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Discourses on Davila.

No. XXIII.—CONTINUED.

Utrumque regem, sua multitudo contulaverat.

THE Queen informed of this union, thought herself deprived of her firmest support, and dreaded, that the Princes of Lorraine, supported by the credit of the Constable, and discontented with her, might attempt to take from her the regency. She thought it necessary therefore, to connect herself more strictly with the King of Navarre, to counter balance this new party. She directed all her cares to maintain that equilibrium, which assured her power and that of her son. She entered into all the views of the King of Navarre, in favor of the Hugonots. Under the pretext of maintaining peace during the minority of the King, and of conciliating the hearts of the people, by a reputation of clemency, she published new declarations, which enjoined upon all the parliaments and all the other magistrates of each province, to molest no man on account of religion; to restore the goods, houses and possessions to all those, who, in times passed, had been deprived of them, on suspicion of Heresy. The parliament of Paris, and some other magistrates refused to comply: but the Hugonots, thinking themselves authorized by the will and orders of the King, of the regent, and the dispositions of the council, assumed to themselves, as they had a better right to do from God and nature, a liberty of conscience, and their numbers and forces augmented from day to day. This was to fulfil the views of the Queen, if these religionists had known how to restrain themselves, within the bounds of moderation and reason. But as it commonly happens to people, who suffer themselves to be transported by their passions, and will not conform to the restraints of authority: as soon as they felt themselves tolerated, protected, and delivered from the fear of punishment, their resentments of former ill usage arose, they lost the respect due to the magistrates, and sometimes by public assemblies, and sometimes by injurious discourses, or other violent proceedings, they drew upon themselves the hatred and indignation of the Catholics. Hence arose obstinate disputes, which throwing the two parties into quarrels, spread tumult and insurrections thro all the provinces of the kingdom. Thus, contrary to the intentions of government, and the expectations of the public, the remedy employed to save the state and maintain peace, became, at least as our Historian represents, contagious and prejudicial: and occasioned precisely those troubles and dangers, which they fought so carefully to prevent.

The *Guises*, we may be sure were not at all mortified at this turn of affairs. It was precisely what they wished. Encouraged and fortified by their union with the Constable, they seized this occasion to oppose the Queen and the King of Navarre. The Cardinal of Lorraine, finding the moment favorable to explain himself in council, without regard to the Queen or the King of Navarre, who were present: began to speak on the state of religion, and to represent, with all the vehemence of his character, that it was to betray religion, and to dishonor themselves in the eyes of the whole earth, to grant, in a most christian kingdom, liberty of conscience, to innovators already condemned by councils and the voice of the church. That not satisfied with disseminating monstrous opinions, with corrupting the rising generation, and imposing on the simplicity of the weak, they blew up the fire of rebellion in all the provinces of the kingdom. That already the insolence and outrages of these Heretics, hindered the ministers of the church from celebrating mass, and from appearing in their pulpits, and left to the magistrates scarce a shadow of authority; that every thing was a prey to the sword and flames, by the imprudence and obstinacy of those who arrogated to themselves the licence of believing and teaching at their pleasure; that the first kingdom of Christendom was upon the point of making a schism, of shaking off the yoke of obedience due to the holy see, and of abandoning the Catholic faith, to satisfy the caprice of an handful of seditious men. The Cardinal, enforced these arguments with so much energy, with that confidence and natural eloquence which gave him such an ascendancy, even in the most problematical opinions, that the protectors of the Hugonots opposed nothing to him but silence. The King of Navarre and the Queen replied not

a word, and even the Chancellor appeared amazed and confounded. The counsellors of state, irritated against the Hugonots, were of opinion to assemble immediately all the Princes and officers of the crown, to the parliament of Paris, there to treat on this subject, in the presence of the King, and determine the means of curing these disorders. This assembly was accordingly held on the 13th of July, 1561, in parliament. The King of Navarre dared not alone to make opposition openly; this would have been to declare himself a Calvinist. The Queen indeed, desired that the Catholic party should not prevail; but she was not the less apprehensive that they would impute to her the establishment and progress of Heresy. The contests in parliament were however, animated: the partizans of the Hugonots, forgot nothing to procure them liberty of conscience, as the only means proper to appease all troubles, and heal all divisions. Their efforts were useless. There was some reason for saying, that liberty of conscience was evidently opposed to the spirit and authority of the Catholic church; but none at all for pretending that it was contrary to the fundamental laws of the kingdom.

