

are in latent operation; for it is sufficiently obvious that what does beget itself, cannot by its own power perpetuate its duration. We all owe a debt to nature, which no art can evade, and no strength or vigour escape; and we scarcely reach to maturity, before we begin to retrograde towards decay. Every surrounding object of perishable nature, is subject to the influence of the same law; and falls as it arose, at the command of the Supreme: A truth so obvious and solemn has impressed every mind; is universally settled and implicitly assented to.

The improvement of literature, the excellence of science, and the purity of taste, as they are fruits of a susceptible nature, of stately growth, and progressive advancement, so they appear obnoxious to the operation of the same principle, in proportion to their delicate texture, and are in constant danger of premature decay, or of sudden impairment, of partial corruption, or total depravation. As they are naturally of the most tender structure, like finer plants, so they suffer most from fortuitous causes; and in their progress to maturity, encounter a thousand evils, one of which if they fail to escape it, intercepts the splendour of their beauties, or proves their certain destruction.

The felicity of the Attick intellect, may serve as an example of this remark. In how short a period, did the warbling muse of true eloquence in the bowers of the academy, change her melodious notes to discordant sounds. False taste, like the destroying angel, entered the paradise of letters, and with the fire of affectation and vanity, drove from its retreats, the classic purity, and chastened imagination, that were the chosen and original possessors of that consecrated spot.

That the intellect has ever been liable to such dangers of mutation, I believe mankind have always been agreed; and the only diversity of opinion that has prevailed, was in regard to the specific causes, that engendered decay, and the precise periods at which literary depravement was most conspicuous.

In the decision of this question, it is not to be imagined that any age would deliver an impartial judgment of its real merits, perhaps against its own excellence; and at the cost of its fancied superiority. Hence the peculiar difficulty of any age, of fixing to its own character, the just degree of excellence it possesses; and which posterity can alone decide with rational precision. Hence too, the increased difficulty of determining the exact period, at which taste and literature begins to decline.

Other impediments also contribute to obstruct a just decision upon this subject. The mind naturally becomes tired and sated with that, which long possession has worn out of regard; and flies to novelty for agreeable relief. Under the influence of such feelings, whatever object is new imparts pleasure; and much pleasurable emotion is too often interpreted, as the irreparable effect of great excellence and sparkling beauty, when in reality, it is the mere casual consequence of a state of feeling, caused by the pernicious indulgence of mental lassitude and vacuity.

From an impatient desire of improvement, on the contrary, we are frequently apt to condemn that as depravation and decay, which is but a mere cessation of advancement to perfection. It is imagined, that because we cease to go forward, we must naturally fall back; and that the power of improvement has been destroyed, because it is not perpetually manifested by increasing excellence. This is rashly judging from the impulse of disappointment, and not from that cool investigation, and comprehensive comparison, that ought to guide and influence so important an inquiry.

Every classical country and age, present examples of similar pauses. The reigns of particular kings and magistrates, have been more auspicious to improvement, than those of others; while centuries have sometimes intervened, between the standing condition of learning, and its renewed march to unknown discoveries and extended conquests.

Hence retardation appears widely different from a diminution of excellence, or an increase of defect; and neither naturally implies the one, nor necessarily induces the other. The state of mankind in every relation, can by no other means be so well judged of, as by resorting for elucidation, to the condition of individuals. In men, more than two years are rarely distinguished by equal improvement of the intellect, after the period of infantile ignorance. The impulse of curiosity naturally grows less, as we approach to general and ample knowledge, and we therefore become less susceptible of mental progression. Repose seems to be called for by nature, to resuscitate expended energy, and relax the rigour of studious contemplation.

