

Amusements of the Learned

AMONG the Jesuits it was a standing rule of the order, that after an application to study for two hours, the mind of the student should be unbent by some relaxation, however trifling. When Petavius was employed in his *Dogma Theologiae*, a work of the most profound and extensive erudition, the great recreation of the learned father was at the end of every second hour, to twirl his chair for five minutes. After protracted studies Spinoza, would mix with the family-party where he lodged, and join in the most trivial conversations, or unbend his mind by setting spiders to fight each other; he observed their combats with so much interest, that he was often seized with immoderate fits of laughter. A continuity of labour deadens the soul, observes Seneca, in closing his treatise on "The Traquillity of the Soul," and the mind must unbend itself by certain amusements. Socrates did not blush to play with children; Cato, over his bottle, found an alleviation from the fatigues of government; a circumstance, Seneca says in his manner, which rather gives honour to this defect, than the defect dishonours Cato. Some men of letters portioned out their day between repose and labour. Asinius Pollio would not suffer any business to occupy him beyond a stated hour; after that time he would not allow any

letter to be opened, that his hours of recreation might not be interrupted by unforeseen labours. In the senate, after the tenth hour, it was not allowed to make any new motion.

Tycho Brahe diverted himself with polishing glasses for all kinds of spectacles, and making mathematical instruments; an amusement too closely connected with his studies to be deemed as one.

D'Andilly, the translator of Josephus, after seven or eight hours of study every day, amused himself in cultivating trees; Barclay, the author of the *Argenis*, in his leisure hours was a florist; Balzac amused himself with a collection of crayon portraits; Peiresc found his amusement amongst his medals and antiquarian curiosities; the Abbé de Maroles with his prints; and Politian in singing airs to his lute. Descartes passed his afternoons in the conversation of a few friends, and in cultivating a little garden; in the morning, occupied by the system of the world, he relaxed his profound speculations by rearing delicate flowers.

Conrad ab Uffenbach, a learned German, recreated his mind, after severe studies, with a collection of prints of eminent persons, methodically arranged; he retained this ardour of the *Grangerite* to his last days.

Rohault wandered from shop to shop to observe the mechanics labour; Count Caylus passed his mornings in the studios of artists, and his evenings in writing his numerous works on art. This was the true life of an amateur.

Granville Sharp, amidst the severity of his studies, found a social relaxation in the amusement of a barge on the Thames, which was well known to the circle of his friends; there, was festive hospitality with musical delight. It was resorted to by men of the most eminent talents and rank. His little voyages to Putney, to Kew, and to Richmond, and the literary intercourse then produced, were singularly happy ones. "The history of his amusements cannot be told without adding to the dignity of his character," observes Mr. Prince Hoare, in the very curious life of this great philanthropist.

Some have found amusement in composing treatises on odd subjects. Seneca wrote a burlesque narrative of Claudian's death. Pierius Valerianus has written an eulogium on beards; and we have had a learned one recently, with due gravity and pleasantry, entitled "Eloge de Perruques."

Holstein has written an eulogium on the North Wind; Heinsius, on "the Ass;" Menage, "the Transmigration

of the Parasitical Pedant to a Parrot" and also the "Petition of the Dictionaries."

Erasmus composed, to amuse himself when travelling in a post-chaise, his panegyric on *Moria*, or Folly; which, authorized by the pun, he dedicated to Sir Thomas More.

Sallengre, who would amuse himself like Erasmus, wrote, in imitation of his work, a panegyric on *Ebreity*. He says, that he is willing to be thought as drunken a man as Erasmus was a foolish one. Synesius composed a Greek panegyric on *Baldneess*. These burlesques were brought into great vogue by Erasmus's *Moriæ Encomium*.

It seems, Johnson observes in his life of Sir Thomas Browne, to have been in all ages the pride of art to show how it could exalt the low and amplify the little. To this ambition perhaps we owe the Frogs of Homer; the Gnat and the Bees of Virgil; the Butterfly of Spenser; the Shadow of Wowerus; and the Quincunx of Browne.

Cardinal de Richelieu, amongst all his great occupations, found a recreation in violent exercises; and he was once discovered jumping with his servant, to try who could reach the highest side of a wall. De Gram-

mont, observing the cardinal to be jealous of his powers, offered to jump with him; and, in the true spirit of a courtier, having made some efforts which nearly reached the cardinal's, confessed the cardinal had surpassed him. This was jumping like a politician; and by this means is said to have ingratiated himself with the minister.

The great Samuel Clarke was fond of robust exercise; and this profound logician has been found leaping over tables and chairs: once perceiving a pedantic fellow, he said, "Now we must desist, for a fool is coming in!"

What ridiculous amusements passed between Dean Swift and his friends, in Ireland, some of his prodigal editors have revealed to the public. He seems to have outlived the relish of fame, when he could level his mind to such perpetual trifles.

An eminent French lawyer, confined by his business to a Parisian life, amused himself with collecting from the classics all the passages which relate to a country life. The collection was published after his death.

Contemplative men seem to be fond of amusements which accord with their habits. The thoughtful game of chess, and the tranquil delight of angling, have been favourite recreations with the studious. Paley had himself painted with a rod and line in his hand; a strange

characteristic for the author of "Natural Theology." Sir Henry Wotton called angling "idle time not idly spent:" we may suppose that his meditations and his amusements were carried on at the same moment.

The amusements of the great Daguesseau, chancellor of France, consisted in an interchange of studies: his relaxations were all the varieties of literature. "Le changement de l'étude est mon seul délassement," said this great man; and Thomas observes, "that in the age of the passions, his only passion was study."

Seneca has observed on amusements proper for literary men, in regard to robust exercises, that these are a folly, an indecency to see a man of letters exult in the strength of his arm, or the breadth of his back! Such amusements diminish the activity of the mind. Too much fatigue exhausts the animal spirits, as too much food blunts the finer faculties: but elsewhere he allows his philosopher an occasional slight inebriation; an amusement which was very prevalent among our poets formerly, when they exclaimed,

Fetch me Ben Jonson's scull, and fill't with sack,
Rich as the same he drank, when the whole pack
Of jolly sisters pledged, and did agree
It was no sin to be as drunk as he!

Seneca concludes admirably, “whatever be the amusements you choose, return not slowly from those of the body to the mind; exercise the latter night and day. The mind is nourished at a cheap rate; neither cold nor heat, nor age itself, can interrupt this exercise; give therefore all your cares to a possession which ameliorates even in its old age!”

An ingenious writer has observed, that “a garden just accommodates itself to the perambulations of a scholar, who would perhaps rather wish his walks abridged than extended.” There is a good characteristic account of the mode in which the literati take exercise in Pope’s letters. “I, like a poor squirrel, am continually in motion indeed, but it is but a cage of three foot; my little excursions are like those of a shopkeeper, who walks every day a mile or two before his own door, but minds his business all the while.” A turn or two in a garden will often very happily close a fine period, mature an unripened thought, and raise up fresh associations, when the mind like the body becomes rigid by preserving the same posture. Buffon often quitted the apartment he studied in, which was placed in the midst of his garden, for a walk in it; Evelyn loved “books and a garden.”