

TABLE TALK.

No. XII.

ON CONSISTENCY OF OPINION.

——— Servetur ad imum

Qualis ab inceptu processerit, et sibi constet.

MANY people boast of being masters in their own house. I pretend to be master of my own mind. I should be sorry to have an ejection served upon me for any notions I may chuse to entertain there. Within that little circle I would fain be an absolute monarch. I do not profess the spirit of martyrdom; I have no ambition to march to the stake or up to a masked battery, in defence of an hypothesis: I do not court the rack: I do not wish to be flayed alive for affirming that two and two make four, or any other intricate proposition: I am shy of bodily pains and penalties, which some are fond of, imprisonment, fine, banishment, confiscation of goods: but if I do not prefer the independence of my mind to that of my body, I at least prefer it to every thing else. I would avoid the arm of power, as I would escape from the fangs of a wild beast: but as to the opinion of the world, I see nothing formidable in it. "It is the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil." I am not to be brow-beat or wheedled out of any of my settled convictions. 'Opinion to opinion, I will face any man. Prejudice, fashion, the cant of the moment, go for nothing; and as for the reason of the thing, it can only be supposed to rest with me or another, in proportion to the pains we have taken to ascertain it. Where the pursuit of truth has been the habitual study of any man's life, the love of truth will be his ruling passion. "Where the treasure is, there the heart is also." Every one is most tenacious of that to which he owes his distinction from others. Kings love power, misers gold, women flattery, poets reputation—and philosophers truth, when they can find it. They are right in cherishing the only privilege they inherit. If "to be wise were to be obstinate," I might set up for as great a philosopher as the best of them; for some of my conclusions are as fixed and as

incorrigible to proof as need be. I am attached to them in consequence of the pains, the anxiety, and the waste of time they have cost me. In fact, I should not well know what to do without them at this time of day; nor how to get others to supply their place. I would quarrel with the best friend I have sooner than acknowledge the right of the Bourbons. I see Mr. ——— seldomer than I did, because I cannot agree with him about the *Catalogue Raisonné*. I remember once saying to this gentleman, a great while ago, that I did not seem to have altered any of my ideas since I was sixteen years old. "Why then," said he, "you are no wiser now than you were then!" I might make the same confession, and the same retort would apply still. Coleridge used to tell me, that this pertinacity was owing to a want of sympathy with others. What he calls *sympathizing with others* is their admiring him, and it must be admitted that he varies his battery pretty often, in order to accommodate himself to this sort of mutual understanding. But I do not agree in what he says of me. On the other hand, I think that it is my *sympathizing beforehand* with the different views and feelings that may be entertained on a subject, that prevents my retracting my judgment, and flinging myself into the contrary extreme afterwards. If you proscribe all opinions opposite to your own, and impertinently exclude all the evidence that does not make for you, it stares you in the face with double force when it breaks in unexpectedly upon you, or if at any subsequent period it happens to suit your interest or convenience to listen to objections which vanity or prejudice had hitherto overlooked. But if you are aware from the first suggestion of a subject, either by subtlety of tact or close attention, of the full force of what others possibly feel and think of it, you are not exposed to the same

vacillation of opinion. The number of grains and scruples, of doubts and difficulties thrown into the scale while the balance is yet undecided, add to the weight and steadiness of the determination. He who anticipates his opponent's arguments, confirms while he corrects his own reasonings. When a question has been carefully examined in all its bearings, and a principle is once established, it is not liable to be overthrown by any new facts which have been arbitrarily and petulantly set aside, nor by every wind of idle doctrine rushing into the interstices of a hollow speculation, shattering it in pieces, and leaving it a mockery and a bye-word; like those tall, gawky, staring, pyramidal erections which are seen scattered over different parts of the country, and are called the *Folkies* of different gentlemen! A man may be confident in maintaining a side, as he has been cautious in choosing it. If after making up his mind strongly in one way, to the best of his capacity and judgment, he feels himself inclined to a very violent revulsion of sentiment, he may generally rest assured that the change is in himself and his motives, not in the reason of things.

