

to be smitten with a blindness as strange as his former clear-sightedness; and, turning neither to the right nor to the left, strode straight on with desperate hardihood to his doom. Therefore, after having early acquired, and long preserved, the reputation of infallible wisdom and invariable success, he lived to see a mighty ruin wrought by his own ungovernable passions;—to see the great party which he had led, vanquished, and scattered, and trampled down;—to see all his own devilish enginery of lying witnesses, partial sheriffs, packed juries, unjust judges, blood-thirsty mobs, ready to be employed against himself and his most devoted followers;—to fly from that proud city whose favour had almost raised him to be Mayor of the Palace;—to hide himself in squalid retreats;—to cover his grey head with ignominious disguises;—and he died in hopeless exile, sheltered by a State which he had cruelly injured and insulted, from the vengeance of a master whose favour he had purchased by one series of crimes, and forfeited by another.

Halifax had, in common with Shaftesbury, and with almost all the politicians of that age, a very loose morality where the public was concerned; but in his case the prevailing infection was modified by a very peculiar constitution both of heart and head;—by a temper singularly free from gall, and by a refining and sceptical understanding. He changed his course as often as Shaftesbury; but he did not change it to the same extent, or in the same direction. Shaftesbury was the very reverse of a trimmer. His disposition led him generally to do his utmost to exalt the side which was up, and to depress the side which was down. His transitions were from extreme to extreme. While he staid with a party he went all lengths for it;—when he quitted it he went all lengths against it. Halifax was

Halifax a trimmer. emphatically a trimmer—a trimmer both by intellect and by constitution.

The name was fixed on him by his contemporaries; and he was so far from being ashamed of it that he assumed it as a badge of honour. He passed from faction to faction. But instead of adopting and inflaming the passions of those whom he joined, he tried to diffuse among them something of the spirit of those whom he had just left. While he acted with the Opposition, he was suspected of being a spy of the Court; and when he

had joined the Court all the Tories were dismayed by his Republican doctrines.

He wanted neither arguments nor eloquence to exhibit what was commonly regarded as his wavering policy in the fairest light. Arguments and eloquence.

He trimmed, he said, as the temperate zone trims between intolerable heat and intolerable cold—as a good government trims between despotism and anarchy—as a pure church trims between the errors of the Papists and those of the Anabaptists. Nor was this defence by any means without weight; for, though there is abundant proof that his integrity was not of strength to withstand the temptations by which his cupidity and vanity were sometimes assailed, yet his dislike of extremes, and a forgiving and compassionate temper which seems to have been natural to him, preserved him from all participation in the worst crimes of his time. If both parties accused him of deserting them, both were compelled to admit that they had great obligations to his humanity; and that, though an uncertain friend, he was a placable enemy. He voted in favour of Lord Stafford, the victim of the Whigs. He did his utmost to save Lord Russell, the victim of the Tories. And on the whole, we are inclined to think that his public life, though far indeed from faultless, has as few great stains as that of any politician who took an active part in affairs during the troubled and disastrous period of ten years which elapsed between the fall of Lord Danby and the Revolution.

His mind was much less turned to particular observations, and much more to general speculation, than that of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury knew the King, the Council, the Parliament, the city, better than Halifax; but Halifax would have written a far better treatise on political science than Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury shone more in consultation, and Halifax in controversy:—Shaftesbury was more fertile in expedients, and Halifax in arguments. Nothing that remains from the pen of

Consultation and controversy.

Shaftesbury will bear a comparison with the political tracts of Halifax. Indeed, very little of the prose of that age is so well worth reading as the "Character of a Trimmer," and the "Anatomy of an Equivalent." What particularly strikes us in those works is the writer's passion for generalization. He was treating of

the most exciting subjects in the most agitated times—he was himself placed in the very thick of the civil conflict:—yet there is no acrimony, nothing inflammatory, nothing personal. He preserves an air of cold superiority, a certain philosophical serenity, which is perfectly marvellous—he treats every question as an abstract question—begins with the widest propositions—argues those propositions on general grounds—and often, when he has brought out his theorem, leaves the reader to make the application, without adding an allusion to particular men or to passing events. This speculative turn of mind rendered him a bad adviser in cases which required celerity. He brought forward, with wonderful readiness and copiousness, arguments, replies to those arguments, rejoinders to those replies, general maxims of policy, and analogous cases from history. But Shaftesbury was the man for prompt decision. Of the Parliamentary eloquence of these celebrated rivals, we can judge only by report; and so judging, we should be inclined to think that, though Shaftesbury was a distinguished speaker, the superiority belonged to Halifax. Indeed, the readiness of Halifax in debate, the extent of his knowledge, the ingenuity of his reasoning, the liveliness of his expression, and the silver clearness and sweetness of his voice, seem to have made the strongest impression on his contemporaries. By Dryden he is described as

“of piercing wit and pregnant thought,
Endued by nature and by learning taught
To move assemblies.”

His oratory is utterly and irretrievably lost to us, like that of Somers, of Bolingbroke, of Charles Townsend—of many others who were accustomed to rise amidst the breathless expectation of senates, and to sit down amidst reiterated bursts of applause. But old men who lived to admire the eloquence of Pulteney in its meridian, and that of Pitt in its splendid dawn, still murmured that they had heard nothing like the great speeches of Lord Halifax on the Exclusion Bill. The power of Shaftesbury over large masses was unrivalled. Halifax was disqualified by his whole character, moral and intellectual, for the part of a demagogue. It was in small circles, and, above all, in the House of Lords, that his ascendancy was felt.

