

CHEAP TRACTS,
Calculated to promote the Interests of Religion, Virtue, and Humanity.

No. XIX.

An ANTIDOTE to
Superstition:

Or, A Cure for those weak minds which
are troubled with the fear of,

Ghosts & Witches,
or who tremble at the consequences of
inauspicious Dreams or Bad Omens.

IN TWO PARTS.

“For as it is the chief concern of wise men to retrench the evils
of life by the reasonings of philosophy; it is the employment of
fools to multiply them by the sentiments of superstition.”

To which is annexed,

THE ART OF FORTUNE TELLING
EXPOSED:

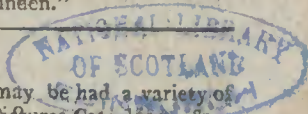
or, the Delphic Oracle of the Old Bai-
ley out of his reckoning for once.

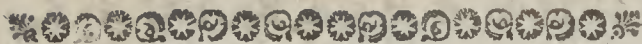
“For I had no sooner returned to my lodgings, than I found a let-
ter on my table, acquainting me that my dear friend had lost his
life in a skirmish that happened between two detachments of the
hostile armies, long before the battle of Minden.”

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WHOLESALE AND RETAIL,





An Antidote to Superstition.

PART 1st.

The History of PHILARETES the SUPERSTITIOUS MAN, with the method He took to extricate himself from the fetters of Superstition.

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*Oh! would mankind but make great truths their guide,  
And force the helm from Prejudice and Pride;  
Were once these maxims fix'd, that God's our friend,  
Virtue our good, and happiness our end;  
How soon must reason o'er the world prevail,  
And error, fraud, and Superstition, fail!*

**A**LTHOUGH man is born to bear, he in fact suffers more distress and misery from the dread of apprehended visionary evils, than the actual feeling of present real ones. Cloyed with the passing moment, with insatiable avidity we rash forward to reconnoitre the invisible regions of futurity, and from events utterly unknown, we anticipate our bliss or woe.

This anticipating bent of mind has had innumerable occasions of exercising its powers, from the long received doctrines of omens, ghosts, spectres, visions, witches and cloven-footed dæmons.

Where-ever knowledge and science are wanting, ignorance, dulness, and credulity dwell, and blind folly and rampant superstition will have numberless abettors and votaries : until the old woman is wholly expelled from our breasts, we shall remain abject slaves to the most ridiculous prejudices of habit, custom and education. The whole inhabitants of the globe verify the truth of these observations. In Lapland, which is as much covered with ignorance & superstition as it is with eternal snow, magicians and sorcerers abound. They live by their craft ; they are wind-merchants, and the mariners are such slaves to these impostors, that they often buy from them a magic cord, which, they vainly hope, will gain what wind they want. Egypt, the mother of occult sciences is at this day over-run with jugglers and slight-of-hand men. The native Americans are absorbed in superstition ; they believe that some bad genii produce all their misery, and that jugglers are their ministers to predict future events. The Chinese fortune-tellers and astrologers direct and govern the whole populace in all affairs of consequence. The modern Persians are the most superstitious people on earth, wholly addicted to, and governed by judicial astrology. The western Scots Islanders pretend to mantology and the second-sight ; numbers amongst ourselves are slaves

to the gloomy terror of dreams and fiery phantoms ; and I myself have seen persons, who begged their daily bread, and knew not where to find lodgings at night, pretend to unfold and discover the impenetrable secrets of divine Providence.

But in every age and nation, where learning has reared aloft her polished head, where true philosophy is cultivated, where common sense is heard and listened to, these omens, apparitions, predictions, and black arts, are universally exploded, and justly derided ; and the mad visionary infatuation of monastic barbarity, is condemned to dwell in the dismal cottages of dull stupidity, amazing folly and moping ignorance.

During those happy days I spent at school, I was a professed devotee to good and ill omens. I was the favourite of a worthy grandmother, who had seen six monarchs sway the British sceptre. This sagacious old world matron was a perfect mistress in the science of mantology, and could unfold all its mysteries, from the mean prognostics of tea-grounds, to the awful predictions of comets : she could plainly foresee all misfortunes, from that of the breaking a China cup, to the death of princes and the dissolution of kingdoms. She had all *Satan's invisible World* by heart, and could repeat a thousand stories of ghosts, hobgoblins, and apparitions, which would make your hair

stand erect, and your nerves convulse, harrow up your soul, and freeze your blood.

