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The History Of English Poetry

From The Close of the Eleventh To The Commencement of the Eighteenth
Century

Warton, Thomas

London, 1774

Section XIV. Chaucer continued. His Troilus and Cresseide. Boccacio's Troilo. Sentimental and pathetic strokes in Chaucer's poem. House of Fame. A Provencial composition. Analysed. Improperly ...

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-51377](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-51377)

S E C T. XIV.

CHAUCER's poem of TROILUS and CRESSEIDE is said to be formed on an old history, written by Lollius, a native of Urbino in Italy^a. Lydgate says, that Chaucer, in this poem,

----- made a translation
Of a booke which called is TROPHE
In Lumbarde tongue, &c.^b

It is certain that Chaucer, in this piece, frequently refers to "MYNE AUCTOR LOLLIUS^c." But he hints, at the same time, that Lollius wrote in Latin^d. I have never seen this history, either in the Lombard or the Latin language. I have before observed, that it is mentioned in Boccaccio's Decameron, and that a translation of it, was made into Greek verse by some of the Greek fugitives in the fourteenth century. Du Fresne, if I mistake not, somewhere mentions it in Italian. In the royal library at Paris it occurs often as an antient French romance. "Cod. 7546. Roman de Troilus."---"Cod. 7564. Roman de Troilus et de Briseida ou Criseida."---Again, as an original

^a Petrus Lambecius enumerates Lollius Urbicus among the *Historici Latini profani* of the third century. Prodrum. p. 246. Hamb. 1659. See also Voss. *Historic. Latin.* ii. 2. p. 163. edit. Ludg. Bat. But this could not be Chaucer's Lollius. Chaucer places Lollius among the historians of Troy, in his House of Fame, iii. 380. It is extraordinary, that Du Fresne, in the *Index Auctorum*, used by him for his Latin glossary, should mention this Lollius Urbicus of the third century. Tom. i. p. 141. edit. i. As I apprehend, none of his works remain. A proof that Chaucer translated

from some Italian original is, that in a manuscript which I have seen of this poem, I find, *Monesteo* for *Menestes*, *Rupheo* for *Rupbes*, *Phebusco* for *Phebuset*, lib. iv. 50. seq. Where, by the way, Xantippe, a Trojan chief, was perhaps corruptly written for Xantippo, i. e. Xantippus. As Joseph. *Iscan.* iv. 10. In Lydgate's Troy, *Zantiphus*, iii. 26. All corrupted from Antiphus, *Dist. Cret.* p. 105. In the printed copies we have *Ascalapbo* for *Ascalaphus*. lib. v.

319.

^b Prol. Boch. ff. iii.^c See lib. i. v. 395.^d Lib. ii. v. 10.
work

work of Boccacio. "Cod. 7757. Philostrato dell'amorose
"fatiche de Troilo per GIOVANNI BOCCACIO." "Les fivans
" (adds Montfaucon ^d) contiennent *les autres œuvres de Boc-*
"cace." Much fabulous history concerning Troilus, is re-
lated in Guido de Columna's Destruction of Troy. Whatever
were Chaucer's materials, he has on this subject constructed a
poem of considerable merit, in which the vicissitudes of love
are depicted in a strain of true poetry, with much pathos and
simplicity of sentiment ^e. He calls it, "a litill tragedie ^f."
Troilus is supposed to have seen Cresside in a temple; and re-
tiring to his chamber, is thus naturally described, in the
critical situation of a lover examining his own mind after
the first impression of love.

And whan that he in chambre was alone,
He down upon his beddis fete him sette,
And first he gan to sihe ^g, and then to grone,
And thought aie on her so withoutin lette:
That as he fatte and woke, his spirit mette ^h
That he her saugh, and temple, and all the wise ⁱ
Right of her loke, and gan it newe avise ^k.

There is not so much nature in the sonnet to Love, which
follows. It is translated from Petrarch; and had Chaucer
followed his own genius, he would not have disgusted us

^d Bibl. p. 793. col. 2. Compare Lengl. Bibl. Rom. ii. p. 253.

^e Chaucer however claims no merit of invention in this poem. He invokes Clio to favour him with rhymes only; and adds,

— To everie lover I me' excuse
That of no *sentiment* I this endite
But out of *latin* in my *tonge* it write.