Shaftesbury seems to have troubled

himself very little about theories of government. Halifax was, in speculation, a strong republican, and did not conceal it. **Republican in speculation.** He often made hereditary monarchy and aristocracy the subjects of his keen pleasantry, while he was fighting the battles of the Court, and obtaining for himself step after step in the peerage. In this way, he attempted to gratify at once his intellectual vanity and his more vulgar ambition. He shaped his life according to the opinion of the multitude, and indemnified himself by talking according to his own. His colloquial powers were great; his perception of the ridiculous exquisitely fine; and he seems to have had the rare art of preserving the reputation of good-breeding and good-nature, while habitually indulging his strong propensity to mockery.

Temple wished to put Halifax into the new council, and to leave out Shaftesbury. The King objected strongly to Halifax, to whom he had taken a great dislike, which is not accounted for, and which did not last long. Temple replied that Halifax was a man eminent both by his station and by his abilities, and would, if excluded, do everything against the new arrangements, that could be done by eloquence, sarcasm, and intrigue. All who were consulted were of the same mind; and the King yielded; but not till Temple had almost gone on his knees. This point was no sooner settled than his Majesty declared that he would have Shaftesbury too. Temple again has recourse to entreaties and expostulations. Charles told him that the enmity of Shaftesbury would be at least as formidable as that of Halifax; and this was true: but Temple might have replied that by giving power to Halifax they gained a friend, and that by giving power to Shaftesbury they only strengthened an enemy. It was vain to argue and protest. The King only laughed and jested at Temple's anger; and Shaftesbury was not only sworn of the Council, but appointed Lord President.

Temple was so bitterly mortified by this step, that he had at one time resolved to have nothing to do with the new Administration; and seriously thought of disqualifying himself from sitting in council by omitting to take the Sacrament. But the urgency of

**The King's
dislike of
Halifax.**

**Bitterly
mortified.**

Lady Temple and Lady Giffard induced him to abandon that intention.

The council was organized on the 21st of April, 1679; and on the very next day one of the fundamental principles on which it had been constructed was violated. A secret committee, or, in the modern phrase, a cabinet of nine members was formed. But as this committee included Shaftesbury and Monmouth, it contained within itself the elements of as much faction as would have sufficed to impede all business. Accordingly,

Small cabinets.

there soon arose a small interior cabinet, consisting of Essex, Sunderland,

Halifax, and Temple. For a time perfect harmony and confidence subsisted between the four. But the meetings of the thirty were stormy. Sharp retorts passed between Shaftesbury and Halifax, who led the opposite parties. In the council Halifax generally had the advantage. But it soon became apparent that Shaftesbury still had at his back the majority of the House of Commons. The discontents which the change of Ministry had for a moment quieted, broke forth again with redoubled violence; and the only effect which the late measures appeared to have produced was that the Lord President, with all the dignity and authority belonging to his high place, stood at the head of the Opposition. The impeachment of Lord Danby was eagerly prosecuted. The Commons were determined to exclude the Duke of York from the throne. All offers of compromise were rejected. It must not be forgotten, however, that in the midst of the confusion one inestimable law—the only benefit which England has derived from the troubles of that period, but a benefit which may well be set off against a great mass of evil—the Habeas Corpus Act, was pushed through the Houses and received the royal assent.

The King, finding the Parliament as troublesome as ever, determined to prorogue it; and he did so

Parliament prorogued.

without even mentioning his intention to the Council

by whose advice he had pledged himself, only a month before, to conduct the Government. The councillors were generally dissatisfied; and Shaftesbury swore with great vehemence that if he could find out who the secret advisers were he would have their heads.

The Parliament rose; London was deserted; and Temple retired to his villa,

whence, on council days, he went to Hampton Court. The post of Secretary was again and again pressed on him by his master, and by his three colleagues of the inner Cabinet. Halifax, in particular, threatened laughingly to burn down the house at Sheen. But Temple was immovable. His short experience of English politics had disgusted him; and he felt himself so much oppressed by the responsibility under which he at present lay, that he had no inclination to add to the load.

Temple retires.

When the term fixed for the prorogation had nearly expired it became necessary to consider what course should be taken. The King, and his four confidential advisers, thought that a new Parliament might possibly be more manageable, and could not possibly be more refractory than that which they now had, and they therefore determined on a dissolution. But when the question was proposed at council, the majority, jealous, it should seem, of the small directing knot, and unwilling to bear the unpopularity of the measures of Government, while excluded from all power, joined Shaftesbury, and the members of the Cabinet were left alone in the minority. The King, however, had made up his mind, and ordered the Parliament to be instantly dissolved. Temple's council was now nothing more than an ordinary privy council, if indeed it were not something less; and though Temple threw the blame of this on the King, on Lord Shaftesbury, on everybody but himself, it is evident that the failure of his plan is to be traced to its own inherent defects. His council was too large to transact business which required expedition, secrecy, and cordial co-operation. A Cabinet was therefore formed within the Council. The Cabinet and the majority of the Council differed, and, as was to be expected, the Cabinet carried their point. Four votes outweighed six-and-twenty. This being the case, the meetings of the thirty were not only useless, but positively noxious.

