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The Works Of Alexander Pope Esq.

In Nine Volumes Complete. With His Last Corrections, Additions, And Improvements; As they were delivered to the Editor a little before his Death

Containing His Juvenile Poems - with his last corrections, additions, and improvements, as they were delivered to the editor a little before his death

Pope, Alexander

London, 1751

Essay on Criticism

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-54366](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-54366)

A N
E S S A Y
O N
C R I T I C I S M .

Written in the Year M D C C I X .

† 1 4

CONSTITUTION
OF THE
FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT
OF THE
UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA
BY
JAMES MADISON
1787

Written in the Year 1787

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ESSAY on CRITICISM.

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A N

E S S A Y

O N

CRITICISM.

'T IS hard to say, if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' offence
To tire our patience, than mislead our sense.

COMMENTARY.

An Essay] The Poem is in one book, but divided into three principals parts or members. The first [to § 201.] gives rules for the *Study of the Art of Criticism*: the second [from thence to § 560.] exposes the *Causes of wrong Judgment*; and the third [from thence to the end] prescribes the *Morals of the Critic*.

In order to a right understanding of this poem, it will be necessary to observe, that tho' it be intituled simply *an Essay on Criticism*, yet several of the precepts relate equally to the good *writing* as well as to the true *judging* of a poem. This is so far from violating the *Unity* of the Subject, that it rounds and compleats it: or from disordering the regularity of the *Form*, that it produces the highest beauty which can arise out of method, as will appear by the following considerations: 1. It was impossible to give a full and exact idea of the *Art of poetical Criticism*, without considering, at the same time, the *Art of Poetry*; so far as Poetry is an *Art*. These therefore being closely connected in nature, the Author has with much judgment reciprocally

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Some few in that, but numbers err in this, 5
 Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss;
 A fool might once himself alone expose,
 Now one in verse makes many more in prose.

'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
 Go just alike, yet each believes his own. 10

COMMENTARY.

interwoven the precepts of both thro' his whole poem. 2. As all the rules of the ancient Critics were taken from Poets who copied nature, this is another reason why every Poet should be a Critic: Therefore, as the subject is *poetical Criticism*, it is frequently addressed to the *critical Poet*. And 3dly, the Art of Criticism is as necessarily, and much more usefully exercised in *writing* than in *judging*.

But Readers have been misled by the modesty of the *Title*: which only promises an Art of *Criticism*, in a treatise, and that a compleat one, of the Art both of *Criticism* and *Poetry*. This, and the not attending to the considerations offered above, perhaps was what misled a very candid writer, after having given this Piece all the praises on the side of genius and poetry which his true taste could not refuse it, to say, that *the observations follow one another like those in Horace's Art of Poetry, without that methodical regularity which would have been requisite in a prose writer*. Spec. N^o 235. I do not see how *method* can hurt any one grace of Poetry; or what prerogative there is in verse to dispense with *regularity*. The remark is false in every part of it. Mr. Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, the Reader will soon see, is a regular piece: And a very learned Critic has lately shewn, that *Horace* had the same attention to method in his *Art of Poetry*.

VER. 1. 'Tis hard to say, etc.] The Poem opens [from *l*. 1 to 9.] with shewing the use and seasonableness of the subject. Its *use*, from the greater mischief in wrong Criticism than in ill Poetry, this only tiring, that misleading the reader: Its *seasonableness*, from the growing number of false Critics, which now vastly exceeds that of bad Poets.

VER. 9. 'Tis with our judgments, etc.] The author having

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 139

In Poets as true genius is but rare,
 True Taste as seldom is the Critic's share;
 Both must alike from Heav'n derive their light,
 These born to judge, as well as those to write.

COMMENTARY.

shewn us the expediency of his subject, the Art of *Criticism*, next inquires [from γ 8 to 15] into the necessary *Qualities* of a *true Critic*: And observes first, that JUDGMENT, simply and alone, is not sufficient to constitute this character, because *Judgment*, like the *artificial measures of Time*, goes different, and yet each relies upon his own. The reason is conclusive; and the similitude extremely just. For *Judgment*, when alone, is always regulated, or at least much influenced by custom, fashion, and habit; and never certain and constant but when founded upon TASTE: which is the same in the *Critic*, as GENIUS in the *Poet*: both are derived from Heaven, and like the Sun (the *natural measure of Time*) always constant and equal.

Nor need we wonder that Judgment alone will not make a Critic in poetry, when we see that it will not make a Poet. And on examination we shall find, that *Genius* and *Taste* are but one and the same faculty, differently exerting itself under different names, in the two professions of *Poet* and *Critic*. For the Art of Poetry consists in *selecting*, out of all those images which present themselves to the fancy, such of them as are truly poetical: And the Art of Criticism in judiciously discerning, and fully relishing what it finds so selected. 'Tis the same operation of the mind in both cases, and consequently, exerted by the same faculty. All the difference is, that in the Poet this faculty is eminently joined with a *bright imagination*, and *extensive comprehension*, which provide stores for the selection, and can form that selection, by proportioned parts, into a regular whole: In the Critic, with a *solid judgment* and *accurate discernment*; which penetrate into the causes of an excellence, and can shew that excellence in all its variety of lights. *Longinus* had *taste* in an eminent degree; so this, which is indeed common to all true Critics, our Author makes his distinguishing character,

*Thee, bold Longinus! all the Nine inspire,
 And bless their Critic with a Poet's fire.*

Let such teach others who themselves excel, 15
 And censure freely who have written well.
 Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,
 But are not Critics to their judgment too?

Yet if we look more closely, we shall find
 Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind: 20

COMMENTARY.

VER. 15. *Let such teach others, etc.*] But it is not enough that the Critic hath these *natural endowments* to entitle him to the exercise of his Art, he ought, as our Author shews us [from v 14 to 19] to give a further test of his qualification, by some *acquired talents*: And this on two accounts: 1. Because the office of a Critic is an exercise of Authority. 2. Because he being naturally as partial to his *Judgment* as the Poet is to his *Wit*, his partiality would have nothing to correct it, as that of the person judged hath. Therefore some test is reasonable; and the best and most unexceptionable is his having written well himself, an approved remedy against *Critical partiality*; and the surest means of so maturing the Judgment, as to reap with glory what *Longinus* calls *the last and most perfect fruits of much study and experience*. Η ΓΑΡ ΤΩΝ ΛΟΓΩΝ ΚΡΙΣΙΣ ΠΟΛΛΗΣ ΕΣΤΙ ΠΕΙΡΑΣ ΤΕΛΕΥΤΑΙΟΝ ΕΠΙΓΕΝΝΗΜΑ.

VER. 19. *Yet if we look, etc.*] But having been so free with this fundamental quality of Criticism, *Judgment*, as to charge it with *inconstancy* and *partiality*, and as often warped by *custom* and *affection*; that this may not be mistaken, he next explains [from v 18 to 36.) the nature of *Judgment*, and the accidents

NOTES.

VER. 15. *Let such teach others*] *Qui scribit artificiose, ab aliis commode scripta facile intelligere poterit.* Cic. ad Herenn. lib. 4. *De pictore, sculptore, fectore, nisi artifex, judicare non potest.* Pliny. P.

VER. 20. *Most have the seeds*] *Omnes tacito quodam sensu, sine ulla arte, aut ratione, quæ sint in artibus ac rationibus recta et prava dijudicant.* Cic. de Orat. lib. iii. P.

Nature affords at least a glimm'ring light ;
 The lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.
 But as the flightest sketch, if justly trac'd,
 Is by ill-colouring but the more disgrac'd,
 So by false learning is good sense defac'd :
 Some are bewilder'd in the maze of schools, 26
 And some made coxcombs Nature meant but fools.

VARIATIONS.

Between γ 25 and 26 were these lines, since omitted by the author :

Many are spoil'd by that pedantic throng,
 Who with great pains teach youth to reason wrong.
 Tutors, like Virtuoso's, oft inclin'd
 By strange transfusion to improve the mind,
 Draw off the sense we have, to pour in new ;
 Which yet, with all their skill, they ne'er could do. P.

COMMENTARY.

occasioning those disorders before objected to it. He owns, that the *seeds* of *Judgment* are indeed sown in the minds of most men, but by ill culture, as it springs up, it generally runs wild : either on the one hand, by *false knowledge* which pedants call *Philology* ; or by *false reasoning* which Philosophers call *School-learning* : Or on the other, by *false wit* which is not regulated by *sense* ; or by *false politeness* which is solely regulated by the *fashion*. Both these sorts, who have their Judgments thus doubly

NOTES.

VER. 25. *So by false learning*] *Plus sine doctrina prudentia, quam sine prudentia valet doctrina.* Quint. P.

VER. 26, 27. *Some are bewilder'd, etc.*] This thought is taken from Lord Rochester, but more decently expressed :

*God never made a Coxcomb worth a groat,
 We owe that name to industry and arts.*

In search of wit these lose their common sense,
 And then turn Critics in their own defence:
 Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write, 30
 Or with a Rival's, or an Eunuch's spite.
 All fools have still an itching to deride,
 And fain would be upon the laughing side.
 If Mævius scribble in Apollo's spight,
 There are, who judge still worse than he can write.

Some have at first for Wits, then Poets past, 36
 Turn'd Critics next, and prov'd plain fools at last.

COMMENTARY.

depraved, the poet observes, are naturally turned to censure and reprehension; only with this difference, that the *Dunce* always affects to be on the *reasoning*, and the *Fool* on the *laughing* side. —And thus, at the same time, our author proves the truth of his introductory observation, *that the number of bad Critics is vastly superior to that of bad Poets.*

VER. 36. *Some have at first for Wits, etc.*] The poet having enumerated, in this account of the nature of Judgment and its

NOTES.

VER. 28. *In search of wit these lose their common sense,*] This observation is extremely just. *Search of wit* is not only the *occasion* but the *efficient cause* of *loss of common sense*. For *wit* consisting in chusing out, and setting together, such ideas from whose likenesses pleasant pictures are made in the fancy; the *Judgment*, thro' an *habitual* search of *Wit*, loses by degrees its faculty of seeing the true relations of things; in which consists the exercise of *common sense*.

VER. 32. *All fools have still an itching to deride, And fain would be upon the laughing side.*] The *sentiment* is just. And if Hobbes's account of laughter be true, that it arises from pride, we see the reason of it. The *expression* too is fine, it alludes to the condition of Idiots and natural-fools who are always on the grin.

Some neither can for Wits nor Critics pass,
 As heavy mules are neither horse nor ass.
 Those half-learn'd witlings, num'rous in our isle,
 As half-form'd insects on the banks of Nile; 41
 Unfinish'd things, one knows not what to call,
 Their generation's so equivocal:

COMMENTARY.

various depravations, the several sorts of *bad Critics*, and ranked them into two general Classes; as the first sort, namely the men spoiled by *false learning*, are but few in comparison of the other, and likewise come less within his main view (which is *poetical Criticism*) but keep groveling at the bottom amongst *words and letters*, he thought it here sufficient just to have mentioned them, proposing to do them right elsewhere. But the men spoiled by *false taste* are innumerable; and These are his proper concern: He therefore, from v 35 to 46. sub-divides them again into the two classes of the *volatile* and *heavy*: He describes in few words the quick progress of the One thro' *Criticism*, from false wit to plain folly, where they end; and the fixed station of the Other between the confines of both; who under the name of *Witlings*, have neither end nor measure. A kind of half formed creature from the equivocal generation of *vivacity* and *dulness*, like those on the banks of *Nile*, from *heat* and *mud*.

NOTES.

VER. 43. *Their generation's so equivocal:*] It is sufficient that a principle of philosophy has been generally received, whether it be true or false, to justify a poet's use of it to set off his *wit*. But to recommend his *argument* he should be cautious how he uses any but the true. For falsehood, when it is set too near, will tarnish the truth he would recommend. Besides, the analogy between natural and moral truth makes the principles of true Philosophy the fittest for his use. Our Poet has been careful in observing this rule.

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To tell 'em, would a hundred tongues require,
Or one vain wit's, that might a hundred tire. 45

But you who seek to give and merit fame,
And justly bear a Critic's noble name,
Be sure yourself and your own reach to know,
How far your genius, taste, and learning go;
Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet, 50
And mark that point where sense and dullness meet.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 46. *But you who seek, etc.*] Our author having thus far, by way of INTRODUCTION, explained the nature, use, and abuse of *Criticism*, in a figurative description of the qualities and characters of *Critics*, proceeds now to deliver the precepts of the Art. The first of which, from v 47 to 68. is, that he who sets up for a Critic should previously examine his own strength, and see how far he is qualified for the exercise of his profession. He puts him in a way to make this discovery, in that admirable direction given v 51.

AND MARK THAT POINT WHERE SENSE AND DULNESS MEET.

He had shewn above, that *Judgment*, without *Taste* or *Genius*, is equally incapable of making a Critic or a Poet: In whatsoever subject then the Critic's *Taste* no longer accompanies his *Judgment*, there he may be assured he is going out of his depth. This our author finely calls,

that point where sense and dulness meet.

And immediately adds the REASON of his precept; the Author of Nature having so constituted the mental faculties, that one of them can never excel but at the expence of another.

NOTES.

VER. 51. *And mark that point where sense and dullness meet.*] Besides the *peculiar* sense explained above in the comment, the words have still a more *general* meaning, and caution us against going on, when our Ideas begin to grow obscure; as we are

Nature to all things fix'd the limits fit,
 And wisely curb'd proud man's pretending wit.
 As on the land while here the ocean gains,
 In other parts it leaves wide sandy plains ; 55
 Thus in the soul while memory prevails,
 The solid pow'r of understanding fails ;
 Where beams of warm imagination play,
 The memory's soft figures melt away.
 One science only will one genius fit ; 60
 So vast is art, so narrow human wit :

COMMENTARY.