I cannot say that, from my own experience, I have found that the persons most remarkable for sudden and violent changes of principle have been cast in the softest or most susceptible mould. All their notions have been exclusive, bigoted, and intolerant. Their want of consistency and moderation has been in exact proportion to their want of candour and comprehensiveness of mind. Instead of being the creatures of sympathy, open to conviction, unwilling to give offence by the smallest difference of sentiment, they have (for the most part) been made up of mere antipathies—a very repulsive sort of personages—at odds with themselves, and with every body else. The slenderness of their pretensions to philosophical inquiry has been accompanied with the most presumptuous dogmatism. They have been persons of that narrowness of view and headstrong self-sufficiency of purpose, that they could see only one side of a question at a time, and whichever they pleased. There is a

story somewhere in *Don Quixote*, of two champions coming to a shield hung up against a tree with an inscription written on each side of it. Each of them maintained, that the words were what was written on the side next him, and never dreamt, till the fray was over, that they might be different on the opposite side of the shield. It would have been a little more extraordinary if the combatants had changed sides in the heat of the scuffle, and stoutly denied that there were any such words on the opposite side as they had before been bent on sacrificing their lives to prove were the only ones it contained. Yet such is the very situation of some of our modern polemics. They have been of all sides of the question, and yet they cannot conceive how an honest man can be of any but one—that which they hold at present. It seems that they are afraid to look their old opinions in the face, lest they should be fascinated by them once more. They banish all doubts of their own sincerity by inveighing against the motives of their antagonists. There is no salvation out of the pale of their strange inconsistency. They reduce common sense and probity to the straitest possible limits—the breasts of themselves and their patrons. They are like people out at sea on a very narrow plank, who try to push every body else off. Is it that they have so little faith in the cause to which they have become such staunch converts, as to suppose that, should they allow a grain of sense to their old allies and new antagonists, they will have more than they? Is it that they have so little consciousness of their own disinterestedness, that they feel if they allow a particle of honesty to those who now differ with them, they will have more than they? Those opinions must needs be of a very fragile texture which will not stand the shock of the least acknowledged opposition, and which lay claim to respectability by stigmatizing all who do not hold them for “sots, and knaves, and cowards.” There is a want of well-balanced feeling in every such instance of extravagant versatility; a something crude, unripe, and harsh, that does not hit a judicious palate, but sets the teeth on edge to think of. “I had rather hear my

mother's cat mew, or a wheel grate on the axle-tree, than one of these same metre-ballad-mongers" chaunt his incondite retrograde lays without rhyme and without reason.

The principles and professions change: the man remains the same. There is the same spirit at the bottom of all this pragmatism, fickleness and virulence, whether it runs into one extreme or another:—to wit, a confinement of view, a jealousy of others, an impatience of contradiction, a want of liberality in construing the motives of others either from monkish pedantry, or a conceited overweening reference of every thing to our own fancies and feelings. There is something to be said, indeed, for the nature of the political machinery, for the whirling motion of the revolutionary wheel which has of late wrenched men's understandings almost asunder, and "amazed the very faculties of eyes and ears;" but still this is hardly a sufficient reason, why the adept in the old as well as the new school should take such a prodigious latitude himself, while at the same time he makes so little allowance for others. His whole creed need not be turned topsyturvy, from the top to the bottom, even in times like these. He need not, in the rage of party-spirit, discard the proper attributes of humanity, the common dictates of reason. He need not outrage every former feeling, nor trample on every customary decency, in his zeal for reform, or in his greater zeal against it. If his mind, like his body, has undergone a total change of essence, and purged off the taint of all its early opinions, he need not carry about with him, or be haunted in the persons of others with, the phantoms of his altered principles to loath and execrate them. He need not (as it were) pass an act of attainder on all his thoughts, hopes, wishes, from youth upwards, to offer them at the shrine of matured servility: he need not become one vile antithesis, a living and ignominious satire on himself. Mr. Wordsworth has hardly, I should think, so much as a single particle of feeling left in his whole composition, the same that he had twenty years ago; not "so small a drop of pity," for what he then was, "as a wren's eye,"—except that I do not

