

some years since, the adoption of a measure avowedly aimed at the relief of those innumerable candidates for immortality, called authors, from the pressure of those afflicting scourges of their tribe, and smooth for their eager footsteps the upward road to fame and honour? Yes! it certainly was one of the "Smiths," and the idea was well worthy of the brain of a bearer of that renowned surname. After bewailing, in expressive and feeling terms, the crisis at which literary affairs had arrived, of the storms that threatened, the oceans that gaped to engulf the Ship of Authors (not the Ship of Fools, fair reader,) the swarms of piratical critics cruising against her, the shoals of plagiarism, and the breakers of imitation, he proposed as the only relief—as the last resort of a despairing age, "*a general and unsparing conflagration of books!*" of books! ay, of books! Start not; the plan emanated not from an Attila or a Bajazet, but from the respected lips of a "Smith." Let us not, therefore, despair of seeing the great conception carried out, or forbear indulging in sweet anticipation of the results of so sweeping a remedy.

Alas for the early ages of literature! for the golden age of the primeval bards of earth, when critics were an unknown race, and plagiarism not even a name; when the bright and the beautiful of all worldly things, and the shadowy visions that Fancy caught of Heaven, found meet and willing interpreters in the undiseased imaginations of the first minstrels. Then was every thing fresh and fair: the waving of the green old woods, the moaning of the breeze through the mountain hollows, the deep song of the lonely ocean, had not as yet been desecrated by the daring impiety of the children of men. They had not as yet been beslavered and be-rhymed by mawkish enthusiasts, or false, unmanly sentimentalists. Aught that was glorious yet stood forth in its undimmed beauty, not seen, as in our degenerate age, through the false and cloudy medium of never-ending verbosity of description, or through the tinselly haze of sparkling yet senseless epithet and flattery, which the countless hosts of our authors and authorlings have woven around it. And the master spirits of old drank deep of their loveliness, and their mind, reflecting the image of its Creator in its fresh and unadulterated youth, imbibing ideas and impressions through legitimate channels alone, and forming them, when received, into the combinations which

Nature whispered were the images of her own workings, produced those unforgetten, undying works which the long lapse of years seems but to encircle with a yet greener chaplet of immortality.

But equally brief and glorious was that happy age. When the early fathers had passed from the earth others sprang into existence, ready if possible to reap the same harvest of fame. They too passed away in their turn, and their places were filled even to overflowing by a succeeding generation. Even then was perceptible the first dawn of the evil which now presses with such deadly weight on literary effort; but in those primitive days its ravages were but trifling. Even then the world was blessed with some specimens of the critic breed; then, certainly, few in number and of questionable reputation. This race of animal would surely seem to have been created for the especial torment of genius, generated from the unwholesome swamps of literatur like the unclean reptiles warmed into life in the noisome slime of the Nile, and clinging as pertinaciously to it in all its journeying as the shell fish of the deep to the timbers of the gallant barque, till they have completed their ignoble efforts for her destruction. Need we further describe the "Critics?"

Even the second and third generations of literary men seemed insecure from their attacks. The very high priest of poetry, the august Homer, was obnoxious to their pert censuring. They called his similes inapplicable, his images forced, his ideas borrowed, ay, *borrowed*. But a cold smile of contempt can alone be accorded to such attempts, accompanied with a passing wish that every reputation had escaped as unscathed from the fiery ordeal of genius. In those days, the mischief of criticism could but have been comparatively small, as it must have been confined to small circles. When no means existed of cheap and rapid transmission of sentiment and reflection, the author as well as the critic could but communicate to a small circle, such as a neighbourhood could furnish. But time rolled on; author succeeded author; and, alas! with equal rapidity critic succeeded critic; till at length things have arrived at such a condition that the authors of the "Rejected Addresses" have been driven, by a sense of the desperate condition of literature, to propose the no less desperate remedy of a general "conflagration of books."

So terribly has the writing mania overspread