

# THE PORT FOLIO,

NEW SERIES,

BY OLIVER OLDSCHOOL, ESQ.

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Various; that the mind  
Of desultory man, studious of change,  
And pleas'd with novelty, may be indulg'd.

COWPER.

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## AMERICAN SCENERY—FOR THE PORT FOLIO.

THE prospects on the Hudson river possess such an infinite variety of character, that it is difficult to groupe, within a single view, their more prominent peculiarities. The author of the annexed picture, in endeavouring to present something like a general idea of the scenery, has chosen a spot about twenty miles above Newyork, in the range of what are called the Palisado Rocks. These commence in the neighbourhood of the town of Bergen, and running along the western bank of the Hudson, terminate at the distance of about forty miles from Newyork, near the upper part of Haverstraw Bay. Their general appearance and character are uniform; they vary in height, from three to five hundred feet; and in their irregularities, present the form of an organ.

VOL. VII.

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## CLASSICAL LITERATURE.—FOR THE PORT-FOLIO.

[We have received through the medium of the Trustees of Bedford Academy, (Penn.) an address delivered at the opening of the new academy, on the 6th of January, 1812, by the Rev. JAMES WILSON, president of that seminary. To this sensible and well written essay, we give publication with much pleasure. We regret only that our limits constrain us to omit the details relative to the rapid progress and flourishing state of the institution, as well as the excellent moral instruction with which the president introduces the more immediate object of his address. We have indeed rarely seen the cause of classical literature so ably yet so concisely asserted as in the ensuing pages, which justify the highest hopes of the establishment over which the writer presides.]

## MY PUPILS,

THE most of you are young and incapable of appreciating, in its full extent, the value of those improvements in literature which you are now making. I shall, however, endeavour to bring the few observations, which I am about to make, within the sphere of your understanding. You are nearly all engaged in the study of the learned languages; and it is natural that you should inquire what advantages will result to you from a knowledge of these languages, now spoken by no nation on earth, in the form in which you learn them. It is reasonable that, if possible, you receive a satisfactory answer.

An elucidation of this subject is peculiarly important in our times, when some modern pretenders to literary reform are labouring to banish at once all classical literature from our seminaries, or are attempting to confine it to limits so narrow as to render it both contemptible and useless. If the war which these gentlemen are engaged in carrying on against classical learning, is a laudable enterprise, then that plan of education which has been selected for you, and which you are now executing, is not only unprofitable; it is calculated to waste, in a criminal manner, both your time and your exertions. But I trust the reverse of all this is truth—truth confirmed by evidence the most conclusive and irresistible.

I trust I shall be able to satisfy you that the study of the ancient languages forms not only a highly ornamental, but also a most valuable and interesting branch of education; and that those who attempt to expel it from our temples of science are, how-

ever honest their views, pursuing measures highly unpropitious to literary and moral improvement.

In attempting to elucidate this subject, I shall confine my remarks chiefly to these five points.

1. The aids afforded by ancient languages in acquiring a knowledge of antiquity, and of political and moral truth.

2. The advantages which arise from them in philological inquiries.

3. The helps we derive from them in theology.

4. The facilities which a knowledge of the Latin tongue furnishes in the acquisition of foreign living languages.

5. The improvement in taste both in delicacy and correctness, which is produced by an *accurate* and *extensive* acquaintance with Greek and Latin essayists, historians, and poets.

The bare mention of this outline is sufficient to carry conviction, if he is not already convinced, into the bosom of every elegant classical scholar. But to you, my pupils, it requires to be filled up; and especially in this age when you will meet with such a herd of smatterers to discountenance your present pursuits—smatterers who know nothing of the value of classical education, and therefore oppose it;—who without the requisite qualifications, invade the pulpit, the bar, and the temple of Esculapius, as the Egyptian mice invaded, at Pelusium, the bow-strings and shield-straps of the Assyrian army.

A discussion of these five points, as full and as minute as they merit, you are not to expect at present. They embrace a wide field of literary investigation.