At twelve years of age I myself was a complete master in all the branches of superstitious science, and could dispute with the most credulous old-maid in town. But, alas! my scientific proficiency constantly filled my mind with thousands of imaginary tortures, in so much, that a magpie did not chatter on our roof, nor a timorous hare start up, but I thought they were omens of some future evil to me. The shaking of a willow or reed was more terrible to me than a ruffian's dagger: the fluttering of a bird, the rustling of aspen leaves, have made my hair stand erect, and the sweat distill in large and copious drops. The lugubrious chirping of a fire-cricket under my bed-chamber grate, almost persuaded me that I was to die very soon; and die I most certainly should through pure fear, had I not boldly poured a large drink-offering of boiling water on the place where I deemed the little reptile had its nest. Darkness and night were as terrible to me as the shades of Tartarus; for I believed both equally full of spirits and apparitions. I would not go into a room alone or without light; once I almost lost my senses, and alarmed the house by going into a cellar where a few dried fish were hung up. I was once pursued nigh the church-yard by a long-bearded goat; I really

thought it was the discontented ghost of some buried person, and by my shrieks I alarmed the guard at the Barracks. I was once confined to bed by a violent head-ach; a clock disturbed my repose; I verily imagined it was the devil, but the fright dislodged my pain; and this was the only profit I ever reaped from my superstition.

Such were the dreadful effects which this preposterous education had on my mind. The hourly and ordinary occurrences in life could not pass without furnishing my disordered and infatuated fancy, with an inexhaustible fund of incumbent misery, and corrosive gnawing torment to my soul.

My great consolation was, that my condition was not singular. I found many of my numerous circle of acquaintance, both old and young, enveloped in as great absurdities as myself. One of them would not dress his head after crossing a grave: a second would not allow his son to be baptised without putting some bread in its cloaths: a third would not cut his nails on Friday: a fourth would not have his work begun on Saturday: a fifth would not proceed on a journey of importance, if he met a person carrying water as he set out: a sixth pretended to expel diseases by burning horse-shoes in the fire, or making the patient pass under some stones taking from a part of the river where the living and dead passed,

whilst he repeated certain charms and spells: a seventh would not pass by the house of an old woman, because he thought her a witch, and that she had stolen his hive of bees. Many of my acquaintance wore amulets to preserve them from bewitching; in fine, we were the abject slaves of every silly idle fret, which imagination has devised, fable feigned, or fear conceived.

This short abstract of my own and my neighbours history, shews with what uncontrolled, yea, almost indeliable power, a wrong education stamps credulity on the mind, and gives it a bias to the grossest superstition. As I found the prejudices I had imbibed hard to be removed, as these delusions of fancy frequently returned and unhinged my soul, in order to fortify myself against their sudden attacks, I have often put the following questions to myself, and as often resolved their answers in my mind. This was the method I took to extricate myself from those dreadful fetters of superstition in which I was entangled, and if you think it may effect a cure on any of the numerous devotees to legendary fictions, visions, &c. I shall think my labour amply compensated.

On hearing a weak woman divine from the dregs of tea in a cup, from seeing some meteor, blazing star, or comet, that some direful misfortunes and public calamities

would happen; O, heavens! said I, can this person look into futurity, or what connection is there betwixt one of the celestial orbs going its ample round, and famines, wars, or plagues? No; there is only one universal eye sees into futurity, to whom all things, past, present, and to come, are perspicuous: it is the essential perfection of deity alone to be omniscient. Persons have indeed been commissioned by him to predict future events, but this has never happened since the world had a plenary revelation of *agenda* and *credenda*. To presume then, from signs or prodigies above or beneath, to fore-know and foretell futurities, is the grossest profaneness and impiety; it is no less than to claim wisdom equal to our maker. Surely then, said I, this impious pretence is only designed to work on the weakness, and fill the breasts of silly mortals with imaginary fears.

