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270 e. 1524

TABLE-TALK;

OR,

ORIGINAL ESSAYS

ON

MEN AND MANNERS.

SECOND EDITION.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

**PRINTED FOR HENRY COLBURN,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.**

1824.



LONDON:
PRINTED BY THOMAS DAVISON, WHITEFRIARS.

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ERRATA.

- Page 221, lines 22, 23, *for* affairs men, *read* affairs of men.
272, line 26, *for* gauntlets, *read* gauntlet.
276, line 11, *for* sphere to, *read* sphere of.
277, line 8, *for* from, *read* for.
286, line 9, *comma after* feel it.
286, lines 14, 15, *for* and must, *read* and they must.
301, line 11, *for* teachers, *read* thinkers.
330, line 21, *for* hauled, *read* hailed.
332, line 9, *for* invited, *read* invited out.
358, line 22, *omit* of.

ESSAY I.
ON A LANDSCAPE OF NICOLAS POUSSIN.

B



ESSAY I.

ON A LANDSCAPE OF NICOLAS POUSSIN.

“ And blind Orion hungry for the morn.”

ORION, the subject of this landscape, was the classical Nimrod; and is called by Homer, “ a hunter of shadows, himself a shade.” He was the son of Neptune; and having lost an eye in some affray between the Gods and men, was told that if he would go to meet the rising sun, he would recover his sight. He is represented setting out on his journey, with men on his shoulders to guide him, a bow in his hand, and Diana in the clouds greeting him. He stalks along, a giant upon earth, and reels and falters in his gait, as if just awaked out of sleep, or uncertain of his way;—you see his blindness, though his back is turned. Mists rise around him, and veil the sides of the green forests; earth is dank and fresh with dews, the

“grey dawn and the Pleiades before him dance,” and in the distance are seen the blue hills and sullen ocean. Nothing was ever more finely conceived or done. It breathes the spirit of the morning; its moisture, its repose, its obscurity, waiting the miracle of light to kindle it into smiles: the whole is, like the principal figure in it, “a forerunner of the dawn.” The same atmosphere tinges and imbues every object, the same dull light “shadowy sets off” the face of nature: one feeling of vastness, of strangeness, and of primeval forms pervades the painter’s canvas, and we are thrown back upon the first integrity of things. This great and learned man might be said to see nature through the glass of time: he alone has a right to be considered as the painter of classical antiquity. Sir Joshua has done him justice in this respect. He could give to the scenery of his heroic fables that unimpaired look of original nature, full, solid, large, luxuriant, teeming with life and power; or deck it with all the pomp of art, with temples and towers, and mythologic groves. His pictures “denote a foregone conclusion.” He applies nature to his purposes, works out her images according to the standard of his thoughts, embodies high fictions; and the first conception being given, all the rest seems to grow

out of, and be assimilated to it, by the unfailing process of a studious imagination. Like his own Orion, he overlooks the surrounding scene, appears to "take up the isles as a very little thing, and to lay the earth in a balance." With a laborious and mighty grasp, he put nature into the mould of the ideal and antique; and was among painters (more than any one else) what Milton was among poets. There is in both something of the same pedantry, the same stiffness, the same elevation, the same grandeur, the same mixture of art and nature, the same richness of borrowed materials, the same unity of character. Neither the poet nor the painter lowered the subjects they treated, but filled up the outline in the fancy, and added strength and reality to it; and thus not only satisfied, but surpassed the expectations of the spectator and the reader. This is held for the triumph and the perfection of works of art. To give us nature, such as we see it, is well and deserving of praise; to give us nature, such as we have never seen, but have often wished to see it, is better, and deserving of higher praise. He who can show the world in its first naked glory, with the hues of fancy spread over it, or in its high and palmy state, with the gravity of history stamped on the proud monuments of vanished

empire,—who, by his “so potent art,” can recal time past, transport us to distant places, and join the regions of imagination (a new conquest) to those of reality,—who shows us not only what nature is, but what she has been, and is capable of,—he who does this, and does it with simplicity, with truth, and grandeur, is lord of nature and her powers; and his mind is universal, and his art the master-art!

There is nothing in this “more than natural,” if criticism could be persuaded to think so. The historic painter does not neglect or contravene nature, but follows her more closely up into her fantastic heights, or hidden recesses. He demonstrates what she would be in conceivable circumstances, and under implied conditions. He “gives to airy nothing a local habitation,” not “a name.” At his touch, words start up into images, thoughts become things. He clothes a dream, a phantom with form and colour and the wholesome attributes of reality. *His* art is a second nature; not a different one. There are those, indeed, who think that not to copy nature, is the rule for attaining perfection. Because they cannot paint the objects which they have seen, they fancy themselves qualified to paint the ideas which they have not seen. But it is possible to fail in

this latter and more difficult style of imitation, as well as in the former humbler one. The detection, it is true, is not so easy, because the objects are not so nigh at hand to compare, and therefore there is more room both for false pretension and for self-deceit. They take an epic motto or subject, and conclude that the spirit is implied as a thing of course. They paint inferior portraits, maudlin lifeless faces, without ordinary expression, or one look, feature, or particle of nature in them, and think that this is to rise to the truth of history. They vulgarise and degrade whatever is interesting or sacred to the mind, and suppose that they thus add to the dignity of their profession. They represent a face that seems as if no thought or feeling of any kind had ever passed through it, and would have you believe that this is the very sublime of expression, such as it would appear in heroes, or demi-gods of old, when rapture or agony was raised to its height. They show you a landscape that looks as if the sun never shone upon it, and tell you that it is not modern—that so earth looked when Titan first kissed it with his rays. This is not the true *ideal*. It is not to fill the moulds of the imagination, but to deface and injure them: it is not to come up

to, but to fall short of the poorest conception in the public mind. Such pictures should not be hung in the same room with that of Orion*.

*Every thing tends to show the manner in which a great artist is formed. If any person could claim an exemption from the careful imitation of individual objects, it was Nicolas Poussin. He studied the antique, but he also studied nature. "I have often admired," says Vignuel de Marville, who knew him at a late period of his life, "the love he had for his art. Old as he was, I frequently saw him among the ruins of ancient Rome, out in the Campagna, or along the banks of the Tyber, sketching a scene that had pleased him; and I often met him with his handkerchief full of stones, moss, or flowers, which he carried home, that he might copy them exactly from nature. One day I asked him how he had attained to such a degree of perfection, as to have gained so high a rank among the great painters of Italy? He answered, I HAVE NEGLECTED NOTHING."—*See his Life lately published.* It appears from this account that he had not fallen into a recent error, that Nature puts the man of genius out. As a contrast to the foregoing description, I might mention, that I remember an old gentleman once asking Mr. West in the British Gallery, if he had ever been at Athens? To which the President made answer, No; nor did he feel any great desire to go; for that he thought he had as good an idea of the place from the Catalogue, as he could get by living there for any number of years. What would he have said, if any one had told him, he could get as good an idea of the subject of one of his great works from reading the Catalogue of it, as from seeing the picture itself! Yet the answer was characteristic of the genius of the painter.

Poussin was, of all painters, the most poetical. He was the painter of ideas. No one ever told a story half so well, nor so well knew what was capable of being told by the pencil. He seized on, and struck off with grace and precision, just that point of view which would be likely to catch the reader's fancy. There is a significance, a consciousness in whatever he does (sometimes a vice, but oftener a virtue) beyond any other painter. His Giants sitting on the tops of craggy mountains, as huge themselves, and playing idly on their Pan's-pipes, seem to have been seated there these three thousand years, and to know the beginning and the end of their own story. An infant Bacchus or Jupiter is big with his future destiny. Even inanimate and dumb things speak a language of their own. His snakes, the messengers of fate, are inspired with human intellect. His trees grow and expand their leaves in the air, glad of the rain, proud of the sun, awake to the winds of heaven. In his Plague of Athens, the very buildings seem stiff with horror. His picture of the Deluge is, perhaps, the finest historical landscape in the world. You see a waste of waters, wide, interminable: the sun is labouring, wan and weary, up the sky; the clouds, dull

and leaden, lie like a load upon the eye, and heaven and earth seem commingling into one confused mass! His human figures are sometimes "o'er-informed" with this kind of feeling. Their actions have too much gesticulation, and the set expression of the features borders too much on the mechanical and caricatured style. In this respect, they form a contrast to Raphael's, whose figures never appear to be sitting for their pictures, or to be conscious of a spectator, or to have come from the painter's hand. In Nicholas Poussin, on the contrary, every thing seems to have a distinct understanding with the artist: "the very stones prate of their whereabouts:" each object has its part and place assigned, and is in a sort of compact with the rest of the picture. It is this conscious keeping, and, as it were, *internal* design, that gives their peculiar character to the works of this artist. There was a picture of Aurora in the British Gallery a year or two ago. It was a suffusion of golden light. The Goddess wore her saffron-coloured robes, and appeared just risen from the gloomy bed of old Tithonus. Her very steeds, milk-white, were tinged with the yellow dawn. It was a personification of the morning.—Poussin succeeded better in classic than in

sacred subjects. The latter are comparatively heavy, forced, full of violent contrasts of colour, of red, blue, and black, and without the true prophetic inspiration of the characters. But in his Pagan allegories and fables he was quite at home. The native gravity and native levity of the Frenchman were combined with Italian scenery and an antique gusto, and gave even to his colouring an air of learned indifference. He wants, in one respect, grace, form, expression; but he has every where sense and meaning, perfect costume and propriety. His personages always belong to the class and time represented, and are strictly versed in the business in hand. His grotesque compositions in particular, his Nymphs and Fauns, are superior (at least, as far as style is concerned) even to those of Rubens. They are taken more immediately out of fabulous history. Rubens's Satyrs and Bacchantes have a more jovial and voluptuous aspect, are more drunk with pleasure, more full of animal spirits and riotous impulses; they laugh and bound along—

Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant spring:

but those of Poussin have more of the intellectual part of the character, and seem vicious on reflection, and of set purpose. Rubens's are

noble specimens of a class ; Poussin's are allegorical abstractions of the same class, with bodies less pampered, but with minds more secretly depraved. The Bacchanalian groups of the Flemish painter were, however, his masterpieces in composition. Witness those prodigies of colour, character, and expression, at Blenheim. In the more chaste and refined delineation of classic fable, Poussin was without a rival. Rubens, who was a match for him in the wild and picturesque, could not pretend to vie with the elegance and purity of thought in his picture of Apollo giving a poet a cup of water to drink, nor with the gracefulness of design in the figure of a nymph squeezing the juice of a bunch of grapes from her fingers (a rosy winepress) which falls into the mouth of a chubby infant below. But, above all, who shall celebrate, in terms of fit praise, his picture of the shepherds in the Vale of Tempe going out in a fine morning of the spring, and coming to a tomb with this inscription:—*ET EGO IN ARCADIA VIXI!* The eager curiosity of some, the expression of others who start back with fear and surprise, the clear breeze playing with the branches of the shadowing trees, “the valleys low, where the mild zephyrs use,” the distant, uninterrupted, sunny prospect speak (and for

ever will speak on) of ages past to ages yet to come*!

Pictures are a set of chosen images, a stream of pleasant thoughts passing through the mind. It is a luxury to have the walls of our rooms hung round with them, and no less so to have such a gallery in the mind, to con over the relics of ancient art bound up "within the book and volume of the brain, unmixed (if it were possible) with baser matter!" A life passed among pictures, in the study and the love of art, is a happy noiseless dream: or rather, it is to dream and to be awake at the same time; for it has all "the sober certainty of waking bliss," with the romantic voluptuousness of a visionary and abstracted being. They are the bright consummate essences of things, and "he who knows of these delights to taste and interpose them oft, is not unwise!"—The Orion, which I have here taken occasion to descant upon, is one of a collection of excellent pictures, as this collection is itself one of a series from the old masters,

* Poussin has repeated this subject more than once, and appears to have revelled in its witcheries. I have before alluded to it, and may again. It is hard that we should not be allowed to dwell as often as we please on what delights us, when things that are disagreeable recur so often against our will.

which have for some years back embrowned the walls of the British Gallery, and enriched the public eye. What hues (those of nature mellowed by time) breathe around, as we enter! What forms are there, woven into the memory! What looks, which only the answering looks of the spectator can express! What intellectual stores have been yearly poured forth from the shrine of ancient art! The works are various, but the names the same—heaps of Rembrandts frowning from the darkened walls, Rubens's glad gorgeous groups, Titians more rich and rare, Claudes always exquisite, sometimes beyond compare, Guido's endless cloying sweetness, the learning of Poussin and the Caracci, and Raphael's princely magnificence, crowning all. We read certain letters and syllables in the catalogue, and at the well-known magic sound, a miracle of skill and beauty starts to view. One might think that one year's prodigal display of such perfection would exhaust the labours of one man's life; but the next year, and the next to that, we find another harvest reaped and gathered in to the great garner of art, by the same immortal hands—

Old GENIUS the porter of them was;
He letteth in, he letteth out to wend.—

Their works seem endless as their reputation—to be many as they are complete—to multiply with the desire of the mind to see more and more of them; as if there were a living power in the breath of Fame, and in the very names of the great heirs of glory “there were propagation too!” It is something to have a collection of this sort to count upon once a year; to have one last, lingering look yet to come. Pictures are scattered like stray gifts through the world; and while they remain, earth has yet a little gilding left, not quite rubbed off, dishonoured, and defaced. There are plenty of standard works still to be found in this country, in the collections at Blenheim, at Burleigh, and in those belonging to Mr. Angerstein, Lord Grosvenor, the Marquis of Stafford, and others, to keep up this treat to the lovers of art for many years: and it is the more desirable to reserve a privileged sanctuary of this sort, where the eye may dote, and the heart take its fill of such pictures as Poussin’s Orion, since the Louvre is stripped of its triumphant spoils, and since he, who collected it, and wore it as a rich jewel in his Iron Crown, the hunter of greatness and of glory, is himself a shade!—

ESSAY II.
ON MILTON'S SONNETS.

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ESSAY II.

ON MILTON'S SONNETS.

THE great object of the Sonnet seems to be, to express in musical numbers, and as it were with undivided breath, some occasional thought or personal feeling, "some fee-grief due to the poet's breast." It is a sigh uttered from the fulness of the heart, an involuntary aspiration born and dying in the same moment. I have always been fond of Milton's Sonnets for this reason, that they have more of this personal and internal character than any others; and they acquire a double value when we consider that they come from the pen of the loftiest of our poets. Compared with *Paradise Lost*, they are like tender flowers that adorn the base of some proud column or stately temple. The author in the one could work himself up with unabated fortitude "to the height of his great argument;" but in the other he has shewn that he could condescend to men of low estate, and after the lightning and the thunder-bolt of his

pen, lets fall some drops of natural pity over hapless infirmity, mingling strains with the nightingale's, "most musical, most melancholy." The immortal poet pours his mortal sorrows into our breasts, and a tear falls from his sightless orbs on the friendly hand he presses. The Sonnets are a kind of pensive record of past achievements, loves, and friendships, and a noble exhortation to himself to bear up with cheerful hope and confidence to the last. Some of them are of a more quaint and humorous character; but I speak of those only, which are intended to be serious and pathetic.—I do not know indeed but they may be said to be almost the first effusions of this sort of natural and personal sentiment in the language. Drummond's ought perhaps to be excepted, were they formed less closely on the model of Petrarch's, so as to be often little more than translations of the Italian poet. But Milton's Sonnets are truly his own in allusion, thought, and versification. Those of Sir Philip Sydney, who was a great transgressor in this way, turn sufficiently on himself and his own adventures; but they are elaborately quaint and intricate, and more like riddles than sonnets. They are "very tolerable and not to be endured." Shakespeare's, which some persons better-informed in

such matters than I can pretend to be, profess to cry up as "the divine, the matchless, what you will,"—to say nothing of the want of point or a leading, prominent idea in most of them, are I think overcharged and monotonous, and as to their ultimate drift, as for myself, I can make neither head nor tail of it. Yet some of them, I own, are sweet even to a sense of faintness, luscious as the woodbine, and graceful and luxuriant like it. Here is one.

" From you have I been absent in the spring,
 When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
 Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing ;
 That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him.
 Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
 Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
 Could make me any summer's story tell,
 Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew :
 Nor did I wonder at the lilies white,
 Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose ;
 They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
 Yet seem'd it winter still, and you away,
 As with your shadow, I with these did play."

