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## ORIGINALITY AND PLAGIARISM.

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Among the many graceful papers which constitute the Sketch-book of Washington Irving is one sufficiently amusing on "The Art of Bookmaking," in which he portrays, with characteristic humor, the interior of the Reading-room of the Library of the British Museum, and the "pale, studious personages" who were there engaged "poring intently over dusty volumes, rummaging among mouldy manuscripts and taking copious notes of their contents." These patient investigators, these laborious seekers after hidden treasure, he very unfairly describes as a set of literary purloiners who repaired to that "sequestered pool of obsolete literature" to "draw buckets full of classic lore," or "pure English, undefiled," wherewith to swell their own scanty rills of thought. In the very same paper, however, the brilliant essayist suggests that what he calls, "this pilfering disposition," may be implanted in authors providentially for wise purposes, and that the labors of these "predatory writers" catch up the knowledge and wisdom of past ages and cast them forth again in new forms.

There is here a manifest want of discrimination between things that differ. In his haste to produce a pleasant paper, Irving has (unintentionally, no doubt,) done serious injustice to a large class of students, whose patient investigation of the forgotten or neglected literature of the past he treats with contempt, affecting to regard all borrowers as alike "predatory;" though he admits the usefulness of that toil by which the wit and learning of the minds of past ages are revived and caused to flourish

again by a kind of intellectual metempsychosis.

It is the purpose of this brief paper to show that borrowing is not entirely synonymous with plagiarism; and that genuine intellectual metempsychosis, far from being indicative of barrenness, is a sure sign of intellectual vigor, yea, the clearest and most unequivocal proof of originality.

No doubt there is in the world a great deal of petty literary purloining,—a really dishonest appropriation, or rather misappropriation, of the thoughts and ideas of another in an attempt to disguise the intellectual poverty of the writer. But these literary jackdaws who vainly disport themselves in the more brilliant plumes of another, are not so common as is generally supposed; and it is from their own ranks that the cant cry of "plagiarism" is most frequently heard. It is not, however, difficult to distinguish between the dishonest spoiler and the frank borrowing of an original thinker. There is a want of harmony in the productions of the mere plagiarist, which will never be found in the works of genius. The patient, persevering pursuit of truth under her manifold forms, and the reduction of the crude elements of thought in the crucible of the mind, does not commend itself to the speculative and speculative manufacturer of books. ~~But~~ without this transmutation of foreign material to gold by the subtle alchemy of thought, no work will long maintain a reputation or pass for currency in the republic of letters. In other words, changing the figure, there must be *assimilation* in order to *vitality*. The seed-thought must be buried in the