

AN
ABRIDGMENT
OF
ELEMENTS OF CRITICISM.

BY THE HONORABLE
HENRY HOME OF KAMES.

EDITED
[REDACTED]

NEW EDITION.

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OF THE AMERICAN EDITOR.

In preparing the present abridgment of Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* for publication, free use has been made of Jamieson's abridgment, published in London in 1823. It has been found necessary, however, to deviate from his plan in several particulars.

The size of the book has been considerably reduced, by omitting portions of which the practical utility was not sufficiently apparent to justify their being retained in a work intended for general use.

All quotations of which the delicacy was in the slightest degree questionable, have been omitted, as also quotations in the ancient and foreign languages.

Certain of the terms used by Lord Kames in explaining the passions and emotions, have been altered with reference to the advanced state of intellectual philosophy.

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Questions have been attached to the whole work, with a view to direct the attention of the student to the leading principles and their illustrations. Some instructors, of course, will dispense with these in examining their pupils, and question them, in their own way, on the text: but it is presumed that the value of the work will not be diminished, even for these instructors, by the addition of the questions.

The mode, in which the examples are to be recited, and their fitness pointed out, by the pupil, must of course be left to the judgment of the instructor.

The Editor indulges the hope, that the present attempt to bring a standard work of criticism within reach of the inmates of our common schools and academies, may meet with the approbation of those of his fellow-citizens who feel interested in the important subject of general education.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE design of the present undertaking is, to examine the sensitive branch of human nature, to trace the objects that are naturally agreeable, as well as those that are naturally disagreeable; and by these means to discover, if we can, what are the genuine principles of the fine arts. The man who aspires to be a critic in these arts, must pierce still deeper: he must acquire a clear perception of what objects are lofty, what low, what proper or improper, what manly, and what mean or trivial. Hence a foundation for reasoning upon the taste of any individual, and for passing sentence upon it. Where it is conformable to principles, we can pronounce with certainty that it is correct; otherwise, that it is incorrect, and perhaps whimsical. Thus the fine arts, like morals, become a rational science; and, like morals, may be cultivated to a high degree of refinement.

Manifold are the advantages of criticism, when thus studied as a rational science. In the first place, a thorough acquaintance with the principles of the fine arts, redoubles the pleasure we derive from them. To the man who resigns himself entirely to sentiment or feeling, without interposing any sort of judgment, poetry, music and painting, are mere pastime: in the prime of life, indeed, they are delightful, being supported by the force of novelty and the heat of imagination: but in time they lose their relish, and are generally neglected in the maturity of life, which disposes to more serious and more important occupations. To those who deal in criticism as a regular science, governed by just principles, and giving scope to judgment as well as to fancy, the fine arts are a favorite entertainment; and in old age they maintain that relish which they produce in the morning of life.

In the next place, a philosophic inquiry into the principles of the fine arts, inures the reflecting mind to the most enticing sort of logic: the practice of reasoning upon subjects so agreeable, tends to a habit; and a habit, strengthening the reasoning faculties, prepares the mind for entering into subjects more intricate and abstract. To have, in that respect, a just conception of the importance of criticism, we need but reflect upon the common method of education; which, after some years spent in acquiring languages, hurries us, without the least preparatory discipline,

into the most profound philosophy. A more effectual method to alienate the tender mind from abstract science, is beyond the reach of invention: and accordingly, with respect to such speculations, the bulk of our youth contract a sort of hobgoblin terror, which is seldom if ever subdued. Those who apply to the arts, are trained in a very different manner: they are led, step by step, from the easier parts of the operation, to what are more difficult; and are not permitted to make a new motion till they are perfected in those which go before. Thus the science of criticism may be considered as a middle link, connecting the different parts of education into a regular chain. This science furnishes an inviting opportunity to exercise the judgment: we delight to reason upon subjects that are equally pleasant and familiar: we proceed gradually from the simpler to the more involved cases: and in a due course of discipline, custom, which improves all our faculties, bestows acuteness on that of reason, sufficient to unravel all the intricacies of philosophy.

Nor ought it to be overlooked, that the reasonings employed on the fine arts, are of the same kind with those which regulate our conduct. Mathematical and metaphysical reasonings have no tendency to improve social intercourse; nor are they applicable to the common affairs of life: but a just taste of the fine arts, derived from rational principles, furnishes elegant subjects for conversation, and prepares us for acting in the social state with dignity and propriety.

The science of rational criticism tends to improve the heart no less than the understanding. It tends, in the first place, to moderate the selfish affections: by sweetening and harmonizing the temper, it is a strong antidote to the turbulence of passion and violence of pursuit: it procures to a man so much mental enjoyment, that in order to be occupied, he is not tempted to deliver up his youth to hunting, gaming, drinking; nor his middle age to ambition; nor his old age to avarice. Pride and envy, two disgusting passions, find in the constitution no enemy more formidable than a delicate and discerning taste: the man upon whom nature and culture have bestowed this blessing, feels great delight in the virtuous dispositions and actions of others: he loves to cherish them, and to publish them to the world: faults and failings, it is true, are to him not less obvious; but these he avoids, or removes out of sight, because they give him pain. On the other hand, a man void of taste, upon whom even striking

beauties make but a faint impression, indulges pride or envy without control, and loves to brood over errors and blemishes; in a word, there are other passions, that, upon occasion, may disturb the peace of society more than those mentioned; but not another passion is so unwearied an antagonist to the sweets of social intercourse: pride and envy put a man perpetually in opposition to others, and dispose him to relish bad more than good qualities, even in a companion. How different that disposition of mind, where every virtue in a companion or neighbor, is, by refinement of taste, set in its strongest light, and defects or blemishes natural to all are suppressed, or kept out of view?