L. ii. v. 10. seq. But Sir Francis Knahton who translated TROILUS AND CRESSIDE [1635.] into Latin rhymes, says, that Chaucer in this poem "has taken the liberty of his own inventions." In the mean time, Chaucer, by his own re-

ferences, seems to have been studious of seldom departing from Lollius. In one place, he pays him a compliment, as an author whose excellencies he could not reach. L. iii. v. 1330.

Bot sothe is, though I can not tellen all,
As can mine author of *his excellence*.

See also L. iii. 576. 1823.

^f L. ult. v. 1785.

^g Sigh.

^h Thought. Imagined.

ⁱ Manner.

^k L. i. v. 359.

with

with the affected gallantry and exaggerated compliments which it extends through five tedious stanzas. The doubts and delicacies of a young girl disclosing her heart to her lover, are exquisitely touched in this comparison.

And as the newe abashid nightingale
That stinith ^m first, when she beginith sing,
When that she herith any herd's ⁿ tale,
Or in the hedgis anie wight stirring,
And after fikir ^o doth her voice outring;
Right so Cresseidè when that her drede stent ^p
Opened her herte and told him her intent ^q.

The following pathetic scene may be selected from many others. Troilus seeing Cressida in a swoon, imagines her to be dead. He unsheaths his sword with an intent to kill himself, and utters these exclamations.

And thou, cite, in which I live in wo,
And thou Priam, and brethren al ifere ^r,
And thou, my mother, farwel, for I go:
And, Atropos, make ready thou my bere:
And thou Cresseidè, O sweet hertè dere,
Receive thou now my spirit, would he say,
With swerd at hert all redy for to dey.

But as god would, of swough ^s she tho abraide ^t,
And gan to fighe, and TROILUS she cride:
And he answerid, Lady mine Cresseide,
Livin ye yet? And let his sword doune glide,
Yes, hertè mine, that thankid be Cupide,

^m Stops.
ⁿ *Herdsman*. A Shepherd.
^o With confidence.
^p Her fears ceased.

^q L. iii. v. 1239.
^r Together.
^s Swoon.
^t Then awaked.

Quoth

Quoth she: and therewithall she forè fight.^u
And he began to glad her as he might.

Toke her in armis two, and kist her oft,
And her to glad he did all his entent:
For which her ghoft, that flickered aie alo
Into her woeful breast aien it went:
But at the last, as that her eyin glent^v
Aside, anon she gan his swerde asprie,
As it lay bere, and gan for fere to crie:

And askid him why he had it outdrawe?
And Troilus anon the cause hir tolde,
And how therwith himself he would have slawe:
For which Creseide upon him gan behold,
And gan him in her armis fast to fold,
And said, O mercy, God, to whiche a dede
Alas! how nere we werin bothè dede^x!

Pathetic description is one of Chaucer's peculiar excellencies.

In this poem are various imitations from Ovid, which are of too particular and minute a nature to be pointed out here, and belong to the province of a professed and formal commentator on the piece. The Platonic notion in the third book^y about universal love, and the doctrine that this principle acts with equal and uniform influence both in the natural and moral world, are a translation from Boethius^z. And in the KNIGHT'S TALE he mentions, from the same favorite system of philosophy, the FAIRE CHAINE OF LOVE^a. It is worth observing, that the reader is referred to Dares

^u Sighed.

^v Glanced.

^x L. iv. v. 1205.

^y v. 1750.

^z Consolat. Philosoph. L. ii. Met. ult. iii. Met. 2. Spenser is full of the same

doctrine. See Fairy Queen, i. ix. 1. iv. x. 34. 35, &c. &c. I could point out many other imitations from Boethius in this poem.

^a v. 2990. Urr.

Phrygius,

Phrygius, instead of Homer, for a display of the achievements of Troilus.

His worthi dedis who so list him here,
Rede DARES, he can tel hem all ifere^a.

Our author, from his excessive fondness for Statius, has been guilty of a very diverting and what may be called a double anachronism. He represents Creffide, with two of her female companions, sitting in a *pavid parlour*, and reading the THEBAID of Statius^b, which is called *the Geste of the Siege of Thebes*^c, and *the Romance of Thebis*^d. In another place, Cassandra translates the Arguments of the twelve books of the THEBAID^e. In the fourth book of this poem, Pandarus endeavours to comfort Troilus with arguments concerning the doctrine of predestination, taken from Brawardine, a learned archbishop and theologift, and nearly Chaucer's cotemporary^f.

