only which produce delight and surprise. Pope defined wit to be a quick conception and an easy delivery ; while, according to a more recent writer, it consists in an assimi­lation of distant ideas.

The word *wit* originally signified *wisdom.* A *witte* was anciently a *wise man ;* the *wirtenagemot,* or Saxon parlia­ment, an assemblage of wise men. So late as the reign of Elizabeth, a man of pregnant *wit,* of great *wit*, was a man of vast *judgment.* We still say, *in his wits, our of his wits,* for in or out of sound mind. The word however is now applied in a more limited sense.

Without attempting to expose the insufficiency of the definitions above mentioned, or hazarding a new definition of our own, we shall endeavour to point out the varieties or different sorts of wit.

It is evident that wit excites in the mind an agreeable surprise, and that this is owing entirely to the strange as­semblage of related ideas presented to the mind. This end is effected, 1. by debasing things pompous or *seemingly* grave ; 2. by aggrandizing things little or frivolous ; 3. by setting ordinary objects in a particular and uncommon point of view, by means not only remote, but apparently contrary. Of so much consequence are surprise and no­velty, that nothing is more tasteless, and sometimes dis­gusting, than a joke that has become stale by frequent re­petition. For the same reason, even a pun or happy illu­sion will appear excellent when thrown out extempore in conversation, which would be deemed execrable in print. In like manner, a witty repartee is infinitely more pleasing than a witty attack; for though in both cases the thing may be equally new to the reader or hearer, the effect on him is greatly injured, when there is access to suppose that it may be the slow production of study and premeditation. This however holds most with regard to the inferior tribes of witticism, of which their readiness is the best recom­mendation. We shall illustrate these observations by sub­joining a specimen or two of each of these sorts of wit.

Of the first sort, which consists in the debasement of things great and eminent, Butler, amongst a thousand other instances, has given us those which follow.

And now had Pbœbus in the lap

Of Thetis taken out his nap ;

And, like a lobster boil'd, the morn From black to red began to turn.

Butler’s *Hudibras,* part ii. canto ii.

Here the low allegorical style of the first couplet, and the simile used in the second, afford us a just notion of this lowest species, which is distinguished by the name of the *ludicrous.* Another specimen from the same author we have in these lines :

Great on the bench, great in the saddle, That could as well bind o’er as swaddle, Mighty he was at both of these, And styl'd of *war,* as well as *peace :* So some rats of amphibious nature, Are either for the *land* or *water.*

*Ibid,* part i. canto i.

In this coarse kind of drollery, those laughable transla­tions or paraphrases of heroic and other serious poems, in which the authors are said to be travestied, chiefly abound.

The second kind, consisting in the aggrandisement of little things, which is by far the most splendid, and displays a soaring imagination, these lines of Pope will serve to il­lustrate :

As Berecynthia, while her offspring vie

In homage to the mother of the sky. Surveys around her in the blest abode, An hundred sons, and every son a god : Not with less glory, mighty Dulness crown'd, Shall take thro’ Grubstreet her triumphant round ; And her Parnassus glancing o’er at once, Behold a hundred sons, and each a dunce.

This whole similitude is spirited. The parent of the ce­lestials is contrasted by the daughter of night and chaos ; heaven by Grubstreet ; gods by dunces. Besides, the pa­rody it contains on a beautiful passage in Virgil adds a particular lustre to it This species we may term *thra­sonical,* or *the mock majestic.* It affects the most pompous language and sonorous phraseology, as much as the other affects the reverse, the vilest and most grovelling dialect.

To this class also we must refer the application of grave reflections to mere trifles. For that *great* and *serious* are naturally associated by the mind, and likewise little and trifling, is sufficiently evinced by the common modes of expression on these subjects used in every tongue. An apposite instance of such an application we have from Phi­lips.

My galligaskins, that have long withstood The winter’s fury and encroaching frosts, By time subdued, *(what will not time tubdue* An horrid chasm disclose.

*Splendid Shilling.*

Of the third species of wit, which is by far the most mul­tifarious, and which results from what may be called the queerness or singularity of the imagery, we shall give a few specimens that will serve to mark some of its principal va­rieties. To illustrate all would be impossible. The first shall be where there is an apparent contrariety in the things exhibited in connection. This kind of contrast we have in these lines of Garth :

Then Hydrops next appears amongst the throng ;

Bloated and big she slowly sails along : But like a miser in excess she’s poor, And pines for thirst amidst her wat’ry store.

*Dispensary.*

A second sort is, where the things compared are what with dialecticians would come under the denomination of *disparates,* being such as can be ranked under no com­mon genus. Of this we shall subjoin an example from Young.

Health chiefly keeps an Atheist in the dark ;

A fever argues better than a Clarke : Let but the logic in his pulse decay, The Grecian he’ll renounce, and learn to pray.

*Universal al Pastion.*

A third variety in this species springs from confounding artfully the proper and the metaphorical sense of an ex­pression. In this way, one will assign as a motive what is discovered to be perfectly absurd when but ever so little attended to ; and yet, from the ordinary meaning of the words, has a specious appearance on a single glance. Of this kind we have an instance in the subsequent lines.

While thus the lady talk’d, thc knight Turn’d th' outside of his eyes to white, As men of inward light are wont To turn their optics in upon't.

*Hudibras,* part iii. canto i.

A fourth variety, much resembling the former, is when the argument or comparison (for all argument is a kind of comparison) is founded on the supposal of corporeal or per­sonal attributes in what is strictly not susceptible of them, as in the following passage.

But Hudibras gave him a twitch

As quick as lightning in the breech,

Just in the place where honour’s lodg’d,

As wise philosophers have judg’d; Because a kick in that place more Hurts honour than deep wounds before.

*Ibid,* part ii. canto iii.

The fifth and only other variety which we shall mention, is that which arises from a relation, not in the things sig­nified, but in the signs, of all relations no doubt the slight­est. Identity here gives rise to puns and clinches ; resem-