

action in Europe worth talking of since the fight of Marston-Moor." Honest old Dick Reptile says to his nephew, "Ay, ay, Jack, you young men think us fools, but we old men know you are." The Bench of the neighbouring Inn, the greatest wit of the company, has about ten distichs of Hudibras without book; and when any town frolic is spoken of, "shakes his head at the dulness of the present age, and tells us a story of Jack Ogle." But even amongst such representatives of social life, who flourished in the reign of Anne, and will endure long after the reign of Victoria, their faculties are opened by conversation. The worthies of the Trumpet appeal to Mr. Bickerstaff for information as "the philosopher;" and puzzled between the Old Style of England, and the New Style of other nations, Sir Jeoffrey, "upon a dispute what day of the month it was then in Holland, pulled his pipe out of his mouth and cried, 'What does the scholar say to it?'"*

Gaming was the universal passion of the reign of Anne. In the first number of the "Tatler" it is said of Will's coffee-house, "This place is very much altered since Mr. Dryden frequented it. Where you used to see songs, epigrams, and satires, in the hands of every one you met, you have now only a pack of cards." Into these places of public resort the lowest sharpers found their way; and gentlemen were not ashamed to stake their money against the money of the most infamous of society. Steele carried on a persevering warfare against the gamblers, for which good service he was threatened with personal injury. Some military men of high rank stood up for him. When two swaggerers came into a coffee-house, and vowed they would cut captain Steele's throat, lord Forbes told them, "In this country you will find it easier to cut a purse than cut a throat," and the bullies were incontinently kicked out of the room. One of the reproaches against Steele by his political adversaries in the House of Commons was, that he had presumed to reflect on the manners of noblemen and gentlemen. In his published "Apology" there is a touch of covert satire highly amusing. "It would be a contradiction to all Mr. Steele's past writing to speak to the disadvantage of the nobility and gentry. The war that the 'Tatler' brought upon himself for stigmatizing and expelling sharpers out of their company, is a merit towards them that will outweigh this allegation. That gamblers, knaves, and pickpockets are no longer the men of fashion, or mingled with so good an air among them as formerly, is much owing to Mr. Steele." There never was a better illustration of the principle that vice levels all distinctions. The "people of quality"

* "Tatler," No. 132.

were not ashamed of their companions till the light of public opinion was let in upon them.

In looking at the general question of the amount of public enlightenment at this period, and indeed throughout the next quarter of a century, it is difficult to draw a line between the acquirements of "the common people" and those of "the persons of quality." The ignorant and dissipated of the upper classes were in no essentials different from the mass of the lower classes, except in their power of commanding a greater amount of vicious pleasures. The theatre, which was open to high and low, was scarcely yet redeemed from the licentiousness which came in with the Restoration of the Stuarts. The licentious comedies were the delight of the side-boxes and of the galleries. The masquerade attracted the fair denizens of Arlington-street and of Drury-lane. The Bear Garden was equally the resort of the peer and the carman; of the beau with his clouded cane and the porter with his knot. The genteel part of the company at the Bear-garden sat on high benches at half-a-crown a seat, whilst the rabble crowded and swore beneath them in their sixpenny standing-place. All ranks gathered to see "a trial of skill exhibited between the two masters of the noble science of defence." The fights of the ring have been brutalizing enough; but to behold two men cut at each other with broad-swords, till one was disabled by severe wounds on the forehead and the leg, was a brutality that was at its height in the Augustan age. The "Spectator" describes the encounter between "James Miller, sergeant, lately come from the frontiers of Portugal," and "Timothy Buck of Clare-market;" and he records that when the sergeant fell beneath the stroke of his more skilful antagonist, "his wound was exposed to the view of all who could delight in it, and sewed up on the stage."*

The small difference in the intelligence of very different ranks of society, in cases where they were led by traditionary opinions, as in popular superstitions, is very remarkable. High and low, of neglected education, had faith in omens. The belief in witchcraft in the eighteenth century is generally looked back upon as a superstition of the lowest part of the community. When Addison represents sir Roger de Coverley as seriously puzzled about the true character of Moll White, the old woman "who had the reputation of a witch all over the country," we may be inclined to think that the humourist is a little hard upon the intellectual capacity of the country gentleman. When the knight and the Spectator visit the old crone's hut, we can scarcely believe that a common delusion of