An analogous state of intellectual torpor, seems to be likewise caused, by a galaxy of genius and learning, in two or three anterior ages. As a light too vivid impairs or destroys our sight, so a glaring state of excellence, diminishes and pre-

vents emulation. The brilliancy of their perfection, instead of animating, seems to dull our exertion. We contemplate their beauties with admiring pleasure, and delight in gazing on what fits us with joy, without producing a sting of envy, or a stir of incitement. The object appears too vast for self-comparison, and precludes the pain of mortification, that rises in the breast of ambition, conscious of inferiority. Besides, the effulgence allows no shade, which we might hope to enlighten; and we continue rapt in serene joy, similar to that, with which we view a summer sun throwing his reviving torch, over a fragrant and fruitful vale.

When we reflect, how many temporary cessations, have interrupted the perfection to which the world has arrived, we shall not be disposed to consider one stop, as prophetic of approaching decay, nor indulge in fears, of a speedy retrogression to barbarity. Such pauses are the natural breathings of imperfect mortals, struggling to attain remote excellence; which though their imaginations can paint in perfection, their powers can but partially accomplish.

The more, however, we investigate the means of attaining to a just decision upon this subject; or of giving an infallible interpretation to doubtful symptoms, the more we become encompassed with seeming obstructions, and involved in apparent uncertainty. To survey the subject from a proper point of view, seems the surest method of forming a settled and correct judgment. Taking the known faculties of the mind, for the point of contemplation, and the standard of excellence, we may discern with facility, the extent to which we can carry our conquests, and the fields which nature has denied us power to subjugate. For that, there must necessarily be some limit to knowledge and improvement; though that limit cannot be defined, is evident to every one. Thus we can compare possible with acquired knowledge; and judge of the degree of perfection at which the mind may arrive, from the nature and extent of its faculties considered in relation to known and potential wisdom.

It is only, therefore, by divesting ourselves of prejudice in favor of our own time, and planting ourselves, by an effort of imagination in an age a century to come, that we can acquire any accuracy in our judgments, upon the present state of intellect and letters. However, we must not only endeavour to be impartial to our own time; we must also struggle to reduce our veneration for antiquity, to the exact level of unprejudiced reason. And thus, by retiring into the shady bowers of futurity and wisdom, see all objects in their real dimensions and native colours, undaxed by glory, and unmagnified by reflection.

In this manner, it at length appears neither impossible nor hopeless, to ascertain the precise period of determination in literature and taste. The great number of confident predictions, on this, as well as other topics of vital interest, that experience and time have proved false, have infused a general incredulity into mankind, as to future events, that genius has pretended to foresee, or ventured to foretell. Hence the failure of premature sagacity, has been taken up as an evidence, of the entire uncertainty of every subject of speculation; and not only the anticipations of futurity, but the exposition of present evils, have been disregarded, or treated with derision and contempt by the majority of mankind!

Yet the present subject of research does not extend to the future, but lies open to living contemplation. When not only a cessation of improvement is visible, but an absolute production of inferior works, has obtained for any length of time, as a blemish on the face of the human intellect, there is ample reason to fear an approaching decline. But if this defect is accompanied by a glaring neglect, and general dereliction for standard works, by eminent authors; while at the same time, our attention is wholly devoted to ephemeral writers of fashion and dulness, it may be rightly inferred, that the worms of decay have invaded our minds; and are fast hastening the age to a premature and disgraceful inferiority.

Yet who shall pronounce judgment on the present age, with unerring impartiality, and exact justice? In the Republic of Letters, who is invested with an authority that can only exist in a despotic government? As no one in particular can arrogate an imperative, and absolute right, to proclaim his decision upon the subject, it may be alleged, that the attainment of certainty, would be without its expected and natural reward. The decree, however just, could not be enforced by arbitrary power. It must appeal to the reason, and depend on the consent of the million; and where there is diversity of minds and tastes, there must arise difference of opinion. Besides, as it is deemed a sort of duty, that all should be partial to their own time, as all are partial to their own country, he who can have the confidence to assert our degeneracy, will be carried down for af-

fecting singularity, and condemned for an unfeeling want of duty. He will be disbelieved, because the current of opinion is against his award; and he will be ridiculed, because he has had the audacious temerity, to attack cotemporary writers!

