The Retrospective Review

1820

Edited by
Yasuo Deguchi

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THE RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW

Volume 1: 1820, vol. I

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The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this book but points out that some imperfections from the original may be apparent.

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VOLUME 1: THE RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW, 1820, VOL. I

PREFACE

In 1820, Henry Southern, a young, talented scholar educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, launched a new periodical called the *Retrospective Review* in the heyday of British periodicals. The major review journals and magazines - famous names like the *Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *Quarterly Review* and the *Gentleman's Magazine* - were fairly well established at that time, with a good readership among British literary society. The *Retrospective Review* was one of over 60 periodicals in circulation in 1820; others included the *London Magazine* and Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*.

The defining aspect of the *Retrospective Review*, in the context of the history of literary criticism, was that it would run 'reviews' of the great books of the past. There was a crusading intention behind this vision, contemporary work apparently not considered to be of sufficient substance. As Southern himself put it in his introduction to the first issue:

> It is time to look back - the enervating effects of a literature of this kind are too obvious - the uncompromising vigour of intellect, and the sturdy and unshrinking adherence to principle, which have been the distinguishing characteristics of Englishmen, cannot for any length of time resist the relaxing power of so diluted a diet.[1]

Published as a quarterly by Charles and Henry Baldwin in London, the new periodical found some supporters in literary circles. Southern (who himself had co-edited the *Westminster Review* and was a regular contributor to the *Examiner* and the *Spectator*) is said to have been backed by Charles Wentworth Dilke, Keats's close friend, and in 1827 Nicholas H. Nicolas joined as co-editor.

From then on the *Retrospective Review* would also carry essays on wider antiquarian and historical themes, its title converting to *Retrospective Review and Historical Magazine* (1827-1828). A second series of the *Retrospective Review* was later edited by John Russell Smith (1853-1854).

Ian Jack has shown how, following the fall of Napoleon in 1815, Southern's over-his-shoulder impulse was actually a general feature of the age.[2] But although it was inevitable that reviews of the Romantic

period should have been political in tone, the *Retrospective Review* itself had no overt political affiliations. Like the *Gentleman's Magazine*, it was intended mainly to be a storehouse of knowledge, aiming to 'exhibit a bird's eye view of the rise and progress in literary history' while 'correcting the reading habit of the public'. 'For no study', wrote Southern, 'is more interesting, and few more useful, than the history of literature, - which is in fact the study of man.'[3]

According to Billy Andrew Inman, writing in *British Literary Magazines*, six per cent of the titles reviewed in the *Retrospective Review* were published during the 16th century, 35 per cent during the 17th century, 55 per cent during the 18th century and 2 per cent during the 19th century.[4]

Major literary works reviewed in the *Retrospective Review* included: Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (vols IX, XII and XIV); Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (vols III and IV); Sydney's *Arcadia and Defence of Poesy* (vols II and X); Richard Lovelace's *Lucasta* (vol. IV); Milton's *Areopagitica* (vol. IX); Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler* (vol. VI); Defoe's *Memoirs of a Cavalier* and *Journal of the Plague Year* (vols III and VI); William Beckford's *Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters* and *Thoughts on Hunting* (vols X and XIII); Shakespeare's poems (vol. VII); and poetical works by Donne (vol. VIII), Herbert (vol. III), Herrick (vol. V) and Marvell (vols X and XI).

The *Retrospective Review* also covered English drama -- from early medieval plays to the works of Aphra Behn, Dryden, Jonson, Marlowe, Middleton, Nash, Thomas Rymer and John Suckling -- and carried several important essays on women's writing, including reviews of Amory's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. An index of books reviewed in the periodical from volume I to XIV appears in volume XIV, so all such articles can be easily located.

Great books of foreign literature were also considered: Charles Cotton's translation of Montaigne's *Essays*; Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*; Dorat's *Poesies*; Michelangelo's *Poems*; Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*; George Sales's translation of the Koran; Hobbes's translation of Homer; and William Cooper's translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Spanish literature featured prominently, with reviews of *The Spanish Rogue*, *Poetical Works of Spain* and the *Life of Ignatio Loyola*.