* "Tatler," No. 436.

the wealthier class is justly indicated, in sir Roger's advice, as a justice of peace, to the poor creature, "to avoid all communication with the devil, and never to hurt any of her neighbour's cattle." Surely the writer must jest, when he says, "I have since found upon inquiry, that Sir Roger was several times staggered with the reports that had been brought to him concerning this old woman, and would frequently have bound her over to the county sessions, had not his chaplain with much ado persuaded him to the contrary."* It was not always in those days that the chaplain was wiser than the justice of the peace. The statutes of Henry VIII., and of James I. against witchcraft and sorcery were in full force; and they were not repealed till the ninth year of George II. The superstition of sir Roger was thus gently touched upon by Addison in July, 1711. In March, 1712, Jane Wenham, the witch of Walkerne, near Stevenage, was found guilty under the statute of James, and was condemned to die. The prosecutors of this unfortunate woman were not ignorant rustics—the constable or the overseer. One of them was the worshipful Sir Henry Cheney, knight, the learned author of the "Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire;" the other prosecutor was the reverend incumbent of Jane Wenham's parish. The Judge, Powel, happily was a little in advance of his age. He reprieved the unhappy creature, very much to the scandal of the stupid jury and the learned prosecutors. That wise judge brought a cheerful nature to the discharge of his solemn duties. Swift passed a mirthful evening in his society at Harley's table, a few months before the Hertfordshire trial: "I went to lord-treasurer, and among other company, found a couple of judges with him. One of them, judge Powel, an old fellow with gray hairs, was the merriest old gentleman I ever saw; spoke pleasant things, and laughed and chuckled till he cried again."† This was not the last conviction upon a charge of witchcraft. There is a "Relation" printed in London, that in 1716, Mrs. Hicks, and her daughter, aged nine years, were hanged at Huntingdon "for selling their souls to the devil; tormenting and destroying their neighbours, by making them vomit pins; raising a storm so that a ship was almost lost, by pulling off her stockings, and making a lather of soap."‡ Though judge Powel had the boldness to reprieve a convicted witch, in spite of the authority of sir Matthew Hale, who left two poor wretches for execution in 1665, we may conclude,

* "Spectator," No. 117.

† "Journal to Stella," July 5, 1711. We are indebted to John Paget, Esq., the author of a valuable Inquiry into the Charges against Penn, for pointing out to us this case of the witch Walkerne.

‡ Brand's "Popular Antiquities," by Ellis, vol. iii. p. 17. ed. 1842.

even from the language of the "Spectator," that it was not prudent to avow a disbelief in witchcraft. Addison manages his scepticism very adroitly: "When I consider the question, whether there are such persons in the world as those we call witches, my mind is divided between two opposite opinions; or rather, to speak my thoughts freely, I believe in general that there is, and has been, such a thing as witchcraft, but at the same time can give no credit to any particular instance of it."

That some of the most absurd superstitions and prejudices lasted through the eighteenth century can scarcely be matter of surprise, when we consider how entirely the instruction of the lower classes was neglected. It was neglected upon principle. It was not squire Booby or parson Trulliber only who believed that to educate the bulk of the people was to destroy the distinctions of rank. Great writers held the same opinion. Swift, discoursing of the wisdom of the institutions of Lilliput, says, "The cottagers and labourers keep their children at home, their business being only to till and cultivate the earth, and therefore their education is of little consequence to the public." We fear that it was somewhat of a melancholy period for the cottagers and labourers—unable to instruct or divert themselves with reading; the old sports very nearly extinct; wakes and Whitsun-ales kicked out by the Puritans, never to revive. The manly sport of our days that, in a limited degree, makes the young yeoman the associate on the village-green with the best bowler, was scarcely known even in the south of England. In one of D'Urfey's songs at the beginning of the century, "Shenkin," is celebrated as "the prettiest fellow at foot-ball or at cricket." No earlier notice of the game could be traced by the indefatigable Strutt. We fear that Hodge, in "the lovely bowers of innocence and ease" of the real English "Auburn," was too often "a-drinking at the Chequers." The old love of music of the peasant and the mechanic had yielded to the puritanical tyranny, and had not revived in the bawling monotony of parochial psalmody. Musical taste and skill had died out for the bulk of the people. In Italy, writes Steele, a cobbler may be heard working to an opera tune; and "there is not a labourer or handicraftman that, in the cool of the evening, does not relieve himself with solos and sonatas." But, "on the contrary, our honest countrymen have so little inclination to music, that they seldom begin to sing until they are drunk."* Sir John Hawkins has described, with some spirit, the musical entertainments which were offered to the middle classes at this period. The landlords of pub-

