

*An Essay, on the Study of Antiquities. By the Rev. JOHN HODGSON,
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SOCIETY has a right to expect, both from individuals, and from bodies of men, that their labours and enquiries be directed to some useful end. Concerning the origin of this right, I forbear any discussion, supposing it cannot be misunderstood; for even experience may teach us, that, in a community of persons, attention to mutual wants is indispensably incumbent on every one. In moral matters, childhood and old age need only be mentioned to refresh our memories with the truth of this position; and the plain impossibility of each individual learning the various arts, connected with procuring for himself an adequate supply of the necessaries suited to the nature of social life, sufficiently demonstrates its utility in every other point of view. We are necessary to each other, and this necessity obtains every possible degree of modification, by dividing the different branches of arts, science, and manufactures, into distinct callings; and by the force of impressions made on our minds so near the time of infancy as often to be mistaken for innate propensities.

But utility is not a striking feature of some of the pursuits that have eagerly engaged the attention of individuals in every civilized nation, and in all ages of the world; and of this class is the Study of Antiquities. The mind does not at first sight perceive any advantage that can arise to society from contemplations on the ruins of cities, camps, and the remains of objects connected with the arts, or military or domestic affairs, of the people that have preceded the æra we live in.

All nations have had perpetual examples of contrivance directed by instinct before their eyes, in the nests of birds, and in the systematic arrangement observable in the habitations of the ant and beaver, and in the cells of bees, hornets, wasps, and other insects. No one, I think, could inspect the curious work of the weaving and the sowing birds, without applying the principles of their art to his own necessities; and after minutely inspecting the wonderful economy of an ant hill, one may perceive how strongly Solomon's advice to the sluggard that he should "go to the ant, learn her ways and be wise," appears to be applicable to the wisest and most industrious. The first exertions of instinctive art are never exceeded by a repetition of trials, but each successive effort of human ingenuity is usually a step to improvement,—an approximation to a species of perfection, which, in works of arts, there is always a possibility of imitating, while the prototype exists, and concerning which no arbitrary height can be fixed as the highest to be attained; for, in human things, I think, we must allow, that whatever is in itself superior and excellent, at present, may itself be excelled.

The Colleges of Numa, the Casts of India, the Guilds and Mysteries of our own Nation, were all political expedients contrived and sanctioned for the purpose of continuing the knowledge, and perpetuating the improvements, in the several arts for which they were instituted.—Where artisans work only from model, where the secrets of a trade are not recorded in books, and especially where the art of printing has not contributed to perpetuate the experience of ingenious persons, without such institutions, valuable discoveries would not only be liable to perish with their authors; but every depression, in the political circumstances of a country, would threaten to obliterate all but the names of many useful arts.

While the Apollo Belvidere, or the horses of Lysippus exist, we have specimens before us of the state of statuary more than three centuries before the Christian æra. The same observation is applicable to the arts of making earthen ware, coining, compounding metals, engraving on precious stones, to architecture, and the manufacturing of

objects capable of resisting the attacks of time. But though Pliny tells us, that the ancient painters found the larch to be immortal in tablets, and that it never cracked, yet, supposing the metaphor of his language to be founded on something analogous to truth, after the storm of ignorance and barbarity which extinguished the glory and overturned the grandeur of the Roman empire, where shall we look for the works of Apelles, or Protogenes; and, with a knowledge of the various substances they employed in their art, be gratified with seeing that perfection, to which painting had arrived in their times, and concerning which the expressions of ancient authors, and the almost inimitable workmanship of the gems, medals, and statues of those ages, are a sort of humiliating and unwelcome recorders of an excellence, to which modern ingenuity has never yet been able to arrive?

That there exists in human nature a propensity to this pursuit is evident, from the anxiety all classes of people evince to be acquainted with the history of the places wherein they were born, or to which they have become attached by residence or property. The antiquity of a man's family, of his house, or his village, is narrated with a pleasure which seems to increase as the history of the object grows older; and when records fail, the obscurity of fable is employed to lengthen the importance of these "simple annals." Most of nations deduce their origin from gods and fabulous heroes, and the poorest villagers of our country, if they have nothing to relate concerning their own families or habitations, are seldom without legendary traditions about battles, fairies, or ghosts, to beguile the tedium of a winter's evening.