Eclectic in taste, fluctuating in tone, reviews in the *Retrospective Review* tended to be impressionistic rather than analytical, passionate rather than intellectual - as is made clear by this extract from a consideration of Shakespeare:

> He plunged into the depths of speculation; he penetrated to the inner places of knowledge, plucking out the 'heart of the mystery'; he soared to the stars, he trod the earth, the air, the waters. Every element yielded him rich tribute. He surveyed the substances and spirits of each; he saw their stature, their power, their quality, and reduced them without an effort to his own divine command.[5]

In spite of its retrospective brief, Southern's magazine did refer to contemporary writers while discussing the works of past times. An article on the 'Various Prospects of Mankind and on the Progress of Literature' gives a fine glimpse of the Romantic poets, praising the 'divine philosophy' of Wordsworth and the 'myriad mindedness' of Coleridge. The sweetness and wisdom of Lamb's humour is also lauded, as are Byron's love of violent emotion, Hazlitt's originality as a critic, and Leigh Hunt's principles of morality and taste.

The same writer had this sympathetic comment to make about Keats:

> [Keats] whose Endymion was cruelly treated by the critics, has just put forth a volume of poems which most effectually silence his deriders. The rich romance of his Lamia - the holy beauty of his St Agnes - the pure and intense feeling of Isabella - and the rough sublimity of his Hyperion - cannot be laughed down, though all the periodical critics in England and Scotland were to cover them with sneers.[6]

In terms of its breadth of reference, its selectivity within that breadth, and its application of notional 'high standards', the *Retrospective Review* offers us an intriguing picture of canon-making in action. One of the most interesting outcomes of Southern's enterprise is that the articles collected here tell us as much about the reviewers - how they thought, the processes by which they made literary value judgements, the way, in fact, that they read – as they do about their subjects. We know many of those 'classics' well now, and see them through the glass of our own age. So, looking back at the *Retrospective Review* as it looks back, we gain from two sides of a powerful, telescopic view of the early 19th-century periodical.

TOKYO
October, 1997

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NOTES TO PREFACE

1 Henry Southern, Introduction to the *Retrospective Review*, first issue, p. IV
2 Ian Jack, *English Literature*, 1963, p. 399
3 Southern, Introduction to the *Retrospective Review*, first issue, p. VIII
4 Edited by Alvin Sullivan, *British Literary Magazines: The Romantic Age, 1789-1836*, 1983, p. 377
5 The *Retrospective Review*, Vol VII, Part I, 'The Poems of Shakespeare', p.380
6 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 204

NOTE ON REPRODUCTION

The copy texts for this edition have been taken from Cambridge University Library. Where the quality of some pages was too poor for reproduction, replacement pages have been taken from the London Library and the British Library. In the originals of volumes I and II, the contents list for the second part of the journal appears midway through the volume. In our facsimile edition we have moved these pages to the start of the volume, to appear after the contents list for part I, so that all contents can be viewed together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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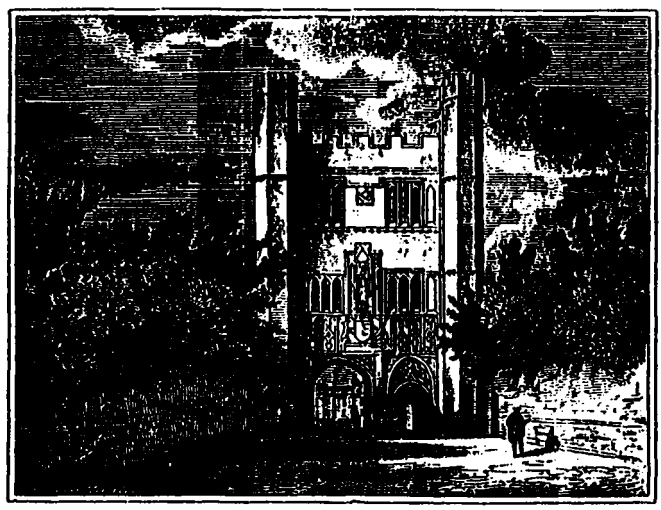
THE

Retrospective Review.