I am not aware of any writer of Sonnets worth mentioning here till long after Milton, that is, till the time of Warton and the revival of a taste for Italian and for our own early literature. During the rage for French models, the Sonnet had not been much studied. It is a mode of

composition that depends entirely on *expression*; and this the French and artificial style gladly dispenses with, as it lays no particular stress on any thing—except vague, general common-places. Warton's Sonnets are undoubtedly exquisite; both in style and matter: they are poetical and philosophical effusions of very delightful sentiment; but the thoughts, though fine and deeply felt, are not, like Milton's subjects, identified completely with the writer, and so far want a more individual interest. Mr. Wordsworth's are also finely conceived and high-sounding Sonnets. They mouth it well, and are said to be sacred to Liberty. Brutus's exclamation, "Oh Virtue, I thought thee a substance, but I find thee a shadow," was not considered as a compliment, but as a bitter sarcasm. The beauty of Milton's Sonnets is their sincerity, the spirit of poetical patriotism which they breathe. Either Milton's or the living bard's are defective in this respect. There is no Sonnet of Milton's on the Restoration of Charles II. There is no Sonnet of Mr. Wordsworth's, corresponding to that of "the poet blind and bold," *On the late Massacre in Piedmont*. It would be no niggard praise to Mr. Wordsworth to grant that he was either half the man or half the poet that Milton was. He has not his high and various imagination, nor

his deep and fixed principle. Milton did not worship the rising sun, nor turn his back on a losing and fallen cause.

“Such recantation had no charms for him!”

Mr. Southey has thought proper to put the author of *Paradise Lost* into his late Heaven, on the understood condition that he is “no longer to kings and to hierarchs hostile.” In his life-time, he gave no sign of such an alteration; and it is rather presumptuous in the poet-laureate to pursue the deceased antagonist of *Salmasius* into the other world to compliment him with his own infirmity of purpose. It is a wonder he did not add in a note that Milton called him aside to whisper in his ear that he preferred the new English hexameters to his own blank verse!

Our first of poets was one of our first of men. He was an eminent instance to prove that a poet is not another name for the slave of power and fashion; as is the case with painters and musicians—things without an opinion—and who merely aspire to make up the pageant and shew of the day. There are persons in common life who have that eager curiosity and restless admiration of bustle and splendour, that sooner than not be admitted on great occasions of

feasting and luxurious display, they will go in the character of livery-servants to stand behind the chairs of the great. There are others who can so little bear to be left for any length of time out of the grand carnival and masquerade of pride and folly, that they will gain admittance to it at the expense of their characters as well as of a change of dress. Milton was not one of these. He had too much of the *ideal* faculty in his composition, a lofty contemplative principle, and consciousness of inward power and worth, to be tempted by such idle baits. We have plenty of chaunting and chiming in among some modern writers with the triumphs over their own views and principles; but none of a patient resignation to defeat, sustaining and nourishing itself with the thought of the justice of their cause, and with firm-fixed rectitude. I do not pretend to defend the tone of Milton's political writings (which was borrowed from the style of controversial divinity) or to say that he was right in the part he took:—I say that he was consistent in it, and did not convict himself of error: he was consistent in it in spite of danger and obloquy, “on evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,” and therefore his character has the salt of honesty about it. It does not offend in the nostrils of posterity. He had taken his

part boldly and stood to it manfully, and submitted to the change of times with pious fortitude, building his consolations on the resources of his own mind and the recollection of the past, instead of endeavouring to make himself a retreat for the time to come. As an instance of this, we may take one of the best and most admired of these Sonnets, that addressed to Cyriac Skinner, on his own blindness.

“ Cyriac, this three years' day, these eyes, though clear,
 To outward view, of blemish or of spot,
 Bereft of light their seeing have forgot,
 Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear
 Of sun or moon or star throughout the year,
 Or man or woman. Yet I argue not
 Against Heav'n's hand or will, nor bate a jot
 Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
 Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?
 The conscience, Friend, to have lost them overply'd
 In liberty's defence, my noble task,
 Of which all Europe talks from side to side.
 This thought might lead me through the world's vain mask,
 Content though blind, had I no better guide.”

Nothing can exceed the mild, subdued tone of this Sonnet, nor the striking grandeur of the concluding thought. It is curious to remark what seems to be a trait of character in the two first lines. From Milton's care to inform the reader that “ his eyes were still clear to out-

ward view of spot or blemish," it would be thought that he had not yet given up all regard to personal appearance; a feeling to which his singular beauty at an earlier age might be supposed naturally enough to lead.—Of the political or (what may be called) his *State-Sonnets*, those to Cromwell, to Fairfax, and to the younger Vane, are full of exalted praise and dignified advice. They are neither familiar nor servile. The writer knows what is due to power and to fame. He feels the true, unassumed equality of greatness. He pays the full tribute of admiration for great acts atchieved, and suggests becoming occasion to deserve higher praise. That to Cromwell is a proof how completely our poet maintained the erectness of his understanding and spirit in his intercourse with men in power. It is such a compliment as a poet might pay to a conqueror and head of the state, without the possibility of self-degradation.

“ Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud,
Not of war only, but detractions rude,
Guided by faith and matchless fortitude,
To peace and truth thy glorious way hast plough'd,
And on the neck of crowned fortune proud
Hast rear'd God's trophies and his work pursued,
While Darwen stream with blood of Scots imbrued,
And Dunbar field resounds thy praises loud,

And Worcester's laureat wreath. Yet much remains
 To conquer still; peace hath her victories
 No less renown'd than war: new foes arise
 Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains;
 Help us to save free conscience from the paw
 Of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw."

The most spirited and impassioned of them all, and the most inspired with a sort of prophetic fury, is the one, entitled *On the late Massacre in Piedmont*.

"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones
 Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;
 Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
 When all our fathers worshipp'd stocks and stones,
 Forget not: in thy book record their groans
 Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
 Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that roll'd
 Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
 The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
 To Heav'n. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow
 O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
 The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow
 A hundred fold, who having learn'd thy way
 Early may fly the Babylonian woe."

In the Nineteenth Sonnet, which is also *On his blindness*, we see the jealous watchfulness of his mind over the use of his high gifts, and the beautiful manner in which he satisfies himself that virtuous thoughts and intentions are not the least acceptable offering to the Almighty.

" When I consider how my light is spent
 Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
 And that one talent which is death to hide,
 Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
 To serve therewith my Maker, and present
 My true account, lest he returning chide ;
 Doth God exact day-labour, light denied,
 I fondly ask : But patience, to prevent
 That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
 Either man's work or his own gifts ; who best
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best ; his state
 Is kingly ; thousands at his bidding speed,
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest ;
 They also serve who only stand and wait."

Those to Mr. Henry Lawes *on his Airs*, and
 to Mr. Lawrence, can never be enough admired.
 They breathe the very soul of music and friend-
 ship. Both have a tender, thoughtful grace ;
 and for their lightness, with a certain melancholy
 complaining intermixed, might be stolen from
 the harp of Æolus. The last is the picture of
 a day spent in social retirement and elegant
 relaxation from severer studies. We sit with
 the poet at table and hear his familiar senti-
 ments from his own lips afterwards.

" Lawrence, of virtuous father virtuous son,
 Now that the fields are dank and ways are mire,
 Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire
 Help waste a sullen day, what may be won

From the hard season gaining? Time will run
 On smoother, till Favonius re-inspire
 The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire
 The lily and rose, that neither sow'd nor spun.
 What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,
 Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise
 To hear the lute well-touch'd, or artful voice
 Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?
 He who of these delights can judge, and spare
 To interpose them oft, is not unwise."

In the last, *On his deceased Wife*, the allusion to Alcestis is beautiful, and shews how the poet's mind raised and refined his thoughts by exquisite classical conceptions, and how these again were enriched by a passionate reference to actual feelings and images. It is this rare union that gives such voluptuous dignity and touching purity to Milton's delineation of the female character.

"Methought I saw my late espoused saint
 Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,
 Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
 Rescued from death by force, though pale and faint.
 Mine, as whom wash'd from spot of child-bed taint
 Purification in the old law did save,
 And such, as yet once more I trust to have
 Full sight of her in Heav'n without restraint,
 Came vested all in white, pure as her mind:
 Her face was veil'd, yet to my fancied sight

Love, sweetness, goodness in her person shined
So clear, as in no face with more delight:
But O as to embrace me she inclined,
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night."

There could not have been a greater mistake or a more unjust piece of criticism than to suppose that Milton only shone on great subjects; and that on ordinary occasions and in familiar life, his mind was unwieldy, averse to the cultivation of grace and elegance, and unsusceptible of harmless pleasures. The whole tenour of his smaller compositions contradicts this opinion, which however they have been cited to confirm. The notion first got abroad from the bitterness (or vehemence) of his controversial writings, and has been kept up since with little meaning and with less truth. His Letters to Donatus and others are not more remarkable for the display of a scholastic enthusiasm, than for that of the most amiable dispositions. They are "severe in youthful virtue unreprieved." There is a passage in his prose-works (the *Treatise on Education*) which shews, I think, his extreme openness and proneness to pleasing outward impressions in a striking point of view. "But to return to our own institute," he says, "besides these constant

exercises at home, there is another opportunity of gaining experience to be won from pleasure itself abroad. *In those vernal seasons of the year, when the air is calm and pleasant, it were an injury and sullenness against nature, not to go out and see her riches, and partake in her rejoicing with Heaven and earth.* I should not therefore be a persuader to them of studying much then, but to ride out in companies with prudent and well staid guides, to all quarters of the land," &c. Many other passages might be quoted, in which the poet breaks through the ground-work of prose, as it were, by natural fecundity and a genial, unrestrained sense of delight. To suppose that a poet is not easily accessible to pleasure, or that he does not take an interest in individual objects and feelings, is to suppose that he is no poet; and proceeds on the false theory, which has been so often applied to poetry and the Fine Arts, that the whole is not made up of the particulars. If our author, according to Dr. Johnson's account of him, could only have treated epic, high-sounding subjects, he would not have been what he was, but another Sir Richard Blackmore.—I may conclude with observing, that I have often wished that Milton had lived to see the Revolution of 1688. This would

have been a triumph worthy of him, and which he would have earned by faith and hope. He would then have been old, but would not have lived in vain to see it, and might have celebrated the event in one more undying strain!

ESSAY III.
ON GOING A JOURNEY.

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ESSAY III.

ON GOING A JOURNEY.

ONE of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey ; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room ; but out of doors, nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.

“ The fields his study, nature was his book.”

I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticising hedge-rows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places, and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room, and fewer incumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude ; nor do I ask for

—— “ a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper solitude is sweet.”

The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others. It is because I want a little breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters, where Contemplation

“ May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair'd,”

that I absent myself from the town for awhile, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a post-chaise or in a Tilbury, to exchange good things with, and vary the same stale topics over again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours' march to dinner—and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sun-burnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things,

like "sunken wrack and sunless treasuries," burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again. Instead of an awkward silence, broken by attempts at wit or dull common-places, mine is that undisturbed silence of the heart which alone is perfect eloquence. No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and analysis better than I do; but I sometimes had rather be without them. "Leave, oh, leave me to my repose!" I have just now other business in hand, which would seem idle to you, but is with me "very stuff of the conscience." Is not this wild rose sweet without a comment? Does not this daisy leap to my heart set in its coat of emerald? Yet if I were to explain to you the circumstance that has so endeared it to me, you would only smile. Had I not better then keep it to myself, and let it serve me to brood over, from here to yonder craggy point, and from thence onward to the far-distant horizon? I should be but bad company all that way, and therefore prefer being alone. I have heard it said that you may, when the moody fit comes on, walk or ride on by yourself, and indulge your reveries. But this looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others, and you are thinking all the time that you ought to rejoin your party. "Out upon

such half-faced fellowship," say I. I like to be either entirely to myself, or entirely at the disposal of others; to talk or be silent, to walk or sit still, to be sociable or solitary. I was pleased with an observation of Mr. Cobbett's, that "he thought it a bad French custom to drink our wine with our meals, and that an Englishman ought to do only one thing at a time." So I cannot talk and think, or indulge in melancholy musing and lively conversation by fits and starts. "Let me have a companion of my way," says Sterne, "were it but to remark how the shadows lengthen as the sun declines." It is beautifully said: but in my opinion, this continual comparing of notes interferes with the involuntary impression of things upon the mind, and hurts the sentiment. If you only hint what you feel in a kind of dumb show, it is insipid: if you have to explain it, it is making a toil of a pleasure. You cannot read the book of nature, without being perpetually put to the trouble of translating it for the benefit of others. I am for the synthetical method on a journey, in preference to the analytical. I am content to lay in a stock of ideas then, and to examine and anatomise them afterwards. I want to see my vague notions float like the down of the thistle before the breeze, and not to have them

entangled in the briars and thorns of controversy. For once, I like to have it all my own way; and this is impossible unless you are alone, or in such company as I do not covet. I have no objection to argue a point with any one for twenty miles of measured road, but not for pleasure. If you remark the scent of a bean-field crossing the road, perhaps your fellow-traveller has no smell. If you point to a distant object, perhaps he is short-sighted, and has to take out his glass to look at it. There is a feeling in the air, a tone in the colour of a cloud which hits your fancy, but the effect of which you are unable to account for. There is then no sympathy, but an uneasy craving after it, and a dissatisfaction which pursues you on the way, and in the end probably produces ill humour. Now I never quarrel with myself, and take all my own conclusions for granted till I find it necessary to defend them against objections. It is not merely that you may not be of accord on the objects and circumstances that present themselves before you—these may recal a number of objects, and lead to associations too delicate and refined to be possibly communicated to others. Yet these I love to cherish, and sometimes still fondly clutch them, when I can escape from the throng to do so. To give

way to our feelings before company, seems extravagance or affectation; and on the other hand, to have to unravel this mystery of our being at every turn, and to make others take an equal interest in it (otherwise the end is not answered) is a task to which few are competent. We must "give it an understanding, but no tongue." My old friend C——, however, could do both. He could go on in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale, a summer's day, and convert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode. "He talked far above singing." If I could so clothe my ideas in sounding and flowing words, I might perhaps wish to have some one with me to admire the swelling theme; or I could be more content, were it possible for me still to hear his echoing voice in the woods of All-Foxden. They had "that fine madness in them which our first poets had;" and if they could have been caught by some rare instrument, would have breathed such strains as the following.

— " Here be woods as green

As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet

As when smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet

Face of the curled stream, with flow'rs as many

As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;

Here be all new delights, cool streams and wells,
 Arbours o'ergrown with woodbine, caves and dells ;
 Choose where thou wilt, while I sit by and sing,
 Or gather rushes to make many a ring
 For thy long fingers ; tell thee tales of love,
 How the pale Phœbe, hunting in a grove,
 First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes
 She took eternal fire that never dies ;
 How she convey'd him softly in a sleep,
 His temples bound with poppy, to the steep
 Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night,
 Gilding the mountain with her brother's light,
 To kiss her sweetest."——

FAITHFUL SHEPHERDESS.

Had I words and images at command like these,
 I would attempt to wake the thoughts that lie
 slumbering on golden ridges in the evening
 clouds : but at the sight of nature my fancy,
 poor as it is, droops and closes up its leaves,
 like flowers at sunset. I can make nothing out
 on the spot :—I must have time to collect my-
 self.—

In general, a good thing spoils out-of-door
 prospects : it should be reserved for Table-talk.
 L—— is for this reason, I take it, the worst
 company in the world out of doors ; because he
 is the best within. I grant, there is one subject
 on which it is pleasant to talk on a journey ;
 and that is, what one shall have for supper

when we get to our inn at night. The open air improves this sort of conversation or friendly altercation, by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every mile of the road heightens the flavour of the viands we expect at the end of it. How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted just at the approach of night-fall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to "take one's ease at one's inn!" These eventful moments in our lives' history are too precious, too full of solid, heart-felt happiness to be frittered and dribbled away in imperfect sympathy. I would have them all to myself, and drain them to the last drop: they will do to talk of or to write about afterwards. What a delicate speculation it is, after drinking whole goblets of tea,

"The cups that cheer, but not inebriate,"

and letting the fumes ascend into the brain, to sit considering what we shall have for supper—eggs and a rasher, a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excellent veal-cutlet! Sancho in such a situation once fixed upon cow-heel; and his choice, though he could not help it, is not to be

disparaged. Then, in the intervals of pictured scenery and Shandean contemplation, to catch the preparation and the stir in the kitchen—*Procul, O procul este profani!* These hours are sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed the source of smiling thoughts hereafter. I would not waste them in idle talk; or if I must have the integrity of fancy broken in upon, I would rather it were by a stranger than a friend. A stranger takes his hue and character from the time and place; he is a part of the furniture and costume of an inn. If he is a Quaker, or from the West Riding of Yorkshire, so much the better. I do not even try to sympathise with him, and he breaks no squares. I associate nothing with my travelling companion but present objects and passing events. In his ignorance of me and my affairs, I in a manner forget myself. But a friend reminds one of other things, rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of the scene. He comes in ungraciously between us and our imaginary character. Something is dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and pursuits; or from having some one with you that knows the less sublime portions of your history, it seems that other people do. You are no longer a citizen

of the world : but your “ unhouſed free condition is put into circumscription and confine.” The *incognito* of an inn is one of its ſtriking privileges — “ lord of one’s-ſelf, uncumber’d with a name.” Oh ! it is great to ſhake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion — to loſe our importunate, tormenting, everlaſting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties — to hold to the univerſe only by a diſh of ſweet-breads, and to owe nothing but the ſcore of the evening — and no longer ſeeking for applauſe and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than *the Gentleman in the parlour* ! One may take one’s choice of all characters in this romantic ſtate of uncertainty as to one’s real pretenſions, and become indefinitely reſpectable and negatively right-worſhipful. We baffle prejudice and diſappoint conjecture ; and from being ſo to others, begin to be objects of curioſity and wonder even to ourſelves. We are no more thoſe hackneyed common-places that we appear in the world : an inn reſtores us to the level of nature, and quits ſcores with ſociety ! I have certainly ſpent ſome enviable hours at inns — ſometimes when I have been left entirely to myſelf, and have tried to ſolve ſome metaphyſical problem, as once at

Witham-common, where I found out the proof that likeness is not a case of the association of ideas—at other times, when there have been pictures in the room, as at St. Neot's, (I think it was) where I first met with Gribelin's engravings of the Cartoons, into which I entered at once, and at a little inn on the borders of Wales, where there happened to be hanging some of Westall's drawings, which I compared triumphantly (for a theory that I had, not for the admired artist) with the figure of a girl who had ferried me over the Severn, standing up in the boat between me and the twilight—at other times I might mention luxuriating in books, with a peculiar interest in this way, as I remember sitting up half the night to read Paul and Virginia, which I picked up at an inn at Bridgewater, after being drenched in the rain all day; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madame D'Arblay's Camilla. It was on the tenth of April, 1798, that I sat down to a volume of the New Eloise, at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. The letter I chose was that in which St. Preux describes his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the Pays de Vaud, which I had brought with me as a *bon bouche* to crown the evening with. It was my birth-day, and I

had for the first time come from a place in the neighbourhood to visit this delightful spot. The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham ; and on passing a certain point, you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheatre, broad, barren hills rising in majestic state on either side, with "green upland swells that echo to the bleat of flocks" below, and the river Dee babbling over its stony bed in the midst of them. The valley at this time "glittered green with sunny showers," and a budding ash-tree dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream. How proud, how glad I was to walk along the high road that overlooks the delicious prospect, repeating the lines which I have just quoted from Mr. Coleridge's poems ! But besides the prospect which opened beneath my feet, another also opened to my inward sight, a heavenly vision, on which were written, in letters large as Hope could make them, these four words, LIBERTY, GENIUS, LOVE, VIRTUE ; which have since faded into the light of common day, or mock my idle gaze.

