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OR,

Monthly Political and Literary Censor

FROM

DECEMBER TO MAY (INCLUSIVE,)

—1805—

WITH AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

AN AMPLE REVIEW OF FOREIGN LITERATURE.

“ Be it known to all who are under the dominion of *hereticks* that they are *set free* from every tie of *fidelity and duty* to them; all *oaths or solemn agreements* to the contrary notwithstanding.”
DECRET. GRES. lib. 5. tit. 7.

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1805.

REVIEWERS REVIEWED.

Remarks on the Edinburgh Review of Dr. Thomson's System of Chemistry. By the Author of that Work. 8vo. Pr. 64. Hurst, London; Anderson, Edinburgh; Gilbert and Hodges, Dublin; Braith and Reid, Glasgow; Brown, Aberdeen; Forfyth, Elgin; and Young, Inverness. 1804.

OUR readers have had repeated proofs that neither we ourselves, nor our correspondents, have been inattentive to the principles and proceedings of the Edinburgh Review. That publication is, indeed, conducted on a plan so extraordinary as to baffle all conjectures with regard to the motives by which the proprietors and editor are influenced. It is natural to suppose that the principal object of authors in general, and of the authors of literary journals in particular, is to deserve, or at least, to conciliate the favour and good-will of the public; since on these must depend both emolument and fame. But the Edinburgh Reviewers appear to have founded their hopes of success on maxims entirely opposite. Instead of endeavouring to recommend their labours by a faithful analysis, and a fair account, of the different works which they undertake to criticise, they seem to have set out with the professed design of declaring war on the whole fraternity of authors. It is certain, at least, that very few of those whom they have honoured with their notice, have met from them, with any thing like justice, not to mention candour. Their system, it must be acknowledged, is a bold one, and discovers great confidence in their own powers. It is likely, however, we think, to be attended with some inconvenience. Authors, we know, whether they write in poetry or in prose, have been long regarded, and justly so, as *genus irritabile*; and the Edinburgh Reviewers, who have apparently fixed on the character of Ishmael as the favourite model by which to form their own, might, with prudence, perhaps, have recollected that, while that patriarch's "hand was to be against every man, every man's hand was to be against him." It is really amusing to observe the impotent self-sufficiency with which these critics pretend to erect themselves into judges, from whose sentence there shall be no appeal. And it is certainly singular, that in exact proportion, as nearly as may be, to the merit of an author, is their anxiety to degrade and vilify his work. Of this very numerous instances might be given, were this the proper time and place. But, unquestionably, none more prominent can be produced than the criticism which gave rise to the pamphlet now before us.

Dr. Thomson's System of Chemistry is a work of such uncommon merit, and acknowledged to be such by the ablest judges both at home and abroad, that, although we imagined ourselves well acquainted with the temper and spirit of the Edinburgh Reviewers, we yet read their laboured criticism on that work with complete astonishment. The Critic's power, indeed, to injure Dr. Thomson, is greatly inferior to his inclination; but in this respect he is more to be pitied than blamed: for no man, we are thoroughly persuaded, ever laboured more strenuously to attain his end, as far as the extent of his abilities would permit. Defects and mistakes have been searched for with a keen and indefatigable eye. Some, Dr. Thomson allows, have been found; for what work, on such a subject, of equal extent, was ever free from them? But where they have not been found,

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they have been made in abundance; and the art of misrepresentation has been called in to supply the deficiency of solid grounds of censure.— Nor has the Reviewer forgotten the hacknied trick of bestowing some general and unappropriate praise on the book, which, if his talent for mischief were equal to his malice, he would consign to the snuff-shops and other less honourable places. He must surely have entertained a most contemptuous opinion of the judgment of those who are accustomed to read the Edinburgh Review, when he took it for granted that they were incapable of seeing through this flimsy disguise.