Again, Are their not such things as ghosts, visions or apparitions? Do we not read, and have we not heard of many of them well attested? No; I cannot believe them: Why? Because a ghost or spirit is, by its very nature, invisible; it cannot be seen: I allow indeed, that spirits have a vehicle for an instrument to them of local motion, which they may rarify or condense; but that they rove about on earth or air, like floating atoms, I cannot believe. Why? Because I believe in a particular Providence; that the



supreme Being ruleth over all ; that spirits are his ministers, and when they descend from above, it is by special commission to execute his commands, and then to return. Some of them may be our guardians ; but that any of them should ever terrify or affright poor mortals (as the *braque* smells out, and terrifies poor birds), is against reason, and formally impossible.

But does not the devil and his retainers sometimes appear and seek their prey ? No ; impossible : For what is he ? Why nothing but a servant in chains for rebellion ; and whilst an all-good Being rules the universe, he cannot hurt a single sparrow. His baits and allurements may be laid before us just as I have laid bird-lime to catch the feather'd songsters), these we may fly to, and be ensnared. No, no ; I dread not the black horns of Belzebub, but I fear the being drawn away by my own lusts after the dæmons of riches, honours and pleasures, into avarice, ambition and voluptuousness.

But though you cannot believe in ghosts and dæmons, there are certainly the spirits of dead men, who hover over their graves, and are to be seen in temples and church yards. No ; I do not believe it. The souls of men after death pass over the irremediable gulph to the regions of separate spirits ; they go to Him who made them ; they never do, nor can return, till the heavens are no more : the bad are shut up ; imprisoned,

tortured, and in misery; the good are present with the source of bliss; they have forgot their pilgrimage state, and endless joys fill their whole capacities.

But though the appearance of ghosts are rare, don't you believe that this sometimes happens? May not their being seen answer some good design? Might they not reclaim the vicious, or advise and console surviving friends? No; I cannot believe it. Why? because the universal President of nature has assigned every being its particular station, office and talents, and whilst he governs, there will be no confusion any where. To dispatch a departed spirit to these lower regions, would serve no end at all. The virtuous will always be directed by, and rely on his word and sacred behests in the day of distress; and if his revealed will cannot convert the bad, a thousand messengers from the Tartarian shades will not avail.

But don't you believe in witches? Surely such there have been; witness that of Endor: you have often heard of their mighty feats. Does not history tell you, that in 1650, in Ord, a village near Berwick, which then contained only fourteen houses, fourteen persons were burnt for witchcraft? This you cannot deny. If by a witch you mean a person in confederacy with Satan, to hurt the bodies or estates of men, I deny that there ever was, or ever will be any such on earth. Such a confederacy is absolutely im-

possible: extol and magnify the devil's powers as much as you please, they are incommunicable. I believe that in former ages of rustic barbarity, and overwhelming fanaticism, envy and malice, oppression and tyranny, were the real and only causes of witch-craft. Whenever a poor woman was maligned by her neighbours, or was possessed of any thing they coveted, she was charged with this crime; without knowing her accuser, the magistrate under whose jurisdiction she lived, caused her to be tried by proper symptoms; these were, an immersion in water; if she sunk she was acquitted, but perished by the experiment; if she swam, she was taken out and burnt without any more proof. The woman of Endor was no such witch; her trade, indeed, was to foretell future events, and for this purpose, she had hired a familiar spirit, who was none else than a shrewd, cunning, artful man, who being well acquainted with men and things, after using certain charms by way of machinery, gave such responses as were most agreeable and likely to fall out to his consultors. The same may be said of the Delphic oracle, that great old sorceress. It was no more than a confederacy of priests, who being versant in public and private state matters, gave answers so ambiguous and doubtful, that which way soever the event happened, they might be interpreted so as

to tally therewith. But that an old dotting haggard can bring diseases on my body, is the highest delusion. No; not one disease can arise merely from any natural cause, without the particular disposal of divine Providence, which reaches to the very hairs of my head. But if by witches you mean gossiping old maids, who constantly trade in injurious scandal, I believe there are myriads, they abound in every place.

