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National Intelligencer.

The following criticiſm on the ÆNEID of VIRGIL extracted from a late work of Miſs Williams, is very happily penned—It can never be too deeply regretted that a writer of ſuch exquiſite talents ſhould have exhauſted all his powers in adorning the character of a tyrant.

Of the various ſtrictures which have been made on this prince of poets, none perhaps are more ſevere than thoſe of the illuſtrious tragedian of Italy. "It is not enough," ſays Alfieri, "for the writer who has the intimate conviction of having diſcovered truth, to feel the diſpoſition to propound it with energy, and expreſs it with eloquence: to inſure ſucceſs, it is indiſpenſable that he enjoy a previous competency, or be content with little; otherwiſe he muſt neceſſarily fail in his efforts." Alfieri is apprehenſive of paſſing for a retailer of paradoxes, while he ſtates propoſitions that are perfectly juſt and reaſonable. That the reward of virtue is not bread, is a proverbial truth. "Write a volume," ſays Voltaire, "in praiſe of Monſeigneur Superbus Fadus: pen ſonnets to his miſtreſs's eye-brow, and dedicate a work to his porter; you are ſure of being well received, and recommended. Inſtruct the world; and make up your account for neglect, and perhaps obloquy." This was the caſe in the days of Voltaire; and philoſophers have obſerved, that, in certain things, mankind are given ſlowly to change.

The ſervility of Virgil is the example which Alfieri produced to juſtify his opinion. He pays the Roman poet the tribute which he thinks is ſo juſtly his due for his various excellencies, ſuch as majeſty of elocution, force of colouring, and imitative harmony; "but what," adds he, "forms the principal part of a writing, and what ought to enter for half at leaſt into a work—the uſeful, mingled with the agreeable—his divine portion, which has for its foundation vigour of thought, and the feeling of truth, all this is totally wanting in Virgil."

To have placed Auguſtus the firſt in the order of time, in the review made by Anchiſes of the great men that were to illuſtrate Rome, and render her miſtreſs of the world, excites the animadverſion of Alfieri againſt the poet as a chronologiſt; but the profuſion of praiſe which Virgil beſtows on his patron, while the Scipios, the Regulus, the Fabricius, and the Fabius, are paſſed haſtily by with the ſcanty tribute of a few ſlender verſes, raiſes in him ſtrong emotions of anger. "Not ſatisfied with that," continues he, "Virgil puts himſelf to the expenſe of nineteen excellent and moſt pathetic lines in praiſe of one Marcellus, the nephew of Auguſtus, who died in his youth and who would have remained abſolutely unknown, but for the baſe ſublimity of theſe verſes: while, for Cato, Virgil has deemed half a line ſufficient; three lines for Junius Brutus, and of Marcus Brutus, not a word." There are omiſſions alſo for which Alfieri cannot pardon the poet: but his indignation ſwells into rage when he finds Cicero, not indeed forgotten, but recorded in a diſgraceful verſe in which the poet gives the palm to the Grecian orators, only to tear it from Cicero.* "Penetrated with juſt indignation," adds Alfieri, "the reader pauſes at ſuch paſſages, and feels himſelf impelled to exclaim, here is the bread of Auguſtus! this is the benefit which the protection of princes holds out to letters! here is the baſeneſs and ſervility which are inſeparable between the patron and the protected."

O anima corteſe Mantovana,
Di cui la fama ancor nel mondo dura,
E durerà, quanto'l moto lontana!

DANTE.

O ever gentle ſhade from Mantua ſprung!
Whoſe fame unfading as the world ſhall laſt,
As long as earth in ambient air is hung.

HAYLEY.

With what mournful reluctance are the friends of liberty, admirers of thy infinite excellence, compelled to ſubſcribe to this ſevere ſentence, which thy tuneful poſterity, feeling the degradation of genius, bring againſt thee! Theſe ſentiments, which the poet of modern Italy indulges againſt the ſervility of his countryman, and which Arioſto before him had gaily expreſſed†, have been felt by the poets of other countries, jealous, like himſelf, of reſcuing their auguſt profeſſion from diſgrace.