When we first perused this precious morsel of Northern criticism, we were impressed with a notion that something more was required to account for its bitterness than the common quantity of gall, large as it is, which constitutes so essential an ingredient in the composition of an Edinburgh Reviewer. We thought that the strictures on Dr. Thomson's work discovered such marks of envy and ill-nature, as could proceed from none but an unsuccessful rival; who thus took occasion to evacuate his spleen at the general and well-deserved reputation which Dr. Thomson has acquired.— For our sagacity on this occasion, we hope that we shall be allowed some credit; for Dr. Thomson himself has fully verified our conjecture. It is obvious that he is thoroughly acquainted with the person of his Reviewer; and the following short quotation will explain the cause of the superabundant bile which pervades every part of the Reviewer's observations. The Reviewer has strongly condemned Dr. Thomson's arrangement. On this the Doctor, among other things, remarks that "Reviewers are so eager to point out errors, that they do not allow themselves to consider the subject. "But," adds he, "the reader will be still more surpris'd, when I inform him that this very Reviewer, notwithstanding the violence of his attack, has himself published an *Epitome of Chemistry*, in which he has carried my arrangement, as he supposes, to the *ne plus ultra* of perfection." (P. 22.)

From the particular manner in which this Reviewer is here described by Dr. Thomson, our readers will conclude that he is perfectly well known to the Literati of Edinburgh; which is really the case. We ourselves are, in fact, in possession of his name. But, although his malignity deserves to be exposed, his name is not of sufficient importance to attract any part of the public attention. We have been assured that his attack on Dr. Thomson, who is a laborious and well-attended Lecturer on Chemistry, in the University of Edinburgh, was written rather with the mean and ungentlemanly desire of diminishing the number of the Doctor's pupils, than with any hope (which, indeed, would have been madness,) of hurting the sale of his book. The assault, in truth, appears to have been meditated for a considerable time. "I learned," says Dr. Thomson, "that the Reviewers, in the fulness of their hearts, had announced their intention of attacking my work whenever it should appear." (Pref. p. 4.) We shall here transcribe, from the Doctor's "Remarks," two important passages, for the length of which we should certainly apologize, if we did not reflect how eminently they are calculated to recommend, to universal notice, the fair and conscientious impartiality of the Edinburgh Review.

"The Review of my work was committed to the charge of a gentleman very well inclined, it was supposed, to tear it in pieces. The manuscript was completed in five weeks, and put into the hands of the Editor, with express permission to make what alterations on the Preface he thought proper. The Editor, who is fond of sarcasm, thought it too tame a performance

formance for the Edinburgh Review, and even declared, that the Preface alone, in the hands of a good workman, would have furnished sufficient matter for filling a whole Review with abuse and repartee. It was thought requisite, of course, to give it a few touches by his own masterly hand; but, instead of consulting the original, he satisfied himself with the garbled account of the Reviewer. By leaving out half sentences, and pruning away others till they answered his purpose, he has totally altered the original meaning, and succeeded in giving the paragraph some point, at the trifling sacrifice of truth and candour. It is more than probable, that the accusations of the same kind, scattered through different parts of the Review, are to be ascribed to the same cause: for they would never have occurred to any person who had perused the work itself." (Pp. 11—12.)

Of the art with which the Edinburgh Reviewers can make an author speak just what they please, Dr. Thomson produces here, in a note, so admirable a specimen, that it would, we think, be doing these gentlemen great injustice to withhold it from our readers. Dr. Thomson, in his Preface had said:

"It would be improper to pass over in silence the many observations on the former edition, with which the Author has been privately favoured, or which have made their appearance in the different journals. To these, the present edition is much indebted for its accuracy. Several hundred errors, chiefly in the numerals, have been pointed out and corrected, which would probably have escaped the familiar eye of an Author. The observations on the plan, the arrangement, and the execution of the work, have been carefully and impartially examined; the improvements suggested have been adopted, while the remarks which appeared inapplicable or unjust, have been disregarded."

To most people, we believe, Dr. Thomson's conduct, as here exhibited by himself, will appear highly proper; and his language is, surely, sufficiently modest. Let us now contemplate them as they are represented by the Edinburgh Review.