The earliest inhabitants of the world, finding oral tradition a defective recorder of events, and that places, which had been sanctified by any act of piety, or rendered remarkable by any great transaction, were soon forgotten, erected rude pillars, or threw up mounds of earth, or heaps of stones, to preserve their memory. The projectors of the Tower of Babel encouraged each other to "build a city and a tower having its summit in heaven, that they might acquire a name—lest they

should be dispersed over the face of the whole earth"* and forgotten. The memorable pillar which Jacob set up in Beth-el;† the pillar and the heap of witness in memory of his agreement with Laban;‡ and the pillar of Padan-aram,§ were all erected to preserve, in the minds of his offspring, a grateful sense of the transactions they were intended to record. The twelve stones, which Joshua commanded to be set up in the midst of the river Jordan, he informed his army were for "a sign among them, that when their children asked their fathers in time to come, saying: What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them: That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off; and these stones shall be for a *memorial* unto the children of Israel for ever."|| Samuel, after a battle with the Philistines, set up a stone "between Mizpeth and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer," that is, the stone of help.¶ After describing the different ceremonies performed at the funeral of Patroclus, Homer tells us——

" That done, they bid the sepulchre aspire,
 " And cast the deep foundations round the pire;
 " High in the midst they heap the swelling bed
 " Of rising earth, memorial of the dead."**

And the spirit of Agamemnon, in the regions of the dead, thus addresses Achilles:——

" Now all the sons of warlike Greece surround
 " Thy destin'd tomb, and cast a mighty mound:
 " High o'er the shore the growing hill we raise,
 " That wide th' extended Hellespont surveys:

* Gen. xi. 4.

† Gen. xxviii. 18.

‡ Gen. xxxi. 45, &c.

§ Gen. xxxv. 14.

|| Josh. xvii. 4, &c.

¶ I. Sam. vii. 12.

** Pope's Homer's Iliad, book 23, line 317.

“ Where all from age to age that pass the coast,
 “ May point Achilles’ tomb, and hail the mighty ghost.”*

The tomb, which the army of Alexander raised over the remains of Demartus, was of “ vast perimeter, and eighty cubits high.”† In the more advanced ages of civilization, these memorials of the “ mighty dead” were covered with hieroglyphic records, and, at length, the strong desire in man to have his name and actions distinctly and surely told among succeeding generations, impelled him to engrave them on rocks and tablets of stone, and perpetuate the glory of his country in histories.

Thus it would appear, that these propensities of mankind to preserve the memory of past events, and to ask their forefathers concerning any pillar or other monument of antiquity: “ What mean ye by these stones,” have prevailed since the earliest ages of the world. All animated nature clings to life; and that part of us, in which is seated the desire which has drawn and bound us together in this society, is not satisfied, even with the prospect of a better and longer existence; but mingles its cup of aversion to die, with the hope that its remembrance will be long cherished amongst its friends and descendants after it has emigrated from this life. The numerous inscriptions on altars, tombs, and all kinds of buildings, strongly mark this inclination for posthumous fame; and the thirst shewn among all classes of people to learn the meaning, date, and history of such remains of former ages, as clearly points out the corresponding propensity to keep in mind, and be acquainted with, the persons and the works of former ages. Nor are we without considerable evidence that the most polite nations of antiquity affected this study, with as much eagerness as modern nations have done. Cato, the elder, wrote a book on the antiquities of cities in Italy; and Tacitus informs us, that “ Germanicus, when Marcus Silanus and Lucius Norbanus were Consuls, made a tour into Egypt to view its

*. Pope’s Homer’s Odyssey, book 24, line 101, &c.

