

She was born in 1776, and died in 1806.

“ Enough that virtue fill'd the space  
between,  
Prov'd by the ends of being, to have  
been.”

Having on a former occasion mentioned the low state of the Dublin press, we have now with much satisfaction to remark that this book is very neatly and accurately printed from the respectable office of Graisberry and Campbell. K

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*Sermons for every Sunday throughout the Year, principally from the Epistles and Gospels, proper to each Sunday; by the Rev. Barnaby Murphy. 2 vols. 8vo. p.p. 1178. Price, in boards, 1l. 2s. 9d.; Dublin, printed for the author, by H. Fitzpatrick, Capel-street, 1808.*

**O**F the three sources of Eloquence, the senate, the bar and the pulpit, the last alone remains to Ireland. The cause which deprived us of the first, has enervated the second. The lawyer, who formerly considered his own profession as a step by which to rise in the scale of politics, deprived of this hope, has no longer an elevated mark at which to aim. The talents that once aspired to the noble height of directing the energies of a great and free people, must now limit its ambition to be leading counsel in cases of fashionable adultery, or imputed high-treason.

We ought, therefore, to expect that the current thus confined to a single channel, should flow with greater fulness and rapidity; that the abilities of the country directed to a single object, should elevate that to which they are limited, to a degree of excellence hitherto unattained, and more especially that where the opportunities and encouragement are greater, the candidates for the crown of eloquence should surpass those not favoured with equal advantage. Yet, strange to tell, the claims of this country to excellence in the eloquence of the pulpit have been maintained not by those in possession of the authority and revenues appropriated to support the dignity of the clerical character, but by

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those from whom power and property have been, and still continue to be most jealously withheld. Were it not for the unpatronized, unpensioned zeal of the Catholic Clergy, this species of oratory would be now nearly, if not altogether unknown. It is singular that the only attempt to raise the Protestant pulpit to any degree of respectability, originated from a Catholic. Kirwan was the first, who, by infusing into the souls of his hearers a portion of that fire he had imbibed in the schools of France and Italy, taught a Church of England congregation what they ought to require of their teachers. His example roused and kept alive a spirit of emulation, which his death will, in all probability damp, or even extinguish. To investigate the causes of the deficiency of eloquence in Protestant preachers both of the establishment and dissenters, would be less difficult than invidious. We might quote the high authority of Longinus, to prove that liberty is essential to eloquence, and show that the spirit of Demosthenes himself could not bear up against the paralyzing effects of a *silver quinsy*. But it will be more useful to confine our thoughts to the present candidate for public approbation, and see how far he has maintained his right to the rank he claims.

From the character acquired by this writer as a popular preacher, and from his successful appeals to the purses of his hearers, we were led to conceive too high an opinion of the work before us, and to look for a degree of excellence inconsistent with the general nature of such compositions. We have already had an instance of a fact equally remarkable; that many discourses, which, when spoken, produced an almost electrical effect on the audience, lost all their force when committed to writing. The spirit evaporated when transferred to paper. The great preacher just named was so sensible of this, that he perseveringly refused to have his sermons printed. He was conscious that they owed much, if not the greatest part of their celebrity to adventitious circumstances, deprived of which they could not stand the test of strict unheated criticism. The book now be-

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fore us confirms the opinion and proves the prudence of his adherence to the line of conduct he pursued. We here find a collection of sermons, good without doubt, and pregnant with salutary instruction. But they were evidently never designed for the closet. The effect produced by them on our minds is somewhat similar to what we should feel on seeing a person dressed for a ball or masque, walking through the streets by day-light. The ornaments want the circumstances of time and place to make them truly ornamental. We have attempted to remove ourselves to the place of delivery, to identify ourselves with the congregation, to observe the preacher, instead of studying the book, but in vain; the strength of imagination could not bear us through; and we are forced to confess that there have been some secret springs to us unknown, by which he has touched the hearts of his auditors, and produced such effects on their minds.

The principal defect throughout the whole appears to be a want of arrangement, a desultory mode of argument which it is very difficult to trace, or unravel. Instead of convincing the judgment before he endeavours to gain the affections, he takes the opposite course: he storms the head through the heart. Hence we find warm appeals to the passions, mixed with arguments, and the arguments themselves appear to be thrown out as they first occurred to his mind: we feel puzzled rather than convinced, and agitated rather than affected.

It is impossible to cite passages in proof of our assertion, because as it is a fault which pervades a whole, it cannot be discovered by a partial quotation. We shall, however, adduce one instance of his mode of reasoning. It is an argument in proof of the existence of God and a state of future rewards and punishments drawn from the nature of conscience.

“The judgment that constitutes the nature of conscience is founded on three principles. First, I am in a state of dependence. Secondly, There is a supreme law, or what is the same, there is something right and something wrong.