"The second part [of the Preface]," says the Reviewer, "rather checked our growing partiality; for, instead of returning thanks to our fellow-labourers on the other side of the Tweed, for the almost unqualified approbation which they bestowed on his former edition, or soliciting the same attention to the present, he boldly sets our whole corporation at defiance, and denies the competency of our tribunal."

Do the Edinburgh Reviewers entertain so poor an opinion of the judgment and moral feelings of their readers, as to suppose that they can neither perceive nor resent so glaring and unprincipled a falsehood? The other passage which we promised to transcribe, as descriptive of the spirit of this Review, and which relates to the strictures passed on the execution of Dr. Thomson's work, is as follows:

"This part of the Review cost the Author great labour. Immediately after the publication of my work, our critical Goliath, armed with a tremendous darning needle, equally fitted for pricking holes, and sticking on patches, and provided with a sufficient number of syringes and clyster-pipes, filled with dirt and mud, sallied forth, after having vowed, in full divan, that he would not return until he had pricked and bespattered the Author to some purpose. His faithful Squire* attended him, ready, with his

* The name of this Squire is likewise known to us; but it is, if possible, of still less importance than that of the Knight,

hands and his heels, (for he made no use of his head,) to execute the orders of this doughty-knight. Five weeks did they wield the needle and the clyster-pipe without intermission. Nor did they confide in their own strength, great as it was, but solicited assistance from every quarter.—Friends and foes were consulted; and the faithful squire has been heard to declare, with doleful voice, that he wore out two pairs of shoes in the service. In plain terms, this part of the Review cost the Author and his assistant (for the Edinburgh Reviewers have ingeniously contrived to introduce a set of understrappers or Reviewers' devils, on whom the drudgery of collecting information is devolved,) the unremitting labour of five weeks. And, not satisfied with their own exertions, they consulted every supposed reader of the work to whom they had access. Committees sat upon particular pages, and a hundred pens were drawn to measure the accuracy of the calculations. Surely, then, I have reason to conclude that every error of consequence has been dragged into notice. A whole regiment of Critics, a fault-hunting for five weeks through four common-sized volumes, must surely have laid hold on every blunder, however ingeniously concealed. If a work pass tolerably through this ordeal, it may certainly be considered as sufficiently purified."

"The reader will naturally," continues Dr. Thomson, "wish to know why such pains were taken to detect faults, while the other parts of the performance were passed over in contemptuous silence. *Happening to make* [when I made] this observation to a friend of mine, he favoured me with the following solution: 'Once,' says he, 'I put a similar question to an Edinburgh Reviewer, and received for answer: We wish our book to *sell*, and know enough of the taste of the public to suit their palate.—Ridicule and invective alone are certain to command success. Let the poor devils of Authors smart; that is no business of ours—Such is their plan, and they act up to it. Reviews are not unfrequently returned, for no other fault than too much candour. The Review, they observe, is excellent; but it is not sufficiently sarcastic for our purpose. If no faults can be detected on a hasty reading, a little misquotation can do no harm; or you may dexterously alter the meaning of the Author, and then abuse him for absurdity. Most of our readers will take us at our word, and inquire no farther.

"Actuated, no doubt," says Dr. Thomson, "by these worthy motives, and by some others, which I leave to the sagacity of the reader to discover, the Reviewer of my work was particularly anxious to acquit himself to the satisfaction of his brethren. And, as he had reasons for wishing to remain concealed, he was very loud in public, during the whole time of writing his remarks, in praising my work, especially those parts of it which he meant to fall foul of." (Pp. 27, 28, 29.)

