

**THE PRIVATE TUTOR, OR,
THOUGHTS UPON THE
LOVE OF EXCELLING AND
THE LOVE OF EXCELLENCE**

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The Private Tutor, Or, Thoughts Upon the Love of Excelling and the Love of Excellence by Basil Montagu

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BASIL MONTAGU

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Preface.

AFTER having passed a few days at Salamis, upon the shores where Xerxes was defeated and Solon was born, I sailed with a fair wind, and in less than an hour anchored in the Piræus, now called Porto Leone.

In my way to Athens we passed along the ruins of Themistocles's wall, by a road in the midst of a beautiful plain covered with vineyards and olive-trees, bounded on one side by mountains and on the other by the sea. Upon approaching the city I saw the temple of Theseus, built by the Athenians soon after the battle of Marathon; and at a small distance the temple of Jupiter Olympius, which contained the most celebrated works of art, the gifts of all the cities of Greece. A few beautiful marble pillars, with their friezes, architraves, and

cornices, are now the only remains of this once magnificent structure.

Near to it are the ruins of the temple of the winds. The Triton which stood at the top, so contrived as to point with his wand to each wind, is no more to be seen; but the figures with their proper attributes may be traced. I easily discovered the God Zephyrus represented as a beautiful young man gliding with a scarcely perceptible motion and surrounded by flowers.

Above all stands the Parthenon, the most renowned temple in Greece. Here the people of Attica, regardless of their several religious dissensions, joined in an unanimous worship. As I was passing between two of the columns I perceived some men watching me with a sort of suspicion and jealousy, which being little disposed to encounter, I avoided and quitted the city. I quitted it with the sad consciousness that the whole of this country, the plains of Marathon and the pass of Thermopylæ, are under the dominion of the Turks.

Athens is governed by a Vaivode, who buys the office of the chief of the black eunuchs, to whom the whole revenue belongs.

I am always disposed rather to discover the cause of misery than to distress or indulge myself in lamentations over its existence. The decline and fall of empires proceed from causes as certain in their operation as any other cause in nature. I saw in the horizon the island of Calauria, where Demosthenes is buried: I was on the very spot where he opposed the misguided multitude; where he in vain exhorted a heedless people to remember that, as vice hurries individuals to destruction, it converts a living nation into a sepulchre. The city is a ruin; the country is governed by unlettered barbarians: but it is some consolation to reflect that the mighty heart is not still. "Of all those massive temples," says a favourite author, "which for pomp or pleasure were builded in goodly Athens, scarcely one stone doth stand upon another: and yet those strains which were chaunted by sweet Menander, learned

“ Euripides, lofty Sophocles, scarce noted by the
“ vulgar, and counted by the most but as thin air;
“ these are familiar to our ears, our instructors at
“ school, our solace in old age: and the walls that
“ did echo them are laid low: so will it ever be when
“ the hand of man doth strive with the imperish-
“ able spirit, the mortal with the immortal.” With
this consolation I proceeded.—On my left was the
river Ilyssus: on my right, close under the walls of
the Acropolis, the theatre of Bacchus, where the
Athenians performed their dramas and where the
statues of their dramatic poets were placed. I passed
over the hill where the poet Musæus is buried, to the
very spot where the Academy, where the schools of
Pythagoras, of Plato, of Isocrates, and of Aristotle
flourished.

The thoughts of an Englishman, in joy or in
sorrow, turn untravelled to his own country. And
did these schools produce more celebrated philoso-
phers, orators, historians, poets, and princes, than
the universities of England? Were the youth of

Greece and of Rome more ardent in the pursuit of knowledge than the young men of England? It has been said that the youth of former times were animated by the *love of excellence*, which is a permanent motive of action; and that we are stimulated by the *love of excelling*, which operates injuriously, or ceases soon after our entrance into life.

An author of a very valuable work, when speaking of education in England, says, "The youths that attended upon Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Epictetus, were thus educated. Their every day lessons and instructions were so many lectures upon the nature of man, his true end, and the right use of his faculties; upon the immortality of the soul, its relation to God, the beauty of virtue, and its agreeableness to the divine nature; upon the dignity of reason, the necessity of temperance, fortitude and generosity, and the shame and folly of indulging our passions. An education under Pythagoras, or Socrates, had no other end, but to teach you to think, judge, act,

and follow such rules of life, as Pythagoras and Socrates used. But alas, our modern education is not of this kind. The first temper that we try to awaken in children, is pride; as dangerous a passion as that of lust. We stir them up to vain thoughts of themselves, and do every thing we can, to puff up their minds with a sense of their own abilities. Whatever way of life we intend them for, we apply to the fire and vanity of their minds, and exhort them to every thing from corrupt motives: We stir them up to action from principles of strife and ambition, from glory, envy, and a desire of distinction, that they may excel others, and shine in the eyes of the world. We repeat and inculcate these motives upon them, till they think it a part of their duty to be proud, envious, and vain-glorious of their own accomplishments. And when we have taught them to scorn to be out-done by any, to bear no rival, to thirst after every instance of applause, to be content with nothing but the highest distinctions; then we begin to take