Thus in every light, the task I have undertaken is replete with dangers, and difficulties; and must of necessity be attended with certain blame. If the age which has been praised by a cotemporary for perfection, should be found unworthy by posterity, the severest censure must fall upon the writer, and his own decision be brought as testimony against his own judgment; while his work would be cited, as an eminent example of the truth, which he was attempting in vain to controvert. Should the prevailing time, on the other hand, be pronounced wanting in Literary excellence, an evil not less afflictive overtakes the hopeless author. He must endure the persecutions of criticism, and listen with patience to the sneers of ignorance; and must be contented with present obloquy, in hopes of a brighter recompense, from the unimpassioned determinations of posterity.

As the result of such an inquiry as this, must be one of those two judgments, the writer, like Ulysses, is in danger of whirlpools on both sides; and though he may shun Charybdis, he must be engulfed by Scylla. In such investigations, however, it cannot be dissembled, that the tendency of the mind is rather towards despair than hope. Milton, when writing his Paradise Lost, thought the world in a state of intellectual decrepitude; and many other ingenious writers have indulged in the same fanciful belief. This consideration may save us from the worst blame, and procure us the applause of the age, if not the veneration of posterity.

Latest Foreign Articles.

ENGLAND.

Lord Holland said in a late debate, that the number of persons in England who were in favour of the income tax, and of those in France who were in favour of the Bourbons, might conveniently find room either in Elba or St. Helena.

A letter from an officer in Lord Exmouth's fleet in the Mediterranean, is published in the London papers. It details the operations of that fleet before Algiers and Tunis; and adds the following:

"The fleet is now, 21st of April, under weigh to Tripoli; and when we shall have effected our negotiations there, shall rendezvous at Cali, in Sardinia; go thence to Algiers to obtain a revision of a treaty made by the Dey with America, by which an undue advantage has been granted to that nation, as it respects the disposal of their prizes in the Dey's ports; and then we shall proceed to England.

Insurrections have broke out in Bulgaria & Romelia—27 heads of men had been sent to Constantinople, and placed over the gates of the Seraglio—this is—order and law."

The Princess Charlotte's husband has been made a *field marshal*, and invested with the grand cross of the order of Bath. A change in the French ministry is expected—the king's councillors are much divided—the *Angouleme* party seems on the decline.

The mobs in several parts of England have been uncommonly numerous and daring—the people being made desperate by oppression, the laboring poor actually suffering for necessaries of life. They have been suppressed by the *bayonets* that cause the *taxes* to be collected. Near Ely, they made a sort of battle with the mercenaries, who were headed by a rosy-gilded priest (as a *magistrate*) preaching the blessings of the government to a starving populace. They paid no more attention to him in the field, than he himself had done to religion, and he ordered the *rotters* to fire!—They did so, and it was returned. Two "rotters" were killed and several wounded and made prisoners; and several of the soldiers were wounded and hurt—but the former were beaten and dispersed. The military force was greatly increasing in this quarter. The *rotters*—*parrots*, as they would have been called in France against Bonaparte, destroyed many houses, barns, &c. The recent had issued a proclamation about them, offering "out" from his Majesty's treasury for the apprehension and conviction of offenders.

The king of Prussia has a decree on the subject of secret societies. It notices the provisions of the general code, by which the members of all societies, when required by a magistrate, are bound to give an account of the objects of their meeting; and all societies which can have any influence upon the safety of the state must be submitted to the examination and approbation of the government, under penalty of fine or *corporal punishment*. The decree of October 23, 1798, containing various regulations respecting secret societies is republished, and ordered to be enforced. Several freemason's lodges are expressly tolerated. *All discussions in printed publications relative to secret societies, or the regulations respecting them are*

forbidden on penalty of fine or *corporal punishment*.

