

the only standards of excellency ; and he who would come forth as the candidate for literary honors, must do little else than servilely imitate Pope or Addison. The consequence was, as the same author proceeds : " Writers scarcely dared to trust to their own observations of nature, but wrote in slavish imitation of both the style of prose and of verse, which they found already so highly approved by the public taste. They wanted that proper confidence in themselves which every upright mind ought to possess. They were imitators of men, and their aim was lower than it would have been had they imitated nature ; and hence we find freedom from faults. A negative sort of excellence was the object at which they aimed, and in their painful efforts for polish and refinement of style, they forgot to think for themselves and nobly speak their thoughts"*. You are aware, gentlemen, I have recommended good models of writing as worthy of your attention—but not in the way of teaching you such a slavish submission to authority in this matter, that you are merely to imitate their phrases or turns of expression—the works of distinguished writers are rather to be read for the purpose of acquiring a copious vocabulary, of stimulating the powers of taste and of imagination in the student—but never so to overawe him by their authority, that he cannot look on nature except through their spectacles. Though I have spoken of the school of Pope and Addison as exercising an undue authority over their successors for a considerable period, I am far from thinking that we are wholly emancipated from the spirit which produced this. The truth is, there seems to be a despotism in matters of taste as much as in politics ; authors are not satisfied with being read and esteemed—they wish also to be masters—and if we have thus far emancipated ourselves from the stiffness and artificial polish of the times of Queen Anne, that it is no longer held to be a proof that an author is unworthy of public estimation because he does not write after the style and manner of one or other of the great wits who penned the Spectator—still, in our day, we need to be upon our guard lest we be drawn into the same error, since through the blinding influence of fashion, men are ever prone to think their own times the most enlightened of all that went before, and in unduly prizing some favorite writer, to imitate his defects rather than his beauties. There are many misconceptions in the minds of young men which stand in the way of their acquiring the noble art of composing well ; but most of these we apprehend may be traced up to the want of that proper confidence in themselves which is indispensable to their progress both in literature and science. Mr. Newman has attended to some of these misconceptions. " It not unfrequently happens," he observes, " that the efforts of the student have taken some wrong direction.

* See Chambers' History.