"The beautiful is vanished, and returns not."

Still I would return some time or other to this enchanted spot ; but I would return to it alone.

What other self could I find to share that influx of thoughts, of regret, and delight, the fragments of which I could hardly conjure up to myself, so much have they been broken and defaced! I could stand on some tall rock, and overlook the precipice of years that separates me from what I then was. I was at that time going shortly to visit the poet whom I have above named. Where is he now? Not only I myself have changed; the world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible. Yet will I turn to thee in thought, O sylvan Dee, in joy, in youth and gladness as thou then wert; and thou shalt always be to me the river of Paradise, where I will drink of the waters of life freely!

There is hardly any thing that shows the short-sightedness or capriciousness of the imagination more than travelling does. With change of place we change our ideas; nay, our opinions and feelings. We can by an effort indeed transport ourselves to old and long-forgotten scenes, and then the picture of the mind revives again; but we forget those that we have just left. It seems that we can think but of one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy is but of a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they immediately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions, we only

shift our point of view. The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye, we take our fill of it, and seem as if we could form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on, and think no more of it: the horizon that shuts it from our sight, also blots it from our memory like a dream. In travelling through a wild barren country, I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it. In the country we forget the town, and in town we despise the country. "Beyond Hyde Park," says Sir Toppling Flutter, "all is a desert." All that part of the map that we do not see before us is a blank. The world in our conceit of it is not much bigger than a nutshell. It is not one prospect expanded into another, county joined to county, kingdom to kingdom, lands to seas, making an image voluminous and vast;—the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance. The rest is a name written in a map, a calculation of arithmetic. For instance, what is the true signification of that immense mass of territory and population, known by the name of China to us? An inch of paste-board on a wooden globe, of no more account than a China orange! Things near us are seen of the size of life: things at a

distance are diminished to the size of the understanding. We measure the universe by ourselves, and even comprehend the texture of our own being only piece-meal. In this way, however, we remember an infinity of things and places. The mind is like a mechanical instrument that plays a great variety of tunes, but it must play them in succession. One idea recalls another, but it at the same time excludes all others. In trying to renew old recollections, we cannot as it were unfold the whole web of our existence; we must pick out the single threads. So in coming to a place where we have formerly lived and with which we have intimate associations, every one must have found that the feeling grows more vivid the nearer we approach the spot, from the mere anticipation of the actual impression: we remember circumstances, feelings, persons, faces, names, that we had not thought of for years; but for the time all the rest of the world is forgotten!—To return to the question I have quitted above.

I have no objection to go to see ruins, aqueducts, pictures, in company with a friend or a party, but rather the contrary, for the former reason reversed. They are intelligible matters, and will bear talking about. The sentiment here is not tacit, but communicable and overt.

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Salisbury Plain is barren of criticism, but Stonehenge will bear a discussion antiquarian, picturesque, and philosophical. In setting out on a party of pleasure, the first consideration always is where we shall go to: in taking a solitary ramble, the question is what we shall meet with by the way. "The mind is its own place;" nor are we anxious to arrive at the end of our journey. I can myself do the honours indifferently well to works of art and curiosity. I once took a party to Oxford with no mean *eclat*—shewed them that seat of the Muses at a distance,

"With glistening spires and pinnacles adorn'd"—

descanted on the learned air that breathes from the grassy quadrangles and stone walls of halls and colleges—was at home in the Bodleian; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powdered Ciceroni that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to common-place beauties in matchless pictures.—As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion. I should want at intervals to hear the sound of my own language. There is an involuntary antipathy in the mind of an Englishman to foreign manners and notions that requires the assistance of social

sympathy to carry it off. As the distance from home increases, this relief, which was at first a luxury, becomes a passion and an appetite. A person would almost feel stifled to find himself in the deserts of Arabia without friends and countrymen : there must be allowed to be something in the view of Athens or old Rome that claims the utterance of speech ; and I own that the Pyramids are too mighty for any single contemplation. In such situations, so opposite to all one's ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species by one's-self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support.—Yet I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set my foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears ; nor did the mariners' hymn, which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbour, as the sun went down, send an alien sound into my soul. I only breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over " the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France," erect and satisfied ; for the image of man was not cast down and chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones : I was at no loss for lan-

guage, for that of all the great schools of painting was open to me. The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled : nothing remains but the Bourbons and the French people!—There is undoubtedly a sensation in travelling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else : but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. It is too remote from our habitual associations to be a common topic of discourse or reference, and, like a dream or another state of existence, does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated but a momentary hallucination. It demands an effort to exchange our actual for our ideal identity ; and to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must “jump” all our present comforts and connexions. Our romantic and itinerant character is not to be domesticated. Dr. Johnson remarked how little foreign travel added to the facilities of conversation in those who had been abroad. In fact, the time we have spent there is both delightful and in one sense instructive ; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence, and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable individual, all the time we are out of our own

country. We are lost to ourselves, as well as our friends. So the poet somewhat quaintly sings,

“ Out of my country and myself I go.”

Those who wish to forget painful thoughts, do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recal them : but we can be said only to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth. I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could any where borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!—

ESSAY IV.

ON COFFEE-HOUSE POLITICIANS.

ESSAY IV.

ON COFFEE-HOUSE POLITICIANS.

THERE is a set of people who fairly come under this denomination. They spend their time and their breath in coffee-houses and other places of public resort, hearing or repeating some new thing. They sit with a paper in their hands in the morning, and with a pipe in their mouths in the evening, discussing the contents of it. The Times, the Morning Chronicle, and the Herald are necessary to their existence: in them “ they live and move and have their being.” The Evening Paper is impatiently expected, and called for at a certain critical minute: the news of the morning become stale and vapid by the dinner-hour. A fresher interest is required, an appetite for the latest-stirring information is excited with the return of their meals; and a glass of old port or humming ale hardly relishes as it ought without the infusion

of some lively topic that had its birth with the day, and perishes before night. "Then come in the sweets of the evening:"—the Queen, the coronation, the last new play, the next fight, the insurrection of the Greeks or Neapolitans, the price of stocks, or death of kings, keep them on the alert till bed-time. No question comes amiss to them that is quite new—none is ever heard of that is at all old.

"That of an hour's age doth hiss the speaker."

The World before the Flood or the Intermediate State of the Soul are never once thought of—such is the quick succession of subjects, the suddenness and fugitiveness of the interest taken in them, that the Two-penny Post-Bag would be at present looked upon as an old-fashioned publication, and the Battle of Waterloo, like the proverb, is somewhat musty. It is strange that people should take so much interest at one time in what they so soon forget:—the truth is, they feel no interest in it at any time, but it does for something to talk about. Their ideas are served up to them, like their bill of fare, for the day; and the whole creation, history, war, politics, morals, poetry, metaphysics, is to them like a file of antedated newspapers, of no use, not even for reference, except the one which lies on the

table!—You cannot take any of these persons at a greater disadvantage than before they are provided with their cue for the day. They ask with a face of dreary vacuity, “Have you any thing new?”—and on receiving an answer in the negative, have nothing farther to say. Talk of the Westminster Election, the Bridge-street Association, or Mr. Cobbett’s Letter to John Cropper of Liverpool, and they are alive again. Beyond the last twenty-four hours, or the narrow round in which they move, they are utterly to seek, without ideas, feelings, interests, apprehensions of any sort; so that if you betray any knowledge beyond the vulgar routine of SECOND EDITIONS and first-hand private intelligence, you pass with them for a dull fellow, not acquainted with what is going forward in the world or with the practical value of things. I have known a person of this stamp censure John Cam Hobhouse for referring so often as he does to the affairs of the Greeks and Romans, as if the affairs of the nation were not sufficient for his hands; another asks you if a General in modern times cannot throw a bridge over a river without having studied Cæsar’s Commentaries; and a third cannot see the use of the learned languages, as he has observed that the greatest proficients in them are rather taciturn than otherwise, and

hesitate in their speech more than other people. A dearth of general information is almost necessary to the thorough-paced coffee-house politician; in the absence of thought, imagination, sentiment, he is attracted immediately to the nearest common-place, and floats through the chosen regions of noise and empty rumours without difficulty and without distraction. Meet "any six of these men in buckram," and they will accost you with the same question and the same answer: they have seen it somewhere in print, or had it from some city-oracle, that morning; and the sooner they vent their opinions the better, for they will not keep. Like tickets of admission to the theatre for a particular evening, they must be used immediately, or they will be worth nothing: and the object is to find auditors for the one and customers for the other, neither of which is difficult; since people who have no ideas of their own are glad to hear what any one else has to say, as those who have not free admissions to the play will very obligingly take up with an occasional order.—It sometimes gives one a melancholy but mixed sensation to see one of the better sort of this class of politicians, not without talents or learning, absorbed for fifty years together in the all-engrossing topic of the day: mounting on it

for exercise and recreation of his faculties, like the great horse at a riding-school, and after his short, improressive, untired career dismounting just where he got up ; flying abroad in continual consternation on the wings of all the newspapers ; waving his arm like a pump-handle in sign of constant change, and spouting out torrents of puddled politics from his mouth ; dead to all interests but those of the state ; seemingly neither older nor wiser for age ; unaccountably enthusiastic, stupidly romantic, and actuated by no other motive than the mechanical operations of the spirit of newsmongering* !

* It is not very long ago that I saw two Dissenting Ministers (the *Ultima Thule* of the sanguine, visionary temperament in politics) stuffing their pipes with dried currant-leaves, calling it Radical Tobacco, lighting it with a lens in the rays of the sun, and at every puff fancying that they undermined the Boroughmongers, as Trim blew up the army opposed to the Allies ! They had *deceived the Senate*. Methinks I see them now, smiling as in scorn of Corruption.

— “ Dream on, blest pair :

Yet happier if you knew your happiness,

And knew to know no more !”

The world of Reform that you dote on, like Berkeley's material world, lives only in your own brain, and long may it live there ! Those same Dissenting Ministers throughout the country (I mean the descendants of the old Puritans) are to this hour a sort of Fifth-monarchy men : very turbulent fellows, in my

“What things,” exclaims Beaumont in his verses to Ben Jonson, “have we not seen done at the Mermaid !

— Then when there hath been thrown
Wit able enough to justify the town
For three days past, wit that might warrant be
For the whole city to talk foolishly !”

I cannot say the same of the S——, though it stands on classic ground, and is connected by local tradition with the great names of the Elizabethan age. What a falling off is here ! Our ancestors of that period seem not only to be older by two hundred years, and proportionably wiser and wittier than we, but hardly a trace of them is left, not even the memory of what has been. How should I make my friend M—— stare, if I were to mention the name of my still better friend, old honest Signor Friscobaldo, the father of Bellafront :—yet his name was perhaps invented, and the scenes in which he figures unrivalled might for the first time have been read aloud to thrilling ears on

opinion altogether incorrigible, and according to the suggestions of others, should be hanged out of the way without judge or jury for the safety of church and state. Marry, hang them ! they may be left to die a natural death : the race is nearly extinct of itself, and can do little more good or harm !

this very spot! Who reads Decker now? Or if by chance any one awakes the strings of that ancient lyre, and starts with delight as they yield wild, broken music, is he not accused of envy to the living Muse? What would a linen-draper from Holborn think, if I were to ask him after the clerk of St. Andrew's, the immortal, the forgotten Webster? His name and his works are no more heard of: though *these* were written with a pen of adamant, "within the red-leaved tables of the heart," his fame was "writ in water." So perishable is genius, so swift is time, so fluctuating is knowledge, and so far is it from being true that men perpetually accumulate the means of improvement and refinement. On the contrary, living knowledge is the tomb of the dead, and while light and worthless materials float on the surface, the solid and sterling as often sink to the bottom, and are swallowed up for ever in weeds and quicksands!—A striking instance of the short-lived nature of popular reputation occurred one evening at the S—, when we got into a dispute, the most learned and recondite that ever took place, on the comparative merits of Lord Byron and Gray. A country-gentleman happened to drop in, and thinking to show off in London company, launched into a lofty panegyric on the Bard of

Gray as the sublimest composition in the English language. This assertion presently appeared to be an anachronism, though it was probably the opinion in vogue thirty years ago, when the gentleman was last in town. After a little floundering, one of the party volunteered to express a more contemporary sentiment, by asking in a tone of mingled confidence and doubt—"But you don't think, Sir, that Gray is to be mentioned as a poet in the same day with my Lord Byron?" The disputants were now at issue: all that resulted was that Gray was set aside as a poet who would not go down among readers of the present day, and his patron treated the works of the Noble Bard as mere ephemeral effusions, and spoke of poets that would be admired thirty years hence, which was the farthest stretch of his critical imagination. His antagonist's did not even reach so far. This was the most romantic digression we ever had; and the subject was not afterwards resumed.—No one here (generally speaking) has the slightest notion of any thing that has happened, that has been said, thought, or done out of his own recollection. It would be in vain to hearken after those "wit-skirmishes," those "brave sublunary things," which were the employment and delight of the Beaumonts

and Bens of former times: but we may happily repose on dulness, drift with the tide of nonsense, and gain an agreeable vertigo by lending an ear to endless controversies. The confusion, provided you do not mingle in the fray and try to disentangle it, is amusing and edifying enough. Every species of false wit and spurious argument may be learnt here by potent examples. Whatever observations you hear dropt, have been picked up in the same place or in a kindred atmosphere. There is a kind of conversation made up entirely of scraps and hearsay, as there are a kind of books made up entirely of references to other books. This may account for the frequent contradictions which abound in the discourse of persons educated and disciplined wholly in coffee-houses. There is nothing stable or well-grounded in it: it is "nothing but vanity, chaotic vanity." They hear a remark at the Globe which they do not know what to make of; another at the Rainbow in direct opposition to it; and not having time to reconcile them, vent both at the Mitre. In the course of half an hour, if they are not more than ordinarily dull, you are sure to find them on opposite sides of the question. This is the sickening part of it. People do not seem to talk for the sake of expressing their opinions, but to maintain an

opinion for the sake of talking. We meet neither with modest ignorance nor studious acquirement. Their knowledge has been taken in too much by snatches to digest properly. There is neither sincerity nor system in what they say. They hazard the first crude notion that comes to hand, and then defend it how they can; which is for the most part but ill. "Don't you think," says M——, "that Mr. —— is a very sensible, well-informed man?"—"Why no," I say, "he seems to me to have no ideas of his own, and only to wait to see what others will say in order to set himself against it. I should not think that is the way to get at the truth. I do not desire to be driven out of my conclusions (such as they are) merely to make way for his upstart pretensions."—"Then there is ——: what of him?"—"He might very well express all he has to say in half the time, and with half the trouble. Why should he beat about the bush as he does? He appears to be getting up a little speech, and practising on a smaller scale for a Debating Society—the lowest ambition a man can have. Besides, by his manner of drawling out his words, and interlarding his periods with inuendos and formal reservations, he is evidently making up his mind all the time which side he shall take. He puts his sentences

together as printers set up types, letter by letter. There is certainly no principle of short-hand in his mode of elocution. He goes round for a meaning, and the sense waits for him. It is not conversation, but rehearsing a part. Men of education and men of the world order this matter better. They know what they have to say on a subject, and come to the point at once. Your coffee-house politician balances between what he heard last and what he shall say next; and not seeing his way clearly, puts you off with circumstantial phrases, and tries to gain time for fear of making a false step. This gentleman has heard some one admired for precision and copiousness of language; and goes away, congratulating himself that he has not made a blunder in grammar or in rhetoric the whole evening. He is a theoretical *Quidnunc*—is tenacious in argument, though wary; carries his point thus and thus, bandies objections and answers with uneasy pleasantry, and when he has the worst of the dispute, puns very emphatically on his adversary's name, if it admits of that kind of misconstruction." G—— is admired by the waiter, who is a sleek hand* for his