Bonaparte.—The master of an American vessel, boarded off St. Helena from a British sloop of war, was informed that Napoleon was—*dis-satisfied*. He has a range of three miles, about which he rides and walks at pleasure—round this a guard is stationed at speaking distance.

FRANCE.

The arrests in France are very numerous. Conspiracy after conspiracy is got up, or said to exist, probably to give the government a pretext for destroying disagreeable persons. *Didier* was "delivered" by two of his accomplices, *it is said*, to receive the reward—20,000 francs. A very rigid police exists at Genoa—every thing is looked into by the government, and the people can hardly think freely; they talk of secret associations here for political purposes.

The correspondence between Wellington's head-quarters at Cambray, and Paris, is very active. The Ottoman Porte has accepted the mediation of Austria and England to settle his differences with Russia. A dreadful disease has broke out at Syndsord (South Holland) which carries off persons seized with it in twelve hours.

It is confirmed that *Savary* and *Lallemand* have been permitted to leave Malta for the United States.

London news to May 31.—Mr. Canning has accepted the office of president of the board of control; and a member of parliament in his stead is to be chosen for Liverpool.

Mr. Brougham gave notice of a motion for the destruction of the treasury records of the income tax. The chancellor of the exchequer said they should be destroyed. The object of Mr. B. is supposed to have been partly to show a detestation of the tax; and partly because it was improper for government to possess a schedule of each man's property.

Lord Grenville, last night, gave notice in parliament, of a motion for the next session, tending to enforce a registration of slaves in the West-Indies; and Lord Bathurst declared government to be ready to concur in effecting the means.

British Oppositionists.

The freedom with which they utter their sentiments may be seen in the following extract from the speech of Mr. Coke, member of parliament, early in May last, at the Norfolk Agricultural meeting:

"I feel no delicacy necessary in speaking the extravagance of the Prince of Wales—*Applause*—Is there an Englishman who can say from a heart that 25,000 men are necessary to the defence of this kingdom in time of peace? It is impossible. It may be asserted, but no man in his senses can believe it. The truth is, that this immense force is to be kept up, in order to please the Prince Regent, and give influence and patronage to ministers. *Applause*. Gentlemen, let ministers make their expenditure meet the amount of the taxes, and not make the taxes meet the amount of the expenditure. If we must have a large warlike establishment, why is the glory and pride of England, her navy, slighted? This was not the policy of our ancestors. There is but one way of accounting for it—namely, as part of a plan to overthrow the liberties of England, and to assimilate our government to that of despotic governments of the continent. Do not indulge the delusive hope, that the constitution can subsist unimpaired, while a large standing army exists in the country. One or the other must be taken up—Let Englishmen decide, and decide in time which they will choose. Gentlemen these are my principles—they are the same as when, forty years ago, you first sent me to parliament. The events of that period have confirmed me in their truth. I have been in parliament during too long bloody and expensive wars—I never voted one shilling of your money for the support of either. I thought them both unjust and unnecessary wars—and I never would consent to tax the people for their support. What has been the termination of the present war? You are saddled with a debt of 800 millions, and you have succeeded in placing an usurper on the throne of France, against the voice of the people.—*(Some exclamations of No! no! from the gallery.)* I would not say an usurper, and who is supported by 30,000 British Bayonets. Let them be withdrawn and Louis XVIII. would not remain upon the throne an hour. Depend upon it, if ministers find another pretence for going to war, the first engine set to work will be the property tax. Exhausted and impoverished as the country now is, nothing but peace and the strictest economy, can save us. Such, gentlemen, are my views of public affairs. I have spoken openly and fairly to you. I have never disguised my opinion, but have always thought it my duty to make you fully acquainted with my sentiments on all great questions, and it is a matter of pride and pleasure to me, that during the period in which I have represented you, my public conduct has deserved your approbation.—*Applause.*"