Cabinet and Council.

At the ensuing election, Temple was chosen for the university of Cambridge. The only objection that was made to him by the members of that learned body was, that in his little work on Holland he had expressed great approbation of the tolerant policy of the States; and this blemish, however serious, was

overlooked, in consideration of his high reputation, and of the strong recommendations with which he was furnished by the Court.

During the summer he remained at Sheen, and amused himself with rearing melons; leaving to the three other mem-

Rearing
melons at
Sheen.

bers of the inner Cabinet the whole directions of public affairs. Some unexplained cause began, about this time, to alienate them from him. They do not appear to have been made angry by any part of his conduct, or to have disliked him personally. But they had, we suspect, taken the measure of his mind, and satisfied themselves that he was not a man for that troubled time, and that he would be a mere incumbrance to them: living themselves for ambition, they despised his love of ease. Accustomed to deep stakes in the game of political hazard, they despised his piddling play. They looked on his cautious measures with the sort of scorn with which the gamblers at the ordinary, in Sir Walter Scott's novel, regarded Nigel's practice of never touching a card but when he was certain to win. He soon found that he was left out of their secrets. The King had, about this time, a dangerous attack of illness. The Duke of York, on receiving the news, returned from Holland. The sudden appearance of the detested Popish successor excited anxiety throughout the country. Temple was greatly amazed and disturbed. He hastened up to London and visited Essex, who professed to be astonished and mortified, but could not disguise a sneering smile. Temple then saw Halifax, who talked to him much about the pleasures of the country, the anxieties of office, and the vanity of all human things, but carefully avoided politics, and when the Duke's return was mentioned, only sighed, shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and lifted up his eyes and hands. In a short time Temple found that his two friends had been quizzing him; and that they had themselves sent for the Duke, in order that his Royal Highness might, if the King should die, be on the spot to frustrate the designs of Monmouth.

He was soon convinced, by a still stronger proof, that, though he had not exactly offended his master, or his colleagues, in the Cabinet, he had ceased to enjoy their confidence. The result of the general election had been decidedly unfavourable to the Government; and

Shaftesbury impatiently expected the day when the Houses were to meet. The King, guided by the advice of the inner Cabinet, de-

Loss of
confidence.

termined on a step of the highest importance. He told the Council that he had resolved to prorogue the new Parliament for a year, and requested them not to object; for he had, he said, considered the subject fully, and had made up his mind. All who were not in the secret were thunderstruck—Temple as much as any. Several members rose and entreated to be heard against the prorogation. But the King silenced them, and declared that his resolution was unalterable. Temple, greatly hurt at the manner in which both himself and the Council had been treated, spoke with great spirit. He would not, he said, disobey the King by objecting to a measure on which his Majesty was determined to hear no argument; but he would most earnestly entreat his Majesty, if the present Council was incompetent to advise him, to dissolve it and select another; for it was absurd to have councillors who did not counsel, and who were summoned only to be silent witnesses of the acts of others. The King listened courteously. But the members of the Cabinet resented this reproof highly; and from that day Temple was almost as much estranged from them as from Shaftesbury.

He wished to retire altogether from business. But just at this time Lord Russell, Lord Cavendish, and some other councillors of the popular party, waited on the King in a body, declared their strong disapprobation of his measures, and requested to be excused from attending any more at

Councillors'
disapproba-
tion.

council. Temple feared that if, at this moment, he also were to withdraw, he might be supposed to act in concert with those decided opponents of the Court, and to have determined on taking a course hostile to the Government. He, therefore, continued to go occasionally to the board, but he had no longer any real share in direction of public affairs.

At length the long term of the prorogation expired. In October, 1680, the Houses met; and the great question of the Exclusion was revived. Few parliamentary contests in our history appear to have called forth a greater display of talent;—none certainly ever called forth more violent passions. The whole

nation was convulsed by party spirit. The gentlemen of every county, the traders of every town, the boys at every public school, were divided into exclusionists and abhorers. The book-stalls were covered with tracts on the sacredness of hereditary right, on the omnipotence of Parliament, on the dangers of a disputed succession, on the dangers of a Popish reign. It was in the midst of this ferment that Temple took his seat, for the first time, in the House of Commons.

The occasion was a very great one. His talents, his long experience of affairs, his unspotted public character, the high posts which he had filled, seemed to mark him out as a man on whom much would depend. He acted like himself. He saw that, if he supported exclusion, he made the King and the heir-presumptive his enemies; and that, if he opposed it, he made himself an object of hatred to the unscrupulous and turbulent Shaftesbury. He neither supported nor opposed it. He quietly absented himself from the House. Nay, he took care, he tells us, never to discuss the question in any society, whatever. Lawrence Hyde, afterwards Earl of Rochester, asked him why he did not attend in his place. Temple replied that he acted according to Solomon's advice, neither to oppose the mighty, nor go about to stop the current of a river. The advice, whatever its value may be, is not to be found either in the canonical or apocryphal writings ascribed to Solomon. But Temple was much in the habit of talking about books which he had never read; and one of those books, we are afraid, was his Bible. Hyde answered, "You are a wise and a quiet man." And this might be true. But surely such wise and quiet men have no call to be members of Parliament in critical times.