This poem, although almost as long as the *Eneid*, was intended to be sung to the harp, as well as read.

And redde where so thou be, or ellis *songe*^g.

It is dedicated to the *morall* Gower, and to the *philosophical* Strode. Gower will occur as a poet hereafter. Strode was

^a L. iv. v. 1770.

^b L. ii. v. 81.

^c L. ii. v. 84.

^d L. ii. v. 100. *Bishop Amphiorax* is mentioned, ib. v. 104. Pandarus says v. 106.

— All this I know my selve,
And all the assiege of Thebes, and all
the care;

For herof ben ther makid *bokis twelve*.

In his *Dreme*, Chaucer, to pass the night away, rather than play at chess, calls for a *Romance*; in which "were writtin fables of quenis livis and of kings, and "many othir thingis finale." This proves to be Ovid. v. 52. seq. See Man. of L.T. v.

54. Urr. There was an old French Romance called PARTONEPEX, often cited by Du Cange and Carpentier. Gl. Lat. This is Parthenopeus, a hero of the Theban story. It was translated into English, and called PERTONAPE. See p. 123. supr.

^e L. v. v. 1490. I will add here, that Creffide proposes the trial of the Ordeal to Troilus. L. iii. v. 1048. Troilus, during the times of truce, amuses himself with hawking. L. iii. v. 1785.

^f In his book DE CAUSA DEI, published by Sir Henry Savile, 1617. He touches on this controversy, Nonne's Pr. T. v. 1349. Urr. See also Tr. Cr. L. iv. v. 961. seq.

^g L. ult. v. 1796.

eminent

eminent for his scholastic knowledge, and tutor to Chaucer's son Lewis at Merton college in Oxford.

Whether the HOUSE OF FAME is Chaucer's invention, or suggested by any French or Italian poet, I cannot determine. But I am apt to think it was originally a Provencial composition, among other proofs, from this passage.

And ther came out so gret a noise,
That had it standin upon OYSE,
Men might have herd it esily,
I trow, to ROME fikerly^a.

The Oyse is a river in Picardy, which falls into the river Seine, not many leagues from Paris. An Englishman would not have expressed distance by such an unfamiliar illustration. Unless we reconcile the matter, by supposing that Chaucer wrote this poem during his travels. There is another passage where the ideas are those of a foreign romance. To the trumpeters of renown the poet adds,

----- All that ufid clarion
In Casteloigne or Arragon^b;

Casteloigne is Catalonia in Spain^c. The martial musicians of English tournaments, so celebrated in story, were a more natural and obvious allusion for an English poet^d.

This poem contains great strokes of Gothic imagination, yet

^a L. ii. v. 838.

ⁱ B. iii. v. 157.

^k See MARCHAUNT'S TALE, v. 1231. p. 70. Urr. He mentions a rock higher than any in Spain. B. ii. v. 27. But this I believe was an English proverb.

^l He mentions a plate of gold, "As fine as duckett in Venise." B. iii. v. 258. But he says, that the Galaxy is called *Wat-*

lyng strete. B. ii. v. 431. He swears by Thomas a Beckett, B. iii. v. 41. In one place he is addressed by the name of GEORGE. B. ii. v. 221. But in two others by that of PETER. B. i. v. 526. B. iii. v. 909. Among the musicians, he mentions "Pipers of all the Duche tong." B. iii. v. 144.

E e e

bordering

bordering often on the most ideal and capricious extravagance. The poet, in a vision, sees a temple of glafs,
 In which were more images
 Of gold stondinge in fundrie stages,
 Sette in more riche tabernacles,
 And with perre^m more pinnacles,
 And more curious pourtraituris,
 And quaint manir of figuris,
 Of golde work than I sawe evirⁿ.

On the walls of this temple were engraved stories from Virgil's *Eneid*^o, and Ovid's *Epistles*^p. Leaving this temple, he sees an eagle with golden wings soaring near the sun.

----- Faste by the sonne on hie,
 As kennyng myght I with mine eie,
 Methought I sawe an egle fore ;
 But that it semid mochil more^q,
 Then I had any egle sene'.-----
 It was af gold, and shone so bright,
 That nevir man sawe fuche a fight^r, &c.