We cannot afford to consider, in detail, either the Reviewer's objections or Dr. Thomson's replies. It is proper, however, to give a specimen or two of each. Some of the Reviewer's observations are extremely ludicrous from their inconsistency. "Nothing," he says, "can be more simple, scientific, and beautiful than the *arrangement*" of Dr. Thomson's System. Yet he afterwards assures us, that this same arrangement "is every where inconsistent with its own principles; that it is incomplete; and that it sometimes classes together bodies which have little analogy; but more frequently divides and subdivides the account of a connected subject into minute portions, which are scattered through very distant parts
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of the work." And thus we find, as Dr. Thomson observes, that, "in the Reviewer's opinion, nothing can be more simple, scientific, and beautiful, than an arrangement every where inconsistent with itself, incomplete, and which fritters down and scatters connected subjects." (P. 19.)

Dr. Thomson had divided simple substances into *confirable* and *unconfirable*. But this, according to the Reviewer, is a false division; for light and heat, the substances termed by Dr. Thomson *unconfirable*, may, it seems, be confined in proper vessels. "Clothing is used to confine the warmth of our body; our furnaces are constructed of bad conductors, to prevent the dissipation of the heat; and caloric may be absolutely confined in a vessel of ice, as long as the vessel itself will last. Light is still more confirable.—Every room is furnished with shutters to exclude it, and the dark lanthorn was contrived to confine it."

"I congratulate the public," says Dr. Thomson, "on this notable discovery, and hope that the Edinburgh Reviewers will secure it to themselves, and to the northern part of the empire, by a patent. In a warm summer like the last, a prodigious number of dark lanthorns might have been filled with sun-beams; and in the cold springs, which almost annually visit this northern kingdom, they might doubtless dispose of their whole stock to great advantage. Some squeamish gentlemen have been announcing their fears that the Edinburgh Review will not be a long liver. How consoling then, must it be to us all, to consider that the worthy proprietor, and his friend, have hit upon so ingenious and inexhaustible a substitute!—For though it is certainly possible that the public may lose their relish for those dishes of abuse, which they swallow at present with so much avidity, I think I may venture to ensure a permanent sale of the new commodity, at least, on this side of the Tweed."

"I readily acknowledge that this discovery knocks my terms on the head, and promise, therefore, to change them for any others which the Reviewers may think proper to substitute, whenever they choose to send me an ice-basket of heat, and a dark lanthorn of light. Till then, I must be allowed the liberty of preferring them, even to the terms *ponderable* and *imperponderable*, which the Reviewer has kindly offered me as altogether unconnected with hypothesis. But these terms, though they do not suit my purpose exactly, suggest a most important superiority which the manufacture of sun-beams has over every other. The ice-baskets and dark lanthorns will receive no sensible addition of weight, though crammed full of heat and light; so that any quantity whatever of these bodies may be transmitted, by any animal whatever, without the smallest inconvenience. I take the liberty to recommend *asses* as very proper for the occasion.—It has been remarked of late, that these animals thrive very well in this country. They are sufficiently long-winded; and naturalists have just ascertained that they are animals of taste; that their voices are very musical; and that they have a great relish for Italian poetry." (Pp. 22—24.)

One specimen more we must yet extract. "But the terms," says our eminently learned Chemist, "are not the only objectionable part of the arrangement. I have begun, it seems, with a set of bodies that are not tangible, and have plunged my readers, in the very first page, (*that is, being interpreted, the 19th page.*) into all the intricacies of a pneumatic apparatus, and have perplexed them with different kinds of gases, before they can be supposed to have any conception of air being a body possessed of chemical properties, or, indeed, to have any conception of chemical properties

perties at all.' What poor numskuls, chemical readers it seems, are!—Perhaps it might have been proper to have treated such ignorant fellows with sentences like the following:

'Matter is of different species. The phenomena of matter are regulated by attraction and repulsion.'

This is the style which the Reviewer would have approved of. Permit me here to ask a question or two. Are *light* and *heat*, with which Chemists often begin, more *tangible* than oxygen gas, sulphur, phosphorus, and charcoal? Is it easier to comprehend the metaphysics of heat than the method of heating an iron pot to redness, and of plunging burning sulphur and phosphorus into a glass jar? I *begin* with oxygen; because a knowledge of it is necessary for enabling us to understand almost all other substances, and because its properties are easily explained. The phenomena of the simple substances are the most entertaining and alluring to beginners, and, of course, the most readily understood and remembered."—(Pp. 25—26.)

