CHARACTER of HOMER.

The following splendid character of HOMER, is extracted from the Travels of Anacharsis, a work which cannot be too strongly recommended to general perusal.

Posterity, which cannot estimate the glory of kings and heroes by their actions, hears, as it were, from far the resounding fame of their immortal deeds, and re-echoes it to following times. But the reputation of an author whose writings still subsist, must be the result of the successive judgments which consecutive ages have pronounced in his favor. The glory of Homer, it is to be remembered, has increased in proportion as his works have become better known, and his readers more capable of appreciating their real worth.—The Greeks have never been so learned and polite as they are at this day, and never were they impressed with so profound an admiration for that poet. His name is in every mouth, and his portrait before every eye; several cities dispute the honor of having given him birth: others have dedicated temples to him; the Argives, who invoke him in their holy ceremonies, send an annual sacrifice in the isle of Chios in his honor. His verses resound through all Greece, and are the brightest ornament of her splendid festivals. In them youth finds its first instructions: from them Æschylus, Sophocles, Archilochus, Herodotus, Demosthenes, Plato, and the most esteemed authors, have drawn the greater part of the beauties that abound in their writings; and by them the sculptor Phidias, and the painter Euphranor, were taught worthily to represent the awful majesty of the sovereign of the gods. How wondrous then is this man, who instructs legislators in the science of politics; who teaches philosophers and historians the art of writing, and poets and orators that of moving the passions; who discloses and expands every talent, and whose superiority is so universally acknowledged, that we are no more jealous of his pre-eminence, than of the sun by which we are enlightened!

I am aware that Homer must more especially interest his own nation. The principal houses of Greece think they discover in his works the titles of their origin; and the different states, the epocha of their greatness. Frequently his testimony has even sufficed to determine the ancient limits of two neighbouring nations. But this merit, which he might possess in common with many authors now consigned to oblivion, never could produce the enthusiasm excited by his poems; many other springs must have operated to obtain him among the Greeks the empire of the mind.

I am but a Scythian; and the harmony of Homer's verses, that harmony which transports the enraptured Greeks, frequently escapes my unpolished organs: but I am no longer master of my admiration, when I see this lofty genius, hovering if I may so speak, over the universe; darting on every side his ardent glances, and collecting those flames and colors with which all objects sparkle in his sight; entering the council of the gods; fathoming the recesses of the human heart; and quickly, rich with his discoveries, intoxicated with the beauties of nature, and, no longer able to support the ardour that consumes him, distributing it with profusion in his descriptions and expressions, making heaven contend with earth, and the passions strive for mastery with each other; dazzling us by those strokes of light which appertain only to superior talents; hurrying us away by those sallies of sentiment that constitute the true sublime, and ever leaving a profound impression which seems to expand and ennoble the soul. For what above all distinguishes Homer, is the power of animating every thing, and of perpetually communicating to us the emotions with which he is himself agitated; it is the skill with which he renders every other subordinate to the leading passion; following it through all its transports, its extravagancies, and incongruities; elevating it to the clouds, and again precipitating it, when necessary, from its height, by the force of sentiment and virtue, as the flames of Ætna are dashed by the wind to the bottom of the abyss: it is the felicity with which he has seized great characters, the skill with which he has diversified the power, the bravery, and other qualities of his personages, not by cold and fastidious descriptions, but by rapid and vigorous strokes of pencil, or by novel fictions scattered as it were fortuitously through his works. I mount with him into the heavens: I discover Venus in all her beauty by that girdle incessantly emitting the fires of love, impatient desire, seductive graces, and the inexpressible charms of language and the eyes; I recognize Pallas and her furies, by that ægis on which are suspended terror, discord, violence, and the tremendous head of the horrid gorgon. Jupiter and Neptune are the most powerful of the gods; but Neptune must have a trident to shake the earth; and Jupiter his nod to make Olympus tremble. I descend to earth; Achilles Ajax, and Diomedes, are the most formidable of the Greeks; but Diomedes retires at the sight of the Trojan army; Ajax does not give way till he has several times repulsed it; Achilles shows himself, and it disappears.

These differences are not contrasted in the sacred books of the Greeks, for so the Iliad and Odyssey may be termed. The poet had given a solid basis to his models; he detached at pleasure those discriminating shades, and had them present before his mind, at the very instant he was bestowing on his characters some momentary variations: for, in fact, art alone attributes a constant unity to characters; nature produces none which do not occasionally differ from themselves in the various occurrences of life.

Plato did not find sufficient dignity in the grief of Achilles, nor in that of Priam, when the former rolls himself in the dust after the death of Patroclus, and when the latter has recourse to a humiliating action to obtain the dead body of his son.—But how strange is that dignity which stifles the feelings of nature! For my part, I commend Homer for having, like nature, placed weakness by the side of strength, and the abyss by the side of elevation; I commend him still more for having shown me the best of fathers in the most powerful of kings, and the tenderest of friends in the most impetuous of heroes.