The eagle descends, seizes the poet in his talons, and mounting again, conveys him to the House of Fame; which is

^m Jewels.

ⁿ B. i. v. 120.

^o Where he mentions Virgil's hell, he likewise refers to Claudian *De Raptu Proserpinae*, and Dante's *Inferno*. v. 450. There is a translation of a few lines from Dante, whom he calls "the wise poet of Florence," in the *WIFE OF BATH'S TALE*, v. 1125. p. 84. Urr. The story of Hugolin of Pifa, a subject which Sir Joshua Reynolds has lately painted in a capital style, is translated from Dante, "the grete poete of Italie that hight Dante," in the *MONKES TALE*, v. 877. A sentence from Dante is cited in the *LEGENDE OF GOOD WOMEN*, v. 360. In the *FREERRE'S TALE*, Dante is compared with Virgil, v. 256.

^p It was not only in the fairy palaces of

the poets and romance-writers of the middle ages, that Ovid's stories adorned the walls. In one of the courts of the palace of Nonestuch, all Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were cut in stone under the windows. Hearne, *Coll. MSS.* 55. p. 64. But the *Epistles* seem to have been the favorite work, the subject of which coincided with the gallantry of the times.

^q Greater.

^r The eagle says to the poet, that this house stands

"Right so as *thine* *and* *boke* tellith."

B. ii. v. 204. That is, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. See *Met. L. xii. v. 40*, &c.

^s B. i. v. 496. seq.

situated

situated, like that of Ovid, between earth and sea. In their passage thither, they fly above the stars; which our author leaves, with clouds, tempests, hail, and snow, far beneath him. This aerial journey is partly copied from Ovid's Phaeton in the chariot of the sun. But the poet apologises for this extravagant fiction, and explains his meaning, by alledging the authority of Boethius; who says, that Contemplation may soar on the wings of Philosophy above every element. He likewise recollects, in the midst of his course, the description of the heavens, given by Marcianus Capella in his book *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*^t, and Alanus in his *Anticlaudian* ". At his arrival in the confines of the House of Fame, he is alarmed with confused murmurs issuing from thence, like distant thunders or billows. This circumstance is also borrowed from Ovid's temple ". He is left by the eagle near the house, which is built of materials bright as polished glass, and stands on a rock of ice of excessive height, and almost inaccessible. All the southern side of this rock was covered with engravings of the names of famous men, which were perpetually melting away by the heat of the sun. The northern side of the rock was alike covered with names; but being here shaded from the warmth of the sun, the characters remained unmelted and uneffaced. The structure of the house is thus imagined.

----- Me thoughtin by sainct Gile,
That all was of stone of berille,
Both the castle and the toure,
And eke the hall and everie boure^x:

^t See *The MARCHAUNT'S TALE*, v. 1248. p. 70. Urr. And Lidg. Stor. Theb. fol. 357.

^u A famous book in the middle ages.

There is an old French translation of it. Bibl. Reg. Paris. MSS. Cod. 7632.

^w See Met. xii. 39. And Virg. *Æn.* iv. 173. Val. Flacc. ii. 117. Lucan. i. 469.

^x Chamber.

Without pecis or joynynges,
 And many subtill compassyngs,
 As barbicans⁷ and pinnacles,
 Imageries and tabernacles
 I sawe, and full eke of windowis
 As flakis fallin in grete snowis.

In these lines, and in some others which occur hereafter², the poet perhaps alludes to the many new decorations in architecture, which began to prevail about his time, and gave rise to the florid Gothic style. There are instances of this in his other poems. In his DREAME, printed 1597³.

And of a fute were al the touris,
 Subtily carven affir flouris.-----
 With many a smal turret hie.

And in the description of the palace of PLEASAUNT REGARDER, in the ASSEMBLIE OF LADIES⁴.

Fairir is none, though it were for a king,
 Devifid wel and that in every thing;
 The towris hie, ful plefante shal ye finde,
 With fannis fresh, turning with everie winde.
 The chambris, and the palirs of a sorte,
 With bay windows, goodlie as may be thought:
 As for daunsing or othir wise disporte,
 The galleries be al right wel ywrought.