From this state and ordination of the mental faculties, and the influence and effects they have one on another, our Poet draws this CONSEQUENCE, that no one genius can excell in more than one Art or Science. The *consequence* shews the *necessity* of the precept, just as the *premisses*, from which it is drawn, shew the *reasonableness* of it.

NOTES.

apt to do, tho' that obscurity is a monition that we should leave off ; for it arises either thro' our small acquaintance with the subject, or the incomprehensibility of its nature. In which circumstances a genius will always write as heavily as a dunce. An observation well worth the attention of all profound writers.

VER. 56. *Thus in the soul while memory prevails,
 The solid pow'r of understanding fails :
 Where beams of warm imagination play,
 The memory's soft figures melt away.]*

These observations are collected from an intimate knowledge of human nature. The cause of that languor and heaviness in the *understanding*, which is almost inseparable from a very strong and tenacious *memory*, seems to be a want of the proper exercise and activity of that power ; the understanding being rather passive while the memory is cultivating. As to the other ap-

Not only bounded to peculiar arts,
 But oft' in those confin'd to single parts.
 Like Kings we lose the conquests gain'd before,
 By vain ambition still to make them more; 65
 Each might his sev'ral province well command,
 Would all but stoop to what they understand.

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame
 By her just standard, which is still the same:

COMMENTARY.

VER. 68. *First follow Nature, etc.*] The Critic observing the directions here given, and finding himself qualified for his office, is shewn next *how* to exercise it. And as he was to attend to *Nature* for a *Call*, so he is first and principally to follow her when *called*. And here again in this, as in the foregoing precept, the poet [from v 67 to 88.] shews both the *fitness* and the *necessity* of it. It's *fitness*, 1. Because Nature is the *source* of poetic Art; that Art being only a representation of Nature, who is its great exemplar and original. 2. Because Nature is the *end* of Art; the design of poetry being to convey the knowledge of

NOTES.

pearance, the decay of memory by the vigorous exercise of Fancy, the poet himself seems to have intimated the cause of it in the epithet he has given to the Imagination. For if, according to the Atomic Philosophy, the memory of things be preserved in a chain of ideas, produced by the animal spirits moving in continued trains; the force and rapidity of the Imagination perpetually breaking and dissipating the links of this chain by forming new associations, must necessarily weaken and disorder the recollective faculty.

VER. 67. *Would all but stoop to what they understand.*] The expression is delicate, and implies what is very true, that most men think it a degradation of their genius to employ it in cultivating what lies level to their comprehension, but had rather exercise their ambition in subduing what is placed above it.

Unerring NATURE, still divinely bright, 70
 One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,
 Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
 At once the source, and end, and test of Art.
 Art from that fund each just supply provides,
 Works without show, and without pomp presides:

COMMENTARY.

Nature in the most agreeable manner. 3. Because Nature is the *test* of Art, as she is unerring, constant, and still the same. Hence the poet observes, that as Nature is the *source*, she conveys *life* to Art: As she is the *end*, she conveys *force* to it, for the *force* of any thing arises from its being directed to its *end*: And, as she is the *test*, she conveys *beauty* to it, for every thing acquires *beauty* by its being reduced to its true *standard*. Such is the sense of those two important lines,

Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,
 At once the source, and end, and test of Art.

We now come to the *necessity* of the Precept. The two great constituent qualities of a *Composition*, as such, are *Art* and *Wit*: But neither of these attains perfection, 'till the first be *hid*, and the other judiciously *restrained*; which is only then when *Nature* is exactly followed; for then Art never makes a parade, nor can Wit commit an extravagance. Art, while it *adheres* to Nature, and has so large a *fund* in the resources which Nature supplies, disposes every thing with so much *ease* and *simplicity*, that we see nothing but those natural images it works with, while itself stands unobserv'd behind: But when Art *leaves* Nature, deluded either by the bold extravagance of Fancy, or the quaint odnesses of Fashion, she is then obliged at every step to come forward, in a painful or pompous ostentation, in order to cover, to soften, or to regulate the shocking disproportion of *unnatural* images. In the *first* case, the poet compares Art to the Soul within, informing a beauteous Body; but we generally find it, in the *last*, only like the outward Habit, bolstering up, by the Taylor's skill, the defects of a mis-shapen one,—As to

In some fair body thus th' informing soul 76
 With spirits feeds, with vigour fills the whole,
 Each motion guides, and ev'ry nerve sustains;
 Itself unseen, but in th' effects, remains.

Some, to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuse,
 Want as much more, to turn it to its use; 81
 For wit and judgment often are at strife,
 Tho' meant each other's aid, like man and wife.
 'Tis more to guide, than spur the Muse's steed;
 Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed; 85
 The winged courser, like a gen'rous horse,
 Shows most true mettle when you check his course.

Those RULES of old discover'd, not devis'd,
 Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd;

VARIATIONS.

VER. 80.

There are whom Heav'n has blest with store of wit,
 Yet want as much again to manage it.

COMMENTARY.

Wit, it might perhaps be imagined that this needed only *Judgment* to govern it: But, as he well observes,

Wit and Judgment often are at strife,

Tho' meant each other's aid, like Man and Wife.

They want therefore some friendly Mediator or Reconciler, which is *Nature*: And in attending to her, the Judgment will learn where to comply with the charms of Wit, and the Wit how to obey the sage directions of Judgment.

VER. 88. *Those Rules of old etc.*] Having thus, in his first precept, *to follow Nature*, settled Criticism on its true bottom; he proceeds to shew what assistance may be had from *Art*. But

Nature, like Liberty, is but restrain'd 90
By the same Laws which first herself ordain'd.

Hear how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites,
When to repress, and when indulge our flights :

COMMENTARY.

lest this should be thought to draw the Critic from the foundation where he had before fixed him, he previously observes [from *vs* 87 to 92] that those *Rules of Art*, which he is now about to recommend to his study, were not invented by the Imagination, but discovered in the book of Nature: And that, therefore, tho' they may seem to restrain *Nature* by *Laws*, yet, as they are laws of her own making, the Critic is still properly in the very liberty of Nature. Those Rules the ancient Critics borrowed from the Poets; who received them immediately from *Nature*,

*Just Precepts thus from great Examples giv'n,
These drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n;*
and are both therefore to be well studied.

VER. 92. *Hear how learn'd Greece, etc.*] He speaks of the *ancient Critics* first, and with great judgment, as the previous knowledge of them is necessary for reading the Poets, with that fruit which the intent here proposed requires. But having, in the previous observation, sufficiently explained the *nature* of ancient Criticism, he enters on the subject [treated of from *vs* 91 to 118] with a sublime description of its *End*; which was to

NOTES.

VER. 88. *Those Rules of old, etc.*] Cicero has, best of any one I know, explained what that is which reduces the wild and scattered parts of human knowledge into *arts*.—*Nihil est quod ad artem redigi possit, nisi ille prius, qui illa tenet, quorum artem instituere vult, habeat illam scientiam, ut ex iis rebus, quarum ars nondum sit, artem efficere possit.*—*Omnia fere, quæ sunt conclusa nunc artibus, dispersa et dissipata quondam fuerunt, ut in Musicis, etc. Adhibita est igitur ars quædam extrinsecus ex alio genere quodam, quod sibi totum PHILOSOPHI assumunt, quæ rem dissolutam divulgantque conglutinet, et ratione quadam constringeret.* De Orat. l. i. c. 41, 2.

High on Parnassus' top her sons she show'd,
 And pointed out those arduous paths they trod; 95
 Held from afar, aloft, th' immortal prize,
 And urg'd the rest by equal steps to rise.
 Just precepts thus from great examples giv'n,
 She drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n.
 The gen'rous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire, 100
 And taught the world with reason to admire.

COMMENTARY.

illustrate the beauties of the best Writers, in order to excite others to an emulation of their excellence. From the admiration which these Ideas raise in him, the poet is naturally brought back to reflect on the degeneracy of modern Criticism: And as the restoring the Art to its original integrity and splendor is the great purpose of his poem, he first takes notice of those, who seem not to understand that *Nature* is exhaustless, that *new models* of good writing may be produced in every age, and consequently *new rules* may be formed from these models in the same manner as the old Critics formed theirs, from the writings of the ancient Poets: but these men wanting art and ability to form these *new rules*, are content to receive, and file up for use, the *old ones* of *Aristotle*, *Quintilian*, *Longinus*, *Horace*, etc. with the same vanity and boldness that Apothecaries practise with their Doctors bills: And thus rashly applying them to *new Originals* (cases which they did not hit) it was no more in their power than their inclination to imitate the candid practice of the *Ancients*, when

*The gen'rous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire,
 And taught the world with reason to admire.*

NOTES.

VER. 98. *Just precepts*] *Nec enim artibus editis factum est ut argumenta inveniremus, sed dicta sunt omnia antequam preciperentur; mox ea scriptores observata et collecta ediderunt.* Quintil. P.

Then Criticism the Muses handmaid prov'd,
 To dress her charms, and make her more belov'd:
 But following wits from that intention stray'd,
 Who cou'd not win the mistress, woo'd the maid;
 Against the Poets their own arms they turn'd,
 Sure to hate most the men from whom they learn'd.
 So modern 'Pothecaries, taught the art
 By Doctor's bills to play the Doctor's part,
 Bold in the practice of mistaken rules, 110
 Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools.
 Some on the leaves of antient authors prey,
 Nor time nor moths e'er spoil'd so much as they.
 Some drily plain, without invention's aid,
 Write dull receipts how poems may be made. 115

COMMENTARY.

For, as *Ignorance*, when joined with *Humility* produces stupid admiration, on which account it is so commonly observed to be the *mother of Devotion* and blind homage; so when joined with *Vanity* (as it always is in bad Critics) it gives birth to every iniquity of impudent abuse and slander. See an example (for want of a better) in a late worthless and now forgotten thing, called the *Life of Socrates*. Where the head of the Author (as a man of wit observed, on reading the book) has just made a shift to do the office of a *Camera obscura*, and represent things in an inverted order; himself *above*, and Sprat, Rollin, Voltaire, and every other Author of reputation, *below*.

NOTES.

VER. 112. *Some on the leaves—Some drily plain.*] The first, the *Apes* of those *Italian Critics*, who at the restoration of letters

These leave the sense, their learning to display,
And those explain the meaning quite away.

You then whose judgment the right course would
steer,

Know well each ANCIENT'S proper character ;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 118. *You then whose judgment etc.*] He comes next to the *ancient Poets*, the other and more intimate commentators of Nature. And shews [from v 117 to 141.] that the study of These must indispensably follow that of the *ancient Critics*, as they furnish us with what the Critics, who only give us *general rules*, cannot supply : while the study of a great original Poet, in

His Fable, Subject, scope in ev'ry page ;

Religion, Country, genius of his Age ;

will help us to those *particular rules*, which only can conduct us

NOTES.

having found the classic writers miserably mangled by the hands of monkish Librarians, very commendably employed their pains and talents in restoring them to their native purity. The second, the *plagiaries* from the *French*, who had made some admirable Commentaries on the ancient critics. But that *acumen* and *taste*, which separately constitute the distinct value of those two species of foreign Criticism, make no part of the character of these paltry mimics at home, described by our Poet in the following lines,

These leave the sense, their learning to display,

And those explain the meaning quite away.

Which species is the least hurtful, the Poet has enabled us to determine in the lines with which he opens his poem,

But of the two less dang'rous is th'offence

To tire our patience than mislead our sense.

From whence we conclude, that the reverend Mr. Upton was much more innocently employed when he quibbled upon Epicte-
tus, than when he commented upon Shakespear.

His Fable, Subject, scope in ev'ry page; 120
 Religion, Country, genius of his Age:
 Without all these at once before your eyes,
 Cavil you may, but never criticize.

VARIATIONS.

VER. 123. *Cavil you may, but never criticize.*] The author after this verse originally inserted the following, which he has however omitted in all the editions:

Zoilus, had these been known, without a name
 Had dy'd, and *Perault* ne'er been damn'd to fame;
 The sense of sound Antiquity had reign'd,
 And sacred Homer yet been unprophan'd.
 None e'er had thought his comprehensive mind
 To modern customs, modern rules confin'd;
 Who for all ages writ, and all mankind.

P. }

COMMENTARY.

safely through every considerable work we undertake to examine; and, without which, we may cavil indeed, as the poet truly observes, but can never *criticize*. We might as well suppose that Vitruvius's book alone would make a perfect Judge of Architecture, without the knowledge of some great master-piece of science, such as the Rotonda at Rome, or the Temple of Minerva at Athens; as that Aristotle's should make a *perfect Judge of wit*, without the study of Homer and Virgil. These therefore he principally recommends to complete the Critic in his Art. But as the latter of these Poets has, by superficial judges, been considered rather as a copyer of Homer, than an original, our Author obviates that common error, and shews it to have arisen (as often error does) from a truth, *viz.* that *Homer and Nature were the same*; and how that the ambitious young Poet, though he scorned to stoop at any thing short of Nature, when he came to understand this great truth, had the prudence to contemplate Nature in the place where she was seen to most advantage, collected in all her charms in the clear mirror of Homer. Hence it would follow, that, though Virgil studied Na-

Be Homer's works your study and delight,
 Read them by day, and meditate by night; 125
 Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims
 bring,

And trace the Muses upward to their spring.
 Still with itself compar'd, his text peruse;
 And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.

When first young Maro in his boundless mind
 A work t'outlast immortal Rome design'd, 131
 Perhaps he seem'd above the Critic's law,
 And but from Nature's fountains scorn'd to draw:

VARIATIONS.

VER. 130.