It was decided that the Calvinistical preachers and ministers should be chased out of the kingdom: and that they should conform in the public worship, only to the customs and ceremonies authorized by the Roman church. All assemblies, of every kind and in every place, with arms or without, except in the Catholic churches, there to hear divine service, according to their usages, were forbidden. To grant, however, some mitigation to the Hugonots, they added in the same Edict, that the cognizance of the crime of Heresy, should be reserved to Bishops and their grand Vicars: and if they had recourse to the secular arm, they could not condemn the guilty, but to banishment: finally, they gave a general amnesty for all disorders committed in times passed, on account of religion. A declaration was drawn, signed by the King, the Queen, and all the Princes and lords of parties. (To be continued.)

From WEBSTER'S DISSERTATIONS on the ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

OF MODERN CORRUPTIONS in the ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION.

(CONTINUED.)

BUT it will be replied, *Custom is the legislator of language*, and custom authorizes the practice I am reprobating. A man can hardly offer a reason, drawn from the principles of analogy and harmony in a language, but he is instantly silenced with the decisive, *jus et norma loquendi*.*

What then is Custom? Some writer has already answered this question: "Custom is the plague of wise men and the idol of fools." This was probably said of those customs and fashions which are capricious and varying; for there are many customs, founded on propriety, which are permanent and constitute laws.

But what kind of custom did Horace design to lay down as the standard of speaking? Was it a local custom? Then the *keow* of New-England; the *onset* and *twicet* of Pennsylvania and Maryland; and the *keind* and *shey* of the London theatres, form rules of speaking. Is it the practice of a court, or a few eminent scholars and orators, that he designed to constitute a standard? But who shall determine what body of men forms this uncontrollable legislature? Or who shall reconcile the differences at court? For these eminent orators often disagree. There are numbers of words in which the most eminent men differ: Can all be right? Or what, in this case, is the *custom* which is to be our guide?

Besides these difficulties, what right have a few men, however elevated their station, to change a national practice? They may say, that they consult their own ears, and endeavor to please themselves. This is their only apology, unless they can prove that the changes they make are real improvements. But what improvement is there in changing the sounds of three or four letters into others, and thus multiplying anomalies, and increasing the difficulty of learning a language? Will not the great body of the people claim the privilege of adhering to their ancient usages, and believing their practice to be most correct? They most undoubtedly will.

If Horace's maxim is ever just, it is only when custom is national; when the practice of a nation is uniform or general. In this case it becomes the common law of the land, and no one will dispute its propriety. But has any man a right to deviate from this practice, and attempt to establish a singular mode of his own? Have two or three eminent stage players authority to make changes at pleasure, and palm their novelties upon a nation under the idea of *custom*? The reader will pardon me for transcribing here the opinion of the celebrated *Michaelis*, one of the most learned philologists of the present century. "It is not," says he, "for a scholar to give laws nor proscribe established expressions: If he takes so much on himself he is ridiculed, and deservedly; it is no more than a just mortification to his ambition, and the penalty of his usurping on the rights of the people. Language is a democratical state, where all the learning in the world does not warrant a citizen to supersede a received custom, till he has convinced the whole nation that this custom is a mistake. Scholars are not so infallible that every thing is to be referred to them. Were they allowed a decisory power, the errors of language, I am sure, instead of diminishing, would be continually increasing. Learned heads team with them no less than the vulgar; and the former are much more imperious, that we should be compelled to defer to their innovations and implicitly to receive every false opinion of theirs."†

Yet this right is often assumed by individuals, who dictate to a nation the rules of speaking, with the same imperiousness as a tyrant gives laws to his vassals: And, strange as it may appear, even well bred people and scholars, often surrender their right of private judgment to these literary governors. The *ipse dixit* of a *Johnson*, a *Garrick*, or a *Sheridan*, has the force of law; and to contradict it, is rebellion. Ask the most of our learned men, how they would pronounce a word or compose a sentence, and they will immediately appeal to some favorite author whose decision is final. Thus distinguished eminence in a writer often becomes a passport for innumerable errors.

