THE

PRINCETON REVIEW.

OCTOBER 1840.

No. IV.

ART. I.—*Sectarianism is Heresy, in three parts, in which are shown its Nature, Evils and Remedy.* By A. Wylie. Bloomington, Ia. 1840. 8vo. pp. 132.

OUR church has occasion to rejoice whenever those who go out from her undertake to give their reasons. Who will venture to predict how many heedless lapses into high-churchism, on the one hand, and no-churchism on the other, have been already, or may yet be, prevented by the printed arguments of Mr. Calvin Colton and of Dr. Andrew Wylie? In this respect, if in no other, these distinguished writers may assure themselves, they have not lived in vain.

The work before us is a series of dialogues betwen one Gardezfoi, one Democop, and Timothy, an alias for Andrew Wylie. As he gives the outlandish names to his opponents, so he does his best to give them all the nonsense, but without success. The book is not so violent as we expected from the author's temper. He is a man of talents, and of reading, but inaccurate, and sadly wanting both in taste and judgment. He makes sectarianism to consist in bigotry and carnality. By bigotry he understands a disposition to lay stress on doctrines; and by carnality all zeal for particular denominations. His great point is, that faith is trust in God, not

Art. V.—*The Court of England, during the reign of the Stuarts; including the Protectorate.* By John Heneage Jesse.

We have felt, in common we presume, with every reader of history, that this department of literature falls far short of conceivable, and we must think, notwithstanding the amount of talent and industry bestowed on its cultivation, of attainable perfection. We are confident that the difficulty of good historical writing has seldom been appreciated by those who have attempted the task: and that, contrary to a common impression, the talents necessary to its sucessful accomplishment, in their number, diversity, and harmony, are among the rarest with which the human mind is gifted.

History may be likened to certain optical instruments, the object of which is to bring into distinct vision objects that are removed from us, both in regard to distance and time, and which must therefore give us a minute and exact view, in detail, of their dimensions and properties, and the several relations of both. The manufacture of such an instrument is obviously attended with extreme difficulty, and is wholly impracticable except in the most advanced stages of the arts. One man may possess skill enough to shape and finish the brass work; another may carve and adjust the wood, and a third may be taught to cut and polish the reflectors and lenses, but none of them can produce a finished telescope; and even should they combine their talents for the purpose, it is barely possible to prevent the instrument from giving a tinge to the objects of vision.

Very analogous is the production of history. One author is occupied in gathering and arranging mere materials, without the slightest attempt to modify them, or even lifting a tool. Another constructs the frame-work of history, while another, still, fits in the glasses and regulates the focus, and after all, when you come to scan the objects in the field of view, you find them partly coloured and dim, and the perspective and proportions wretchedly bad. Some of the difficulties are inherent and insurmountable, but greater skill and experience would vanquish the most of them.

In historical literature, in the widest sense of the term, there are three classes of writers. The first comprises mere annalists, collectors and compilers of documents and statis-

tics, men who furnish the warp and woof of history. Their avocation requires untiring patience, a relish for prying into all manner of things, with curiosity and impudence enough to surmount the apathy and reserve of mankind; and above all, that far-sighted perception and appreciation of the great and vital, but remote connexion of these primary mechanical offices with important results; something like that which enables the bellows-man behind his organ to reckon his services just as indispensable, and therefore as deserving of a share of the applause, as those of his coadjutor, who draws out the enrapturing melody from its keys. The comparision, however, does injustice to the subject: for the talents of this class of writers are as rare as they are valuable; and if specimens in natural history are valued in proportion as they are scarce, we see not why these should not receive a high niche in our Cabinet of Authors. Our country can boast a few admirable examples of this class; but after what we have said, they might, perhaps, consider it dubious praise, to have their names given as specimens of the genus we have described.

Our second class of writers includes those who are known distinctively as historians: that is, those who take the materials furnished at hand, and form a connected tissue. We have characterized the previous class as that which provides the warp and woof, the present weaves the web of history. Our literature abounds with specimens that are excellent of the sort. But what more do we want? We have a full, faithful narrative of facts, interspersed with profound philosophical reflections as to the causes and tendency of all the great leading transactions. What more can we desire? Where is the imperfection of history of which we venture to complain?