When first young Maro sung of Kings and Wars,
 Ere warning Phœbus touch'd his trembling ears,

COMMENTARY.

ture, yet the *vulgar* reader would believe him to be a copier of Homer; and though he copied Homer, yet the *judicious* reader would see him to be an imitator of Nature: the finest praise which any one, who came after Homer, could receive.

NOTES.

VER. 130. *When first young Maro etc.*] Virg. Eclog. vi.
*Cum canerem reges et prælia, Cynthia aurem
 Vellit.*

It is a tradition preserved by Servius, that Virgil began with writing a poem of the Alban and Roman affairs; which he found above his years, and descended first to imitate Theocritus on rural subjects, and afterwards to copy Homer in Heroic poetry. P.

But when t'examine ev'ry part he came,
 Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.
 Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold design;
 And rules as strict his labour'd work confine,
 As if the Stagirite o'erlook'd each line.
 Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
 To copy nature is to copy them. 140

Some beauties yet no Precepts can declare,
 For there's a happiness as well as care.
 Music resembles Poetry, in each
 Are nameless graces which no methods teach,
 And which a master-hand alone can reach. 145
 If, where the rules not far enough extend,
 (Since rules were made but to promote their end)

COMMENTARY.

VER. 141. *Some beauties yet no Precepts can declare, etc.*
 Our Author, in these two general precepts for studying *Nature*
 and her *Commentators*, having considered Poetry as it *is*, or *may*
be reduced to Rule; lest this should be mistaken as sufficient to
 attain PERFECTION either in *writing* or *judging*, he proceeds
 [from v 140 to 201.] to point up to those *sublimier beauties*
 which *Rules* will never reach, that is, enable us either to *exe-*
cute or *taste*: and which rise so high above all precept as not even
 to be *described* by it; but being entirely the gift of Heaven,
 Art and Reason have no further share in their production than
 just to moderate their operations. These *Sublimities* of Poetry,
 like the *Mysteries* of Religion (some of which are above Rea-
 son, and some contrary to it) may be divided into *two sorts*,
 such as are *above Rules*, and such as are *contrary* to them.
 VER. 146. *If, where the rules etc.*] The *first* sort our author

Some lucky Licence answer to the full
 Th'intent propos'd, that Licence is a rule.
 Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take, 150
 May boldly deviate from the common track ;

COMMENTARY.

describes [from *ŷ* 145 to 158.] and shews, that where a great beauty is in the *Poet's* view which no stated *Rules* will direct him how to reach, there, as the purpose of rules is only to promote an end like this, a lucky *Licence* will supply the want of them: nor can the *Critic* fairly object to it, since this *Licence*, for the reason given above, has the proper force and authority of a *Rule*.

NOTES.

VER. 146. *If, where the rules etc.*] *Neque enim rogationibus plebisve scitis sancta sunt ista Præcepta, sed hoc, quicquid est, Utilitas excogitavit. Non negabo autem sic utile esse plerumque; verum si eadem illa nobis aliud suadebit Utilitas, hanc, relicta magistrorum autoritatibus, sequemur.* Quintil. lib. ii. cap. 13. P.

VER. 150. *Thus Pegasus, &c.*] We have observed how the precepts for *writing* and *judging* are interwoven throughout the whole work. He first describes the sublime flight of a *Poet*, soaring above all vulgar bounds, to snatch a *grace* directly, which lies beyond the reach of a common adventurer. And afterwards, the *effect* of that *grace* upon the *true Critic*: whom it penetrates with an equal rapidity; going the nearest way to his *heart*, without passing through his *Judgment*. By which is not meant that it could not stand the test of *Judgment*; but that, it being a beauty uncommon, and *above rule*, and the *Judgment* habituated to determine only *by rule*, it makes its direct application to the *Heart*; which once gained, soon opens and enlarges the *Judgment*, whose concurrence (it being now set above forms) is easily procured. That this is the poet's sublime conception appears from the concluding words:

and all its end at once attains.

For Poetry doth not attain *all its end*, till it hath gained the *Judgment* as well as *Heart*.

From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,
 And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,
 Which without passing thro' the judgment, gains
 The heart, and all its end at once attains. 155

In prospects thus, some objects please our eyes,
 Which out of nature's common order rise,
 The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice. }

Great Wits sometimes may gloriously offend,
 And rise to faults true Critics dare not mend. 160

But tho' the Ancients thus their rules invade,
 (As Kings dispense with laws themselves have made)
 Moderns, beware! or if you must offend

Against the precept, ne'er transgress its End;
 Let it be seldom, and compell'd by need; 165
 And have, at least, their precedent to plead.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 159. *Great Wits sometimes may gloriously offend, etc.*
 He describes next the *second sort*, the beauties *against rule*.
 And even here, as he observes [from *vs* 158 to 169] the of-
 fense is so glorious, and the fault so sublime, that the *true Critic*
 will not dare either to censure or reform them. Yet still the
Poet is never to abandon himself to his Imagination: the rules
 our author lays down for his conduct in this respect, are these:
 1. That though he transgress the *letter* of some *one particular*
 precept, yet that he still adhere to the end or *spirit* of them *all*;
 which end is the creation of *one uniform perfect Whole*. And
 2. That he have, in each instance, the authority of the *dispens-*
ing power of the Ancients to plead for him. These rules observ-
 ed, this licence will be *seldom* used, and only when he is *com-*
pelled by need: which will disarm the Critic, and screen the trans-
 gressor from his laws.

The Critic else proceeds without remorse,
Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force.

I know there are, to whose presumptuous thoughts
Those freer beauties, ev'n in them, seem faults. 170
Some figures monstrous and mis-shap'd appear,
Consider'd singly, or beheld too near,
Which, but proportion'd to their light, or place,
Due distance reconciles to form and grace.
A prudent chief not always must display 175
His pow'rs in equal ranks, and fair array,

COMMENTARY.

VER. 169. *I know there are, etc.*] But as some *modern Critics* have had the presumption to say, that this last rule is only justifying one fault by another, our author goes on [from ν 168 to 181] to vindicate the *Ancients*; and to shew that this censure proceeds from rank Ignorance. As where their *partial Judgment* cannot see that this licence is sometimes necessary for the symmetry and proportion of a perfect whole, from the point, and in the light wherein it must be viewed: or, where their *hasty Judgment* will not give them time to discover, that a deviation from rule is for the sake of attaining some great and admirable purpose. — These observations are further useful as they tend to give modern Critics an humbler opinion of their own abilities, and an higher of the Authors they undertake to criticize. On which account He concludes with a fine reproof of that common *proverb* perpetually in the mouths of Critics, *quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus*; misunderstanding the sense of Horace, and taking *quandoque* for *aliquando*:

*Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.*

NOTES.

VER. 175. *A prudent chief etc.*] Οἷόν τι ποῖσιν οἱ Φρόνι-

But with th'occasion and the place comply,
 Conceal his force, nay seem sometimes to fly.
 Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,
 Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream. 180
 Still green with bays each ancient Altar stands,
 Above the reach of sacrilegious hands ;
 Secure from Flames, from Envy's fiercer rage,
 Destructive War, and all-involving Age.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 181. *Still green with bays, etc.*] But now fired with the name of *Homer*, and transported with the contemplation of those beauties which a cold Critic can neither see nor conceive, the Poet [from v 180 to 201.] breaks into a rapturous exclamation on the rare felicity of those few Ancients who have risen superior over time and accidents: And, as it were disdainful any longer to *reason* with his Critics, offers this to them as the surest confutation of their censures. Then with the *humility* of a supplicant at the shrine of Immortals, and the *Sublimity* of a Poet participating of their fire, he turns again to these ancient worthies, and apostrophises their Manes:

Hail, Bards triumphant! etc.

NOTES.

μοι σεβηλάται τὰς τάξεις τῶν σεβημάτων—Dion. Hal. De struct. orat.

VER. 180. *Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.*] *Modeste, et circumspēcto judicio de tantis viris pronunciandum est, ne quod (quod plerisque accidit) damnent quod non intelligunt. Ac si necesse est in alteram errare partem, omnia eorum legentibus placere, quam multa displicere maluerim.* Quint. P.

VER. 183. *Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage, Destructive war, and all-involving age.*] The Poet here alludes to the four great causes of the ravage amongst ancient writings: The destruction of the Alexandrine and Palatine libraries by *fire*; the fiercer rage of *Zoilus* and *Mævius* and their followers against *Wit*; the irruption of the *Barbarians* into the

† L.

See, from each clime the learn'd their incense bring!
 Hear, in all tongues consenting Pæans ring! 185
 In praise so just let ev'ry voice be join'd,
 And fill the gen'ral chorus of mankind.
 Hail, Bards triumphant! born in happier days;
 Immortal heirs of universal praise! 190
 Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
 As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow;
 Nations unborn your mighty names shall found,
 And worlds applaud that must not yet be found!
 Oh may some spark of your celestial fire, 195
 The last, the meanest of your sons inspire,
 (That on weak wings, from far, pursues your flights;
 Glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes)
 To teach vain Wits a science little known,
 T'admire superior sense, and doubt their own! 200

COMMENTARY.

VER. 200. *T'admire superior sense, and doubt their own.*] This line concludes the first division of the Poem; in which we

NOTES.

empire; and the long reign of Ignorance and Superstition in the cloisters.

VER. 189. *Hail, Bards triumphant!*] There is a pleasantry in this title, which alludes to the state of *warfare* that all true Genius must undergo while here upon earth.

VER. 196. *The last*] This word, spoken in his early youth, as it were by chance, seems to have been ominous.

OF all the Causes which conspire to blind
 Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,
 What the weak head with strongest bias rules,
 Is *Pride*, the never-failing vice of fools,

COMMENTARY.

see the *subject* of the first and second part, and likewise the connexion they have with one another. It serves likewise to introduce the second. The effect of studying the *Ancients*, as hitherto recommended, would be the *admiration of their superior sense*; which, if it will not of itself dispose *Moderns* to a *diffidence of their own* (one of the great uses, as well as natural fruits of that study) the poet, to help forward their modesty, in his second part shews them (in a regular deduction of the *causes and effects of wrong Judgment*) their own image and amiable turn of mind.

VER. 201. *Of all the Causes, etc.*] Having, in the first part, delivered *Rules for perfecting the Art of Criticism*, the second is employ'd in explaining the *Impediments* to it. The order of the two parts is judicious. For the causes of wrong Judgment being *Pride, superficial Learning, a bounded Capacity, and Partiality*; Those to whom this part is principally addressed, would not readily be brought either to see the malignity of the *causes*, or to own themselves concerned in the *effects*, had not the Author previously both enlightened and convicted them, by the foregoing observations, on the *vastness of Art, and narrowness of Wit*; the extensive study of *human Nature and Antiquity*; and the *Characters of ancient Poetry and Criticism*; the natural remedies to the four epidemic disorders he is now endeavouring to redress.

Ibid. *Of all the causes, etc.*] The first cause of wrong Judgment is PRIDE. He judiciously begins with it, [from v 200 to 215.] as on other accounts, so on this, that it is the very thing which gives modern Criticism its character; whose complexion is *abuse and censure*. He calls it the vice of *Fools*; by whom are not meant those to whom Nature has given no Judgment (for he is here speaking of what misleads the Judgment) but those in whom education and study has made no improvement; as appears from the happy similitude of an *ill-nourish'd*

Whatever Nature has in worth deny'd, 205
 She gives in large recruits of needful Pride;
 For as in bodies, thus in souls, we find
 What wants in blood and spirits, swell'd with wind:
 Pride, where Wit fails, steps in to our defence,
 And fills up all the mighty Void of sense. 210
 If once right reason drives that cloud away,
 Truth breaks upon us with resistless day.
 Trust not yourself; but your defects to know,
 Make use of ev'ry friend—and ev'ry foe.

COMMENTARY.

body; where the same words which express the *cause*, express likewise the *nature* of pride:

*For as in bodies, thus in souls, we find,
 What wants in blood and spirits, swell'd with wind.*

'Tis the business of reason, he tells us, to dispel the *cloud* which pride throws over the mind: But the mischief is, that the rays of reason, diverted by self-love, sometimes *gild* this *cloud*, instead of *dissipating* it. So that the Judgment, by false lights reflected back upon itself, is still apt to be a little dazzled, and to mistake its object. He therefore advises to call in still more helps:

*Trust not yourself; but your defects to know,
 Make use of ev'ry Friend—and ev'ry Foe.*

Both the *beginning* and *conclusion* of this precept are remarkable. The question is of the means to subdue Pride: He directs the Critic to begin with a *distrust of himself*; and this is *Modesty*, the *first* mortification of Pride: And then to seek the assistance of others, and *make use even of an Enemy*; and this is *Humility*, the *last* mortification of Pride: For when a man can once bring himself to submit to profit by an enemy, he has either already quite subdued his Vanity, or is in a fair way of so doing.

NOTES.

VER. 209. *Pride where Wit fails steps in to our defence, And fills up all the mighty void of sense.*] A very sensible french writer makes the following remark on this species of pride. "Un homme qui sçait plusieurs Langues, qui entend les Auteurs

A little learning is a dang'rous thing ; 215
 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring :
 There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
 And drinking largely sobers us again.
 Fir'd at first sight with what the Muse imparts,
 In fearless youth we tempt the heights of Arts,

COMMENTARY.

VER. 215. *A little learning, etc.*] We must here remark the Poet's skill in his disposition of the *causes* obstructing true Judgment. Each *general cause* which is laid down first, has its own *particular cause* in that which follows. Thus, the *second cause* of wrong Judgment, SUPERFICIAL LEARNING, is what gives birth to that critical *Pride*, which he mentioned first.