In the next place, delicacy of taste tends not less to invigorate the social affections, than to moderate those that are selfish. To be convinced of that tendency, we need only reflect that delicacy of taste necessarily heightens our feeling of pain and pleasure; and of course our sympathy, which is the capital branch of every social passion. Sympathy invites a communication of joys and sorrows, hopes and fears: such exercise, soothing and satisfactory in itself, is necessarily productive of mutual good-will and affection.

One other advantage of criticism is reserved to the last place, being of all the most important; which is, that it is a great support to morality. I insist on it with entire satisfaction, that no occupation attaches a man more to his duty, than that of cultivating a taste in the fine arts: a just relish for what is beautiful, proper, elegant, and ornamental, in writing or painting, in architecture or gardening, is a fine preparation for the same just relish of these qualities in character and behavior. To the man who has acquired a taste so acute and accomplished, every action, wrong or improper, must be highly disgusting: if, in any instance, the overbearing power of passion sway him from his duty, he returns to it with a doubled resolution never to be swayed a second time: he has now an additional motive to virtue, a conviction derived from experience, that happiness depends on regularity and order, and that disregard to justice or propriety never fails to be punished with shame and remorse.

With respect to the present undertaking, it is not the author's intention to compose a regular treatise upon each of the fine arts; but only in general to exhibit their fundamental principles, drawn from human nature, the true source of criticism. The fine arts are intended to entertain us, by making pleasant impressions; and,

by that circumstance, are distinguished from the useful arts: but in order to make pleasant impressions, we ought, as above hinted, to know what objects are naturally agreeable, and what naturally disagreeable. That subject is here attempted, so far as necessary for unfolding the genuine principles of the fine arts; and the author assumes no merit from his performance, but that of evincing, perhaps more distinctly than hitherto has been done, that these principles, as well as every just rule of criticism, are founded upon the sensitive part of our nature. What the author has discovered or collected upon that subject, he chooses to impart in the gay and agreeable form of criticism; imagining that this form will be more relished, and perhaps be not less instructive, than a regular and labored disquisition. His plan is, to ascend gradually to principles, from facts and experiments; instead of beginning with the former, handled abstractedly, and descending to the latter. But though criticism be thus his only declared aim, he will not disown, that all along it has been his view to explain the nature of man, considered as a sensitive being, capable of pleasure and pain: and though he flatters himself with having made some progress in that important science, he is however too sensible of its extent and difficulty, to undertake it professedly, or to avow it as the chief purpose of the present work.

REVIEW.

What is the design of this work?
 What is requisite in order to become a critic in the fine arts?
 What do the fine arts thus become?
 What is the first advantage which arises from an acquaintance with the principles of the fine arts?
 To whom are the fine arts a favorite entertainment?
 What habit is acquired by philosophic inquiry into the principles of the fine arts?
 How may the science of criticism be considered?
 Of what kind are the reasonings employed on the fine arts?
 What does a just taste for the fine arts furnish?
 How does the science of criticism tend to improve the heart?
 To what vices is a discerning taste an enemy?
 In what does the man of taste delight?
 What does delicacy of taste invigorate?
 What is the last and most important advantage of criticism?
 What occupation particularly attaches a man to his duty?
 What additional motive to virtue has the man of taste?
 From what are the fundamental principles of criticism drawn?
 Upon what is every just rule of criticism founded?
 What is the author's plan?
 What other object besides the science of criticism has the author kept in view?

- Why are mixed allegories intolerable in a picture?
 What examples are mentioned?
 When is a metaphor improper?
 Why is Macbeth's speech faulty?
 Why are the speeches of Calista and Chalmont faulty?
 Point out the metaphors in the speeches of Gonzalez and Macduff.
 Why is the metaphor in Wolsey's speech commended?
 What is meant by *Figure of Speech*?—by figurative sense?
 What is the rule concerning the figurative sense?
 What are the two objects presented by a figurative expression called?—how are they signified?
 Analyze the sentence "*youth is the morning of life*,"—"*Imperious ocean*."
 What power has this figure?
 How do words acquire beauty?
 Of what use is this acquired beauty in figures?
 How may the familiarity of proper names be prevented?
 Give an example.
 What is the effect of this figure on language?
 What besides subjects may be expressed figuratively?
 Give examples of subjects—of qualities—of actions—of an effect for the cause—of a cause for the effect—of the relation of resemblance.
 Give examples of words which have lost their figurative power

CHAPTER XXI.

Narration and Description.

HORACE, and many critics after him, exhort writers to choose a subject adapted to their genius. Such observations would multiply rules of criticism without end; and at any rate belong not to the present work, the object of which is human nature in general, and what is common to the species. But though the choice of a subject comes not under such a plan, the manner of execution comes under it; because the manner of execution is subjected to general rules, derived from principles common to the species. These rules, as they concern the things expressed, as well as the language or expression, require a division of this chapter into two parts; first of thoughts, and next of words. I pretend not to justify this division as entirely accurate:

for, in discoursing of thoughts, it is difficult to abstract altogether from the words; and still more difficult, in discoursing of words, to abstract altogether from the thought.

