THE PICKERING MASTERS

POLITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS OF WILLIAM GODWIN

Volume 5. *Educational and Literary Writings*

First published 1993 by Pickering & Chatto (Publishers) Limited
Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA
Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA
Godwin, William
Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin. – (Pickering Masters Series)
I. Title II. Philp, Mark III. Series
320.01
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA
A catalogue record for this title is available from the Library of Congress
ISBN-13: 978-1-85196-026-2 (set)
Typeset by Waveney Typesetters, Norfolk

CONTENTS

AN ACCOUNT OF THE SEMINARY

That will be opened

On MONDAY the FOURTH Day of AUGUST, At EPSOM in SURREY, For the INSTRUCTION of TWELVE PUPILS IN The GREEK, LATIN, FRENCH, and ENGLISH Languages.

LONDON:
Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand.
M. DCC. LXXXIII.

Of whom information respecting other Particulars may be received.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE SEMINARY

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

An Account of the Seminary that will be opened on Monday the Fourth Day of August, at Epsom in Surrey, for the Instruction of Twelve Pupils in the Greek, Latin, French, and English Languages (London, T. Cadell, 1783). The present text is based on the single edition to appear in Godwin's lifetime. A guide to the principles of textual treatment will be found in volume 1.

An Account of the Seminary, published anonymously, was advertised in the *Morning Herald* on 2 July 1783. It was written as a prospectus for Godwin's planned school at Epsom, but it failed to attract enough pupils and he was forced to abandon the experiment.

It was reviewed in two journals. The *Gentleman's Magazine* observed that 'Men of genius seldom will submit to the drudgery of education', and commended the author for his 'singular but just observations' on this apparently exhausted subject. It described Godwin's plan as 'ingenious, without being romantic, and deeply speculative, yet strictly practicable', and ended by hoping for its practical success.[1] The *Monthly Review* was more cautious. It noted that Godwin was critical of Rousseau - 'that singularly ingenious, though visionary and paradoxical writer' - but was sceptical about how his plan would work in practice, and refused to give an opinion on 'an experiment that is yet under trial'.[2]

NOTES

1. *Gentleman's Magazine,* 53 (August 1783), 688.

2. *Monthly Review*, 70 (January 1784), 79.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE SEMINARY, *&c.*

The two principal objects of human power are government and education. They have accordingly engrossed a very large share in the disquisitions of the speculative in all ages. The subject of the former indeed is man, already endowed with his greatest force of body, and arrived at the exercise of his intellectual powers: the subject of the latter is man, as yet shut up in the feebleness of childhood, and the imbecility of inexperience. Civil society is great and unlimited in its extent; the time has been, when the whole known world was / in a manner united in one community: but the sphere of education has always been limited. It is for nations to produce the events, that enchant the imagination, and ennoble the page of history: infancy must always pass away in the unimportance of mirth, and the privacy of retreat. That government however is a theme so much superior to education, is not perhaps so evident, as we may at first imagine.

It is indeed wider in its extent, but it is infinitely less absolute in its power. The state of society is incontestibly artificial; the power of one man over another must be always derived from convention, or from conquest; by nature we are equal. The necessary consequence is, that government must always depend upon the opinion of the governed. Let the most oppressed people under heaven once change their mode of thinking, and they are free. But the inequality of parents and children is the law of our / nature, eternal and uncontrolable. - Government is very limited in its power of making men either virtuous or happy; it is only in the infancy of society that it can do any thing considerable; in its maturity it can only direct a few of our outward actions. But our moral dispositions and character depend very much, perhaps entirely, upon education. - Children indeed are weak and imbecil; but it is the imbecility of spring, and not that of autumn; the imbecility that verges towards power, and not that is already exhausted with performance. To behold heroism in its infancy, and immortality in the bud, must be a most attractive object. To mould those pliant dispositions, upon which the happiness of multitudes may one day depend, must be infinitely important.

Proportionable to what we have stated to be the importance of the subject, is the attention that has been afforded it in the republic of letters. The brightest / wits, and the profoundest philosophers have emulated each other in their endeavours to elucidate so valuable a theme. In vain have pedants urged the stamp of antiquity, and the approbation of custom; there is scarcely the scheme so visionary, the execution of which has not at some time or other been attempted. Of the writers upon this interesting subject, he perhaps that has produced the most valuable treatise is Rousseau.[a] If men of equal abilities have explored this ample field, I know of none, however, who have so thoroughly investigated the first principles of the science, or who have treated it so much at large. If he have indulged to a thousand agreeable visions, and wandered in the pursuit of many a specious paradox, he has however richly repaid us for this defect, by the profoundest researches, and the most solid discoveries.

[a]Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), philosopher of Geneva; his *Emilius; or, An Essay on Education* (1762), translated from the French by Mr Nugent (2 vols, 1763).

I have borrowed so many of my ideas from this admirable writer, that I thought / it necessary to make this acknowledgement in the outset. The learned reader will readily

perceive, that if I have not scrupled to profit from his discoveries, at least I have freely and largely dissented from him, where he appeared to me to wander from the path of truth. For my own part, I am persuaded that it can only be by striking off something of inflexibility from his system, and something of pedantry from the common one, that we can expect to furnish a medium, equally congenial to the elegance of civilization, and the manliness of virtue.

In pursuance of these principles it shall be my first business to enquire, whether or not the languages ought to make any part of a perfect system of education; and if they ought, at what time they should be commenced. The study of them does indeed still retain its ground in our public schools and universities. But it has received a rude / shock from some writers of the present age; nor has any attack been more formidable, than that of the author of Emile.[b] Let us endeavour to examine the question, neither with the cold prejudice of antiquity on the one hand; nor on the other, with the too eager thirst of novelty, and unbounded admiration of the geniuses, by whom it has been attacked.

[b] cf. *Emiitus,* i. 128-30.

When we look back to the venerable ancients, we behold a class of writers, if not of a much higher rank, at least of a very different character, from the moderns. One natural advantage they indisputably possessed. The field of nature was all their own. It had not yet been blasted by any vulgar breath, or touched with a sacrilegious hand. Its fairest flowers had not been culled, and its choicest sweets rifled before them. As they were not encumbered and hedged in with the multitude of their predecessors, they did not servilely borrow their / knowledge from books; they read it in the page of the universe. They studied nature in all her romantic scenes, and all her secret haunts. They studied men in the various ranks of society, and in different nations of the world. I might add to this several other advantages. Of these the noble freedom of mind that was characteristic of the republicans of Greece and Rome, and that has scarcely any parallel among ourselves, would not be the least.

Agreeably to these advantages, they almost every where, particularly among the Greeks, bear upon them the stamp of originality. All copies are feeble and unmarked. They sacrifice the plainness of nature to the gaudiness of ornament, and the tinsel of wit. But the ancients are full of a noble and affecting simplicity. By one touch of nature and observation they paint a scene more truly, than their successors are able to do in whole wire-drawn[a] pages. In description / they are unequalled. Their eloquence is fervent, manly and sonorous. Their thoughts are just, natural, independent and profound. The pathos of Virgil, and the sublimity of Homer, have never been surpassed.[b] And as their knowledge was not acquired in learned indolence, they knew how to join the severest application with the brightest genius. Accordingly in their style they have united simplicity, eloquence and harmony, in a manner of which the moderns have seldom had even an idea. The correctness of a Caesar, and the sonorous period of a Cicero; the majesty of a Virgil, and the politeness of a Horace, are such as no living language can express.[c]

[a] Drawn out with elaborate subtlety.

[b] Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BC), Roman poet; Homer (probably 8th century BC), Greek epic poet.

[c] Gaius Julius Caesar (100-44 BC), Roman general, statesman and historian, who earned praise for the lucid

style of his *Commentaries on the Gallic War;* Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC), Roman orator and statesman, who was celebrated for the complex periodic style of his oratory and prose treatises; Quintus Horatius Flaccus {65-8 BC), who, like Virgil, was a leading poet of the Augustan Age 44 BC-AD 17, and was famous for his urbanity.

