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[WHOLE No. 117.]

THE TABLET.—No. CXVII.

“Laughing is a proof, neither of wisdom or folly.”

THE editor, desirous to pay attention to the efforts of his young correspondents, does not scruple to publish the following essay, which was sent him by ARISTIDES. Some alterations in the style might have been made, which, in the opinion of the editor, would have added to the elegance of it. But as every author chuses to write in his own way, we communicate the sentiments of ARISTIDES just as he expressed them.

FOR THE TABLET.

NUMEROUS passions have residence in the human breast, and happy for mankind it would be if some of the more violent could be restrained from so often breaking loose.—A very considerable variety however is manifest in their operations upon individuals.—Whether this arises from a different method of education—some peculiarity of structure in the internal and more delicate organs of our frame—or whether the cause of this difference is to be sought for in the mental faculties, are questions I shall not pretend to determine. Possibly it might be found that under an accurate investigation this seemingly great diversity would vanish, or at any rate be considerably diminished—and something similar to what we find in regard to colours take place; in which the proper mixture of a few original ones, that almost boundless variety is produced.

I shall not attempt to trace the different passions to their source, and endeavor to discover those few original ones which may exist according to this last hypothesis—but for the present shall confine myself to a few observations upon the risible faculty or passion for laughter.—In this there is something peculiarly extraordinary and to me unaccountable—because it is excited by causes directly contrary to each other, viz. actions or transactions which are modestly decent, and those which are really contemptible and exceedingly absurd—which perhaps would justify an assertion that it is not always indicative of pleasing sensations—yet in chusing a partner for the nuptial bands, or those of friendship, a cheerful is preferred to a gloomy countenance—the reason for which is obvious, they are generally supposed to communicate somewhat of the same cast to our minds. It is true the opposite passion partakes also in some measure of this seemingly two fold nature, there being tears of joy as well as of sorrow—still there appears to me a manifest contrast—as joyous tears are not only less common but also of very short continuance—lasting only while the tenderness of heart is overcome by an unexpected effusion of satisfaction, which is entirely evaporated when the mind is a little composed, and recollection returns.—In the other case peals of laughter are repeatedly excited and continued, not only by witty sayings but actions very contemptible—How often do we see this passion raised by little calamitous incidents, such as a fall into a mud puddle, a fright or the like?—Is not the invention put to its utmost stretch in schools to devise tricks which when they succeed raise the loudest roars? But what seems strange we cannot perceive the least difference in the feelings when the laugh is excited, whether it be by wit or witticisms, drollery or nonsense.

To admit this might not be relished by those who possess this so much celebrated and frequently desired faculty—if the effects are the same, which must be the case, allowing the communicated satisfaction to be equal, it is reducing the two characters of wit and drollery pretty nearly to the same level, though they are generally estimated differently.—We find most people pleased with a joke, and you may discover many anxiously treasuring up every little incident which they imagine will excite merriment in the circle of their associates—It is surely commendable to pass at least part of our hours of recreation in innocent mirth, and to take some pains to entertain the company with humorous anecdotes and sallies of wit, whether of our own invention or acquired from reading or experience. This is mentioned as one of the circumstances which tended to endear the company and enhance the conversation of our late illustrious and much esteemed Franklin.

According to the foregoing remarks he is the most desirable companion who has the best knack of raising a laugh—for I do not conceive that the design of the most facetious extends beyond the

accomplishment of this, nor do all the repositories of wit obtain more, if it be conceded that every laugh produces a similarity of feeling—and this may be boldly asserted according to one of the rules of philosophizing so fully established, by which we are taught to expect similar effects from similar causes, and undoubtedly we may with still more confidence look for it from the same cause; yet however desirous persons may be to excite, still immoderate laughter gives a character for levity—and the word ridiculous is applied to express the idea of the conduct of those whose actions are far from being unexceptionable.—When it is considered how frequently we are compelled contrary to our inclination or rather intention to laugh we cannot help wondering how we should be pleased with absurdity and nonsense; it must be some peculiar oddity which conferring a momentary pleasure is not able to encounter a serious retrospection.

ARISTIDES.

On the GOVERNMENT of our PASSIONS.

I.
SAY, Love, for what good end design'd
Wert thou to mortals given?
Was it to fix on earth the mind?
Or raise the heart to Heav'n?

II.
Deluded oft we still pursue
The fleeting bliss we sought,
As children chase the bird in view,
That's never to be caught.

III.
O! who shall teach me to sustain
A more than manly part,
To go thro' life, nor suffer pain
Nor joy to touch my heart?

IV.
Thou, blest indifference, be my guide,
I court thy gentle reign;
When Passion turns my steps aside,
Still call me back again.

V.
Teach me to see, thro' Beauty's art,
How oft its trappings hide
A base, a lewd, a treacherous heart,
With thousand ills beside.

VI.
Nor let my gen'rous soul give way,
Too much to serve my friends;
Let reason still control their sway,
And shew we're duty ends.

VII.
If to my lot a wife should fall,
May Friendship be our love;
The passion that is transport all
Does seldom lasting prove.