FOR OUT OF THE OLDE FIELDES, AS MEN SAITHE,
COMETH ALL THIS NEWE CORN FRO YERE TO YERE;
AND OUT OF OLDE BOOKES, IN GOOD FAITHE,
COMETH ALL THIS NEWE SCIENCE THAT MEN LERE.

CHAUCER.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

CHARLES AND HENRY BALDWYN, NEWGATE STREET.

1820.

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OF

VOLUME I. PART I.

CONTENTS

OF

VOLUME I. PART II.

INTRODUCTION.

THE accumulation of books has ever been regarded with some degree of jealousy—an inundation of paper and print seems to have been thought as formidable to the ideas of men, as an inundation of water to their houses and cattle. In these latter times, the danger to be apprehended has been deemed so imminent, that various dykes or mud-banks have been established and supported, for the purpose of being interposed between the public and the threatened danger. Reviews have sprung up as rapidly, and as well armed, as the fabled warriors from the teeth sown by Cadmus, to stand in the gap in the hour of need; but it has been "whispered in the state," that, like the same sons of the earth, these self-elected champions, neglecting the public weal, have turned their arms against each other—that, having cleared a ring for themselves under the false pretext of a public cause, they have ceased to exhibit themselves in any other character than that of intellectual gladiators; with literature for an arena—the public for spectators—and weapons poisoned with party malice and personal slander.

However this may be, the "cacöethes scribendi," or rather, "cacöethes imprimendi," is regularly set down as a disease, as urgently demanding medical aid, as a disorder of the frame, a typhus, or a dropsy. The writers of satire, ever since the times of Horace and

Juvenal, have been exclaiming, that all the world were scribbling. That the number of books has been increasing—is increasing—and ought to be diminished—is the deliberate resolution even of those who esteem themselves friendly to literature. That a great book is a great evil, is stamped with the sanction of ages—it has passed into a proverb. If, however, the evil of a book is to be measured by its bulk, the mischief *we* shall do is small; while at the same time, the good we propose to effect, if estimated on a scale of this kind, is such as must call down upon us the approbation of all favourers of the proverb—since it is one of our objects, and indeed no small part of the design of this work, to reduce books to their *natural* size; a process which we apprehend will compress many a distended publication into a very insignificant tenement. Let no man weep, as the Thracians did, over the birth of a child, and cry, "another book is born unto the world!" For the space we shall empty is greater than that which we hope to fill, should even our future labours ever rival the "piled heaps" of the most favoured periodical that exists. Though some books will undoubtedly stand the test of the critical touchstone, which we propose, from time to time, to apply to the productions before us, and appear the brighter for the trial; many a well-looking and well-bound volume will fall into ashes in our hands, as the tempting fruit does, which is said to float on the surface of the Dead Sea; while from others, ponderous and unwieldy, the essential ingredients shall be disengaged from the superfluous matter, and the deposit presented either for the amusement or instruction of our readers.

The only real evil to be apprehended from the enormous increase in the number of books is, that it is likely to distract the attention, and dissipate the mind, by inducing the student to read many, rather than much. The alluring catalogue of attractive title-pages unfixes the attention, and causes the eye to wander over a large surface, when it ought to be intently turned upon a small though fertile spot. It induces a passion for reading as an end, and not as a means—merely to satisfy an appetite, and not to strengthen the system, and enrich the powers of original thinking. It makes learned men, and not wise men. Hobbes, on being asked why he did not read more? answered, if I read as much as other men, I should know as little; his library consisted of Homer, Thucydides, Euclid, and Virgil. As the Caliph that destroyed the literary stores of Alexandria, said of the Koran, so Hobbes thought of his four authors, "if other books contained any thing, which was not in them, then it was naught; if only what was therein contained, then it was needless." True it is, that for the purpose of supplying the place of constant companions, of suggesting never-failing subjects of reflection, and of exercising and gratifying the imagination, a few choice and venerable authors are amply sufficient. "Make," says Bishop Watson, "Bacon then, and Locke, and why should I not add, that sweet child of nature Shakespeare, your chief companions through life; let them be ever upon your table, and when you have an hour to spare, spend it upon them; and I will answer for their giving you entertainment and instruction as long as you live."

