

K N O W L E D G E : A N O D E .

B Y T H E S A M E .

Ducit in errorem variarum ambage viarum. OVID.

HIGH on a hill's green bosom laid,
 At ease my carelefs Fancy stray'd,
 And o'er the landskip ran ;
 Review'd what scenes the seasons show,
 And weigh'd what share of joy and woe
 Is doom'd to toiling Man.

The nibbling flocks around me bleat,
 The oxen low beneath my feet

Along the clover'd dale ;

The golden sheaves the reapers bind,
 The ploughman whistles near behind,
 And breaks the new-mown vale.

“ Hail, Knowledge, gift of heaven ! I cried,

“ E'en all the gifts of heaven beside,

“ Compar'd to thee, how low !

“ The blessings of the earth and air

“ The beasts of fold and forest share,

“ But godlike Beings know.

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“ How

- “ How mean the short-liv'd joys of Sense !
“ But how sublime the excellence
“ Of Wisdom's sacred lore !
“ In Death's deep shades what nations lie !
“ Yet still can Wisdom's piercing eye
“ Their mighty deeds explore.
- “ She sees the little Spartan band,
“ With great Leonidas, withstand
“ The Asian world in arms ;
“ She hears the heavenly sounds that hung
“ On Homer's and on Plato's tongue,
“ And glows at Tully's charms.
- “ The wonders of the spacious sky
“ She penetrates with Newton's eye,
“ And marks the planets roll ;
“ The human mind with Locke she scans ;
“ With Cambray Virtue's flame she fans,
“ And lifts to heaven the soul.
- “ How matter takes ten thousand forms
“ Of metals, plants, of men and worms,
“ She joys to trace with Boyle :
“ This life she deems an infant state,
“ A gleam that bodes a light complete,
“ When done the mortal toil.

- “ What numerous ills in life befall !
“ Yet Wisdom learns to scorn them all,
“ And arms the breast with steel :
“ E'en Death's pale face no horror wears ;
“ But, ah, what horrid pangs and fears
“ Unknowing wretches feel !
- “ That breast excels proud Ophir's mines,
“ And fairer than the morning shines,
“ Where Wisdom's treasures glow ;
“ But, ah, how void yon peasant's mind !
“ His thoughts how darken'd and confin'd !
“ Nor cares he more to know.
- “ The last two tenants of the ground,
“ Of antient times his history bound :
“ Alas, it scarce goes higher.
“ In vain to him is Maro's strain,
“ And Shakespeare's magic powers in vain,
“ In vain is Milton's fire.
- “ Nor sun by day, nor stars by night,
“ Can give his soul the grand delight
“ To trace almighty power :
“ His team think just as much ~~as~~ he
“ Of Nature's vast variety
“ In animal and flower.”

As thus I fung, a solemn sound
Accosts mine ear ; I look'd around,

And, lo, an antient Sage,
Hard by an ivied oak, stood near,
That fenc'd the cave, where many a year
Had been his hermitage.

His mantle grey flow'd loose behind,
His snowy beard wav'd to the wind,
And added solemn grace ;
His broad bald front gave dignity,
Attention mark'd his lively eye,
And peace smil'd in his face.

He beckon'd with his wrinkled hand,
My ear was all at his command ;

And thus the Sage began :

“ Godlike it is to know, I own,

“ But, oh, how little can be known

“ By poor short-fighted man !

“ Go mark the Schools, where letter'd Pride,

“ And star-crown'd Science, boastful guide,

“ Display their fairest light :

“ There led by some pale meteor's ray,

“ That leaves them oft, the Sages stray,

“ And grope in endless night.

