

Literary Journals

WHEN writers were not numerous, and readers rare, the unsuccessful author fell insensibly into oblivion; he dissolved away in his own weakness: if he committed the private folly of printing what no one would purchase, he was not arraigned at the public tribunal—and the awful terrors of his day of judgement consisted only in the retributions of his publisher's final accounts. At length, a taste for literature spread through the body of the people; vanity induced the inexperienced and the ignorant to aspire to literary honours. To oppose these forcible entries into the haunts of the Muses, periodical criticism brandished its formidable weapon; and the fall of many, taught some of our greatest geniuses to rise. Multifarious writings produced multifarious strictures, and public criticism reached to such perfection, that taste was generally diffused, enlightening those whose occupations had otherwise never permitted them to judge literary compositions.

The invention of REVIEWS, in the form which they thay have at length gradually assumed, could not have existed but in the most polished ages of literature; for without a constants supply of authors, and a refined spirit of criticism, they could not excite a perpetual in-

terest among the lovers of literature. These publications are the chronicles of taste and science, and present the existing state of the public mind, while they form a ready resource for those idle hours, which men of letters do not choose to pass idly.

Their multiplicity has undoubtedly produced much evil; puerile critics, and venal drudges, manufacture reviews; hence that shameful discordance of opinion, which is the scorn and scandal of criticism. Passions hostile to the peaceful truths of literature have likewise made tremendous inroads in the republic, and every literary virtue has been lost! In “Calamities of Authors” I have given the history of a literary conspiracy, conducted by a solitary critic, Gilbert Stuart, against the historian Henry.

These works may disgust by vapid panegyric, or gross invective; weary by uniform dulness, or tantalize by superficial knowledge. Sometimes merely written to catch the public attention, a malignity is indulged against authors, to season their caustic leaves. A reviewer has admired those works in private, which he has condemned in his official capacity. But good sense, good temper, and good taste, will ever form an esti-

mable journalist, who will inspire confidence, and give stability to his decisions.

To the lovers of literature these volumes, when they have outlived their year, are not unimportant. They constitute a great portion of literary history, and are indeed the annals of the republic.

To our own reviews, we must add the old foreign journals, which are perhaps even more valuable to the man of letters. Of these the variety is considerable; and many of their writers are now known. They delight our curiosity by opening new views, and light up in observing minds many projects of works, wanted in our own literature. GIBBON feasted on them; and while he turned them over with constant pleasure, derived accurate notions of works which no student can himself have verified; of many works a notion is sufficient, but this notion is necessary.

The origin of so many literary journals was the happy project of DENIS de SALLO, a counsellor in the parliament of Paris. In 1665 appeared his *Journal des Sçavans*. He published his essay in the name of the Sieur de He-douville, his footman! Was this a mere stroke of humour, or designed to insinuate that the freedom of his criticism could only be allowed to his footman? The

work, however, met with so favourable a reception, that SALLO had the satisfaction of seeing it, the following year, imitated throughout Europe, and his Journal, at the same time, translated into various languages. But as most authors lay themselves open to an acute critic, the animadversions of SALLO were given with such asperity of criticism, and such malignity of wit, that this new journal excited loud murmurs, and the most heart-moving complaints. The learned had their plagiarisms detected, and the wit had his claims disputed. Sarasin called the gazettes of this new Aristarchus Hebdomadory Flams! *Billevesées hebdomadaires!* and Menage having published a law-book, which Sallo had treated with severe raillery, he entered into a long argument to prove, according to Justinian, that a lawyer is not allowed to defame another lawyer, &c. *Senators maledicere non licet remaledicere jus fusque est.* Others loudly declaimed against this new species of imperial tyranny, and this attempt to regulate the public opinion by that of an individual. Sallo, having published only his third volume, felt the irritated wasps of literature thronging so thick about him, that he very gladly abdicated the throne of criticism. The journal is said to have suffered a short interruption by a remonstrance from the nuncio

of the pope, for the enrgy with which Sallo had defended the liberties of the Gallican church.

Intimidated by the fate of SALLO, his successor Abbé GALLOIS, flourished in a milder reign. He contented himself with giving the titles of books, accompanied with extracts; and he was more useful than interesting. The public, who had been so much amused by the railery and severity of the founder of this dynasty of new critics, now murmured at the want of that salt and acidity by which they had relished the fugitive collation. They were not satisfied in having the most beautiful, or the most curious parts of a new work brought together; they wished for the unreasonable entertainment of railing and raillery. At length another objection was conjured up against the review; mathematicians complained they were neglected to make room for experiments in natural philosophy; the historian sickened over works of natural history; the antiquaries would have nothing but discoveries of MSS. or fragments of antiquity. Medical works were called for by one party and reprobated by another. In a word, each reader wished only to have accounts of books which were interesting to his profession or his taste. But a review is a work presented to the public at large, and written for more than

one country. In spite of all these difficulties, this work was carried to a vast extent. An *index* to the *Journal des Sçavans* has been arranged on a critical plan, occupying ten volumes in quarto, which may be considered as a most useful instrument to obtain the science and literature of the entire century.