The practice of these times, it is needless to say, is as unlike that here recommended, as it can well be; the British public are almost solely occupied by the productions which daily issue from the press; newspapers, reviews, pamphlets, magazines, the popular poetry, the fashionable romances, together with new voyages and travels, occupy the reading time, and fix the attention of the people.—The old and venerable literature of the country, which has, as much as any thing, tended to make us what we are, is treated with distant reverence—its noble works, which every one is ashamed not to know—which every one pretends to know, and which far too few are acquainted with, are much oftener talked of than read.—Their authors are apotheosized, but seldom worshipped,—their brilliant but temperate lustre neglected for the glaring meteors, which are hanging their short-lived blaze every where in the heavens—It is time to look back—the enervating effects of a literature of this kind are too obvious—the uncompromising vigor of intellect, and the sturdy and unshrinking adherence to principle, which have been distinguishing characteristics of Englishmen, cannot for any length of time resist the relaxing power of so diluted a diet. Never was education so common as at present—never were books so commonly dispersed, so multifariously read. We present a spectacle of what, perhaps, was never before seen in any age, certainly neither Greek nor Roman, that of a whole nation, employing nearly all its leisure hours from the highest to the lowest rank in *reading*—we have been truly called a READING PUBLIC. The lively Greeks were not a *reading* nation—they were a hearing and a talking people—they fed the mind through the ear,

and not through the eye; historians and poets were not so much read as heard—Homer was recited by rhapsodists—Herodotus read his history at the Olympic games,—the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides were at stated times the objects of sight and hearing. The philosopher who wished to enlighten his countrymen, and circulate his peculiar opinions, did not so frequently write as lecture—he established a school, and his benches were daily crowded by a people who carried on no trade—who lived on the tributes of subject nations, or on the industry of their slaves. The business of the nation was transacted in public by means of orators who addressed the assembled citizens—each man had his mind to make up—and thus they became fond of disputing. Their social hours were spent in the open air—in their groves, gardens, and porticoes—where they busily reviewed the operations of their generals and admirals, canvassed the merits of opposing orators, or listened to the reasoning of philosophers, upon such subjects as the soul, the creation of the universe, its duration, its formation, its sustaining causes, and the purposes of its various parts. Thus they became a thinking, talking, enlightened nation—free of speech, brilliant in wit, restless, active, boasting, audacious, and arrogant—but they were not a *reading* nation. For one library, the Greeks had a hundred theatres for plays, music, spectacles—groves, and academies for disputation—forums for orators—and gymnasia and palæstræ, for exercise and conversation. All other languages but their own they despised—all other nations were accounted and called barbarians. The energetic Greek, with his person perfect, and formed in the finest

