

The Scuderies

Bien heureux SCUDERY, dont la fertile plume
Peut tous les mois sans peine enfanter un volume.

BOILEAU has written this couplet on the Scuderies, the brother and sister, both famous in their day for composing romances, which they sometimes extended to ten or twelve volumes. It was the favourite literature of that period, as novels are now. Our nobility not unfrequently condescended to translate these voluminous compositions.

The diminutive size of our modern novels is undoubtedly an improvement; but, in resembling the size of primers, it were to be wished that their contents had also resembled their inoffensive pages. Our great-grandmothers were incommoded with overgrown folios; and, instead of finishing the eventful history of two lovers at one or two sittings, it was sometimes six months, *including Sundays*, before they could get quit of their Clelias, their Cyruses, and Parthenissas.

Mademoiselle Scullery, Menage informs us, had composed *ninety* volumes! She had even finished another romance, which she would not give the public, whose taste, she perceived, no more relished this kind of work. She was one of those unfortunate authors who, living

to more than ninety years of age, survive their own celebrity.

She had her panegyrists in her day: Menage observes, "What a pleasing description has Mademoiselle Scudery made, in her *Cyrus*, of the little court at Rambouillet! A thousand things in the romances of this learned lady render them inestimable. She has drawn from the ancients their happiest passages, and has even improved upon them; like the prince in the fable, whatever she touches becomes gold; We may read her works with great profit, if we possess a correct taste, and love instruction. Those who censure their *length* only show the littleness of their judgment; as if Homer and Virgil were to be despised, because many of their books are filled with episodes and incidents that necessarily retard the conclusion. It does not require much penetration to observe, that *Cyrus* and *Clelia* are a species of the *epic* poem. The epic must embrace a number of events to suspend the course of the narrative; which only taking in a part of the life of the hero, would terminate too soon to display the skill of the poet. Without this artifice, the charm of uniting the greater part of the episodes to the principal subject of the romance would be lost. Mademoiselle de Scullery has so well treated

them, and so aptly introduced a variety of beautiful passages, that nothing in this kind is comparable to her productions. Some expressions, and certain turns, have become somewhat obsolete, all the rest will last for ever, and outlive the criticisms then have undergone.”

Menage has here certainly uttered a false prophecy. The curious only look over her romances. They contain doubtless many beautiful inventions; the misfortune is, that *time* and *patience* are rare requisites for the enjoyment of these Iliads in prose.

“The misfortune of her having written too abundantly has occasioned an unjust contempt,” says a French critic. “We confess there are many heavy and tedious passages in her voluminous romances; but if we consider that in the Clelia and the Artamene are to be found inimitable delicate touches, and many splendid parts which would do honour to some of our living writers, we must acknowledge that the great defects of all her works arise from her not writing in an age when taste had reached the acme of cultivation. Such is her erudition, that the French place her next to the celebrated Madame Dacier. Her works, containing many secret intrigues of the court and city, her readers must have keenly relished on their early publication.”

Her Artamenes, or the Great Cyrus, and principally her Clelia, are representations of what then passed at the court of France. The *Map of the Kingdom of Tenderness*, in Clelia, appeared, at the time, as one of the happiest inventions. This once celebrated map is an allegory which distinguishes the different kinds of Tenderness, which are reduced to esteem, gratitude, and inclination. The map represents three rivers, which have these three names, and on which are situated three towns called Tenderness: Tenderness on *Inclination*; Tenderness on *Esteem*; and Tenderness on *Gratitude*. *Pleasing Attentions*, or *Petit Soins*, is a *village* very beautifully situated. Mademoiselle de Scudery was extremely proud of this little allegorical map; and had a terrible controversy with another writer about its originality.

GEORGE SCUDERY, her brother, and, inferior in genius, had a striking singularity of character:—he was one of the most complete votaries to the universal divinity of Vanity. With a heated imagination, entirely destitute of judgment, his military character was continually exhibiting itself by that peaceful instrument the pen, so that he exhibits a most amusing contrast of ardent feelings in a cool situation; not liberally endowed with genius, but abounding with its semblance in the fire

of eccentric gasconade; no man has portrayed his own character with a bolder colouring than himself in his numerous prefaces and addresses; surrounded by a thousand self-illusions of the most sublime class, everything, that related to himself had an Homeric grandeur of conception.