Thirdly, I am either guilty or innocent. Every man who maintains the improbability of these principles, and the vanity of the consequences drawn from them must be either a fool or a madman, whose attachment to vice has blinded his eyes, or turned his brain. Take the first principle. I am in a state of dependence: I am subject to a supreme being, to whom I owe my existence, and who holds my destiny in his mighty hand; do I exceed the truth when I say that the man who ventures to affirm that this principle is neither demonstrable nor probable, is a fool or a madman?”

If by principles are meant axioms, self-evident truths, the elucidation is superfluous. If they require proof as seems to be intimated by calling them *demonstrable* and *probable*, it would have been more consistent with the dignity of an orator, and perhaps more convincing to the antagonist, to have advanced his proofs instead of calling names. The futility of such a mode of arguing, if, indeed, it deserves the name, may be seen by using the same method with a principle the reverse of that laid down; a similar mode of proving which, will equally confirm it. Let us make the trial. “I am in a state of independence; there is no being to whom I owe my existence; none who controuls my destiny. The man who denies that this principle is incapable of demonstration is either a fool or a madman.”

As an instance of the manner in which this writer attacks the passions instead of convincing the judgment, take the beginning of the sermon preached at the dedication of St. Patrick's chapel. The passage is too long for insertion. The seven first pages are occupied with a high-wrought description of the dedication of Solomon's temple, concluding with an animated apostrophe and address to the Supreme Being, which ends with a prayer, making a complete discourse in itself, so that the preacher is obliged to continue his discourse by a second exordium.

These defects we are inclined to attribute to the nature of extemporary preaching, which necessarily induces a loose and desultory mode of thinking and expression. Hurried on by the

vehemence of passion, the orator cannot pause to digest and arrange the thoughts that press for utterance; did he allow himself time for cool reflection, more would be lost in energy than would be gained in correctness. The same reason may account for occasional asperities, and even vulgarities of expression, which too frequently offend the ear. As where he speaks of "the all-wise governor of the universe leaving the series of human events to *hap-hazard*," and tells us that, "Religious prejudices and disunion are melting *in the crucible* of natural affection and common interest." These may strike the hearer for a moment, but are immediately effaced; they dwell on the mind of the reader.

Let it not be supposed that because we have pointed out these defects, the work is to be wholly condemned: far from it. Independently of the many brilliant passages which shine through it, and of which we would gladly give specimens, a vein of sound piety and pure Christian morality pervades the whole; and with very few exceptions, these volumes would prove a valuable family companion for every Sunday in the year, to a Christian of any religious persuasion. We particularly approve of the adaptation of the subject to the day; a practice which links the several parts of the divine service more closely together, and induces the hearer to make the passages of scripture selected for the occasion, the subjects of reflection by finding them referred to, explained and enforced by the subsequent words of the preacher. It were much to be wished that such practice was more common. If any one wish to see one of the points of difference between the two great sects of the Christian Church treated of, let him turn to the sermon preached on the profession of a nun. Though he be not persuaded he will be interested. To hear the arguments by which so many of the young, and opulent, and beautiful, have been prevailed on to forego all the allurements of youth, and wealth, and beauty, and through the purest, the most sublime motives of exalted veneration to the great author of nature, to bind themselves by a vow in direct opposition to the

first great commandment given by that Being to the newly created world, cannot fail of being a source of affecting though melancholy gratification; a pleasure chastized by pain.

One point more deserves notice. In preaching on general subjects, to a numerous and mixed congregation, it appears to be unnecessary, and in some measure indelicate, to introduce any remark bearing upon tenets either religious or political, concerning which an avowed difference of opinion exists. To a Catholic audience the peculiar doctrines of their faith should be explained; but this may be done without reflecting on those of others. At a time when each party professes to live on terms of mutual forgiveness and amity, and be it remembered that *both* parties have much to forgive and forget, too great caution can not be used in avoiding these points, which have already produced such deadly feuds. When the wounds have been so lately healed, we should avoid touching the tender part. Yet Dr. Murphy speaks of the Reformation, improperly so called. Every Catholic must believe that what we call Reformation is a culpable schism; did he think otherwise, his adherence to his sect would be mere pertinacity. Why then at such a time press a topic which irritates, but does not instruct. Were a Protestant preacher publicly to make use of such a strong expression in condemnation of any of those tenets which he must believe to be false, we need not tell what would be the effect. It has been felt already. The out-cry would be loud and violent; and not without reason. But let each grant what it requires from the other. This is the mutual sacrifice which only can cement our new-formed peace. Let each maintain and extend his faith by arguments, drawn from the nature of the thing itself, without endeavouring to found it on the ruins of his neighbour's. In points of doctrine the difference must and will be great and durable. In points of practice, in mutual love and mutual forbearance, both agree; both preach the same heavenly precepts, and, in the sacred name of heaven, let both practice them.

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