The first rule is, That in history the reflections ought to be chaste and solid; for while the mind is intent upon truth, it is little disposed to the operations of the imagination. Strada's *Belgic History* is full of poetical images, which, discording with the subject, are unpleasant; and they have a still worse effect, by giving an air of fiction to a genuine history. Such flowers ought to be scattered with a sparing hand, even in epic poetry; and at no rate are they proper till the reader be warmed, and by an enlivened imagination be prepared to relish them; in that state of mind they are agreeable: but while we are sedate and attentive to an historical chain of facts, we reject with disdain every fiction. This *Belgic History* is indeed wofully vicious both in matter and in form: it is stuffed with frigid and unmeaning reflections; and its poetical flashes, even laying aside their impropriety, are mere tinsel.

Second, Vida,* following Horace, recommends a modest commencement of an epic poem; giving for a reason, that the writer ought to husband his fire. This reason has weight; but what is said above suggests a reason still more weighty: bold thoughts and figures are never relished till the mind be heated and thoroughly engaged, which is not the reader's case at the commencement. Homer introduces not a single simile in the first book of the *Iliad*, nor in the first book of the *Odyssey*. On the other hand, Shakspeare begins one of his plays with a sentiment too bold for the most heated imagination:

Bedford. Hung be the heav'ns with black, yield day
to night!

Comets, importing change of times and states,
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky,
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars,

* Poet. lib. 2. l. 30

That have consented unto Henry's death!
 Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long!
 England ne'er lost a king of so much worth.

FIRST PART HENRY VI.

The passage with which Strada begins his history is too poetical for a subject of that kind; and at any rate, too high for the beginning of a grave performance. A third reason ought to have no less influence than either of the former, That a man, who, upon his first appearance, strains to make a figure, is too ostentatious to be relished. Hence, the first sentences of a work ought to be short, natural, and simple. Cicero, in his oration for the poet Archias, errs against this rule; his reader is out of breath at the very first period; which seems never to end. Burnet begins the History of his Own Times with a period long and intricate.

A third rule or observation is, That where the subject is intended for entertainment solely, not for instruction, a thing ought to be described as it appears, not as it is in reality. In running, for example, the impulse upon the ground is proportioned in some degree to the celerity of motion; though in appearance it is otherwise; for a person in swift motion seems to skim the ground, and scarcely to touch it.

Fourth, In narration as well as in description, objects ought to be painted so accurately as to form in the mind of the reader distinct and lively images. Every useless circumstance ought indeed to be suppressed, because every such circumstance loads the narration; but if a circumstance be necessary, however slight, it cannot be described too minutely. The force of language consists in raising complete images; which have the effect to transport the reader as by magic into the very place of the important action, and to convert him as it were into a spectator, beholding every thing that passes. The narrative in an epic poem ought to rival a picture in the liveliness and accuracy of its representations: no circumstance must

be omitted that tends to make a complete image; because an imperfect image, as well as any other imperfect conception, is cold and uninteresting. I shall illustrate this rule by several examples.

Shakspeare says,* "You may as well go about to turn the sun to ice by fanning in his face with a *peacock's feather*." The peacock's feather, not to mention the beauty of the object, completes the image: an accurate image cannot be formed of that fanciful operation, without conceiving a particular feather; and one is at a loss when this is neglected in the description. Again, "The rogues slighted me into the river with as little remorse as they would have drown'd a bitch's blind puppies, fifteen i' th' litter."†

Old Lady. You would not be a queen?

Anne. No; not for all the riches under heaven.

Old Lady. 'Tis strange: a threepence bow'd would hire me, old as I am, to queen it. HENRY VIII.—ACT II. Sc. 5.

In the following passage, the action, with all its material circumstances, is represented so much to the life, that it would scarce appear more distinct to a real spectator; and it is the manner of description that contributes greatly to the sublimity of the passage:

He spake; and, to confirm his words, out flew
Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
Of mighty cherubim; the sudden blaze
Far round illumin'd hell: highly they rag'd
Against the Highest, and fierce with grasped arms
Clash'd on their sounding shields the din of war,
Hurling defiance toward the vault of heav'n.

MILTON.—BOOK I.

A passage I am to cite from Shakspeare, falls not much short of that now mentioned, in particularity of description:

O you hard hearts! you cruel men of Rome!
Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,

* Henry V. Act IV. Sc. 4.

† Merry Wives of Windsor, Act III. Sc. 5.

Your infants in your arms; and there have sat
 The livelong day, with patient expectation,
 To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome;
 And when you saw his chariot but appear,
 Have you not made an universal shout,
 That Tiber trembled underneath his banks,
 To hear the replication of your sounds,
 Made in his concave shores?

JULIUS CÆSAR.—ACT I. Sc. 1.

The following passage is scarce inferior to either of those mentioned:

Far before the rest, the son of Ossian comes; bright in the smiles of youth, fair as the first beams of the sun. His long hair waves on his back: his dark brow is half beneath his helmet. The sword hangs loose on the hero's side: and his spear glitters as he moves. I fled from his terrible eye, king of high Temora.

FINGAL.

The *Henriade* of Voltaire errs greatly against the foregoing rule: every incident is touched in a summary way, without ever descending to circumstances. This manner is good in a general history, the purpose of which is to record important transactions: but in a fable it is cold and uninteresting; because it is impracticable to form distinct images of persons or things represented in a manner so superficial.

It is observed above, that every useless circumstance ought to be suppressed. The crowding such circumstances is, on the one hand, no less to be avoided, than the conciseness for which Voltaire is blamed, on the other. In the *Æneid*,* Barce, the nurse of Sichæus, whom we never hear of before nor after, is introduced for a purpose not more important than to call Anna to her sister Dido; and that it might not be thought unjust in Dido, even in this trivial circumstance, to prefer her husband's nurse before her own, the poet takes care to inform his reader, that Dido's nurse was dead.