† Plut. Vit. p. 1277, Ed. Hen. Stephani, an. 1572.

antiquities.—He sailed up the Nile, from Canopus, a city, which the Spartans built in memory of a pilot of that name, whom they buried there, at the time Menelaus, on his return to Greece, was driven on the Lybian coast. From thence he went to the mouth of the Nile, dedicated to Hercules, who, as the natives contend, was born among them, and the first who bore that name, succeeding heroes having honoured his memory by suffering themselves to be called after him. Then he visited the extensive remains of Thebes, where Egyptian characters, on obelisks, described its former opulence; and which one of the eldest of their priests interpreted to him. He saw the statue of Memnon, which, though wrought in stone, gives a vocal sound when the rays of the sun strike it; the pyramids, resembling mountains, raised in almost impassable sands, by the emulation of kings; the lake made by the labour of man to receive the overflowings of the Nile; and, in certain straits of the river, places of such profound depth, that they had never been sounded. He also went to Elephantice and Scyenè, formerly the boundaries of the Roman empire, which now extends to the Red Sea.”

The miscellaneous works of Plutarch, commonly called, his *Morals*; abound with profound enquiries into the antiquities of several nations; and his two books on Greek and Roman Questions, he recommends as treatises on the manners and customs of those countries, “which may answer their turn very well, who, reading old authors, are desirous to know the particulars of antiquity.”*

There is, perhaps, a sort of indefinable regret constantly hanging about our minds, that our lives and knowledge are so circumscribed, that we cannot more strongly assimilate our mental faculties to that Infinite Perfection, who made us “after his own image,” and has a distinct comprehension of the whole economy of his works. The largest circle of darkness, that any human intellect ever yet investigated, is a little one, when compared with the orbits of the planets; and these but insignificant rings, when set in opposition to the immensity of space,

* Holland's Translation; p. 888.

which the divine understanding fills and illuminates. But to us, not only the operations of nature are either inexplicably mysterious or indistinctly known; but the greater part of the history of the families of the world, that have passed behind the goal of the present time, is for ever removed from the reach of our observation. Daylight has shone on all the places and generations of the people that have preceded us; but how little of their experience has been recorded for our benefit! how obscure the history of those among them that are best known! No ingenious and well educated mind could, I think, but be gratified with seeing the annals of his country accurately analyzed, and the dregs of fable filtered off; and even those, who fix their minds on objects more sensibly beneficial to the world, certainly could not refuse to rejoice at the discovery (suppose in the deflagrated ruins of Herculaneum or Pompeia) of some account of the progress of that refinement, or some treatise on those arts that lead to the enviable greatness of the nations of antiquity. But look at Greece, once the favourite abode of liberty, the land of politeness, the cradle of heroes, the seat of learning; now inhabited by slaves, the nurse of ignorance and superstition! Italy, that of old, called her dominions orbis terrarum, and boasted so many goodly cities, the sun of her glory has long since gone down, and her inhabitants been swayed by petty tyrants or foreign powers. How finely has Sulpicius, in a letter to Cicero, represented this notion of the weakness of man, by contrasting it with the ruins of the most splendid of his works. "Returning," says he, "out of Asia, as I sailed from Ægina towards Megara, I began to view the country all around. Ægina was behind me, before me Megara, on the right Piræus, on the left Corinth, all in former times most flourishing cities; but now they lie prostrate and in ruins before my eyes. I began to think within myself: Ah! shall we, shadows of creatures, shall we be indignant, if one of us die or be slain, when in one place the carcasses of so many cities bestrew the earth."*

* Ex Asia rediens, cum ab Ægina Megaram versus navigarem, cœpi regiones circumcirca

When, indeed, the mind reflects that there is a principle in nature, which, by constant, though imperceptible industry, dissolves the strongest and most beautiful monuments of human skill; and that this principle often finds powerful assistance in wars and civil commotions, how can it but behold with admiration and pleasure any object that has escaped, through a long series of ages, the reiterated attacks of this combined enemy? Who is there so dull and incurious, that if he should be shewn the tomb of one of the Jewish prophets, or the sepulchre where the author of our religion was laid, would not approach it with reverence, and examine it with care? Who would not wish he could say, that he had trod the plains of Issus, where Alexander defeated Darius; of Cannæ, memorable for the overthrow of the Romans, by Hannibal; or to witness, on the plains of Pharsalia, the fulfilment of this prophecy of Virgil?—

“ The time, indeed, shall come, when in these fields,
 “ Turning the soil, some hind, with crooked plough,
 “ Shall spears discover, eaten through with rust;
 “ With pond’rous harrows dash ’gainst empty helms,
 “ And bones enormous, wond’ring, dig from tombs.*