A poet of my country, in numbers not unworthy of the Mantuan bard, had preceded Alfieri; and the ſentiments of both are ſo coincident, that it would ſeem as if the elegant regrets of the Engliſh poet, had ſerved for the baſis of the energetic indignation of the Italian.

O! had thy muſe, whoſe decorating ſkill
Could ſpread rich foliage o'ver the leafleſs hill;
Had ſhe, who knew with niceſt hand to frame
The ſweet unperiſhable wreaths of fame:
Had ſhe, exaulted by a happier fate,
Virtue's free herald, and no ſlave of ſtate,
Decked worthier ſhrines with her unfading flower,
And given to freedom, what ſhe gave to power;
Then with more keen delight, and warmer praiſe,
The world had liſtened to thy bolder lays;
Perchance had owed to thee (a mighty debt)
Verſe where Perfection her bright ſeal had ſet,
Where art could nothing blame, and nature nought regret."

HAYLEY, Eſſay on Epic poetry.

However great may have been the poetical crimes of Virgil, whatever effect they might have had in lulling his countrymen into ſervitude, we ſhould, perhaps, feel ſome indulgence for the poet, ſince his offences, in provoking chaſtiſement, have given birth to ſuch glowing ſentiments in favour of freedom. It would indeed be difficult to clear him from the charges which theſe accuſing ſpirits bring againſt him: but might not ſomething be urged in alleviation of the ſeverity of the ſentence? The facts ſtand on eternal record: but can nothing be ſuggeſted in favour of the intention? Are we ſure that the poet, while he was conſummating his crime againſt liberty, felt no concern for the ſnare he was ſpreading for his country? Did he caſt no lengthened looks into future ages, following in his fancy that tract in the infinite ocean of time, along which his reputation was deſtined to ſail? On this ſubject, an idea ſuggeſts itſelf, which though it preſents little in juſtification of the offence, offers a plea in mitigation of the puniſhment.

"The ivory gate," ſays Mr. Gibbon in his critical obſervations on the ſixth book of the Æneid, "puzzles every commentator, and grieves every lover of Virgil: yet it affords no advantages to the biſhop of Glouceſter." But, though Mr. Gibbon has demoliſhed the ivory gate, as well as every other part of the Warburtonian hypotheſis, are we ſure that he has diſcovered its uſes, or the meaning of Virgil, better than preceding commentators? The explanation by which he attempts to "ſave Virgil's judgement and religion," may be ingenious; but he admits that it is at the expenſe of uncommon harſhneſs and ambiguity of expreſſion. Dr. Jortin has obſerved, that Virgil, after having ſhone out with full ſplendour through the ſixth book, ſets at laſt in a cloud; and acquieſces in the common opinion, that, by ſix unlucky lines, Virgil deſtroyed the beautiful ſyſtem which it coſt him eight hundred to raiſe.

Had Mr. Gibbon been as ſolicitous for the political as for the religious reputation of the poet, he might perhaps, while he was framing hypotheſes, have hazarded other conjectures to unfold this enigma. Throughout his critical obſervations, Mr. Gibbon does not appear to have ſtumbled on any of thoſe formidable objections which our lynx-eyed poets have brought againſt Virgil. On the contrary, he enumerates, among the moſt ſtriking beauties of this ſixth book, the poet's repreſentation of the happineſs enjoyed by the patriot who died for his country.

Is it poſſible that the offences charged on the poet either eſcaped the notice, or, conſidering the political character of the critic, were not judged by him to be offences? Dr. Jortin has aſſigned what Mr. Gibbon calls a reaſon new and ingenious for Virgil's having explained away his hero's deſcent into an *idle dream*; but this reaſon the critic finds alſo untenable. "The prepoſterous conduct," which is explained by the poet's epicuriſm, and which, is ſuppoſed to be the reſult of deſign by the one, is attributed to haſte and indiſcretion by the other.

