

REVIEW OF NEW PUBLICATIONS.

Select Papers of the Belfast Literary Society. Fasciculus 1st.....Containing First, A Memoir on Fiorin Grass, by W. Richardson, D.D.....Second, Relation of an Aerostatic Voyage, by M. Gay Lussac, transmitted to the Society by D. B. Warden, Secretary to the American Legation at Paris. 4to. p.p. 45, Smyth and Lyons, Belfast. Price, 2s. 2d. sewed.

THE influence of Literary Societies on the knowledge of Europe, has been very considerable. Those fugitive ideas, which would otherwise have passed away unnoticed, even by the persons in whose minds they originated, have been recorded, and given birth to others which led to incontrovertible facts. Many of the Arts, which render man more powerful, and administer to the comfort and embellishment of civilized Society, have been discovered, or highly improved, by means of scientific men, whose minds were roused to exertion by the stimulus of surrounding associates.

A number of years have now elapsed since the institution of the first Society for the cultivation of Science and Literature, and bodies of learned men, in different countries, have endeavoured by treading in the footsteps of their predecessors, to extend the limits of knowledge. While some have risen to eminence, others have gradually sunk into obscurity, leaving no records to inform us whether their decay was caused by extraneous checks, or fundamental errors, in their constitution. Undeterred, however, by prognostics of a speedy dissolution, the Belfast Literary Society commenced its career in the year 1801, and embraced at once such a variety of subjects, as the most learned and numerous bodies have deemed beyond the limits of their powers.

An attempt to subject the workings of genius to an almost military discipline, and to force it to perform those mental movements in mechanical rotation, which are seldom if ever well made but from voluntary exertion, although it preserved order in the Society, has, perhaps, been the principal

cause of its tardy progress towards gratifying the expectations of the public; and it is not without some portion of astonishment, that we now behold its first effort in the re-publication of a Memoir, which has been first addressed to the Grand Jury of the County of Armagh, and afterwards to the Board of Agriculture. Making, however, due allowance for the very flattering Address to the learned Principal of the Belfast Academy, we are happy to find, that among the first articles which appear in our hall of Criticism, is a work of considerable importance to society. Whether we consider it as introducing to notice a valuable grass, or showing the futility of speculative opinions when directed to Agriculture, an art which experience has taught mankind to regard as peculiarly dependant on accurate practice. Agriculture is an art of slow progress. Its steady pace has often been disturbed, and its course impeded by theorists, who, with a poetical warmth of imagination, have raised what may be denominated, the "hue and cry," about some favourite object of cultivation. Burnet Ribwort, and various kinds of turnip and cabbage, have each had their day, and sunk into neglect.

Dr. R. begins his Memoir, with noticing his former publications on the same subject, the Irish Fiorin Grass; and recapitulating some of the observations which they contained; he then advances his higher claim on the attention of the Public from his longer experience, though diffident of obtaining it, on account of the very extraordinary qualities, which, he thinks, he has discovered in the object of his research. He afterwards proceeds to mention a variety of interesting particulars, one of which is particularly curious: viz. that the Grass in question, is also a native of India, and esteemed there as preferable to all others, and propagated in the manner which the Doctor, without any previous knowledge of the circumstance, had employed in its cultivation. The remainder of the work gives his method of managing the

Fiorin, and details some experiments which seem to prove its value, and which demand the attention of the cultivator. We now proceed to a more particular examination of the work.

Why Dr. R. has chosen to adopt a name unknown to the generality of his Readers in the north of Ireland, and totally neglected a scientific description, or figure, by which it could be known to the most illiterate, we cannot comprehend; especially as this attachment to local nomenclature, seems confined to the grass under consideration: for even in the very same sentence he introduces two others under their proper botanical terms (*Poa trivialis* and *Poa annua*) without any reference to the vulgar idiom, while the Fiorin either sinks below, or soars above its fellows, with no other designation than its sonorous Irish appellation.

The scientific Reader, however, after having read to the Note at page 30, may find what the celebrated Fiorin is; for the Doctor there, like a child telling a secret, says, "though I am not ignorant of the Botanical characters and name *Agrostis Stolonifera* of this grass, I shall persist in calling it by its Irish appellation, Fiorin Grass; for it appears, by my former Memoir, that the English have known it at Orcheston long above an hundred years, without availing themselves of its valuable qualities, or attempting, as far as I can find, to cultivate it, beyond that meadow where it was so celebrated. Surely then we, Irish, have a good right to insist on the name being retained, by which this Grass has been always distinguished in the country where its value has been long known, and is now more fully established." Then by the same mode of reasoning, the inhabitants of India may insist upon calling it by their name of Doob Grass. Hence would arise an inextricable series of perplexities, which the learned of all civilized countries have been long endeavouring to get clear of, by the adoption of general names.