bear that he has given up his theory that poetry should be written in the language of prose, or applied for an injunction against the Lyrical Ballads. I will wager a trifle, that our ingenious poet will not concede to any patron, (how noble or munificent soever) that the Leech Gatherer is not a fit subject of the Muse, and would sooner resign the stamp-distributorship of two counties, than burn that portion of the Recluse, a Poem, which has been given to the world under the title of the Excursion. The tone, however, of Mr. Wordsworth's poetical effusions requires a little revision to adapt it to the progressive improvement in his political sentiments: for, as far as I understand the Poems themselves or the Preface, his whole system turns upon this, that the thoughts, the feelings, the expressions of the common people in country places are the most refined of all others; at once the most pure, the most simple, and the most sublime:—yet, with one stroke of his prose-pen, he disfranchises the whole rustic population of Westmoreland and Cumberland from voting at elections, and says there is not a man among them that is not a knave in grain. In return, he lets them still retain the privilege of expressing their sentiments in select and natural language in the Lyrical Ballads: So much for poetical justice and political severity! An author's political theories sit loose upon him, and may be changed like his clothes. His literary vanity, alas! sticks to him like his skin, and survives in its first gloss and sleekness, amidst

The wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds.

Mr. Southey still makes experiments on metre, not on governments, and seems to think the last resort of English liberty is in court-iambics. Still the same upstart self-sufficiency, still the same itch of newfangled innovation directed into a new channel, still the same principle of favouritism, still the same overcharged and splenetic hostility—all is right that he approves, all is wrong that opposes his views in the smallest particular. There is no inconsistency in all these anomalies. Absurdity is uniform; egotism is the same thing; a limited range of comprehension is a habit of mind that a man seldom

gets the better of, and may distinguish equally the Pantisocratist or Constitutional Association-monger.

To quit this, which is rather a stale topic, as well as a hopeless one, and give some instances of a change of sentiment in individuals, which may serve for materials of a history of opinion in the beginning of the 19th century:—A gentleman went to live, some years ago, in a remote part of the country, and as he did not wish to affect singularity he used to have two candles on his table of an evening. A romantic acquaintance of his in the neighbourhood, smit with the love of simplicity and equality, used to come in, and without ceremony snuff one of them out, saying, it was a shame to indulge in such extravagance, while many a poor cottager had not even a rush-light to see to do their evening's work by. This might be about the year 1802, and was passed over as among the ordinary occurrences of the day. In 1816 (oh! fearful lapse of time, pregnant with strange mutability), the same enthusiastic lover of economy, and hater of luxury, asked his thoughtless friend to dine with him in company with a certain lord, and to lend him his man servant to wait at table; and just before they were sitting down to dinner, he heard him say to the servant in a sonorous whisper—"and be sure you don't forget to have six candles on the table!" Extremes meet. The event here was as true to itself as the oscillation of the pendulum. My informant, who understands moral equations, had looked for this reaction, and noted it down as characteristic. The impertinence in the first instance was the cue to the ostentatious servility in the second. The one was the fulfilment of the other, like the type and anti-type of a prophecy. No—the keeping of the character at the end of fourteen years was as unique as the keeping of the thought to the end of the fourteen lines of a Sonnet!—Would it sound strange if I were to whisper it in the reader's ear, that it was the same person who was thus anxious to see six candles on the table to receive a lord, who once (in ages past) said to me, that "he saw nothing to admire in the eloquence of such men as Mansfield and Chatham; and

what did it all end in, but their being made Lords?" It is better to be a lord than a lacquey to a lord. So we see that the swelling pride and preposterous self-opinion which exalts itself above the mightiest, looking down upon, and braving the boasted pretensions of the highest rank and the most brilliant talents as nothing, compared with its own conscious powers and silent unmoved self-respect, grovels and licks the dust before titled wealth, like a lacquered slave, the moment it can get wages and a livery! Would Milton or Marvel have done thus?

