

# SOMETHING.

EDITED

BY NEMO NOBODY, ESQUIRE.

*"'Tis Something.....Nothing."*

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## MORE LETTERS TO NOBODY.

MR.      If you don't write more plaiter, no body can't understand you.

Yours,      G.

MR. EDITOR,

There is an obscurity in some of your passages that excites inquiry,  
consequently expansion of intellect.

Yours,      H.

*Answer to the above.*

"Brevis esse laboro" sed non, ut obscurus fiam.      N. N.

MR. SOMETHING,

I am of a very singular nature, and being the first person in the so-  
ciety of Letters, see no reason why I should be excluded from so sin-  
gular a production.

I.

*Answer.*

MR. I,—You are very cunning, but cannot gain admittance.—"We"  
gives us a plural importance.

N. N.

FRIEND NEMO,—The soft sounds of C have robbed me of my natural  
rights, you are no "sceptic," and I, therefore, trust that you will do all  
in your power to restore them to me.

K.

*Answer.*

FRIEND K,—We rather think that C has given up too many of his  
Roman rights, and we fear irretrievably.

N. N.

GOOD SIR,—As I help to make up your name I think you should en-  
deavour to prevent my banishment from words with which I have been  
so intimately connected.

Yours, finally,      L.

GOOD L,

*Answer.*

Too much of one thing is good—for nothing.      N. N.

will venture to assure them, from our own experience, that they disgrace the characters they pretend to imitate—were they really acquainted with, or had they been accustomed to the first, that is, the best company in England, from the king to the commoner, they would have been taught that affability and liberality were its predominant features, and that politeness (not politesse) was the superstructure founded on the broad base of common civility.

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RELIGION.

WE shall, considering such subjects as most appropriate to the season, indulge ourselves still further on topics of this nature—Religion we consider as the only sure foundation of all mortal acquirements, and the only never-failing resource of those who are weary and heavy laden, and wish for rest. We shall consider it, therefore, as the focus to which every ray of light we may be enabled to elicit shall converge.

But on this subject we wish explicitly to be understood, we shall enter into no controversial arguments respecting the opinions of individuals, interfere with no sect, be biassed by no prepossessions. But as christians we shall do every thing in our power to impress the divinity of the christian religion. As Episcopalians, we trust we can maintain our ground; as admirers, we might almost say adorers of the sacred writings, we shall exert ourselves to our last ability in causing them to be equally admired, by endeavouring to make them more generally understood.

But that they are not now commonly understood, is not the fault of the original writers or of the translators; the difficulty originates in the capriciousness of men with respect to language. A word that signifies one thing to day, to-morrow will be applied to an object essentially different; a man who would boast of being called by a certain title one year, the next will reprobate it as a stigma on his character. We need no stronger proof of versatility in the application of terms, than what has come within the knowledge of every intelligible man during the short round of twenty years. The fact is, that if a man *adopts*, or *to* that man is given, a title, distinguishing his situation, if that situation, or his behaviour in it becomes opprobrious, the word itself originally honourable, partakes of his opprobrium, and becomes transferred to those who are really objects of disgrace.

We will here introduce an example. The word “Harlot,” for instance, was once a respectable denomination, of an hired *man*, of any rank, we need not express what it means now; as the term was transferable, it was transferred, and by a slight alteration of the orthogra-

phy the word "varlet" introduced in its stead; *that* word submitting to the customary fate of all distinguishing terms was transmitted to inferiors, and by the omission of one letter the term *valet* was adopted in its place. We introduce this observation, for the purpose of asking this question—Should we not in finding that word in an author's works published two or three centuries ago, apply to it the same signification that it has at present?

To those who would answer yes, we should reply, they did their author wrong; for he employed the word according to its meaning in *his* time, and certainly should not be answerable for any alteration in its meaning by his posterity.

The most antient translation of the Old Testament, now extant, is the Septuagint, translated, as it is said, about 260 years before the christian æra. This translation was from Hebrew into Greek.

The version we now generally use of the Bible was translated by order of James I. into English from the *Hebrew* of the *Old Testament*, and the *Greek* of the *New*. And was published in the year sixteen hundred and ten. In both instances the greatest exertions were made to procure a faithful transcript; but neither could Ptolemy Philadelphus nor James I. however FAITHFUL the translation of either, command each word to retain the meaning then assigned to it through all *succeeding* generations. Words consequently having essentially changed their meaning during the course of two hundred years, it is not astonishing that with a reader incompetent to restore to them their original sense, passages should frequently occur to alienate attention, where they would otherwise command admiration.

Another cause of some of the difficulties that at present occur, is perhaps derived from the *very means* that were taken to remove *all*; from the number of persons employed in the respective translations; seventy two in the former instance, and fifty four in the latter; for as the translation of each was to be compared with the others, and as it was required that, although their work was carried on *separately*, they should agree *conjointly*, it was necessary for each to render the original into Greek in the former instance, and the Hebrew or Greek in the latter into English, as *literally* as possible. Now it requires no very extensive knowledge of languages to ascertain, that although we may, without injury to the original, translate literally *historical facts, common narrative, descriptive, and plain didactic pieces*; nay, even some of the *figurative* expressions, such as similes or comparisons, figures of thought, and even allegories, where the objects are simplified in estimation by all nations; yet that peculiarity of expression which every language has, and which consti-

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tutes its idiom, and that simple but comprehensive figure of rhetoric, the metaphor, defy all *literal* translations.

Were we inclined to prove the correctness of this position, we should only need to refer to the daily translations of living tongues, where we continually find the original sense perverted by literal translations of idiomatic expressions.

When an English minister is sent to the United States, we say he comes *to* our government, but when a French minister is sent, we say he comes *near* it. Whence has this evident incorrectness of expression originated, but from a literal translation of an idiomatic word?

We may indeed translate literally the *word* which has a metaphorical allusion in one language into another; but where is the explanatory circle of intelligence that was intended by its author?—left with the original. The consequence of such literal translations, must be an injury to the author, and confusion to the unlearned reader; and we cannot but believe, that confusions of this nature affected the inconsiderate mind of Mr. Thomas Paine, when he rashly entered into a contest for which he was in every respect unprepared. He may have observed passages in the scriptures, which to *him* were unintelligible, and judged therefrom that they *could* not be understood. Ignorant himself, so far of the subject on which he wrote, as not to know that the two testaments were necessary to constitute the bible, he wrote only for the *ignorant*. How pitiful is the triumph over defenceless minds! the sallies of Mr. Paine may have unsettled the faith of many an honest rustic, but the doctrines of St. Paul make Felix tremble.—He is now gone—and though we elsewhere opposed him to the utmost of our ability while on earth, we hope and confidently believe he is now participating in the mediation of that Saviour, he attempted to calumniate, and pretended to despise.

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Theatre, Wednesday, Dec. 27th, 1809.

GEORGE BARNWELL, AND TEKELI.

IT is customary in almost every town in America and England, where a theatre exists, to have this play performed during Christmas week, and merchants generally send their apprentices, sons, and daughters to visit it, for the moral and practical doctrines it inculcates.—From the thinness of the house on this occasion, we presume we may congratulate the citizens of Boston, on the *perfection* of our young men, and *their* acknowledgment that no further improvement in morals is necessary.

The play was so well performed, that even admitting that there is no cause for amendment in our youth, we think they might have received an impressive amusement.