

THE
LITERARY GARDEN
AND
BRITISH NORTH AMERICAN MAGAZINE.

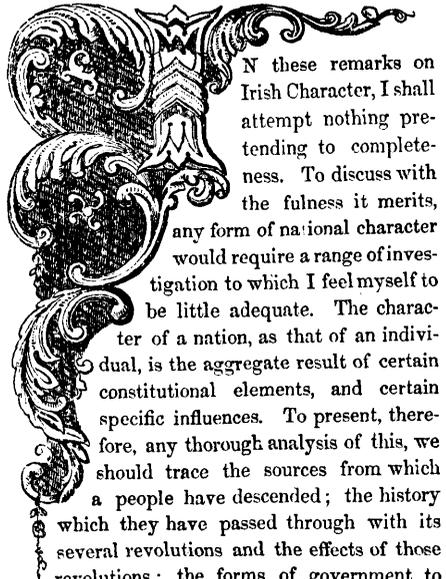
VOL. IX.

JANUARY, 1851.

NO. 1.

FRAGMENTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS OF IRISH CHARACTER.

BY THE REV. HENRY GILES.



N these remarks on Irish Character, I shall attempt nothing pretending to completeness. To discuss with the fulness it merits, any form of national character would require a range of investigation to which I feel myself to be little adequate. The character of a nation, as that of an individual, is the aggregate result of certain constitutional elements, and certain specific influences. To present, therefore, any thorough analysis of this, we should trace the sources from which a people have descended; the history which they have passed through with its several revolutions and the effects of those revolutions; the forms of government to which they have been subjected; the form of religion in which they have been nurtured. Nor should we omit physical circumstances. We should take into account the locality of a nation, its position on the globe and the consequences of climate and situation; its insular or continental existence; the extent of its shores; the nature of its soil; its geological structure—in a word, its physical capacities, united to the means of their development. How many of the characteristics of England may we deduce from the fact of its being an island, and having exhaustless wealth of coals, and iron in its bosom. We should further estimate the

moral operation of particular habits of life, the standard of comfort or luxury; the quality of food and residence, the several kinds of industry, and the amount of remuneration. When we have examined all these with scrupulous enquiry, and defined in what degrees they mingle with, and modify one another; when with the finest philosophic acumen, and the most exact statistics, we have drawn the final result, it will still be vague and general; numberless peculiarities will yet remain attached to rank, education, and even to the special districts of a country. Had I the knowledge and ability to conduct an examination of this kind, it would require an elaborate treatise, and could not be accomplished in a desultory essay, such as this. I shall therefore, at once begin to do all that I propose to do, and that is, to describe some general tendencies and forms of Irish character; particularly, as they exist among the masses of the people. I may pass these limits, but it will be only rarely.

The intellectual character of the Irish is acute, rapid, vivacious and versatile. The Irish apprehend readily, and they apprehend vividly. They delight in dialectics, and nothing gives them higher pleasure than intellectual and religious contest. They love pure science, too, but they want that practical tendency, or they have had nothing to develop it, which leads to its applications. Ireland, therefore, has no Watt. The Irish want, also that laborious perseverance which would carry them into the higher regions of abstraction and invention; and Ireland, therefore, has no Newton or Laplace, they are metaphysical within certain limits; and though in this department of human