It is the remark of a certain old-fashioned writer, 'The form of the world passeth away.'[d] A century or two ago the greatest wits were known to have pathetically lamented, that the writers, of whose merits I have been speaking, were handed down to us in so mutilated a condition. / Now it seems very probable, that, if their works were totally annihilated, it would scarcely call forth a sigh from the refined geniuses of the present age. It is certainly very possible to carry the passion for antiquity to a ridiculous extreme. No man can reasonably deny, that it is by us only that the true system of the universe has been ascertained, and that we have made very valuable improvements upon many of the arts. No man can question that some of our English poets have equalled the ancients in sublimity, and that, to say the least, our neighbours, the French, have emulated the elegance of their composition in a manner, that is very far indeed from contempt. From these concessions however we are by no means authorised to infer their inutility.

[d] 1 John 2: 17 (adapted).

But I shall be told that in the first revival of letters the study of the ancient languages might indeed be very proper; / but since that time we have had so many excellent translations of every thing they contain, that to waste the time, and exhaust the activity of our youth in the learning of Latin and Greek, is to very little purpose indeed. Translation! what a strange word! To me I confess it appears the most unaccountable invention, that ever entered into the mind of man. To distil the glowing conceptions, and to travesty the beautiful language of the ancients, through the medium of a language estranged to all its peculiarities and all its elegancies. The best thoughts and expressions of an author, those that distinguish one writer from another, are precisely those that are least capable of being translated. And who are the men we are to employ in this promising business? Original genius disdains the unmeaning drudgery, A mind that has one feature resembling the ancients, will scarcely stoop to be their translator. The persons then, to whom the performance / must be committed, are persons of cool elegance. Endowed with a little barren taste, they must be inanimate enough to tread with laborious imbecility in the footsteps of another. They must be eternally incapable of imbibing the spirit, and glowing with the fire of their original. But we shall seldom come off so well as this. The generality of translators are either on the one hand mere pedants and dealers in words, who, understanding the grammatical construction of a period, never gave themselves the trouble to enquire, whether it conveyed either sentiment or instruction; or on the other hand mere writers for hire, the retainers of a bookseller, men who translate Homer from the French, and Horace out of Creech.[a]

[a] Alluding to *The Iliad of Homer... Done from the French by Mr Ozell; and by him compar'd with the Greek* (1712); Thomas Creech (1659-1700), translator and headmaster of Sherborne School 1694-6; his *The Odes, Satyrs, and Epistles of Horace. Done into English* (1684), which had limited success.

Let it not be said that I am now talking at random. Let us descend to examples. We need not be afraid of instancing in the most favourable. I believe / it is generally allowed that Mr Pope's Iliad is the very best version that was ever made out of one language into another.[b] It

must be confessed to exhibit very many poetical beauties. As a trial of skill, as an instance of what can be effected upon so forlorn a hope, it must ever be admired. But were I to search for a true idea of the style and composition of Homer, I think I should rather recur to the verbal translation in the margin of the original, than to the version of Pope. Homer is the simplest and most unaffected of poets. Of all the writers of elegance and taste that ever existed, his translator is the most ornamented. We acknowledge Homer by his loose and flowing robe, that does not constrain a muscle of his frame. But Pope presents himself in the close and ungraceful habit of modern times;

[b] Alexander Pope (1688-1744), poet and critic; his translation of *The Iliad of Homer* (1715-20).

'Glittering with gems, and stiff with woven gold.'[c]

[c] Quotation unidentified.

No, let us for once conduct ourselves with honesty and generosity. If we will / not study the ancients in their own nervous[a] and manly page, let us close their volumes for ever. I had rather, says the amiable philosopher of Chaeronea, it should be said of me, that there never was such a man as Plutarch, than that Plutarch was ill-natured, arbitrary, and tyrannical.[b] And were I the bard of Venusia, sure I am, I had rather be entirely forgotten, than not be known for the polite, the spirited, and the elegant writer I really was.[c]

[a] Vigorous, forcible.

[b] Plutarch (c. AD 46-c. 120), Greek biographer, historian and moral philosopher who was born at Chaeronea in Boeotia; cf. his *De Superstitione,* 169-70, in *Moralia* (see note to p. 204).

[c] i.e. Horace, who was born in Venusia (Venosa, in Apulia, S. Italy).

To converse with the accomplished, is the obvious method by which to become accomplished ourselves. This general observation is equally applicable to the study of polite writers of our own and of other countries. But there are some reasons, upon account of which we may expect to derive a more perceptible advantage from the ancients. They carried the art of composition to greater heights than any of the moderns. Their / writers were almost universally of a higher rank in society, than ours. There did not then exist the temptation of gain to spur men on to the profession of an author. An industrious modern will produce twenty volumes, in the time that Isocrates employed to polish one oration.[d]

[d] Isocrates (436-338 BC), Athenian orator, known for the complex and highly wrought style of his rhetorical prose.

Another argument flows from the simple circumstance of their writing in a different language. Of all the requisites to the attainment either of a style of our own, or a discernment in that of others, the first is grammar. Without this, our ideas must be always vague and desultory. Respecting the delicacies of composition, we may guess, but we can never decide and demonstrate. Now, of the minutiae of grammar, scarcely any man ever attained a just knowledge, who was acquainted with only one language. And if the study of others be the surest, I will venture also to pronounce it the / easiest method for acquiring a mastery in philology.

From what has been said, I shall consider this conclusion as sufficiently established, that the languages ought at some time to be learned by him who would form to himself a perfect

character. I proceed to my second enquiry, at what time the study of them should be commenced? And here I think this to be the best general answer: at the age of ten years.

In favour of so early a period one reason may be derived from what I have just been mentioning. The knowledge of more languages than one, is almost an indispensible prerequisite to the just understanding either of the subject of grammar in particular, or of that of style in general. Now if the cultivation of elegance and propriety be at all important, it cannot be entered upon / too soon, provided the ideas are already competent to the capacity of the pupil. The Roman Cornelia, who never suffered a provincial accent, or a grammatical barbarism in the hearing of her children, has always been cited with commendation; and the subsequent rhetorical excellence of the Gracchi has been in a great degree ascribed to it.[a] Fluency, purity and ease are to be acquired by insensible degrees; and against habits of this kind I apprehend there can be no objection.

[a] Cornelia (2nd century BC), wife of Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, the censor (d. 154 BC), Roman matron celebrated for her virtue and accomplishments, whose surviving epistles are remarkable for their purity of diction. After the death of her husband she undertook the education of her twelve children, including the two famous tribunes, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus (c. 164-133 BC) and Gaius Sempronius Gracchus (d. 121 BC).

Another argument of still greater importance is, that the knowledge of languages has scarcely ever been mastered, but by those, the commencement of whose acquaintance with them was early. To be acquainted with any science slightly and superficially, can in my opinion be productive of little advantage. But such an acquaintance with languages must be very useless indeed. What benefit can / it be expected that we should derive from an author, whom we cannot peruse with facility and pleasure? The study of such an author will demand a particular strength of resolution, and aptitude of humour.[b] He can scarcely become the favourite companion of our retirement, and the never-failing solace of our cares. Something of slow and saturnine must be the necessary accompaniment of that disposition, that can conquer the difficulties of such a pursuit. And accordingly we find that the classics and the school are generally quitted together, even by persons of taste, who have not acquired a competent mastery of them in their course of education. Very few indeed have been those, who, estranged to the languages till the age of manhood, have after that period obtained such a familiarity with them, as could ever be productive of any considerable advantage. /

[b] Disposition.

Brutes and savages are totally unacquainted with lassitude and spleen, the lust of variety, and the impatience of curiosity. In a state of society our ideas habitually succeed in a certain proportion, and an employment that retards their progress, speedily becomes disagreeable and tedious. But children, not having yet felt this effect of civilization, are not susceptible to this cause of disgust. They are endowed with a pliableness and versatility of mind, that with a little attention and management may easily be turned to any pursuit. Their understandings not yet preoccupied, they have a singular facility of apprehending, and strength of retention. It is certain this pliableness and facility are very liable to abuse. It is not easy to believe, that they were given to learn words without meaning; terms of art, not understood by the pupil; the systems of theologians, and the jargon of metaphysics. But then neither were they given without a capacity / of being turned to advantage. And it

should seem that it could not be a very fallacious antidote to abuse, to confine our instructions to such kinds of knowledge, as are of the highest importance, and are seldom learned with success, and even scarcely attainable, at any other period.