We will remark, before proceeding to answer the question, that our historical narratives and disquisitions are almost universally tinctured with party bias. Without falsifying the facts of history, it is perfectly easy to make them produce false convictions in the mind of the reader. It cannot be too often repeated, for example, that while Gibbon is admirable as a historian of the class we are describing, his book is one of the most dangerous in our language, for its insidious and powerful hostility to religion. Hume is vastly less objectionable, but would also be a strong case in proof of our remark. But this objection is a fault in the execution of this description of history, and not fundamental to the thing itself.

We proceed, therefore, to say that the whole style of historical writing seems to us extremely defective. Let us advert, for a moment, to its characteristics. It is a detailed narrative of facts and qualities in the abstract, with occasional philosophical essays. Now it enters into the very nature of this mode of writing to be dull and tedious. It addresses itself to the understanding and the reasoning powers, while the more sprightly and buoyant of our faculties, conception and fancy, are suffered to grow drowsy and go to sleep for want of amusement. This defect is peculiarly unfortunate in the case of children and youth. In the early stages of intellectual developement, when the perceptive and immaginative faculties are by far the most active, and are the avenues by which the great bulk of knowledge gets access to the juvenile mind, it is almost impossible to lead them through the domains of history; for there is not a vestige of life to be seen, no melody of birds, no waving sunny banks, not even a flower to delight their fancy; but straight, monotonous, interminable roads, bordered, indeed, with ripe and rich fruit, but most of it above their reach, and even that, of a sort which they have not yet learned to relish. Nor is it only the fatigue of the process. The want of interest has left them to wander through the mazes of their path, half asleep; and when they have reached the end, they have scarce a single distinct recollection of the objects and localities which you wished to impress upon their memory. In a word, it is heavy drudgery, for youth especially, to wade through history; and when they have done, some of their faculties may perhaps be strengthened, but their minds are not stored with knowledge. The impressons on the memory are few and faint and evanescent.

There is of course a vast difference in this respect in different authors. Some are more dry, more dull, more abstract than others. But the difficulty of which we complain is not a thing of degree, but of kind; not a fault of the composition, in point of beauty, vigour, or eloquence, but of the whole mode of representing historical truth to the mind. Several modern attempts to make history attractive to youth have, to a great extent, failed by mistaking the real difficulty of the case. They have simplified, ornamented and tried to enliven their subject, and while they have succeeded in part, they have still failed to compass the great object in view. History is still the least interesting of all the branches of study, to a great body of students; while, from

the nature of the case, we should certainly conclude that it ought to be the most absorbing to every class of minds, and the most of all to the young.

To take an example, and one which will give every possible advantage to the department of history:—The student will devour with absorbing interest the historical dramas of Shakspeare, while the excellent volumes of Hallam will be read, not for their interest, but for the knowledge they contain, if indeed they are not left undisturbed amidst the dust of an upper shelf. Sir Walter Scott will enlist and enchant a thousand readers, who could not be induced to wade through the best histories of classical or modern times. Now why is this? The subject is the same in both cases; men, manners, and actions. Ah, but in one case it is fiction, and in the other fact. But no man admires fiction as fiction. It is only as the representation of scenes, which the mind at the moment contemplates as real. And hence, fiction, itself, is interesting, only in proportion to its resemblance to nature and truth. If it is unnatural it is shocking. Now why is not a display of truth and nature as attractive as fiction, when fiction herself is obliged to array herself in their garb, in order to please? We do not recollect to have seen the question distinctly put: and we cannot conceive of an answer, except, that truth is kept behind the scenes, and merely described, while fiction borrows her dress and steps out upon the stage, to display herself in real living characters. Let truth then take back her own attire, and come forth, and play her part in life, instead of having it recited by a prompter, and she will instantly become, by her simplicity and honesty, the universal favourite alike of buoyant youth, and sober manhood.

Between the ordinary style of historical narrative, and that which we have attempted to describe, there is much the same difference, as to effect, that exists between the hearing of the ear, and the seeing of the eye. It is the difference which every one must have felt between two versions of the same story, accordingly as they are well or ill told. One man will hold the breathless attention of children by some trifling narrative, while another will fail to gain a hearing for the most instructive details of history. It is the same principle, which, as to the interest of their works, distinguishes Rollin from Shakspeare. To concede this superiority to fiction over truth, would, it seems to us, be a libel on the constitution of the human mind, and its relation to human nature.