I have known the poet blamed for the insolent and abusive language which he puts into the mouth of his heroes, both in their assemblies and in the heat of battle: I then cast my eyes on children who approach much nearer to nature than ourselves, on the vulgar always in a state of childhood, on savages who are always the vulgar; and have observed in all these, that their anger constantly expresses itself in insolence and outrage, previous to producing any other effect.

I have heard Homer censured for having painted in all their simplicity the manners of the times that preceded him; I smiled at the criticism, and was silent.

But when it is alleged against him as a crime, that he has degraded the gods, I content myself with relating the answer made me one day by an intelligent Athenian.—Homer, said he, ascribed to the gods the infirmities of men, according to the poetical system of his time. Aristophanes has since exhibited them on our theatre, and our fathers applauded that licence; the most ancient theologians have said that men and gods had one common origin, and almost in our own days Pindar has held the same language. It was never imagined then, that these gods could be substitutes for the idea we entertain of the Divinity; and in fact genuine philosophy admits a Supreme Being superior to them, who has delegated to them his power. It is that Being whom men of understanding adore in secret: the multitude address their prayers, and sometimes their complaints to those who represent him; and poets in general are like the subjects of the king of Persia, who prostrate themselves before the sovereign, and inveigh against his ministers.

Let those who are unmoved by the beauties of Homer dwell on his defects. For why dissemble the truth? He frequently reposes, and sometimes slumbers; but his is the repose of the eagle, who, after visiting his vast domains of air, drops oppressed with fatigue, upon a lofty mountain; and his slumber resembles that of Jupiter, who, according to Homer himself, hurls his thunder when he awakes.

Whoever shall judge of Homer not by frigid reasonings, but by his feelings, not by rules too often arbitrary, but according to the immutable laws of nature, will undoubtedly be convinced, that he merits all the honors lavished on him by the Greeks, and that his works are the greatest ornament of the ages whose history I have been abridging.

EQUALITY of MANKIND.

In the center of those islands, situated in the midst of the South Sea, lies one distant from the rest, and large beyond proportion. A descendant of one of the great men of this island, becoming a gentleman to so improved a degree, as to despise the good qualities which had originally ennobled his family, thought of nothing but how to support and distinguish his dignity by the pride of an ignorant mind, and a disposition abandoned to pleasure. He had a house on the sea side, where he spent great part of his time in hunting and fishing; but he found himself at a loss in the pursuit of these important diversions, by means of a long slip of marsh land, overgrown with high reeds, that lay between his house and the sea. Resolving at length that it became not a man of his quality to submit to restraints in his pleasure for the ease and convenience of an obstinate mechanic; and having often endeavored in vain to buy out the owner, who was an honest poor basket-maker, and whose livelihood depended on working up the flags of those reeds in a manner peculiar to himself, the gentleman took advantage of a very high wind, and commanded his servant to burn down the barrier.

The basket-maker, who saw himself undone, complained of the oppression in terms more suited to his sense of the injury, than the respect due to the rank of the offender: and the reward this imprudence procured him was the additional injustice of blows and reproaches, and all kinds of insult and indignity.

There was but one way to a remedy, and he took it. For going to the capital with the marks of his hard usage upon him, he threw himself at the feet of the king, and procured a citation for his oppressor's appearance; who, confessing the charge, proceeded to justify his behaviour by the poor man's unmindfulness of the submission due from the vulgar to gentlemen of rank and distinction.

"But pray," replied the king, "what distinction of rank had the grandfather of your father, when, being a cleaver of wood in the palace of my ancestors, he was raised from among those vulgar you speak of, with such contempt, in reward of an instance he gave of his courage and loyalty in defence of his master? yet his distinction was nobler than yours: it was the distinction of soul, not of birth; the superiority of worth, not of fortune. I am sorry I have a gentleman in my kingdom who is base enough to be ignorant, that ease and distinction of fortune were bestowed on him but to this end, that, being at rest from all cares of providing for himself, he might apply his heart, head, and hands, for the public advantage of others."

Here the king, discontinuing his speech, fixed an eye of indignation on a sullen resentment of mein which he observed in the haughty offender, who muttered out his dislike of the encouragement this way of thinking must give to the commonalty, who, he said, were to be considered as persons of no consequence in comparison of men who were born to be honored.—"Where reflection is wanting," replied the king with a smile of disdain, "men must find their defects in the pain of their sufferings." "Yanhumo," added he, turning to a captain of his gallies, "strip the injured and the injurer, and conveying them to one of the most barbarous and remote of the islands, set them ashore in the night, and leave them both to their fortune."

The place in which they were landed was a marsh, under cover of whose flags the gentleman was in hopes to conceal himself, and give the slip to his companion, whom he thought it a disgrace to be found with. But the lights in the galley having given an alarm to the savages, a considerable body of them came down, and discovered in the morning the two strangers in their hiding place. Setting up a dismal yell, they surrounded them, and advancing nearer and nearer with a kind of clubs, seemed determined to dispatch them, without sense of hospitality or mercy.