In a work ſo finiſhed, it is ſcarcely to be ſuppoſed that Virgil could have acted without ſome deſign; much leſs, that, in the moſt exquiſite parts of his poem, he could have been guilty of haſte and indiſcretion. Notwithſtanding the devotedneſs of the poet to Auguſtus, may it not be preſumed that he could not eradicate from his mind the remembrance of thoſe virtues which illuſtrated his country, thoſe principles which it were impoſſible to be a Roman and a poet and not feel? May it not be conjectured that Virgil felt at times the indignity he had committed towards the ſacredneſs of his profeſſion, in the perverſion of the moral leſſon which he might have held up to the world? May not compunction have wrung his heart, when he reflected on the diſhonourable offering which he made to power, of that incenſe which he ſhould have conſecrated to the manes of the laſt defenders of the republic? Did he feel no remorſe in careſſing thus ingloriouſly the hand that fed him? He, who ſometimes threw out his republican ſoul athwart the cuiraſſed breaſt plate of the courtier, repreſenting, on the ſhield of his hero, the ſacred ſpirit of Cato diſpenſing laws to the happy ſhades around him, and who could ſo feelingly paint the country court of the poor Evander, and thus panegyriſe mediocrity:

"Dare to be poor . . . . .
and emulate a god."

Did no ſtruggles ariſe in favor of virtue, in which the poet contraſted the ſublimity of his character, and the ſervility of his ſituation? Did he contrive no mode of eſcape from the reproaches with which elevated minds, among his own countrymen and poſterity, might overwhelm him? Here the 'idle dream' finds a neceſſary appendage in the ivory gate, through which the patriot might hope to glide, though the poet were torn to tatters in the paſſage.

To quit the luxuries of a court, to make the ſurrender of his elegant villas in Campania and Sicily, and retire to his native marſhes, as Alfieri ſuggeſts, were ſacrifices which probably required more ſtrength of mind than Virgil poſſeſſed. But to enjoy the reward of ſervility, and mourn the price at which it is obtained, are not incongruous feelings. All ſentiment of republican virtue was not yet extinct in the ſoul of Virgil. It it were not a moral feeling of this kind which urged the ſacrifice of his reputation as a poet, what motives could have led him, at the cloſe of life, to order this precious monument, this work of eleven years, to be committed to the flames? The faſtidiouſneſs of genius leads ſometimes to extravagancies. Diſſatisfaction is the conſtant attendant of extraordinary talents. But Virgil ſaw nothing around him that could bear the ſlighteſt point of competition: he had no rival: he had ſtruggled ſucceſsfully againſt his divine original, and had perhaps equalled, if he had not, as Scaliger pretends, outſtript him. May it not then be conjectured, that this laſt act of the poet's life, the order for burning the Æneid, was the ſacrifice of genius to principle? Unwilling to perpetuate the injury he had done his country, or that theſe records of 'baſe ſublimity' ſhould ſurvive him; fearful that this ænigma of the ivory gate might, like his other ænigmas, remain unſolved, and foreſeeing the accuſations which might be brought againſt him, he was anxious to complete the ſacrifice while the ſureſt means of repairing the miſchief remained in his power. But theſe intentions were fruſtrated, and happily for the world; which though, with Arioſto, Alfieri and Hayley, it may reprobate the cowardice of the republican, and the ſervility of the courtier, will, as long as 'this globe ſhall be hung in ambient air,' bow in reſpectful admiration before the poet."

* "Let others . . . . plead better at the bar." Æneid, Book VI.

† "Non fu ſi ſanto ne benigno Auguſto,
Come la tuba di Virgilio ſuona,
L'avere avuto in poeſia buon guſto,
La proſcrizione iniqua gli pardona."

The poet adds,

"Neſſun ſapria, ſe Neron foſſe ingiuſto,
Ne ſua fama ſaria men forſe buona,
Aveſſe avuto e terra e ciel nemico,
Se gli ſcrittor ſapea tenerſi amici."

CANTO 35.