VER. 216. *Drink deep, etc.*] *Nature* and *Learning* are the pole stars of all true Criticism: But *Pride* hinders the sight of *Nature*; and a *smattering of letters* takes away all sense of the want of *Learning*. To avoid this ridiculous situation, the poet [from \S 214 to 233] advises, either to drink deep, or not to taste at all; for the least sip is enough to make a bad Critic, while even a moderate draught can never make a good one. And yet the labours and difficulties of *drinking deep* are so great that a young author, "Fir'd with ideas of fair Italy," and ambitious to snatch a palm from Rome, engages in an undertaking as arduous almost as that of Hannibal: Finely illustrated by the similitude of an unexperienced traveller penetrating thro' the Alps.

NOTES.

" Grecs et Latins, qui s'eleve même jusqu' à la dignité de SCHOLIASTE; si cet homme venoit à peser son véritable mérite, il trouveroit souvent qu'il se réduit à avoir eu des yeux et de la mémoire, il se garderoit bien de donner le nom respectable de science à une *érudition sans lumiere*. Il y a une grande difference entre s'enrichir des mots ou des choses, entre aller des autoritez ou des raisons. Si un homme pouvoit se surprendre à n' avoir que cette sorte de mérite, il en rougiroit plutôt que d'en être vain."

VER. 217. *There shallow draughts, etc.*] The thought was taken from Lord Verulam, who applies it to more serious enquiries.

While from the bounded level of our mind, 221
 Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;
 But more advanc'd, behold with strange surprize
 New distant scenes of endless science rise!
 So pleas'd at first the tow'ring Alps we try, 225
 Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky,
 Th' eternal snows appear already past,
 And the first clouds and mountains seem the last;
 But, those attain'd, we tremble to survey
 The growing labours of the lengthen'd way, 230
 Th' increasing prospect tires our wand'ring eyes,
 Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!

A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit
 With the same spirit that its author writ:

VARIATIONS.

VER. 225.

So pleas'd at first the tow'ring Alps to try,
 Fill'd with ideas of fair Italy,
 The Traveller beholds with chearful eyes
 The less'ning vales, and seems to tread the skies.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 233. *A perfect Judge, etc.*] The third cause of wrong Judgment is a NARROW CAPACITY; the natural and certain cause of the foregoing defect, *acquiescence in superficial learning*. This *bounded Capacity* the poet shews [from 232 to 384.] betrays itself two ways; in the *matter*, and in the *manner* of the

NOTES.

VER. 233. *A perfect Judge, etc.*] *Diligenter legendum est, ac pœne ad scribendi sollicitudinem: Nec per partes modo scrutanda sunt omnia, sed perlectus liber utique ex integro resumendus.* Quin-

Survey the WHOLE, nor seek slight faults to find
 Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;
 Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,
 The gen'rous pleasure to be charm'd with wit.

COMMENTARY.

work criticised. In the matter by judging *by parts*; or by having one *favorite part* to a neglect of all the rest: In the manner, by confining the regard only to *conceit*, or *language*, or *numbers*. This is our Poet's order; and we shall follow him as it leads us; only just observing one great beauty which runs thro' this part of the poem; it is, that under each of these heads of *wrong* Judgment, he has intermixed excellent precepts for *right*. We shall take notice of them as they occur.

He exposes the folly of judging by parts very artfully, not by a direct description of that sort of Critic, but of his opposite, a *perfect Judge*, etc. Nor is the elegance of this conversion inferior to the art of it; for as, in *poetic style*, one word or figure is still put for another, in order to catch new lights from different images, and to reflect them back upon the subject in hand; so, in *poetic matter*, one person or thing may be advantageously employed for another, with the same elegance of representation. It is observable that our Author makes it almost the necessary consequence of judging *by parts*, to find fault: And this not without much discernment: For the several *parts* of a compleat *Whole*, when *seen only singly*, and *known only indepen-*

NOTES.

VER. 235. *Survey the Whole, nor seek slight faults to find, Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;*] The *second* line, in apologizing for those *faults* which the *first* says should be overlooked, gives the reason of the precept. For when a writer's attention is fixed on a general view of Nature, and his imagination warm'd with the contemplation of great ideas, it can hardly be but that there must be small irregularities in the disposition both of matter and style, because the avoiding these requires a coolness of recollection, which a writer so busied is not master of.

But in such lays as neither ebb, nor flow,
 Correctly cold, and regularly low, 240
 That shunning faults, one quiet tenour keep;
 We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep.
 In Wit, as Nature, what affects our hearts
 Is not th' exactness of peculiar parts;
 'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call, 245
 But the joint force and full result of all,
 Thus when we view some well-proportion'd dome,
 (The world's just wonder, and ev'n thine, O Rome!)
 No single parts unequally surprize,
 All comes united to th' admiring eyes; 250

COMMENTARY.

dently, must always have the appearance of irregularity; often, of deformity: Because the Poet's design being to *create* a resultive beauty from the artful assemblage of several various *parts* into one natural *whole*; those parts must be fashioned with regard to their mutual relations in the stations they occupy in that whole, from whence, the beauty required is to arise: But that *regard* will occasion so unreducible a form in each part, when *considered singly*, as to present a very mis-shapen appearance.

NOTES.

VER. 248. *The world's just wonder, and ev'n thine, O Rome!*] The *Pantheon*. There is something very Gothic in the taste and judgment of a learned man, who despises this master-piece of Art for those very qualities which deserve our admiration.—
 “ Nous esmerveillons comme l'on fait si grand cas de ce Panthe-
 “ on, veu que son edifice n'est de si grande industrie comme
 “ l'on crie: car chaque petit Masson peut bien concevoir la ma-
 “ niere de sa façon tout en un instant: car estant la base si mas-
 “ sive, et les murailles si espousses, ne nous a semblé difficile d'y

No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear;
The Whole at once is bold, and regular.

Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
In ev'ry work regard the writer's End, 255
Since none can compass more than they intend;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 253. *Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,*] He shews next [from v 252 to 263] that to fix our censure on *single parts* tho' they happen to *want* an exactness consistent enough with their relation to the rest, is even then very unjust: And for these reasons, 1. Because it implies an expectation of a *faultless piece*, which is a vain imagination: 2. Because no more is to be expected of any work than that it fairly *attains its end*: But the end may be attained, and yet these trivial faults committed: Therefore, in spite of such faults, the work will merit the praise due to that which attains its end. 3. Because sometimes a great beauty is not to be procured, nor a notorious blemish to be avoided, but by suffering one of these minute and trivial errors. 4. And lastly, because the generous *neglect* of them is a *praise*; as it is the indication of a *Genius*, busied about greater matters.

NOTES.

“adjouster la voute à claire voye.” *Pierre Belon's Observations, etc.* The nature of the Gothic structures apparently led him into this mistake of the Architectonic art in general; that the excellency of it consisted in raising the greatest weight on the least assignable support, so that the edifice should have strength without the appearance of it, in order to excite admiration. But to a judicious eye it would have a contrary effect, *the Appearance* (as our poet expresses it) *of a monstrous height, or breadth, or length.* Indeed did the just proportions in regular Architecture take off from the grandeur of a building, by *all the single parts coming united to the eye*, as this learned traveller seems to insinuate, it would be a reasonable objection to those rules on which this Master-piece of Art was constructed. But it is not so. The Poet tells us,

The Whole at once is BOLD and regular.

And if the means be just, the conduct true,
 Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due.
 As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,
 T' avoid great errors, must the less commit: 260
 Neglect the rules each verbal Critic lays,
 For not to know some trifles, is a praise.
 Most Critics, fond of some subservient art,
 Still make the Whole depend upon a Part:
 They talk of principles, but notions prize, 265
 And all to one lov'd Folly sacrifice.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 263. *Most Critics, fond of some subservient art, etc.*
 II. The *second* way in which a *narrow capacity*, as it relates to the *matter*, shews itself, is judging by a *favorite Part*. The author has placed this [from ψ 262 to 285] after the other of judging *by parts*, with great propriety, it being indeed a natural consequence of it. For when men have once left the *whole* to turn their attention to the *separate parts*, that regard and reverence due only to a *whole* is fondly transferred to one or other of its *parts*. And thus we see that Heroes themselves as well as Hero-makers, even *Kings* as well as Poets and Critics, when they chance never to have had, or long to have lost the idea of that which is the only legitimate object of their office, the care and conservation of the *whole*, are wont to devote themselves to the service of some favorite part, whether it be love of money, military glory, despotic power, etc. *And all*, as our Author says on this occasion,

to one lov'd Folly sacrifice,

NOTES.

VER. 261. *verbal Critic*] Is not here used in its common signification, of one who retails the sense of single words; but of one who deals in large cargo's of them without any sense at all.

Once on a time, La Mancha's Knight, they say,
 A certain Bard encount'ring on the way,
 Discours'd in terms as just, with looks as sage,
 As e'er could Dennis, of the Grecian stage; 270
 Concluding all were desp'rate fots and fools,
 Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules.
 Our Author, happy in a judge so nice,
 Produc'd his Play, and begg'd the Knight's advice;

COMMENTARY.

This general misconduct much recommends that maxim in good Poetry and Politics, *to give a principal attention to the whole*; a maxim which our author has elsewhere shewn to be equally true likewise in *Morals and Religion*; as being founded in the order of things: For, if we examine, we shall find it arise from this imbecillity of our nature, that the mind must always have something *to rest upon*, to which the passions and affections may be interestingly directed. Nature prompts us to seek it in the most worthy object; and common sense points out to a *Whole or System*: But Ignorance, and the false lights of the Passions, confound and dazzle us; we stop short, and before we get to a *Whole*, take up with some *Part*; which from thence becomes our Favourite.

NOTES.

VER. 267. *Once on a time, etc.*] This tale is so very apposite, that one would naturally take it to be of the Poet's own invention; and so much in the spirit of *Cervantes*, that one might easily mistake it for one of the chief strokes of that incomparable Satire. But, in truth, it is neither this nor that; but a story taken by our Author from the *spurious Don Quixote*; which shews how proper an use may be made of General reading, when if there is but one good thing in a book (as in that wretched performance there scarce was more) it may be pick'd out, and employ'd to an excellent purpose.

Made him observe the subject, and the plot, 275

The manners, passions, unities; what not?

All which, exact to rule, were brought about,

Were but a Combat in the lists left out.

“What! leave the Combat out?” exclaims the
Knight;

Yes, or we must renounce the Stagirite. 280

“Not so by Heav’n” (he answers in a rage)

“Knights, squires, and steeds, must enter on the
“stage.”

So vast a throng the stage can ne’er contain.

“Then build a new, or act it in a plain.”

Thus Critics, of less judgment than caprice, 285

Curious not knowing, not exact but nice,

COMMENTARY.

VER. 285. *Thus Critics of less judgment than caprice,
Curious not knowing, not exact but nice,
Form short Ideas, etc.]*

2. He concludes his observations on those *two sorts* of judges by *parts*, with this general reflexion.—The *curious not knowing* are the *first* sort, who judge *by parts*, and with a *microscopic* sight (as he says elsewhere) *examine bit by bit*: The *not exact but nice*, are the *second*, who judge by a *favourite part*, and talk of a *whole* to cover their fondness for a *part*; as Philosophers do of *principles*, in order to obtrude their *notions* or opinions for them.

NOTES.

VER. 285. *Thus Critics of less judgment than caprice,
Curious not knowing, not exact but nice.]* In these two lines the poet finely describes the way in which bad writers are wont to imitate the qualities of good ones. As true *Judgment*

Form short Ideas ; and offend in arts
(As most in manners) by a love to parts.

Some to *Conceit* alone their taste confine,
And glitt'ring thoughts struck out at ev'ry line; 290
Pleas'd with a work where nothing's just or fit;
One glaring Chaos and wild heap of wit.

COMMENTARY.

But the fate common to both is, to be governed by *caprice* and not by *Judgment*, and consequently, to form short ideas, or to have ideas short of truth: Tho' the latter sort, thro' a fondness to their favorite part, imagine that they comprehend the whole in epitome: As the famous Hero of *La Mancha*, mentioned just before, used to maintain, that *Knight Errantry* comprised within itself the quintessence of all Science, civil and military.

VER. 289. *Some to Conceit alone, etc.*] We come now to that second sort of bounded capacity, which betrays itself in the manner of the work criticised. And this our Author prosecutes from v 288 to 384. These are again subdivided into divers classes.

Ibid. *Some to Conceit alone, etc.*] The first [from v 288 to 305.] are those who confine their attention solely to *Conceit* or *Wit*. And here again the Critic by parts, offends doubly in the manner, just as he did in the matter: For he not only confines his atten-

NOTES.

generally draws men out of popular opinions, so he who cannot get from the croud by the assistance of this guide, willingly follows *Caprice*, which will be sure to lead him into singularities. Again, true *Knowledge* is the art of treasuring up only that which, from its use in life, is worthy of being lodged in the memory. But *Curiosity* consists in a vain attention to every thing out of the way, and which, for its uselessness the world least regards. Lastly, *Exactness* is the just proportion of parts to one another, and their harmony in a whole: But he who has not extent of capacity for the exercise of this quality, contents himself with *Nicety*, which is a busying one's self about points and syllables.

Poets like painters, thus, unskill'd to trace
 The naked nature and the living grace,
 With gold and jewels cover ev'ry part, 295
 And hide with ornaments their want of art.
 True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
 What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;

COMMENTARY.

tion to a *part*, when it should be extended to the *whole*; but he likewise judges *falsely* of that *part*. And this, like the other, is unavoidable, as the *parts* in the *manner*, bear the same close relation to the *whole*, that the *parts* in the *matter* do; to which *whole* the ideas of this Critic have never yet extended. Hence it is, that our author, speaking here of those who confine their attention solely to *Conceit* or *Wit*, describes the two species of *true* and *false* Wit; because they not only mistake a *wrong disposition of true Wit for a right*, but likewise *false Wit for true*; He describes false Wit first, from v 288 to 297.