mould of nature—his mind filled with the noblest shapes of ideal beauty—his tongue nimble to speak the most melodious of languages, with all his faculties about him, critical, exact, and sensitive—filled with the spirit of enjoyment that proceeds from health, fine climate, free government, and a beautiful country—was raised so high above other men, that he looked with contempt and derision upon the rugged Scythian, the enervated Persian, the depraved Egyptian, the savage and untutored Italian. Thus it was, that all history was uninteresting to them, but what was Greek; that which was not Greek, was to them without the pale of civilization—and this is one main reason why the Greeks, in the time of their prosperity, (for we speak not of the Greeks in their dotage, when "the last of the Greeks" had died) read so little—what related to other nations they cared not for; what related to themselves, it was their constant business to listen to. The Romans of the higher ranks paid more attention to, and depended more for their amusement upon reading, than the Greeks; Homer, and all the Greek authors, were their constant study. We begin to hear, in their times, of the student's solitary lamp, and midnight oil—but still literature was confined to the upper ranks. "The Romans conquered the world without the help of books, and lost it after they knew the use of them." The middle ages are proverbially dark—it was the *torpid* time for the great authors of antiquity—like bats and moles they slept away this winter of literature, in the cold and gloomy cells of monasteries, till the dawning of better times shot revivifying light into these recesses on ignorance and superstition. The invention of paper

in the eleventh, and of printing in the fifteenth, century, are as cheering to the lovers of humanity, as the sea-birds and sea-weeds, signs of approaching land, are to the wearied and despairing navigator, who is darkly tracking an unknown and pathless ocean. The fertile and luxurious crop of modern literature then appeared above the earth—the richness of the soil, which had lain fallow for so long a time, during which it had only borne the rank weeds of scholastic subtlety, mingled indeed with the wild but romantic flowers of chivalrous feudality, as well as the greenness and freshness of the productions themselves, all encouraging animating hopes of an abundant harvest. Since that time, books have become a common and current coin; every city and every town has its mint—they are almost numberless. A catalogue of all the books that have been printed, would of itself fill a little library. The knowledge of their external qualities, and the adventitious circumstances attending their formation or history, has become a science—professors devote their lives to it, with an enthusiasm not unworthy of a higher calling—they have earned the name of *bibliomaniacs*. Vast collections of books are esteemed the pride and glory of the countries or cities fortunate enough to possess them. The Vatican boasts its millions—the Laurentian, Ambrosian, and other libraries of Italy, the Bibliothèque du Roi at Paris, the enormous collection at the British Museum, our university and college libraries, particularly the Bodleian, while they are proud monuments of the ingenuity and all-reaching, all-fathoming, mind of man; yet must strike the heart of the student that enters them with despair, should he aim at

attaining universal knowledge through the medium of books. Life is too short for wading through many of the sets of ten folios, such as the *Opera* of the old scholars used to be collected in, unlike the diminutive quartos and octavos of these book-making times.

> Not two strong men th' enormous weight could raise—
> Such men as live in these degenerate days.

Fortunately it is not necessary, though at the same time, a general acquaintance with all that has been written, with the reigning pursuits of different ages, with the different modes and different degrees of talent, with which particular individuals and schools have followed them, are not only highly gratifying to a liberal curiosity, but essentially necessary to the accomplished scholar. No study is more interesting, and few more useful, than the history of literature,—which is, in fact, the history of the mind of man. This observation leads us to the chief object of this introduction, namely, a more particular statement of our views in sending forth the "Retrospective Review," one of whose most valuable and important departments, it is the intention of the editors to assign to the history of literature.

The design of this Review of past literature, had its origin in the decisively modern direction of the reading of the present day—it is an attempt to recal the public from an exclusive attention to new books, by making the merit of old ones the subject of critical discussion. The interesting form and manner of the present Reviews it is intended to preserve; though, from the nature of the work, and from our unfeigned horror of either political or personal invective, we shall neither pamper the depraved appetites of listless readers, by

piquant abuse—nor amuse one part of the public, by holding up another to scorn and mockery;—at any rate, we shall not be driven to a resource of this description through a paucity of interesting matter which we may legitimately present to our readers. While the present Reviews are confined to the books of the day, *we* have the liberty of ranging over the whole extent of modern literature. Criticism, which, when able and just, is always pleasing, we shall combine with copious and characteristic extracts, analyses, and biographical accounts, so as in some measure to supply the dearth of works on the history of literature in our own language; for it is to be lamented, that except the unfinished work of Warton, and a few detached Essays, we have no regular history of English poetry—and that of the prose writers, their language, style, spirit, and character, there exists no account at all.* A deficiency as striking occurs with respect to the literature of neighbouring nations: unless from native or foreign works, we are entirely in the dark respecting the national literature of Spain, Germany, Italy, even France, and the northern nations. Mr. Berington, indeed, has done good service to this department, by his "Literary History of the Middle Ages," but his subject was too extensive for the space he has allowed it to occupy, and perhaps required more research, combined with a philosophical and generalizing power of mind, than often falls to the lot of a single individual. His sketch of Arabian literature