As an appendix to the foregoing rule, I add the following observation, That, to make a sudden and strong impression, some single circumstance, happily selected, has more power than the most-labored description.

* Lib. 4. l. 632.

Macbeth, mentioning to his lady some voices he heard while he was murdering the king, says—

There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried Murder!
They wak'd each other; and I stood and heard them:
But they did say their prayers, and address them
Again to sleep.

Lady. There are two lodg'd together.

Macbeth. One cried, God bless us! and Amen the other;
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
Listening their fear, I could not say Amen,
When they did say, God bless us.

Lady. Consider it not so deeply.

Macbeth. But wherefore could not I pronounce Amen?
I had most need of blessing, and Amen
Stuck in my throat.

Lady. These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; so, it will make us mad.

Macbeth. Methought I heard a voice cry, Sleep no more!
Macbeth doth murder sleep! &c. ACT II. Sc. 3.

Alphonso, in the *Mourning Bride*, shut up in the same prison where his father had been confined:

In a dark corner of my cell I found
This paper: what it is this light will show.

"If my Alphonso"—Ha! [Reading.]

"If my Alphonso live, restore him Heav'n;
Give me more weight, crush my declining years
With bolts, with chains, imprisonment, and want;
But bless my son, visit not him for me."

It is his hand: this was his pray'r—Yet more:

"Let ev'ry hair, which sorrow by the roots [Reading.]

Tears from my hoary and devoted head,

Be doubled in thy mercies to my son:

Not for myself, but him, hear me, all-gracious"—

'Tis wanting what should follow—Heav'n should follow,

But 'tis torn off—Why should that word alone

Be torn from his petition? 'Twas to Heav'n,

But Heav'n was deaf, Heav'n heard him not; but thus,

Thus as the name of Heav'n from this is torn,

So did it tear the ears of mercy from

His voice, shutting the gates of pray'r against him.

If piety be thus debarr'd access

On high, and of good men the very best

Is singled out to bleed, and bear the scourge,

What is reward? or, What is punishment?

But who shall dare to tax eternal justice?

MOURNING BRIDE.—ACT III. Sc. 1.

This incident is a happy invention, and a mark of uncommon genius

Describing Prince Henry:

I saw young Harry, with his beaver on,
His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury;
And vaulted with such ease into his seat,
As if an angel dropt down from the clouds,
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.

FIRST PART HENRY VI.—ACT IV. Sc. 2.

King Henry. Lord Cardinal, if thou think'st on Heaven's
bliss,

Hold up thy hand, make signal of thy hope.—
He dies, and makes no sign!

SECOND PART HENRY VI.—ACT III. Sc. 10

The same author, speaking ludicrously of an army
debilitated with diseases, says—

Half of them dare not shake the snow from off their cassocks,
lest they shake themselves to pieces.

I have seen the walls of Balclutha, but they were desolate. The
flame had resounded in the halls; and the voice of the people is
heard no more. The stream of Clutha was removed from its place
by the fall of the walls. The thistle shook there its lonely head:
the moss whistled to the wind. The fox looked out from the win-
dows: and the rank grass of the wall waved round his head. Deso-
late is the dwelling of Morna: silence is in the house of her fathers.

FINGAL.

To draw a character is the master-stroke of descrip-
tion. In this Tacitus excels; his portraits are natural
and lively, not a feature wanting nor misplaced. Shak-
speare, however, exceeds Tacitus in liveliness; some
characteristical circumstance being generally invented,
or laid hold of, which paints more to the life than many
words. The following instance will explain my mean-
ing, and, at the same time, prove my observation to be
just:

Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,
Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
Sleep when he wakes, and creep into the jaundice,
By being peevish? I tell thee what, Antonio,
(I love thee, and it is my love that speaks.)
There are a sort of men, whose visages
Do cream and mantle like a standing pond;
And do a wilful stillness entertain,
With purpose to be dress'd in an opinion

Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit;
As who should say, I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!
O my Antonio, I do know of those,
That therefore only are reputed wise,
For saying nothing.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.—ACT I. Sc. 2.

Again:

Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice; his reasons are like two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff; you shall seek all day ere you find them, and when you have them, they are not worth the search. *IBID.*

In the following passage, a character is completed by a single stroke:

Shallow. O the mad days that I have spent; and to see how many of mine old acquaintance are dead.

Silence. We shall all follow, Cousin.

Shallow. Certain. 'Tis certain, very sure. Death (as the Psalmist saith) is certain to all: all shall die. How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?

Slender. Truly, Cousin, I was not there.

Shallow. Death is certain. Is old Double of your town living yet?

Silence. Dead, Sir.

Shallow. Dead! see, see; he drew a good bow: and dead. He shot a fine shoot. How a score of ewes now?

Silence. Thereafter as they be. A score of good ewes may be worth ten pounds.

Shallow. And is old Double dead?

SECOND PART HENRY IV.—ACT III. Sc. 3.

Congreve has an inimitable stroke of this kind in his comedy of *Love for Love*:

Ben Legend. Well, father, and how do all at home? how does brother Dick, and brother Val?

Sir Sampson. Dick! body o' me, Dick has been dead these two years. I writ you word when you were at Leghorn.

Ben. Mess, that's true: marry, I had forgot. Dick's dead, as you say. *ACT III. Sc. 6.*

Falstaff, speaking of ancient Pistol:

He's no swaggerer, hostess: a tame cheater, i' faith; you may stroke him as gently as a puppy-greyhound; he will not swagger with a Barbary hen, if her feathers turn back in any show of resistance.

SECOND PART HENRY IV.—ACT II. Sc. 9.