Let it be observed that I have riot fixed upon the age or ten years at random. It is the observation of Rousseau; Both children and men are essentially feeble.[a] Children, because however few be their wants, they are unable to supply them. Men, in a state of society, because whatever be their absolute strength, the play of the imagination renders their desires yet greater. There is an intermediate period, in which our powers having made some progress, and the artificial and imaginary wants being unknown, we are relatively strong.[b] And this he represents as the principal period / of instruction. This remark is indeed still more striking, when applied to a pupil, the progress of whose imagination is sedulously retarded. But it is not destitute either of truth or utility in the most general application we can possibly give it. Let it be observed, that Rousseau fixes the commencement of this period at twelve years. I would choose to take it at ten.

[a] cf. *Emilius,* i. 78,

[b] cf. Rousseau's discussion of the 'third state of infancy', *Emilius,* i. 231-3.

However we may find it convenient to distribute the productions of nature into classes, and her operations into epochas,[c] yet let it be remembered, that her progress is silent and imperceptible. Between a perfect animal and vegetable, the distinction is of the highest order. Between distant periods we may remark the most important differences. But the gradations of nature are uninterrupted. Of her chain every link is compleat. As therefore I shall find in commencing at ten years, that my time will be barely / sufficient for the purposes to which I would appropriate it, I consider this circumstance as sufficient to determine my election. A youth of ten years is omnipotent, if we contrast him with a youth of eight.

[c] Epochs, ages.

But if the languages constitute so valuable a part of a just system of education, the next question is, in what manner they are to be taught. Indeed, I believe, if the persons employed in the business of education had taken half the pains to smooth the access to this department of literature, that they have employed to plant it round with briars and thorns, its utility and propriety, in the view we are now considering it, would scarcely have been questioned.

There is something necessarily disgusting in the forms of grammar. Grammar therefore is made in our public schools the business of a twelvemonth. / Rules are heaped upon rules with laborious stupidity. To render them the more formidable, they are presented to our youth in the very language, the first principles of which they are designed to teach. For my own part, I am persuaded the whole business of grammar may be dispatched in a fortnight. I would only teach the declensions of nouns, and the inflexions of verbs. For the rest, nothing is so easily demonstrated, as that the auxiliary sciences are best communicated in connection with their principals. Chronology, geography, are never so thoroughly understood, as by him that treats them literally as the handmaids of history. He, who is instructed in Latin with clearness and accuracy, will never be at a loss for the rules of grammar.

But to complete the disgust we seem so careful to inspire, the learned languages are ever surrounded with the severity / of discipline; and it would probably be thought little short of sacrilege to discompose their features with a smile. Such a mode of proceeding can never be sufficiently execrated.

Indeed, I shall be told, 'this is the time to correct the native vices of the mind. In childhood the influence of pain and mortification is comparatively trifling. What then can be more judicious than to accumulate upon this period, what must otherwise fall with tenfold mischief upon the age of maturity?'[a] In answer to this reasoning, let it be first considered, how many there are, who by the sentence of nature are called out of existence, before they can live to reap these boasted advantages. Which of you is there, that has not at some time regretted that age, in which a smile is ever upon the countenance, and peace and serenity at the bottom of the heart? How is it you can consent to / deprive these little innocents of an enjoyment, that slides so fast away? How is it you can find in your heart to pall these fleeting years with bitterness and slavery? The undesigning gaiety of youth has the strongest claim upon your humanity. There is not in the world a truer object of pity, than a child terrified at every glance, and watching, with anxious uncertainty, the caprices of a pedagogue. If he survive, the liberty of manhood is dearly bought by so many heart aches. And if he die, happy to escape your cruelty, the only advantage he derives from the sufferings you have inflicted, is that of not regretting a life, of which he knew nothing but the torments.

[a] *Emilius,* i. 76 (adapted).

But who is it that has told you, that the certain, or even the probable consequences of this severity are beneficial? Nothing is so easily proved, as that the human mind is pure and spotless, as it came from the hands of God, and that / the vices of which you complain, have their real source in those shallow and contemptible precautions, that you pretend to employ against them. Of all the conditions to which we are incident, there is none so unpropitious to whatever is ingenuous and honourable, as that of a slave. It plucks away by the root all sense of dignity, and all manly confidence. In those nations of antiquity, most celebrated for fortitude and heroism, their youth had never their haughty and unsubmitting neck bowed to the inglorious yoke of a pedagogue. To borrow the idea of that gallant assertor of humanity, sir Richard Steele: I will not say that our public schools have not produced many great and illustrious characters; but I will assert, there was not one of those characters, that would not have been more manly and venerable, if they had never been subjected to this vile and sordid condition.[a] /

[a]Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729), who collaborated with Joseph Addison (1672-1719) in the production of the periodicals *The Tatler* (1709-11) and *The Spectator* (1711— 12, 1714); the passage from 'I will not... ' to the end of the paragraph is loosely quoted from *The Spectator,* No, 157, 30 August 1711.

Having thus set aside the principal corruptions of modern education, the devising methods for facilitating the acquisition of languages will not be difficult. The first books put into the hands of a pupil should be simple, interesting, and agreeable. By their means, he will perceive a reasonableness and a beauty in the pursuit. If he be endowed by nature with a clear understanding, and the smallest propensity to literature, he will need very little to stimulate him either from hope or fear.

Attentive to the native gaiety of youth, the periods, in which his attention is required,

though frequent in their returns, should in their duration be short and inoppressive. The pupil should do nothing merely because he is seen or heard by his preceptor. If he have companions, still nothing more is requisite, than that degree of silence and order, which shall hinder the attention of any from being / involuntarily diverted. The pupil has nothing to conceal, and no need of falshood. The approbation of the preceptor respects only what comes directly under his cognizance, and cannot be disguised. Even here, remembering the volatility and sprightliness, inseparable from the age, humanity will induce him not to animadvert with warmth upon the appearances of a casual distraction, but he will rather solicit the return of attention by gentleness, than severity.

But of all rules, the most important is that of preserving an uniform, even tenour of conduct. Into the government of youth passion and caprice should never enter. The gentle yoke of the preceptor should be confounded as much as possible, with the eternal laws of nature and necessity. The celebrated maxim of republican government should be adopted here. The laws should speak, and the magistrate be silent.[b] The constitution / should be for ever unchangeable and independent of the character of him that administers it.

[b] A republican commonplace ultimately deriving from Aristotle, *Politics,* 1287, A 30-2.

Nothing can certainly be more absurd than the attempt to educate children by reason. We may be sure they will treat every determination as capricious, that shocks their inclination. The *chef d'æuvre* of a good education is to form a reasonable human being; and yet they pretend to govern a child by argument and ratiocination. This is to enter upon the work at the wrong end, and to endeavour to convert the fabric itself into one of the tools by which it is constructed. The laws of the preceptor ought to be as final and inflexible, as they are mild and humane.

There is yet another method for facilitating the acquisition of languages, so just in itself, and so universally practicable, that I cannot forbear mentioning / it. It is that of commencing with the modern languages, French for instance in this country. These in the education of our youth, are universally postponed to what are stiled the learned languages. I shall perhaps be told that modern tongues being in a great measure derived from the Latin, the latter is very properly to be considered as introductory to the former. But why then do we not adopt the same conduct in every instance? Why to the Latin do we not premise the Greek, and to the Greek the Coptic and Oriental tongues? Or how long since is it, that the synthetic has been proved so much superior to the analytic mode of instruction? In female education, the modern languages are taught without all this preparation; nor do I find that our fair rivals are at all inferior to the generality of our sex in their proficiency. With the youth of sense and spirit of both sexes, the learning of French is usually considered, rather as a pleasure, / than a burden. Were the Latin communicated with the same mild and accommodating manner, I think I may venture to pronounce, that thus taken in the second place, there will be no great difficulty in rendering it equally attractive.

I would just observe that there is an obvious propriety in the French language being learned under the same direction, as the Latin and Greek. The pursuit of this elegant accomplishment ought at no time to be entirely omitted. But the attention of youth is distracted between the method of different masters, and their amiable confidence, in the direction under which they are placed, entirely ruined by mutability and inconstance. The same observation may also be applied here, as in the learned languages. The attention of the

pupil should be confined as much as possible to the most classical writers; and the French would furnish a most useful subsidiary in a course of / history. Let me add, that though I have prescribed the age of ten years, as the most eligible for the commencement of classical education, I conceive there would be no impropriety in taking up the modern language so early as nine.