The writers of romances and novels have discovered, that the best of the human passions is often most effectually called out amongst scenes, which favour antiquarian contemplation; and have, therefore, laid many of their finest plots within the walls of decaying castles, or heightened

prospicere. Post me erat Ægina; ante Megara; dextra Piræus, sinistra Corinthus: quæ oppida quodam tempore florentissima fuerunt, nunc prostrata et diruta ante oculos jacent. Cœpi egomet mecum sic cogitare: Hem! nos homunculi indignamur, si quis nostrum interiit, aut occisus est, quorum vita brevior esse debet, cum uno loco tot oppidum cadavera projecta jaceant? Cic. Ep. Lib. iv. Ep. 5.

* Scilicet et tempus veniet cum finibus illis
 Agricola, incurvo terram molitus aratro,
 Exesa inveniet scabra rubigine pila,
 Aut gravibus rastris galeas pulsabit inanes,
 Grandiæque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulchris. Geor. lib. i. prope finem.

their narratives with descriptions of the ruins of monastic edifices, crowned with ivy, and gilded with moon-beams. Indeed all the best modifications of our passions and affections are never more satisfactorily employed than in meditating over the wrecks of ancient times. What piety is there so cold as could not be warmed among the ruins of Jerusalem, on the banks of Kedron, or on the heights of Calvary?— Which of us, without horror and virtuous indignation, could visit the chambers of the tower of London, where Tyrrel, at the command of Richard the Third, smothered the king's young nephews, Edward the Fifth and the Duke of York? We find Shakespeare lamenting to see a fine religious edifice falling together from neglect, in the following beautiful passage:—

O it pities me

To see these antique walls and hallowed towers
 Split with the winter's frost, or mould'ring down
 Their very ruins ruined; the crushed pavement,
 Time's marble register, deep o'ergrown
 With hemlock and rank fumitory, hides,
 Together with their perishable mould,
 The brave man's trophies and the good man's praise,
 Envyng the worth of buried ancestry.

A cabinet of ancient medals not only fills us with admiration at the excellency of their workmanship, and instructs us in the mythology, architecture, dress, and the shape and use of various articles connected with the war, government, religion, and domestic concerns of the times in which they were stricken; but it brings us into the presence and friendship of the worthies of Greece and Rome. With Alexander before us, we seem to “fight his battles o'er again.” We stand doubtful whether the more to admire or condemn the conduct of Cæsar; and as we examine the lines of Tiberius's brow, we sigh at the hopelessness of seeing liberty and security in a nation, while its throne is filled by a sullen and artful tyrant.

But perhaps the obscurity, in which the antiquary's pursuits are generally involved, is not the least contributor to his pleasure. We are naturally gratified with making new discoveries, and with overcoming difficulties. We love to make the little candle of our intellect extend its light as far as possible; and it is only by constant exercise, that we can tutor our eyes to see objects that lie on the verge of the circle of darkness that surrounds the brightest understandings; and at that point, every thing, as if enveloped in a mist, represents itself to us in a magnitude and importance greater than is real. The deception invites us forward, and the avidity of our enquiry increases as certainty is removed, or truth assumes a more shadowy and incomprehensible form.

This employment is shaded with a mixture of satisfaction and melancholy, suitable to minds that love to retire, at times, from the hurry and confusion of the world. It is calculated to raise up in us a source of enjoyment, and to bring us into the company of friends, which we can never hope to be blessed with in the exercise of our worldly engagements. *Nunquam minus solus, quam quum solus*, as Cowley observes, "is now become a vulgar saying: it has been in the mouth of every man, and almost every boy, since the days of Scipio." This sort of retirement and meditation strengthens us, and sends us out again into life more capable of opposing its evils, enjoying its true pleasures, and honourably executing our several engagements in it. And even here, when we begin to grow tired with close attention to truth, we have the boundless regions of past ages in which fancy may expatiate, and take as extended flights as in those of futurity. After we have seen the Roman Eagle planted in the southern provinces of our island, and several of the tribes of Britain contending for freedom upwards of 120 years, against the legions of the mistress of the world, our imaginations might be warmed with the contemplation of the celebrated barriers which extend from this place to the Western Sea—with the spectacle of the Emperor Hadrian, at the head of his legions, excavating his vallum; of Severus widening and strengthening it; and of the soldiers and an enervated peasantry, about the time of Gallo, sheltering

their frontier from their northern invaders, behind the laborious, but cowardly, defence of walls and towers. And it is not difficult to raise in one's mind an idea of some robust Pict, in attempting to scale the battlements of Pons Ælii, perishing on its glacis, by the javelin of a Roman soldier, and thus rendering the spot, on which we now stand, sacred to liberty, as the establishment,* which at present occupies it, has, in latter times, consecrated it to literature.