Ossian, among his other excellencies, is eminently successful in drawing characters: and he never fails

to delight his reader with the beautiful attitudes of his heroes. Take the following instances:

O Oscar! bend the strong in arm; but spare the feeble hand. Be thou a stream of many tides against the foes of thy people; but like the gale that moves the grass to those who ask thine aid. —So Tremor lived; such Trathal was; and such has Fingal been. My arm was the support of the injured; and the weak rested behind the lightning of my steel.

We heard the voice of joy on the coast, and we thought that the mighty Cathmore came. Cathmore, the friend of strangers! the brother of red-haired Cairbar. But their souls were not the same; for the light of heaven was in the bosom of Cathmore. His towers rose on the banks of Atha; seven paths led to his halls: seven chiefs stood on these paths, and called the stranger to the feast. But Cathmore dwelt in the wood to avoid the voice of praise.

Dermid and Oscar were one: they reaped the battle together. Their friendship was strong as their steel: and death walked between them to the field. They rush on the foe like two rocks falling from the brow of Ardven. Their swords are stained with the blood of the valiant: warriors faint at their name. Who is equal to Oscar but Dermid? Who to Dermid but Oscar?

Son of Comhal, replied the chief, the strength of Morni's arm has failed. I attempt to draw the sword of my youth, but it remains in its place: I throw the spear, but it falls short of the mark: and I feel the weight of my shield. We decay like the grass of the mountain, and our strength returns no more. I have a son, O Fingal! his soul has delighted in the actions of Morni's youth; but his sword has not been fitted against the foe, neither has his fame begun. I come with him to battle, to direct his arm. His renown will be a sun to my soul in the dark hour of my departure. O that the name of Morni were forgot among the people! that the heroes would only say, "Behold the father of Gaul."

Some writers, through heat of imagination, fall into contradiction; some are guilty of downright absurdities; and some even rave like madmen. Against such capital errors, one cannot be more effectually warned than by collecting instances.

When first young Maro, in his boundless mind,
A work t' outlast *immortal* Rome design'd.

ESSAY ON CRITICISM, l. 130.

The following are examples of absurdities:

He fled; but flying left his life behind. *ILIAD*, xi. 433

Full through his neck the weighty falchion sped;
Along the pavement roll'd the muttering head.

ODYSSEY, xxii. 365.

The last article is of raving, like one mad. Cleopatra, speaking to the asp:

Welcome, thou kind-deceiver,
Thou best of thieves; who, with an easy key,
Dost open life, and unperceiv'd by us,
Ev'n steal us from ourselves; discharging so
Death's dreadful office, better than himself;
Touching our limbs so gently into slumber,
That Death stands by, deceiv'd by his own image,
And thinks himself but Sleep.

DRYDEN.—ALL FOR LOVE, ACT V.

Reasons that are common and known to every one, ought to be taken for granted; to express them is childish, and interrupts the narration.

Having discussed what observations occurred upon the thoughts, or things, expressed, I proceed to what more peculiarly concerns the language or verbal dress. The language proper for expressing passion, being handled in a former chapter, several observations there made are applicable to the present subject; particularly, that as words are intimately connected with the ideas they represent, the emotions raised by the sound and by the sense, ought to be concordant. An elevated subject requires an elevated style; what is familiar, ought to be familiarly expressed; a subject that is serious and important, ought to be clothed in plain nervous language; a description, on the other hand, addressed to the imagination, is susceptible of the highest ornaments that sounding words and figurative expression can bestow upon it.

I shall give a few examples of the foregoing rules. A poet of any genius is not apt to dress a high subject in low words; and yet blemishes of that kind are found even in classical works:

Not one looks backward, onward still he goes,
Yet ne'er looks forward farther than his nose.

ESSAY ON MAN, Ep. iv. 223.

On the other hand, to raise the expression above the tone of the subject, is a fault than which nothing is more common. Take the following instances:

No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day,
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell;
And the king's rouse the hearers shall bruit again,
Respeaking earthly thunder.

HAMLET.—ACT I. Sc. 2.

In the inner room
I spy a winking lamp, that weakly strikes
The ambient air, scarce kindling into light.

SOUTHERN.—FATE OF CAPUA, ACT 3.

The following passage, intended, one would imagine as a receipt to boil water, is altogether burlesque, by the labored elevation of the diction:

A massy caldron of stupendous frame
They brought, and plac'd it o'er the rising flame:
Then heap the lighted wood; the flame divides
Beneath the vase, and climbs around the sides:
In its wide womb they pour the rushing stream:
The boiling water bubbles to the brim.

ILIAD, XVIII. 405.

The language of Homer is suited to his subject, no less accurately than the actions and sentiments of his heroes are to their characters. Virgil, in that particular, falls short of perfection: his language is stately throughout; and though he descends at times to the simplest branches of cookery, roasting and boiling, for example, yet he never relaxes a moment from the high tone.* In adjusting his language to his subject, no writer equals Swift. I can recollect but one exception, which, at the same time, is far from being gross: *The Journal of a Modern Lady* is composed in a style blending sprightliness with familiarity, perfectly suited to the subject: in one passage, however, the poet, deviating from that style, takes a tone above his subject. The passage I have in view, begins l. 116, *But let me now awhile survey*, &c. and ends at l. 135.

