

THE
COLUMBIAN READER,

COMPRISING

A NEW AND VARIOUS SELECTION

OF

ELEGANT EXTRACTS

IN

PROSE AND POETRY,

OR THE USE OF SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED AN

INTRODUCTION

ON THE

ARTS ~~OF~~ READING AND SPEAKING:

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PUBLISHED BY
P. & C. WILLIAMS, BOSTON, AND EZEKIEL GOODALE, HALLOWELL.—For Sale by them at their respective
Book-Stores, and by most of the Book-
Sellers in New-England.

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E. GOODALE, PRINTER,
1815.

questions of theology, from various causes often agitated, but never determined, he neither pretended nor desired to investigate, satisfied that they related to points uncertain or unimportant: but he loved to view religion on the practical side, as designed to operate by a few simple and grand truths on the affections, actions and habits of men.

CHARACTER OF JOHN MARSHAL.

The Chief Justice of the United States, is in his person, tall, meagre, emaciated; his muscles relaxed, and his joints so loosely connected, as not only to disqualify him, apparently, for any vigorous exertion of body, but to destroy every thing like elegance and harmony in his air and movement. Indeed in his whole appearance, and demeanor; dress, attitude, gesture; sitting, standing, or walking; he is as far removed from the idolized graces of Lord Chesterfield, as any other gentleman on earth. To continue the portrait—his head and face are small in proportion to his height; his complexion swarthy; the muscles of his face, being relaxed, give him the appearance of a man of fifty years of age, nor can he be much younger; his countenance has a faithful expression of great good humor and hilarity; while his black eyes, that unerring index, possess an irradiating spirit, which proclaims the imperial powers of the mind that sits enthroned within.

This extraordinary man, without the aid of fancy, without the advantages of person, voice, attitude, gesture, or any of the ornaments of an orator, deserves to be considered as one of the most eloquent men in the world; if eloquence may be said to consist in the power of seizing the attention with irresistible force, and never permitting it to elude the grasp, until the hearer has received the conviction which the speaker intends. As to his person, it has already been described. His voice is dry and hard; his attitude, in his most effective orations, was often extremely awkward, as

it was not unusual for him to stand with his left foot in advance; while all his gesture proceeded from his right arm, and consisted merely in a vehement, perpendicular swing of it, from about the elevation of his head, to the bar behind which he was accustomed to stand. As to fancy, if she holds a seat in his mind at all, which is very much doubted, his gigantic genius tramples with disdain, on all her flower-decked plats and blooming parterres. How then, it will be asked with a look of incredulous curiosity, how is it possible, that such a man can hold the attention of an audience enchained, through a speech of even ordinary length? The explanation is easy.

He possesses one original, and, almost supernatural faculty: the faculty of developing a subject by a single glance of his mind, and detecting at once, the very point on which every controversy depends. No matter what the question; though ten times more knotty than "the gnarled oak," the lightning of heaven is not more rapid, not more resistless, than his astonishing penetration. Nor does the exercise of it seem to cost him an effort. On the contrary it is as easy as vision. I am persuaded that his eyes cannot fly over a landscape, and take in its various objects with more promptitude and facility, than his mind embraces and analyzes the most complex subject.— Possessing this intellectual elevation, which enables him to look down and comprehend the whole ground at once, he determines immediately, and without difficulty, on which side the question may be most advantageously approached and assailed. In a bad cause his art consists in laying his premises so remotely from the point directly in debate, or else in terms so general and so specious, that the hearer, seeing no consequence which can be drawn from them, is just as willing to admit them as not; but, his premises once admitted, the demonstration, however distant, follows as certainly, as cogently, as inevitably, as any demonstration in Euclid. All his eloquence consists in the apparently deep self conviction, and emphatic earnestness of his manner; the correspon-

dent simplicity and energy of his style ; the close and logical connection of his thoughts ; and the easy gradations by which he opens his lights on the attentive minds of his hearers. The audience are never permitted to pause for a moment. There is no stopping to weave garlands of flowers to hang in festoons around a favorite argument. On the contrary, every sentence is progressive—every idea sheds new lights on the subjects—the listener is kept perpetually in that sweetly pleasurable vibration, with which the mind of man always receives new truths—the dawn advances in easy but unremitting pace—the subject opens gradually on the view—until, rising, in high relief, in all its native colors and proportions, the argument is consummated, by the conviction of the delighted hearer.