* "Tatler," No. 222.

lic-houses hired performers, and hither came very unrefined audiences, to drink and to smoke. This historian of music has described such an orchestra; "Half-a-dozen of fiddlers would scrape 'Sellenger's Round,' or 'John come kiss me,' or 'Old Simon the king,' with divisions, till themselves and their audience were tired; after which, as many players on the hautboy, would, in the most harsh and dissonant tones, grate forth 'Green Sleeves,' 'Yellow Stockings,' 'Gillian of Croydon,' or some such common dance tune, and the people thought it fair music." * Yet Purcell had lived amongst these harmonists. The fashionable world patronised foreign compositions and foreign performances. "Our English music is quite rooted out, and nothing yet planted in its stead," complains Addison. Nevertheless the old musical taste was not wholly rooted out. Before the palmy days of the "Academy of Ancient Concerts," established in 1710, there had been a signal example of what a man in humble life could do for the revival of that love of good music which had been sleeping for a century. Over his coal-shed in Clerkenwell, Thomas Britton, who literally carried a sack, assembled the best amateurs and professional musicians; and to his concert-loft, ascended by ladder-stairs from the exterior, came the high-born to listen, while the honest man exulted to have Handel sitting at the harpsichord, whilst he himself touched the viol-de-gamba. The humble tradesman was also a collector of rare books, and was as well known to Hearne, the antiquary, as to Pepusch, the doctor of music. Hughes, a poet, justly placed by Swift "among the Mediocribus, in prose as well as verse," has eight lines, "Under the Print of Tom Britton, the Musical Small-Coal Man," which thus conclude:

"Let useless pomp behold, and blush to find
So low a station, such a liberal mind."

* Hawkins, "History of Music."

CHAPTER XVII.

Intellectual activity in every department of knowledge.—A Reading Public.—Poetical translations of classical authors.—Pope's Homer.—The popular element shown in the attacks of the wits upon some pursuits of learning.—Battle of the Books.—Pope's ridicule of Dennis.—Martinus Scriblerus.—Small Poets.—The Dunciad.—Commentators.—Public Schools.—Universities.—Travelling.—Entomologists and Florists.—The abuses of knowledge only deserving the poet's ridicule.—The popular element in the mental philosophy of the age.—Locke.—Character of Swift's genius.—Tale of a Tub.—Gulliver's Travels.—Robinson Crusoe.—Defoe.

HOWEVER low, by comparison with modern times, might be the state of popular enlightenment in the reign of Anne, and in the reigns of the two first sovereigns of the House of Brunswick, the amount of intellectual activity in every department of knowledge was very remarkable. In literature there was evidently forming what Coleridge laughs at—"a Reading Public." He has well described the process of the change from books for the few to books for the many: "In times of old, books were as religious oracles; as literature advanced, they next became venerable preceptors; they then descended to the rank of instructive friends; and, as their number increased, they sank still lower to that of entertaining companions." * They were approaching this latter state in the early part of the eighteenth century. Again, Coleridge says: "Poets and philosophers, rendered diffident by their very number, addressed themselves to 'learned readers;' then aimed to conciliate the graces of 'the candid reader;' till, the critic still rising as the author sank, the amateurs of literature were erected into a municipality of Judges, and addressed as 'The Town.' † Yet, whatever evils might result, or be supposed to result, in the comparative discouragement of the higher branches of learning by this enlargement of the circle of knowledge, the immediate consequence was to produce a very marked adaptation of the quality of literature to the wants of the purchasers in an extended market. We doubt very much if the quality were lowered, except in the opinion of some who thought that the "Pierian spring" was not to be tasted except by those who drank deep.

One of the most signal proofs of the extension of reading is

* "Biographia Literaria," vol. i. p. 58.

† *Ibid.*, p. 63.