In fine, without the aid of rhetoric, by proposing and answering these and similar questions, I have grubbed up the lowest roots of superstition and folly from my breast. I am firmly persuaded that no man ever did see an apparition, unless it was the product of his own fertile imagination. I never did nor never shall see a real one till I go to the world of spirits. I dread not the great adversary of mankind, but I fear and constantly guard against his baits to seduce me into the paths of vice, to live impiously, impurely, and unjustly. I am not terrified with walking in burying-grounds by night. No; the organised bodies which moulder there, I believe to be no more the sentient agent, who once moved in them, than I do the table I write on, or any other matter is I myself. I dread nothing by night but robbers and blood-thirsty assassins. I believe that as omniscience sees all things past, present and future, so consummate wisdom directs

the whole system of events to the best and noblest ends. It is that all-great and good Being whom alone I fear, and regard as the only ruler and guide of universal nature, whose mercy and goodness will prevent every evil from coming on me, by the direction of his holy and wise Providence, which extends to and watches over the minutest of his works.

## An Antidote to Superstition,

PART 2ND.

*The SUPERSTITIOUS WIFE &c. with an excellent Way of fortifying the Soul against gloomy Presages and Terrors of the mind.*

*Visions, and magic spells, can you despise,  
And laugh at witches, ghosts, and prodigies?*

**G**OING yesterday to dine with an old acquaintance, I had the misfortune to find his whole family very much dejected. Upon asking him the occasion of it, he told me that his wife had dreamed a strange dream the night before, which they were afraid portended some misfortune to themselves or to their children. At her coming into the room I observed a settled melancholy in her countenance, which I should have

been troubled for, had I not heard from whence it proceeded, We were no sooner sat down, but after having looked upon me a little while, My dear, says she, turning to her husband, you may now see the stranger that was in the candle last night. Soon after this, as they began to talk of family affairs, a little boy at the lower end of the table told her, that he was to go into join-hand on Thursday. Thursday? says she, No, child, if it please God, you shall not begin upon Childermas day; tell your writing-master that Friday will be soon enough. I was reflecting with myself on the oddness of her fancy, and wondering that any body would establish it as a rule to lose a day in every week. In the midst of these my musings, she desired me to reach her a little salt upon the point of my knife, which I did in such a trepidation and hurry of obedience, that I let it drop by the way; at which she immediately startled, and said it fell towards her. Upon this I looked very blank; and observing the concern of the whole table, began to consider myself, with some confusion, as a person that had brought a disaster upon the family. The lady, however, recovering herself after a little space, said to her husband, with a sigh, My dear, misfortunes never come single. My friend, I found, acted but an under-part at his table, and being a man of more good-nature than

understanding, thinks himself obliged to fall in with all the passions and humours of his yoke-fellow : Do not you remember, child, says she, that the pigeon-house fell the very afternoon that our careless wench spilt the salt upon the table ? Yes, says he, my dear, and the next post brought us an account of the battle of Almanza. The reader may guess at the figure I made, after having done all this mischief. I dispatched my dinner, as soon as I could, with my usual taciturnity ; when to my utter confusion the lady seeing me quitting my knife and fork, and laying them across one another upon my plate, desired me that I would humour her so far as to take them out of that figure, and place them side by side. What the absurdity was which I had committed I did not know, but I suppose there was some traditionary superstition in it ; and therefore, in obedience to the lady of the house, I disposed of my knife and fork in two parallel lines, which is the figure I shall always lay them in for the future, though I do not know any reason for it.

It is not difficult for a man to see that a person has conceived an aversion to him. For my own part, I quickly found, by the lady's looks, that she regarded me as a very odd kind of fellow, with an unfortunate aspect. For which reason I took my leave immediately after dinner, and withdrew to

my own lodgings. Upon my return home, I fell into a profound contemplation on the evils that attend these superstitious follies of mankind; how they subject us to imaginary afflictions, and additional sorrows, that do not properly come within our lot. As if the natural calamities of life were not sufficient for it, we turn the most indifferent circumstances into misfortunes, and suffer as much from trifling accidents, as from real evils. I have known the shooting of a star spoil a nights rest; and have seen a man in love grow pale and lose his appetite, upon the plucking of a merry thought. A screech-owl at midnight has alarmed a family more than a band of robbers; nay, the voice of a cricket hath struck more terror than the roaring of a lion. There is nothing so inconsiderable, which may not appear dreadful to an imagination that is filled with omens and prognostics. A rusty nail, or a crooked pin shoot up into prodigies.

