

man, all the grandeur which their weakness could bestow upon them, all which time could impart to them, either of interest or majesty, vanished from his sight before the works of that creative hand whose power extends over worlds, and to whom, in his eternal activity, human generations are scarcely an instant! From that moment he learned to behold nature with transport and with reflection; he united the taste of observation to that of the contemplative sciences, and embracing them all in the universality of his knowledge, he formed the resolution of devoting his life exclusively to them,

A constitution which rendered him capable of long and continued labour, an ardour which made him devour without disgust, and almost without lassitude, the most fastidious details; a character in which were found none of those qualities which repulse fortune, the consciousness which he had of his own powers; all seemed to call him to that pre-eminence which nature had marked out, and where he could hope a brilliant success: they were sacrifices to the sciences, nor is he the only example which the academy presents of this noble devotion. What rendered Buffon more singular is, that at that time he was not impelled towards any particular science by that resistless impulse which compels the mind to occupy itself about one object, and does not leave to inclination the power of diverting it. But every thing which elevated his ideas or enlarged his knowledge had a charm for him; he knew, that if literary glory be, after that of arms, the most durable and the most brilliant, it is also that which of all others can be the least contested; he knew also, that every man who attracts the attention of the public by his works or by his actions, has no longer an opportunity of affecting importance, but may expect it from his character and conduct.

The first labours of Buffon were translations; a singular fact, not perhaps to be found in the life of any man destined to great renown.* He wished to perfect himself in the English language, to exercise himself in writing his own, to study in Newton the calculation of infinities, in Hales the

* It may be presumed that Condorcet here means translations from living languages; the greatest names have commenced by versions from the classics—Dryden, Pope, &c.; and even in the former, the name of Johnson is a contradiction to this assertion; his translation of Lobo, was prior to all his other works.