This pursuit, however, distinguishes itself into two very different kinds. The vulgar antiquary, while he walks among the ruins of a city, is stricken with wonder, and fixes his observation most upon their extent, their state of preservation, the largeness of their columns, and the difficulty of lifting the massive blocks of stone into the several situations they occupy: he is an admirer of coins on account of their rarity, their age, the beauty of their rust, or from some accidental variety which marks them: he values his collection of manuscripts, or rare editions of books, merely because they are old, or that they issued from the presses of Faust, Caxton, or other early printers. But the judicious antiquary considers the various objects of his contemplation with a learned eye; and imposes a value upon them in proportion to the quantity of light they throw upon the several departments of the history of the people to which they belong. He seizes hold of objects ready to perish, and gives them "a local habitation and a name."

Perhaps in this country, our ideas of an antiquary are somewhat confined, and the ridicule to which the attacks of Scriblerus, and other satirists, have exposed the character, have abridged it of its just proportion of public regard.†

* This Essay was read in one of the rooms of the Literary and Philosophical Society, in Newcastle, with which we were kindly accommodated, by that body, till the Corporation honoured us with apartments in the Castle.

† Blount, in his *Microcosmography*, tells us "an antiquary is a great admirer of the rust of old monuments, and reads only those characters where time hath eaten out the letters. He will go you forty miles to see a Saint's well, or a ruined abbey; and if there be but a cross or stone footstool in the way, he'll be considering it so long, till he forget his journey.

Under the influence of first reflections on the subject, we should perhaps define him to be one who collects and explains the use of such objects of human skill as belong to past ages. But, I think, a nearer examination of the case, will discover his employment to consist in the illustration of the general history and pursuits of mankind in ancient times, from visible objects. The historian draws his materials from facts, transacted in his own times; and the annals of every country are complete or imperfect, in proportion to the complement of facts thus recorded, and the regular succession of its historians. The antiquary attempts to illustrate and confirm the pages of history by contemporary objects. If history leaves us deficient in the date of a battle, the age of some public building, or the death of an emperor; some medal or inscription, perhaps, records the required information. But it is not merely in the labyrinths of history that he walks. He is not satisfied with ranging in one department of literature. The policy, laws, religion, and manners of old times, engage his attention; and he loves to examine into the arts, and define the boundaries of ancient empires; to follow the emigrations of the early families of the world; and to show how, by little and little, they spread over the surface of the whole globe. Truth, in combination with mystery, doubt, uncertainty, and superstition he laboriously searches after, and scrupulously analyzes: He ranges through the world at large, meditating upon men and things as they existed in past ages.

The restorers of letters in Italy, among the many other excellent qualifications which they possessed, were all profound antiquaries.— While some of them travelled in search of ancient manuscripts, others

His estate consists much in shekels and Roman coins; and he hath more pictures of Cæsar than James or Elizabeth. Beggars cozen him with musty things which they have raked from dung-hills; and he preserves their rags for precious relics. He loves no library but where there are more spider's volumes than others, and looks with great admiration on the antique work of cobwebs. Printed books he contemns, as a novelty of this latter age, but a MS. he pores on everlastingly, especially if the cover be all moth-eaten, and the dust make a parenthesis between every syllable. He would give all the books in his study (which are rarities all) for one of the old Roman binding, or six lines of Tully in his own hand."

