

Few however of the heathen Philosophers conceived or uttered sentiments like these; and trained as they were in a superstition which deified their bad passions, and sanctioned their vices under the impure forms of its religious rites, we need not wonder at their limited knowledge of the attributes of God, or their feeble hopes of a more exalted state of future being*.

In speaking of the spirit which ought to guide us in our classical studies, we must look also to their lessons of practical wisdom. History is to our knowledge of man in his social capacity, what physical experiments are to our knowledge of the laws of nature: and well it is for that country which learns wisdom by the experiments of other nations. In ancient history we can not only trace the fortunes of mankind under almost every condition of political and social life; but all the successive actions we contemplate are at such a distance from us, that we can see their true bearings on each other undistorted by that mist of prejudice with which every modern political question is surrounded. We may see that the higher virtues, which are the only secure foundation of a nation's strength, are confined to no time or country; and although sometimes called into their fullest action by a sudden and trying circumstance, are in the common course of things but the slowly matured fruit of good discipline and good government. We may look on states rising out of small beginnings, and watch the means by which they gradually ascend in the scale of national strength. We may mark the giant power of despotism wasting away before a petty combination of free men. We may

* See note (D) at the end.