I remember I was once in a mixed assembly, that was full of noise and mirth, when on a sudden an old woman unluckily observed there were thirteen of us in company. This remark struck a panic terror into several who were present, insomuch that one or two of the ladies were going to leave the room; but a friend of mine taking notice that one of our female companions was big with child, affirmed there were fourteen in



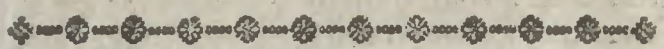
the room, and that, instead of portending one of the company should die, it plainly foretold one of them should be born. Had not my friend found out this expedient to break the omen, I question not but half the women in the company would have fallen sick that very night.

An old maid, that is troubled with the vapours, produces infinite disturbances of this kind among her friends and neighbours. I know a maiden aunt, of a great family, who is one of these antiquated Sibyls, that forebodes and prophesies from one end of the year to the other. She is always seeing apparitions, and hearing death-watches; and was the other day almost frightened out of her wits by the great houle-dog, that howled in the stable at a time when she lay ill of the tooth-ach. Such an extravagant cast of mind engages multitudes of people, not only in impertinent terrors, but in supernumerary duties of life; and arises from that fear and ignorance which are natural to the soul of man. The horror with which we entertain the thoughts of death, or indeed of any future evil, and the uncertainty of its approach, fill a melancholy mind with innumerable apprehensions and suspicions, and consequently dispose it to the observation of such groundless prodigies and predictions. For as it is the chief concern of wise men to retrench the evils of life by the

reasonings of philosophy ; it is the employment of fools to multiply them by the sentiments of superstition.

For my own part, I should be very much troubled were I endowed with this divining quality, though it should inform me truly of every thing that can befall me. I would not anticipate the relish of any happiness, nor feel the weight of any misery, before it actually arrives.

I know but one way of fortifying my soul against these gloomy presages and terrors of mind, and that is, by securing to myself the friendship and protection of that being who disposes of events, and governs futurity. He sees, at one view, the whole thread of my existence, not only that part of it which I have already passed through, but that which runs forward into all the depths of eternity. When I lay me down to sleep, I recommend myself to his care ; when I awake, I give myself up to his direction. Amidst all the evils that threaten me, I will look up to him for help, and question not but he will either avert them, or turn to my advantage. Though I know neither the time nor the manner of the death I am to die, I am not at all solicitous about it ; because I am sure that he knows them both, and that he will not fail to comfort and support me under them.



*The ART of*  
FORTUNE-TELLING EXPOSED,  
*or, the DELPHIC ORACLE of the OLD BAI-  
LEY out of his reckoning for once.*

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*Heav'n from all creatures hides the book of Fate,  
All but the title page, prescrib'd their present state.*

**I** Was lately prevailed upon by a female acquaintance, to accompany her to that Delphic Oracle of the great as well as small vulgar, the famous fortune-teller in the Old-Bailey. Upon our entering the antichamber, or outer court, or whatever you please to call it, we found a large company of people, who were come thither on the same errand with ourselves; but I believe, with a greater share of credulity, and more serious intentions. As we were obliged to wait here a considerable time, before we could have the honour of being admitted into the penetrable, or inner-temple, of this hoary sage, I had an opportunity of making my remarks on all these votaries of fortune; some of whom had already obtained an audience, whilst the rest were every moment expecting

the same favour. It is impossible for me to describe, or for you to conceive, the rapture of joy and gladness that flushed in the countenances of the former; or the ardour of hope and expectation that glowed in the faces of the latter: and had I been a good painter, I think I could have sent you one of the finest representations of what they call, a Fool's Paradise, that was ever seen; for every single person, in this groupe, was either happy, or expecting to be happy, without ever reflecting upon what a sandy foundation their happiness was placed: and, I must own, I am greatly surpris'd that neither Hogarth, nor any other of our comic genius's, have ever thought of such a curious subject.

I could overhear one young lady telling her companion, that she was resolv'd to break off the intended match; "For says she, this here Philosopher assures me that my brother (who is Captain of a privateer) will soon take such a rich French prize, as will enable him to give me a very large fortune; and then, adds she, I shall have a title to a much better gentleman than Mr. G——." A married lady told her husband (who by the bye seem'd to have been drawn to this place much against his will) that she was determin'd to breed the child, with which she was then pregnant, to the law; for that the Wiseacre had inform'd her it would be a boy; and

that he would make a distinguished figure and be advanced to a very eminent rank in that honourable profession. In a word, Sir, there was nothing to be heard or seen in this company, but congratulations of good fortune, forming of schemes, hope, joy, exultation, or whatever can be conceived as pleasing or agreeable : and if there be such a thing as happiness without reason, these were surely a set of the happiest people that ever existed ; though I must confess, I was frequently tempted to think, that their happiness bore a very strong resemblance to that of the straw-crowned monarch in Bedlam.