We cannot conceive why the style of representation of the great Dramatist of English literature might not, as to its essential characteristic, be applied to the department of history. We do not mean, of course, to have the events of history manufactured into dramas, of five acts each, cut and carved for theatrical exhibition; but to have them represented, in the style in question, to the "minds eye," as they successively arise; so that instead of listening as to a report of distant transactions, we may enter into them with all the interest of living present reality. In a word, we would have the genius of Shakspeare employed, not to create, but simply to display human character and actions. For the verbal descriptions, or, at best, the outline profiles or crayon sketches of the characters of common history, we would substitute the fresh speaking portraits, full length and coloured to the life, after the style of those which enchant you at every step in the galleries of the romance of history. The only difference would he, that instead of fancy paintings, we would have them perfect likenesses. Let this be done, and students of all classes will linger amidst the scenes of history, and receive the lessons of its wisdom, with nearly the same interest, and more real pleasure, than they now resort to gaze upon the splendid and gorgeous, but unsubstantial visions of fiction.

Nor let it be objected, that this mode of representation would require an endless accumulation of the details of life, in order to secure fulness and accuracy, and thus swell the compass of history beyond all reasonable proportion. It is not so. The artist does not lay fibre after fibre, nerve after nerve, and vein after vein; but a few touches of his pencil, and the features of his picture, beam upon you from the canvass. The perfect distinctness, and amazing compass of action, comprised in the characters of Hamlet or Othello, show that brevity would gain as much as beauty by the style in question.

The reader has probably perceived, what we ought to have distinctly stated before this time, that the third class of authors, in the division proposed at the outset of these remarks, consists of those who have taken undisputed possession of the wide field of historical romance. To revert once more to our original figure, it is the characteristic province of this class, to take the threadbare web of history, and work upon it all manner of embroidery. Their object is to beautify and please. Their relation to the others, will probably be

sufficiently apparent from all that we have said. We would only repeat, that we blame them, not for the fascinating embroidery which they put upon the otherwise bare unsightly fabric; but that they have wrought upon it fancy work, instead of the sweet scenery of nature. The evils thus occasioned are twofold: first they have begotten a false taste just so far as they depart from nature; and secondly, they have done injustice to truth, by substituting fiction in its place. History will shine in the perfection of beauty, not by condemning the style of their workmanship, but by changing the character of their subjects; and by availing herself of their art, to adorn with the vivid, impressive pictures of truth the nakedness of her narrative.

We have felt, without expressing it, unfeigned diffidence in penning suggestions so radical, in regard to a subject which has lain under the full glare of so many strong minds. But it is not impossible for one, of no great pretensions in architecture, to make a suggestion as to a principle embodied in a given plan which had escaped the notice of a master mind, simply because the latter was occupied with the vastly greater difficulties encountered in the execution of the plan. To criticise, in such a case, is not to enter the lists invidiously with those who have the talents to embody,—to create. A very small man may be able to assign very sufficient reasons, why one of the great structures of Sir Christopher Wren would have answered the purpose better if it had been a parallelogram instead of a cross.

For ourselves we confess, that, in the case in hand, our growing convictions are ripened into confidence, by the sanction to the principles which we meant to develope, (whether we have succeeded or not,) furnished by that Book, which, while it makes no pretensions whatever to any thing of the sort, really supplies the most perfect models in every department of literature: It is an unspeakable relief to our mind, to take refuge behind an authority which is conclusive, if we are fairly sheltered by it;—to put forth a specimen which embodies, and therefore both defines and defends the principles we have tried to describe. The Bible furnishes the most perfect example of what we mean. The characteristics of its style are precisely those which we wished to portray and recommend. In every chapter of its histories, we have not dry, tedious narrative, but living characters acting and speaking before us. We catch the exact expression of their features, and sympathize with every emotion that kin-