Some to Conceit alone, etc.

Where the reader may observe our Author's skill in representing, in a description of *false* Wit, the false disposition of the *true*, as the Critic *by parts* is apt to fall into both these errors.

He next describes *true* Wit, from 296 to 305.

True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd, etc.

And here again the reader may observe the same beauty, not only an explanation of *true* Wit, but likewise of the *right disposition* of it; which the poet illustrates, as he did the *wrong*, by ideas taken from the art of Painting.

NOTES.

VER. 297. *True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd, etc.*] This definition is very exact. Mr. Locke had defined *Wit* to consist in the *assemblage of ideas*, and putting those together, with *quickness and variety*, wherein can be found any *resemblance or congruity*, whereby to make up *pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy*. But that great Philosopher, in separating *Wit* from

Something, whose truth convinc'd at sight we find
 That gives us back the image of our mind. 300
 As shades more sweetly recommend the light,
 So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit.
 For works may have more wit than does 'em good,
 As bodies perish thro' excess of blood.

Others for *Language* all their care express, 305
 And value books, as women men, for Dress:

COMMENTARY.

VER. 305. *Others for Language, etc.*] He proceeds secondly to those narrow-minded Critics, whose whole concern turns upon *Language*, and shews [from *v* 304 to 337.] that this quality, where it holds the principal place, *deserves no commendation*; 1. Because it excludes qualities more essential. And when the abounding Verbiage has excluded the sense, the writer has nothing to do but to gild over the defect, by giving his words all the false colouring in his power.

2. He shews, that the Critic who busies himself with this quality alone, is altogether *unable to make a right Judgment* of it; because *true Expression* is only the dress of Thought; and so must be perpetually varied according to the subject, and man-

NOTES.

Judgment, as he does in this place, has given us (and he could therefore give us no other) only an account of Wit in general: In which false Wit, tho' not every species of it, is included. A *striking Image* therefore of Nature is, as Mr. *Locke* observes, certainly *Wit*: But this *image* may *strike* on several other accounts, as well as for its *truth* and *amiableness*; and the Philosopher has explained the manner how. But it never becomes that *Wit* which is the ornament of true Poesy, whose end is to represent Nature, but when it *dresses that Nature to advantage*, and presents her to us in the clearest and most amiable light. And to know when the *Fancy* has done its office truly, the poet subjoins this admirable Test, *viz.* When we perceive that it

Their praise is still,—the Style is excellent:
 The Sense, they humbly take upon content.
 Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
 Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found. 310
 False Eloquence, like the prismatic glass,
 Its gaudy colours spreads on ev'ry place;
 The face of Nature we no more survey,
 All glares alike, without distinction gay:

COMMENTARY.

ner of thinking. But those who never concern themselves with the *Sense*, can form no judgment of the correspondence between *that* and the *Language*:

*Expression is the dress of thought, and still
 Appears more decent as more suitable, etc.*

Now as these Critics are ignorant of this correspondence, their whole judgment in Language is reduced to the examination of *single words*; of which, such as are to his taste, are so only in proportion as they smack of Antiquity: On which our author has therefore bestowed a little raillery; concluding with a short and proper direction concerning the *use of words*, so far as regards their *novelty* and *ancientry*.

NOTES.

gives us back the image of our mind. When it does that, we may be sure it plays no tricks with us: For this *image* is the creature of the *Judgment*; and whenever *Wit* corresponds with *Judgment*, we may safely pronounce it to be *true*.

Naturam intueamur, hanc sequamur: id facillime accipiunt animi quod agnoscunt. Quintil. lib. viii. c. 3.

VER. 311. *False eloquence, like the prismatic glass, etc.*] This simile is beautiful. For the false colouring, given to objects by the prismatic glass, is owing to its untwisting, by its *obliquities*, those threads of light, which Nature had put together in order to spread over its works an ingenuous and simple *candor*, that

But true Expression, like th' unchanging Sun,
Clears, and improves whate'er it shines upon,
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.

Expression is the dress of thought, and still
Appears more decent, as more suitable ;
A vile conceit in pompous words express'd, 320
Is like a clown in regal purple dress'd :

For different styles with different subjects sort,
As several garbs with country, town, and court.
Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phrase, meer moderns in their sense ;
Such labour'd nothings, in so strange a style, 326
Amaze th' unlearn'd, and make the learned smile.

NOTES.

should not hide, but only heighten the native complexion of the objects. And *false Eloquence* is nothing else but the straining and *divaricating* the parts of *true expression*; and then daubing them over with what the Rhetoricians very properly term, *COLOURS*; in lieu of that candid light, now lost, which was reflected from them in their natural state while sincere and entire.

VER. 324. *Some by old words, etc.] Abolita et abrogata retinere, insolentiæ cujusdam est, et frivoliæ in parvis jactantiæ. Quintil. lib. i. c. 6. P.*

Opus est ut verba à vetustate repetita neque crebra sint, neque manifesta, quia nil est odiosius affectatione, nec utique ab ultimis repetita temporibus. Oratio cujus summa virtus est perspicuitas, quam sit vitiosa, si egeat interprete? Ergo ut novorum optima erunt maxime vetera, ita veterum maxime nova. Idem. P.

Unlucky, as Fungoso in the Play,
 These sparks with aukward vanity display
 What the fine gentleman wore yesterday; 330
 And but so mimic ancient wits at best,
 As apes our grandfires, in their doublets drest.
 In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold;
 Alike fantastic, if too new, or old:
 Be not the first by whom the new are try'd, 335
 Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

But most by Numbers judge a Poet's song;
 And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong:

COMMENTARY.

VER. 337. *But most by Numbers judge, etc.*] The last sort are those [from v 336 to 384.] whose ears are attached only to the *Harmony* of a poem. Of which they judge as ignorantly and as perversely as the other sort did of *Eloquence*; and for the very same reason. He *first* describes that *false Harmony* with which they are so much captivated; and shews, that it is wretchedly *flat* and *unvaried*: For

Smooth or rough with them is right or wrong.

He then describes the *true*. 1. As it is in *itself*, *constant*; with a happy mixture of *strength* and *sweetness*, in contradiction to the *roughness* and *flatness* of false Harmony: And 2. as it is

NOTES.

VER. 328. — *unlucky as Fungoso etc.*] See Ben Johnson's *Every Man in his Humour*. P.

VER. 337. *But most by Numbers, etc.*]

Quis populi sermo est? quis enim? nisi carmine molli

Nunc demum numero fluere, ut per lævæ severos

Effundat junctura unguis: scit tendere versum

Non secus ac si oculo rubricam dirigat uno. Pers. Sat. i. P.

In the bright Muse tho' thousand charms conspire,
 Her Voice is all these tuneful fools admire; 340
 Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,
 Not mend their minds; as some to Church repair,
 Not for the doctrine, but the music there. }
 These equal syllables alone require,
 Tho' oft the ear the open vowels tire; 345
 While expletives their feeble aid do join;
 And ten low words oft creep in one dull line:

COMMENTARY.

varied, in compliance to the *subject*, where the *sound becomes an echo to the sense*, so far as is consistent with the preservation of numbers; in contradiction to the *monotony* of false Harmony: Of this he gives us, in the delivery of his precepts, four fine examples of *smoothness*, *roughness*, *slowness*, and *rapidity*. The *first* use of this correspondence of the *sound* to the *sense*, is to aid the fancy in acquiring a perfecter and more lively image of the thing represented. A *second* and nobler, is to calm and subdue the turbulent and selfish passions, and to raise and warm the beneficent: Which he illustrates in the famous adventure of *Timotheus* and *Alexander*: where, in referring to Mr. *Dryden's* Ode on that subject, he turns it to a high compliment on that great poet.

NOTES.

VER. 345. *Tho' oft the ear, etc.*] *Fugiemus crebras vocalium concursiones, quæ vastam atque hiantem orationem readunt.* Cic. ad Heren. lib. iv. Vide etiam Quintil. lib. ix. c. 4. P.

IMITATIONS.

VER. 346. *While expletives their feeble aid do join,
 And ten low words oft creep in one dull line.*] From *Dryden*. "He creeps along with ten little words in every line, and helps out his numbers with [for] [to] and [unto] and all the pretty expletives he can find, while the sense is left half tired behind it." *Essay on Dram. Poetry*.

While they ring round the same unvary'd chimes,
 With sure returns of still expected rhymes;
 Where-e'er you find "the cooling western breeze,"
 In the next line, it "whispers thro' the trees:"
 If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep,"
 The reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with "sleep:"
 Then, at the last and only couplet fraught
 With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,
 A needless Alexandrine ends the song, 356
 That, like a wounded snake, drags its flow length
 along.

Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know
 What's roundly smooth, or languishingly flow;
 And praise the easy vigour of a line, 360
 Where Denham's strength, and Waller's sweetness
 join.

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
 As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
 The sound must seem an Echo to the sense: 365

NOTES.

VER. 364. *'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;
 The sound must seem an Echo to the sense:}]* The judi-
 cious introduction of this precept is remarkable. The Poets,
 and even some of the best of them, have been so fond of
 the beauty arising from this trivial precept, that, in their prac-

Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
 And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
 But when loud surges lash the sounding shoar,
 The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
 When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
 The line too labours, and the words move flow;
 Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain, 372
 Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the
 main.

NOTES.

tice, they have violated the very *End* of it, which is the encrease of *harmony*; and, so they could but raise an *Echo*, did not care whose ears they offended by its dissonance. To remedy this abuse therefore, the poet, by the introductory line, would insinuate, that *Harmony* is always presupposed as observed; tho' it may and ought to be perpetually varied, so as to produce the effect here recommended.

VER. 365. *The sound must seem an Echo to the sense,*] Lord Roscommon says,

The sound is still a comment to the sense.

They are both well expressed: only *this* supposes the sense to be assisted by the sound; *that*, the sound assisted by the sense.

IMITATIONS.

VER. 366. *Soft is the strain, etc.*]

Tum si læta canunt, etc. Vida Poet. l. iii. v. 403.

VER. 368. *But when loud surges, etc.*]

Tum longe sale saxa sonant, etc. Vida ib. 388.

VER. 370. *When Ajax strives, etc.*]

Atque ideo si quid geritur molimine magno, etc. Vida ib. 417.

VER. 372. *Not so, when swift Camilla, etc.*]

At mora si fuerit damno, properare jubebo, etc. Vida ib. 420.

Hear how Timotheus' vary'd lays surprize,
 And bid alternate passions fall and rise! 375
 While, at each change, the son of Libyan Jove
 Now burns with glory, and then melts with love;
 Now his' fierce eyes with sparkling fury glow,
 Now sighs steal out, and tears begin to flow:
 Persians and Greeks like turns of nature found,
 And the World's victor stood subdu'd by Sound!
 The pow'r of Music all our hearts allow,
 And what Timotheus was, is DRYDEN now.

Avoid Extremes; and shun the fault of such,
 Who still are pleas'd too little or too much. 385

COMMENTARY.

VER. 384. *Avoid Extremes, etc.*] Our Author is now come to the last cause of wrong Judgment, PARTIALITY; the parent of the immediately preceding cause, a bounded capacity: Nothing so much narrowing and contracting the mind as prejudices entertained for or against things or persons. This, therefore, as the main root of all the foregoing, he prosecutes at large from v 383 to 473.

First, to v 394. he *previously* exposes that capricious turn of mind, which, by running men into *Extremes*, either of praise or dispraise, lays the *foundation* of an *habitual partiality*. He cautions therefore both against one and the other; and shews that excess of *Praise* is the mark of a *bad taste*; and excess of *Censure*, of a *bad digestion*.

NOTES.

VER. 374. *Hear how Timotheus, etc.*] See Alexander's *Feast, or the Power of Music; an Ode by Mr. Dryden.* P,

At ev'ry trifle scorn to take offence,
 That always shows great pride, or little sense;
 Those heads, as stomachs, are not sure the best,
 Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.
 Yet let not each gay Turn thy rapture move; 390
 For fools admire, but men of sense approve:
 As things seem large which we thro' mists descry,
 Dulness is ever apt to magnify.

Some foreign writers, some our own despise;
 The Ancients only, or the Moderns prize. 395

COMMENTARY.

VER. 394. *Some foreign writers, etc.*] Having explained the disposition of mind which produces an *habitual partiality*, he proceeds to expose this *partiality* in all the shapes in which it appears both amongst the *unlearned* and the *learned*.

I. In the *unlearned*, it is seen, *first*, In an unreasonable fondness for, or aversion to our *own* or *foreign*, to *ancient* or *modern* writers. And as it is the *mob* of unlearned readers he is here speaking of, he exposes their folly in a very apposite similitude:

*Thus Wit, like Faith, by each Man is apply'd
 To one small sect, and all are damn'd beside.*

But he shews [from v 397 to 408] that these Critics have as wrong a notion of *Reason* as those Bigots have of *God*: For that Genius is not confined to times or climates; but, as the common gift of Nature, is extended throughout all ages and countries: That indeed this intellectual light, like the material light of the Sun itself, may not shine at all times, in every place, with equal splendor; but be sometimes *clouded* with *popular ignorance*; and sometimes again *eclipsed* by the discountenance of *Princes*; yet it shall still recover itself; and, by breaking thro' the strongest of these impediments, manifest the eternity of its nature.

Thus Wit, like Faith, by each man is apply'd
 To one small sect, and all are damn'd beside.
 Meanly they seek the blessing to confine,
 And force that sun but on a part to shine,
 Which not alone the southern wit sublimes, 400
 But ripens spirits in cold northern climes;
 Which from the first has shone on ages past,
 Enlightens the present, and shall warm the last;
 Tho' each may feel encreases and decays,
 And see now clearer and now darker days. 405
 Regard not then if Wit be old or new,
 But blame the false, and value still the true.
 Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own,
 But catch the spreading notion of the Town;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 408. *Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own*] A second instance of *unlearned partiality*, he shews [from *v* 407 to 424.] is mens going always along with the *cry*, as having no fixed or well grounded principles whereon to raise any judgment of their own. A *third* is reverence for *names*; of which sort, as he well observes, the worst and vilest are the idolizers of *names of quality*; whom therefore he stigmatizes as they deserve. Our

NOTES.