Mr. Coleridge, indeed, sets down this outrageous want of keeping to an excess of sympathy, and there is, after all, some truth in his suggestion. There is a craving after the approbation and concurrence of others natural to the mind of man. It is difficult to sustain the weight of an opinion singly for any length of way. The intellect languishes without cordial encouragement and support. It exhausts both strength and patience to be always striving against the stream. *Contra audentior ito*—is the motto but of few. Public opinion is always pressing upon the mind, and, like the air we breathe, acts unseen, unfelt. It supplies the living current of our thoughts, and infects without our knowledge. It taints the blood, and is taken into the smallest pores. The most sanguine constitutions are, perhaps, the most exposed to its influence. But public opinion has its source in power, in popular prejudices, and is not always in accord with right reason, or a high and abstracted imagination. Which path to follow where the two roads part? The heroic and romantic resolution prevails at first in high and heroic tempers. They think to scale the heights of truth and virtue at once with him "whose genius had angelic wings, and fed on manna,"—but after a time find themselves baffled, toiling on in an uphill road, without friends, in a cold neighbourhood, without aid or prospect of success. The poet

Like a worm goes by the way.

He hears murmurs loud or suppressed, meets blank looks or scowling faces, is exposed to the pelting of the pitiless press, and is stunned

by the shout of the mob, that gather round him to see what sort of a creature a poet and a philosopher is. What is there to make him proof against all this? A strength of understanding steeled against temptation, and a dear love of truth that smiles opinion to scorn? These he perhaps has not. A lord passes in his coach. Might he not get up, and ride out of the reach of the rabble-rout? He is invited to stop dinner. If he stays he may insinuate some wholesome truths. He drinks in rank poison—flattery! He recites some verses to the ladies who smile delicious praise, and thank him through their tears. The master of the house suggests a happy allusion in the turn of an expression. "There's sympathy." This is better than the company he lately left. Pictures, statues meet his raptured eye. Our Ulysses finds himself in the gardens of Alcinoüs: our truant is fairly caught. He wanders through enchanted ground. Groves, classic groves nod unto him, and he hears "ancestral voices" hailing him as brother-hard! He sleeps, dreams, and wakes, cured of his thriftless prejudices and morose philanthropy. He likes this courtly and popular sympathy better. "He looks up with awe to kings; with honour to nobility; with reverence to magistrates," &c. He no longer breathes the air of heaven and his own thoughts, but is steeped in that of palaces and courts, and finds it agree better with his constitutional temperament. Oh! how sympathy alters a man from what he was!

I've heard of hearts unkind,
Kind deeds with coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of man
Has oftener set me mourning.

A spirit of contradiction, a wish to monopolize all wisdom, will not account for uniform consistency, for it is sure to defeat and turn against itself. It is "every thing by turns, and nothing long." It is warped and crooked. It cannot bear the least opposition, and sooner than acquiesce in what others approve it will change sides in a day. It is offended at every resistance to its captious, domineering humour, and will quarrel for straws with its best friends: A person under the