* William, our waiter, is dressed neatly in black, takes in the TICKLER, (which many of the gentlemen like to look into)

temper in managing an argument. Any one else would perceive that the latent cause is not patience with his antagonist, but satisfaction with himself. I think this unmoved self-complacency, this cavalier smooth simpering indifference is more annoying than the extremest violence or irritability. The one shews that your opponent does care something about you, and may be put out of his way by your remarks ; the other seems to announce that nothing you say can shake his opinion a jot, that he has considered the whole of what you have to offer beforehand, and that he is in all respects much wiser and more accomplished than you. Such persons talk to grown people with the same air of patronage and condescension that they do to children. "They will explain"—is a familiar expression with them, thinking you can only differ from them in consequence of misconceiving what they say. Or if you detect them in any error in point of fact (as to acknowledged deficiency in wit or argument, they would smile at the idea) they add some correction to your correc-

wears, I am told, a diamond-pin in his shirt-collar, has a music-master to teach him to play on the flageolet two hours before the maids are up, complains of confinement and a delicate constitution, and is a complete Master Stephen in his way.

tion, and thus have the whip-hand of you again, being more correct than you who corrected them. If you hint some obvious oversight, they know what you are going to say, and were aware of the objection before you uttered it:—"So shall their anticipation prevent your discovery." By being in the right you gain no advantage: by being in the wrong you are entitled to the benefit of their pity or scorn! It is sometimes curious to see a select group of our little Gotham getting about a knotty point that will bear a wager, as whether Dr. Johnson's Dictionary was originally published in quarto or folio. The confident assertions, the cautious overtures, the length of time demanded to ascertain the fact, the precise terms of the forfeit, the provisos for getting out of paying it at last, lead to a long and inextricable discussion. G—— was however so convinced in his own mind that the Mourning Bride was written by Shakespear, that he ran headlong into the snare: the bet was decided, and the punch was drank. He has skill in numbers, and seldom exceeds his sevenpence.—He had a brother once, no Michael Cassio, no great arithmetician: R—— was a rare fellow, of the driest humour, and the nicest tact, of infinite sleights and evasions, of a picked phraseology, and the very soul of mimicry. I

fancy I have some insight into physiognomy myself, but he could often expound to me at a single glance the characters of those of my acquaintance that I had been most at fault about. The account as it was cast up and balanced between us was not always very favourable. How finely, how truly, how gaily he took off the company at the S——! Poor and faint are my sketches compared to his! It was like looking into a *camera obscura*—you saw faces shining and speaking—the smoke curled, the lights dazzled, the oak wainscoating took a higher polish—there was old S——, tall and gaunt, with his couplet from Pope and case at Nisi Prius, M—— eyeing the ventilator and lying *perdu* for a moral, and H—— and A—— taking another friendly finishing glass!— These and many more wind-falls of character he gave us in thought, word, and action. I remember his once describing three different persons together to myself and M— B——, viz. the manager of a country theatre, a tragic and a comic performer, till we were ready to tumble on the floor with laughing at the oddity of their humours, and at R——'s extraordinary powers of ventriloquism, bodily and mental; and B—— said (such was the vividness of the scene) that when he awoke the next morning,

he wondered what three amusing characters he had been in company with the evening before. Oh! it was a rich treat to see him describe M—df—rd, him of the Courier, the Contemplative Man, who wrote an answer to Cœlebs, coming into a room, folding up his great coat, taking out a little pocket volume, laying it down to think, rubbing the calf of his leg with grave self-complacency, and starting out of his reverie when spoken to with an inimitable vapid exclamation of “Eh!” M—df—rd is like a man made of fleecy hosiery: R—— was lank and lean “as is the ribbed sea-sand.” Yet he seemed the very man he represented, as fat, pert, and dull as it was possible to be. I have not seen him of late:—

“For Kais is fled, and our tents are forlorn.”

But I thought of him the other day when the news of the death of Buonaparte came, whom we both loved for precisely contrary reasons, he for putting down the rabble of the people, and I because he had put down the rabble of kings. Perhaps this event may rouse him from his lurking-place, where he lies like Reynard, with head declined, in feigned slumbers*!—

* His account of Dr. L—— was prodigious—of his occult sagacity, of his eyes prominent and wild like a hare’s,

I had almost forgotten the S—— Tavern. We for some time took C—— for a lawyer, from a

fugacious of followers, of the arts by which he had left the City to lure the patients that he wanted after him to the West-End, of the ounce of tea that he purchased by stratagem as an unusual treat to his guest, and of the narrow winding staircase, from the height of which he contemplated in security the imaginary approach of duns. He was a large, plain, fair-faced Moravian preacher, turned physician. He was an honest man, but vain of he knew not what. He was once sitting where Sarratt was playing a game at chess without seeing the board; and after remaining for some time absorbed in silent wonder, he turned suddenly to me and said, "Do you know, Mr. H——, that I think there is something I could do?" "Well, what is that?" "Why perhaps you would not guess, but I think I could dance, I'm sure I could; ay, I could dance like Vestris!"—Sarratt, who was a man of various accomplishments, (among others one of the Fancy,) afterwards bared his arm to convince us of his muscular strength, and Mrs. L—— going out of the room with another lady said, "Do you know, Madam, the Doctor is a great jumper!" Moliere could not outdo this. Never shall I forget his pulling off his coat to eat beef-steaks on equal terms with Martin B——. Life is short, but full of mirth and pastime, did we not so soon forget what we have laughed at, perhaps that we may not remember what we have cried at!—Sarratt, the chess-player, was an extraordinary man. He had the same tenacious, epileptic faculty in other things that he had at chess, and could no more get any other ideas out of his mind than he could those of the figures on the board. He was a great reader, but had not the least taste. Indeed the violence of his memory tyrannised over and destroyed all power

certain arguteness of voice and slenderness of neck, and from his having a quibble and a laugh at himself always ready. On inquiry, however, he was found to be a patent-medicine seller, and having leisure in his apprenticeship, and a forwardness of parts, he had taken to study Blackstone and the Statutes at Large, On appealing to M—— for his opinion on this matter, he observed pithily, “I don’t like so much law: the gentlemen here seem fond of law, but I have law enough at chambers.” One sees a great deal of the humours and tempers of men in a place of this sort, and may almost gather their opinions from their characters. There is E——, a fellow that is always in the wrong—who puts might for right on all occasions—a Tory in grain—who has no one idea but what has been instilled into him by custom and authority—an everlasting babbler on the stronger side of the question—querulous and dictatorial, and with a peevish whine in his

of selection. He could repeat Ossian by heart, without knowing the best passage from the worst; and did not perceive he was tiring you to death by giving an account of the breed, education, and manners of fighting-dogs for hours together. The sense of reality quite superseded the distinction between the pleasurable and the painful. He was altogether a mechanical philosopher.

voice like a beaten school-boy. He is a great advocate for the Bourbons, and for the National Debt. The former he affirms to be the choice of the French people, and the latter he insists is necessary to the salvation of these kingdoms. This last point a little inoffensive gentleman among us, of a saturnine aspect but simple conceptions, cannot comprehend. "I will tell you, Sir—I will make my proposition so clear that you will be convinced of the truth of my observation in a moment. Consider, Sir, the number of trades that would be thrown out of employ, if it were done away with: what would become of the porcelain manufacture without it?" Any stranger to overhear one of these debates would swear that the English as a nation are bad logicians. Mood and figure are unknown to them. They do not argue by the book. They arrive at conclusions through the force of prejudice, and on the principles of contradiction. Mr. E—— having thus triumphed in argument, offers a flower to the notice of the company as a specimen of his flower-garden, a curious exotic, nothing like it to be found in this kingdom, talks of his carnations, of his country-house, and old English hospitality, but never invites any of his friends to come down and take their Sunday's dinner with him. He is

mean and ostentatious at the same time, insolent and servile, does not know whether to treat those he converses with as if they were his porters or his customers: the prentice-boy is not yet wiped out of him, and his imagination still hovers between his mansion at —, and the work-house. Opposed to him and to every one else, is K——, a radical reformer and logician, who makes clear work of the taxes and national debt, reconstructs the Government from the first principles of things, shatters the Holy Alliance at a blow, grinds out the future prospects of society with a machine, and is setting out afresh with the commencement of the French Revolution five and twenty years ago, as if on an untried experiment. He minds nothing but the formal agreement of his premises and his conclusions, and does not stick at obstacles in the way nor consequences in the end. If there was but one side of a question, he would be always in the right. He casts up one column of the account to admiration, but totally forgets and rejects the other. His ideas lie like square pieces of wood in his brain, and may be said to be piled up on a stiff architectural principle, perpendicularly, and at right angles. There is no inflection, no modification, no graceful embellishment, no Corinthian capi-

tals. I never heard him agree to two propositions together, or to more than half a one at a time. His rigid love of truth bends to nothing but his habitual love of disputation. He puts one in mind of one of those long-headed politicians and frequenters of coffee-houses mentioned in Berkeley's Minute Philosopher, who would make nothing of such old-fashioned fellows as Plato and Aristotle. He has the new light strong upon him, and he knocks other people down with its solid beams. He denies that he has got certain views out of Cobbett, though he allows that there are excellent ideas occasionally to be met with in that writer. It is a pity that this enthusiastic and unqualified regard to truth should be accompanied with an equal exactness of expenditure and unrelenting eye to the main-chance. He brings a bunch of radishes with him for cheapness, and gives a band of musicians at the door a penny, observing that he likes their performance better than all the Opera-squalling. This brings the severity of his political principles into question, if not into contempt. He would abolish the National Debt from motives of personal economy, and objects to Mr. Canning's pension because it perhaps takes a farthing a year out of his own pocket. A great deal of radical reasoning has

its source in this feeling.—He bestows no small quantity of his tediousness upon M——, on whose mind all these formulas and diagrams fall like seed on stony ground: “while the manna is descending,” he shakes his ears, and in the intervals of the debate, insinuates an objection, and calls for another half-pint. I have sometimes said to him—“Any one to come in here without knowing you, would take you for the most disputatious man alive, for you are always engaged in an argument with somebody or other.” The truth is, that M—— is a good-natured, gentlemanly man, who notwithstanding, if appealed to, will not let an absurd or unjust proposition pass without expressing his dissent; and therefore he is a sort of mark for all those (and we have several of that stamp) who like to tease other people’s understandings, as wool-combers tease wool. He is certainly the flower of the flock. He is the oldest frequenter of the place, the latest sitter-up, well-informed, inobtrusive, and that sturdy old English character, a lover of truth and justice. I never knew M—— approve of any thing unfair or illiberal. There is a candour and uprightness about his mind which can neither be wheedled nor brow-beat into unjustifiable complaisance. He looks strait-forward as he sits with his glass

in his hand, turning neither to the right nor the left, and I will venture to say that he has never had a sinister object in view through life. Mrs. Battle (it is recorded in her *Opinions on Whist*) could not make up her mind to use the word "*Go*." M—— from long practice has got over this difficulty, and uses it incessantly. It is no matter what adjunct follows in the train of this despised monosyllable:—whatever liquid comes after this prefix is welcome. M—— without being the most communicative, is the most conversible man I know. The social principle is inseparable from his person. If he has nothing to say, he drinks your health; and when you cannot from the rapidity and carelessness of his utterance catch what he says, you assent to it with equal confidence: you know his meaning is good. His favourite phrase is, "We have all of us something of the coxcomb;" and yet he has none of it himself. Before I had exchanged half a dozen sentences with M——, I found that he knew several of my old acquaintance (an immediate introduction of itself, for the discussing the characters and foibles of common friends is a great sweetener and cement of friendship)—and had been intimate with most of the wits and men about town for the last twenty years. He knew Tobin, Words-

worth, Porson, Wilson, Paley, Erskine, and many others. He speaks of Paley's pleasantry and unassuming manners, and describes Porson's long potations and long quotations formerly at the Cider-Cellar in a very lively way. He has doubts, however, as to that sort of learning. On my saying that I had never seen the Greek Professor but once, at the Library of the London Institution, when he was dressed in an old rusty black coat, with cobwebs hanging to the skirts of it, and with a large patch of coarse brown paper covering the whole length of his nose, looking for all the world like a drunken carpenter, and talking to one of the Proprietors with an air of suavity, approaching to condescension, M—— could not help expressing some little uneasiness for the credit of classical literature. "I submit, Sir, whether common sense is not the principal thing? What is the advantage of genius and learning if they are of no use in the conduct of life?"—M—— is one who loves the hours that usher in the morn, when a select few are left in twos and threes like stars before the break of day, and when the discourse and the ale are "aye growing better and better." W——, M——, and myself were all that remained one evening. We had sat

together several hours without being tired of one another's company. The conversation turned on the Beauties of Charles the Second's Court at Windsor, and from thence to Count Grammont, their gallant and gay historian. We took our favourite passages in turn—one preferring that of Killigrew's country-cousin, who having been resolutely refused by Miss Warminster (one of the Maids of Honour) when he found she had been unexpectedly brought to bed, fell on his knees and thanked God that now she might take compassion on him—another insisting that the Chevalier Hamilton's assignation with Lady Chesterfield, when she kept him all night shivering in an old out-house, was better. Jacob Hall's prowess was not forgotten, nor the story of Miss Stuart's garters. I was getting on in my way with that delicate *endroit*, in which Miss Churchill is first introduced at court and is besieged (as a matter of course) by the Duke of York, who was gallant as well as bigoted on system. His assiduities however soon slackened, owing (it is said) to her having a pale, thin face; till one day, as they were riding out hunting together, she fell from her horse, and was taken up almost lifeless. The whole assembled court were

thrown by this event into admiration that such a body should belong to such a face* (so transcendent a pattern was she of the female form) and the Duke was fixed. This I contended was striking, affecting, and grand, the sublime of amorous biography, and said I could conceive of nothing finer than the idea of a young person in her situation, who was the object of indifference or scorn from outward appearance, with the proud suppressed consciousness of a Goddess-like symmetry, locked up by "fear and niceness, the hand-maids of all women," from the wonder and worship of mankind. I said so then, and I think so now: my tongue grew wanton in the praise of this passage, and I believe it bore the bell from its competitors. W—— then spoke of Lucius Apuleius and his Golden Ass, which contains the story of Cupid and Psyche, with other matter rich and rare, and went on to the romance of Heliodorus, Theagenes and Chariclea. This, as he affirmed, opens with a pastoral landscape equal to Claude, and in it the presiding deities of Love and Wine appear in all their pristine strength, youth and grace, crowned and wor-

* "Ils ne pouvoient croire qu'un corps de cette beauté fût de quelque chose au visage de Mademoiselle Churchill."—*MEMOIRES DE GRAMMONT*, Vol. II. p. 254.

shipped as of yore. The night waned, but our glasses brightened, enriched with the pearls of Grecian story. Our cup-bearer slept in a corner of the room, like another Endymion, in the pale ray of an half-extinguished lamp, and starting up at a fresh summons for a farther supply, he swore it was too late, and was inexorable to entreaty. M—— sat with his hat on and with a hectic flush in his face while any hope remained, but as soon as we rose to go, he darted out of the room as quick as lightning, determined not to be the last that went.—I said some time after to the waiter, that “Mr. M—— was no flincher.”—“Oh! Sir,” says he, “you should have known him formerly, when Mr. H—— and Mr. A—— used to be here. Now he is quite another man: he seldom stays later than one or two.”—“Why, did they keep it up much later then?”—“Oh! yes; and used to sing catches and all sorts.”—“What, did Mr. M—— sing catches?”—“He joined chorus, Sir, and was as merry as the best of them. He was always a pleasant gentleman!”—This H—— and A—— succumbed in the fight. A—— was a dry Scotchman, H—— a good-natured, hearty Englishman. I do not mean that the same character applies to all Scotchmen or to all Englishmen. H—— was of the Pipe-Office