VER. 402. *Which from the first etc.*] *Genius* is the same in all ages; but its fruits are various; and more or less excellent as they are checked or matured by the influence of Government or Religion upon them. Hence in some parts of Literature the Ancients excell; in others, the modern; just as those accidental circumstances influenced them.

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 183

They reason and conclude by precedent, 410
 And own stale nonsense which they ne'er invent.
 Some judge of authors names, not works, and then
 Nor praise nor blame the writings, but the men.
 Of all this fervile herd, the worst is he
 That in proud dulness joins with Quality. 415
 A constant Critic at the great man's board,
 To fetch and carry nonsense for my Lord.
 What woful stuff this madrigal would be,
 In some starv'd hackney sonneteer, or me?
 But let a Lord once own the happy lines, 420
 How the wit brightens! how the style refines!
 Before his sacred name flies ev'ry fault,
 And each exalted stanza teems with thought!
 The Vulgar thus through Imitation err;
 As oft the Learn'd by being singular; 425

COMMENTARY.

author's temper as well as judgment is here very observable, in throwing this species of partiality amongst the *unlearned* Critics: His affection for letters would not suffer him to conceive, that any *learned* Critic could ever fall to so low a prostitution.

VER. 424. — *The Vulgar thus—As oft the Learn'd—*] II. He comes, in the *second place* [from ψ 423 to 452] to consider the instances of *partiality* in the *learned*. 1. The *first* is *Singularity*. For, as want of principles, in the *unlearned*, necessitates them to rest on the general judgment as *always right*; so adherence to false principles (that is, to *notions of their own*) misleads the *learned* into the other extreme, of supposing the gene-

So much they scorn the croud, that if the throng
 By chance go right, they purposely go wrong:
 So Schismatics the plain believers quit,
 And are but damn'd for having too much wit.

COMMENTARY.

ral judgment *always wrong*. And as, before, the Poet compared *those* to *Bigots*, who made true faith to consist in believing after others; so he compares *these* to *Schismatics*, who make it to consist in believing as no one ever believed before. Which folly he marks with a lively stroke of humour in the turn of the thought:

*So Schismatics the plain believers quit,
 And are but damn'd for having too much Wit.*

2. The second is *Novelty*. And as this proceeds sometimes from *fondness*, sometimes from *vanity*; he compares the *one* to the *passion for a mistress*; and the *other*, to the *pride of being in fashion*: But the excuse common to both is, the *daily improvement of their Judgment*.

Ask them the cause, they're wiser still they say.

Now as this is a plausible pretence for their inconstancy; and our author has himself afterwards laid down the like thought, in a *precept* for a remedy against obstinacy and pride, where he says, § 570.

*But you with pleasure own your errors past,
 And make each day a critic on the last,*

he has been careful, by the turn of the expression in this place, to shew the difference. For *Time*, considered only as *duration*, vitiates as frequently as it improves: Therefore to expect wisdom as the necessary attendant of *length of years*, unrelated to *long experience*, is vain and delusive. This he illustrates by a remarkable example; where we see *Time*, instead of becoming *wiser*, destroying *good letters*, to substitute *school divinity* in their place.—The *genius* of which kind of learning; the *character* of its professors; and the *fate*, which, sooner or later, always attends whatsoever is wrong or false, the poet sums up in those four lines;

Faith, Gospel, all seem'd made to be disputed, etc.

Some praise at morning what they blame at night;
But always think the last opinion right. 431

A Muse by these is like a mistress us'd,
This hour she's idoliz'd, the next abus'd;
While their weak heads like towns unfortify'd,
'Twi'xt sense and nonsense daily change their side.
Ask them the cause; they're wiser still, they say;
And still to-morrow's wiser than to-day.

We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow;
Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so. 439

Once School-divines this zealous isle o'er-spread;
Who knew most Sentences, was deepest read;
Faith, Gospel, all, seem'd made to be disputed,
And none had sense enough to be confuted:
Scotists and Thomists, now, in peace remain,
Amidst their kindred cobwebs in Duck-lane. 445

COMMENTARY.

And in conclusion, he observes, that perhaps this mischief, from love of *novelty*, might not be so great, did it not, with the *Critic*, infect *Writers* likewise; who, when they find their readers disposed to take *ready Wit* on the standard of *current Folly*, never trouble themselves to make better payment.

NOTES.

VER. 444. *Scotists and Thomists*] These were two parties amongst the schoolmen, headed by *Duns Scotus* and *Thomas Aquinas*, of different opinions, and from that difference denominated *Realists* and *Nominalists*; they were perpetually disputing on the *immaculate conception*, and on subjects of the like importance.

If Faith itself has different dresses worn,
 What wonder modes in Wit should take their turn?
 Oft', leaving what is natural and fit,
 The current folly proves the ready wit;

VARIATIONS.

VER. 447. Between this and y 448.

The rhyming Clowns that gladdened Shakespear's age,
 No more with crambo entertain the stage.
 Who now in Anagrams their Patron praise,
 Or sing their Mistress in Acrostic lays?
 Ev'n pulpits pleas'd with merry puns of yore;
 Now all are banish'd to the Hibernian shore!
 Thus leaving what was natural and fit,
 The current folly prov'd their ready wit;
 And authors thought their reputation safe,
 Which liv'd as long as fools were pleas'd to laugh.

NOTES.

VER. 444. *Scotists*] So denominated from *Johannes Duns Scotus*. He suffered a miserable reverse of fortune at Oxford in the time of Henry VIII. That grave Antiquary Mr. Antony Wood sadly laments the *deformation*, as he calls it, of that University by the King's Commissioners; and even records the blasphemous speeches of one of them in his own Words—*We have set DUNCE in Boccardo, with all his blind Glossers, fast nailed up upon posts in all common houses of easement*. Upon which our venerable Antiquary thus exclaims: “If so be, the
 “commissioners had such disrespect for that most famous Au-
 “thor J. Duns, who was so much admired by our predecessors,
 “and so DIFFICULT TO BE UNDERSTOOD, that the Doctors
 “of those times, namely Dr. William Roper, Dr. John Kynnton,
 “Dr. William Mowse, etc. professed, that, in twenty eight years
 “study, they could not understand him rightly, What then had
 “they for others of inferior note?”—What indeed! But then,
If so be, that most famous J. Duns was so difficult to be under-

And authors think their reputation safe, 450
Which lives as long as fools are pleas'd to laugh.

Some valuing those of their own side or mind,
Still make themselves the measure of mankind :

COMMENTARY.

VER. 452. *Some valuing those of their own side or mind, etc.*] 3. The *third* and last instance of *partiality* in the *learned*, is *Party* and *Faction*. Which is consider'd from γ 451 to 474. where he shews how men of this turn deceive themselves when they load a writer of their own side with commendation. They fancy they are paying tribute to *merit*, when they are only sacrificing to *self-love*. But this is not the worst. He further shews, that this *party spirit* has often very ill effects on Science

NOTES.

stood (for that this is a most classical proof of his great value, who doubts?) I should conceive our good old Antiquary to be a little mistaken. And that the nailing up this Proteus was done by the Commissioners in honour of *the most famous Duns*: There being no other way of catching the sense of so slippery an Author, who had eluded the pursuit of three of their most renowned Doctors, in full cry after him, for twenty eight years together. And this *Boccardo* in which he was confined, seem'd very proper for the purpose; it being observed, that men are never more serious and thoughtful than in that place. SCRIBL.

Ibid. *Thomists*,] From *Thomas Aquinas*, a truly great Genius, who was, in those blind ages, the same in Theology that Friar Bacon was in natural Philosophy: less happy than our Countryman in this, that he soon became surrounded with a number of dark Glossers, who never left him till they had extinguished the radiance of that light which had pierced thro' the thickest night of Monkery, the thirteenth century, when the *Waldenses* were suppressed, and *Wickliffe* not yet risen.

VER. 445. *Duck-lane*] A place where old and second-hand books were sold formerly, near Smithfield. P.

VER. 450. *And Authors think their reputation safe, Which lives as long as fools are pleas'd to laugh.*] This is a just and admirable satire on those we call, *Authors in fashion*; for they are

Fondly we think we honour merit then,
 When we but praise ourselves in other men. 455
 Parties in Wit attend on those of State,
 And public faction doubles private hate.
 Pride, Malice, Folly, against Dryden rose,
 In various shapes of Parsons, Critics, Beaus;
 But sense surviv'd, when merry jests were past;
 For rising merit will buoy up at last. 461
 Might he return, and bless once more our eyes,
 New Blackmores and new Milbourns must arise:
 Nay should great Homer lift his awful head,
 Zoilus again would start up from the dead. 465
 Envy will merit, as its shade, pursue;
 But like a shadow, proves the substance true;

COMMENTARY.

itself; while, in support of *Faction*, it labours to depress some rising Genius, that was, perhaps, raised by nature, to enlighten his age and country. By which he would insinuate, that all the base and viler passions seek refuge, and find support in *party madness*.

NOTES.

the men who get the laugh on their side. He shews, on how pitiful a basis their reputation stands, the changeling disposition of fools to laugh; who are always carried away with the last joke.

VER. 463. *Milbourn*] The Rev. Mr. Luke Milbourn. Dennis served Mr. Pope in the same office. And indeed the attendance of these slaves is necessary to render the triumphs of a great Genius complete. They are of all times, and on all occasions. Sir Walter Raleigh had Alexander Ross, Chillingworth had his Cheynel, and Locke his EDWARDS: Not *Fungoso* of Lincoln's-Inn. Mr. Locke's *Edwards* was a Divine of parts and learning, this *Edwards* is a critic with neither. Yet

For envy'd Wit, like Sol eclips'd, makes known
 Th' opposing body's grossness, not its own.
 When first that sun too pow'ful beams displays,
 It draws up vapours which obscure its rays; 471
 But ev'n those clouds at last adorn its way,
 Reflect new glories, and augment the day.
 Be thou the first true merit to befriend;
 His praise is lost, who stays 'till all commend. 475

COMMENTARY.

VER. 474. *Be thou the first, etc.*] The poet having now gone thro' the last cause of *wrong Judgment*, and root of all the rest, PARTIALITY; and ended it with the highest instances of it, in *party-rage* and *envy*; this affords him an opportunity [from \S 473 to 560.] of closing his *second division* in the most graceful manner, by concluding from the premises, and calling upon the TRUE CRITIC to be careful of his *charge*, which is the *protection* and *support* of *Wit*. For, the defence of it from malevolent censure is its true protection; and the illustration of its beauties, its true support.

He first shews, the Critic ought to do this service without delay: And on these motives. 1. *Out of regard to himself*: For there is *some* merit in giving the world notice of an excellence; but *none at all* in pointing, like an Idiot, to that which has been long in the admiration of men. 2. *Out of regard to the Poem*: For the short duration of modern works requires they should begin

NOTES.

(as Mr. Pope says of Luke Milbourn) *the fairest of all critics*; for having written against the Editor's remarks on Shakespear, *he did him justice in printing at the same time his own*.

VER 468. *For envy'd Wit, like Sol eclips'd, etc.*] This similitude implies a fact too often verified; and of which we need not seek abroad for examples. It is, that frequently those very Authors, who have at first done all they could to obscure and depress a rising genius, have at length, in order to keep themselves

Short is the date, alas, of modern rhymes,
 And 'tis but just to let them live betimes.
 No longer now that golden age appears,
 When Patriarch-wits surviv'd a thousand years :
 Now length of Fame (our second life) is lost, 480
 And bare threescore is all ev'n that can boast ;

COMMENTARY.

to enjoy their existence early. He compares the life of *modern Wit*, and of the *ancient*, which survives in an universal language, to the difference between the Patriarchal age and our own : And observes, that while the ancient writings live for ever, as it were in brass and marble, the modern are but like *Paintings*, which, of how masterly a hand soever, have no sooner gained their requisite perfection by the incorporating, softening, and ripening of their tints, which they do in a very few years, but they begin to fade and die away. 3. Lastly, our author shews, that the Critic ought to do this service *out of regard to the Poet* ; when he considers the slender dowry the Muse brings along with her : In *youth* 'tis only a short lived vanity ; and in *maturer years* an accession of care and labour, in proportion to the weight of Reputation to be sustained, and of the increase of Envy to be opposed : And concludes his reasoning therefore on this head, with that pathetic and insinuating address to the Critic, from 508 to 524.

Ah ! let not learning, etc.

NOTES.

in some little credit, been reduced to borrow from him, imitate his manner, and reflect what they could of his splendor. Nor hath the poet been less artful, to insinuate also what is sometimes the *cause*. A youthful genius, like the Sun rising towards the Meridian, displays *too strong and powerful beams* for the dirty genius of inferior writers, which occasions their *gathering, condensing, and blackening*. But as he descends from the Meridian (the time when the Sun gives its *gilding* to the surrounding clouds) his rays grow milder, his heat more benign. and then

*—ev'n those Clouds at last adorn its way,
 Reflect new glories, and augment the day.*

Our sons their fathers failing language see,
 And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.
 So when the faithful pencil has design'd
 Some bright Idea of the master's mind, 485
 Where a new world leaps out at his command,
 And ready Nature waits upon his hand;
 When the ripe colours soften and unite,
 And sweetly melt into just shade and light;
 When mellowing years their full perfection give,
 And each bold figure just begins to live,
 The treach'rous colours the fair art betray,
 And all the bright creation fades away!