* We must not, however, omit to mention, that this department is eminently indebted to the elegant productions of Dr. Drake, his "Essays on Periodical Literature," and other Works.

is, however, particularly valuable, and opens to the view a rich and dazzling mine of unexplored genius. That Arabian learning should be extensively cultivated in England is, perhaps, as little to be desired as expected—though we promise ourselves a favourable reception to an attempt to convey to the English reader, an accurate idea of the spirit of the extraordinary writers who flourished in Spain and other countries, at a time when the rest of Europe was immersed in darkness—criticisms upon whom, accompanied by a selection of translated extracts, will occasionally form a part of our future labours.

The Moorish authors in Spain were succeeded by no unworthy descendants. Spanish literature is far from being familiar, to the generality even of the scholars of this country—Cervantes is highly and duly appreciated —a few poets also have met their deserved reputation, but the animated, clear, and spirited, Spanish writers in prose, are comparatively unknown. The beautiful ballads in which the Spaniards perhaps excel even the Scotch and English, as well as the higher departments of poetry, with the prose works of fiction, are likely to afford a number of new and interesting articles to our Critical Miscellany. The literature of Germany, Italy, and France, is in a general way well known to the majority of those who devote their attention to literature; though we have the presumption to hope we shall lead some to a more particular acquaintance with many delightful companions, whom it is intended to introduce to their notice. Some whose names have been bruited abroad, but whose qualities have been mistaken or misunderstood—some who, though not pleasing in the

whole, and undesirable as inmates and partners of the society of our most retired and sacred hours, yet have their bright passages and inspired moments, the spirit of which may be caught and transferred;—others again whose merits no kind hand has yet unveiled and presented to the public view, but who

> like some sequester'd star
> That rolls in its creator's beams afar,
> Unseen by man; till telescopic eye,
> Sounding the blue abysses of the sky,
> Draws forth its hidden beauty into light,
> And adds a jewel to the crown of night.
>
> MONTGOMERY.

The literature, however, of our own country, the most rich, varied, and comprehensive, of any in the world, and replete with more interest to the English reader than any other, will have peculiar claims on our attention—and to it will the pages of the "Retrospective" be zealously devoted;—not, however, to that portion of it whose sole recommendation is its antiquity, although we shall avail ourselves of such bibliographical information as will in any manner illustrate the history of art, or the grand, though slow and silent, march of mind. We shall not pay exclusive homage to the mighty in intellect—to those of heavenly mould, who, like the giants of old, are the offspring of the gods and the daughters of men—far from it—many others less imposing, whether in philosophy, poetry, or general literature, from which any thing original in design, profound in thought, beautiful in imagination, or delicate in expression, can be extracted, will be considered worthy of a place in this work. There are few of the productions of mind, as well as of nature, which do not possess some

useful or valuable properties—many ponderous volumes, however tedious as a whole, frequently contain something useful or beautiful, but the road to which is as arid and fatiguing as journeying through the desert of Arabia, to the green spots and fresh waters with which it is sprinkled: to those green spots and fresh waters, we shall shorten the way. In our neglected or forgotten poetry in particular, we are often surprised, in the midst of dull passages or quaint conceits, with fine ideas, lofty flights of imagination, or sparkling expressions, which are too good to be lost, and too much encumbered with worthless matter to be sought for by general readers. In other works, in which the good is so diffused amidst the bad as to render it difficult, if not impossible, to separate the different parts, we shall present our readers with an analysis, which is often more agreeable, and as useful as the originals. We shall also, by a careful selection of particular extracts, not only endeavour to give an idea of the mode of thought and style of individual authors, but to furnish a collection of specimens of the greatest part of our writers, so as to exhibit a bird's-eye view of the rise and progress of our literature. The utility of such a work to the student, in abridging his labour, and thereby increasing his gratification, is obvious—whilst to him who reads only for his own amusement, it will have the attraction of a various literary miscellany, without exacting from him a too rigid attention; and, as it is our design to mingle the useful with the agreeable in due proportions, it may not be to him even without its value and instruction.

