

ART. VI.—*Cours de Littérature Dramatique.* Par A. W. Schlegel. Traduit d'Allemand. 8vo. 3 vols. pp. 1900. London. 1814.

THIS is a work of extraordinary merit. It was originally delivered at Vienna in the form of lectures, and professed to be a review of dramatic literature in the different countries where it has successively flourished. It has been since carefully revised, and now comes before the public with the author's last touches and improvements.

Mr. Schlegel employs his first chapter in analysing the spirit with which a critic ought to be animated, and in various preliminary remarks which appear essential to the success of his system; he observes, that either from the imperfection of language, or the perversion of ideas, the office of a critic is usually supposed to consist in the talent of detecting faults, rather than in that refined and delicate taste, which is requisite to appreciate the higher order of beauties. This opinion he acknowledges to be in some measure justified by the proceedings of modern critics, eager to point out the smallest defect, and more ready to eulogise the industrious accuracy of mediocrity than the lofty flights of superior genius. For a long time after the revival of letters, writers were exposed to innumerable disadvantages from the pedantry and presumption of the commentators, who attributed to the ancients an unbounded authority in every branch of literature. Hence the admiratio, so deservedly due to the poets and historians of Athens and Rome, became in some sort injurious to posterity, who were told, by what they considered as authority that nothing could be expected from the labours of man, if he forsook the path of imitation; that the only praise which remained for a modern to acquire, was by closely adhering to those excellent models; and that the slightest deviation from the precepts of Aristotle was a proof of degenerated taste.—vol. i. p. 12.

A servile copyist must ever be tame; it is by imbibing the spirit, not by pilfering the ideas of Homer or Virgil, that we can hope to reach the temple of Fame. To this description of men, however, the pedantry of critics long assigned the honourable appellation of modern classics, while they treated those who ventured to follow the inspiration of genius, as bold and barbarous innovators. And the better to establish this absurd theory, they attempted to draw an impassable line between taste and genius. Fortunately, however, the world has discovered that commentators are seldom good judges of taste, and that the plodding perseverance of a Wolf or a Heyne would never have produced the *Iliad*, or the *Georgics*. 'Taste and genius,' says our author, 'are unquestionably derived from the same

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