Such then is the kind of subjection, that the learning of languages demands. The question that recurs upon us is; How far this subjection may fairly be considered as exceptionable, and whether its beneficial consequences do not infinitely outweigh the trifling inconveniences that may still be ascribed to it?

But there is another subject that demands our consideration. Modern education not only corrupts the heart of our youth, by the rigid slavery to which it condemns them, it also undermines their reason, by the unintelligible jargon with which they are overwhelmed in the first instance, and the little attention, / that is given to the accommodating their pursuits to their capacities in the second.

Nothing can have a greater tendency to clog and destroy the native activity of the mind, than the profuseness with which the memory of children is loaded, by nurses, by mothers, by masters. What can more corrupt the judgment, than the communicating, without measure, and without end, words entirely devoid of meaning? What can have a more ridiculous influence upon our taste, than for the first verses to which our attention is demanded, to consist of such strange and uncouth jargon? To complete the absurdity, and that we may derive all that elegance and refinement from the study of languages, that it is calculated to afford, our first ideas of Latin are to be collected from such authors, as Corderius, Erasmus, Eutropius, and the Selectae.[a] To begin indeed with the classical writers, is not the way / to smooth the path of literature. I am of opinion however, that one of the above-mentioned authors will be abundantly sufficient. Let it be remembered, that the passage from the introductory studies to those authors, that form the very essence of the language, will be much facilitated by the previous acquisition of the French.

[a] Mathurin Cordier (1478-1564), French educationalist whose Latin manual for beginners was translated by John Clarke as *Corderii Colloquiorum Centuria Selecta; or, A Select Century of Cordery's Colloquies* (1718), which went through many eighteenth-century editions; Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1467-1536), celebrated Dutch humanist; Eutropius, Roman historian who published during the reign of the emperor Valens (AD 364-378) a survey of Roman history in ten books; the *Selectae,* probably alluding to the educational manuals of Jean Heuzet (c. 1660-1728), French humanist, *Selectae e profanis scriptoribus historiae* (1726, London, 1734), and *Selectae e Veteri Teslamento historiae* (1727, London 1736); both reprinted numerous times.

Having spoken of the article of memory, let me be permitted to mention the practice, that has of late gained so great a vogue; the instructing children in the art of spouting and acting plays. Of all the qualities incident to human nature, the most universally attractive is simplicity, the most disgusting is affectation. Now what idea has a child of the passions of a hero, and the distresses of royalty? But he is taught the most vehement utterance, and a thousand constrained cadences, without its being possible that he should see in them, either reasonableness or propriety. /

I would not have a child required to commit any thing to memory more than is absolutely necessary. If, however, he be a youth of spirit, he will probably learn some things in this manner, and the sooner because it is not expected of him. It will be of use for him to repeat these with a grave and distinct voice, accommodated to those cadences, which the

commas, the periods, and the notes of interrogation, marked in this author, may require, but without the smallest instruction to humour the gay, or to sadden the plaintive.

Another article, that makes a conspicuous figure in the education of our youth, is composition. Before they are acquainted with the true difference between verse and prose, before they are prepared to decide upon the poetical merit of Lily and Virgil, they are called upon to write Latin verse themselves.[b] In the same manner some of their first / prose compositions are in a dead language. An uniform, petty, ridiculous scheme is laid down, and within that scheme all their thoughts are to be circumscribed.

[b] William Lily (? 1468—1522), grammarian and high master of St Paul's School from 1512; his *Grammatices Rudimenta* (1527), revised as *A Shorte Introduction of Grammar* (1549, reprinted numerous times), which concludes with Latin verses exhorting his readers to good habits of study.

Composition is certainly a desirable art, and I think can scarcely be entered upon too soon. It should be one end after which I would endeavour, and the mode of effecting it will be farther illustrated in the sequel, to solicit a pupil to familiarity, and to induce him to disclose his thoughts upon such subjects as were competent to his capacity, in an honest and simple manner. After having thus warmed him by degrees, it might be proper to direct him to write down his thoughts, without any prescribed method, in the natural and spontaneous manner, in which they flowed from his mind. Thus the task of throwing his reflections upon paper would be facilitated to him, and his style gradually / formed, without teaching him any kind of restraint and affectation. To the reader who enters at all into my ideas upon the subject, it were needless to subjoin, that I should never think of putting a youth upon the composition of verse.

From all I have said it will be sufficiently evident, that it would be a constant object with me to model my instructions to the capacity of my pupil. They are books, that beyond all things teach us to talk without thinking, and use words without meaning. To this evil there can be no complete remedy. But shall we abolish literature, because it is not unaccompanied with inconveniences? Shall we return to a state of savage ignorance, because all the advantages of civilization have their attendant disadvantages?

The only remedy that can be applied, is to accustom ourselves to clear and accurate / investigation. To prefer, wherever we can have recourse to it, the book of nature to any human composition. To begin with the latter as late as may be consistent with the most important purposes of education. And when we do begin, so to arrange our studies, as that we may commence with the simplest and easiest sciences, and proportion our progress to the understanding of the pupil.

With respect to grammar in particular, the declensions of nouns, and the inflexions of verbs, we may observe, that to learn words to which absolutely no ideas are affixed, is not to learn to think loosely, and to believe without being convinced. These certainly can never corrupt the mind. And I suppose no one will pretend, that to learn grammar, is to be led to entertain inaccurate notions of the subjects, about which it is particularly conversant. On the contrary, / the ideas of grammar are exceedingly clear and accurate. It has, in my opinion, all those advantages, by which the study of geometry is usually recommended, without any of its disadvantages. It tends much to purge the understanding, to render it close in its investigations, and sure in its decisions. It introduces more easily and intelligibly than mathematical science, that most difficult of all the mental operations, abstraction. It

imperceptibly enlarges our conceptions, and generalises our ideas.

But if to read its authors, be the most valuable purpose of learning a language, the grammar will not be sufficient. Other books will be necessary. And how shall these be chosen, so as not to leave behind us the understanding of our pupil? Shall we introduce him first to the sublime flights of Virgil, the philosophical investigations of a Cicero, or the refined / elegance and gay satire of Horace? Alas! if thus introduced unprepared to the noblest heights of science, how can it be expected that his understanding should escape the shipwreck, and every atom of common sense not be dashed and scattered ten thousand ways?

The study then I would here introduce, should be that of history. And that this study is not improper to the age with which I connect it, is the second point I would endeavour to demonstrate.

But is history, I shall be asked, the study so proper for uninstructed minds? History, that may in some measure be considered as concentring in itself the elements of all other sciences? History, by which we are informed of the rise and progress of every art, and by whose testimony the comparative excellence of every art is ascertained? History, the / very testimony of which is not to be admitted, without the previous trial of metaphysical scrutiny, and philosophic investigation? Lastly, History, that is to be considered as a continual illustration of the arts of fortification and tactics; but above all of politics, with its various appendages, commerce, manufacture, finances?

To all this, I calmly answer, No: it is not history in any of these forms, that constitutes the science to which I would direct the attention of my pupil. Of the utility of the history of arts and sciences, at least, as a general study, I have no very high opinion. But were my opinion ever so exalted, I should certainly chuse to postpone this study for the present. I should have as little to do with tactics and fortification. I would avoid as much as possible the very subject of war. Politics, commerce, finances, might easily be deferred. I would keep / far aloof from the niceties of chronology, and the dispute of facts. I would not enter upon the study of history through the medium of epitome. I would even postpone the general history of nations, to the character and actions of particular men.

Many of the articles I have mentioned, serve to compose the pedantry of history. Than history, no science has been more abused. It has been studied from ostentation; it has been studied with the narrow views of little minds; it has been warped to serve a temporary purpose. Ingenious art has hung it round with a thousand subtleties, and a thousand disputes. The time has at length arrived, when it requires an erect understanding, and a penetrating view, above the common rate, to discover the noble purposes, which this science is most immediately calculated to subserve. /

In a word, the fate of history has been like that of travelling. The institution has been preserved, but its original use is lost. One man travels from fashion, and another from pride. One man travels to measure buildings, another to examine pictures, and a third perhaps to learn to dance. Scarcely any remember that its true application is to study men and manners. Perhaps a juster idea cannot be given of the science we are considering, than that which we may deduce from a reflection of Rousseau. 'The ancient historians,' says he, 'are crowded with those views of things, from which we may derive the utmost utility, even though the facts that suggest them, should be mistaken. But we are unskilled to derive any real advantage from history. The critique of erudition absorbs every thing; as if it imported us much whether the relation were true, provided we could extract from it any useful

instruction. Men / of sense ought to regard history as a tissue of fables, whose moral is perfectly adapted to the human heart.'[a]

[a] *Emilius,* i. 215 n. 28 (adapted).