guidance of this démon, if every whimsey or occult discovery of his own is not received with acclamation by one party, will wreak his spite by deserting to the other, and carry all his talent for disputation with him, sharpened by rage and disappointment. A man, to be steady in a cause, should be more attached to the truth than to the acquiescence of his fellow-citizens. A young student, who came up to town a few years since with some hypercritical refinements on the modern philosophy to introduce him to the Gamaliels of the age, but who would allow no one else to have a right view of the common doctrines of the school, or to be able to assign a reason for the faith that was in him, was sent to Coventry by the true adepts, who were many of them as wise and as fastidious as himself. He therefore turned round upon the whole set for this indignity, and has been playing off the heavy artillery of his scurrilous abuse, his verbal logic; and the powerful distinctions of the civil and canon law upon the devoted heads of his tasteless associates; "perpetual volley, arrowy sleet," ever since! It is needless to mention names. The learned gentleman having left his ungrateful party and unprofitable principles in dudgeon, has gone into the opposite extreme like mad, sticks at nothing, is callous to public opinion, so that he pleases his employers, and can become "a thorn in the side of freedom;" and fairly takes the bridle in his teeth, stop him who can. A more obstinate being never took pen in hand. Yet, by agreeing to his conclusions, and subscribing to his arguments (such as they are) it would be still possible to make him give up every one of his absurdities in succession, and to drive him to set up another New Daily Paper against himself!

I can hardly consider Mr. Coleridge as a deserter from the cause he first espoused, unless one could tell what cause he ever heartily espoused, or what party he ever belonged to, in downright earnest. He has not been inconsistent with himself at different times, but at all times. He is a sophist, a casuist, a rhetorician, what you please; and might have served as a deacon to

the end of his breath on one side of a question or another, but he never was a pragmatist fellow. He lived in a round of contradictions, and never came to a settled point. His fancy gave the cue to his judgment, and his vanity set his invention afloat in whatever direction he could find most scope for it, or most sympathy, that is, admiration. His *Life and Opinions* might naturally receive the title of one of Hume's *Essays*—"A Sceptical Solution of Sceptical Doubts." To be sure, his *WATCHMAN* and his *FRIEND* breathe a somewhat different tone on subjects of a particular description, both of them apparently pretty high-raised, but whoever will be at the pains to examine them closely, will find them to be *voluntaries*, fugues, solemn capriccios, not set compositions with any malice prepense in them, or much practical meaning. I believe some of his friends, who were indebted to him for the suggestion of plausible reasons for conformity, and an opening to a more qualified view of the letter of their paradoxical principles, have lately disgusted him by the virulence and extravagance to which they have carried hints, of which he never suspected that they would make the least possible use. But if Mr. Coleridge is satisfied with the wandering Moods of his Mind, perhaps this is no reason that others may not reap the solid benefit. He himself is like the idle sea-weed on the ocean, tossed from shore to shore: they are like barnacles fastened to the vessel of the state, rotting its goodly timbers!

There are some persons who are of too fastidious a turn of mind to like any thing long, or to assent twice to the same opinion. — always sets himself to prop the falling cause, to nurse the ricketty bantling. He takes the part which he thinks in most need of his support, not so much out of magnanimity, as to prevent too great a degree of presumption or self-complacency on the triumphant side. "Though truth be truth, yet he contrives to throw such changes of vexation on it as it may lose some colour." I have been delighted to hear him exultate with the most natural and affecting simplicity on a favourite passage or pic-