Unhappy Wit, like most mistaken things,
 Atones not for that envy which it brings. 495

NOTES.

VER. 484. *So when the faithful pencil, etc.*] This similitude, in which the poet discovers (as he always does on this subject) *real science* in the thing spoken of, has still a more peculiar beauty, as at the same time that it confesses the just superiority of *antient* writings, it insinuates one advantage the *modern* have above them; which is this, that in these, our intimate acquaintance with the *occasion of writing*, and the *manners described*, lets us into all those living and striking graces which may be well compared to that perfection of imitation only given by colouring: While the ravage of Time amongst the monuments of former ages, hath left us but the gross substance of ancient wit, so much of the form and matter of body only as may be expressed in brass or marble.

† N

In youth alone its empty praise we boast,
 But soon the short-liv'd vanity is lost :
 Like some fair flow'r the early spring supplies,
 That gayly blooms, but ev'n in blooming dies.
 What is this Wit, which must our cares employ ?
 The owner's wife, that other men enjoy ; 501
 Then most our trouble still when most admir'd,
 And still the more we give, the more requir'd ;
 Whose fame with pains we guard, but lose with ease,
 Sure some to vex, but never all to please ; 505
 'Tis what the vicious fear, the virtuous shun,
 By fools 'tis hated, and by knaves undone !
 If Wit so much from Ign'rance undergo,
 Ah let not Learning too commence its foe !
 Of old, those met rewards who could excell, 510
 And such were prais'd who but endeavour'd well :
 Tho' triumphs were to gen'als only due,
 Crowns were reserv'd to grace the soldiers too.
 Now, they who reach Parnassus' lofty crown,
 Employ their pains to spurn some others down ;

NOTES.

VER. 507. — *by Knaves undone !*] By which the Poet would insinuate, a common but shameful truth, That Men in power, if they got into it by illiberal arts, generally left Wit and Science to starve.

And while self-love each jealous writer rules,
 Contending wits become the sport of fools :
 But still the worst with most regret commend,
 For each ill Author is as bad a Friend. 520

To what base ends, and by what abject ways,
 Are mortals urg'd thro' sacred lust of praise!
 Ah ne'er so dire a thirst of glory boast,
 Nor in the Critic let the Man be lost.
 Good-nature and good-sense must ever join ; 525
 To err is human, to forgive, divine.

But if in noble minds some dregs remain
 Not yet purg'd off, of spleen and sour disdain ;

COMMENTARY.

VER 527. *But if in noble minds some dregs remain, etc.*] So far as to what ought to be the *true Critic's* principal study and employment. But if the sour critical humour must needs have vent, he points to its right object ; and shews [from v 526 to 556.] how it may be usefully and innocently diverted. This is very observable ; for our author makes spleen and disdain the characteristic of the *false Critic*, and yet here supposes them inherent in the *true*. But it is done with judgment, and a knowledge of nature. For as bitterness and acerbity in unripe fruits of the best kind are the foundation and capacity of that high spirit, race, and flavour which we find in them, when perfectly concocted by the heat and influence of the Sun ; and which, without those qualities, would often gain no more by that influence than only a *mellow insipidity* : so spleen and disdain in the true Critic, improved by long study and experience, ripen into an exactness of Judgment and an elegance of Taste : But, lying in the false Critic remote from

Discharge that rage on more provoking crimes,
 Nor fear a dearth in these flagitious times. 530
 No pardon vile Obscenity should find,
 Tho' wit and art conspire to move your mind ;
 But Dulness with Obscenity must prove
 As shameful sure as Impotence in love.
 In the fat age of pleasure, wealth, and ease, 535
 Sprung the rank weed, and thriv'd with large in-
 crease :

COMMENTARY.

the influence of good letters, continue in all their first offensive harshness and astringency. The Poet therefore shews how, after the exaltation of these qualities into their state of perfection, the very *Dregs* (which, tho' precipitated, may possibly, on some occasions, rise and ferment even in a *noble mind*) may be usefully employed in branding OBSCENITY and IMPIETY. Of these he explains the rise and progress, in a beautiful picture of the different genius's of the reigns of *Charles II.* and *William III.* the former of which gave course to the most *profligate luxury*; the latter to a *licentious impiety*. These are the criminals the poet assigns over to the caustic hand of the Critic, but concludes however, from \S 556 to 561. with this necessary admonition, to take care not to be misled into unjust censure; either on the one hand, by a pharisaical *niceness*, or on the other by a consciousness of guilt. And thus the *second division* of his Essay ends: The judicious conduct of *which* is worthy our observation. The subject of it are the *causes of wrong judgment*: These he derives upwards from *cause to cause*, till he brings them to their source, an *immoral partiality*: For as he had, in the first part, *trac'd the Muses upward to their spring*, and shewn them to be derived from Heaven, and the Offspring of virtue; so hath he *here* pursued this enemy of the Muses, the *bad Critic*, to his low original, in the arms of his nursing mother *Immorality*. This order naturally *introduces*, and at the same time shews the *necessity* of, the subject of the third and last division, which is, on the *Morals of the Critic*.

When love was all an easy Monarch's care ;
 Seldom at council, never in a war :
 Jilts rul'd the state, and statesmen farces writ ;
 Nay wits had pensions, and young Lords had wit :
 The Fair fate panting at a Courtier's play, 541
 And not a Mask went unimprov'd away :
 The modest fan was lifted up no more,
 And Virgins smil'd at what they blush'd before.
 The following licence of a Foreign reign 545
 Did all the dregs of bold Socinus drain ;
 Then unbelieving Priests reform'd the nation,
 And taught more pleasant methods of salvation ;

NOTES.

VER. 546. *Did all the dregs of bold Socinus drain ;*] The seeds of this *religious* evil, as well as of the *political* that encouraged it (for all *Revolutions* are in themselves evils, tho' brought about thro' necessity, for the removal of greater) were sown in the preceding *fat age of pleasure*. The mischiefs done, during Cromwell's usurpation, by fanaticism, inflamed by erroneous and absurd notions of the doctrine of *grace* and *satisfaction*, made the loyal *Latitudinarian* divines (as they were called) at the Restoration, go so far into the other extreme of resolving all Christianity into *Morality*, as to afford an easy introduction to *Socinianism* : Which in that reign (founded on the principles of Liberty) men had full opportunity of propagating.

VER. 547. The author has omitted two lines which stood here, as containing a *National Reflection*, which in his stricter judgment he could not but disapprove on any People whatever. P.

Where Heav'n's free subjects might their rights
dispute,

Lest God himself should seem too absolute: 550

Pulpits their sacred fatire learn'd to spare,

And Vice admir'd to find a flatt'rer there!

Encourag'd thus, Wit's Titans brav'd the skies,

And the press groan'd with licens'd blasphemies.

These monsters, Critics! with your darts engage,

Here point your thunder, and exhaust your rage!

Yet shun their fault, who, scandalously nice,

Will needs mistake an author into vice;

All seems infected that th' infected spy,

As all looks yellow to the jaundic'd eye. 560

LEARN then what MORALS Critics ought to show,
For 'tis but half a Judge's task, to know.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 561. *Learn then, etc.*] We enter now on the *third part*, the MORALS of the *Critic*; included in CANDOUR, MODESTY, and GOOD-BREEDING. This third and last part is in two divisions. In the *first* of which [from v 560 to 632.] he inculcates these *morals* by *precept*: In the *second* [from v 631 to the end] by *example*. His *first* precept [from v 562 to 567.] recommends CANDOUR, for its *use to the Critic*, and to the *writer criticised*.

NOTES.

VER. 562. *For 'tis but half a Judge's task, to know.*] The Critic acts in two capacities, of *Assessor* and of *Judge*: in the first, *science* alone is sufficient; but the other requires *morals* likewise.

'Tis not enough, taste, judgment, learning, join;
 In all you speak, let truth and candour shine:
 That not alone what to your sense is due 565
 All may allow; but seek your friendship too.

Be silent always when you doubt your sense;
 And speak, tho' sure, with seeming diffidence:
 Some positive, persisting fops we know,
 Who, if once wrong, will needs be always so;

COMMENTARY.

2. The *second* [from *vs* 566 to 573.] recommends MODESTY, which manifests itself by these four *signs*: 1. Silence where it doubts,

Be silent always when you doubt your sense;

2. A seeming diffidence where it knows,

And speak, tho' sure, with seeming diffidence:

3. A free confession of error where wrong,

But you with pleasure own your errors past,

4. And a constant review and scrutiny even of those opinions which it still thinks right:

And make each day a Critic on the last.

3. The *third* [from *vs* 572 to 585.] recommends GOOD BREEDING, which will not force truth dogmatically upon men, as ignorant of it, but gently insinuates it into them, as not *sufficiently attentive* to it. But as *men of breeding* are apt to fall into two *extremes*, he prudently cautions against them. The one is a *backwardness in communicating* their knowledge, out of a false delicacy, and fear of being thought *Pedants*: The other, and much more common extreme in *men of breeding*, is a *mean complacence*, which such as are worthy of your advice do not want to make it acceptable; for those can best bear reproof in particular points, who best deserve commendation in general.

But you, with pleasure own your errors past,
And make each day a Critic on the last.

'Tis not enough, your counsel still be true;
Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do;
Men must be taught as if you taught them not, 575
And things unknown propos'd as things forgot.
Without Good Breeding, truth is disapprov'd;
That only makes superior sense belov'd.

Be niggards of advice on no pretence;
For the worst avarice is that of sense. 580
With mean complacence ne'er betray your trust,
Nor be so civil as to prove unjust.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 585. [*Twere well might Critics, etc.*] The poet having thus recommended, in these *general rules of Conduct* for the *Judgment*, the *three critical Virtues* to the *heart*; shews next [from ψ 584 to 632.] on what three sort of Writers these Virtues, together with the advice convey'd under them, would be thrown away; and, which is worse, be repaid with obloquy and slander. These are the *false Critic*, the *dull Man of Quality*, and the *bad Poet*; each of which *incorrigible* writers he hath very justly and exactly characterized.

But having drawn the last of them at large, and being always attentive to his main subject, which is, *of writing and judging well*, he re-assumes the character of the *bad Critic* (whom he had but touch'd upon before) to contrast him with the other; and makes the *Characteristic* common to both, to be a never-ceasing *Repetition* of their own impertinence.

The *Poet*,—*still runs on in a raging vein, etc.* ψ 607, *etc.*

The *Critic*—*with his own tongue still edifies his ears, ψ 615, etc.*

Fear not the anger of the wise to raise;
 Those best can bear reproof, who merit praise.
 'Twere well might Critics still this freedom take,
 But Appius reddens at each word you speak, 586
 And stares, tremendous, with a threat'ning eye,
 Like some fierce Tyrant in old tapestry.
 Fear most to tax an Honourable fool,
 Whose right it is, uncensur'd to be dull; 590
 Such, without wit, are Poets when they please,
 As without learning they can take Degrees.
 Leave dang'rous truths to unsuccessful Satires,
 And flattery to fulsome Dedicators,
 Whom, when they praise, the world believes no
 more, 595
 Than when they promise to give scribbling o'er.
 'Tis best sometimes your censure to restrain,
 And charitably let the dull be vain:
 Your silence there is better than your spite,
 For who can rail so long as they can write? 600

NOTES.

VER. 587. *And stares, tremendous, etc.*] This picture was taken to himself by *John Dennis*, a furious old Critic by profession, who, upon no other provocation, wrote against this Essay and its author, in a manner perfectly lunatic: For, as to the mention made of him in \S 270. he took it as a Compliment, and said it was treacherously meant to cause him to overlook this *Abuse of his Person*. P.

Still humming on, their drouzy course they keep,
 And lash'd so long, like tops, are lash'd asleep.
 False steps but help them to renew the race,
 As, after stumbling, Jades will mend their pace.
 What crouds of these, impenitently bold, 605
 In sounds and jingling syllables grown old,
 Still run on Poets, in a raging vein,
 Ev'n to the dregs and squeezings of the brain,
 Strain out the last dull droppings of their sense,
 And rhyme with all the rage of Impotence. 610

Such shameless Bards we have; and yet 'tis true,
 There are as mad, abandon'd Critics too.
 The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
 With loads of learned lumber in his head,
 With his own tongue still edifies his ears, 615
 And always list'ning to himself appears.
 All books he reads, and all he reads affails,
 From Dryden's Fables down to Durfey's Tales.
 With him, most authors steal their works, or buy;
 Garth did not write his own Dispensary. 620

NOTES.

VER. 620. *Garth did not write, etc.*] A common slander at that time in prejudice of that deserving author. Our Poet did him this justice, when that slander most prevail'd; and it is now (perhaps the sooner for this very verse) dead and forgotten. P.

Name a new Play, and he's the Poet's friend,
 Nay show'd his faults--but when would Poets mend?
 No place so sacred from such fops is barr'd,
 Nor is Paul's church more safe than Paul's church
 yard :

Nay, fly to Altars ; there they'll talk you dead : 625
 For Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread.

Distrustful sense with modest caution speaks, }
 It still looks home, and short excursions makes; }
 But rattling nonsense in full vollies breaks, }
 And never shock'd, and never turn'd aside, 630
 Bursts out, resistless, with a thund'ring tide.

But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,
 Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know ?

VARIATIONS.

VER. 624. Between this and v 625.

