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In Four Volumes

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----- *Bella, horrida bella!*

Virg.

I Have sometimes amused my self with considering the several methods of managing a debate, which have obtained in the world.

The first races of mankind used to dispute, as our ordinary people do now-a-days, in a kind of wild logic, uncultivated by rules of art.

Socrates introduced a catechetical method of arguing. He would ask his adversary question upon question, 'till he had convinced him out of his own mouth that his opinions were wrong. This way of debating drives an enemy up into a corner, seizes all the passes through which he can make an escape, and forces him to surrender at discretion.

Aristotle changed this method of attack, and invented a great variety of little weapons, called Syllogisms. As in the *Socratic* way of dispute you agree to every thing which your opponent advances, in the *Aristotelic* you are still denying and contradicting some part or other of what he says. *Socrates* conquers you by stratagem, *Aristotle* by force: the one takes the town by sapp, the other sword in hand.

The universities of *Europe*, for many years, carried on their debates by Syllogism, infomuch that we see the knowledge of several centuries laid out into objections and answers, and all the good sense of the age cut and minced into almost an infinitude of distinctions.

When our Universities found that there was no end of wrangling this way, they invented a kind of argument, which is not reducible to any mood or figure of *Aristotle*. It was called the *Argumentum Basiliuum* (others write it *Bacilinum* or *Baculinum*) which is pretty well expressed in our *English* word *Club-law*. When they were not able to confute their antagonist, they knocked him down. It was their method in these polemical debates, first to discharge their syllogisms, and afterwards to betake themselves to their clubs, till such time as they had one way or other confounded their gainfayers. There is in *Oxford* a narrow defile, (to make use of a military term) where the partisans used to encounter, for which

which reason it still retains the name of *Logic-Lane*. I have heard an old gentleman, a physician, make his boasts, that when he was a young fellow, he marched several times at the head of a troop of *Scotists*, and cudgelled a body of *Smiglesians* half the length of *High-street*, till they had dispersed themselves for shelter into their respective garrisons.

This humour, I find, went very far in *Erasmus's* time. For that author tells us, that upon the revival of *Greek* letters, most of the Universities in *Europe* were divided into *Greeks* and *Trojans*. The latter were those who bore a mortal hatred to the language of the *Grecians*, inso-much that if they met with any who understood it, they did not fail to treat him as a foe. *Erasmus* himself had, it seems, the misfortune to fall into the hands of a party of *Trojans*, who laid him on with so many blows and buffets, that he never forgot their hostilities to his dying day.

There is a way of managing an argument not much unlike the former, which is made use of by states and communities, when they draw up a hundred thousand disputants on each side, and convince one another by dint of sword. A certain grand monarch was so sensible of his strength in this way of reasoning, that he writ upon his great guns--- *Ratio ultima Regum, The Logic of Kings*; but, God be thanked, he is now pretty well baffled at his own weapons. When one has to do with a Philosopher of this kind, one should remember the old gentleman's saying, who had been engaged in an argument with one of the *Roman Emperors*. Upon his friend's telling him, that he wondered he would give up the question, when he had visibly the better of the dispute, *I am never ashamed*, says he, *to be confuted by one who is master of fifty legions*.

I shall but just mention another kind of reasoning, which may be called arguing by poll; and another which is of equal force, in which wagers are made use of as arguments, according to the celebrated line in *Hudibras*.

But the most notable way of managing a controversy, is that which we call *Arguing by torture*. This is a method of reasoning which has been made use of with the poor refugees, and which was so fashionable in our country during the reign of *Queen Mary*, that in a passage of an author quoted by *Monfieur Bayle*, it is said the price of wood was raised in *England* by reason of the executions that were made in *Smithfield*. These disputants convince their adversaries with a *Sorites*, commonly called a pile of faggots. The rack is also a kind of syllogism which has been used with good effect, and has made multitudes of converts. Men were formerly disputed out of their doubts, reconciled to truth by force of reason,

son, and won over to opinions by the candour, sense and ingenuity of those who had the right on their side; but this method of conviction operated too slowly. Pain was found to be much more enlightning than reason. Every scruple was looked upon as obstinacy, and not to be removed but by several engines invented for that purpose. In a word, the application of whips, racks, gibbets, gallies, dungeons, fire and faggot in a dispute, may be looked upon as popish refinements upon the old heathen logic.

There is another way of reasoning, which seldom fails, though it be of a quite different nature to that I have last mentioned. I mean, convincing a man by ready money, or, as it is ordinarily called, bribing a man to an opinion. This method has often proved successful, when all the others have been made use of to no purpose. A man who is furnished with arguments from the mint, will convince the antagonist much sooner than one who draws them from reason and philosophy. Gold is a wonderful clearer of the understanding; it dissipates every doubt and scruple in an instant; accommodates it self to the meanest capacities; silences the loud and clamorous, and brings over the most obstinate and inflexible. *Philip of Macedon* was a man of most invincible reason this way. He refuted by it all the wisdom of *Athens*, confounded their statesmen, struck their Orators dumb, and at length argued them out of all their liberties.

Having here touched upon the several methods of disputing, as they have prevailed in different ages of the world, I shall very suddenly give my reader an account of the whole art of cavilling; which shall be a full satisfactory answer to all such papers and pamphlets as have yet appeared against the SPECTATOR.



Thursday,