Deem not Auguſtus's life ſo free from blame
As Virgil's tramp delivers him to fame.
His ſkill in verſe, and love to bards diſplay'd,
The dire proſcription veils in friendly ſhade.
Not one might now on Nero's guilt exclaim,
Nor infamy perchance attend a name
By gods and men abhorr'd, had he enſur'd
The pen of writers, and the muſe ſecur'd."

HOOLE.

WASHINGTON CITY.

MONDAY, JUNE 25, 1804.

ON TITLES.

IT has long been a ſubject of regret to thoſe who correctly eſtimate the value of ſimplicity and truth under republican inſtitutions, that the miſerable trappings of monarchies ſhould remain, in any degree, attached to our governments. After the great revolution atchieved by Americans in the moral world, and the elevated ground aſſigned to the citizens of our free republics, there was reaſon to hope that the oſtentation and folly of kings and nobles would have ceaſed to contaminate our manners. The upright and enlightened congreſs of 1776, who declared us independent, and who by the heroiſm of their character and the wiſdom of their meaſures, commanded the admiration of the whole civilized world, thought and acted on this point with Spartan propriety: They thought too highly of themſelves, and eſtimated too correctly the dignified character they held as repreſentatives of free and ſovereign ſtates, to dwell with a moment's complacency on the ridiculous diſtinctions of titles, ſtars and garters. Seeing men and things as they are, they beheld monarchs and nobles and prieſts in their true colors. Stripped of the purple and ermine, they perceived little left. So far, therefore, from imitating their manners, and covering themſelves with *nominal* dignity and diſtinction, they offered themſelves to the world in their true colors.—The *American Congress*, unaided by extravagant titles, inſpired univerſal reſpect and affection. Their *Presidents* had not the arrogance to claim the titles of *Highness*, *Excellency* or *Honorable*. They looked down, as well they might, upon the crowd of political dwarfs that ſported in the ſummer breeze of courts, and were dandled in the lap of luxury. The reſult was an elevation of the American name among the truly great men of Europe.

In the ſucceſſive congreſſes under the confederation, patriotiſm was too predominant a feeling to ſuffer vanity to urge her *little* claims; nor did party ſpirit materially diſturb the general harmony—Thus things remained until the new conſtitution was formed.

Under this form of government two legiſlative branches were eſtabliſhed; the Senate, a ſmall body, repreſenting the ſtates; and the Repreſentatives, a more numerous body repreſenting the people. As it is the tendency of rival bodies, no leſs than rival individuals, to aim at ſuperior diſtinction, the Senate, apparently deriving conſequence in their own eyes from being the ſmaller body, and from being the repreſentatives of ſtates, early directed their attention to the propriety of conferring titles. It is underſtood that they contemplated, in the firſt inſtance, *robing* themſelves in theſe childiſh diſtinctions; but, driven from this purpoſe by public opinion and the auſterity of the popular branch they were induced to deſiſt from this purpoſe. Firm, however in their original intention, they reſolved to ſurround with this peurile luſtre the Firſt Magiſtrate, and they had the folly to propoſe to DISTINGUISH the *illustrious* WASHINGTON *with the title of* HIS HIGHNESS! Never was there a more bitter ſarcaſm levelled at the fame of that great man—*His Highness George Washington!* As well might we ſay *His Excellency Cato!*

The people with their uſual good ſenſe, ridiculed the project, and their repreſentatives rejected it.

As there are too many good men who even at this enlightened day, and after this decided expreſſion of the public ſentiment, encourage the fooliſh parade of titles, and delight to trick e themſelves or pleaſe others with the epithets of *Excellency* and *Honorable*, it may be well to make them acquainted with the remarks made on the above propoſition in the Houſe of Repreſentatives. It is much to be regretted that the arguments uſed in the Senate in favor of titles have, from their doors being cloſed, never reached the public; as they would probably have been the beſt commentary on the weakneſs or depravity of the project. As it is, we muſt reſt contented with the obſervations made in the Houſe of Repreſentatives.