It is proper to be observed upon this head, that writers of inferior rank are continually upon the stretch to enliven and enforce their subject by exaggeration and superlatives. This unluckily has an effect contrary to what is intended; the reader, disgusted with

* See *Æneid*, lib. i. 188—219.

language that swells above the subject, is led by contrast to think more meanly of the subject than it may possibly deserve. A man of prudence, beside, will be no less careful to husband his strength in writing than in walking; a writer too liberal of superlatives, exhausts his whole stock upon ordinary incidents, and reserves no share to express, with greater energy, matters of importance.*

Many writers of that kind abound so in epithets, as if poetry consisted entirely in high-sounding words. Take the following instance:

When black-brow'd Night her dusky mantle spread,
And wrapt in solemn gloom the sable sky;
When soothing Sleep her opiate dews had shed,
And seal'd in silken slumber ev'ry eye:
My wakeful thoughts admit no balmy rest,
Nor the sweet bliss of soft oblivion share;
But watchful woe distracts my aching breast,
My heart the subject of corroding care:
From haunts of men, with wand'ring steps and slow,
I solitary steal, and soothe my pensive woe.

Here every substantive is faithfully attended by some tumid epithet; like young master, who cannot walk abroad without having a laced livery-man at his heels. Thus, in reading without taste, an emphasis is laid on every word; and in singing without taste, every note is graced. Such redundancy of epithets, instead of pleasing, produces satiety and disgust.

The power of language to imitate thought, is not confined to the capital circumstances above mentioned; it reacheth even the slighter modifications. Slow action, for example, is imitated by words pronounced slow: labor, or toil, by words harsh or rough in their sound. But this subject has been already handled.

* Montaigne, reflecting upon the then present modes, observes that there never was, at any time, so abject and servile prostitution of words in the addresses made by people of fashion to one another; the humblest tenders of life and soul; no professions under that of devotion and adoration; the writer constantly declaring himself a vassal, nay, a slave; so that when any more serious occasion of friendship or gratitude requires more genuine professions, words are wanting to express them.

In dialogue-writing, the condition of the speaker is chiefly to be regarded in framing the expression. The sentinel in *Hamlet*, interrogated with relation to the ghost, Whether his watch had been quiet? answers with great propriety for a man in his station, "Not a mouse stirring."*

I proceed to a second remark, no less important than the former. No person of reflection but must be sensible, that an incident makes a stronger impression on an eye-witness than when heard at second-hand.—Writers of genius, sensible that the eye is the best avenue to the heart, represent every thing as passing in our sight; and, from readers or hearers, transform us, as it were, into spectators: a skilful writer conceals himself, and presents his personages; in a word, every thing becomes dramatic as much as possible. Plutarch observes, that Thucydides makes his reader a spectator, and inspires him with the same passions as if he were an eye-witness; and the same observation is applicable to our countryman Swift. From this happy talent arises that energy of style, which is peculiar to him; he cannot always avoid narration; but the pencil is his choice, by which he bestows life and coloring upon his objects. Pope is richer in ornament, but possesseth not in the same degree the talent of drawing from the life. A translation of the sixth satire of Horace, begun by the former and finished by the latter, affords the fairest opportunity for a comparison. Pope obviously imitates the picturesque manner of his friend; yet every one of taste must be sensible, that the imitation, though fine, falls short of the original. In other instances, where

* One can scarce avoid smiling at the blindness of a certain critic, who, with an air of self-sufficiency, condemns this expression as low and vulgar. A French poet, says he, would express the same thought in a more sublime manner: "Mais tout dort, et l'armée, et les vents, et Neptune." And he adds, "The English poet may please at London, but the French everywhere else."

Pope writes in his own style, the difference of manner is still more conspicuous.

Abstract or general terms have no good effect in any composition for amusement; because it is only of particular objects that images can be formed. Shakspeare's style in that respect is excellent: every article in his descriptions is particular, as in nature; and if, accidentally, a vague expression slip in, the blemish is discernible by the bluntness of its expression.

In the fine arts, it is a rule to put the capital objects in the strongest point of view; and even to present them oftener than once, where it can be done. In history-painting, the principal figure is placed in the front, and in the best light: an equestrian statue is placed in the centre of streets, that it may be seen from many places at once. In no composition is there greater opportunity for this rule than in writing;

Full many a lady
I've ey'd with best regard, and many a time
Th' harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
Brought my too diligent ear; for several virtues
Have I lik'd several women, never any
With so full soul, but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she own'd,
And put it to the foil. But you, O you,
So perfect, and so peerless, are created
Of ev'ry creature's best. *TEMPER.—Act III. Sc. 1*

Orlando. Whate'er you are
That in this desert inaccessible,
Under the shade of melancholy boughs,
Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time;
If ever you have look'd on better days;
If ever been where bells have knoll'd to church;
If ever sat at any good man's feast;
If ever from your eyelids wip'd a tear,
And know what 'tis to pity and be pitied;
Let gentleness my strong enforcement be,
In the which hope I blush and hide my sword.

Duke sen. True is it that we have seen better days;
And have with holy bell been knoll'd to church;
And sat at good men's feasts; and wip'd our eyes
Of drops that sacred pity had engender'd:
And therefore sit you down in gentleness,
And take upon command what help we have,
That to your wanting may be minister'd.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

With thee conversing I forget all time:
 All seasons and their change, all please alike.
 Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
 With charm of earliest birds; pleasant the sun,
 When first on this delightful land he spreads
 His orient beams, on herbs, tree, fruit, and flow'r,
 Glist'ning with dew; fragrant the fertile earth
 After soft showers; and sweet the coming on
 Of grateful evening mild, and silent night
 With this her solemn bird, and this fair moon,
 And these the gems of heav'n, her starry train.
 But neither breath of morn, when she ascends
 With charm of earliest bird, nor rising sun
 On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, flow'r,
 Glist'ning with dew, nor fragrance after showers,
 Nor grateful evening mild, nor silent night,
 With this her solemn bird, nor walk by moon
 Or glitt'ring starlight, without thee is sweet.