ture, and all the while afraid of agreeing with him lest he should instantly turn round and unsay all that he had said, for fear of my going away with too good an opinion of my own taste, or too great an admiration of my idol—and his own. I dare not ask his opinion twice, if I have got a favourable sentence once, lest he should belie his own sentiments to stagger mine. I have heard him talk divinely (like one inspired) of Boccaccio, and the story of the Pot of Basil, describing "how it grew, and it grew, and it grew," till you saw it spread its tender leaves in the light of his eye, and wave in the tremulous sound of his voice; and yet if you asked him about it at another time, he would, perhaps, affect to think little of it, or to have forgotten the circumstance. His enthusiasm is fickle and treacherous. The instant he finds it shared in common, he backs out of it. His enmity is equally refined, but hardly so unsocial. His exquisitely turned invectives display all the beauty of scorn, and impart elegance to vulgarity. He sometimes finds out minute excellencies, and cries up one thing to put you out of conceit with another. If you want him to praise Sir Joshua *con amore*, in his best manner, you should begin with saying something about Titian—if you seem an idolizer of Sir Joshua, he will immediately turn off the discourse, gliding like the serpent before Eve, wary and beautiful, to the graces of Sir Peter Lely, or ask you if you saw a Vandyke the other day, which he does not think Sir Joshua could stand near. But find fault with the Lake Poets, and mention some pretended patron of rising genius, and you need not fear but he will join in with you and go all lengths that you can wish him. You may calculate upon him there. "Pride elevates, and joy brightens his face." And, indeed, so eloquent is he, and so beautiful in his eloquence, that I myself, with all my freedom from gall and bitterness, could listen to him untired, and without knowing how the time went, losing and neglecting many a meal and hour,

— From morn to noon,

From noon to dewy eve, a summer's day!

When I cease to hear him quite,
Other tongues, turned to what ac-

cents they may of praise or blame, will sound dull, ungrateful, out of tune, and harsh, in the comparison.

An overstrained enthusiasm produces a capriciousness in taste, as well as too much indifference. A person who sets no bounds to his admiration takes a surfeit of his favourites. He over-does the thing. He gets sick of his own everlasting praises, and affected raptures. His preferences are a great deal too violent to last. He wears out an author in a week, that might last him a year, or his life, by the eagerness with which he devours him. Every such favourite is in his turn the greatest writer in the world. Compared with the lord of the ascendant for the time being, Shakspeare is commonplace, and Milton a pedant, a little insipid or so. Some of these prodigies require to be dragged out of their lurking-places, and cried up to the top of the compass;—their traits are subtle, and must be violently obtruded on the sight. But the effort of exaggerated praise, though it may stagger others, tires the maker, and we hear of them no more after a while. Others take their turns, are swallowed whole, undigested, ravenously, and disappear in the same manner. Good authors share the fate of bad, and a library in a few years is nearly dismantled. It is a pity thus to outlive our admiration, and exhaust our relish of what is excellent. Actors and actresses are disposed of in the same conclusive peremptory way: some of them are talked of for months, nay, years; then it is almost an offence to mention them. Friends, acquaintance, go the same road;—are now asked to come six days in the week, then warned against coming the seventh. The smallest faults are soon magnified in those we think too highly of: but where shall we find perfection? If we will put up with nothing short of that, we shall have neither pictures, books, nor friends left—we shall have nothing but our own absurdities to keep company with! “In all things a regular and moderate indulgence is the best security for a lasting enjoyment.”—BURKE.

There are numbers who judge by the event, and change with fortune. They extol the hero of the day, and

join the prevailing clamour whatever it is; so that the fluctuating state of public opinion regulates their feverish, restless enthusiasm, like a thermometer. They blow hot or cold, according as the wind sets favourable or otherwise. With such people the only infallible test of merit is success; and no arguments are true that have not a large or powerful majority on their side. They go by appearances. Their vanity, not the truth, is their ruling object. They are not the last to quit a falling cause, and they are the first to hail the rising sun. Their minds want sincerity, modesty, and keeping. With them—

————— To have done is to hang
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
In monumental mockery.

They still, “with one consent, praise new-born gauds,” and Fame, as they construe it, is—

————— Like a fashionable host,
That slightly shakes his parting guest by
the hand;
And with his arms outstretch'd, as he
would fly,
Grasps in the comer. Welcome ever
smiles,
And Farewell goes out sighing.

Such servile flatterers made an idol of Buonaparte while fortune smiled upon him, but when it left him, they removed him from his pedestal in the cabinet of their vanity, as we take down the picture of a relation that has died without naming us in his will. The opinion of such triflers is worth nothing: it is merely an echo. We do not want to be told the event of a question, but the rights of it. Truth is in their theory nothing but “noise and inexplicable dumb show.” They are the heralds, outriders, and trumpeters in the procession of fame; are more loud and boisterous than the rest, and give themselves great airs, as the avowed patrons and admirers of genius and merit.

