

consistency, by contending that the address to Venus, is only a bold personification of the generative principle which pervades all nature. Having described the influence of love on the animal creation, he comes to the glowing picture," admired by Wharton:

Do thou, the while, bid war's dire labours cease,  
 And lull the earth and seas in tranquil peace;  
 For thou, alone with peace can'st man delight,  
 Thou only soothe the dreadful God of fight.  
 Oft the fierce power, by mighty love oppress'd,  
 Love's wound eternal bleeding in his breast,  
 Hung on thy bosom, round thee fondly twined,  
 And close by thine, his taper neck reclin'd;  
 Supinely laid, and panting in thine arms,  
 Feeds his wild eyes, insatiate on thy charms,  
 'Till all his spirit, thrilled with sweet desire,  
 Hangs on thy lips, that glow with mutual fire.  
 Now gentle Goddess! now thy influence prove,  
 Seize the soft moment of dissolving love;  
 Pour in his ear, thy soul-subduing voice,  
 Implore for peace, and bid thy Rome rejoice.

*As the extension of these observations might encroach too much on the limits of a Magazine, the subject shall be resumed in some future number.*

C.

#### CRITICISM ON OVID.

*Consiliis, non curribus utere nostris.*

OVID is one of those writers whose fate seems to be, never to be praised, nor blamed in moderation; yet we may say of him, that there is scarcely an author, whose claims may be more easily settled. A rich elegance of expression, with an exuberance of fancy, seems his prominent characteristic. In that kind of musing sentiment, in the indulgence of which the speaker may be supposed as reclined, *lentus in umbra*, and entertaining his excursive fancy with amusing combinations, weaving fantastic garlands of many coloured thought, his merits are of the most conspicuous kind. To these productions of his fancy, it may, however, be justly objected, that quaint and ostentatious contrasts in his words and thoughts, bring with them the idea of labour and constraint; they

consequently do not seem to occur naturally; hence, and because of their frequent recurrence, they must become tiresome, and Ovid cease to appear the poet of nature.

Thus, speaking generally, the merits and demerits of this author may be easily fixed: yet we must be impartial, and, while we acknowledge his merits, acknowledge, also, that they are of an inferior kind. The process of the mind in forming an estimate of him, in some measure proves this. While we are inexperienced, and open to the seductions of novelty, he carries off all our applause; but when we have attained to some knowledge of the human mind, and are qualified to judge what is pathetic, what sublime, that is, when the mind has been matured by experience, and our feelings duly analyzed, we learn to *put down* into its proper class what was raised too high through the fervour of youthful admiration. But while we judge thus, we must not place him lower than he deserves; there are some, who can see no fault in their favourite author; who, while they find in Homer, more than Homer ever wrote, blind themselves to the actual merits of those they dislike. It is to be regretted, that men of this description are to be found among our leading critics; for as their opinions are received with deference, their errors procure reception, and young minds may, from them imbibe false principles of judgment. It may, perhaps be objected, that errors of judgment in matters of mere criticism cannot be very dangerous. In answer to this, it may be replied, that just criticism implies sound reasoning, and consequently, that there can be no false principle admitted into its process without the danger of, more or less, clouding the judgment, and that a false principle may find admission unsuspected through an unimportant medium. On some future occasion, I purpose submitting to the public a few thoughts in proof of this; at present, the assertion seems to me reasonable enough to obtain credit.

Hurd has obtained, in the judgment of some, an unmerited degree of applause in the literary world: it is certain that he is dashing and dogmatical in the sentences, he pronounces. The passage, prefixed to this, is an instance, and is also a proof, that we should duly weigh what any, the most respectable critic, will pronounce.

The bishop, in his annotations on Horace, most decisively condemns Ovid for what he terms an unbecoming application of one verb to two words, in different

meanings: and gives it as his opinion, that such use of words is tolerable only in a burlesque poem. As an instance of the propriety of this use, he cites the following couplet from Pope's Rape of the Lock.

"Here, thou great Anna, whom three realms obey,  
"Dost sometimes counsel *take*..... and sometimes tea."

He then concludes his sentence of condemnations, roundly asserting, that in all of Virgil's writings a similar instance occurs but once. What the instance is he has not mentioned, at least, that I can recollect.

But to show the *truth* of this hardy assertion, I shall cite a few passages out of *many* more of a similar nature, which might be extracted from Virgil.

.....Morsque viris et mœnia ponet.  
Æn. i. l. 265.  
Crudeles aras, trajectaque pectora ferro  
Nudavit. Æ. i. l. 355.  
Inclusos utero Danaos & pinea furtim  
Laxat claustra Simon. Æ. ii. l. 258.  
.....Nec voci iræque pepercit.  
Æ. ii. l. 534.  
.....Inceptoq; et sedibus hæret  
iisdem. Æ. ii. l. 654.  
.....Et cœlo palmas cum voce tetendit.  
Æ. ii. l. 688.

In each of these passages the verb is evidently connected with the depending nouns in a difference of application; and the practice of Ovid is well authorized by that of the correct Virgil. The judgment of Hurd seems to have been biassed by an early prepossession, originating in the passage quoted from the English poet; and thus biassed he proceeded to judge of the idiom of one language by the idiom of another.

#### ON THE PASSAGE OF VOLTAIRE.

CONTINENTAL authors have contracted a very strong prejudice against our older tragic writers, and against Shakespeare in particular. For this there has been some foundation. The great latitude assumed by them in the formation and conduct of their plots, and their deviations from those rules of criticism to which the French writers in particular adhere with such scrupulous exactness, afford sufficient grounds for censure. The ignorance of our language increases this prejudice. Some part, however, must be attributed to misrepresentation. Voltaire is a strong instance of this. The remarks which he makes on the prince of English tragedy, show how cautious we

should be in placing implicit credit on the representations of another, however great his talents or well established his character. Some of his observations are very just, and serve to give currency to all. Our dependence on his judgment is farther increased by the apparent candour with which he premises his criticisms. He begins by saying, "that one reason for the prejudice against Shakespeare so common on the Continent, is, that his errors only have been taken notice of; but that no one has translated any of those strong and brilliant passages which make atonement for his faults." The truth of this is undeniable. His most zealous admirers will allow that though he is the most sublime, he is also the most unequal of poets; and therefore that those who hear of his faults alone, must wonder at the perversity of English taste. Voltaire proceeds to give a reason for this unjust mode of treatment. "Nothing," says he, "is easier than to exhibit in prose all the silly impertinences of a poet; but it is a very difficult task to translate his fine verses. Two pages which display some of the beauties of a great genius are of infinitely more value than volumes of comments: greater advantage may be reaped from a dozen of verses of Homer or Virgil, than from all the critiques which have been written on these two poets." In order to illustrate these observations, he proceeds to give a translation of a select passage. That which he has chosen, if not one of the most sublime, is certainly very striking, and such as would be selected by any one desirous of giving a specimen of the nervous diction and bold sentiments of this poet. It is the celebrated soliloquy of Hamlet upon death. But who would suppose after such an appearance of candour and impartiality, that the words of Shakespeare would be perverted into a declamation against priests and religion? In order that the reader may judge for himself, I here lay before him Voltaire's words and a literal translation, in which, though the beauty of the expressions may not be preserved, the sentiments which the French critic puts into the mouth of the Danish prince are correctly stated. The passage is as follows...

Demeure, il faut choisir et passer à l'instant  
De la vie, à la mort, ou de l'Être au néant.  
Dieux cruels, s'il en est, éclairez mon courage.  
Faut il veillir courbé sous la main qui m'outrage,