Although Dr. Richardson may claim the merit of introducing the Fiorin into more general notice, and to genteel company, yet, as the Dr. says, "Its value has been long known," for we learn from good authority, that in the neighbourhood of Derry, the Fiorin

has been cultivated from a very remote period, by cutting it into pieces with a hatchet, and after strewing the fragments over the ground, covering it lightly with some manure, nearly the Doctor's own mode of cultivation, and that by this method it has produced such crops in a valley called after the grass, the Fiorin Glen, that a man has been obliged to attend the mower with a pitch-fork, to disencumber his scythe. This property of forming itself into closely intangled masses, has always been an objection brought against it by farmers, who, endeavouring to make hay while the sun shines, have found it so difficult to disentangle and dry, in moist, warm weather, that the crop was spoiled. Another disadvantage is, that not being supported by other strong grasses, the lower leaves excluded from air soon perish, and unless it is exposed so long to dry, that this dead vegetable matter is turned to dust and blown away, it remains to spoil the hay. All these objections are, however, completely removed by Dr. Richardson's plan of making hay, after the autumnal rains have washed the grass, and the more snow, and the keener the frost, when it is cut, we presume it will keep the better; that the Dr. had green food throughout the winter, no one can deny, when it is so evidently proved by the following experiments: p. 14.

"December 28, the day I housed my first crop, I took three or four of its strings indiscriminately. I laid them on the surface of a flower-pot, sprinkled them lightly with mould, and put them in my hot house; they soon vegetated, and in three weeks the pot was covered with a fine green fleece.

"Observing one sprout unusually large and strong, I pulled it up and found it was the projecting point of a string.

"This fact seems of much importance, as it proves that when the string was cut, December 7, its length was still increasing, and of course with it the quantity of the crop, a point not easily determined in the field, on account of the matting of the sward.

"January 18, I a second time took some strings from the same parcel of s

Hay, and without choosing the best, the result was the same; these also vegetated from every joint.

"February 5, I repeated the experiment with the same success.

"And finally, February 27, I took strings from each parcel of Hay, the one in the house, cut December 7, the other mowed December 28; and still in the field; these were as before, put into my hot-house, and this day March 4, I observe them both sprouting."

The reclaiming of our turf-bogs has for a great length of time engaged the attention of Irish improvers, and perhaps Dr. R's plan is the most reasonable that has ever been adopted for this purpose. The turf-bog drained, and put into a high state of cultivation, has produced crops for a few years which have come up to the most sanguine expectations of the improver; but of all soils, peat-mould, when kept dry, is the soonest exhausted, and without constant manuring, and additions of more tenacious soils, it becomes incapable of paying for cultivation. But a more serious evil is to be apprehended by the present thoughtless draining and waste of turf-bog, which is the destruction of what Ireland principally depends on for fuel; and if the schemes of the present speculators were carried to the extent of their wishes, depopulation of considerable districts must ultimately ensue. To those who say this can never occur, we answer, look around and you may see how much our bogs have been consumed even by the necessary supply of fuel, within the memory of people yet alive. Dr. Richardson's plan, as tending in some degree to retard this rapid destruction, we think may be useful. The moisture necessary for the luxuriant growth of the Fiorin will preserve the turf below, and possibly allow even the increase of the bog, and every person conversant in turf-cutting knows, that the moister and deeper the bog, the better the turf.

"Were I to limit myself (says Dr. R.) to the assertion, that the Irish Fiorin Grass is superior to most, perhaps to all others, and better fitted to every separate use to which grass can be applied, I might expect to be

considered merely as a prejudiced panegyrist, and have great allowance made for my partiality.

"But I must proceed much farther, and state, that this grass possesses the most opposite qualities: that it thrives almost equally in soils of the most contrary descriptions; the richest, the poorest, the deepest and the shallowest, the tops of mountains, the bottoms of vallies, and that it bears greater extremes of wet and drought, than any other grass, or perhaps vegetable."