A single session was quite enough for Temple. When the Parliament was dissolved, and another summoned at Oxford, he obtained an audience of the King, and begged to know whether his Majesty wished him to continue in Parliament. Charles, who had a singularly quick eye for the weaknesses of all who came near him, had no doubt seen through and through Temple, and rated the parliamentary support of so cool and guarded

a friend at its proper value. He answered good-naturedly, but we suspect a little contemptuously, "I doubt, as things stand, your coming into the House will not do much good. I think you may as well let it alone." Sir William accordingly informed his constituents that he should not again apply for their suffrages; and set off for Sheen, resolving never again to meddle with public affairs. He soon found that the King was displeased with him. Charles indeed, in his usual easy way, protested that he was not angry,—not at all. But in a few days he struck Temple's name out of the list of Privy Councillors. Why this was done Temple declares himself unable to comprehend. But surely it hardly required his long and extensive converse with the world to teach him that there are conjunctures when men think that all who are not with them are against them,—that there are conjunctures when a lukewarm friend, who will not put himself the least out of his way, who will make no exertion, who will run no risk, is more distasteful than an enemy. Charles had hoped that the fair character of Temple would add credit to an unpopular and suspected Government. But his Majesty soon found that this fair character resembled pieces of furniture which we have seen in the drawing-rooms of very precise old ladies, which are a great deal too white to be used. This exceeding niceness was altogether out of season. Neither party wanted a man who was afraid of taking a part, of incurring abuse, of making enemies. There were probably many good and moderate men who would have hailed the appearance of a respectable mediator. But Temple was not a mediator. He was merely a neutral.

At last, however, he had escaped from public life, and found himself at liberty to follow his favourite pursuits. His fortune was Easy fortune. easy. He had about fifteen hundred a-year, besides the Mastership of the Rolls in Ireland; an office in which he had succeeded his father, and which was then a mere sinecure for life, requiring no residence. His reputation both as a negotiator and a writer stood high. He resolved to be safe, to enjoy himself, and to let the world take its course; and he kept his resolution.

Darker times followed. The Oxford Parliament was dissolved. The Tories were triumphant. A terrible vengeance was

inflicted on the chiefs of the Opposition. Temple learned in his retreat the disastrous fate of several of his old colleagues

Darker times. in council. Shaftesbury fled to Holland. Russell died on the scaffold. Essex added a yet sadder and more fearful story to the bloody chronicles of the Tower. Monmouth clung in agonies of supplication round the knees of the stern uncle whom he had wronged, and tasted a bitterness worse than death—the bitterness of knowing that he had humbled himself in vain. A tyrant trampled on the liberties and religion of the realm. The national spirit swelled high under the oppression. Disaffection spread even to the strongholds of loyalty—to the cloisters of Westminster, to the schools of Oxford, to the guardroom of the household troops, to the very hearth and bed-chamber of the Sovereign. But the troubles which agitated the whole society did not reach the quiet Orangery in which Temple loitered away several years without once seeing the smoke of London. He now and then appeared in the circle at Richmond or Windsor. But the only expressions which he is recorded to have used during these perilous times were, that he would be a good subject, but that he had done with politics.

The Revolution came. Temple remained strictly neutral during the short struggle; and then transferred to the new settlement the same languid sort of loyalty which he had felt for his former masters. He paid court to William at Windsor, and William dined with him at Sheen. But in spite of the most pressing solicitations he refused to become Secretary of State. The refusal evidently proceeded only from his dislike of trouble and danger; and not, as some of his admirers would have us believe, from any scruple of conscience or honour. For he consented that his son should take the office of Secretary at War under the new Sovereigns. This unfortunate young man destroyed himself within a week after his appointment, from vexation at finding that his advice had led the King into some improper steps with regard to Ireland. He seems to have inherited his father's extreme sensibility to failure; without that singular prudence which kept his father out of all situations in which any serious failure was to be apprehended. The blow fell heavy on the family. They retired in deep dejection

to Moor Park, which they now preferred to Sheen, on account of the greater distance from London. In that spot,* then very secluded, Temple passed the remainder of his life. The air agreed with him. The soil was fruitful, and well suited to an experimental farmer and gardener. The grounds were laid out with the angular regularity which Sir William had admired in the flower-beds of Haarlem and the Hague. A beautiful rivulet, flowing from the hills of Surrey, bounded the domain. But a straight canal which, bordered by a terrace, intersected the garden, was probably more admired by the lovers of the picturesque in that age. The house was small, but neat and well furnished;—the neighbourhood very thinly peopled. Temple had no visitors, except a few friends who were willing to travel twenty or thirty miles in order to see him; and now and then a foreigner whom curiosity brought to have a look at the author of the Triple Alliance.

Here, in May 1694, died Lady Temple. From the time of her marriage we know little of her, except that her letters were always **Death of Lady Temple.** greatly admired, and that she had the honour to correspond constantly with Queen Mary. Lady Giffard, who, as far as appears, had always been on the best terms with her sister-in-law, still continued to live with Sir William.