In Chaucer's Life by Anthony Hall, it is not mentioned that he was appointed clerk of the king's works, in the palace of Westminster, in the royal manors of Shene, Kenington, Byfleet, and Clapton, and in the Mews at Charing⁵.

⁷ Turrets.

² B. ii. v. 211.

³ v. 81. p. 572. Urr.

⁴ V. 158.

⁵ Clauf. 8. Ric. ii.

Again

Again in 1380, of the works of St. George's chapel at Windsor, then ruinous^c. But to return.

Within the niches formed in the pinnacles stood all round the castle,

----- All manir of minstrelis,
And jefstours^d that tellyn tales
Both of weping and eke of game.

That is, those who sung or recited adventures either tragic or comic, which excited either compassion or laughter. They were accompanied with the most renowned harpers, among which were Orpheus, Arion, Chiron, and the Briton Glaske-
rion^e. Behind these were placed, "by many a thousand
"time twelve," players on various instruments of music. Among the trumpeters are named Joab, Virgil's Mife-
nus, and Theodamas^f. About these pinnacles were also
marshalled the most famous magicians, jugglers, witches, pro-
phetesses, forcereffes, and professors of natural magic,^g which
ever existed in antient or modern times: such as Medea,
Circe, Calliope, Hermes^h, Limotheus, and Simon Ma-

^c Pat. 14. Ric. ii. Apud Tanner, Bibl. p. 166. Not. e.

^d This word is above explained.

^e Concerning this harper, see Percy's Ballads.

^f See also THE MARCHAUNT'S TALE, v. 1236. seq. p. 70. Urr.

^g See the FRANKLEIN'S TALE, where several feats are described, as exhibited at a feast done by natural magic, a favorite science of the Arabians. Chaucer there calls it "An art which sotill trage-
"toris plaie." v. 2696. p. 110. Urr. Of this more will be said hereafter.

^h None of the works of the first Hermes Trifmegistus now remain. See Cornel. Agrip. Van. Scient. cap. xlvi. The astrological and other philosophical pieces under that name are supposititious. See Fabr. Biblioth. Gr. xii. 708. And Chan. YEM. TALE, v. 1455. p. 126. Urr. Some of these pieces

were published under the fictitious names of Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Solomon, Saint Paul, and of many of the patriarchs and fathers. Cornel. Agripp. De Van. Scient. cap. xlv. Who adds, that these trifles were followed by Alphonfus king of Castile, Robert Groshead, Bacon, and Apponus. He mentions Zabulus and Barnabas of Cyprus as famous writers in magic. See also Gower's Confess. Amant. p. 134. b. 149. b. edit. 1554. fol. per Berthelette. In speaking of antient authors, who were known or celebrated in the middle ages, it may be remarked, that Macrobius was one. He is mentioned by William de Lorris in the ROMAN DE LA ROSE, v. 9. "Ung
"aucteur qui ot nom *Macrobe*." A line literally translated by Chaucer, "An au-
"thor that hight *Macrobes*." v. 7. Chau-
cer quotes him in his DREME, v. 284. In the NONNES PRIEST'S TALE, v. 1238. p. 171.

gus¹. At entering the hall he sees an infinite multitude of heralds, on the furcoats of whom were richly embroidered the armorial ensigns of the most redoubted champions that ever tourneyed in Africa, Europe, or Asia. The floor and roof of the hall were covered with thick plates of gold, studded with the costliest gems. At the upper end, on a lofty shrine made of carbuncle, sat Fame. Her figure is like those in Virgil and Ovid. Above her, as if sustained on her shoulders, sat Alexander and Hercules. From the throne to the gates of the hall, ran a range of pillars with respective inscriptions. On the first pillar made of lead and iron^k, stood Josephus, the Jewish historian, "That of the Jewish" "gestis told," with seven other writers on the same subject. On the second pillar, made of iron, and painted all over with the blood of tigers, stood Statius. On another higher than the rest stood Homer, Dares Phrygius, Livy^l, Lollius, Guido of Columna, and Geoffry of Monmouth, writers of the Trojan story. On a pillar of "tinnid iron clere," stood Virgil: and next him, on a pillar of copper, appeared Ovid.