We are greatly afraid that most people who read Dr. R's Memoir, will think him a highly prejudiced panegyrist, especially if they take the second paragraph in the unlimited sense which the words "thrives almost equally," will allow them. The grass in question does not perhaps exceed, in the opposite qualities of bearing drought and moisture several other grasses; but who would wish to cultivate any plant unless under the most advantageous circumstances? And while there are a variety of plants which thrive in a dry soil, why endeavour to transplant any into an unnatural situation? We allow that the value of the Fiorin crop is considerable in a rich moist soil, but that it is equal in a dry one to rye-grass, clover, lucerne or sainfoin, we are disposed to dispute. On moist, rich lands, the Fiorin certainly merits the attention of the farmer, and in such places only is it worth cultivation, but we presume it will be valuable in proportion as it is intermixed and supported by other strong plants and grasses.

In the famous Orcheston meadow, which has excited so much attention, Mr. W. G. Maton, the last botanical visitor, found a variety of grasses, and other plants of most luxuriant growth, indicating strongly the rich nourishment which they received; but he does not seem to speak more in favour of the *Agrostis Stolonifera* than of the other herbage*;

*The crops of the Orcheston grass within these late years, have not, by any means, equalled what they had hitherto been. Perhaps the gradual deepening of the mould may be the cause of this, as it must deprive the crop more and more

although Dr. R. seems to consider it the principal, if not the only grass in the place.

We are sorry to see that Dr. Richardson has so little knowledge of vegetable geography as to suppose Iceland without grasses. If we are right in reckoning the *Agrostis Stoloniifera*, Dr. R's famous Florin, Iceland already possesses it, with most of the other grasses of Ireland; and we presume if the Doctor's publication ever reaches Denmark, and the king can smile at any thing British, his jest will be returned. But certainly Dr. R's plan of packing up hay in ice, as we do fresh salmon, when adopted in Iceland, must be particularly advantageous, and in plentiful seasons they may lay up a quantity in store for years of scarcity.

From the view which we have taken of Dr. Richardson's Memoir, we are led to conclude that had the writer confined his praises within moderate boundaries, he might have been the means of inducing some agriculturists to turn their attention to the cultivation of a plant, which, in a suitable soil and situation, will probably reward their labours. The Doctor's detail of experiments is simple and satisfactory, and if the saying be true that the man who makes two blades of grass grow, where but one grew before, has more real merit than he who conquers kingdoms, Dr. R. deserves the thanks of his country-men, and we sincerely wish that he may long enjoy the pleasure which must be doubly grateful to a person descending into the vale of life, that of having employed his time and turned his amusements to the benefit of his fellow-creatures.

of the advantages arising from the disposition of the pebbles, which (if I might venture a conjecture) seems to be a very important peculiarity in the situation. It is certain that the space of only two acres and an half, has yielded as much as ten tons of hay in one year. The first crop has usually been cut about the end of May, and the second in July (or, which is rare) as late as the end of August. The tithes of the meadow have been rented more than once for £5.....
Trans. Lin. Soc, V. xxx.

The first Book of T. Lucretius Carus, of the Nature of Things; translated into English verse, by the Rev. W. Hamilton Drummond, p.p. 79. Edinburgh, Mundell & Co. 5s. 5d.

HAD we not promised to give an accurate review of all books published in Ireland, or by Irishmen, we should have been inclined to pass over this in silence; not, because its merits are insufficient to raise it to a due rank in our estimation, but on account of the extreme delicacy of the situation in which we find ourselves placed with respect to it. Whatever may be the opinion which we pass, private motives will be thought by many to have had considerable influence in dictating our determinations. The praises which it obtains because it deserves them, will be attributed to the zeal of private friendship, or the flattery of private interest; the censures it may incur, (and how few are the publications which do not lie open to some degree of censure?) will be supposed to arise from the envy of competition, or the bitterness of private enmity. To our own hearts we appeal for the integrity of our motives; on the candour of such unbiassed readers as compare the text with the comment, we rely for the general impartiality of our sentence.

It has been a question with many whether Lucretius ought to be translated. The apostle of impiety should be consigned, (according to them) to the obscurity in which by the change of language, and lapse of time, he has been concealed. At the present season the doctrines of atheism which have had lately so powerful an effect upon the public opinions and manners, and are now but beginning to sink into the oblivion, from which they had been raised to promote the views of unprincipled political agitators, ought not again to be brought into view, particularly when they appear clothed in a dress which, the more it displays the skill and ability of the translator, serves more strongly to recommend to the heedless, the doctrines thus adorned. Could we see Vice in her native colours, she would be as disgusting as she is destructive, but caught by the false glare of so many meretricious ornaments, we are captivated before we can be sufficiently