dles in their eye. We retire to the desert or the mountain-top with our Saviour and his disciples, and bend with silent interest to catch, not the wisdom merely, but the very tones of his voice. We mingle with the crowd who spread their garments and palm branches before the King of the Daughter of Zion, and the Hosannas of the multitude resound in our very ears. All the leading scenes of our Saviour's history, at Sychar, in the temple, in the judgment hall of Herod, and on Calvary, are not descriptions, but pictures. You see not only every individual of the whole assembly, but you could paint every countenance: not because one of them is described, but because the passions of each are so marked that you cannot avoid conceiving a face to express them. Why is it, we ask, that not only the best, but the most numerous class of our great historical paintings, are founded on scripture scenes? Partly, no doubt, because of the sublimity of the subjects: but we are persuaded that an equally important reason, though we do not recollect to have seen it stated, is that the style is so highly graphic, that it irresistibly suggests the idea, and the artist may be said merely to copy the picture, which already beams in brightness and perfection from the pages of Scripture. Even the most prosaic passages of the prophecies are so strikingly picturesque, that Hengstenberg, the clearest of prophetic commentators, maintains the theory that all their communications were made to the minds of the prophets, in the form of dramatic or rather scenic representations; that all, even the most didactic, were literally "visions."

We have not yet placed the subject in as strong a light as it will bear. The writers of fiction, though perhaps unknown to themselves, are deeply indebted to the Bible, for the very excellencies which we have noticed, and endeavoured to recommend to the attention of writers of history. Dr. Spring has said with equal truth and force, "There is not a finer character nor a finer description in all the works of Walter Scott, than that of Rebekah in Ivanhoe. And who does not see that it owes its excellence to the Bible?" Shakspeare, Byron and Southey, are not a little indebted for some of their best scenes and inspirations, to the same source. At the suggestion of a valued friend, we have turned our thoughts to the parallel between Macbeth and Ahab—between Lady Macbeth and Jezebel—between the announcement to Macbeth of the murder of his family, and that to David of the death of Absalom by Joab—to the parallel

between the opening of the Lamentations of Jeremiah and Byron's apostrophe to Rome, as the Niobe of nations—to the parallel between his ode to Napoleon, and Isaiah's ode on the fall of Senacherib,—and also to the resemblance between Southey's chariot of Carmala, in the curse of Kehama, and Ezekiel's vision of the wheels; and have been forcibly impressed with the obligations of this class of writers to the Sacred Scriptures.

We have here a triumphant answer to the objection, founded on the alleged impossibility of applying the style in question, in its full perfection, to other subjects than those of fiction. In the Bible we find that it not only admits of this application; but that its primary and appropriate office, is to clothe and adorn the characters and incidents of real history.

Such is our theory of good historical writing: but let it not be thought that we deem its execution an easy task. To attempt it unsuccessfully, is to incur the danger not only of failure, but of rendering ones self ridiculous. The later works of Carlyle furnish a notable case in point. He has indeed brought his characters on the stage, in person; but he has them stiffened up in the buckram of his egotism till simplicity and nature are out of the question. Hence they disgust instead of pleasing. And to make the matter utterly ridiculous with personages who are too stiff even to walk with tolerable grace, he sets them to soaring transcendentally, till they are lost to view amidst the clouds of mysticism.

There is still another class of Authors who may 'by permission' be included among historians. They differ from those described only in the nature of their subject, and belong to one or the other respectively, as it regards the style and manner of treating it. We refer to those who describe, not nations, but individuals, not great public events, but prominent public characters. It is in this category that the author of the work before us is found. He writes Memoirs of the Court of England during the reign of the Stuarts. But the volumes we have seen come no further down than the Court of Charles the First, and do not therefore fulfil the promise of the title page, which covers the whole dynasty, "including also the Protectorate." The work exhibits the usual characteristics of its kind. The author has displayed great industry in hunting up details of private history, and in rummaging files of old letters. He seems to think nothing beneath his notice