PARADISE LOST.—BOOK IV. l. 634.

The repetitions in Homer, which are frequent, have been the occasion of much criticism. Suppose we were at a loss about the reason, might not taste be sufficient to justify them? At the same time, we are at no loss about the reason; they evidently make the narration dramatic, and have an air of truth, by making things appear as passing in our sight. But such repetitions are unpardonable in a didactic poem. In one of Hesiod's poems of that kind, a long passage occurs twice in the same chapter.

A concise comprehensive style is a great ornament in narration; and superfluity of unnecessary words, no less than of circumstances, a great nuisance. A judicious selection of the striking circumstances, clothed in a nervous style, is delightful. In this style, Tacitus excels all writers ancient and modern.

After Tacitus, Ossian in that respect justly merits the place of distinction. One cannot go wrong for examples in any part of the book; and at the first opening the following instance meets the eye:

Nathos clothed his limbs in shining steel. The stride of the chief is lovely; the joy of his eye terrible. The wind rustles in his hair. Carthula is silent at his side: her look is fixed on the chief. Striving to hide the rising sigh, two tears swell in her eye.

I add one other instance, which, beside the property under consideration, raises delicately our most tender sympathy.

Son of Fingal! dost thou not behold the darkness of Crothar's hall of shells? My soul was not dark at the feast, when my people lived. I rejoiced in the presence of strangers, when my son shone in the hall. But Ossian, he is a beam that is departed, and left no streak of light behind. He is fallen, son of Fingal, in the battles of his father. Rothmar, the chief of grassy Tromlo, heard that my eyes had failed; he heard that my arms were fixed in the hall, and the pride of his soul arose. He came towards Cromar: my people fell before him. I took my arms in the hall, but what could sightless Crothar do? My steps were unequal; my grief was great. I wished for the days that were past: days! wherein I fought and won in the field of blood. My son returned from the chase; the fair-haired Fovar-gormo. He had not lifted his sword in battle, for his arm was young. But the soul of the youth was great; the fire of valor burnt in his eye. He saw the disordered steps of his father, and his sigh arose. King of Cromar, he said, is it because thou hast no son? is it for the weakness of Fovar-gormo's arm that thy sighs arise? I begin, my father, to feel the strength of my arm; I have drawn the sword of my youth, and I have bent the bow. Let me meet this Rothmar, with the youths of Cromar; let me meet him, O my father, for I feel my burning soul.

And thou shalt meet him, I said, son of the sightless Crothar! But let others advance before thee, that I may hear the tread of thy feet at thy return; for my eyes behold thee not, fair-haired Fovar-gormo! He went: he met the foe; he fell. The foe advances towards Cromar. He who slew my son is near, with all his pointed spears.

If a concise or nervous style be a beauty, tautology must be a blemish: and yet writers, fettered by verse, are not sufficiently careful to avoid this slovenly practice; they may be pitied; but they cannot be justified. Take for a specimen the following instances, from the best poet, for versification at least, that England has to boast of.

High on his helm celestial lightnings play,
His beamy shield emits a living ray,
Th' unweary'd blaze incessant streams supplies,
Like the red star that fires the autumnal skies.

ÆLAD V. 5.

Strength and omnipotence invest thy throne.

Isid. viii. 576.

So silent fountains, from a rock's tall head,
In sable streams soft trickling waters shed.

IBID. ix. 19.

His clanging armor rung.

IBID. xii. 94.

Fear on their cheek, and horror in their eye.

IBID. xv. 4.

The blaze of armor flash'd against the day.

IBID. xvii. 736.

As when the piercing blasts of Boreas blow.

IBID. xix. 380.

And like the moon, the broad refulgent shield
Blaz'd with long rays, and gleam'd athwart the field.

IBID. xix. 402.

No—could our swiftness o'er the winds prevail,
Or beat the pinions of the western gale,
All were in vain.

IBID. xix. 460.

The humid sweat from ev'ry pore descends.

IBID. xxiii. 829.

Redundant epithets, such as *humid* in the last citation, are by Quintilian disallowed to orators; but indulged to poets, because his favorite poets, in a few instances, are reduced to such epithets for the sake of versification.

As an apology for such careless expressions, it may well suffice, that Pope, in submitting to be a translator, acts below his genius. In a translation, it is hard to require the same spirit of accuracy, that is cheerfully bestowed on an original work.

I close this chapter with a curious inquiry. An object, however ugly to the sight, is far from being so when represented by colors or by words. What is the cause of this difference? With respect to painting, the cause is obvious: a good picture, whatever the subject be, is agreeable by the pleasure we take in imitation; and this pleasure, overbalancing the disagreeableness of the subject, makes the picture upon the whole agreeable. With respect to the description of an ugly object, the cause follows. To connect individuals in the social state, no particular contributes more than language, by the power it possesses of an expeditious

communication of thought, and a lively representation of transactions. But nature hath not been satisfied to recommend language by its utility merely; independent of utility, it is made susceptible of many beauties, which are directly felt, without any intervening reflection. And this unfolds the mystery; for the pleasure of language is so great, as in a lively description to overbalance the disagreeableness of the image raised by it. This, however, is no encouragement to choose a disagreeable subject; for the pleasure is incomparably greater, where the subject and the description are both of them agreeable.