The mere external actions of men are not worth the studying: Who would have ever thought of going through a course of history, if the science were comprised in a set of chronological tables? No: it is the hearts of men we should study. It is to their actions, as expressive of disposition and character, we should attend. But by what is it that we can be advanced thus far, but by specious conjecture, and plausible inference? The philosophy of a Sallust, and the sagacity of a Tacitus, can only advance us to the regions of probability,[b] But whatever be the most perfect mode of historical composition, it is to the simplest writers that our youth should be first introduced, writers equally distant from the dry detail of Du Fresnoy, and the unrivalled eloquence of a Livy.[c] The translation / of Plutarch would, in my opinion, form the best introduction. As he is not a writer of particular elegance, he suffers less from a version,[d] than many others. The Roman revolutions of Vertot might very properly fill the second place.[e] Each of these writers has this further recommendation, that, at least, in the former part of their works, they treat of that simplicity and rectitude of manners of the first Greeks and Romans, that furnish the happiest subject that can be devised for the initiating youth in the study of history.

[b] Roman historians celebrated for their condensed, epigrammatic styles: Gaius Sallustius Crispus (86-35 BC), Roman historian; Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 56-c. 117).

[c] Nicholas Lenglet du Fresnoy (1674-1735); his *A New Method of Studying History* (1713), translated from the French by Richard Rawlinson (1728).

[d] Translation.

[e] Rene Aubert de Vertot d'Aubeuf (1655-1735); his *The History of the Revolutions that happened in the Government of the Roman Republic* (1719), translated from the French by Mr Ozell and others (1720).

Under the restrictions I have laid down, history is of all sciences the most simple. It has been ever considered by philosophers, as the porch of knowledge. It has ever been treated by men of literature, as the relaxation of their severer pursuits. It leads directly to the most important of all attainments, the knowledge of the heart. It introduces us, without expence, and without danger, to / an acquaintance with manners and society. By the most natural advances it points us forward to all the depths of science. With the most attractive blandishments it forms us by degrees to an inextinguishable thirst of literature.

But there is still an objection remaining, and that the most important of all. Let history be stripped as much as you will of every extraneous circumstance, let it be narrowed to the utmost simplicity, there is still one science previously necessary. It is that of morals. If you see nothing in human conduct, but purely the exterior and physical movements, what is it that history teaches? Absolutely nothing; and the science devoid of interest, becomes incapable of affording either pleasure or instruction. We may add, that the more perfectly it is made a science of character and biography, the more indispensible is ethical examination. But to such an examination it has been doubted whether the understandings of / children be competent. Upon this question I will beg leave to say a few words, and I have done.

It is scarcely necessary to observe, that I do not speak here of ethics as an abstract

science, but simply as it relates to practice, and the oeconomy of human life. Our enquiry therefore is respecting the time at which that intuitive faculty is generally awakened, by which we decide upon the differences of virtue and vice, and are impelled to applaud the one, and condemn the other.

The moment in which the faculty of memory begins to unfold itself, the man begins to exist as a moral being. Not long posterior to this, is the commencement of prescience and foresight. Rousseau has told us, in his animated language, that if a child could escape a whipping, or obtain a paper of sweetmeats, by promising to throw himself out at window tomorrow, the promise would instantly / be made.[a] Nothing is more contrary to experience than this. It is true, death, or any such evils, of which he has no clear conception, do not strongly affect him in prospect. But by the view of that which is palpable and striking, he is as much influenced as any man, however extensive his knowledge, however large his experience. It is only by seizing upon the activity and earnestness incident to youthful pursuits, and totally banishing the idea of what is future, that we can destroy its influence. Their minds, like a sheet of white paper, are susceptible to every impression. Their brain, uncrouded with a thousand confused traces, is a cause, that every impression they receive is strong and durable.

[a] cf. *Emilius,* i. 116.

The aera of foresight is the aera of imagination, and imagination is the grand instrument of virtue. The mind is the seat of pleasure and pain. It is not by what we see, but by what we infer and suppose, that we are taught, that any being / is the object of commiseration. It is by the constant return of the mind to the unfortunate object, that we are strongly impressed with sympathy. Hence it is that the too frequent recurrence of objects of distress, at the same time that it blunts the imagination, renders the heart callous and obdurate.

The sentiment that the persons about us have life and feeling as well as ourselves, cannot be of very late introduction. It may be forwarded by cultivation, but it can scarcely at any rate be very much retarded. For this sentiment to become perfectly clear and striking, and to be applied in every case that may come before us, must undoubtedly be an affair gradual in its progress. From thence to the feelings of right and wrong, of compassion and generosity, there is but one step.

It has, I think, been fully demonstrated by that very elegant philosopher Mr / Hutcheson, that self-love is not the source of all our passions, but that disinterested benevolence has its seat in the human heart.[a] At present it is necessary for me to take this for granted. The discussion would lead me too far from my subject. What I would infer from it is, that benevolent affections are capable of a very early commencement. They do not wait to be grafted upon the selfish. They have the larger scope in youthful minds, as such have not yet learned those refinements of interest, that are incident to persons of longer experience.

[a] Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow 1729-46.

Accordingly no observation is more common, than that mankind are more generous in the earlier periods of their life, and that their affections become gradually contracted the farther they advance in the vale of years. Confidence, kindness, benevolence, constitute the entire temper of youth. And unless these amiable dispositions be blasted in the bud / by the baneful infusions of ambition, vanity and pride, there is nothing with which they would not part, to cherish adversity, and remunerate favour.

Hence we may infer, that the general ideas of merit and character are perfectly competent to the understanding of children of ten years. False glory is the farthest in the world from insinuating its witchcraft into the undepraved heart, where the vain and malignant passions have not yet erected their standard. It is true, the peculiar sublimities of heroism cannot be supposed perfectly within his comprehension. But something of this sort, as we have already said, is incident to every step in the scale of literature.

But the more perfectly to familiarise to my pupil the understanding and digesting whatever he read, I would consider it as an indispensible part of my business, to talk over with him familiarly / the subjects, that might necessarily demand our attention. I would lead him by degrees to relate with clearness and precision the story of his author. I would induce him to deliver his fair and genuine sentiments upon every action and character that came before us. I would frequently call upon him for a plain and simple reason for his opinion. This should always be done privately, without ostentation, and without rivalship. Thus, separate from the danger of fomenting those passions of envy and pride, that prepare at a distance for our youth so many mortifications, and at the expence of which too frequently this accomplishment is attained, I would train him to deliver his opinion upon every subject with freedom, perspicuity and fluency. Without at any time dictating to him the sentiments it became him to entertain, I might, with a little honest artifice, mould his judgment into the form it was most desirable it should take, at the same time that I discovered / his genius, and ascertained the original propensities of his mind.

It is unnecessary for me to say any thing respecting morals in the other sense of the word, I mean as they are connected with the conduct, the habits of which we should endeavour to cultivate in a pupil; as that subject has been already exhausted. The vices of youth spring not from nature, who is equally the kind and blameless mother of all her children; they derive from the defects of education. We have already endeavoured to shut up all the inlets of vice. We have precluded servility and cowardice. We have taken away the motives to concealment and falshood. By the liberal indulgence we have prescribed, we have laid the foundation of manly spirit, and generous dignity. A continual attention to history, accompanied with the cultivation of moral discernment, and animated with the examples of heroic virtue, could not fail to form the heart / of the pupil, to all that is excellent. At the same time, by assiduous care, the shoots of vanity and envy might be crushed in the bud. Emulation is a dangerous and mistaken principle of constancy. Instead of it I would wish to see the connection of pupils, consisting only of pleasure and generosity. They should learn to love, but not to hate each other. Benevolent actions should not directly be preached to them, they should strictly begin in the heart of the performer. But when actually done, they should receive the most distinguished applause.