We could easily quote from this masterly pamphlet a great number of passages, which are equally distinguished by solidity of argument and by keenness of wit. The unfortunate Reviewer is, in most instances indeed, not only confuted, but convinced of ignorance, and covered with ridicule. We are, however, in danger of exceeding our limits, and must, therefore, restrain our strong propensity to exhibit Dr. Thomson more at large in a style of writing in which he seems peculiarly qualified to excel. But one part of this pamphlet does him so much honour, as a candid and ingenuous man, that it cannot be mentioned without the highest praise. The *real* errors which the lynx-eyed Reviewer has been able to discover, are trivial and few. But Dr. Thomson himself has discovered several, which he thinks of importance; and has proved his title to the confidence of the public, by taking this opportunity of pointing them out. As this portion of the pamphlet must be very acceptable and useful to all who are possessed of his work, we shall make no apology for inserting it entire.

"I flatter myself," says Dr. Thomson, "that I have succeeded in refuting most of the serious charges brought against me. But, I fear, that I must ascribe my escape rather to the ignorance of the Reviewer, than to the want of mistakes in the work reviewed. I have not had leisure, indeed, fully to examine the edition since it came from the press; yet the occasional glances, which I have made, detected several errors; the most important of which are the following:

"1. The specific gravity of the English guinea, which I copied from Briffon and Hauy, (Chemistry, Vol. I. p. 143.) is erroneous. Hatchett has shewn, that the density of gold alloyed with copper is less than the medium."

"2. In the same page I have erroneously stated the proportion of alloy in our silver coin 1-16th. It ought to be 1-12th."

"3. I have erroneously stated *putty* to be an oxide of tin. It contains likewise lead. This mistake was pointed out by Mr. Arthur Aikin, in the Annual Review. A specimen which I analysed was composed of two parts, oxide of lead; and one part oxide of tin."

"4. In page 239 of the same volume, line 2 from the bottom, for '4. 8' read '4. 6.'"

"5. Ibid.

" 5. *Ibid.* p. 393, line 15, *dele* the word *inversely*. This mistake was pointed out by the Edinburgh Review."

" 6. The discovery of the fact, that water begins to expand when cooled below 42°, which I ascribe to Deluc (in Vol. I. p. 352, of my system,) was made long before by Dr. Crowne, and exhibited publicly to the Royal Society. See Birche's History of the Royal Society, Vol. IV. p. 253. For this piece of information I am obliged to Professor Robison."

" 7. *Ibid.* p. 358. In the table of melting points, that of spermaceti is set down at '133°;' it ought to be '113.' See Smith Gibbes, Phil. Transf. 1795, p. 240.

" 8. The crystals of pure lime, stated (in p. 507, Vol. I.) to have been obtained by Trommsdorf, are not crystals of lime, but of submuriat of lime. Berthollet."

" 9. Vol. II. p. 216, line 18, for 'volatile' read 'porcelain,'"

" 10. In my classification of salts, (Vol. II. p. 307.), I have arranged the *phosphats* among those which are decomposed when heated with charcoal. This is inaccurate: for it is well known to chemists that several of the alkaline and earthy phosphats want that property."

" 11. In Vol. II. p. 327, I ascribe the discovery of muriat of magnesia to Dr. Black. This is inaccurate. The salt had been very well described before by Brown. See Phil. Transf. Nos. 377 and 378."

" 12. In my account of *beer*, (Vol. IV. p. 466.), I have expressed myself rather loosely, when I say that it is customary to use only one-third of malt. I allude to the distillers, who, by that method, improve the strength of their wash. The brewers, I suppose, employ malt only."

" 13. In my account of urinary calculi, (p. 667,) I erroneously place *carbonat of lime* among the ingredients; and in p. 671, quote the authority of Mr. Crumpton for the fact. But the calculus which he examined was not a urinary, but a pulmonary concretion. The paragraph, of course, ought to be inserted under the account of the pulmonary concretions in p. 659 (Pp. 58—61.)

