

AFDIA - To The Reader (Introduction by Frances Wright)

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TO THE READER.

That I may not obtain credit for more learning than I possess, I beg to acknowledge the assistance I have received in my version of the curious relict of antiquity now offered to the public from the beautiful Italian MS. of the erudite Professor of Greek in the university of ****. I hesitate to designate more clearly the illustrious Hellenist, whose labors have brought to light this curious fragment. Since the establishment of the saintly domination of the Vandals throughout the territories of the rebellious and heterodox Italy, and particularly in consequence of the ordinance of his most orthodox, most legitimate, and most Austrian Majesty, bearing that his dominions being in want of good subjects, his colleges are forbidden to send forth good scholars,{4} it has become necessary for the gownsmen of the classic peninsula to banish all profane learning from their lectures and their libraries, and to evince a holy abhorrence of the sciences and arts which they erst professed. The list of the class-books now employed in the transalpine schools is exceedingly curious; I regret that I have mislaid the one lately supplied to me by an illustrious Italian exile. My memory recalls to me only that in the school of rhetoric, the orations of Cicero are superseded by those of the Marquis of Londonderry, and the philippics of Demosthenes by those of M. de Peyronett; that the professors of history have banished the decades of Livy for the martyrs of Mons. de Chateaubriand; and that the students of Greek, in place of the Odes of Pindar, and the retreat of the ten thousand from Cunaxa, construe the hexameters of the English Laureate, and the advance of Louis the XVIII upon Ghent. In this state of the Italian world of letters, it is not surprising that the scholar, to whose perseverance, ingenuity, and learning, the public are indebted for the following fragment, should object to lay claim to the honor which is his due.

The original MS. fell into the hands of my erudite correspondent in the autumn of the year 1817. From that period until the commencement of last winter, all his leisure hours were devoted to the arduous task of unrolling the leaves, and deciphering the half-defaced characters. The imperfect condition of the MS. soon obliged him to forego his first intention of transcribing the original Greek; he had recourse, therefore, to an Italian version, supplying the chasms, consisting sometimes of a word, sometimes of a line, and occasionally of a phrase, with a careful and laborious study of the context. While this version was printing in Florence, a MS. copy was transmitted to me in Paris, with a request that I would forthwith see it translated into the English and French languages. The former version I undertook myself, and can assure the reader that it possesses the merit of fidelity. The first erudite translator has not conceived it

necessary to encumber the volume with marginal notes; nor have I found either the inclination or the ability to supply them. Those who should wish to refer to the allusions scattered through the whole classics to the characters and systems here treated of, will find much assistance from the marginal authorities of the eloquent and ingenious Bayle.

I have only to add, that the present volume comprises little more than a third of the original MS.; it will be sufficient, however, to enable the public to form an estimate of the probable value of the whole.