"The Houſe took into conſideration the meſſage from the Senate, communicated on Saturday laſt, reſpecting the diſagreement of the Senate to the report of a joint committee, on the ſubject of annexing titles to the office of Preſident and Vice Preſident.

"Mr. Parker moved a reſolution to the following effect: Reſolved, That this Houſe having, on Tueſday laſt, adopted the report of their committee, appointed to confer with a committee of the Senate, ſtating "That it is not proper to annex any ſtyle or title, to the reſpective ſtyles or titles of [illegible] expreſſed in the Conſtitution;" and having in their addreſs to the Preſident of the United States on Friday laſt, proceeded to act purſuant thereto, deem it improper to accede to the propoſition made by the Senate, as communicated by their order of the 9th inſtant, for appointing a committee to confer with a committee of this Houſe, in conſidering and reporting, under what title it will be proper for the Preſident of the U. States in future to be addreſſed.

Mr. PAGE, (*now Governor of Virg.*)

"Seconded the motion, obſerving, that in his opinion the Houſe had no right to interfere in the buſineſs, the conſtitution expreſsly preſcribed the power of Congreſs as to beſtowing titles. He did not conceive the real honor, or dignity, of either of thoſe ſituations to conſiſt in high ſounding titles. The Houſe had, on a former occaſion, expreſſed their diſapprobation of any title being annexed to their own members and very juſtly too. After having ſo fully and explicitly declared their ſentiments againſt ſuch meaſures, he thought it behoved them to be explicit with the Senate. Indeed he felt himſelf a good deal hurt, that gentlemen on this floor, after having refuſed their permiſſion to the clerk to enter any more than their plain names on the journal, ſhould be ſtanding up and addreſſing one another by the title of "the honorable gentleman," he wiſhed the practice could be got over, becauſe it added neither to the honor nor dignity of the Houſe.

Mr. LEE

Approved of the appointment of a committee to confer with a committee of the Senate, as the mode due to the occaſion, but he was againſt adding any title.

Mr. TUCKER, (*the present Treasurer of the United States.*)

When this buſineſs was firſt brought before the Houſe, I objected to the appointment of a committee to confer with a committee of the Senate; becauſe I thought it a ſubject which this Houſe had no right to take into conſideration. I then ſtood ſingle and unſupported in my opinion, but have had the pleaſure to find ſince, that ſome gentlemen on this floor agree that I was right. If I was then right, I ſhall, from ſtronger reaſoning, be right now in oppoſing the appointment of another committee on the ſame ſubject. The joint committee reported, that no titles ought to be given; we agreed to the report, and I was in hopes we ſhould have heard no more of the matter. The Senate rejected the report, and have now ſent us a reſolution, expreſſive of a determination to give a title; to which they deſire our concurrence. I am ſtill of opinion, that we were wrong in appointing the firſt committee, and think that we ſhall be guilty of greater impropriety, if we now appoint another. What, ſir, is the intention of this buſineſs? Will it not alarm our fellow citizens? Will it not give them juſt cauſe of alarm? Will they not ſay, that they have been deceived by the Convention that framed the Conſtitution?—that it has been contrived with a view to lead them on by degrees to that kind of government, which they have thrown off with abhorrence? Shall we not juſtify the fears of thoſe who were oppoſed to the Conſtitution, becauſe they conſidered it as inſidious and hoſtile to the liberties of the people? One of its warmeſt advocates, one of the framers of it (Mr. Wilſon of Pennſylvania,) has recommended it by calling it a pure democracy. Does this look like a democracy, when one of the firſt acts of the two branches of the Legiſlature is to confer titles? Surely not. To give dignity to our government we muſt give a lofty title to our Chief Magiſtrate. Does the dignity of a nation conſiſt in the diſtance betwixt the Firſt Magiſtrate and his citizens?—does it conſiſt in the exaltation of one man, and the humiliation of the reſt? If ſo, the moſt deſpotic government is the moſt dignified; and to make our dignity complete, we muſt give a high title, an embroidered robe, a princely