The success of this gentleman, has rendered it doubtful with several literary characters in this country, whether a high fancy be of real use or advantage to any one but a poet. They contend, that although the most beautiful flights of the happiest fancy, interspersed through an argument, may give an audience the momentary delightful swell of admiration, the transient thrill of divinest rapture ; yet, that they produce no lasting effect in forwarding the purpose of the speaker : On the contrary, that they break the unity and disperse the force of an argument, which otherwise, advancing in close array, like the phalanx of Sparta, would carry every thing before it. They give an instance in the celebrated Curran ; and pretend that his fine fancy, although it fires, dissolves, and even transports his audience to a momentary frenzy, is a real and a fatal misfortune to his clients ; as it calls off the attention of the jurors from the intrinsic and essential merits of the defence ; eclipses the justice of the client's cause, in the blaze of the advocates talents ; induces a suspicion of the guilt which requires such a glorious display of refulgence to divert their inquiry ; and substitutes a fruitless short-lived ecstasy in the place of permanent and substantial conviction. Hence they say that the client of Mr. Curran.

is invariably the victim of the prosecution, which that able and eloquent advocate is employed to resist.— The doctrine, in the abstract, may be true. It is to be feared however, that Mr. Curran's failures may be traced to a cause very different from any fault either in the style or execution of his enchanting defences.

To return to the Chief Justice of the United States. His adversaries allege that he is a mere lawyer; that his mind has been so long trammelled by judicial precedent, so long habituated to the quart and tierce of forensic digladiation, (as Doctor Johnson would probably have called it) as to be unequal to the discussion of a great question of state. Mr. Curran, in his defence of Rowan, seems, to have sanctioned the probability of such an effect from such a cause, when he complains of his own mind as having been massacred and circumscribed, by a strict and technical adherence to established forms: but in the next breath, an astonishing burst of the grandest thought, and a power of comprehension to which there seems to be no earthly limits, prove that his complaint, as it relates to himself, is entirely without foundation. Indeed, if the objection to the Chief Justice, mean any thing more than that he has not had the same illumination and exercise in matters of state, as if he had devoted his life to them, it cannot be admitted. The force of a cannon is the same, whether pointed at a rampart or a man of war, although practice may have made the engineer more expert in the one case than the other. So it is clear, that practice may give a man a greater command over one class of subjects than another; but the inherent energy of his mind remains the same, whithersoever it may be directed. From this impression there is not any cause to wonder at what is called a universal genius; it proves only that the man has applied a powerful mind to the consideration of a great variety of subjects, and pays a compliment rather to his superior industry, than his superior intellect. It is very certain that the gentleman of whom we are speaking, possesses the *acumen* which might constitute a universal genius;—according to

the usual acceptation of the phrase.—But if he be the truant which his warmest friends represent him to be, there is very little probability that he will ever reach this distinction.

CHARACTER OF JOSEPH DENNIE.

Our country will be insensible of its obligations, unless it number Mr. Dennie among its most meritorious citizens. Next; and next only to those distinguished beings to whom heaven has given capacity to lead a nation's arms to freedom, or guide her councils to happiness, may be safely ranked the few, who contribute to purify her morals and adorn her name by elegant literature. Their value is not always appreciated, because the gradual revolution they accomplish, may escape the eye of vulgar calculation, but their efficacy is not less certain, nor their utility less permanent.—In our own country, more especially, the avenues to political fame are so wide, the interest of public concerns so overwhelming, that they absorb, perhaps, too much of our attention. For the distinction they confer is momentary, the honors they bring are very precarious; and often after a few years of feverish notoriety, that man subsides into a mortified and sullen politician, whose talents, otherwise directed, might have yielded honorable distinction to himself, and permanent lustre to his country.

Mr. Dennie gave to the powers of his mind a far more useful application. The great purpose of all his exertions, the uniform pursuit of his life, was to disseminate among his countrymen a taste for elegant literature, to give to education and to letters their proper elevation in the public esteem, and reclaiming the youth of America from the low career of sordid interests, to fix stedfastly their ambition on objects of a more exalted character. In this honorable enterprise, he stood at first almost alone. But such is the power of a single mind in awakening the talents of a whole nation, so easily may the pliant mat-