It may be proper, before we conclude this *entretien* with our readers, in this the vestibule of our edifice, to say

something of the works which have already appeared, of a nature bearing any resemblance to the present attempt. The design, of the execution of which this number is a specimen, is in our opinion an original one—at least, we can say with certainty, that it is unlike any other that has fallen within the limits of our observation—it owed its birth to no imitation of any other previous publication, but from the mere want of such a work—from a constantly recurring feeling of the absence of a review and critical miscellany, which was not precariously fed upon the literature of the day, but should live securely and competently upon the never-failing income derivable from the treasures which men of genius, in all countries, have been long creating and accumulating for our use.

The lovers of old English literature are considerably indebted to the bibliographical works of Sir Egerton Brydges, who combines the two apparently inconsistent characters of a bibliographer and a man of taste and genius; who in a publication, far the greater part of which is mere compilation and transcription, has contrived to interest the reader in his own habits and feelings—and who, through the mist of black-letter, dates, title-pages, and colophons, clearly shines an amiable man and elegant writer. His "Censura Literaria," which at first sight might be supposed to bear a near resemblance to the "Retrospective," is however essentially different, though many of the articles taken separately are a good deal on the same plan. The "Censura" was never intended. or at least very ill calculated, to become a favourite with the public—had the number of copies printed, which was very limited, been more extensive, the nature of its contents must have

prevented it from ever becoming generally read—it being almost entirely adapted to the purposes of the curious book-collector, or literary antiquary. It has, however, had and always will have, its use—its collection of title-pages, its discussions on the age of the old writers, its bibliographical notices, and its quotations, which though not often selected for their beauty, are frequently introduced, all have their value, and confer important advantages on the student of English literature. Although we should be sorry to lose the original productions of Sir Egerton's own pen, yet we cannot but lament the striking inconsistency of introducing his own literary papers and poetry, together with obituaries and biographies of contemporary writers, into a publication whose avowed object was to recal the taste of the public from modern trash to antient treasures.*

Of the "British Librarian" of Oldys, only one volume was published. It appeared monthly, and met, it is said, with a most favourable reception.—The plan of this work is more similar to ours, than that of any other, though still very different. The object of the British Librarian was to give an abstract, rather than a critical account, of the work which it notices, while the articles of the "Retrospective" will consist of both, sometimes jointly and sometimes separately—the books that chiefly attracted his notice, were valuable works in their respective departments, which ought to be read,

* The title of the "Censura," is as follows—Censura Literaria, containing titles, abstracts, and opinions, of old English books, with original disquisitions, articles of biography, and other literary antiquities.

and commonly were read, by the student in that department—on the contrary, many books will occur in our selection, which neither are read in the whole, nor deserve to be read, but from which we hope to extract the valuable part, and exhaust them, as it were, of their vitality, in a receiver.—Had this work been continued, it would, in all probability, have contained an accurate and important account of a very curious and valuable collection of English books: it ceased, however, at the end of the sixth monthly number; when Mr. Oldys could neither be persuaded by the entreaty of his friends, nor the demands of the public, to continue the labour. Some extracts from the preface to this work we shall here transcribe, by way of conclusion, because they are as applicable to our design, as to that to which they were prefixed, and because they are well worthy of being read, for their intrinsic merit:—

> "For through the defect of such intelligence, in its proper extent, how many authors have we, who are consuming their time, their quiet, and their wits, in searching after what is past finding, or already found? Or admiring at the penetrations which themselves have made, though to the rind only, in those very branches of science which their forefathers have pierced to the pith? And how many who would be authors, as excellent as ever appeared, had they but such plans or models laid before them, as might induce them to marshal their thoughts into a regular order; or did they but know where to meet with concurrence of opinion, with arguments, authorities, or examples, to corroborate and ripen their teeming conceptions."—Page 1.

