

### *Physiognomy*

A VERY extraordinary physiognomical anecdote has been given by De la Place in his "*Pieces Interessantes et peu Connues*," vol. iv. p. 8.

A friend assured him that he had seen a voluminous and secret correspondence which had been carried on between Louis XIV, and his favourite physician De la Chambre on this science: the faith of the monarch seems to have been great, and the purpose to which this correspondence tended was extraordinary indeed, and perhaps scarcely credible. Who will believe that Louis XIV. was so convinced of that talent which De la Chambre attributed to himself; of deciding merely by the physiognomy of persons not only on the real bent of their character, but to what employment they were adapted, that the king entered into a *secret correspondence* to obtain the critical notices of his *physiognomies*? That Louis XIV. should have pursued this system, undetected by his own courtiers, is also singular; but it appears by this correspondence that this art positively swayed him in his choice of officers and favourites. On one of the backs of these letters De la Chambre had written, "If I die before his majesty, he will incur great risk of making an unfortunate choice!"

This collection of physiognomical correspondence, if it does really exist, could form a curious publication; we have heard nothing of it! De la Chambre was an enthusiastic physiognomist, as appears by his works; "The Characters of the Passions," four volumes in quarto; "The Art of knowing Mankind;" and "The Knowledge of Animals." Lavater quotes his "Vote and Interest" in favour of his favourite science. It is, however, curious to add, that Philip Earl of Pembroke, under James I., had formed a particular collection of portraits, with a view to physiognomical studies. According to Evelyn on Medals, p. 302, such was his sagacity in discovering the characters and dispositions of men by their countenances, that James I. made no little use of his extraordinary talent on the *first arrival of ambassadors at court*.

The following physiological definition of PHYSIOGNOMY is extracted from a publication by Dr. Gwither, of the year 1604, which, dropping his history of "The Animal Spirits," is curious.

"Soft wax cannot receive more various and numerous impressions, than are imprinted on a man's face by *objects* moving his affections: and not only the *objects* themselves have this power, but also the very *images*

or *ideas*; that is to say, anything that puts the animal spirits into the same motion that the *object* present did will have the same effect with the object. To prove the first, let one observe a man's face looking on a pitiful object, then a ridiculous, then a strange, then on a terrible or dangerous object, and so forth. For the second, that *ideas* have the same effect with the *object*, dreams confirm too often.

“The manner I conceive to be thus. The animal spirits moved in the sensory by an object, continue their motion to the brain; whence the motion is propagated to this or that particular part of the body, as is most suitable to the design of its creation; having first made an alteration in the *face* by its nerves, especially by the *pathetic* and *oculorum motorii* actuating its many muscles, as the dial-plate to that stupendous piece of clockwork which shows what is to be expected next from the striking part. Not that I think the motion of the spirits in the sensory continued by the impression of the object all the way, as from a finger to the foot: I know it too weak, though the tenseness of the nerves favours it. But I conceive it done in the medulla of the brain, where is the common stock of spirits; as in an organ, whose pipes being uncovered, the air rushes into them; but the keys let go, are stopped again. Now, if by repeated

acts or frequent entertaining of a favourite idea of a passion or vice, which natural temperament has hurried one to, or custom dragged, the *face* is so often put into that posture which attends such acts, that the animal spirits find such latent passages into its nerves, that it is sometimes unalterably set: as the *Indian* religious are by long continuing in strange postures in their *pagods*. But most commonly such a habit is contracted, that it falls insensibly into that posture when some present object does not obliterate that more natural impression by a new, or dissimulation hide it.

“Hence it is that we see great *drinkers* with *eyes* generally set towards the nose, the adducent muscles being often employed to let them see their loved liquor in the glass at the time of drinking; which were therefore called *bibitory*. *Lascivious persons* are remarkable for the *oculorum mobilis petulantia*, as Petronius calls it. From this also we may solve the *Quaker's* expecting face, waiting for the pretended spirit; and the melancholy face of the *sectaries*; the *studious* face of men of great application of mind; revengeful and *bloody* men, like executioners in the act: and though silence in a sort may awhile pass for wisdom, yet sooner or later, Saint Martin peeps through the disguise to undo all. A *changeable face* I have observed to show a *changeable mind*. But I would

by no means have what has been said understood as without exception; for I doubt not but sometimes there are found men with great and virtuous souls under very unpromising outsides.”

The great Prince of Conde was very expert in a sort of phisiognomy which showed the peculiar habits, motions, and postures of familiar life and mechanical employments. He would sometimes lay wagers with his friends, that he would guess, upon the Pont Neuf, what trade persons were of that passed by, from their walk and air.