p. 171. Urr. In the ASSEMBLIE OF FOWLES, v. III. see also *ibid.* v. 31. He wrote a comment on Tully's *SOMNIUM SCIPIONIS*, and in these passages he is referred to on account of that piece. Petrarch, in a letter to Nicolas Sigeros, a learned Greek of Constantinople, quotes Macrobius, as a Latin author of all others the most familiar to Nicolas. It is to prove that Homer is the fountain of all invention. This is in 1354. *Famil. Let.* ix. 2. There is a manuscript of the first, and part of the second book of Macrobius, elegantly written, as it seems, in France, about the year 800. MSS. Cotton. VITELL. C. iii. Cod. Membr. fol. viii. fol. 138. M. Planudes, a Constantinopolitan monk of the fourteenth century, is said to have translated Macrobius into Greek. But see *Fabric. Bibl. Gr.* x. 534. It is remarkable, that in the above letter, Petrarch apologises for calling Plato the Prince of Philosophers, after Cicero,

Seneca, Apuleius, Plotinus, Saint Ambrose, and Saint Austin.

ⁱ Among these he mentions *Juglers*, that is, in the present sense of the word, those who practised *Legerdmain*: a popular science in Chaucer's time. Thus in *Squ. T.* v. 239. Urr.

As *jugelours* playin at these festis grete.

It was an appendage of the occult sciences studied and introduced into Europe by the Arabians.

^k In the composition of these pillars, Chaucer displays his chemical knowledge.

^l Dares Phrygius and Livy are both cited in Chaucer's *DREME*, v. 1070. 1084. Chaucer is fond of quoting Livy. He was also much admired by Petrarch; who, while at Paris, assisted in translating him into French. This circumstance might make Livy a favorite with Chaucer. See *Vie de Petrarque*, iii. p. 547.

The

The figure of Lucan was placed on a pillar of iron "wrought
"full sternly," accompanied with many Roman historians".
On a pillar of sulphur stood Claudian, so symbolised, because
he wrote of Pluto and Proserpine.

That bare up all the fame of hell;
Of Pluto and of Proserpine
That queen is of the darkè pine".

The hall was filled with the writers of antient tales and romances, whose subjects and names were too numerous to be recounted. In the mean time crouds from every nation and of every condition filled the hall, and each presented his claim to the queen. A messenger is dispatched to summon Eolus from his cave in Thrace; who is ordered to bring his two clarions called SLANDER and PRAISE, and his trumpeter Triton. The praises of each petitioner are then refounded, according to the partial or capricious appointment of Fame; and equal merits obtain very different success. There is much satire and humour in these requests and rewards, and in the disgraces and honours which are indiscriminately distributed by the queen, without discernment and by chance. The poet then enters the house or labyrinth of RUMOUR. It was built of fallow twigs, like a cage, and therefore admitted every sound. Its doors were also more numerous than leaves on the trees, and always stood open. These are romantic exaggerations of Ovid's inventions on the same subject. It was moreover sixty miles in length, and perpetually turning round. From this house, says the poet, issued tidings of every kind, like fountains and rivers from the sea. Its inhabitants, who were eternally employed in hearing or telling news, together with the rife of reports, and the for-

^m Was not this intended to characterise Lucan? Quintilian says of Lucan, "*Oratoribus magis quam poetis annumerandus.*" *Instit. Orat. L. x. c. i.*

ⁿ B. iii. v. 419. Chaucer alludes to this poem of Claudian in the *MARSHAUNT'S TALE*, where he calls Pluto, the king of "fayrie." v. 1744. p. 73. Urr.

mation

mation of lies are then humourously described: the company is chiefly composed of failors, pilgrims, and pardoners. At length our author is awakened at seeing a venerable personage of great authority: and thus the Vision abruptly concludes.

Pope has imitated this piece, with his usual elegance of diction and harmony of versification. But in the mean time, he has not only misrepresented the story, but marred the character of the poem. He has endeavoured to correct it's extravagancies, by new refinements and additions of another cast: but he did not consider, that extravagancies are essential to a poem of such a structure, and even constitute it's beauties. An attempt to unite order and exactness of imagery with a subject formed on principles so professedly romantic and anomalous, is like giving Corinthian pillars to a Gothic palace. When I read Pope's elegant imitation of this piece, I think I am walking among the modern monuments unsuitably placed in Westminster-abbey.

SECT.