The knowledge of antiquity forms, as all confess, a highly important department of human science. The happiest means to put us in possession of this knowledge, with accuracy, is the means which ought to be resorted to: and we contend, that, were every excellent Greek, Latin, and oriental writer, translated into the English language, yet the mere English scholar could form but an imperfect view of the manners and customs and modes of thought in ancient times.

Clothe the histories of Thucydides and Cornelius Tacitus in the best garb which the English language furnishes, and you, in

a great measure, clothe the republics of Greece and the Roman empire, in an English dress: so intimate is the connexion between thought and the language in which it is clothed.

But read these excellent historians in the originals, and you remount to venerable antiquity: Grecian and Roman statesmen, heroes, and philosophers, tread the stage arrayed in all the sober grandeur of ancient times.

Were you to pluck the beard from the bust of a Roman senator, and clothe it in the most fashionable dress of modern times, would you exhibit accurately a Roman? No; except the stature and the robust form, a modern fine gentleman stands before you. Translations of ancient authors pluck the beard from antiquity; while the originals present it in all its hoary-headed majesty.

The profound Latin and Greek scholar can, at pleasure, transport himself into Greece in all its refinement—walk in the groves of the academy, and saunter along the banks of Ilissus, where every grove is rendered vocal by the sweet melodious strains of Apollo's lyre—he can see Rome in its glory, associate himself with the shades of heroes and sages, and hear the Roman senate-house ring with Tully's eloquence. To be thus conveyed beyond the regions of English language and English thought and English feeling, gives a new tone to the mind, an expansion of thought and a manliness to the feelings, both of youth and age, which no English translation can effect. But all the valuable classic writers are not translated. Rich mines of knowledge are yet covered from the view of the mere English scholar. Again suppose all the historians of ancient times were translated into modern tongues, and the study of the ancient languages neglected, and all knowledge of them lost; in three or four centuries the originals would be lost, and all times before the origin of modern writers would be numbered among the fabulous ages.

Why are the accounts we have transmitted to us of the infancy of ancient empires, Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome, accounted fables? Doubtless, because we no longer understand the historical language of the pillars, the knots, and the hieroglyphics, in which those events, for which we seek, were re-

corded. If you wish to lose all knowledge of antiquity, banish from your schools the ancient languages: if you wish it preserved, retain them. I might now develop the assistance which we derive from these languages, in political and moral investigations; how they enable us to trace with precision the rise, progress, and fall of states, and the causes which either forwarded or retarded these events—and I might explain to you the advantages which they afford, in our attempts to unfold the human character, as they present man placed in an endless variety of circumstances: but these I wave for the present.

I shall now attend to the second topic, the advantages which arise from these languages in philological inquiries. I say philological, in order to avoid the word etymology, which has become so disgusting of late.

From the revival of letters by the munificence of the Medici, in the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, until the time of Dr. Johnson, etymology was fashionable among the learned. Since Horne Tooke's *Diversions of Purley* made their appearance, etymology has been nearly hissed off the stage. It is probable that the etymologists and anti-etymologists have both gone to extremes. But I think the course which literary men now take, much less propitious to learning, than that which they pursued before the *Diversions of Purley* appeared. It is indeed vain to attempt, to ascertain from its derivation the precise meaning of every English word, which we can trace into a foreign language. No two nations think precisely in the same way, much less those which speak different languages. Hence words, in passing from one nation and tongue into another nation and tongue, generally lose a part of their signification, sometimes the whole of it, and have annexed to them other thoughts, or shades of thought accommodated to the nature of that language which has adopted them. But this very circumstance proves that we can never acquire an accurate knowledge of ancient times, without a knowledge of ancient language. This revolution, which words experience in their migrations from language to language, presents the fairest opportunity for arriving at certainty in our investigations of subjects so subtle as thought and the symbols of thought.