(not unfitly appointed), and in his cheerfuller cups would delight to speak of a widow and a bowling-green, that ran in his head to the last. "What is the good of talking of those things now?" said the man of utility. "I don't know," replied the other, quaffing another glass of sparkling ale, and with a lambent fire playing in his eye and round his bald forehead—(he had a head that Sir Joshua would have made something bland and genial of)—"I don't know, but they were delightful to me at the time, and are still pleasant to talk and think of."—*Such a one*, in Touchstone's phrase, *is a natural philosopher*; and in nine cases out of ten that sort of philosophy is the best! I could enlarge this sketch, such as it is; but to prose on to the end of the chapter might prove less profitable than tedious.—

I like very well to sit in a room where there are people talking on subjects I know nothing of, if I am only allowed to sit silent and as a spectator. But I do not much like to join in the conversation, except with people and on subjects to my taste. Sympathy is necessary to society. To look on, a variety of faces, humours, and opinions is sufficient: to mix with others, agreement as well as variety is indispensable. What makes good society? I answer,

in one word, real fellowship. Without a similitude of tastes, acquirements, and pursuits (whatever may be the difference of tempers and characters) there can be no intimacy or even casual intercourse, worth the having. What makes the most agreeable party? A number of people with a number of ideas in common, "yet so as with a difference;" that is, who can put one or more subjects which they have all studied in the greatest variety of entertaining or useful lights. Or in other words, a succession of good things said with good humour, and addressed to the understandings of those who hear them, make the most desirable conversation. Ladies, lovers, beaux, wits, philosophers, the fashionable or the vulgar, are the fittest company for one another. The discourse at Randall's is the best for boxers: that at Long's for lords and loungers. I prefer H——'s conversation almost to any other person's, because, with a familiar range of subjects, he colours with a totally new and sparkling light, reflected from his own character. Elia, the grave and witty, says things not to be surpassed in essence: but the manner is more painful and less a relief to my own thoughts. Some one conceived he could not be an excellent companion, because he was seen walking down the side of the Thames, *passibus*

iniquis, after dining at Richmond. The objection was not valid. I will however admit that the said Elia is the worst company in the world in bad company, if it be granted me that in good company he is nearly the best that can be. He is one of those of whom it may be said, *Tell me your company, and I'll tell you your manners*. He is the creature of sympathy, and makes good whatever opinion you seem to entertain of him. He cannot outgo the apprehensions of the circle; and invariably acts up or down to the point of refinement or vulgarity at which they pitch him. He appears to take a pleasure in exaggerating the prejudices of strangers against him; a pride in confirming the prepossessions of friends. In whatever scale of intellect he is placed, he is as lively or as stupid as the rest can be for their lives. If you think him odd and ridiculous, he becomes more and more so every minute, *à la folie*, till he is a wonder gazed by all—set him against a good wit and a ready apprehension, and he brightens more and more—

“ Or like a gate of steel

Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
Its figure and its heat.”

We had a pleasant party one evening at B——
C——’s. A young literary bookseller who was

present went away delighted with the elegance of the repast, and spoke in raptures of a servant in green livery and a patent-lamp. I thought myself that the charm of the evening consisted in some talk about Beaumont and Fletcher and the old poets, in which every one took part or interest, and in a consciousness that we could not pay our host a better compliment than in thus alluding to studies in which he excelled, and in praising authors whom he had imitated with feeling and sweetness!—I should think it may be also laid down as a rule on this subject, that to constitute good company a certain proportion of hearers and speakers is requisite. Coleridge makes good company for this reason. He immediately establishes the principle of the division of labour in this respect, wherever he comes. He takes his cue as speaker, and the rest of the party theirs as listeners—a “Circean herd”—without any previous arrangement having been gone through. I will just add that there can be no good society without perfect freedom from affectation and constraint. If the unreserved communication of feeling or opinion leads to offensive familiarity, it is not well. But it is no better where the absence of offensive remarks arises only from formality and an assumed respectfulness of manner.

I do not think there is any thing deserving the name of society to be found out of London: and that for the two following reasons. First, there is *neighbourhood* elsewhere, accidental or unavoidable acquaintance: people are thrown together by chance or grow together like trees; but you can pick your society nowhere but in London. The very persons that of all others you would wish to associate with in almost every line of life, (or at least of intellectual pursuit,) are to be met with there. It is hard if out of a million of people you cannot find half a dozen to your liking. Individuals may seem lost and hid in the size of the place: but in fact from this very circumstance you are within two or three miles' reach of persons that without it you would be some hundreds apart from. Secondly, London is the only place in which each individual in company is treated according to his value in company, and to that only. In every other part of the kingdom he carries another character about with him, which supersedes the intellectual or social one. It is known in Manchester or Liverpool what every man in the room is worth in land or money; what are his connexions and prospects in life—and this gives a character of servility or arrogance, of mercenariness or impertinence to the whole of

provincial intercourse. You laugh not in proportion to a man's wit, but his wealth: you have to consider not what, but whom you contradict. You speak by the pound, and are heard by the rood. In the metropolis there is neither time nor inclination for these remote calculations. Every man depends on the quantity of sense, wit, or good manners he brings into society for the reception he meets with in it. A member of parliament soon finds his level as a commoner: the merchant and manufacturer cannot bring his goods to market here: the great landed proprietor shrinks from being the lord of acres into a pleasant companion or a dull fellow. When a visitor enters or leaves a room, it is not inquired whether he is rich or poor, whether he lives in a garret or a palace, or comes in his own or a hackney-coach, but whether he has a good expression of countenance, with an unaffected manner, and whether he is a man of understanding or a blockhead. These are the circumstances by which you make a favourable impression on the company, and by which they estimate you in the abstract. In the country, they consider whether you have a vote at the next election, or a place in your gift; and measure the capacity of others to instruct or entertain them by the strength of their pockets

and their credit with their banker. Personal merit is at a prodigious discount in the provinces. I like the country very well, if I want to enjoy my own company: but London is the only place for equal society, or where a man can say a good thing or express an honest opinion without subjecting himself to being insulted, unless he first lays his purse on the table to back his pretensions to talent or independence of spirit. I speak from experience*.

* When I was young, I spent a good deal of my time at Manchester and Liverpool; and I confess I give the preference to the former. There you were oppressed only by the aristocracy of wealth; in the latter by the aristocracy of wealth and letters by turns. You could not help feeling that some of their great men were authors among merchants and merchants among authors. Their bread was buttered on both sides, and they had you at a disadvantage either way. The Manchester cotton-spinners, on the contrary, set up no pretensions beyond their looms, were hearty good fellows, and took any information or display of ingenuity on other subjects in good part. I remember well being introduced to a distinguished patron of art and rising merit at a little distance from Liverpool, and was received with every mark of attention and politeness, till the conversation turning on Italian literature, our host remarked that there was nothing in the English language corresponding to the severity of the Italian ode—except perhaps Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*, and Pope's *St. Cecilia*! I could no longer contain my desire to display my smattering in criticism, and began to maintain that Pope's

Ode was, as it appeared to me, far from an example of severity in writing. I soon perceived what I had done, but here am I writing *Table-talks* in consequence. Alas! I knew as little of the world then as I do now. I never could understand any thing beyond an abstract definition.

ESSAY · V.
ON THE ARISTOCRACY OF LETTERS.

ESSAY V.

ON THE ARISTOCRACY OF LETTERS.

“ Ha ! here’s three of us are sophisticated :—off, you leadings.”——

THERE is such a thing as an aristocracy or privileged order in letters, which has sometimes excited my wonder, and sometimes my spleen. We meet with authors who have never done any thing, but who have a vast reputation for what they could have done. Their names stand high, and are in every body’s mouth, but their works are never heard of, or had better remain undiscovered for the sake of their admirers.—*Stat nominis umbra*—their pretensions are lofty and unlimited, as they have nothing to rest upon, or because it is impossible to confront them with the proofs of their deficiency. If you inquire farther, and insist upon some act of authorship to establish the claims of these Epicurean votaries of the Muses, you find that they had a great reputation at Cambridge, that they were senior wranglers or successful prize-essayists, that they visit at —— House, and to support that honour, must be supposed

of course to occupy the first rank in the world of letters*. It is possible, however, that they have some manuscript work in hand, which is of too much importance (and the writer has too much at stake in publishing it) hastily to see the light: or perhaps they once had an article in the Edinburgh Review, which was much admired at the time, and is kept by them ever since as a kind of diploma and unquestionable testimonial of merit. They are not like Grubstreet authors, who write for bread, and are paid by the sheet. Like misers who hoard their wealth, they are supposed to be masters of all the wit and sense they do not impart to the public. "Continents have most of what they contain," says a considerable philosopher; and these persons, it must be confessed, have a

* Lord H—— had made a diary (in the manner of Boswell) of the conversation held at his house, and read it at the end of a week *pro bono publico*. Sir J— M—— made a considerable figure in it, and a celebrated poet none at all, merely answering Yes and No. With this result he was by no means satisfied; and talked incessantly from that day forward. At the end of the week he asked, with some anxiety and triumph, if his Lordship had continued his diary, expecting himself to shine in "the first row of the rubric." To which his Noble Patron answered in the negative, with an intimation that it had not appeared to him worth while. Our poet was thus thrown again into the back ground, and Sir James remained master of the field!

prodigious command over themselves in the expenditure of light and learning. The Oriental curse—"O that mine enemy had written a book"—hangs suspended over them. By never committing themselves, they neither give a handle to the malice of the world, nor excite the jealousy of friends; and keep all the reputation they have got, not by discreetly blotting, but by never writing a line. Some one told Sheridan, who was always busy about some new work and never advancing any farther in it, that he would not write because he was afraid of the Author of the School for Scandal. So these idle pretenders are afraid of undergoing a comparison with themselves in something they have never done, but have had credit for doing. They do not acquire celebrity, they assume it; and escape detection by never venturing out of their imposing and mysterious *incognito*. They do not let themselves down by every-day work: for them to appear in print is a work of supererogation as much as in lords or kings, and like gentlemen with a large landed estate, they live on their established character, and do nothing (or as little as possible) to increase or lose it. There is not a more deliberate piece of grave imposture going. I know a person of this description who has been employed many years (by implication) on a translation

of Thucydides, of which no one ever saw a word, but it does not answer the purpose of bolstering up a factitious reputation the less on that account. The longer it is delayed and kept sacred from the vulgar gaze, the more it swells into imaginary consequence; the labour and care required for a work of this kind being immense:—and then there are no faults in an unexecuted translation. The only impeccable writers are those who never wrote. Another is an oracle on subjects of taste and classical erudition, because (he says at least) he reads Cicero once a year to keep up the purity of his Latinity. A third makes the indecency pass for the depth of his researches and for a high gusto in *virtù*, till from his seeing nothing in the finest remains of ancient art, the world by the merest accident find out that there is nothing in him. There is scarcely any thing that a grave face with an impenetrable manner will not accomplish, and whoever is weak enough to impose upon himself, will have wit enough to impose upon the public—particularly if he can make it their interest to be deceived by shallow boasting, and contrives not to hurt their self-love by sterling acquirements. Do you suppose that the understood translation of Thucydides costs its supposed author nothing? A select party of friends and admirers dine with him once a week at a magnificent town-mansion,

or a more elegant and picturesque retreat in the country. They broach their Horace and their old hock, and sometimes allude with a considerable degree of candour to the defects of works which are brought out by contemporary writers—the ephemeral offspring of haste and necessity!

Among other things, the learned languages are a ready passport to this sort of unmeaning, unanalysed reputation. They presently lift a man up among the celestial constellations, the signs of the Zodiac (as it were) and third heaven of inspiration, from whence he looks down on those who are toiling on in this lower sphere, and earning their bread by the sweat of their brain, at leisure and in scorn. If the graduates in this way condescend to express their thoughts in English, it is understood to be *infra dignitatem*—such light and unaccustomed essays do not fit the ponderous gravity of their pen—they only draw to advantage and with full justice to themselves in the bow of the ancients. Their native-tongue is to them strange, inelegant, unapt, and crude. They “cannot command it to any utterance of harmony. They have not the skill.” This is true enough; but you must not say so, under a heavy penalty—the displeasure of pedants and blockheads. It would be sacrilege against the privileged classes, the Aristocracy

of Letters. What! will you affirm that a profound Latin scholar, a perfect Grecian, cannot write a page of common sense or grammar? Is it not to be presumed, by all the charters of the Universities and the foundations of grammar-schools, that he who can speak a dead language must be *a fortiori* conversant with his own? Surely, the greater implies the less. He who knows every science and every art cannot be ignorant of the most familiar forms of speech. Or if this plea is found not to hold water, then our scholastic bungler is said to be above this vulgar trial of skill, "something must be excused to want of practice—but did you not observe the elegance of the Latinity, how well that period would become a classical and studied dress?" Thus defects are "monster'd" into excellences, and they screen their idol, and require you, at your peril, to pay prescriptive homage to false concords and inconsequential criticisms, because the writer of them has the character of the first or second Greek or Latin scholar in the kingdom. If you do not swear to the truth of these spurious credentials, you are ignorant and malicious, a quack and a scribbler—*flagranti delicto!* Thus the man who can merely read and construe some old author is of a class superior to any living one, and, by

parity of reasoning; to those old authors themselves: the poet or prose-writer of true and original genius, by the courtesy of custom, “ducks to the learned fool:” or as the author of *Hudibras* has so well stated the same thing,

— “He that is but able to express
No sense at all in several languages,
Will pass for learned than he that’s known
To speak the strongest reason in his own.”

These preposterous and unfounded claims of mere scholars to precedence in the commonwealth of letters, which they set up so formally themselves and which others so readily bow to, are partly owing to traditional prejudice:—there was a time when learning was the only distinction from ignorance, and when there was no such thing as popular English literature. Again, there is something more palpable and positive in this kind of acquired knowledge, like acquired wealth, which the vulgar easily recognise. That others know the meaning of signs which they are confessedly and altogether ignorant of, is to them both a matter of fact and a subject of endless wonder. The languages are worn like a dress by a man, and distinguish him sooner than his natural figure; and we are, from motives of self-love, inclined to give

others credit for the ideas they have borrowed or have come into indirect possession of, rather than for those that originally belong to them and are exclusively their own. The merit in them and the implied inferiority in ourselves is less. Learning is a kind of external appendage or transferable property—

“’T was mine, ’t is his, and may be any man’s”—

Genius and understanding are a man’s self, an integrant part of his personal identity; and the title to these last, as it is the most difficult to be ascertained, is also the most grudgingly acknowledged. Few persons would pretend to deny that Porson had more Greek than they. It was a question of fact which might be put to the immediate proof, and could not be gainsaid. But the meanest frequenter of the Cider-cellar or the Hole in the Wall would be inclined, in his own conceit, to dispute the palm of wit or sense with him; and indemnify his self-complacency for the admiration paid to living learning by significant hints to friends and casual droppers-in, that the greatest men, when you came to know them, were not without their weak sides as well as others.—Pedants, I will add here, talk to the vulgar as pedagogues talk to school-boys, on an understood principle of

condescension and superiority, and therefore make little progress in the knowledge of men or things. While they fancy they are accommodating themselves to, or else assuming airs of importance over, inferior capacities, these inferior capacities are really laughing at them. There can be no true superiority but what arises out of the presupposed ground of equality: there can be no improvement but from the free communication and comparing of ideas. Kings and nobles, for this reason, receive little benefit from society—where all is submission on one side, and condescension on the other. The mind strikes out truth by collision, as steel strikes fire from the flint!

There are whole families who are born classical, and are entered in the heralds' college of reputation by the right of consanguinity. Literature, like nobility, runs in the blood. There is the B—— family. There is no end of it or its pretensions. It produces wits, scholars, novelists, musicians, artists in "numbers numberless." The name is alone a passport to the Temple of Fame. Those who bear it are free of Parnassus by birth-right. The founder of it was himself an historian and a musician, but more of a courtier and man of the world than either. The secret of his success may

perhaps be discovered in the following passage, where, in alluding to three eminent performers on different instruments, he says, "These three illustrious personages were introduced at the Emperour's court," &c.; speaking of them as if they were foreign ambassadours or princes of the blood, and thus magnifying himself and his profession. This overshadowing manner carries nearly every thing before it, and mystifies a great many. There is nothing like putting the best face upon things, and leaving others to find out the difference. He who could call three musicians "personages," would himself play a personage through life, and succeed in his leading object. Sir Joshua Reynolds, remarking on this passage, said, "No one had a greater respect than he had for his profession, but that he should never think of applying to it epithets that were appropriated merely to external rank and distinction." Madame D——, it must be owned, had cleverness enough to stock a whole family, and to set up her cousin-germans, male and female, for wits and virtuosos to the third and fourth generation. The rest have done nothing, that I know of, but keep up the name.