In vain you shrug and sweat, and strive to fly;
 These know no *Manners* but of Poetry.
 They'll stop a hungry Chaplain in his grace,
 To treat of Unities of time and place.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 631. *But where's the man, etc.*] II. The *second* division of this last part, which we now come to, is of the *Morals of Critics* by *example*. For, having there drawn a picture of the *false Critic*, at large, he breaks out into an apostrophe, containing an exact and finished character of the *true*, which, at the same time, serves for an easy and proper introduction to *this second division*. For, having asked [from v 631 to 644.] *Where's the*

Unbias'd, or by favour, or by spite;
 Not dully prepossess'd, nor blindly right; 635
 Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere;
 Modestly bold, and humanly severe:
 Who to a friend his faults can freely show,
 And gladly praise the merit of a foe?
 Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfi'd; 640
 A knowledge both of books and human kind;

COMMENTARY.

man, etc. he answers [from v 643 to 682.] That he was to be found in the happier ages of *Greece* and *Rome*; in the persons of *Aristotle* and *Horace*, *Dionysius* and *Petronius*, *Quintilian* and *Longinus*. Whose features he has not only exactly delineated, but contrasted with a peculiar elegance; the profound science and logical method of *Aristotle* being opposed to the plain common sense of *Horace*, conveyed in a natural and familiar negligence; the study and refinement of *Dionysius*, to the gay and courtly ease of *Petronius*; and the gravity and minuteness of *Quintilian*, to the vivacity and general topics of *Longinus*. Nor has the Poet been less careful, in these examples, to point out their eminence in the several critical Virtues he so carefully inculcated in his precepts. Thus in *Horace* he particularizes his Candour, in *Petronius* his Good Breeding, in *Quintilian* his free and copious Instruction, and in *Longinus* his noble Spirit.

NOTES.

VER. 632. *But where's the man, etc.*] The Poet, by his manner of asking after this Character, and telling us, when he had described it, that *such once were Critics*, does not encourage us to search for it in modern writers. And indeed the discovery of him, if it could be made, would be but an invidious business. I will venture no farther than to name the piece of Criticism in which these marks may be found. It is intitled, *Q. Hor. Fl. Ars Poetica, with an English Commentary and Notes.*

Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;
And love to praise, with reason on his side?

Such once were Critics; such the happy few,
Athens and Rome in better ages knew. 645

The mighty Stagirite first left the shore,
Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore;
He steer'd securely, and discover'd far,
Led by the light of the Mæonian Star.

VARIATIONS.

Between ν 647 and 648. I found the following lines, since
supprest by the author:

That bold Columbus of the realms of wit,
Whose first discov'ry's not exceeded yet.
Led by the light of the Mæonian Star,
He steer'd securely, and discover'd far.
He, when all Nature was subdu'd before,
Like his great Pupil, sigh'd, and long'd for more:
Fancy's wild regions yet unvanquish'd lay,
A boundless empire, and that own'd no sway.
Poets, etc.

NOTES.

VER. 643. *with REASON on his side?*] Not *only* on his *side*,
but actually exercised in his *service*. That Critic makes but a
mean figure, who, when he has found out the excellencies of his
author, contents himself in offering them to the world, with
only empty exclamations on their beauties. His office is to ex-
plain the nature of those beauties, shew from whence they arise,
and what effects they produce; or, in the better and fuller ex-
pression of the Poet,

To teach the world with Reason to admire.

Poets, a race long unconfin'd, and free, 650
 Still fond and proud of savage liberty,
 Receiv'd his laws; and stood convinc'd 'twas fit,
 Who conquer'd Nature, should preside o'er Wit.
 Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
 And without method talks us into sense, 655
 Will, like a friend, familiarly convey
 The truest notions in the easiest way.
 He, who supreme in judgment, as in wit,
 Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ, 659
 Yet judg'd with coolness, tho' he sung with fire;
 His Precepts teach but what his works inspire.
 Our Critics take a contrary extreme,
 They judge with fury, but they write with sle'me:

NOTES.

VER. 653. *Who conquer'd Nature, should preside o'er Wit.*] By this is not meant *physical* Nature, but *moral*. The force of the observation consists in our understanding it in this sense. For the Poet not only uses the word *Nature* for *human nature*, throughout this poem; but also, where, in the beginning of it, he lays down the principles of the arts he treats of, he makes the knowledge of *human nature* the foundation of all *Criticism* and *Poetry*. Nor is the observation less true than apposite. For, *Aristotle's* natural enquiries were superficial, and ill made, tho' extensive: But his *logical* and *moral* works are incomparable. In these he has unfolded the human mind, and laid open all the recesses of the heart and understanding; and by his *Categories*, not only *conquered Nature*, but kept her in *tenfold chains*: Not as *Dulness* kept the Muses, in the *Dunciad*, to silence them; but as *Aristæus* held *Proteus* in *Virgil*, to deliver Oracles.

Nor suffers Horace more in wrong Translations
By Wits, than Critics in as wrong Quotations. 665

See Dionysius Homer's thoughts refine,
And call new beauties forth from ev'ry line!

Fancy and art in gay Petronius please,
The scholar's learning, with the courtier's ease.

In grave Quintilian's copious work, we find 670
The justest rules, and clearest method join'd:
Thus useful arms in magazines we place,
All rang'd in order, and dispos'd with grace,
But less to please the eye, than arm the hand,
Still fit for use, and ready at command. 675

Thee, bold Longinus! all the Nine inspire,
And bless their Critic with a Poet's fire.
An ardent Judge, who zealous in his trust,
With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just;
Whose own example strengthens all his laws; 680
And is himself that great Sublime he draws.

Thus long succeeding Critics justly reign'd,
Licence repress'd, and useful laws ordain'd.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 682. *Thus long succeeding Critics, etc.*] The next period in which the true Critic (he tells us) appear'd, was at the revival and restoration of letters in the West. This occasions his giving a short history [from v 683 to 710.] of the decline

NOTES.

VER. 666. *See Dyonyfius*] Of Halicarnassus. P.

Learning and Rome alike in empire grew ; 684
 And Arts still follow'd where her Eagles flew ;
 From the same foes, at last, both felt their doom,
 And the same age saw Learning fall, and Rome.
 With Tyranny, then Superstition join'd,
 As that the body, this enslav'd the mind ;
 Much was believ'd, but little understood, 690
 And to be dull was constru'd to be good ;
 A second deluge Learning thus o'er-run,
 And the Monks finish'd what the Goths begun.

VARIATIONS.

Between ν 691 and 692. the author omitted these two,
 Vain Wits and Critics were no more allow'd,
 When none but Saints had licence to be proud. P.

COMMENTARY.

and re-establishment of arts and sciences in *Italy*. He shews that they both fell under the same enemy, *despotic power* ; and that when both had made some little efforts to restore themselves, they were soon quite overwhelmed by a *second deluge* of another kind, *Superstition* ; and a calm of Dulness finish'd upon *Rome* and Letters what the rage of Barbarism had begun :

*A second deluge learning thus o'er-run,
 And the Monk finish'd what the Goth begun.*

When things had been long in this condition, and all recovery now appear'd desperate, it was a CRITIC, our author shews us for the honour of the *Art* he here teaches, who at length brok the charm of Dulness, dissipated the enchantment, and, like another *Hercules*, drove those cowl'd and hooded serpents from the *Hesperian* tree of knowledge, which they had so long guarded from human approach.

At length Erasmus, that great injur'd name,
 (The glory of the Priesthood, and the shame!)
 Stem'd the wild torrent of a barb'rous age, 696
 And drove those holy Vandals off the stage.

But see! each Muse, in LEO's golden days,
 Starts from her trance, and trim's her wither'd bays;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 694. *At length Erasmus, etc.*] Nothing can be more artful than the application of this *example*; or more happy than the turn of compliment to this admirable man. To throw glory quite round his illustrious character, he makes it to be (as in fact it really was) by his assistance chiefly, that *Leo* was enabled to restore letters and the fine arts, in his Pontificate.

VER. 698. *But see each Muse in Leo's golden days*] This presents us with the *second period* in which the *true Critic* appear'd; of whom he has given us a perfect *idea* in the single example of *Marcus Hieronymus Vida*: For his *subject* being *poetical Criticism*, for the use principally of a *critical Poet*; his *example* is an eminent *poetical Critic*, who had had written of that Art in verse.

NOTES.

VER. 695. *The glory of the Priesthood and the shame!*] Our author elsewhere lets us know what he esteems to be the *glory of the Priesthood* as well as of a Christian in general, where, comparing himself to *Erasmus*, he says,

In MODERATION placing all my glory,
 and consequently, what he esteems to be the *shame* of it. The whole of this character belong'd most eminently and almost solely to *Erasmus*: For the other Reformers, such as *Luther*, *Calvin*, and their followers, understood so little in what true Christian Liberty consisted, that they carried with them, into the reformed Churches that very spirit of *persecution*, which had driven them from the church of Rome.

Rome's ancient Genius, o'er its ruins spread, 700
 Shakes off the dust, and rears his rev'rend head.
 Then Sculpture and her sister-arts revive ;
 Stones leap'd to form, and rocks began to live ;
 With sweeter notes each rising Temple rung ;
 A Raphael painted, and a Vida sung. 705
 Immortal Vida : on whose honour'd brow
 The Poet's bays and Critic's ivy grow :
 Cremona now shall ever boast thy name,
 As next in place to Mantua, next in fame! 709
 But soon by impious arms from Latium chas'd,
 Their ancient bounds the banish'd Muses pass'd ;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 710. *But soon by impious arms, etc.*] This brings us to the *third period*, after learning had still travelled farther West ; when the arms of the *Emperor*, in the sack of Rome by the duke of *Bourbon*, had driven it out of *Italy*, and forced it to pass the *Mountains*—The Examples he gives in this period, are of *Boileau* in *France*, and of the Lord *Roscommon* and the duke of *Buckingham* in *England*: And these were all Poets, as well as Critics in verse. It is true, the last instance is of one who was no eminent poet, the late Mr. *Walsh*. This small deviation might be well over-looked, was it only for its being a pious office to the memory of his friend : But it may be farther justified as it was an homage paid in particular to the MORALS of the Critic, nothing being more amiable than the character here drawn of this excellent person. He being our Author's Judge and Censor, as

IMITATIONS.

VER. 708. *As next in place to Mantua,*] Alluding to
Mantua vœ miseræ nimium vicina Cremonæ. Virg.

Thence Arts o'er all the northern world advance,
 But Critic-learning flourish'd most in France:
 The rules a nation, born to serve, obeys;
 And Boileau still in right of Horace sways. 715
 But we, brave Britons, foreign laws despis'd,
 And kept unconquer'd, and unciviliz'd;
 Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,
 We still defy'd the Romans, as of old.
 Yet some there were, among the founder few
 Of those who less presum'd, and better knew, 721
 Who durst assert the juster ancient cause,
 And here restor'd Wit's fundamental laws.
 Such was the Muse, whose rules and practice tell,
 ' Nature's chief Master-piece is writing well.' 725

COMMENTARY.

well as Friend, it gives him a graceful opportunity to add *himself* to the number of the later Critics; and with a *character of himself*, sustained by that *modesty* and *dignity* which it is so difficult to make consistent, this performance concludes.

I have given a short and plain account of the *Essay on Criticism*, concerning which I have but one thing more to acquaint the reader: That when he considers the Regularity of the plan, the masterly Conduct of each part, the penetration into Nature, and the compass of Learning, so conspicuous throughout, he should at the same time know, it was the work of an Author who had not attained the twentieth year of his age.

NOTES.

VER. 724. *Such was the Muse—*] *Essay on Poetry* by the Duke of Buckingham. Our Poet is not the only one of his time

Such was Roscommon, not more learn'd than good,
 With manners gen'rous as his noble blood ;
 To him the wit of Greece and Rome was known,
 And ev'ry author's merit, but his own.
 Such late was Walsh—the Muse's judge and friend,
 Who justly knew to blame or to commend; 731
 To failings mild, but zealous for desert ;
 The clearest head, and the sincerest heart.
 This humble praise, lamented shade! receive,
 This praise at least a grateful Muse may give: 735

NOTES.

who complimented this *Essay*, and its noble Author. Mr. Dryden had done it very largely in the Dedication to his translation of the *Æneid*; and Dr. Garth in the first Edition of his *Dispensary* says,

*The Tyber now no courtly Gallus sees,
 But smiling Thames enjoys his Normanbys.*

Tho' afterwards omitted, when parties were carried so high in the reign of Queen Anne, as to allow no commendation to an opposite in Politics. The Duke was all his life a steady adherent to the Church of England-Party, yet an enemy to the extravagant measures of the Court in the reign of Charles II. On which account after having strongly patronized Mr. Dryden, a coolness succeeded between them on that poet's absolute attachment to the Court, which carried him some lengths beyond what the Duke could approve of. This Nobleman's true character had been very well marked by Mr. Dryden before,

*the Muse's friend,
 Himself a Muse. In Sanadrin's debate
 True to his prince, but not a slave of state.*

Abf. and Achit.

Our Author was more happy, he was honour'd very young with his friendship, and it continued till his death in all the circumstances of a familiar esteem. P.

The Muse, whose early voice you taught to sing,
 Prescrib'd her heights, and prun'd her tender wing,
 (Her guide now lost) no more attempts to rise,
 But in low numbers short excursions tries : 739
 Content, if hence th' unlearn'd their wants may view,
 The learn'd reflect on what before they knew :
 Careless of censure, nor too fond of fame ;
 Still pleas'd to praise, yet not afraid to blame ;
 Averse alike to flatter, or offend ; 744
 Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend.

ESSAY ON CRITICISM

The Muse, whose sacred fount alone
Suffices for the world, ought never to
Dry up, nor to her chalice ever send
Down to the dross of common sense,
But in her lowest measure still
Some quantity of heaven should lend.
Who can but see, that such a store
Will best befit the walled city, where
A silent train of sages sit,
Whom long years' study has acquir'd
To deep and vast knowledge, yet their souls
Shall feel the ease of rural solitude,
And in the same retirement keep
The sacred flame, in small or great degree,
Which heaven has kindled in their souls.

HERBERT GRANT

P O E M