The following description is upon the whole agreeable, though the subject described is in itself dismal:

Nine times the space that measures day and night
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew
Lay vanquish'd, rolling in the fiery gulf,
Confounded though immortal! but his doom
Reserv'd him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
That witness'd huge affliction and dismay,
Mix'd with obdurate pride and steadfast hate:
At once as far as angels' ken he views
The dismal situation waste and wild:
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great furnace flam'd; yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsum'd!
Such place eternal Justice hath prepar'd
For those rebellious.

PARADISE LOST.—BOOK I. l. 50.

An unmanly depression of spirits in time of danger, is not an agreeable sight; and yet a fine description or representation of it will be relished:

K. Richard. What must the king do now? must he submit?
The king shall do it; must he be depos'd?
The king shall be contented: must he lose
The name of king? O God's name, let it go:
I'll give my jewels for a string of beads;

My gorgeous palace for a hermitage;
 My gay apparel for an almsman's gown;
 My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood;
 My sceptre for a palmer's walking-staff;
 My subjects for a pair of carved saints;
 And my large kingdom for a little grave;
 A little, little grave;—an obscure grave.
 Or, I'll be buried in the king's highway;
 Some way of common tread, where subjects' feet
 May hourly trample on their sovereign's head;
 For on my heart they tread now, whilst I live;
 And, buried once, why not upon my head?

RICHARD II.—Act III. Sc. 6.

Objects that strike terror in a spectator have in poetry and painting a fine effect. The picture, by raising a slight emotion of terror, agitates the mind; and in that condition every beauty makes a deep impression. May not contrast heighten the pleasure, by opposing our present security to the danger of encountering the object represented?

The other shape,
 If shape it might be call'd, that shape had none
 Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;
 Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
 For each seem'd either; black it stood as night,
 Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
 And shook a dreadful dart.

PARADISE LOST.—Book II. l. 666.

Now storming fury rose,
 And clamor such as heard in heaven till now
 Was never: arms on armor clashing bray'd
 Horrible discord, and the madding wheels
 Of brazen chariots rag'd; dire was the noise
 Of conflict: overhead the dismal hiss
 Of fiery darts in flaming volleys flew,
 And flying vaulted either host with fire.
 So under fiery cope together rush'd
 Both battles main, with ruinous assault
 And inextinguishable rage: all heaven
 Resounded; and had earth been then, all earth
 Had to her centre shook.

PARADISE LOST.—Book VI. l. 207.

Ghost. But that I am forbid
 To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
 I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
 Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,

Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
 Thy knotty and combined locks to part,
 And each particular hair to stand on end,
 Like quills upon the fretful porcupine:
 But this eternal blazon must not be
 To ears of flesh and blood.

HAMLET.—ACT I. Sc. 8

Gratiano. Poor Desdemona! I'm glad thy father's dead:
 Thy match was mortal to him; and pure grief
 Shore his old thread in twain. Did he live now,
 This sight would make him do a desperate turn;
 Yea, curse his better angel from his side,
 And fall to reprobation.

OTHELLO.—ACT V. Sc. 2

Objects of horror must be excepted from the foregoing theory; for no description, however lively, is sufficient to overbalance the disgust raised even by the idea of such objects. Every thing horrible ought therefore to be avoided in a description. Nor is this a severe law: the poet will avoid such scenes for his own sake, as well as for that of his reader; and to vary his descriptions, nature affords plenty of objects that disgust us in some degree without raising horror.

I am obliged, therefore, to condemn the picture of Sin in the second book of *Paradise Lost*, though a masterly performance: the original would be a horrid spectacle; and the horror is not much softened in the copy.

Iago's character, in the tragedy of *Othello*, is insufferably monstrous and satanical: not even Shakspeare's masterly hand can make the picture agreeable.

REVIEW.

What is the first rule in the composition of history?—what are the reasons for it?

What is the second rule?—what are the reasons for it?

What is the effect of straining to make a figure at first?

How should the first sentences of a work be?

What is the third rule?

What is the fourth rule?

In what does the force of language consist?

What should the narrative in an epic poem resemble?

Give examples.

What is the criticism on Voltaire's *Henriade*?

How should circumstances be disposed of?

What is the effect of a well-chosen circumstance?

- Give examples.
 What writers excel in drawing characters?
 Give examples from Shakspeare, Congreve, and Ossian.
 Give examples of contradictions and absurdities, which some writers fall into?
 Should common and well-known reasons be expressed?
 What sort of style is required by an elevated subject?—a familiar subject?—a serious subject?—a description?
 What example is given of a high subject expressed in low words?—of expression raised above the subject?
 What is the common error of inferior writers?
 What is its effect?
 Give an example.
 What is the remark made on these lines?
 How is slow action imitated?—how is labor?
 What is to be regarded in dialogue-writing?
 How does an incident make the strongest impression?
 How do writers of genuine taste take advantage of this fault?
 Give examples.
 When are repetitions allowable?
 Give examples.
 How are Homer's repetitions justified?
 What is observed of a concise style?
 What writers excel in it?
 Give examples from Ossian.
 What is observed of tautology?
 What writer is sometimes guilty of it?
 Why is the picture of an ugly object agreeable?
 Why may the description of a disagreeable object be agreeable?
 Give examples.
 How may an object that strikes terror in the spectator, have a fine effect in poetry and painting?
 Are objects of horror proper for description?
 Why not?

CHAPTER XXII.

Epic and Dramatic Compositions.

TRAGEDY differs not from epic in substance: in both the same ends are pursued, namely, instruction and amusement; and in both the same mean is employed, namely, imitation of human actions. They differ only in the manner of imitating; epic poetry employs narration; tragedy represents its facts as passing in our