's Prayer, Scott would that moment have been precipitated from the back of his infernal charger into the bottom of the sea, and the fiend, with all his brethren, would have been forever released from the tyranny of their irresistible and imperious master.

No evil sprite could endure to be touched with any thing on which the holy name of God was written; and if a fiend commissioned for an evil purpose was commanded in the name of the Trinity by the person whom he was sent to afflict, to become his servant, and turn his powers against his sender, he was compelled to obey. A very curious passage in the romance of Richard Cœur de Lion turns entirely upon this notion. It is long, but perhaps its curiousness may excuse its length.

The Soldan of the Saracens lamenting the havock wherewith Richard is desolating his dominions, challenges him to single combat, but being well aware that he will never be able to overcome him by fair means, he has recourse to magic. He sends a messenger to the English monarch, to offer him a matchless steed to bear him in the approaching combat; one, compared with which,

Favel of Cypre, ne Lyard of price,
Are nought at need as that he is.—
For a thousand pound y. told
Should not that that one be sold.

Richard gladly accepts the combat and offered steed, and this intelligence being reported to the "rich Saudon,"

A noble clerk he sent for then,
A master negromancien,
That conjured, as I you tell,
Through the fiende's craft of hell,
Two strange fiendes of the air,
In likeness of two steeds fair,
Like both of hew and hair,
As they said that were there.
Never was there seen none slike
That one was a mere like.
The other a colt, a noble steed,
Where, were he in only need,
Was never king, ne knight so hold,
That when the dam neigh wold,
Should him hold against his will,
That he would not ren her till,
And kneel adown and suck his dam.

And thereby put his rider's life in the hands of him who was mounted upon the other steed.