But there were other inmates of Moor Park to whom a far higher interest belongs. An eccentric, uncouth, disagreeable, young Irishman, who had narrowly escaped plucking at Dublin, attended Sir William as an amanuensis, for twenty pounds a-year and his board,—dined at the second table, wrote bad verses in praise of his employer, and made love to a very pretty, dark-eyed young girl, who waited on Lady Giffard. Little did Temple imagine that the coarse exterior of his dependent concealed a genius equally suited to politics and to letters;—a genius destined to shake great kingdoms, to stir the laughter and the rage of millions, and to leave to posterity memorials which can perish only with the English language. Little did he think that the flirtation in his servants' hall, which he perhaps scarcely deigned to

* Mr. Courtenay (vol. ii., page 160) confounds Moor Park in Surrey, where Temple resided, with the Moor Park in Hertfordshire, which he praises in the Essay on Gardening.

make the subject of a jest, was the beginning of a long unprosperous love, which

Jonathan Swift.

was to be as widely famed as the passion of a Petrarch, or of Abelard.

Sir William's secretary was Jonathan Swift—Lady Giffard's waiting-maid was poor Stella.

Swift retained no pleasing recollections of Moor Park. And we may easily suppose a situation like his to have been intolerably painful to a mind haughty, irascible, and conscious of pre-eminence. Long after, when he stood in the Court of Requests with a circle of gartered Peers round him, or punned and rhymed with Cabinet Ministers over Secretary St. John's Mount-Pulciano, he remembered, with deep and sore feeling, how miserable he used to be for days together when he suspected that Sir William had taken something ill. He could hardly believe that he, the same Swift who chid the Lord Treasurer, rallied the Captain General, and confronted the pride of the Duke of Buckinghamshire with pride still more inflexible, could be the same being who had passed nights of sleepless anxiety in musing over a cross look, or a testy word of a patron. "Faith," he wrote to Stella, with bitter levity, "Sir William spoiled a fine gentleman." Yet in justice to Temple

Swift at Moor Park.

we must say, that there is no reason to think that Swift was more unhappy at Moor Park than he would have

been in a similar situation under any roof in England. We think also that the obligations which the mind of Swift owed to that of Temple were not inconsiderable. Every judicious reader must be struck by the peculiarities which distinguish Swift's political tracts from all similar works produced by mere men of letters. Let any person compare, for example, the Conduct of the Allies, or the Letter to the October Club, with Johnson's False Alarm, or Taxation no Tyranny, and he will be at once struck by the difference of which we speak. He may possibly

Jonathan and Swift.

think Johnson a greater man than Swift. He may possibly prefer Johnson's

style to Swift's. But he will at once acknowledge that Johnson writes like a man who has never been out of his study. Swift writes like a man who has passed his whole life in the midst of public business, and to whom the most important affairs of state are as familiar as his weekly pills.

"Turn him to any cause of policy,
The Gordian knot of it he will unloose,
Familiar as his garters."

The difference, in short, between a political pamphlet by Johnson, and a political pamphlet by Swift, is as great as the difference between an account of a battle by Dr. Southey and the account of the same battle by Colonel Napier. It is impossible to doubt that the superiority of Swift is to be, in a great measure, attributed to his long and close connection with Temple.

Indeed, remote as the alleys and flower-pots of Moor Park were from the haunts of the busy and the ambitious, Swift had ample opportunities of becoming acquainted with the hidden causes of many great events. William III. was in the habit of consulting Temple, and occasionally visited him. Of what passed between them very little is known. It is certain, however, that, when the Triennial Bill had been carried through the two Houses, his Majesty, who was exceedingly unwilling to pass it, sent the Earl of Portland to learn Temple's opinion. Whether Temple thought the bill in itself a good one does not appear; but he clearly saw how imprudent it must be in a prince, situated as William was, to engage in an altercation with his Parliament; and directed Swift to draw up a paper on the subject, which, however, did not convince the King.

The chief amusement of Temple's declining years was literature. After his final retreat from business, he wrote his very agreeable memoirs; corrected and transcribed many of his letters; and published several miscellaneous treatises, the best of which, we think, is that on Gardening. The style of his essays is, on the whole, excellent,—almost always pleasing, and now and then stately and splendid. The matter is generally of much less value; as our readers will readily believe when we inform them that Mr. Courtenay—a biographer,—that is to say, a literary vassal, bound by the immemorial law of his tenure to render homage, aids, reliefs, and all other customary services to his lord—avows that he cannot give an opinion about the essay on "Heroic Virtue," because he cannot read it without skipping;—a circumstance which strikes us as peculiarly strange, when we consider how long Mr. Courtenay was at the India Board, and how many

Temple's writing.

thousand paragraphs of the copious official eloquence of the East he must have perused.

One of Sir William's pieces, however, deserves notice, not, indeed, on account of its intrinsic merit, but on account of the light which it throws on some curious weaknesses of his character; and on account of the extraordinary effect which it produced on the republic of letters.