Here the gentleman began to discover, that the superiority of his blood was imaginary; for, between a consciousness of shame and cold, under the nakedness he had never been used to, a fear of the event from the fierceness of the savages approach, and the want of an idea whereby to soften or divert their asperity, he fell behind the poor sharer of his calamity; and with an unsinewed, apprehensive, unmanly sneakingness of mein, gave up the post of honor, and made a leader of the very man whom he had thought it a disgrace to consider as a companion.

The basket-maker, on the contrary, to whom the poverty of his condition had made nakedness habitual, to whom a life of pain and mortification represented death as not dreadful, and whose remembrance of his skill in arts, of which these savages were ignorant, gave him hopes of becoming safe, from demonstrating that he could be useful, moved with bolder and more open freedom; and having plucked a handful of flags, sat down without emotion, and making signs he would show them something worthy their attention, fell to work with smiles and noddings, while the savages drew near and gazed in expectation of the consequence.

It was not long before he had wreathed a kind of coronet of pretty workmanship, and rising, with respect approached the savage who appeared the chief, and placed it gently on his head; whose figure under this new ornament so charmed his followers, that they threw down their clubs, and formed a dance of welcome and congratulation.

There was not one but showed the marks of his impatience to be made as fine as his captain; so that the poor basket-maker had his hands full of employment: and the savages observing one quite idle, while the other was so busy in their service, took up arms in behalf of natural justice, and began to beat him.

The basket-maker's pity now effaced the remembrance of his sufferings. He arose, and rescued his oppressor, by making signs that he was ignorant of the art; but might, if they thought fit, be usefully employed in waiting on the work, and fetching flags to his supply as fast as he should want them.

This proposition luckily fell in with a desire the savages expressed to keep themselves at leisure that they might croud round, and mark the progress of a work they took such pleasure in. They left the gentleman therefore to his duty in the basket-maker's service, considering him, from that time forward, as one who was, and ought to be treated as inferior to the artist.

Men, women and children, from all corners of the island, came in droves for coronets; and setting the gentleman to work to gather boughs and poles, they made a fine hut to lodge the basket-maker; and brought down daily from the country such provisions as they lived upon themselves; but never offered the imagined servant any thing till his master had done eating.

Three months reflection in this mortified condition gave a new and just turn to our gentleman's mind, insomuch, that lying awake one night, he thus confessed his error to the basket-maker. "I have been to blame," says he, "and wanted judgment to distinguish between accident and excellence. When I should have measured nature, I looked only at vanity. The preference which fortune gives is empty and imaginary; and I perceive too late, that only things of use are naturally honorable. I am ashamed when I compare my malice with your humanity. But if the gods should please to call me to a repossession of my rank and happiness, I would divide all with you in atonement of my justly punished arrogance."

He promised, and performed his promise. For the king soon after sent the captain who landed them, with presents to the savages, and ordered him to bring them back again. And it continues to this day a custom in that island, to degrade all gentlemen who cannot give a better reason for their pride, than that they were born to do nothing: on which occasion they usually cry out, *Send him to the Basket-Maker's.*

Ten Cents Reward.

WILL be paid for apprehending my apprentice boy GEORGE W BROWN, who having gone from home on Sunday the 6th inst. with my permission has overstayed the time allowed him, and has not yet returned: Therefore, I do hereby caution all persons from harboring said Brown, also masters of vessels and others, from carrying him away; or I will prosecute them according to law. He is about 17 years of age, very tall and well built, pale complexion and small visage. I will pay the above reward and no charges, for taking him up.

JOHN MINCHIN,
New Jersey Avenue.

Washington, Sept. 23, 1801. 3t.

Whereas a commission of Bankruptcy has been awarded and issued against ISAAC SMITH, of Harwich, resident in Boston, in the District of Massachusetts, trader; and the said Isaac Smith has been declared a bankrupt; he is hereby required to surrender himself to the Commissioners in the said commission named, or to the major part of them, on the 5th day of September next, on the 24th day of said September, and on the 9th day of October next, at 11 o'clock in the forenoon of each of said days, at the office of Nathan Goodale, Esq in Tremont-street, Boston, and make a full disclosure and discovery of his estate and effects—When and where his Creditors are to come prepared to prove their debts; and at the second meeting to chose an assignee or assignees, and at the last meeting, said bankrupt is required to finish his examination. And at said last meeting, any of the creditors of said bankrupt may be heard before said commissioners, against the making or allowing of a certificate to the judge of said district to entitle the said bankrupt to a certificate of discharge.—All persons indebted to the said bankrupt are to make payment, and those who have any of his effects are to deliver the same to such persons only as the commissioners shall appoint

By order of the Commissioners,
JOHN HEARD, Sec'ry.

Dated August 28, 1801.