VIII.
If lasting, 'tis too great for peace,
The pleasure's so profuse;
The heart can never be at ease
Which has too much to lose.

IX.
Calm let me estimate this life,
Which I must leave behind,
Nor let fond passions raise a strife,
To discompose my mind.

X.
When Nature calls, may I steal by,
As rising from a feast;
I've had my fill of life, and why
Should I disturb the rest?

DISCOURSES ON DAVILA.

No. VII.

The Senate's thanks, the Gazette's pompous tale,
With force resistless, o'er the brave prevail.
This power has praise, that Virtue scarce can warm
Till fame supplies the universal charm.

THE result of the preceding discourses is, that avarice and ambition, vanity and pride, jealousy and envy, hatred and revenge, as well as the love of knowledge and desire of fame are very often nothing more than various modifications of that desire of the attention, consideration and congratulations of our fellow men, which is the great spring of social activity. That all men compare themselves with others; especially those with whom they most frequently converse; those, who, by their employments or amusements, professions or offices, present themselves most frequently, at the same time to the view and thoughts of that public, little or great, to which every man is known. That emulations and rivalries naturally, and necessarily are excited by such comparisons; that the most heroic actions in war, the sublimest virtues in peace, and the most useful industry in agriculture, arts, manufactures and commerce, proceed from such emulations, on the one hand, and jealousies, envy, enmity, hatred, revenge, quarrels, factions, seditions and wars, on the other. The final cause of this constitution of things is easy to discover. Nature has ordained it, as a constant incentive to activity and industry, that, to acquire the attention and complacency, the approbation and admiration of their fellows, men might be urged to constant ex-

ertions of beneficence. By this destination of their natures, men of all sorts, even those who have the least of reason, virtue or benevolence, are chained down to an incessant servitude to their fellow-creatures, labouring without intermission to produce something which shall contribute to the comfort, convenience, pleasure, profit or utility of some or other of the species, they are really thus constituted by their own vanity, slaves to mankind. Slaves, I say again: for what a folly is it? On a selfish system, what are the thoughts, passions and sentiments of mankind to us? What is fame? A fancied life, in others breath. What is it to us, what shall be said of us, after we are dead? Or in Asia, Africa, or Europe, while we live? There is no greater possible or imaginable delusion: yet the impulse is irresistible. The language of nature to man in his constitution is this, “I have given you reason, conscience, and benevolence: and therefore, by made you accountable for your actions, and capable of virtue in which you will find your highest felicity. But I have not confided wholly in your laudable improvement of these divine gifts. To them I have superadded a passion in your bosoms, for the notice and regard of your fellow mortals, which if you perversely violate your duty and wholly neglect the part assigned you, in the system of the world and the society of mankind shall torture you, from the cradle to the grave.”

(To be continued.)

CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

MONDAY, MAY 10.

On the proposition to increase the duty of Tonnage, on foreign bottoms.

MR. SMITH, [S. C.] moved to strike out the first clause of the report, which proposed to raise the tonnage on foreign built vessels to a dollar per ton, and gave several reasons in support of the motion. The measure he considered impolitic because it was injurious to the primary interests of the United States, its agriculture, and unequal in its operation; because it would be severely felt by some states, while it would be advantageous to others; it ought to be viewed either as a matter of revenue or as a bounty; if the former, it should be collected with an impartial hand from each state according to its just proportion; if the latter, it should be paid out of the Treasury, and not raised on particular states. South-Carolina would pay 30,000 dollars, while Massachusetts paid only 8000, and Georgia would pay 14,000 when New-Hampshire paid only 1200. This was requiring the southern states to make too great a sacrifice, and was imposing enormous burthens on them for the exclusive benefit of the eastern states; it was taxing South-Carolina and Georgia to give bounties to Massachusetts and New-Hampshire. Massachusetts having shipping of her own would export her commodities at the rate of six cents per ton, while the southern states whose produce was of a bulky nature must pay 100 cents: In addition to this advantage, Massachusetts would receive the same freight for her shipping as would be paid to foreigners, and as this increased tonnage would immediately increase the freight, Massachusetts would receive for her shipping a higher freight than she does now; she would therefore derive numerous advantages from the proposition, while some other states would be exceedingly injured by it. South-Carolina he said, was obliged to employ foreign shipping to carry off full one half of her crop; this increased tonnage would either make her pay an increased freight, or would diminish the quantity of foreign shipping on which she depended; in the one case it would operate as a tax on exports, which was against the constitution; in the other it would check the exportation of its produce, and thereby materially affect the agriculture of the country which was its principal resource. He was aware he should be told that this was the way to increase the American shipping and to rescue the exporting states from their dependance on foreigners. Such an event was not likely to take place without a convulsion; commerce was not easily forced from a channel in which it had long run; in the attempt those states must suffer and they were not at present in a condition to bear it: Embarrassed with their debts, public and private, from which nothing could extricate them but a facility of exporting their productions, they were not in a humour to make experiments; this was one of a dangerous nature;