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-----poetarum veniet manus, auxilio que
 Sit mihi-----

Hor.

THERE is nothing which more shows the want of taste and discernment in a writer, than the decrying of any Author in gross, especially of an Author who has been the admiration of multitudes, and that too in several ages of the world. This, however, is the general practice of all illiterate and undistinguishing Critics. Because *Homer* and *Virgil* and *Sophocles* have been commended by the learned of all times, every scribler, who has no relish of their beauties, gives himself an air of rapture when he speaks of them. But as he praises these he knows not why, there are others whom he depreciates with the same vehemence and upon the same account. We may see after what a different manner *Strada* proceeds in his judgment on the *Latin Poets*; for I intend to publish, in this paper, a continuation of that *Profusion* which was the subject of the last *Thursday*. I shall therefore give my Reader a short account, in prose, of every poem which was produced in the learned assembly there described; and if he is thoroughly conversant in the works of those ancient Authors, he will see with how much judgment every subject is adapted to the Poet who makes use of it, and with how much delicacy every particular Poet's way of writing is characterised in the censure that is passed upon it. *Lucan's* representative was the first who recited before the august assembly. As *Lucan* was a *Spaniard*, his poem does honour to that nation, which at the same time makes the romantic bravery in the hero of it more probable.

Alphonso was the Governour of a town invested by the *Moors*. During the blockade they made his only son their prisoner, whom they brought before the walls, and exposed to his father's sight, threatening to put him to death, if he did not immediately give up the town. The father tells them if he had an hundred sons, he would rather see them all perish than do an ill action, or betray his country. But, says he, if you take

take a pleasure in destroying the innocent, you may do it if you please: behold a sword for your purpose. Upon which he threw his sword from the wall, returned to his Palace, and was able, at such a juncture, to sit down to the repast, which was prepared for him. He was soon raised by the shouts of the enemy and the cries of the besieged. Upon returning again to the walls, he saw his son lying in the pangs of death; but far from betraying any weakness at such a spectacle, he upbraids his friends for their sorrow, and returns to finish his repast.

Upon the recital of this story, which is exquisitely drawn up in *Lucan's* spirit and language, the whole assembly declared their opinion of *Lucan* in a confused murmur. The poem was praised or censured according to the prejudices which every one had conceived in favour or disadvantage of the Author. These were so very great, that some had placed him in their opinions above the highest, and others beneath the lowest of the *Latin* Poets. Most of them however agreed, that *Lucan's* genius was wonderfully great, but at the same time too haughty and headstrong to be governed by art, and that his style was like his genius, learned, bold and lively, but withal too tragical and blustering. In a word, that he chose rather a great than a just reputation; to which they added, that he was the first of the *Latin* Poets who deviated from the purity of the *Roman* language.

The representative of *Lucretius* told the assembly, that they should soon be sensible of the difference between a Poet who was a native of *Rome*, and a stranger who had been adopted to it: after which he entered upon his subject, which I find exhibited to my hand in a Speculation of one of my predecessors.

Strada, in the person of *Lucretius*, gives an account of a chimerical correspondence between two friends by the help of a certain load-stone, which had such a virtue in it, that if it touched two several needles, when one of the needles so touched began to move, the other, though at never so great a distance, moved at the same time, and in the same manner. He tells us, that the two friends, being each of them possessors of one of these needles, made a kind of dial-plate, inscribing it with the four and twenty letters, in the same manner as the hours of the day are marked upon the ordinary dial-plate. They then fixed one of the needles on each of these plates in such a manner that it could move round without impediment, so as to touch any of the four and twenty letters. Upon their separating from one another into distant countries, they agreed to withdraw themselves punctually into their closets at a certain hour of the day, and to converse with one another by means of this their invention. Accordingly when they were some hundred miles asunder, each of them shut him-
self

self up in his closet at the time appointed, and immediately cast his eye upon his dial-plate. If he had a mind to write any thing to his Friend, he directed his needle to every letter that formed the words which he had occasion for, making a little pause at the end of every word or sentence, to avoid confusion. The friend, in the mean while, saw his own sympathetick needle moving of it self to every letter which that of his Correspondent pointed at: By this means they talk'd together a-cross a whole continent, and conveyed their thoughts to one another in an instant over cities or mountains, seas or desarts.

The whole audience were pleased with the artifice of the Poet who represented *Lucretius*, observing very well how he had laid asleep their attention to the simplicity of his style in some verses, and to the want of harmony in others, by fixing their minds to the novelty of his subject, and to the experiment which he related. Without such an artifice they were of opinion that nothing would have sounded more harsh than *Lucretius's* diction and numbers. But it was plain that the more learned part of the assembly were quite of another mind. These allowed that it was peculiar to *Lucretius* above all other Poets, to be always doing or teaching something, that no other style was so proper to teach in, or gave a greater pleasure to those who had a true relish for the *Roman* tongue. They added further, that if *Lucretius* had not been embarrassed with the difficulty of his matter, and a little led away by an affectation of antiquity, there could not have been any thing more perfect than his Poem.

CLAUDI AN succeeded *Lucretius*, having chosen for his subject the famous contest between the nightingale and the lutanist, which every one is acquainted with, especially since Mr. *Philips* has so finely improved that hint in one of his pastorals.

He had no sooner finished, but the assembly rung with acclamations made in his praise. His first beauty, which every one owned, was the great clearness and perspicuity which appeared in the plan of his Poem. Others were wonderfully charmed with the smoothness of his verse, and the flowing of his numbers, in which there were none of those elisions and cuttings-off so frequent in the works of other Poets. There were several however of a more refined judgment, who ridiculed that infusion of foreign phrases with which he had corrupted the *Latin* tongue, and spoke with contempt of the equability of his numbers that cloyed and fatiated the ear for want of variety: to which they likewise added a frequent and unseasonable affectation of appearing sonorous and sublime.

The sequel of this prolusion shall be the work of another day.

Friday,