Literary controversy. A most idle and contemptible controversy had arisen in France touching the comparative merit of the ancient and modern writers. It was certainly not to be expected that, in that age, the question would be tried according to those large and philosophical principles of criticism which guided the judgments of Lessing, and of Herder. But it might have been expected, that those who undertook to decide the point, would at least take the trouble to read and understand the authors on whose merits they were to pronounce. Now it is no exaggeration to say that, among the disputants who clamoured, some for the ancients and some for the moderns, very few were decently acquainted with either ancient or modern literature, and not a single one was well acquainted with both. In Racine's amusing preface to the "Iphigénie," the reader may find noticed a most ridiculous mistake, into which one of the champions of the moderns fell about a passage in the *Alcestis* of Euripides. Another writer blames Homer for mixing the four Greek dialects—Doric, Ionic, Æolic, and Attic—just, says he, as if a French poet were to put Gascon phrases, and Picard phrases, into the midst of his pure Parisian writing. On the other hand, it is no exaggeration to say that the defenders of the ancients were entirely unacquainted with the greatest productions of later times; nor, indeed, were the defenders of the moderns better informed. The parallels which were instituted in the course of this dispute are inexpressibly ridiculous. Balzac was selected as the rival of Cicero. Corneille was declared to unite the merits of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. We should like to see a "Prometheus" after Corneille's fashion. The "Provincial Letters," masterpieces undoubtedly of reasoning, wit, and eloquence, were pronounced to be superior to all the writings of Plato, Cicero, and Lucian together—particularly in the art of dialogue—an art in which, as it happens,

Plato far excelled all men, and in which Pascal, great and admirable in other respects, is notoriously very deficient.

This childish controversy spread to England; and some mischievous demon suggested to Temple the thought of undertaking the defence of the ancients. As to ^{Defence of the} his qualifications for the ^{ancients.} task, it is sufficient to say, that he knew not a word of Greek. But his vanity, which, when he was engaged in the conflicts of active life and surrounded by rivals, had been kept in tolerable order by his discretion, now, when he had long lived in seclusion, and had become accustomed to regard himself as by far the first man of his circle, rendered him blind to his own deficiencies. In an evil hour he published an "Essay on Ancient and Modern Learning." The style of this treatise is very good—the matter ludicrous and contemptible to the last degree. There we read how Lycurgus travelled into India, and brought the Spartan laws from that country—how Orpheus and Musæus made voyages in search of knowledge, and how Orpheus attained to a depth of learning which has made him renowned in all succeeding ages—how Pythagoras passed twenty-two years in Egypt, and, after graduating there, spent twelve years more at Babylon, where the Magi admitted him *ad eundem*—how the ancient Brahmins lived two hundred years—how the earliest Greek philosophers foretold earthquakes and plagues, and put down riots by magic—and how much Ninus surpassed in abilities any of his successors on the throne of Assyria. The moderns, he owns, have found out the circulation of the blood; but, on the other hand, they have quite lost the art of magic; nor can any modern fiddler enchant fishes, fowls, and serpents by his performance. He tells us that "Thales, Pythagoras, Democritus, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus made greater progresses in the several empires of science than any of their successors have since been able to reach;" which is as much as if he had said the greatest names in British science are Merlin, Michael Scott, Dr. Sydenham, and Lord Bacon. Indeed, the manner in which he mixes the historical and the fabulous reminds us of those classical dictionaries, intended for the use of schools, in which Narcissus, the lover of himself, and Narcissus, the freedman of Claudius—Pollux,

the son of Jupiter and Leda, and Pollux, the author of the Onomasticon—are ranged under the same heading, and treated as personages equally real. The effect of this arrangement resembles that which would be produced by a dictionary of modern names, consisting of such articles as the following:—“Jones, William, an eminent Orientalist, and one of the Judges of the Supreme Court of Judicature in Bengal—Davy, a fiend, who destroys ships—Thomas, a foundling, brought up by Mr. Allworthy.” It is from such sources as these that Temple seems to have learned all that he knew about the ancients. He puts the story of Orpheus between the Olympic games, and the battle of Arbela; as if he had exactly as much reason for believing that Orpheus led beasts with his lyre, as we have for believing that there were races at Pisa, or that Alexander conquered Darius.

He manages little better when he comes to the moderns. He gives us a catalogue of those whom he regards as the greatest

omissions. Absurd wits of later times. It is sufficient to say that, in his list of Italians, he has omitted Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso; in his list of Spaniards, Lopé and Calderon; in his list of French, Pascal, Bossuet, Molière, Corneille, Racine, and Boileau; and in his list of English, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton.

In the midst of all this vast mass of absurdity one paragraph stands out pre-eminent. The doctrine of Temple—not a very comfortable one—is, that the human race is constantly degenerating; and that the oldest books in every kind are the best. In confirmation of this doctrine, he remarks that the Fables of Æsop are the best Fables, and the Letters of Phalaris the best Letters in the world. On the merit of the Letters of Phalaris he dwells with great warmth and with extraordinary felicity of language. Indeed, we could hardly select a more favourable specimen of the graceful and easy majesty to which his style sometimes

men, or men who passed for learned, such as Politian, have doubted the genuineness of these letters. But of these doubts he speaks with the greatest contempt. Now it is perfectly certain, first, that the letters are very bad;

secondly, that they are spurious; and thirdly, that, whether they be bad or good, spurious or genuine, Temple could know nothing of the matter; inasmuch as he was no more able to construe a line of them than to decipher an Egyptian obelisk.

This Essay, silly as it is, was exceedingly well received, both in England and on the Continent. And the reason is evident. The classical scholars, who saw its absurdity, were generally on the side of the ancients, and were inclined rather to veil than to expose the blunders of an ally; the champions of the moderns were generally as ignorant as Temple himself; and the multitude was charmed by his flowing and melodious diction. He was doomed, however, to smart, as he well deserved, for his vanity and folly.