As there are many who change their sentiments with circumstances, (as they decided lawsuits in Rabelais with the dice), so there are others who change them with their acquaintance. “Tell me your company, and I'll tell you your opinions,” might be said to many a man who piques himself on a select and superior view of things, distinct from the vulgar. Individuals of this class are quick and versatile, but they are not before-

head with opinion. They catch it, when it is pointed out to them, and take it at the rebound, instead of giving the first impulse. Their minds are a light, luxuriant soil, into which thoughts are easily transplanted, and shoot up with uncommon sprightliness and vigour. They wear the dress of other people's minds very gracefully and unconsciously. They tell you your own opinion, or very gravely repeat an observation you have made to them, about half a year afterwards. They let you into the delicacies and luxuries of Spenser with great disinterestedness, in return for your having introduced that author to their notice. They prefer West to Raphael, Stothard to Rubens, till they are told better. Still they are acute in the main, and good judges in their way. By trying to improve their taste, and reform their notions according to an ideal standard, they perhaps spoil and muddle their native faculties, rather than do them any good. Their first manner is their best, because it is the most natural. It is well not to go out of ourselves, and to be contented to take up with what we are, for better for worse. We can neither beg, borrow, nor steal characteristic excellencies. Some views and modes of thinking suit certain minds, as certain colours suit certain complexions. We may part with very shining and very useful qualities without getting better ones to supply them. Mocking is catching, only in regard to defects. Mimicry is always dangerous.

It is not necessary to change our road in order to advance on our journey. We should cultivate the spot of ground we possess to the utmost of our power, though it may be circumscribed and comparatively barren. *A rolling stone gathers no moss.* People may collect all the wisdom they will ever attain, quite as well by staying at home as by travelling abroad. There is no use in shifting from place to place, from side to side, or from subject to subject. You have always to begin again, and never finish any course of study or observation. By adhering to the same principles you do not become stationary. You enlarge, correct, and consolidate your reasonings, without contradicting and shuffling about in your conclusions. If truth consisted in hasty assumptions and petulant

contradictions, there might be some ground for this whiffing and violent inconsistency. But the face of truth, like that of nature, is different and the same. The first outline of an opinion, and the general tone of thinking, may be sound and correct, though we may spend any quantity of time and pains in working up and uniting the parts at subsequent sittings. If we have mistaken the character of the countenance altogether at first, no alterations will bring it right afterwards. Those who mistake white for black in the first instance, may just as well mistake black for white when they reverse their canvass. I do not see what security they can have in their present opinions, who build their pretension to wisdom on the total folly, rashness, and extravagance (to say no worse) of their former ones. The perspective may change with years and experience: we may see certain things nearer, and others more remote; but the great masses and landmarks will remain, though thrown into shadow and tinged by the intervening atmosphere: so the laws of the understanding, the truths of nature will remain, and cannot be thrown into utter confusion and perplexity by our blunders or caprice, like the objects in Hogarth's Rules of Perspective, where every thing is turned upside down, or thrust out of its well-known place. I cannot understand how our political Harlequins feel after all their summersaults and metamorphoses. They can hardly, I should think, look at themselves in the glass, or walk across the room without stumbling. This at least would be the case if they had the smallest reflection or self-knowledge. But they judge from pique and vanity solely. There should be a certain decorum in life as in a picture, without which it is neither useful nor agreeable. If my own opinions are not right, at any rate they are the best I have been able to form, and better than any others I could take up at random, or out of perversity, now. Contrary opinions vitiate one another, and destroy the simplicity and clearness of the mind: nothing is good that has not a beginning, a middle, and an end; and I would wish my thoughts to be

Linked each to each by natural piety!