The most celebrated author in modern times has written without a name, and has been

knighted for anonymous productions. Lord Byron complains that Horace Walpole was not properly appreciated, "first, because he was a gentleman, and secondly, because he was a nobleman." His Lordship stands in one, at least, of the predicaments here mentioned, and yet he has had justice, or somewhat more, done him. He towers above his fellows by all the height of the peerage. If the poet lends a grace to the nobleman, the nobleman pays it back to the poet with interest. What a fine addition is ten thousand a year and a title to the flaunting pretensions of a modern rhapsodist! His name so accompanied becomes the mouth well: it is repeated thousands of times, instead of hundreds, because the reader in being familiar with the Poet's works seems to claim acquaintance with the Lord.

"Let but a lord once own the happy lines:
How the wit brightens, and the style refines!"

He smiles at the high-flown praise or petty cavils of little men. Does he make a slip in decorum, which Milton declares to be the principal thing? His proud crest and armorial bearings support him: — no bend-sinister slurs his poetical escutcheon! Is he dull, or does he put off some trashy production on the public? It is

not charged to his account, as a deficiency which he must make good at the peril of his admirers. His Lordship is not answerable for the negligence or extravagances of his Muse. He "bears a charmed reputation, which must not yield" like one of vulgar birth. The Noble Bard is for this reason scarcely vulnerable to the critics. The double barrier of his pretensions baffles their puny, timid efforts. Strip off some of his tarnished laurels, and the coronet appears glittering beneath: restore them, and it still shines through with keener lustre. In fact, his Lordship's blaze of reputation culminates from his rank and place in society. He sustains two lofty and imposing characters; and in order to simplify the process of our admiration, and "leave no rubs or botches in the way," we equalise his pretensions, and take it for granted that he must be as superior to other men in genius as he is in birth. Or, to give a more familiar solution of the enigma, the Poet and the Peer agree to honour each other's acceptances on the bank of Fame, and sometimes cozen the town to some tune between them.—Really, however, and with all his privileges, Lord Byron might as well not have written that strange letter about Pope. I could not afford it, poor as I am. Why does he pronounce, *ex cathedra* and robed, that Cowper

is no poet? Cowper was a gentleman and of noble family like his critic. He was a teacher of morality as well as a describer of nature, which is more than his Lordship is. His John Gilpin will last as long as Beppo, and his verses to Mary are not less touching than the Farewell. If I had ventured upon such an assertion as this, it would have been worse for me than finding out a borrowed line in the Pleasures of Hope.—

There is not a more helpless or more despised animal than a mere author, without any extrinsic advantages of birth, breeding, or fortune to set him off. The real ore of talents or learning must be stamped before it will pass current. To be at all looked upon as an author, a man must be something more or less than an author—a rich merchant, a banker, a lord, or a ploughman. He is admired for something foreign to himself, that acts as a bribe to the servility or a set-off to the envy of the community. “What should such fellows as we do, crawling betwixt heaven and earth;”—“coining our hearts for drachmas;” now scorched in the sun, now shivering in the breeze, now coming out in our newest gloss and best attire, like swallows in the spring, now “sent back like hollowmas or shortest day?” The best wits, like the hand-

somest faces *upon the town*, lead a harassing, precarious life—are taken up for the bud and promise of talent, which they no sooner fulfil than they are thrown aside like an old fashion—are caressed without reason, and insulted with impunity—are subject to all the caprice, the malice, and fulsome advances of that great keeper, the Public—and in the end come to no good, like all those who lavish their favours on mankind at large and look to the gratitude of the world for their reward. Instead of this set of Grub-street authors, the mere *canaille* of letters, this corporation of Mendicity, this ragged regiment of genius suing at the corners of streets *in forma pauperis*, give me the gentleman and scholar, with a good house over his head and a handsome table “with wine of Attic taste” to ask his friends to, and where want and sorrow never come. Fill up the sparkling bowl, heap high the dessert with roses crowned, bring out the hot-pressed poem, the vellum manuscripts, the medals, the portfolios, the intaglios—this is the true model of the life of a man of taste and *virtù*—the possessors, not the inventors of these things, are the true benefactors of mankind and ornaments of letters. Look in, and there, amidst silver services and shining chandeliers, you will see the man of genius at his

proper post, picking his teeth and mincing an opinion, sheltered by rank, bowing to wealth—a poet framed, glazed, and hung in a striking light: not a straggling weed, torn and trampled on; not a poor *Kit-run-the-street*, but a powdered beau, a sycophant plant, an exotic reared in a glass-case, hermetically sealed,

“Free from the Sirian star and the dread thunder-stroke”—

whose mealy coat no moth can corrupt nor blight can wither. The poet Keats had not this sort of protection for his person—he lay bare to weather—the serpent stung him, and the poison-tree dropped upon this little western flower:—when the mercenary servile crew approached him, he had no pedigree to show them, no rent-roll to hold out in reversion for their praise: he was not in any great man’s train, nor the butt and puppet of a lord—he could only offer them “the fairest flowers of the season, carnations and streaked gilliflowers,”—“rue for remembrance and pansies for thoughts”—they recked not of his gift, but tore him with hideous shouts and laughter,

“Nor could the Muse protect her son!”

Unless an author has an establishment of his own, or is entered on that of some other person,

he will hardly be allowed to write English or to spell his own name. To be well-spoken of, he must enlist under some standard; he must belong to some *coterie*. He must get the *esprit de corps* on his side: he must have literary bail in readiness. Thus they prop one another's rickety heads at M——'s shop, and a spurious reputation, like false argument, runs in a circle. Cr—k—r affirms that G—ff—rd is sprightly, and G—ff—rd that Cr—k—r is genteel: D'I— that J—c—b is wise, and J—c—b that D'I— is good-natured. A Member of Parliament must be answerable that you are not dangerous or dull before you can be of the *entrée*. You must commence toad-eater to have your observations attended to; if you are independent, unconnected, you will be regarded as a poor creature. Your opinion is honest, you will say: then ten to one, it is not profitable. It is at any rate your own. So much the worse; for then it is not the world's. T—— is a very tolerable barometer in this respect. He knows nothing, hears every thing, and repeats just what he hears; so that you may guess pretty well from this round-faced echo what is said by others! Almost every thing goes by presumption and appearances. "Did you not think Mr. B——'s language very elegant?"—I thought he bowed

very low. "Did you not think him remarkably well-behaved?"—He was unexceptionably dressed. "But were not Mr. C—'s manners quite insinuating?"—He said nothing. "You will at least allow his friend to be a well-informed man?"—He talked upon all subjects alike. Such would be a pretty faithful interpretation of the tone of what is called *good society*. The surface is every thing: we do not pierce to the core. The setting is more valuable than the jewel. Is it not so in other things as well as letters? Is not an R. A. by the supposition a greater man in his profession than any one who is not so blazoned? Compared with that unrivalled list, Raphael had been illegitimate, Claude not classical, and Michael Angelo admitted by special favour. What is a physician without a diploma? An alderman without being knighted? An actor whose name does not appear in great letters? All others are counterfeits—men "of no mark or likelihood." This was what made the Jackalls of the North so eager to prove that I had been turned out of the Edinburgh Review. It was not the merit of the articles which excited their spleen—but their being there. Of the style they knew nothing; for the thought they cared nothing:—all that they knew was

that I wrote in that powerful journal, and therefore they asserted that I did not!

We find a class of persons who labour under an obvious natural inaptitude for whatever they aspire to. Their manner of setting about it is a virtual disqualification. The simple affirmation—"What this man has said, I will do,"—is not always considered as the proper test of capacity. On the contrary, there are people whose bare pretensions are as good or better than the actual performance of others. What I myself have done, for instance, I never find admitted as proof of what I shall be able to do: whereas I observe others who bring as proof of their competence to any task (and are taken at their word) what they have never done, and who gravely assure those who are inclined to trust them that their talents are exactly fitted for some post because they are just the reverse of what they have ever shown them to be. One man has the air of an Editor as much as another has that of a butler or porter in a gentleman's family. — is the model of this character, with a prodigious look of business, an air of suspicion which passes for sagacity, and an air of deliberation which passes for judgment. If his own talents are no ways prominent, it is

inferred he will be more impartial and in earnest in making use of those of others. There is _____, the responsible conductor of several works of taste and erudition, yet (God knows) without an idea in his head relating to any one of them. He is learned by proxy, and successful from sheer imbecility. If he were to get the smallest smattering of the departments which are under his controul, he would betray himself from his desire to shine; but as it is, he leaves others to do all the drudgery for him. He signs his name in the title-page or at the bottom of a vignette, and nobody suspects any mistake. This contractor for useful and ornamental literature once offered me Two Guineas for a Life and Character of Shakespear, with an admission to his *conversationis*. I went once. There was a collection of learned lumber, of antiquaries, lexicographers, and other Illustrious Obscure, and I had given up the day for lost, when in dropped Jack T. of the Sun—(Who would dare to deny that he was “the Sun of our table?”)—and I had nothing now to do but hear and laugh. Mr. T—— knows most of the good things that have been said in the metropolis for the last thirty years, and is in particular an excellent retailer of the humours and extravagances of his old friend, Peter Pindar. He had

recounted a series of them, each rising above the other in a sort of magnificent burlesque and want of literal preciseness, to a medley of laughing and sour faces, when on his proceeding to state a joke of a practical nature by the said Peter, a Mr. —, (I forget the name) objected to the moral of the story, and to the whole texture of Mr. T——'s *facetiæ*—upon which our host, who had till now supposed that all was going on swimmingly, thought it time to interfere and give a turn to the conversation by saying—“Why yes, Gentlemen, what we have hitherto heard fall from the lips of our friend has been no doubt entertaining and highly agreeable in its way: but perhaps we have had enough of what is altogether delightful and pleasant and light and laughable in conduct. Suppose, therefore, we were to shift the subject, and talk of what is serious and moral and industrious and laudable in character—Let us talk of Mr. Tomkins, the Penman!”—This staggered the gravest of us, broke up our dinner-party, and we went up stairs to tea. So much for the didactic vein of one of our principal guides in the embellished walks of modern taste, and master-manufacturers of letters. He had found that gravity had been a never-failing resource when taken at a pinch—for once the joke miscarried—and Mr.

Tomkins the Penman figures to this day nowhere but in Sir Joshua's picture of him!

To complete the natural Aristocracy of Letters, we only want a Royal Society of Authors!

ESSAY VI.
ON CRITICISM.

ESSAY VI.

ON CRITICISM.

CRITICISM is an art that undergoes a great variety of changes, and aims at different objects at different times.

At first, it is generally satisfied to give an opinion whether a work is good or bad, and to quote a passage or two in support of this opinion : afterwards, it is bound to assign the reasons of its decision and to analyse supposed beauties or defects with microscopic minuteness. A critic does nothing now-a-days who does not try to torture the most obvious expression into a thousand meanings, and enter into a circuitous explanation of all that can be urged for or against its being in the best or worst style possible. His object indeed is not to do justice to his author, whom he treats with very little ceremony, but to do himself homage, and to show his acquaintance with all the topics and resources of criticism. If he recurs to the

stipulated subject in the end, it is not till after he has exhausted his budget of general knowledge; and he establishes his own claims first in an elaborate inaugural dissertation *de omniscibile et quibusdam aliis*, before he deigns to bring forward the pretensions of the original candidate for praise, who is only the second figure in the piece. We may sometimes see articles of this sort, in which no allusion whatever is made to the work under sentence of death, after the first announcement of the title-page; and I apprehend it would be a clear improvement on this species of nominal criticism, to give stated periodical accounts of works that had never appeared at all, which would save the hapless author the mortification of writing, and his reviewer the trouble of reading them. If the real author is made of so little account by the modern critic, he is scarcely more an object of regard to the modern reader; and it must be confessed that after a dozen close-packed pages of subtle metaphysical distinction or solemn didactic declamation, in which the disembodied principles of all arts and sciences float before the imagination in undefined profusion, the eye turns with impatience and indifference to the imperfect embryo specimens of them, and the hopeless attempts to realise

this splendid jargon in one poor work by one poor author, which is given up to summary execution with as little justice as pity. "As when a well-graced actor leaves the stage, men's eyes are idly bent on him that enters next"—so it is here.—Whether this state of the press is not a serious abuse and a violent encroachment in the republic of letters, is more than I shall pretend to determine. The truth is, that in the quantity of works that issue from the press, it is utterly impossible they should all be read by all sorts of people. There must be *tasters* for the public, who must have a discretionary power vested in them, for which it is difficult to make them properly accountable. Authors in proportion to their numbers become not formidable, but despicable. They would not be heard of or severed from the crowd without the critic's aid, and all complaints of ill-treatment are vain. He considers them as pensioners on his bounty for any pittance of praise, and in general sets them up as butts for his wit and spleen, or uses them as a stalking-horse to convey his own favourite notions and opinions, which he can do by this means without the possibility of censure or appeal. He looks upon his literary *protégé* (much as Peter Pounce looked upon Parson Adams) as a kind of humble

companion or unnecessary interloper in the vehicle of fame, whom he has taken up purely to oblige him, and whom he may treat with neglect or insult, or set down in the common foot-path, whenever it suits his humour or convenience. He naturally grows arbitrary with the exercise of power. He by degrees wants to have a clear stage to himself, and would be thought to have purchased a monopoly of wit, learning, and wisdom—

“ Assumes the rod, affects the God,
And seems to shake the spheres.”



Besides, something of this overbearing manner goes a great way with the public. They cannot exactly tell whether you are right or wrong; and if you state your difficulties or pay much deference to the sentiments of others, they will think you a very silly fellow or a mere pretender. A sweeping, unqualified assertion ends all controversy, and sets opinion at rest. A sharp, sententious, cavalier, dogmatical tone is therefore necessary, even in self-defence, to the office of a reviewer. If you do not deliver your oracles without hesitation, how are the world to receive them on trust and without inquiry? People read to have something to talk about, and “to seem to know that which they do

not." Consequently, there cannot be too much dialectics and debateable matter, too much pomp and paradox in a review. *To elevate and surprise* is the great rule for producing a dramatic or a critical effect. The more you startle the reader, the more he will be able to startle others with a succession of smart intellectual shocks. The most admired of our Reviews is saturated with this sort of electrical matter, which is regularly played off so as to produce a good deal of astonishment and a strong sensation in the public mind. The intrinsic merits of an author are a question of very subordinate consideration to the keeping up the character of the work and supplying the town with a sufficient number of grave or brilliant topics for the consumption of the next three months!

This decided and paramount tone in criticism is the growth of the present century, and was not at all the fashion in that calm peaceable period when the Monthly Review bore "sole sovereign sway and masterdom" over all literary productions. Though nothing can be said against the respectability or usefulness of that publication during its long and almost exclusive enjoyment of the public favour, yet the style of criticism adopted in it is such as to appear

slight and unsatisfactory to a modern reader. The writers, instead of "outdoing termagant or out-Heroding Herod," were somewhat precise and prudish, gentle almost to a fault, full of candour and modesty,

"And of their port as meek as is a maid*!"