Christchurch at Oxford was then widely and justly celebrated as a place where the lighter parts of classical learning were cultivated with success. With the deeper mysteries of philology neither the instructors nor the pupils had the smallest acquaintance. They fancied themselves Scaligers, as Bentley scornfully said, as soon as they could write a copy of Latin verses with only two or three small faults. From this College proceeded a new edition of the Letters of Phalaris, which were rare, and had been in request since the appearance of Temple's Essay. The nominal editor was Charles Boyle, a young man of noble family and promising parts; but some older members of the society lent their assistance. While this work was in preparation an idle quarrel, occasioned, it should seem, by the negligence and misrepresentations of a bookseller, arose between Boyle and the King's Librarian, Richard Bentley. Boyle, in the preface to his edition, inserted a bitter reflection on Bentley. Bentley revenged himself by proving that the Epistles of Phalaris were forgeries; and in his remarks on this subject treated Temple, not indecently, but with no great reverence.

Temple, who was quite unaccustomed to any but the most respectful usage, who, even while engaged in politics, had always shrunk from all rude collision, and had generally succeeded in avoiding it, and whose sensitiveness had been increased by many years of seclusion and flattery—was moved to most violent

resentment; complained, very unjustly, of Bentley's foul-mouthed raillery; and

Temple's
resentment. declared that he had commenced an answer, but had laid it aside, "having no mind to enter the lists with such a mean, dull, unmannerly pedant." Whatever may be thought of the temper which Sir William showed on this occasion, we cannot too highly applaud his discretion in not finishing and publishing his answer, which would certainly have been a most extraordinary performance.

He was not, however, without defenders. Like Hector, when struck down prostrate by Ajax, he was in an instant covered by a thick crowd of shields—

"ὄντις ἐδυνήσατο ποιμένα λαῶν
Οὐτάσαι οὐδὲ βαλεῖν· πρὶν γὰρ περίβησαν ἄριστοι,
Πουλυδάμας τε, καὶ Αἰνεΐας, καὶ δῖος Ἀγήνωρ,
Σαρπηδῶν τ' ἄρχος Λυκίων, καὶ Γλαυκὸς ἄμύμων."

Christchurch was up in arms; and though that college seems then to have been almost destitute of severe and accurate learning, no academical society could show a greater array of orators, wits, politicians,—bustling adventurers who united the superficial accomplishments of the scholar with the manners and arts of the man of the world; and this formidable body resolved to try how far smart repartees, well turned sentences, confidence, puffing, and intrigue could,—on the question whether a Greek book were or were not genuine,—supply the place of a little knowledge of Greek.

Out came the Reply to Bentley, bearing the name of Boyle, but in truth written by Atterbury, with the assistance of

Smalridge and others. A most remarkable book it is, and often reminds us of

Goldsmith's observation, that the French would be the best cooks in the world if they had any butcher's meat; for that they can make ten dishes out of a nettle-top. It really deserves the praise, whatever that praise may be worth, of being the best book ever written by any man on the wrong side of a question of which he was profoundly ignorant. The learning of the confederacy is that of a schoolboy, and not of an extraordinary schoolboy; but it is used with the skill and address of most able, artful, and experienced men; it is beaten out to the very thinnest leaf, and is disposed in such a way as to seem ten times larger than it is. The dexterity with which

they avoid grappling with those parts of the subject with which they know themselves to be incompetent to deal is quite wonderful. Now and then, indeed, they commit disgraceful blunders, for which old Busby, under whom they had studied, would have whipped them all round. But this circumstance only raises our opinion of the talents which made such a fight with such scanty means. Let our readers, who are not acquainted with the controversy, imagine a Frenchman who has acquired just English enough to read the Spectator with a dictionary, coming forward to defend the genuineness of "Rowley's Poems" against Percy and Farmer; and they will have some notion of the feat which Atterbury had the audacity to undertake, and which, for a time, it was really thought he had performed.

The illusion was soon dispelled. Bentley's answer for ever settled the question, and established his claim to the first place amongst classical scholars. Nor do those do him justice who represent the controversy as a battle between wit and learning. For, though there is a lamentable deficiency of learning on the side of Boyle, there is no want of wit on the side of Bentley. Other qualities too, as valuable as either wit or learning, appear conspicuously in Bentley's book;—a rare sagacity, an unrivalled power of combination, a perfect mastery of all the weapons of logic. He was greatly indebted to the furious outcry which the misrepresentations, sarcasms, and intrigues of his opponents had raised against him;—an outcry in which fashionable and political circles joined, and which was re-echoed by thousands who did not know whether Phalaris ruled in Sicily or in Siam. His spirit, daring even to rashness—self-confident, even to negligence—and proud, even to insolent ferocity—was awed for the first and for the last time—awed, not into meanness or cowardice, but into wariness and sobriety. For once he ran no risks; he left no crevice unguarded; he wantoned in no paradoxes;—above all he returned no railing for the railing of his enemies. In almost everything that he has written we can discover proofs of genius and learning. But it is only here that his genius and learning appear to have been constantly under the guidance of good sense and good temper. Here we find none of that besotted reliance on his own

Bentley's
answer.

powers and on his own luck, which he showed when he undertook to edit Milton; none of that perverted ingenuity which deforms so many of his notes on Horace; none of that disdainful carelessness by which he laid himself open to the keen and dexterous thrust of Middleton; none of that extravagant vaunting and savage scurrility by which he afterwards dishonoured his studies and profession, and degraded himself almost to the level of De Paucis.