A Hebrew word, when used by a Greek, loses one shade of thought which was connected with it in the mind of a Hebrew; when a Roman employed it, another shade vanished; it became still more limited in signification in the mouth of a Gaul; when adopted into our language, we can perhaps scarcely recognise any remains of the thought which the Hebrew expressed by it. Thus we are furnished with a means of analyzing our conceptions, a means which is no where else to be found. The habit of thus analyzing our intellectual operations, we form while engaged in the study of ancient language.

What can be more admirably adapted to the young mind, just beginning to unfold its powers, than such an employment as this? It gives the mind an accuracy and clearness of perception, which renders lucid all its future operations. All this may be acquired at an age when a boy is incapable of any other important intellectual improvement. In many instances our inquiries in natural history are aided by etymology. Take the plant hyssop as an example. If it were asked whether the plant with which the Israelites sprinkled the blood of the passover lamb, on the lintels and door-posts, and the plant which grew on the wall, and of which Solomon wrote, is the same plant which we call hyssop: I answer, it is; and by etymology alone we ascertain its identity. By the Hebrews it was named *esoph*, by the Greeks *hyssofos*, by the Latins *hyssofus*, and we call it *hyssop*: thus its identity is ascertained.

To all this we may add, by being able to recur to those languages from which words in ours are derived, we are often able to ascertain the extent of their import, when no English dictionary ministers to us that satisfaction which we desire; and also, by this means, to arrive at clear perceptions of the origin and progress of language. By recurring to the structure and philosophy of the Latin and Greek tongues, we have been, and still are, aided by these regular and stately languages, to fix and determine our own, which is irregular and monosyllabic.

In the Latin and Greek languages, the philosophical principles of every language are comprehended. These principles every learner must, in some degree, understand. Without these

he can make no progress. The relations of things are expressed by change of termination in words; and the great number of these changes introduces the student to a knowledge of the astonishing variety of relations, which objects bear to each other—relations of which one, who was acquainted with his native tongue alone, could scarcely form a conjecture.

A Latin noun wears seven forms; an adjective forty-eight; a pronoun eighteen; and a verb two hundred and seventeen. A Greek noun, without contraction, has eleven terminations; some contracted nouns have above twenty-two; the article, twenty-one; some adjectives, sixty-two; some pronouns, twenty-one. An uncontracted Greek verb is found in no less than nine hundred forms; and some contracted verbs in more than one thousand.

All these changes are employed to express the relations of things which a Latin and Greek scholar must understand. These relations, in English, and in most modern languages, are expressed by small words, such as auxiliary verbs and prepositions, and cannot be presented to the mind of a learner in form so condensed, as in the Latin and Greek. And were it not for the help which we derive from these ancient languages, many of these relations, which are essentially necessary to be known, in order to form a correct writer, an eloquent speaker, or scientific man, would pass unnoticed.

While acquiring a knowledge of the classics, all these are clearly perceived, and can easily be applied, when we attempt an analysis of our native tongue. In these and many other ways, our philological inquiries are facilitated by an acquaintance with the classics.

I shall now proceed to the third topic in our enumeration—the helps we derive from the ancient languages in theology. It is with pain that I am compelled to express a fear, that the introduction of such a topic into a literary paper, will be esteemed a breach of the laws of fashion, which, *in modern times*, has enchained all religion to the sacred desk, and forbids it, under pain of the high displeasure of society, to appear in the halls of science, or to tread the walks of social life. However, while engaged in the discharge of my sacred duty to the youth committed

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to my care; under the auspices of omnipotent truth, I shall proceed regardless of the mandates of depraved fashion. Theology ought to interest, deeply interest, the private citizen, the lawyer, the statesman, and physician, as well as the divine. If I can show satisfactorily, that theological knowledge is promoted by an acquaintance with the branch of literature which I discuss, I shall believe that an argument absolutely irresistible is offered in its favour.