that has any connexion with the subject of his memoir. He throws the light of accredited correspondence on a thousand trifling little questions, which no one has thought worth while to investigate, and yet every one is curious to see settled. He has all the fondness for gossip and scandal, which could be desired. He loves to tell us how Charles's favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, excited the indignation of London, by having his coach drawn by six horses, "a memorable instance of his splendour when we remember that only forty years had elapsed since coaches were first introduced into England," and how the old Earl of Northumberland eclipsed him "to the great contentment of the citizens" by driving through the streets with eight:—How the pompous Lord Herbert of Cherbury chased a French Cavalier all through a meadow to compel the surrender of a knot of riband, to a young girl of ten or eleven years of age, from whose arm he had stolen it:—How Lord Bacon always fainted at an eclipse of the moon, and how his servants never dared to approach before him, except in boots of Spanish leather, as he could always detect the smell of common leather which was extremely offensive to his Lordship's nerves: How Queen Henrietta Maria, having been driven from her house in Burlington, by Parliamentary cannon balls, returned in the face of danger, to rescue her favourite lap-dog, which she had left asleep. One is at a loss whether to feel amused or indignant at the zeal displayed in proving that this unfortunate Princess, after she became a widow, was actually married in secret to her *Chevalier d'honneur*, Henry Jermyn, and in uncovering to the world, the harshness and cruelty with which he treated her. The book throughout is of the highest order. But for some rather gross indelicacies, it might be characterized as a book for girls. There are no masterly touches in the portraiture; no meddling with great questions of government or national policy.

In regard to the character of the prominent individuals and parties of the day, both civil and religious, he is a mere mirror for the opinions of Hume; and of course the reflected images he gives us have gained nothing in correctness, while they have lost greatly in brightness and force. There is the same misrepresentation, the same special pleading, the same recklessness and even bitterness towards religion. Charles I. is a perfect saint, the most meek, well meaning, and conciliating, while the most abused and persecuted of mortals.

The Earl of Stafford, as usual, plays the part of a Martyr to the hypocritical bigotry and uncompromising hatred of Puritanism.

We have no wish to dogmatise on the great questions of English history, at the interesting period in question, but inasmuch as the other side of the subject has suffered in public estimation from the want of a historian attached to its principles and its parties, we will take the occasion to say, that in our judgment, it was the unfortunate issue of this struggle, which stamped it with the name and impress of infamy, which it still wears in the accredited records of history. Clarendon stigmatized it as "The Great Rebellion," and the epithet still adheres to it; while we cannot but think, that if the royal sceptre had passed at once into the hands of some Prince of Orange, it would have robbed of its honours and titles the change of Dynasty which occurred under James II., and descended to us in history under the title of "The Glorious Revolution." And even yet, notwithstanding its misfortunes, we hope it will not be long, before the Court of Public Sentiment will reverse the verdict given under the combined influence of fear and favour, and pronounce it the first, though unsuccessful, struggle, for religious and civil liberty.

We were disappointed at first, but on reflection were glad that our author says so little about these great public interests. We should have to quarrel with him at every step if he did: while we willingly take his hand, and step with him behind the tapestry to listen to the private intrigues of those, whose public character it is difficult to assail. There are not many writers who have a talent, perhaps we should say a taste, for exactly that sort of business. And yet while it does not greatly exalt our ideas of their merit, we thank them for admitting us,—not to stare at kings and nobles clad in the artificial splendors of the camp, the council chamber or the throne, —but to observe in the privacy of their own family, the familiar scenes of domestic life. We get many new ideas, and occasionally one of some importance by thus stealing behind the scenes. What a contrast there is between the notions of the unbending dignity and awful majesty, which even we Republicans are apt to throw over royalty, and the ridiculous pranks ascribed to James I. at the marriage of Herbert, Earl of Montgomery, and Lady Susan Vere.

But there is another respect, more honourable to the par-

ties, in which the private differs from the public character of those, who were active in the great political transactions of Modern Europe. Since the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII. and Ferdinand of Arragon, and their respective successors, the period when the use of standing armies was resumed, and the leading powers of Europe commenced their struggle for the empire of the world, the small remains of principle and integrity which lingered in the courts of the age, were completely annihilated, and the desperate game which followed, engendered the policy, which Machiavelli has embodied, and which passes by his name;—a policy which every man professed to abhor, but which every court in Europe notoriously practised without the least hesitation, in all their foreign diplomacy. Such was the perverted public sentiment of the age, that we must not infer that all public men were necessarily bad men in the domestic and social circle. While this is no apology for the enormous political vices of the times, it is often a great relief to our feelings to find men, whose public conduct we cannot defend, prove themselves worthy of our respect and admiration, by the constancy and purity of their domestic virtues.

We rise from the perusal of every thing pertaining to the public and private life of political men with a profound sense of the wretchedness of a life which so many covet. The emptiness, insincerity, intrigue, jealousy, hatred, oppression and assassination, which go to make up the history of thrones and of courts, present a gloomy picture of human nature.