Temple did not live to witness the utter and irreparable defeat of his champions. He died, indeed at a fortunate moment, just after the appearance of Boyle's book, and while all England was laughing at the way in which the Christchurch men had handled the pedant. In

Boyle's book, Temple was praised in the highest terms, and compared to Memmius—

not a very happy comparison; for the only particular information which we have about Memmius is, that in agitated times he thought it his duty to attend exclusively to politics; and that his friends could not venture, except when the Republic was quiet and prosperous, to intrude on him with their philosophical and poetical productions. It is on this account, that Lucretius puts up the exquisitely beautiful prayer for peace with which his poem opens,—

“Nam neque nos agere hoc patriæ tempore iniquo
Possumus æquo animo, nec Memmi clara propago
Talibus in rebus communi deesse saluti.”

This description is surely by no means applicable to a statesman who had, through the whole course of his life, carefully avoided exposing himself in seasons of trouble; who had repeatedly refused, in most critical conjunctures, to be Secretary of State; and who now, in the midst of revolutions, plots, foreign and domestic wars, was quietly writing nonsense about the visits of Lycurgus to the Brahmins, and the tunes which Arion played to the Dolphin.

We must not omit to mention that, while the controversy about Phalaris was raging, Swift, in order to show his zeal and attachment, wrote the “Battle of the Books.” —the earliest piece in which his peculiar talents are discernible. We may observe that the bitter dislike

of Bentley, bequeathed by Temple to Swift, seems to have been communicated by Swift to Pope, to Arbuthnot, and to others who continued to tease the great critic, long after he had shaken hands very cordially both with Boyle and with Atterbury.

Sir William Temple died at Moor Park in January, 1699. He appears to have suffered no intellectual decay. His heart was buried under a sun-dial

Death of Temple.

which still stands in his favourite garden. His body was laid in Westminster Abbey by the side of his wife; and a place hard by was set apart for Lady Giffard, who long survived him. Swift was his literary executor, and superintended the publication of his Letters and Memoirs, not without some acrimonious contests with the family.

Of Temple's character little more remains to be said. Burnet accuses him of holding irreligious opinions, and corrupting everybody who came near him. But the vague assertion of so rash and partial a writer as Burnet, about a

A vague assertion.

man with whom, as far as we know, he never exchanged a word, is of very little weight. It is, indeed, by no means improbable that Temple may have been a freethinker. The Osbornes thought him so when he was a very young man. And it is certain that a large proportion of the gentlemen of rank and fashion who made their entrance into society while the Puritan party was at the height of power, and while the memory of the reign of that party was still recent, conceived a strong disgust for all religion. The imputation was common between Temple and all the most distinguished courtiers of the age. Rochester and Buckingham were open scoffers, and Mulgrave very little better. Shaftesbury, though more guarded, was supposed to agree with them in opinion. All the three noblemen who were Temple's colleagues during the short time of his continuance in the Cabinet, were of very indifferent repute as to orthodoxy. Halifax, indeed, was generally considered as an atheist; but he solemnly denied the charge; and, indeed, the truth seems to be, that he was more religiously disposed than most of the statesmen of that age; though two impulses which were unusually strong in him—a passion for ludicrous images, and a passion for subtle speculations—sometimes prompted him

to talk on serious subjects in a manner which gave great and just offence. It is not unlikely that Temple, who seldom went below the surface of any question, may have been infected with the prevailing scepticism. All that we can say on the subject is, that there is no trace of impiety in his works; and that the ease with which he carried his election for an university, where the majority of the voters were clergymen, though it proves nothing as to his opinions, must, we think, be considered as proving that he was not, as Burnet seems to insinuate, in the habit of talking atheism to all who came near him.

Temple, however, will scarcely carry with him any great accession of authority to the side either of religion or of infidelity. He was no profound thinker. He was merely a man of lively parts and quick observation—a man of the world amongst men of letters—a man of letters amongst men of the world. Mere scholars were dazzled by the Ambassador and Cabinet councillor; mere politicians by the Essayist and Historian. But neither as a writer nor as a statesman can we allot to him any very high place. As

a man, he seems to us to have been excessively selfish, but very sober, wary, and far-sighted in his selfishness; to have known better than most people know what he really wanted in life; and to have pursued what he wanted with much more than ordinary steadiness and sagacity;—never suffering himself to be drawn aside either by bad or by good feelings. It was his constitution to dread failure more than he desired success—to prefer security, comfort, repose, leisure, to the turmoil and anxiety which are inseparable from greatness;—and this natural languor of mind, when contrasted with the malignant energy of the keen and restless spirits among whom his lot was cast, sometimes appears to resemble the moderation of virtue. But we must own, that he seems to us to sink into littleness and meanness when we compare him—we do not say with any high ideal standard of morality,—but with many of those frail men who, aiming at noble ends, but often drawn from the right path by strong passions and strong temptations, have left to posterity a doubtful and checkered fame.

Summary of
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