were employed in writing commentaries upon and editing them; and many in collecting the coins and statues, and studying the architecture, and reanimating the arts of Athens and of Rome. The eyes, indeed, of many of these able men never became sufficiently strong to look on truth in its native brightness. While every sentence of the works of Cicero was made to comply with the rules of the rhetoric and logic, which prevailed at that time, the pages of natural history were darkened with astrological superstitions; and their criticisms, on matters of antiquity, were often polluted with the cabalistic and other childish mysteries. The hammers, for instance, hatchets, arrow-heads, and other instruments of stone, used to this day by people unacquainted with the use of metals, and which are often dug up in various parts of Europe, were by Gesner, Agricola, and others, confounded with meteoric stones: though they might have found knives of stone mentioned by Moses and in the book of Joshua, as employed in the rite of circumcision, a use to which they are said to be still applied by the people of Alnajah, a nation of Ethiopia.*

But though our employment must be of a more humble nature than that of the early antiquaries;—though we can scarcely hope to have the honour of discovering and publishing any valuable manuscript, or of illustrating antiquities equal in interest to those of Asia Minor, or of Italy; yet the four counties to which our labours are to be primarily directed, present us with a field rich in Roman, Saxon, Danish, Norman, and monastic Antiquities; and in which, numerous objects connected with the manners, property, and general history of its inhabitants, are as yet very inadequately explained. The remains of the Roman Wall, though largely described about the middle of the last century, by the accurate and judicious Horsley, are still but slightly investigated; and the received opinions respecting the constructors of the several parts of it, seem to be founded on very inaccurate criticism. The same obser-

* Ludophus' *Æthiopic Hist.* book 3, chap. i. quoted by Parkhurst under Υ . See also *Gent. Mag.* Sep. 1789, p. 799.

vations are applicable to the state of our information on the castles and camps with which the interesting district of the borders abound. The popular superstitions of the common people, now, it is to be hoped, fast vanishing away before the light of truth, are also worthy of our attention; and much curious matter in philology might be gleaned from well selected lists of vulgar words, and the names of farm-houses, glens, brooks, and especially of fields.

The prosperity of this Society altogether depends upon its members. If our meetings be taken up merely with conversations, and our attention directed only to collecting books and trifling curiosities, it will either die in its infancy, or, at best, draw out a feeble and rickety existence. But if any real gratification is to arise to us as individuals, or respectability to attach to us as a body, they can only be effected by every member zealously contributing his portion of knowledge; and each of us certainly has it in his power, by adding something to the common stock of information, to further the designs of the institution. Should it, unhappily, be discovered, that drones have been admitted into the hive—that we have members among us that neither desire nor endeavour to promote its interest and honour, watchfulness will be necessary to guard against any accession of their numbers. In a constellation, however dim, there may be stars of different degrees of brightness, and even some that shine with borrowed lustre; and in literary societies, it is to be expected, that there will be persons, not only of various gradations of capacity and attainment, but even some that can delight themselves with gilding their names with the reflection of other men's celebrity. The meanness of such a spirit need scarcely be pointed out, and, I trust, it will be long before it shew itself here. In prosecuting the business we have undertaken, we must not confide in numerical strength; our industry must be directed by intelligence, and by endeavouring to deserve the support and countenance of the distinguished personages, who patronise and preside over us with such munificence and fatherly attention. For, should any unhappy circumstance withdraw from us the light and honour we derive from this

source, our sustenance and good report would too certainly fail ; but because the glory of ancestry—the reputation so justly due to families, who, in spite of the infatuating nature of wealth, have preserved their names and properties through a long series of ages, cannot but fill the minds of their possessors with high reverence for every thing allied to the history and times of their worthy forefathers, we may never doubt of flourishing under the auspices that shine upon us, while our labours are assiduously employed in the objects of the Society.

I conclude this incoherent essay with observing, that it is only by a retrospect into past ages, that we know whether the world be improving in refinement, or at a stand ; and though this study never ought to be put in comparison, in point of utility, with many of the pursuits of the human mind ; with such, for instance, as relate to our moral and physical wants ; yet, when I contemplate the vast advantages, that must ever accrue to society by a due cultivation of the simplicity and experience of the early ages of the world, I cannot, I think, too severely stigmatise that insatiable appetite for variety and novelty which disgraces the learning, manners, and religion of these days, or too cordially agree with Cicero, that *antiquitas proximè ad deos accedit*, both with respect to time and merit.