

## CHAPTER VI.

### DIALOGUES.

485. A **Dialogue** is a conversation between two or more persons. Among the ancients this species of composition was carried to great perfection. Their dialogues were of two kinds, the *descriptive* and the *didactic* or philosophical.

486. The **descriptive** kind was used by Lucian for the portrayal of characters. We have elsewhere spoken of the description of characters. **Lucian**, instead of describing them in his own words, introduces his personages as speaking. He makes the pagan gods and the souls of the dead converse among themselves in such a way as to exhibit marked traits of character, and he does this in a lively, interesting manner. His object is to show forth the absurdities of pagan superstitions.

487. **Didactic** or philosophical dialogues were written with great elegance by Plato, and, after his example, by Cicero. These authors introduced learned men discussing some important subject, in an easy and natural manner, with great refinement of thought and language. Their purpose was the same as that of philosophical essays; but the conversational form added special charm to the composition. The personages introduced were such as would command attention; they were placed in situations interesting to the reader, and made to converse in language consistent with their respective characters.

488. As an **example** we may take the dialogue of Plato styled *Phædon*. A discourse on the immortality of the

soul is put on the lips of the philosopher Socrates, and addressed by him to his disciples, under circumstances which make it remarkably impressive. It was the day at the close of which the philosopher was to drink hemlock in punishment of his teachings. His disciples had gathered round him in his prison to show their esteem and affection for their master. Every one must feel that such circumstances add far more weight to the philosopher's words than an abstract essay could possess.

489. **Plato** in his dialogues never speaks in his own person; but **Cicero** proceeds differently. He dedicates his compositions to some friend, and explains to him who his characters are, why he has chosen them, and under what circumstances they are supposed to discourse. His conversations "On Old Age," "On Friendship," and "On the Orator" are special favorites with classical scholars.

490. **English literature** has not produced any acknowledged masterpieces in this species of composition. But we have many scenes in dramas and in novels exhibiting characters as strikingly as do the dialogues of Lucian—*e.g.*, the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius in Shakspeare's "Julius Cæsar"; the examination of Sam Weller by Sergeant Buzfuz in Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*; the character of the Martyr's Boy in Cardinal Wiseman's *Fabiola* (c. ii.).

491. Of the **philosophical dialogue** we have a good specimen in *Brownson's Review* for 1854, styled "Uncle Jack and his Nephew," and another in the *Month* for November, 1869, styled "The Dialogues of Sydney." A late work by St. George Mivart, entitled *Nature and Thought*, is an imitation of Cicero's dialogues. In modern times didactic treatises usually assume the form of essays; when conversation is introduced at all it is wont to be combined with so much incident as to be classed among Novels. Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* is of this nature.

492. Dialogues are subject to the following **rules**:

1. They must create interest by presenting lifelike characters, placed in interesting situations, and conversing in a natural and unaffected manner.

2. If didactic they must treat of some theme, and develop it with sufficient regularity, so as to give a clear insight into the views of the author on that subject.

3. They must be replete with wisdom, or at least with good sense.

4. They must be couched in refined language, with tasteful and modest ornament.

493. **Exercise I.** Write a descriptive dialogue exhibiting the character of a miser, a spendthrift, a fop, a flatterer, a young hero. (For a model see *Fabiola*, c. ii.)

494. **Exercise II.** Write a didactic conversation on the advantages of a thorough education, of music, of good company; on the Crusades, the Inquisition, on Galileo. (For a model see a dialogue between *Fabiola* and her slave Syra in the sixteenth chapter of *Fabiola*.)

## CHAPTER VII.

### NOVELS.

495. A **Novel** is a fictitious narrative in prose, embracing a complete series of events, and exhibiting some phase of human life.

Such phases of human life are, for instance:

(a) *Peculiar conditions of society*, as in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, his *Leatherstocking Tales*, etc.

(b) *The manners of certain periods* of history, as in historical novels generally. Such are Cardinal Wiseman's *Fabiola*, Cardinal Newman's *Callista*, B. O'Reilly's *Victims of the Mamertine*, McKeon's *Dion and the Sibyls*, Bailey's *Pearl of Antioch*, Conscience's *Lion of Flanders*, Lady Fullerton's *Constance Sherwood* and *Too Strange not to be True*.

(c) *The workings of the passions*, as in Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, etc.

(d) *The tendencies of institutions* and popular movements, as in Bresciani's *Few of Verona* and *Lionello*, and in Brownson's *Spirit-Rapper*.

(e) *Peculiar views of the world*, as in Dickens' *Christmas Carols*.

496. Some novels may be called **philosophical**, being intended to set forth special views and systems of doctrine. To this class belong religious novels. In all such it is important that not only the doctrines inculcated be sound, but also that the composition possess literary beauty and