"Lastly: Again, how many readers, who would not be glad of attaining to knowledge the shortest way, seeing the orb thereof is swollen to such a magnitude, and life but such a span to grasp it! How many who have not some curiosity to know the foundations of those tenets upon which they so securely trust their understandings? or where the footsteps of those opinions and precedents may be found, which have given direction to so many modern performances? Who would not embrace the most likely means to detect the vile grievance of plagiarism, and deter so many disadvantageous repetitions of the same thing? What reader would not think it convenient to be apprised of the worth of authors, before he gave them place in his study or esteem, by some previous character, or little analysis of what is comprised in them? and who would not find it commodious to have the opportunity of revising the library of which he has been or may be possessed, in faithful portraits thereof, at such times and places, and in which he cannot come at the originals? In a word, if he be ignorant, who would not covet to enlarge his knowledge? If he be knowing, who would not willingly refresh his memory? And yet all the expedients we have to accommodate the curious with so many desiderata are only some superficial catalogues, either of authors rather than their works, or of the works of authors only, in some one peculiar place of education, or in some single science; or else those which have been most cursorily taken of some particular libraries, and also a few extracts, limited to the recommendation only of some modern writers."—P. ii.

The following quotation will clearly exhibit the difference between our work and that of Oldys:

"Our business therefore cannot be so much to delight Readers with the *flowers* of books, or satisfy them with a smooth contexture of all the reasons and arguments in them, as to point out those heads or topics which, like so many streams and rivulets that severally arise in the provinces of literature, may best direct them to the fountains themselves, where every reader will extract those parts and those proportions, which no epitomist can do for him:—So that by this compendium of hints and advertisements concerning the most observable persons and places, times and things, which have been spoken of in the writings of men, is intended a *promptuary* only to the search of those writings, as the best means to expedite the attainment of what every one is seeking; for, as the excellent Lord Bacon complains, 'learned men want such inventories of every thing in nature and art, as rich men have of their estates.'"

THE

Retrospective Review.

Vol. I. Part I.

Art. I. *The Tragedies of the last Age, considered and examined by the Practice of the Ancients, and by the Common Sense of all Ages, in a Letter to* Fleetwood Shepheard, Esq. *by* Mr. Rymer, *Servant to their Majesties, Part I. London,* 1692. *Second Edition.*

A short View of Tragedy; its original Excellency, and Corruption, with some Reflections on Shakespear, *and other Practitioners for the Stage. By* Mr. Rymer, *Servant to their Majesties. London,* 1693.

These are very curious and edifying works. The author (who was the compiler of the *Fœdera*) appears to have been a man of considerable acuteness, maddened by a furious zeal for the honour of tragedy. He lays down the most fantastical rules for the composition which he chiefly reveres, and argues on them as "truths of holy writ." He criticizes Shakespear as one invested with authority to sit in judgment on his powers, and passes on him as decisive a sentence of condemnation, as ever was awarded against a friendless poet by a Reviewer. We will select a few passages from his work, which may be consolatory to modern authors, and useful to modern critics.

The chief weight of Mr. Rymer's critical vengeance is wreaked on *Othello.* After a slight sketch of the plot, he proceeds at once to speak of the *moral,* which he seems to regard as of the first importance in tragedy.

"Whatever rubs or difficulty may stick on the bark, the moral use of this fable is very instructive. First, this may be a caution to all maidens of quality, how, without their parents' consent, they run away with blackamoors. Secondly, this may be a warning to all good

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