The writings of the Greek and Roman sages, when read in that language in which those sages thought, introduce us into the very bosom of man, unenlightened by the pages of inspiration, unmask the depravity of the human heart, and exhibit in glowing colours to us the weakness of human intellect. Extremely imperfect are the best representations, which translations make, of the feelings of a heathen relative to divine things, compared with the almost living picture contained in the original.

Had we seen Cato seated by his table, with the dialogues of Plato on the immortality of the soul, and his sword lying upon it—had we seen his countenance, and heard him speak and reason on the nature of futurity, how vivid would our perceptions have been of the feelings of the heathen philosopher?

If we read them in the language which he spoke, the perception is comparatively obscured; but when we read them in our own language, it is almost defaced. You may apply this to the morals of Epictetus and Seneca, to the meditations of Marcus Antoninus, and to every other Grecian and Roman treatise on moral or religious subjects.

The theological works of the ancient fathers of the church, are all written in Greek or Latin, and comparatively few of them are translated into any modern language. He who would avail himself of the excellent disquisitions of these immediate successors of the apostles, must be a classical scholar. In the many and great theological controversies which are agitated, the authority of these fathers is often much relied upon, and great deference is due to their opinions. He who understands modern languages only, will never be able to ascertain, with precision, what is the opinion of these old divines. Many of the theolo-

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gical works of the reformers are written in Latin. Those of the continental divines are nearly all Latin.

These writings are such as we expect from men placed in their situations. The great events which were then exhibited; the shaking down of empires, and the destruction of systems of superstition and of tyranny, which for centuries had been held in veneration, awakened the human mind from the slumbers of ages; it arose in its might, and all its faculties stimulated to vigorous action. It performed every thing but miracles. Its first effort was to drag the Greek and Latin writers from their Gothic sepulchres; and next, to make the language of the latter the vehicle through which it found out the boldest stream of thought. The stupendous production of human intellect in that age, to the mere English scholar, are shrouded in darkness. No where did the genius of that constellation of heroes, who achieved the reformation, shine with such brilliancy as in the department of theology. The insight into the plan of Providence, and the display of the Christian system, contained in the works of Francis Turretin alone, will amply repay any one for all his labour in acquiring a knowledge of the language in which they are written. These works are not translated. The holy scriptures were originally written in languages now dead. In Greek and Hebrew we have the revelations which the God of nature and of grace has made to man—that wisdom which flows immediately from the infinite fountain of intellect. This consideration I think sufficient to strike dumb every enemy to classical literature, who professes himself a friend to revealed religion; and with the deist we have nothing to do: we hold him to be an incorrigible foe to all true learning, as well as to God and man.

The facilities which a knowledge of the Latin tongue affords in the acquisition of foreign living languages, is our fourth topic. To the enlightened part of our American citizens, it is not necessary, at this day, to press arguments in favour of the study of the languages of southern Europe, or the advantages which a knowledge of them affords to the man of business, to the professional character, and to the private gentleman. Every day we become more sensible of their importance. Commerce has enlarged her

sphere. All the civilized nations of the world are connected with each other, and interested in each other's fate. And though the European wars, which have lately raged with unexampled fury, bind commerce in chains, and contract the limits of social intercourse; yet this state of things is unnatural and cannot last long. It offers violence to the genius of the civilized world. And even in the present state of things, it requires little keenness of penetration to discover the advantages which the man possesses, who is acquainted with the languages spoken on the continent of Europe. He is at home in a foreign land. All state-papers, literary notices, and mercantile advices, he can read in the language in which they are written. In conversation he can avail himself of the descriptions which intelligent foreigners give of their native land. French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, are languages highly important to every scholar, and to every man in public life; and these are no more than dialects of Latin. It is true that when the northern barbarians rushed down upon the Roman Empire, laid it in ruins, and took possession of Italy and the northern provinces; many foreign words were introduced into those kingdoms where they settled down.