At last, our turn of being admitted arrived, and the young lady, as good manners required, was introduced first. After being closetted for about a quarter of an hour with this false Prophet, she returned, and assured me, that he was certainly one of the most wonderful men in the world ; for he had told her a thousand things which she thought no body had known but herself.

By this time, Sir, you will imagine, that my incredulity must have been, in some measure, removed, and that I was readily disposed to believe the incoherent reveries of this solemn mocker ; but so fully was I convinced of the fallacy of his art, that I offered to lay a wager, that he could not give a true and satisfactory answer to any single

question I proposed. And, in fact, this was the case ; for, when we came to have a private conversation, I told him the only thing about which I meant to consult him, was the fate of a young gentleman, a relation of mine, who was abroad with the British troops in Germany, and from whom I had not heard for some time past. At first he begged to be informed of his age ; that I told him, I had forgot : then he enquired, of what rank he was in the army : that, I said, was one of the principal things I wanted to learn from him. In a word, Sir, he asked me so many questions about his family, fortune, learning, interest and connexions, that, had I answered them all, I should have left nothing for him to do, but to draw some plain conclusion, which any man of common sense might have done as well as himself. But finding that he could extort nothing from me, and being ashamed to acknowledge the imperfection of his art, he ventured to make a bold push : contracting his brows, therefore, into a most gloomy frown, and looking with a great deal of gravity and grimace, he continued for some time in a thoughtful posture: then starting, as it were, from a trance, “ Now, says he, I have it :——your friend  
 “ has nobly distinguished himself in that  
 “ glorious battle which was fought between  
 “ the British and French armies on the plains  
 “ of Minden, and for his courage and con-

“ duct in that important action, he is now  
 “ raised to a higher rank ; and at the con-  
 “ clusion of the campaign you will have the  
 “ pleasure of seeing him in England.” As  
 there was nothing improbable in all this, I  
 must own, I was inclined to believe or more  
 properly to wish, that it might be true ; but  
 I rather believed it from the probability of the  
 thing itself, than from any faith I had in his  
 art, which, in this particular instance (and,  
 I imagine, it will be found to do so in all o-  
 thers) most unluckily proved to be deceitful:  
 for I had no sooner returned to my lodgings,  
 then I found a letter on my table, acquaint-  
 ing me that my dear friend had lost his life  
 in a skirmish that happened between two  
 detachments of the hostile armies, long be-  
 fore the battle of Minden.

The whole of this adventure led me into  
 a train of serious reflections on the folly and  
 impiety of searching into future events.  
 Whence can proceed this unreasonable de-  
 sire ? Does it spring from a secret distrust  
 of Providence, as if we were more capable  
 of managing matters for ourselves, than that  
 omniscient and omnipotent Being, in whose  
 hand is the disposal of all things past, pre-  
 sent, and future ? Or is the human mind of  
 such an extensive capacity, that, not satisfied  
 with the knowledge of all the transactions of  
 former ages, it must be diving into the un-  
 fathomable depths of futurity ?

Whatever be its cause, its effects are but too plain and obvious : for it naturally tends to unsettle and unhinge the mind, and to draw us off from the improvement of present advantages, and the enjoyment of present pleasures, by the fear of future evil that never may happen, and the hope of distant good that never may arrive. Were some men to foresee all the misfortunes that are to befall them, their spirits would sink under the terrible prospect ; and were others to be previously informed of all the happiness they are to enjoy, they would be in danger, like spend-thrift heirs, of mortgaging their estates before they come to the real possession. It is to prevent these, and the like fatal consequences, that the wise Governor of the universe hath wrapt up the knowledge of future events in thick and pitchy darkness, impenetrable to human eyes : these are the secret things of the Almighty, into which no mortal should dare to pry ; yesterday is irrecoverably gone ; the morrow is yet unborn, and, perhaps, to us, may never be born ; the present day, therefore, and that only is our's, and upon our right improvement of it depends our happiness, as well in this life as in that which is to come.

F I N I S.