- “ Of Wisdom proud, yon Sage exclaims,
“ Virtue and Vice are merely names,
“ And changing every hour ;
“ Ashley, how loud in Virtue's praise !
“ Yet Ashley with a kiss betrays
“ And strips her of her dower.
- “ Hark, Bolingbroke his God arraigns ;
“ Hobbes smiles on Vice, Descartes maintains :
“ A godless passive cause ;
“ See, Bayle, oft sily shifting round,
“ Would fondly fix on sceptic ground,
“ And wrest th' eternal laws.
- “ And what the joy this lore bestows ?
“ Alas, no joy, no hope it knows
“ Above what Brutes may claim :
“ To quench our noblest native fire,
“ That bids to nobler worlds aspire,
“ Is all its hope, its aim.
- “ Not Afric's wilds, nor Babel's waste,
“ Where Ignorance her tents hath plac'd,
“ More dismal scene display :
“ A scene, where Virtue sickening dies,
“ Where Vice to dark extinction flies,
“ And scorns the future day.

- “ Wisdom you boast to you is given :
“ At night then mark the fires of heaven,
“ And let thy mind explore ;
“ Swift as the lightning let it fly
“ From star to star, from sky to sky,
“ Still, still are millions more.
- “ Th’ immense ideas strike the soul
“ With pleasing horror, and controul
“ Thy Wisdom’s empty boast.
“ What are they ? — Thou canst never say :
“ Then silent adoration pay,
“ And be in wonder lost.
- “ Say, how the self-same roots produce
“ The wholesome food, and poisonous juice,
“ And adders balsams yield :
“ How fierce the lurking tyger glares,
“ How mild the heifer with thee shares
“ The labours of the field ?
- “ Why growling to his den retires
“ The fullen pard, while joy inspires
“ Yon happy sportive lambs ?
“ Now scatter’d o’er the hill they stray,
“ Now, weary of their gambling play,
“ All fingle out their dams,

- “ Instinct directs—But what is That?
“ Fond man, thou never canst say What:
“ Far short thy searches fall.
“ By stumbling chance, and slow degrees,
“ The useful arts of men increase,
“ But this at once is all,
“ A trunk first floats along the deep,
“ Long ages still improve the ship,
“ Till she commands the shore:
“ But never bird improv'd her nest,
“ Each all at once of powers possess,
“ Which ne'er can rise to more.
“ That down the steep the waters flow,
“ That weight descends we see, and know;
“ But why, can ne'er explain.
“ Then humbly weighing Nature's laws,
“ To God's high will ascribe the cause,
“ And own thy wisdom vain.
“ For still the more thou knowest, the more
“ Shalt thou the vanity deplore
“ Of all thy soul can find:
“ This life a sickly woful dream,
“ A burial of the soul will seem,
“ A palsy of the mind.

“ Tho’ Knowledge scorns the peasant’s fear,

“ Alas, it points the secret spear

“ Of many a nameless woe :

“ Thy delicacy dips the dart

“ In rankling gall, and gives a smart

“ Beyond what he can know.

“ How happy then the simple mind

“ Of yon unknowing labouring hind,

“ Where all is smiling peace !

“ No thoughts of more exalted joy

“ His present bliss one hour destroy,

“ Nor rob one moment’s ease.

“ The slings neglected Merit feels,

“ The pangs the virtuous foul conceals,

“ When crush’d by wayward fate ;

“ These are not found below his roof,

“ Against them all securely proof,

“ Heaven guards his humble state.

“ Knowledge or wealth to few are given ;

“ But, mark how just the ways of heaven !

“ True joy to all is free :

“ Nor Wealth nor Knowledge grant the boon,

“ ’Tis thine, O Virtue, thine alone,

“ It all belongs to thee,

“ With thee—how blest the Shepherd lives !

“ Gay is his morn, his evening gives

“ Content and sweet repose.

“ Without thee—ever, ever cloy'd,

“ To sage, or chief, one weary void

“ Is all that life bestows.

“ Then wouldst thou, Mortal, rise divine ?

“ Let innocence of soul be thine,

“ With active goodness join'd :

“ Thy heart shall then confess thee blest,

“ And, ever lively, joyful taste

“ The pleasures of the mind.”

So spake the Sage: my heart reply'd,

“ How poor, how blind is human pride !

“ All joy how false and vain,

“ But that from Conscious Worth which flows,

“ Which triumphs in the midst of woes,

“ And boasts an endless reign.”