There was none of that Drawcansir work going on then that there is now; no scalping of authors, no hacking and hewing of their Lives and Opinions, except that they used those of Tristram Shandy, GENT. rather scurvily; which was to be expected. All, however, had a show of courtesy and good-manners. The satire was covert and artfully insinuated; the praise was short and sweet. We meet with no oracular theories; no profound analysis of principles; no unsparing exposure of the least discernible deviation from them. It was deemed sufficient to recommend the work in general terms, "This is an agreeable volume," or "This is a work

* A Mr. Rose and the Rev. Dr. Kippis were for many years its principal support. Mrs. Rose (I have heard my father say) contributed the Monthly Catalogue. There is sometimes a certain tartness and the woman's tongue in it. It is said of Gray's Elegy—"This little poem, however humble its pretensions, is not without elegance or merit." The characters of prophet and critic are not always united.

of great learning and research," to set forth the title and table of contents, and proceed without farther preface to some appropriate extracts, for the most part concurring in opinion with the author's text, but now and then interposing an objection to maintain appearances and assert the jurisdiction of the court. This cursory manner of hinting approbation or dissent would make but a lame figure at present. We must have not only an announcement that "this is an agreeable or able work," but we must have it explained at full length, and so as to silence all cavillers, in what the agreeableness or ability of the work consists: the author must be reduced to a class, all the living or defunct examples of which must be characteristically and pointedly *differenced* from one another; the value of this class of writing must be developed and ascertained in comparison with others; the principles of taste, the elements of our sensations, the structure of the human faculties, all must undergo a strict scrutiny and revision. The modern or metaphysical system of criticism, in short, supposes the question, *Why?* to be repeated at the end of every decision; and the answer gives birth to interminable arguments and discussion. The former laconic mode was well adapted to guide those who merely wanted

to be informed of the character and subject of a work in order to read it : the present is more useful to those whose object is less to read the work than to dispute upon its merits, and go into company clad in the whole defensive and offensive armour of criticism.—

Neither are we less removed at present from the dry and meagre mode of dissecting the skeletons of works, instead of transfusing their living principles, which prevailed in Dryden's Prefaces*, and in the criticisms written on the model of the French school about a century ago. A genuine criticism should, as I take it, reflect the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work :—here we have nothing but its superficial plan and elevation, as if a poem were a piece of formal architecture. We are told something of the plot or fable, of the moral, and of the observance or violation of the three unities of time, place, and action ; and perhaps a word or two is added on the dignity of the persons or the baldness of the style : but we no more know, after reading one of these complacent *tirades*, what the essence of the work is, what passion has been touched, or how

* There are some splendid exceptions to this censure. His comparison between Ovid and Virgil, and his character of Shakespear, are master-pieces of their kind.

skilfully, what tone and movement the author's mind imparts to his subject or receives from it, than if we had been reading a homily or a gazette. That is, we are left quite in the dark as to the feelings of pleasure or pain to be derived from the genius of the performance or the manner in which it appeals to the imagination: we know to a nicety how it squares with the thread-bare rules of composition, not in the least how it affects the principles of taste. We know every thing about the work, and nothing of it. The critic takes good care not to baulk the reader's fancy by anticipating the effect which the author has aimed at producing. To be sure, the works so handled were often worthy of their commentators: they had the form of imagination without the life or power; and when any one had gone regularly through the number of acts into which they were divided, the measure in which they were written, or the story on which they were founded, there was little else to be said about them. It is curious to observe the effect which the *Paradise Lost* had on this class of critics, like throwing a tub to a whale: they could make nothing of it. "It was out of all plumb—not one of the angles at the four corners was a right angle!" They did not seek for, nor would they much relish

the marrow of poetry it contained. Like polemics in religion, they had discarded the essentials of fine writing for the outward form and points of controversy. They were at issue with Genius and Nature by what route and in what garb they should enter the Temple of the Muses. Accordingly we find that Dryden had no other way of satisfying himself of the pretensions of Milton in the epic style but by translating his anomalous work into rhyme and dramatic dialogue*.—So there are connoisseurs who give you the subject, the grouping, the perspective, and all the mechanical circumstances of a picture; but never say a word about the expression. The reason is, they see the former, but not the

* We have critics in the present day who cannot tell what to make of the tragic writers of Queen Elizabeth's age (except Shakespear, who passes by prescriptive right,) and are extremely puzzled to reduce the efforts of their "great and irregular" power to the standard of their own slight and shewy common-places. The truth is, they had better give up the attempt to reconcile such contradictions as an artificial taste and natural genius; and repose on the admiration of verses which derive their odour from the scent of rose-leaves inserted between the pages, and their polish from the smoothness of the paper on which they are printed. They, and such writers as Decker and Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford and Marlowe, move in different orbits of the human intellect, and need never jostle.

latter. There are persons, however, who cannot employ themselves better than in taking an inventory of works of art (they want a faculty for higher studies,) as there are works of art, so called, which seem to have been composed expressly with an eye to such a class of connoisseurs. In them are to be found no recondite nameless beauties thrown away upon the stupid vulgar gaze; no "graces snatched beyond the reach of art;" nothing but what the merest pretender may note down in good set terms in his common-place book, just as it is before him. Place one of these half-informed, imperfectly organised spectators before a tall canvas with groups on groups of figures, of the size of life, and engaged in a complicated action, of which they know the name and all the particulars, and there are no bounds to their burst of involuntary enthusiasm. They mount on the stilts of the subject and ascend the highest Heaven of Invention, from whence they see sights and hear revelations which they communicate with all the fervour of plenary explanation to those who may be disposed to attend to their raptures. They float with wings expanded in lofty circles, they stalk over the canvas at large strides, never condescending to pause at any thing of less magnitude than a group or a colossal figure.

The face forms no part of their collective inquiries; or so that it occupies only a sixth or an eighth proportion to the whole body, all is according to the received rules of composition. Point to a divine portrait of Titian, to an angelic head of Guido, close by—they see and heed it not. What are the “looks commercing with the skies,” the soul speaking in the face, to them? It asks another and an inner sense to comprehend them; but for the trigonometry of painting, nature has constituted them indifferently well. They take a stand on the distinction between portrait and history, and there they are spell-bound. Tell them that there can be no fine history without portraiture, that the painter must proceed from that ground to the one above it, and that a hundred bad heads cannot make one good historical picture, and they will not believe you, though the thing is obvious to any gross capacity. Their ideas always fly to the circumference, and never fix at the centre. Art must be on a grand scale; according to them, the whole is greater than a part, and the greater necessarily implies the less. The outline is in this view of the matter the same thing as the filling-up, and “the limbs and flourishes of a discourse” the substance. Again, the same persons make an absolute distinction, without

knowing why, between high and low subjects. Say that you would as soon have Murillo's *Two Beggar-Boys* at the Dulwich Gallery as almost any picture in the world, that is, that it would be one you would chuse out of ten (had you the choice), and they reiterate upon you, that surely a low subject cannot be of equal value with a high one. It is in vain that you turn to the picture: they keep to the class. They have eyes, but see not; and upon their principles of refined taste, would be just as good judges of the merit of the picture without seeing it as with that supposed advantage. They know what the subject is *from the catalogue!*—Yet it is not true, as Lord Byron asserts, that execution is every thing, and the class or subject nothing. The highest subjects, equally well-executed (which, however, rarely happens) are the best. But the power of execution, the manner of seeing nature, is one thing, and may be so superlative (if you are only able to judge of it) as to countervail every disadvantage of subject. Raphael's storks in the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, exulting in the event, are finer than the head of Christ would have been in almost any other hands. The cant of criticism is on the other side of the question; because execution depends on various degrees of power

in the artist, and a knowledge of it on various degrees of feeling and discrimination in you: but to commence artist or connoisseur in the grand style at once, without any distinction of qualifications whatever, it is only necessary for the first to chuse his subject, and for the last to pin his faith on the sublimity of the performance, for both to look down with ineffable contempt on the painters and admirers of subjects of low life. I remember a young Scotchman once trying to prove to me that Mrs. Dickons was a superior singer to Miss Stephens, because the former excelled in sacred music, and the latter did not. At that rate, that is, if it is the singing sacred music that gives the preference, Miss Stephens would only have to sing sacred music to surpass herself and vie with her pretended rival; for this theory implies that all sacred music is equally good, and therefore better than any other. I grant that Madame Catalani's singing of sacred music is superior to Miss Stephens's ballad-strains, because her singing is better altogether, and an ocean of sound more wonderful than a simple stream of dulcet harmonies. In singing the last verse of "God save the King" not long ago, her voice towered above the whole confused noise of the orchestra, like an eagle piercing the clouds, and poured

“such sweet thunder” through the ear, as excited equal astonishment and rapture!

Some kinds of criticism are as much too insipid as others are too pragmatical. It is not easy to combine point with solidity, spirit with moderation and candour. Many persons see nothing but beauties in a work, others nothing but defects. Those cloy you with sweets, and are “the very milk of human kindness,” flowing on in a stream of luscious panegyrics; these take delight in poisoning the sources of your satisfaction, and putting you out of conceit with nearly every author that comes in their way. The first are frequently actuated by personal friendship, the last by all the virulence of party-spirit. Under the latter head would fall what may be termed *political criticism*. The basis of this style of writing is a *caput mortuum* of impotent spite and dulness, till it is varnished over with the slime of servility, and thrown into a state of unnatural activity by the venom of the most rancorous bigotry. The eminent professors in this groveling department are at first merely out of sorts with themselves, and vent their spleen in little interjections and contortions of phrase:—cry *Pish* at a lucky hit, and *Hem* at a fault, are smart on personal defects, and sneer at “Beauty out of favour and

on crutches"—are thrown into an ague-fit by hearing the name of a rival, start back with horror at any approach to their morbid pretensions like Justice Woodcock with his gouty limbs—rifle the flowers of the Della Cruscan school, and give you in their stead, as models of a pleasing pastoral style, Verses upon Anna—which you may see in the notes to the Baviad and Mæviad. All this is like the fable of the *Kitten and the Leaves*. But when they get their brass collar on and shake their bells of office, they set up their backs like the Great Cat Rodilardus, and pounce upon men and things. Woe to any little heedless reptile of an author that ventures across their path without a safe-conduct from the Board of Controul. They snap him up at a mouthful, and sit licking their lips, stroking their whiskers, and rattling their bells over the imaginary fragments of their devoted prey, to the alarm and astonishment of the whole breed of literary, philosophical, and revolutionary vermin, that were naturalised in this country by a Prince of Orange and an Elector of Hanover a hundred years ago*. When one of these pampered, sleek, "demure-

* The intelligent reader will be pleased to understand, that there is here a tacit allusion to Squire Western's significant phrase of *Hanover Rats*.

looking, spring-nailed, velvet-pawed, green-eyed" critics makes his King and Country parties to this sort of sport literary, you have not much chance of escaping out of his clutches in a whole skin. Treachery becomes a principle with them, and mischief a conscience, that is, a livelihood. They not only *damn* the work in the lump, but vilify and traduce the author, and substitute lying abuse and sheer malignity for sense and satire. To have written a popular work is as much as a man's character is worth, and sometimes his life, if he does not happen to be on the right side of the question. The way in which they set about *stultifying* an adversary is not to accuse you of faults, or to exaggerate those which you may really have, but they deny that you have any merits at all, least of all, those that the world have given you credit for; bless themselves from understanding a single sentence in a whole volume; and unless you are ready to subscribe to all their articles of peace, will not allow you to be qualified to write your own name. It is not a question of literary discussion, but of political proscription. It is a mark of loyalty and patriotism to extend no quarter to those of the opposite party. Instead of replying to your arguments,

they call you names, put words and opinions into your mouth which you have never uttered, and consider it a species of misprision of treason to admit that a Whig author knows any thing of common sense or English. The only chance of putting a stop to this unfair mode of dealing would perhaps be to make a few reprisals by way of example. The Court-party boast some writers who have a reputation to lose, and who would not like to have their names dragged through the kennel of dirty abuse and vulgar obloquy. What silenced the masked battery of Blackwood's Magazine was the implication of the name of Sir Walter Scott in some remarks upon it—(an honour of which it seems that extraordinary person was not ambitious)—to be “pilloried on infamy's high stage” was a distinction and an amusement to the other gentlemen concerned in that praiseworthy publication. I was complaining not long ago of this prostitution of literary criticism as peculiar to our own times, when I was told that it was just as bad in the time of Pope and Dryden, and indeed worse, inasmuch as we have no Popes or Drydens now on the obnoxious side to be nicknamed, metamorphosed into scarecrows, and impaled alive by bigots and dunces.

I shall not pretend to say how far this remark may be true. The English (it must be owned) are rather a foul-mouthed nation.

Besides temporary or accidental biases of this kind, there seem to be sects and parties in taste and criticism (with a set of appropriate watch-words) coeval with the arts of composition, and that will last as long as the difference with which men's minds are originally constituted. There are some who are all for the elegance of an author's style, and some who are equally delighted with simplicity. The last refer you to Swift as a model of English prose—thinking all other writers sophisticated and naught—the former prefer the more ornamented and sparkling periods of Junius or Gibbon. It is to no purpose to think of bringing about an understanding between these opposite factions. It is a natural difference of temperament and constitution of mind. The one will never relish the antithetical point and perpetual glitter of the artificial prose-style; as the plain unperverted English idiom will always appear trite and insipid to the others. A toleration, not an uniformity of opinion is as much as can be expected in this case: and both sides may acknowledge, without imputation on their taste or consistency, that these different writers excelled each in their way. I might remark here that the epithet

elegant is very sparingly used in modern criticism. It has probably gone out of fashion with the appearance of the *Lake School*, who, I apprehend, have no such phrase in their vocabulary. Mr. Rogers was, I think, almost the last poet to whom it was applied as a characteristic compliment. At present it would be considered as a sort of diminutive of the title of poet, like the terms *pretty* or *fanciful*, and is banished from the *haut ton* of letters. It may perhaps come into request at some future period.— Again, the dispute between the admirers of Homer and Virgil has never been settled, and never will: for there will always be minds to whom the excellences of Virgil will be more congenial, and therefore more objects of admiration and delight than those of Homer, and *vice versá*. Both are right in preferring what suits them best, the delicacy and selectness of the one, or the fulness and majestic flow of the other. There is the same difference in their tastes that there was in the genius of their two favourites. Neither can the disagreement between the French and English school of tragedy ever be reconciled, till the French become English, or the English French*. Both are right

* Of the two the latter alternative is more likely to happen. We abuse and imitate them. They laugh at but do not imitate us.

in what they admire, both are wrong in condemning the others for what they admire. We see the defects of Racine, they see the faults of Shakespear probably in an exaggerated point of view. But we may be sure of this, that when we see nothing but grossness and barbarism, or insipidity and verbiage in a writer that is the God of a nation's idolatry, it is we and not they who want true taste and feeling. The controversy about Pope and the opposite school in our own poetry comes to much the same thing. Pope's correctness, smoothness, &c. are very good things and much to be commended in him. But it is not to be expected or even desired that others should have these qualities in the same paramount degree, to the exclusion of every thing else. If you like correctness and smoothness of all things in the world, there they are for you in Pope. If you like other things better, such as strength and sublimity, you know where to go for them. Why trouble Pope or any other author for what they have not, and do not profess to give? Those who seem to imply that Pope possessed, besides his own peculiar, exquisite merits, all that is to be found in Shakespear or Milton, are I should hardly think in good earnest. But I do not therefore see that, because this was not the case,

Pope was no poet. We cannot by a little verbal sophistry confound the qualities of different minds, nor force opposite excellences into a union by all the intolerance in the world. We may pull Pope in pieces as long as we please, for not being Shakespear or Milton, as we may carp at them for not being Pope: but this will not make a poet equal to all three. If we have a taste for some one precise style or manner, we may keep it to ourselves and let others have theirs. If we are more catholic in our notions, and want variety of excellence and beauty, it is spread abroad for us to profusion in the variety of books and in the several growth of men's minds, fettered by no capricious or arbitrary rules. Those who would proscribe whatever falls short of a given standard of imaginary perfection, do so not from a higher capacity of taste or range of intellect than others, but to destroy, to "crib and cabin in," all enjoyments and opinions but their own.

We find people of a decided and original, and others of a more general and versatile taste. I have sometimes thought that the most acute and original-minded men made bad critics. They see every thing too much through a particular medium. What does not fall in with their own bias and mode of composition, strikes

them as common-place and factitious. What does not come into the direct line of their vision, they regard idly, with vacant, "lack-lustre eye." The extreme force of their original impressions compared with the feebleness of those they receive at second hand from others, oversets the balance and just proportion of their minds. Men who have fewer native resources, and are obliged to apply oftener to the general stock, acquire by habit a greater aptitude in appreciating what they owe to others. Their taste is not made a sacrifice to their egotism and vanity, and they enrich the soil of their minds with continual accessions of borrowed strength and beauty. I might take this opportunity of observing, that the person of the most refined and least contracted taste I ever knew was the late Joseph Fawcett, the friend of my youth. He was almost the first literary acquaintance I ever made, and I think the most candid and unsophisticated. He had a masterly perception of all styles and of every kind and degree of excellence, sublime or beautiful, from Milton's *Paradise Lost* to Shenstone's *Pastoral Ballad*, from Butler's *Analogy* down to Humphry Clinker. If you had a favourite author, he had read him too, and knew all the best morsels, the subtle *traits*, the capital touches. "Do you

like Sterne?"—"Yes, to be sure," he would say, "I should deserve to be hanged, if I didn't!" His repeating some parts of *Comus* with his fine, deep, mellow-toned voice, particularly the lines, "I have heard my mother Circe with the Sirens three," &c.—and the enthusiastic comments he made afterwards were a feast to the ear and to the soul. He read the poetry of Milton with the same fervour and spirit of devotion that I have since heard others read their own. "That is the most delicious feeling of all," I have heard him exclaim, "to like what is excellent, no matter whose it is." In this respect he practised what he preached. He was incapable of harbouring a sinister motive, and judged only from what he felt. There was no flaw or mist in the clear mirror of his mind. He was as open to impressions as he was strenuous in maintaining them. He did not care a rush whether a writer was old or new, in prose or in verse—"What he wanted," he said, "was something to make him think." Most men's minds are to me like musical instruments out of tune. Touch a particular key, and it jars and makes harsh discord with your own. They like *Gil Blas*, but can see nothing to laugh at in *Don Quixote*: they adore Richardson, but are disgusted with Fielding. Fawcett had a

taste accommodated to all these. He was not exceptionous. He gave a cordial welcome to all sorts, provided they were the best in their kind. He was not fond of counterfeits or duplicates. His own style was laboured and artificial to a fault, while his character was frank and ingenuous in the extreme. He was not the only individual whom I have known to counteract their natural disposition in coming before the public, and by avoiding what they perhaps thought an inherent infirmity, debar themselves of their real strength and advantages. A heartier friend or honest critic I never coped withal. He has made me feel (by contrast) the want of genuine sincerity and generous sentiment in some that I have listened to since, and convinced me (if practical proof were wanting) of the truth of that text of Scripture—"That had I all knowledge and could speak with the tongues of angels, yet without charity I were nothing!" I would rather be a man of disinterested taste and liberal feeling, to see and acknowledge truth and beauty wherever I found it, than a man of greater and more original genius, to hate, envy, and deny all excellence but my own—but that poor scanty pittance of it (compared with the whole) which I had myself produced!