Let me be permitted in this place to observe, that the association of a small number of pupils seems the most perfect mode of education. There is surely something unsuitable to the present state of mankind, in the wishing to educate our youth in perfect solitude. Society calls forth a thousand powers both of mind and body, that must otherwise / rust in inactivity. And nothing is more clear from experience, than that there is a certain tendency to moral depravation in very large bodies of this kind, to which there has not yet been discovered a sufficient remedy.

If, by the pursuit of principles like these, the powers of the understanding and the heart might be developed in concert; if the pupils were trained at once to knowledge and virtue; if they were enabled to look back upon the period of their education, without regretting one

instance of anxious terror, or capricious severity; if they recollected their tutor with gratitude, and thought of their companions, as of those generous friends whom they would wish for the associates of their life, - in that case, the pains of the preceptor would not be thrown away. /

THE HERALD OF LITERATURE

OR, A REVIEW of THE MOST CONSIDERABLE PUBLICATIONS THAT Will BE MADE IN THE COURSE OF THE ENSUING WINTER: WITH EXTRACTS.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. MURRAY, KO. 32, FLEET-STREET.
M DCC *LXXXIV*.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The Herald of Literature; or, A Review of the most considerable Publications that will be made in the course of the ensuing Winter: with Extracts (London, J. Murray, 1784). The present text is based on the single edition to appear in Godwin's lifetime. A guide to the principles of textual treatment will be found in volume 1.

The Herald of Literature was written between July and October 1783, and published anonymously on 17 November 1783. In his opening address to the writers of the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review,* the two most influential periodicals of the day, Godwin accuses them of capricious literary judgements, and cites examples of inconsistency from each review in turn.[1] In the *Herald* itself, he presents a series of literary parodies in the guise of forthcoming works from well-established writers, and reviews them as if they were genuine. Godwin's experiment with a range of different literary styles prepares for the three early novels that were written in the winter of 1783-4, especially *Imogen,* which purports to be a 'translation' from ancient Welsh and is written in the manner of James Macpherson's 'Ossian' poems. [2]

Contemporary reviews were generally appreciative and alert to the topical significance of individual parodies. The *Gentleman's Magazine* singled out as an example of 'misplaced' wit Article VIII, 'The Alchymist', adapted from Jonson's comedy of that name and 'altered' by Sheridan, and explained its origin in a sally in one of Sheridan's parliamentary speeches, in which he compared the young Pitt with Kastril, the 'angry boy' in Jonson's play.[3] Although it condemned Godwin's 'wantonness of satire' in this instance, it praised other parts of the work. It ended by cautioning the reader against 'the venom of party, with whatever abilities it may be connected', but declared the *Herald* 'in every other respect ... worthy of perusal'.[4] Not surprisingly, the reviews in both the *Monthly* and the *Critical* reflected Godwin's criticism of them in his opening address. The *Critical Review* condemned the address as 'ill-natured; and though apparently designed to raise a smile ... calculated to fix a dagger'.

Nevertheless it praised the quality of most of the extracts and accompanying criticisms, especially the sections on Gibbon and Burke (Articles I and X), but it thought the comments on Hayley (Article VI) were unfair,[5] By contrast, the *Monthly Review* gave the *Herald* short shrift: it spoke mockingly of its ingenuity, and declared it a useless work.[6] The *English Review* was more positive: it praised Godwin's 'happy choice of forcible language', especially in the imitations of Gibbon and Robertson (Article II), and emphasized the originality of his concept: 'the whole affords the reader a new species of amusement, inasmuch as our author has pointed out a new source of satire',[7] Its critical remarks were virtually duplicated in the *Edinburgh Weekly Magazine,* which reprinted the parodies of Gibbon, Robertson, Burney (Article IV), and Beattie (Article VII) in successive issues.[8] The *Westminster Review* also applauded the idea of the *Herald,* but found that it fell short in practice: 'the caricature is by no means sufficiently striking'. Provoked by Article II, it gave a lengthy account of Robertson's shortcomings as a historian, and ended with the ironical suggestion that the author of the *Herald* 'might not be uselessly employed in a continuation of his history of America'.[9] While most reviews agreed in their praise of Godwin's originality, whatever their differences about individual extracts, both the *New Annual Register* and the *Town and Country Magazine* suggested a possible model for the *Herald* in Richard Tickell's pamphlet, *Anticipation* (1778, 10th edn., 1780), a satirical forecast of parliamentary proceedings which included imaginary speeches by Burke and Fox.[10] Nevertheless both conceded the superior quality of Godwin's imitations, again citing the parody of Gibbon, but the *New Annual Register* disapproved of the satirical extracts.

NOTES

1. For bibliographical details, see note to p. 27.
2. See *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin,* ed. Mark Philp *et al.,* 8 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1992), vol 2, pp. 163-267.
3. See below, notes to pp. 59-60; *Gentleman's Magazine,* 53 (December 1783), 1036-7; cf. Godwin's description of Pitt as 'this angry boy, this impertinent Kastril' in his 'Mucius' article on 'Modern Characters, by the Right Honourable William Pitt', *Morning Chronicle,* 13 June 1786, *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. Philp *et al.,* 7 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), vol 1.
4. *Gentleman's Magazine,* 1037.
5. *Critical Review,* 57 (January 1784), 24-6 (24, 25).
6. *Monthly Review,* 71 (July 1784), 69.
7. *English Review,* 3 (January 1784), 50-2 (50, 51).
8. *Edinburgh Weekly Magazine*, 59 (4 March 1784), 290-4; (11 March 1784), 312-15; (18 March 1784), 339-42; and 60 (? April 1784), 19-20.
9. *Westminster Magazine,* 11 (December 1783), 650-1.
10. *New Annual Register for 1783* (1784), pp. 279-80; *Town and Country Magazine,* 16 (February 1784), 100-1.

TO THE AUTHORS OF THE MONTHLY AND CRITICAL REVIEWS

GENTLEMEN,

In presenting the following sheets to the public, I hope I shall not be considered as encroaching upon that province, which long possession has probably taught you to consider as your exclusive right.[a] The labour it has cost me, and the many perils I have encountered to bring it to perfection, will, I trust, effectually plead my pardon with persons of your notorious candour and humanity. Represent / to yourselves, Gentlemen, I entreat you, the many false keys, bribes to the lacqueys of authors that can keep them, and collusions with the booksellers of authors that cannot, which were required in the prosecution of this arduous undertaking. Imagine to yourselves how often I have shuddered upon the verge of petty larceny, and how repeatedly my slumbers have been disturbed with visions of the King's-Bench Prison and Clerkenwell Bridewell [b] You, gentlemen, sit in your easy chair, and with the majesty of a Minos or an Aeacus, summon the trembling culprits to your bar.[c] But though you never knew what fear was, recollect, other men have snuffed a candle with their fingers.

[a] *The Monthly Review: or, Literary Journal. By Several Hands* (1749-89) (First Series), and *The Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature. By a Society of Gentlemen* (1756-90) (First Series), were the two most powerful literary journals of the day.

[b] King's Bench Prison, prison of the Supreme Court of the Common Law; Clerkenwell Bridewell, in Finsbury, London, a prison built in 1615 to relieve the City Bridewell (a house of correction in Blackfriars), and demolished in 1804.

[c] In Greek mythology, Minos, son of Zeus and Europa, and Aeacus, son of Zeus and the nymph Aegina, are represented as just rulers who, together with Rhadamanthys, Minos' brother, became judges of the dead in the Underworld (Homer, *Odyssey,* Book XI).

But I would not be misunderstood. Heroical / as I trust my undertaking proves me, I fear no man's censure, and court no man's applause. But I look up to you as a respectable body of men, who have long united your efforts to reduce the disproportioned members of an ancient republic to an happy equality, to give wings to the little emmet of Grub-street,[d] and to hew away the excrescences of lawless genius with a hatchet. In this character I honour you, That you have assumed it uncompelled and self-elected, that you have exercised it undazzled by the *ignis fatuus*[a] of genius, is your unfading glory.

[d] Former name of a street near Moorfields in London (now Milton Street); used allusively for needy authors, literary hacks, and their work.

[a] (Latin) will-o'-the-wisp, a light caused by the combustion of marsh-gas and apt to lead travellers into danger.