In an epistle to the Duke of Montmorency, he says, "I will learn to write with my left hand, that my right hand may more nobly be devoted to your service;" and alluding to his pen, (*plume*) declares "he comes from a family who never used one, but to stick in their hats." When he solicits small favours from the great, he assures them "that princes must not think him importunate, and that his writings are merely inspired by his own individual interest; no! (he exclaims) I am studious only of your glory, while I am careless of my own fortune." And indeed, to do him justice, he acted up to these romantic feelings. After he had published his epic of Alaric, Christina of Sweden proposed to honour him with a chain of gold of the value of five hundred pounds, provided he would expunge from his epic the eulogiums he bestowed on the Count of Gardie, whom she had disgraced. The epical soul of Scudery magnanimously scorned the bribe, and replied, that "If the chain of gold should be as weighty as that chain men-

tioned in the history of the Incas, I will never destroy any altar on which I have sacrificed!"

Proud of his boasted nobility and erratic life, he thus addresses the reader: "You will lightly pass over any faults in my work, if you reflect that I have employed the greater part of my life in seeing the finest parts of Europe, and that I have passed more days in the camp than in the library. I have used more matches to light my musket than to light my candles; I know better to arrange columns in the field than those on paper; and to square battalions better than to round periods." In his first publication, he began his literary career perfectly in character, by a challenge to his critics!

He is the author of sixteen plays, chiefly heroic tragedies; children who all bear the features of their father. He first introduced in his "L'Amour Tyrannique" a strict observance of the Aristotelian unities of time and place; and the necessity and advantages of this regulation are insisted on, which only shows that Aristotle's art goes but little to the composition of a pathetic tragedy. In his last drama, "Arminius," he extravagantly scatters his panegyrics on its fifteen predecessors; but of the present one he has the most exalted notion: it is the quintessence of Scudery! An ingenious critic calls it "The downfall of mediocrity!" It is amusing to lis-

ten to this blazing preface—"At length, reader, nothing remains for me but to mention the great Arminius which I now present to you, and by which I have resolved to close my long and laborious course. It is indeed my masterpiece! and the most finished work that ever came from my pen; for whether we examine the fable, the manners, the sentiments, or the versification, it is certain that I never performed anything so just, so great, nor more beautiful; and if my labours could ever deserve a crown, I would claim it for this work!"

The actions of this singular personage were in unison with his writings: he gives a pompous description of a most unimportant government which he obtained near Marseilles, but all the grandeur existed only in our author's heated imagination. Bachaumont and De la Chapelle, two wits of those times, in their playful "Voyage," describe it, with humour;

Mais il faut vous parler du fort
 Qui sans doute est une merveille;
 C'est notre dame de la garde!
 Gouvernement commode et beau,
 A qui suffit pour tout garde,
 Un Suisse avec sa halebarde
 Peint sur la porte du château!

A fort very commodiously guarded; only requiring one sentinel, and that sentinel a soldier painted on the door!

In a poem on his disgust with the world, he tells us how intimate he has been with princes : Europe has known him through all her provinces; he ventured everything in a thousand combats:

L'on me vit obeir, lon me vit commander,
 Et mon poil tout poudreux a blanchi sous les armes;
 Il est peu de beaux arts ou je ne sois instruit;
 En prose et en vers, men nom fit quelque bruit;
 Et par plus dun chemin je parvins à la gloire!

IMITATED.

Princes were proud my friendship to proclaim,
 And Europe gazed, where'er her Hero came!
 I grasp'd the laurels of heroic strife,
 The thousand perils of a soldier's life!
 Obedient in the ranks each toilful day!
 Though heroes soon command, they first obey.
 'Twas not for me, too long a time to yield!
 Born for a chieftain in the tented field!
 Around my plumed helm, my silvery hair
 Hung like an honour'd wreath of age and care!
 The finer arts have charm'd my studious hours,
 Versed in their mysteries, skilful in their powers;
 In verse and prose my equal genius glow'd,
 Pursuing glory, by no single road!

Such was the vain George Scudery! whose heart,
however, was warm; poverty could never degrade him;
adversity never broke down his magnanimous spirit!