The Spanish has many words of Moorish origin. But so stately is the Latin tongue, and so firmly established in the philosophy of the human mind are its principle and structure, that the shock which prostrated the empire, was too feeble to overturn it. The savage nations fell into the use of it, and with such variations as their respective languages induced, adopted it as their own. The four languages which we have enumerated, are dialects of ancient Latin. Teach a boy the Latin, and from his very entrance on the study of these dialects he feels himself at home; his progress is rapid, and, in the end, his knowledge of them philosophical and complete. We may safely affirm, that Latin, Italian, and French, will be learned in the same time that the two latter can be acquired without the help of the former, and that the student will be much more accurate. The Spanish and Portuguese will require but a few months of additional labour. Hence much time and labour are saved.

The changes, which the various tribes of barbarians made in the Latin tongue when they adopted it, present to the learner an excellent opportunity of investigating the nature of the human mind. He will continually direct his thoughts to the Latin, and inquire after the causes which produced the various departures from its laws, which he finds in its living modifications. This topic deserves a separate paper.

My last topic is the improvement in taste, which we derive from classical literature.

The late profound Dr. Nesbit, the greatest scholar that ever consecrated by his presence an American seminary, is known to have been a very warm friend of classical learning. And the cultivation of taste derived from Latin and Greek writers was his first and last argument. In his hand it was the shield of Achilles. I do conceive that his word is sufficient to silence the whole phalanx of smatterers.

All civilized nations have considered Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Æneid* as standards by which the merits of all other epic poems must be measured. They come down to us with the accumulated approbation of ages. The *Idyls* of Theocritus and Virgil are imperishable standards of pastoral song. The *Odes* of Horace and Anacreon, and Horace's *Epistles* and *Satires*, and the *Satires* of Juvenal and Perseus, have been esteemed by men of taste in all times, as works almost perfect in their kind. Thucydides, Livy, Xenophon, Plutarch, Tacitus, Cæsar, Curtius, and Sallust, furnish all nations with models of historical and biographical writing, which we despair of ever seeing excelled. What shall we say of the rapid and overwhelming eloquence of Demosthenes, and the flowing tide of Tully's oratory, which has charmed the world for eighteen centuries?

Form the taste of youth upon these, or some of these models, and, like the person who has been accustomed to the works of masters in painting, they have always a standard by which they almost intuitively approve or condemn every work which meets their eye. In all these works, there are delicate tints, impassioned touches, and manners and feelings warm from life, chasteness of expression, and accuracy of thought, which cannot in

their native beauty be transferred into any other language. Pope's Homer is beautiful; Cowper's is more truly Homeric; but they are both languid when compared with the glowing life of the original.

Indeed when I cast my eye over the pages of Greek and Roman history—when I see the astonishing accuracy of taste which they display; the bold and rapid flights of their genius; I am impelled into the belief, that one great design of Providence in raising up the empires of Greece and Rome, and in them condensing all the literature and all the polish of the east, was to furnish the world, in all ages to come, with standard works of taste and genius. This thought receives additional force from the circumstance that the New Testament has forever consecrated the Greek language. ●

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#### THE FINE ARTS—FOR THE PORT FOLIO.

WE now turn our attention to the Venetian school of painting. Venice was once the seat of opulence and traffic, the repository of gorgeous silks and of shining tissues, and in fact, the splendid toyshop of Europe. The gay and fastidious hues imparted their tincture to the minds of all classes of people. From the artist who wrought, to the proudest of the nobility who was decorated with such glittering ornaments, the same taste pervaded. Colour, that delicate and captivating medium, instead of being subordinate, assumed a primary station, and was made the pander of traffic. From causes so obvious, the Venetian painter outrivalled all others in the beauty of his tints. Of this school Giorgione del Castel Franco, is considered as the earliest founder; for he abandoned the flat, dry, and meagre manner of his predecessors, and gave to his forms a bolder relief by stronger contrasts of light and shade. Possessing, however, no remains of antique sculpture, the artists were still incapable of elevating their thoughts to a standard of ideal excellence and visionary beauty. They had not been taught the mystery of selecting the fairest of the most beautiful forms of nature, and of