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P R E F A C E.

TO a man sincerely interested in the welfare of society and of his country, it must be particularly agreeable to reflect on the rapid progress and general diffusion of learning and civility, which, within the present age, have taken place in Great Britain. Whatever may be the case in some other kingdoms of Europe, we, in this island, may boast of our superiority to those illiberal prejudices, which not only cramp the genius, but sour the temper of man, and disturb all the agreeable intercourse of society. Among us, learning is no longer confined within the schools of the philosophers, or the courts of the great; but, like all the greatest advantages which Heaven has bestowed on mankind, it is become as universal as it is useful.

This general diffusion of knowledge is one effect of that happy constitution of government, which, towards the close of the last century, was confirmed to us, and which constitutes the peculiar glory of this nation. In other countries, the great body of the people possess little wealth, have little power, and consequently meet with little respect; in Great Britain, the people are opulent, have great influence, and claim, of course, a proper share of attention. To their improvement, therefore, men of letters have lately directed their studies; as the great body of the people, no less than the dignified, the learned, or the wealthy few, have an acknowledged title to be amused and instructed. Books have been divested of the terms of the schools, reduced from that size which suited only the purses of the rich and the avocations of the studious; and adapted to persons of more ordinary fortunes, whose attachment to other pursuits admitted of little leisure for those of knowledge. It is to books of this kind, more than to the works of our Bacons, our Lockes, and our Newtons, that the generality of our countrymen owe that superior improvement, which

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