Ample as our extracts have already been, we cannot conclude without saying before our readers some additional observations, with which, no doubt, the Edinburgh Reviewers, and particularly the gentleman employed to operate on Dr. Thomson's work, must be highly delighted.

" Such," he says, "are the mistakes which I have hitherto detected. I here offer them to my worthy friends, if they think of bringing me before their tribunal a second time. I shall only take the liberty to request of them, at parting, not to indulge too freely in those unjustifiable arts of criticism, which so unhappily distinguish the Edinburgh Review. Any man can abuse and call names; any man can misquote and pervert the meaning of an author: but to discriminate between faults and perfections, and to point out the various degrees of merit with justice, belong only to a superior mind. If they must indulge in severity, let them not lose sight of candour. Had the Review of my work possessed that character, though I might have been displeas'd at the severity of their strictures, I should at least have been silent. But, if they are determined to abuse indiscriminately, right or wrong, without regard to justice; let them, at least, employ writers who have some share of abilities, and who understand a little of the subject on which they pretend to decide."

" Now that they have given their opinions to the public, I am very
far

far from advising them to retract. To acknowledge a fault, would derogate from the dignity of the Edinburgh Reviewers, and might induce even their admirers to suppose them not absolutely infallible. Let them stick boldly, therefore, to all their charges. I would recommend it to them even to be facetious on the occasion, and to expatiate on the *silliness, tameness, and insipidity* of these remarks of mine; but never to commit themselves by descending to particulars. While they keep to general observations, even the ignorant may consider themselves as safe. The words *mean, vulgar, contemptible, trifling, insufficient, &c.* should be always at hand; and if repeated with proper assurance, will gain them some credit. But, above all, let them insist upon it, that all their former observations are just, and that not one of their objections has been refuted. Let them dwell, in an especial manner, on the absurdities of my arrangement, on the errors in my calculations, and my ignorance of multiplication and division. This alone, if properly managed, will be sufficient to render them invulnerable. For it may be laid down as a general rule, that, if a champion finds an opinion or assertion so completely refuted, that it is no longer tenable, and yet, at the same time, is resolved not to give it up; nothing answers his purpose so well as to *repeat* his opinion or assertion as positively as ever, and without condescending to take any notice of the refutation. This shews a becoming spirit, and a confidence in the goodness of one's cause, both of which are known to have their weight with the spectators and the judges; and the adversary, when he finds himself thus handled, will either be reduced to the necessity of holding his peace, or at least he will speak to no purpose. Had Rabelais been obliged to keep company with a regiment of geese, his finest flights would have been rewarded with hisses."

"Our worthy Critics ought, therefore, to *review* this pamphlet of mine, unless they think it better to publish a *second Review* of the work itself. By the usual methods of perversion and misquotation, they may make both as ridiculous as they please. In that case, I *pledge* myself beforehand, to examine their objections, and to lay the result of them before the public. The old channels of information are still open to me. In the preceding remarks I have been exceedingly moderate, purposely passing over several precious speculations which occupy a considerable portion of the *Review* of my work. But if I find it necessary to resume the pen a second time, it will not be expected, I hope, that I shall stand merely on the defensive." (Pp. 61—63.)

We may venture, we think, to assure Dr. Thomson that the Edinburgh Reviewers will not be forward, by conferring the honour which he here solicits, to afford him an occasion of resuming his pen.

A Supplement to an Examination of the Strictures of the Critical Reviewers on the Translation of Juvenal. 4to. Hatchard.

IN noticing the attack of the Critical Reviewers on Mr. Gifford's "Examination," we ventured to predict that their ill-judged attempt to intimidate him by threats of future vengeance, would produce that reply which the imbecility of their malice would, perhaps, fail to draw forth. Accordingly we have here a spirited retort, in which every charge that was formerly brought against them is repeated, and enforced with a mass of evidence which leaves no possibility of farther cavil on the subject. The