Having thus cleared myself from the suspicion of any sinister view, I cannot here refrain from presenting you with a peace-offering. Had it been in my power to procure gums[b] more costly, or incense / more fragrant, I would have rendered it more worthy your acceptance.

[b] Glutinous secretions of trees or shrubs which were used for burning as incense,

It has been a subject upon which I have often reflected with mortification, that the world

is too apt to lay aside your lucubrations with the occasions that gave birth to them, and that if they are ever opened after, it is only with old magazines by staid matrons over their winter fire. Such persons are totally incapable of comparing your sentences with the maturer verdict of the public; a comparison that would redound so much to your honour. What I design at present, is in some measure to remedy an evil, that can never perhaps be entirely removed. As the field which is thus opened to me is almost unbounded, I will confine myself to two of the most striking examples, / in Tristram Shandy, and the Rosciad of Churchill.[c]

[c] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Adventures of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67); Charles Churchill (1732-64); his *The Rosciad* (1761), a satirical poem on actors, first published anonymously.

In the Monthly Review, vol, 24, p. 103, I find these words:

'But your indiscretion, good Mr Tristram, is not all we complain of in the volumes before us. We must tax you with what you will dread above the most terrible of all insinuations - nothing less than dullness. Yes, indeed, Mr Tristram, you are dull, *very dull.* Your jaded fancy seems to have been exhausted by two pigmy octavos, which scarce contained the substance of a twelve-penny pamphlet, and we now find nothing new to entertain us.'[d]

[d] Review of *Tristram Shandy,* vols iii and iv, *Monthly Review,* 24 (February 1761), 101-16 (103-4).

The following epithets are selected at / random. 'We are sick ... we are quite tired ... we can no longer bear corporal Trim's insipidity ... thread-bare ... stupid and unaffecting ... absolutely dull ... misapplication of talents ... he will unavoidably sink into contempt.'[e]

[e] Ibid. 104, 116; corporal Trim is the devoted servant of Tristram's uncle Toby. [f]Review of *The Rosciad, Critical Review,* 11 (March 1761), 209-12 (212).

The Critical Review, vol. 11, p. 212, has the following account of the Rosciad:[f]

'It is *natural* for young authors to conceive themselves the cleverest fellows in the world, and withal, that there is not the least degree of merit subsisting but in their own works: It is *natural* likewise for them to imagine, that they may conceal themselves by appearing in different shapes, and that they are not to be found out by their stile; but little do these *Connoisseurs* in writing conceive, how easily they are / discovered by a veteran in the service.[a] In the title-page to this performance we are told (by way of quaint conceit), that it was written by *the author,* what if it should prove that the Author and the Actor* are the same! Certain it is that we meet with the *same* vein of peculiar humour, the same turn of thought, the same *autophilism*[b] (there's a new word for you to bring into the next poem) which we meet with in the other; insomuch that we are ready to make the conclusion in the author's own words;

* *The Actor, a Poem, by Robert Lloyd, Esq.*[j]

[a] Alluding to *The Connoisseur* (1754-6), a periodical edited by George Colman, the elder (1732-94), theatre manager and dramatist, who was a friend and schoolfellow of Churchill, and Bonnell Thornton (1724-68), journalist and wit.

[b] (Greek) self-love,

Who is it? -- Lloyd.[c]

[c] Churchill, *The Rosciad,* l. 232.

'We will not pretend however absolutely to assert that Mr L wrote this poem; but we may

venture to affirm, that it is the production, jointly / or separately, of the new triumvirate of wits, who never let an opportunity slip of singing their own praises,[d] *Caw me, caw thee,* as Sawney says, and so to it they go, and *scratch* one another like so many Scotch pedlars.'[e]

[d] i.e. Churchill, Colman and Lloyd.

[e] *Caw me, caw thee,* originally 'ka me, ka thee', a Scottish phrase implying mutual help or flattery; Sawney, i.e. Sandy (short for Alexander), a derisive name for a Scotsman.

In page 339, I find a passage referred to in the Index, under the head of 'a notable instance of their candour,' retracting their insinuations against Lloyd and Colman, and ascribing the poem in a particular vein of pleasantry to Mr Flexney, the bookseller, and Mr Griffin, the printer.[f] Candour certainly did not require that they should acknowledge Mr Churchill, whose name was now inserted in the title-page, as the author, or if author of any, at least not of a considerable part of the poem,[g] That this was / their sense of the matter, appears from their account of the apology for the Rosciad, p. 409.[h]

[f] Review of *The Rosciad* (3rd edn., 1761), *Critical Review*, 11 (April 1761), 339-40 (339), which reprints an attestation, signed by William Flexney, publisher, and William Griffin, printer, that Lloyd had nothing to do with the publication of *The Rosciad.*

[g] In fact Churchill's name appeared on the title-page of the second edition.

[h] Review of Charles Churchill's poem, *The Apology. Addressed to the Critical Reviewers* (1761), *Critical Review,* 11 (May 1761), 409-11 (409) (adapted).

'This is another *Brutum Fulmen* launched at the Critical Review by one Churchill, who it seems is a clergyman, and it must be owned has a knack at versification; a bard, who upon the strength of having written a few good lines in a thing called *The Rosciad,* swaggers about as if he were the game-keeper of Parnassus.'[i]

[i] *Brutum Fulmen,* harmless thunderbolt (Pliny, *Historia Naturalis,* II. xliii); Parnassus, sacred mountain in Greece associated with the worship of the Muses.

[j] Robert Lloyd (1733-64), poet and a friend of Churchill and Colman, who contributed five sets of verses to *The Connoisseur,* his *The Actor. A Poetical Epistle to Bonnell Thornton, Esq* (1760), first published anonymously. (The author's name appeared in the third edition.)

P. 410. 'This apologist has very little reason to throw out behind against the Critical Reviewers, who in mentioning *The Rosciad,* of which he calls himself author, commended it in the lump, without specifying the bald lines, the false thoughts, and tinsel / frippery from which it is not entirely free.' They conclude with contrasting him with Smollet,[a] in comparison of whom he is 'a puny antagonist, who must write many more poems as good as the Rosciad, before he will be considered as a respectable enemy.'

[a] Tobias George Smollett (1721-71), novelist, and co-founder and editor of the *Critical Review* 1756-63.

Upon these extracts I will beg leave to make two observations.

1. Abstracted from all consideration of the profundity of criticism that is displayed, no man can avoid being struck with the humour and pleasantry in which they are conceived, or the elegant and gentlemanlike language in which they are couched. What can be more natural or more ingenuous than to suppose that the persons principally commended in a / work, were themselves the writers of it? And for that allusion of the Scotch pedlars, for my part, I hold it to be inimitable.

2. But what is most admirable is the independent spirit, with which they stemmed the


image
not
available

accomplishment of a work, that must constitute one of the greatest ornaments of the present age. We have now before us, in one view, and described by the uniform / pencil of one historian, the stupendous and instructive object of the gradual decline of the greatest empire; circumscribed by degrees within the narrow walls of a single city;[b] and at length, after the various revolutions of thirteen centuries, totally swallowed up in the empire of the Turks. Of this term, the events of more than nine hundred years are described in that part of our author that now lies before us. It cannot therefore be expected, that in the narrow limits we have prescribed to ourselves, we should enter into a regular synopsis of the performance, chapter by chapter, after the laudable example of our more laborious brother reviewers. We will pay our readers the compliment, however unauthorised by the venerable seal of custom, of supposing them already informed, that Anastasius succeeded Zeno, and Justin Anastasius; that Justinian published the celebrated code that is called by his name; and that his generals, Belisarius and Narses, were / almost constantly victorious over the Barbarians, and restored, for a moment, the expiring lustre of the empire.[c] We shall confine ourselves to two extracts, relating to subjects of the greatest importance, and which we presume calculated, at once to gratify and excite the curiosity of the public.

[b] Constantinople, capital of the Roman empire AD 330-1453.

[c] Roman emperors on the throne at Constantinople: Anastasius I 491-518; Zeno 474-491; and Flavius Petrus Sabbatius Justinianus (b. c. 482) 527—65, who was determined to restore the Roman empire by recovering the lost provinces of the west, and by reorganizing the legal system; his *Codex Justinianus* (529), a codification of imperial constitutions. Belisarius, an outstanding general, recovered Africa from the Vandals in 533, and Italy from the Ostrogoths in 540; Narses finally crushed the Ostrogoths in 553.