The whole evil originates in a fallacy. It is often supposed that certain great men are infallible, or that their practice constitutes custom and the rule of propriety. But on the contrary, any man, however learned, is liable to mistake; the most learned, as *Michaelis* observes, often teem with errors, and not unfrequently become attached to particular systems, and imperious in forcing them upon the world.‡ It is not the particular whim of such men, that constitutes custom; but the common practice of a nation, which is conformed to their general ideas of propriety. The pronunciation of *keow*, *keind*, *drap*, *juty*, *natshur*, &c. are neither right nor wrong, because they are approved or censured by particular men; nor because one is local in New-England, another in the middle States, and the others are supported by the court and stage in London. They are wrong, because they are opposed to national practice; they are wrong, because they are arbitrary or careless changes of the true sounds of our letters; they are wrong, because they break in upon the regular construction of the language; they are wrong, because they render the pronunciation difficult both for natives and foreigners; they are wrong, because they make an invidious distinction between the polite and common pronunciation, or else oblige a nation to change their general customs, without presenting to their view one national advantage. These are important, they are permanent considerations; they are superior to the caprices of courts and theatres; they are reasons that are interwoven in the very structure of the language, or founded on the common law of the nation; and they are a living satire upon the licentiousness of modern speakers, who dare to slight their authority.

But let us examine whether the practice I am censuring is general or not; for if not, it cannot come within *Horace's* rule. If we may believe well informed gentlemen, it is not general even in Great-Britain. I have been personally informed, and by gentlemen of education and abilities, one of whom was particular in his observation, that it is not general, even among the most eminent literary characters in London. It is less frequent in the interior counties, where the inhabitants still speak as the common people do in this country. And *Kenrick* speaks of it as an affectation in the metropolis which ought to be discontinued.

(To be continued.)

* "*Quem penes arbitrium est, et jus et norma loquendi.*" *Horace*. — "Nothing," says *Kenrick*, "has contributed more to the adulteration of living languages, than the too extensive acceptance of *Horace's* rule in favor of custom. Custom is undoubtedly the rule of present practice; but there would be no end in following the variations daily introduced by caprice. Alterations may sometimes be useful—may be necessary; but they should be made in a manner conformable to the genius and construction of the language. *Modus est in rebus*. Extremes in this, as in all other cases, are hurtful. We ought by no means to shut the door against the improvements of our language; but it were well that some criterion were established to distinguish between improvement and innovation."—*Rhet. Gram.* page 6, *Did.*

† See a learned "Dissertation on the influence of opinions on language and of language on opinions, which gained the prize of the Prussian Royal Academy in 1758. By Mr. *Michaelis*, court counsellor to his Britanic Majesty, and director of the Royal Society of Gottingen."

‡ The vulgar thus by imitation err,
As oft the learn'd by being singular.
So much they scorn the crowd, that if the throng,
By chance go right, they purposely go wrong. Pope.

LITERATURE

FLOURISHES in the United States. As one instance we mention the patronage given to the American press. The new publications multiply fast. Besides original productions, many transatlantic works have been reprinted. The *Bible* in 12mo. has lately been published in Philadelphia by Mr. **YOUNG**—in which city, and in New-York, two or three other editions of this valuable book, are now in the press—and Mr. **THOMAS**—(whom an ingenious southern writer has called the American *Baskerville*, and from whose press have issued many large and valuable books)—is now engaged in printing two editions of the *Bible*; one the large Royal Quarto BIBLE; the other a large Folio, with 50 copperplates—A patriotic, laudable and heavy undertaking, deserving the patronage and encouragement of every friend to his country, the sciences, and religion. Mr. **DOBSON**, of Philadelphia, is also publishing an "American Edition of the ENCYCLOPEDIA or Dictionary of ARTS, SCIENCES, and MISCELLANEOUS LITERATURE."—Two volumes of this work are already finished—it will comprise 16 volumes. (Columbian Centinel.)

HUMANE SOCIETY.

At a meeting of the Trustees of the Humane Society, held at Boston, November 1st, 1790.

VOTED,

THAT the thanks of the Trustees of the Humane Society, be returned to Mr. **GOFFE**, for his humane and generous conduct in receiving the body of Mr. *Davis*, lately drowned, when this act of kindness was denied him at his own lodgings; and that Mr. **GOFFE** be presented with the highest premium which the Constitution of the said Society will permit them to give.

Attest, JOHN AVERY, Junr, Record Sec'y.