The next celebrated reviewer is BAYLE, who undertook, in 1684, his *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*. He possessed the art, acquired by habit, of reading a book by his fingers, as it has been happily expressed; and of comprising, in concise extracts, a just notion of a book, without the addition of irrelevant matter. He had for his day sufficient playfulness to wreath the rod of criticism with roses; and, for the first time, the ladies and the *beau-monde* took an interest in the labours of the critic. Yet even BAYLE, who declared himself to be a reporter and not a judge, BAYLE, the discreet sceptic, could not long satisfy his readers. His panegyric was thought somewhat prodigal; his fluency of style somewhat too familiar; and others affected not to relish his gaiety. In his latter volumes, to still the clamour, he assumed the cold sobriety of an historian: and has bequeathed no mean legacy to the literary world, in thirty-six small volumes of criticism, closed in 1687. These

were continued by Bernard, with inferior skill; and by Basnage more successfully in his *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans*.

The contemporary and the antagonist of BAYLE was LE CLERC. His firm industry has produced three *Bibliothèques—Universelle et Historique—Choisie—and Ancienne et Moderne*: forming in all 82 volumes, which complete bear a very high price. Inferior to BAYLE in the more pleasing talents, he is perhaps superior in erudition, and shows great skill in analysis: but his hand drops no flowers! Apostolo Zeno's *Giornale de' Litterati d'Italia*, from 1710 to 1733 is valuable. GIBBON resorted to Le Clerc's volumes at his leisure, "as an inexhaustible source of amusement and instruction."

BEAUSOBRE and L'ENFANT, two learned Protestants, wrote a *Bibliothèque Germanique*, from 1720 to 1740, in 50 volumes; our own literature is interested by the "*Bibliothèque Britannique*," written by some literary Frenchmen, noticed by La Croze in his "Voyage littéraire," who designates the writers in this most tantalizing manner: "Les auteurs sont gens de merite et qui entendent tous parfaitement l'Anglois; Messrs. S. B. le M. D. et le savant Mr. D." Posterity has been partially let into the secret; De Missy was one of the contributors, and Warburton communicated his project of an edition of

Velleius Paterculus. This useful account of only English books begins in 1733, and closes in 1747, Hague, 23 vols.: to this we must add the *Journal Britannique*, in 18 volumes, by Dr. MATY, a foreign physician residing in London: this Journal exhibits a view of the state of English literature from 1750 to 1755. GIBBON bestows a high character on the Journalist, who sometimes "aspires to the character of a poet and a philosopher; one of the last disciples of the school of Fontenelle."

MATY's son produced here a review known to the curious; his style and decisions often discover haste and heat, with some striking observations: alluding to his father, Maty, in his motto, applies Virgil's description of the young Ascanius: "Sequitur *patrem* non passibus æquis." He says he only holds a *monthly conversation* with the public; but criticism demands more maturity of reflection and more terseness of style. In his obstinate resolution of carrying on this review without an associate, he has shown its folly and its danger; for a fatal illness produced a cessation, at once, of his periodical labours and his life.

Other reviews, are the *Mémoires de Trevoux*, written by the Jesuits. Their caustic censure and vivacity of style made them redoubtable in their day: they did not even spare their brothers. The *Journal Littéraire*,

printed at the Hague, and chiefly composed by Prosper Marchand, Sallengre, Van Effen, who were then young writers. This list may be augmented by other journals, which sometimes merit preservation in the history of modern literature.

Our early English journals notice only a few publications, with but little acumen. Of these, the "Memoirs of Literature," and the "Present State of this Republic of Letters," are the best. The Monthly Review, the venerable mother of our journals, commenced in 1749.

It is impossible to form a literary journal in a manner such as might be wished; it must be the work of many different tempers and talents. An individual, however versatile and extensive his genius, would soon be exhausted. Such a regular labour occasioned Bayle a dangerous illness, and Maty fell a victim to his review. A prospect always extending, as we proceed, the frequent novelty of the matter, the pride of considering one's self as the arbiter of literature, animate a journalist at the commencement of his career; but the literary Hercules becomes fatigued; and to supply his craving pages he gives copious extracts, till the journal becomes tedious, or fails in variety. Abbé Gallois was frequently diverted from continuing his journal, and Fontenelle remarks, that this occupation was too restrictive for a mind so

extensive as his; the Abbé could not resist the charms of revelling in a new work, and gratifying any sudden curiosity which seized him: this interrupted perpetually the regularity which the public expects from a journalist.

To describe the character of a perfect journalist, would be only an ideal portrait! There are however some acquirements which are indispensable. He must be tolerably acquainted with the subjects he treats on; no *common* acquirement! He must possess the *literary history of his own times*: a science which Fontenelle observes is almost distinct from any other. It is the result of an active curiosity, which leads us to take a lively interest in the tastes and pursuits of the age, while it saves the journalist from some ridiculous blunders. We often see the mind of a reviewer half a century remote from the work reviewed. A fine feeling of the various manners of writers, with a style, adapted to fix the attention of the indolent, and to win the untractable, should be his study; but Candour is the brightest gem of criticism! He ought not to throw everything into the crucible, nor should he suffer the whole to pass as if he trembled to touch it. Lampoons and satires, in time will lose their effect, as well as panegyrics. He must learn to resist the seductions of his own pen; the pretensions of compos-

ing a treatise on the *subject*, rather than on the *book* he criticises, proud of insinuating that he gives in a dozen pages, what the author himself has not been able to perform in his volumes. Should he gain confidence by a popular delusion and by unworthy conduct, he may chance to be mortified by the pardon or chastisement of insulted genius. The most noble criticism is that, in which the critic is not the antagonist so much as the rival of the author.