The reign of the emperor Heraclius is perhaps more crowded with events of the highest consequence, than that of any other prince in the series.[a] It has therefore a proportionable scope allotted it in the plan of Mr Gibbon; who seems to understand better than almost any historian, what periods to sketch with a light and active pen, and upon what to dwell with minuteness, and dilate his various powers. While we pursue the various adventures of Cosroes II, beginning his reign in a flight from his capital city; suing for the protection and support of the Greek emperor; soon after declaring war against the empire; successively conquering / Mesopotamia, Armenia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and the greater part of Natolia; then beaten; a fugitive; and at last murdered by his own son; we are unable to conceive of a story more interesting, or more worthy of our attention.[b] But in contemplating the rise of the Saracen khalifate, and the religion of Mahomet, which immediately succeeded these events, we are compelled to acknowledge a more astonishing object.[c]

[a] Heraclius, Roman Emperor AD 610-41.

[b] Cosroes II Parvez, 'the Conqueror', King of Persia 590-628, in 590 fled from Ctesiphon, which was occupied by the usurper Bahram, and sought the aid of Maurice, 'the Cappadocian', Roman Emperor 582-602, in regaining the throne of his ancestors. After the death of Maurice in 602, Cosroes embarked on a war against Roman tyranny, in which he advanced as far as Chalcedon opposite Constantinople (608, 615 and 626), conquered Syria (Damascus 613) and Palestine (Jerusalem 614), and occupied Egypt (614), but in 623 he began to retreat before Heraclius' advancing army; he died as the result of a conspiracy led by his son Siroes. (Natolia, i.e. Anatolia, formerly Asia Minor, now the Asian part of Turkey.)

[c] Khalifate, caliphate, the dominion of the caliph (successor), the title given in Mohammedan countries to successors of Mahomet or Muhammad (c. 570-632, founder of the Muslim religion), in temporal and

the duties of men, of parents, or of citizens, by the contents of *Paine's Age of Reason,* or *Godwin's Political Justice'.* Dismissing the essays in Part II, the review concluded in an equivocal manner: 'Godwin's Enquirer, though far from being fit for general circulation, contains some hints that may be improved by the sound philosopher'.[10]

NOTES

1. Abinger Manuscripts, dep. e. 202-3.
2. *Analytical Review,* 25 (April 1797), 395-404 (395 [quoting *Enquirer,* p. 77], 404).
3. *Analytical Review,* 27 (May 1798), 481—90 (481, 485 [quoting *Enquirer,* p. 174), 487, 490).
4. *Monthly Visitor,* 1 (April 1797), 381-4; (May 1797), 457-9 (459).
5. *Critical Review,* Second Series, 20 (May 1797), 58-64 (64).
6. *Monthly Review,* Second Series, 23 (July 1797), 291-302 (292, 302).
7. *Scots Magazine,* 59 (October 1797), 751-2; (April 1797), 239-42; (June 1797), 377-9.
8. *New Annual Register* for 1797 (1799), 220-1 (220).
9. *Monthly Magazine* for 1797, 4 (1798), 119.
10. *British Critic,* 11 (January 1798), 20-7, (20-1, 22, 26, 27).

PREFACE

The volume here presented to the reader, is upon a construction totally different from that of a work upon the principles of political science, published by the same author four years ago.[a]

[a] William Godwin, *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (2 vols, 1793).

The writer deems himself an ardent lover of truth; and, to increase his chance of forcing her from her hiding-place, he has been willing to vary his method of approach.

There are two principal methods according to which truth may be investigated.

The first is by laying down one or two simple principles, which seem scarcely to be exposed to the hazard of refutation; and then developing them, applying them to a number of points, and following them into a variety of inferences. From this method of investigation, the first thing we are led to hope is, that there will result a system consentaneous to itself; and, secondly, that, if all the parts shall thus be brought into agreement with a few principles, and if those principles be themselves true, the whole will / be found conformable to truth. This is the method of investigation attempted in the Enquiry concerning Political Justice.

An enquiry thus pursued is undoubtedly in the highest style of man. But it is liable to many disadvantages; and, though there be nothing that it involves too high for our pride, it is perhaps a method of investigation incommensurate to our powers. A mistake in the commencement is fatal. An error in almost any part of the process is attended with

extensive injury; where every thing is connected, as it were, in an indissoluble chain, and an oversight in one step vitiates all that are to follow. The intellectual eye of man, perhaps, is formed rather for the inspection of minute and near, than of immense and distant objects. We proceed most safely, when we enter upon each portion of our process, as it were, *de nova;* and there is danger, if we are too exclusively anxious about consistency of system, that we may forget the perpetual attention we owe to experience, the pole-star of truth.

An incessant recurrence to experiment and actual observation, is the second method / of investigating truth, and the method adopted in the present volume. The author has attempted only a short excursion at a time; and then, dismissing that, has set out afresh upon a new pursuit. Each of the Essays he has written, is intended in a considerable degree to stand by itself. He has carried this principle so far, that he has not been severely anxious relative to inconsistencies that may be discovered, between the speculations of one Essay and the speculations of another.

The Essays are principally the result of conversations, some of them held many years ago, though the Essays have all been composed for the present occasion. The author has always had a passion for colloquial discussion; and, in the various opportunities that have been afforded him in different scenes of life, the result seemed frequently to be fruitful both of amusement and instruction. There is a vivacity, and, if he may be permitted to say it, a richness, in the hints struck out in conversation, that are with difficulty attained in any other method. In the subjects of several of the / most considerable Essays, the novelty of idea they may possibly contain, was regarded with a kind of complacence by the author, even when it was treated with supercilious inattention in its first communication. It is very possible, in these instances, that the public may espouse the party of the original auditor, and not of the author. Wherever that shall be strikingly. the case, the complacence he mentions will be radically affected. An opinion peculiar to a single individual, must be expected, to that individual to appear pregnant with dissatisfaction and uncertainty.

From what has been said the humble pretensions of the contents of the present volume are sufficiently obvious. They are presented to the contemplative reader, not as *dicta,* but as the materials of thinking. They are committed to his mercy. In themselves they are trivial; the hints of enquiry rather than actual enquiries: but hereafter perhaps they may be taken under other men's protection, and cherished to maturity. The utmost that was here proposed, was to give, if possible, a certain / perspicuity and consistency to each detached member of enquiry. Truth was the object principally regarded; and the author endeavoured to banish from his mind every modification of prepossession and prejudice.

There is one thought more he is desirous to communicate; and it may not improperly find a place in this Preface. It relates to the French Revolution; that inexhaustible source of meditation to the reflecting and inquisitive.[a] While the principles of Gallic republicanism were yet in their infancy, the friends of innovation were somewhat too imperious in their tone. Their minds were in a state of exaltation and ferment. They were too impatient and impetuous. There was something in their sternness that savoured of barbarism. The barbarism of our adversaries was no adequate excuse for this.[b] The equable and independent mind should not be diverted from its bias by the errors of the enemy with whom it may have to contend.

[a] The French Revolution 1789-91.

[b] Alluding to the series of government moves to stop the spread of radicalism from mid-1792 onwards: the

Scottish trials 1793-4, in which leading radicals were sentenced to transportation; the London treason trials 1794, in which those accused included Godwin's friend Thomas Holcroft (1745-1809) (all charges were dropped); the Two Bills against 'treasonable practices' and 'seditious meetings' 1795, which were designed to suppress the reform movement as a whole.

The author confesses that he did not escape the contagion. Those who ranged / themselves on the same party, have now moderated their intemperance, and he has accompanied them also in their present stage. With as ardent a passion for innovation as ever, he feels himself more patient and tranquil. He is desirous of assisting others, if possible, in perfecting the melioration of their temper. There are many things discussed in the following Essays, upon which perhaps, in the effervescence of his zeal, he would have disdained to have written. But he is persuaded that the cause of political reform, and the cause of intellectual and literary refinement, are inseparably connected. He has also descended in his investigations into the humbler walks of private life. He ardently desires that those who shall be active in promoting the cause of reform, may be found amiable in their personal manners, and even attached to the cultivation of miscellaneous enquiries. He believes that this will afford the best security, for our preserving kindness and universal philanthropy, in the midst of the operations of our justice.

LONDON,
February 4, 1797. /

CONTENTS