There is another race of critics who might be designated as the *Occult School*—*verè adepti*. They discern no beauties but what are concealed from superficial eyes, and overlook all that are obvious to the vulgar part of mankind. Their art is the transmutation of styles. By happy alchemy of mind they convert dross into gold—and gold into tinsel. They see farther into a millstone than most others. If an author is utterly unreadable, they can read him for ever: his intricacies are their delight, his mysteries are their study. They prefer Sir Thomas Brown to the Rambler by Dr. Johnson, and Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy to all the writers of the Georgian Age. They judge of works of genius as misers do of hid treasure—it is of no value unless they have it all to themselves. They will no more share a book than a mistress with a friend. If they suspected their favourite volumes of delighting any eyes but their own, they would immediately discard them from the list. Theirs are superannuated beauties that every one else has left off intriguing with, bed-ridden hags, a “stud of night-mares.” This is not envy or affectation, but a natural proneness to singularity, a love of what is odd and out of the way. They must come at their pleasures with difficulty, and support admiration by an uneasy sense of

ridicule and opposition. They despise those qualities in a work which are cheap and obvious. They like a monopoly of taste, and are shocked at the prostitution of intellect implied in popular productions. In like manner, they would chuse a friend or recommend a mistress for gross defects; and tolerate the sweetness of an actress's voice only for the ugliness of her face. Pure pleasures are in their judgment cloying and insipid—

“ An ounce of sour is worth a pound of sweet !”

Nothing goes down with them but what is *caviare* to the multitude. They are eaters of olives and readers of black-letter. Yet they smack of genius, and would be worth any money, were it only for the rarity of the thing!

The last sort I shall mention are *verbal critics*—mere word-catchers, fellows that pick out a word in a sentence and a sentence in a volume, and tell you it is wrong*. These erudite persons constantly find out by anticipation that you are deficient in the smallest things—that you cannot spell certain words or join the nominative case and the verb together, because to do this is the height of their own ambition, and of course

* The title of *Ultra-Crepidarian critics* has been given to a variety of this species.

they must set you down lower than their opinion of themselves. They degrade by reducing you to their own standard of merit; for the qualifications they deny you, or the faults they object are so very insignificant, that to prove yourself possessed of the one or free from the other, is to make yourself doubly ridiculous. Littleness is their element, and they give a character of meanness to whatever they touch. They creep, buzz, and fly-blow. It is much easier to crush than to catch these troublesome insects; and when they are in your power, your self-respect spares them. The race is almost extinct:—one or two of them are sometimes seen crawling over the pages of the Quarterly Review!

ESSAY VII.
ON GREAT AND LITTLE THINGS.

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ON GREAT AND LITTLE THINGS.

“ These little things are great to little man.”

GOLDSMITH.

THE great and the little have, no doubt, a real existence in the nature of things : but they both find pretty much the same level in the mind of man. It is a common measure, which does not always accommodate itself to the size and importance of the objects it represents. It has a certain interest to spare for certain things (and no more) according to its humour and capacity; and neither likes to be stinted in its allowance, nor to muster up an unusual share of sympathy, just as the occasion may require. Perhaps if we could recollect distinctly, we should discover that the two things that have affected us most in the course of our lives have been, one of them of the greatest, and the other of the smallest possible consequence. To let that pass as too fine a speculation, we know

well enough that very trifling circumstances do give us great and daily annoyance, and as often prove too much for our philosophy and forbearance, as matters of the highest moment. A lump of soot spoiling a man's dinner, a plate of toast falling in the ashes, the being disappointed of a ribbon to a cap or a ticket for a ball, have led to serious and almost tragical consequences. Friends not unfrequently fall out and never meet again for some idle misunderstanding, "some trick not worth an egg," who have stood the shock of serious differences of opinion and clashing interests in life; and there is an excellent paper in the *TATLER*, to prove that if a married couple do not quarrel about some point in the first instance not worth contesting, they will seldom find an opportunity afterwards to quarrel about a question of real importance. Grave divines, great statesmen, and deep philosophers are put out of their way by very little things: nay, discreet, worthy people, without any pretensions but to good-nature and common sense, readily surrender the happiness of their whole lives sooner than give up an opinion to which they have committed themselves, though in all likelihood it was the mere turn of a feather which side they should take in the argument. It is the being

balked or thwarted in any thing that constitutes the grievance, the unpardonable affront, not the value of the thing to which we had made up our minds. Is it that we despise little things; that we are not prepared for them; that they take us in our careless, unguarded moments, and tease us out of our ordinary patience by their petty, incessant, insect warfare, buzzing about us and stinging us like gnats; so that we can neither get rid of nor grapple with them, whereas we collect all our fortitude and resolution to meet evils of greater magnitude? Or is it that there is a certain stream of irritability that is continually fretting upon the wheels of life, which finds sufficient food to play with in straws and feathers, while great objects are too much for it, either choke it up, or divert its course into serious and thoughtful interest? Some attempt might be made to explain this in the following manner.

One is always more vexed at losing a game of any sort by a single hole or ace, than if one has never had a chance of winning it. This is no doubt in part or chiefly because the prospect of success irritates the subsequent disappointment. But people have been known to pine and fall sick from holding the next number to the twenty thousand pound prize in the lottery.

Now this could only arise from their being so near winning in fancy, from there seeming to be so thin a partition between them and success. When they were within one of the right number, why could they not have taken the next—it was so easy: this haunts their minds and will not let them rest, notwithstanding the absurdity of the reasoning. It is that the will here has a slight imaginary obstacle to surmount to attain its end; it should appear it had only an exceedingly trifling effort to make for this purpose, that it was absolutely in its power (had it known) to seize the envied prize, and it is continually harassing itself by making the obvious transition from one number to the other, when it is too late. That is to say, the will acts in proportion to its fancied power, to its superiority over immediate obstacles. Now in little or indifferent matters there seems no reason why it should not have its own way, and therefore a disappointment vexes it the more. It grows angry according to the insignificance of the occasion, and frets itself to death about an object, merely because from its very futility there can be supposed to be no real difficulty in the way of its attainment, nor any thing more required for this purpose than a determination of the will. The being hauled of this throws

the mind off its balance, or puts it into what is called *a passion*; and as nothing but an act of voluntary power still seems necessary to get rid of every impediment, we indulge our violence more and more, and heighten our impatience by degrees into a sort of frenzy. The object is the same as it was, but we are no longer as we were. The blood is heated, the muscles are strained. The feelings are wound up to a pitch of agony with the vain strife. The temper is tried to the utmost it will bear. The more contemptible the object or the obstructions in the way to it, the more are we provoked at being hindered by them. It looks like witchcraft. We fancy there is a spell upon us, so that we are hampered by straws and entangled in cobwebs. We believe that there is a fatality about our affairs. It is evidently done on purpose to plague us. A demon is at our elbow to torment and defeat us in every thing, even in the smallest things. We see him sitting and mocking us, and we rave and gnash our teeth at him in return. It is particularly hard that we cannot succeed in any one point, however trifling, that we set our hearts on. We are the sport of imbecility and mischance. We make another desperate effort, and fly out into all the extravagance of impotent rage once

more. Our anger runs away with our reason, because, as there is little to give it birth, there is nothing to check it or recal us to our senses in the prospect of consequences. We take up and rend in pieces the mere toys of humour, as the gusts of wind take up and whirl about chaff and stubble. Passion plays the tyrant, in a grand tragic-comic style, over the Lilliputian difficulties and petty disappointments it has to encounter, gives way to all the fretfulness of grief and all the turbulence of resentment, makes a fuss about nothing because there is nothing to make a fuss about—when an impending calamity, an irretrievable loss, would instantly bring it to its recollection, and tame it in its preposterous career. A man may be in a great passion and give himself strange airs at so simple a thing as a game at ball, for instance; may rage like a wild beast, and be ready to dash his head against the wall about nothing, or about that which he will laugh at the next minute, and think no more of ten minutes after, at the same time that a good smart blow from the ball, the effects of which he might feel as a serious inconvenience for a month, would calm him directly—

“ Anon as patient as the female dove,
His silence will sit drooping.”

The truth is, we pamper little griefs into great

ones, and bear great ones as well as we can. We can afford to dally and play tricks with the one, but the others we have enough to do with, without any of the wantonness and bombast of passion—without the swaggering of Pistol, or the insolence of King Cambyses' vein. To great evils we submit, we resent little provocations. I have before now been disappointed of a hundred pound job and lost half a crown at rackets on the same day, and been more mortified at the latter than the former. That which is lasting we share with the future, we defer the consideration of till to-morrow: that which belongs to the moment we drink up in all its bitterness, before the spirit evaporates. We probe minute mischiefs to the quick; we lacerate, tear, and mangle our bosoms with misfortune's finest, brittlest point, and wreak our vengeance on ourselves and it for good and all. Small pains are more manageable, more within our reach; we can fret and worry ourselves about them, can turn them into any shape, can twist and torture them how we please:—a grain of sand in the eye, a thorn in the flesh only irritates the part, and leaves us strength enough to quarrel and get out of all patience with it:—a heavy blow stuns and takes away all power of sense as well as of resistance. The great and

mighty reverses of fortune, like the revolutions of nature, may be said to carry their own weight and reason along with them: they seem unavoidable and remediless, and we submit to them without murmuring as to a fatal necessity. The magnitude of the events, in which we may happen to be concerned, fills the mind, and carries it out of itself, as it were, into the page of history. Our thoughts are expanded with the scene on which we have to act, and lend us strength to disregard our own personal share in it. Some men are indifferent to the stroke of fate, as before and after earthquakes there is a calm in the air. From the commanding situation whence they have been accustomed to view things, they look down at themselves as only a part of the whole, and can abstract their minds from the pressure of misfortune, by the aid of its very violence. They are projected, in the explosion of events, into a different sphere, far from their former thoughts, purposes, and passions. The greatness of the change anticipates the slow effects of time and reflection:—they at once contemplate themselves from an immense distance, and look up with speculative wonder at the height on which they stood. Had the downfall been less complete, it would have been more galling and borne with

less resignation, because there might still be a chance of remedying it by farther efforts and farther endurance—but *past cure, past hope*. It is chiefly this cause (together with something of constitutional character) which has enabled the greatest man in modern history to bear his reverses of fortune with gay magnanimity, and to submit to the loss of the empire of the world with as little discomposure as if he had been playing a game at chess*. This does not prove by our theory that he did not use to fly into violent passions with Talleyrand for plaguing him with bad news when things went wrong. He was mad at uncertain forebodings of disaster, but resigned to its consummation. A man may dislike impertinence, yet have no quarrel with necessity!

There is another consideration that may take off our wonder at the firmness with which the principals in great vicissitudes of fortune bear their fate, which is, that they are in the secret of its operations, and know that what to others appears chance-medley was unavoidable. The clearness of their perception of all the circumstances converts the uneasiness of doubt into certainty: they have not the qualms of con-

* This Essay was written in January, 1821.

science which their admirers have, who cannot tell how much of the event is to be attributed to the leaders, and how much to unforeseen accidents: they are aware either that the result was not to be helped, or that they did all they could to prevent it.

——— “ Si Pergama dextra
Defendi possent, etiam hac defensa fuissent.”

It is the mist and obscurity through which we view objects that makes us fancy they might have been, or might still be otherwise. The precise knowledge of antecedents and consequents makes men practical as well as philosophical Necessarians.—It is the want of this knowledge which is the principle and soul of gambling, and of all games of chance or partial skill. The supposition is, that the issue is uncertain, and that there is no positive means of ascertaining it. It is dependent on the turn of a die, on the tossing up of a halfpenny: to be fair, it must be a lottery; there is no knowing but by the event; and it is this which keeps the interest alive, and works up the passion little short of madness. There is all the agitation of suspense, all the alternation of hope and fear, of good and bad success, all the eagerness of desire, without the possibility of reducing

this to calculation, that is, of subjecting the increased action of the will to a known rule, or restraining the excesses of passion within the bounds of reason. We see no cause beforehand why the run of the cards should not be in our favour :—we will hear of none afterwards why it should not have been so. As in the absence of all *data* to judge by, we wantonly fill up the blank with the most extravagant expectations, so, when all is over, we obstinately recur to the chance we had previously. There is nothing to tame us down to the event, nothing to reconcile us to our hard luck, for so we think it. We see no reason why we failed (and there was none, any more than why we should succeed)—we think that, reason apart, our will is the next best thing; we still try to have it our own way, and fret, torment, and harrow ourselves up with vain imaginations to effect impossibilities*. We play the game over again: we wonder how it was possible for us to fail. We turn our brain with straining at contradictions, and striving to make things what they are not, or in other

* Losing gamesters thus become desperate, because the continued and violent irritation of the will against a run of ill luck drives it to extremity, and makes it bid defiance to common sense and every consideration of prudence or self-interest.

words, to subject the course of nature to our fantastical wishes. “*If it had been so—if we had done such and such a thing*”—we try it in a thousand different ways, and are just as far off the mark as ever. We appealed to chance in the first instance, and yet, when it has decided against us; we will not give in; and sit down contented with our loss, but refuse to submit to any thing but reason, which has nothing to do with the matter. In drawing two straws, for example, to see which is the longest, there was no apparent necessity we should fix upon the wrong one; it was so easy to have fixed upon the other, nay, at one time we were going to do it—if we had—the mind thus runs back to what was so possible and feasible at one time, while the thing was pending, and would fairly give a bias to causes so slender and insignificant, as the skittle-player bends his body to give a bias to the bowl he has already delivered from his hand, not considering that what is once determined, be the causes ever so trivial or evanescent, is in the individual instance unalterable. Indeed, to be a great philosopher, in the practical and most important sense of the term, little more seems necessary than to be convinced of the truth of the maxim, which the wise man repeated to the daughter of King Cophetna,

That if a thing is, it is, and there is an end of it!

We often make life unhappy in wishing things to have turned out otherwise than they did; merely because that is possible to the imagination which is impossible in fact. I remember when L——'s farce was damned (for damned it was, that's certain) I used to dream every night for a month after (and then I vowed I would plague myself no more about it) that it was revived at one of the Minor or provincial theatres with great success, that such and such retrenchments and alterations had been made in it, and that it was thought *it might do at the other House*. I had heard indeed (this was told in confidence to L——) that *Gentleman Lewis* was present on the night of its performance; and said; that if he had had it, he would have made it; by a few judicious curtailments, "the most popular little thing that had been brought out for some time." How often did I conjure up in recollection the full diapason of applause at the end of the *Prologue*, and hear my ingenious friend in the first row of the pit roar with laughter at his own wit! Then I dwelt with forced complacency on some part in which it had been doing well: then we would consider (in concert)

whether the long, tedious opera of the *Travellers*, which preceded it, had not tired people beforehand, so that they had not spirits left for the quaint and sparkling "wit skirmishes" of the dialogue, and we all agreed it might have gone down after a Tragedy, except L—— himself, who swore he had no hopes of it from the beginning, and that he knew the name of the hero when it came to be discovered could not be got over.—Mr. H——, thou wert damned! Bright shone the morning on the play-bills that announced thy appearance, and the streets were filled with the buzz of persons asking one another if they would go to see Mr. H——, and answering that they would certainly: but before night the gaiety, not of the author, but of his friends and the town was eclipsed, for thou wert damned! Hadst thou been anonymous, thou haply mightst have lived. But thou didst come to an untimely end for thy tricks, and for want of a better name to pass them off!

In this manner we go back to the critical minutes on which the turn of our fate, or that of any one else in whom we are interested, depended; try them over again with new knowledge and sharpened sensibility; and thus think to alter what is irrevocable, and ease for a mo-

ment the pang of lasting regret. So in a game at rackets* (to compare small things with great) I think if at such a point I had followed up my success, if I had not been too secure or over-anxious in another part, if I had played for such an opening, in short, if I had done any thing but what I did and what has proved unfortunate in the result, the chances were all in my favour. But it is merely because I do not know what would have happened in the other case, that I interpret it so readily to my own advantage. I have sometimes lain awake a whole night, trying to serve out the last ball of an interesting game in a particular corner of the court, which I had missed from a nervous feeling. Rackets (I might observe for the sake of the uninformed reader) is, like any other athletic game, very much a thing of skill and practice : but it is also a thing of opinion, "subject to all the skyey influences." If you think you can win, you can win. Faith is necessary to victory. If you hesitate in striking at the ball, it is ten to one but you miss it. If you are apprehensive of committing some particular

* Some of the poets in the beginning of the last century would often set out on a simile by observing—"So in Arabia have I seen a Phœnix!" I confess my illustrations are of a more homely and humble nature.

error (such as striking the ball *foul*) you will be nearly sure to do it. While thinking of that which you are so earnestly bent upon avoiding, your hand mechanically follows the strongest idea, and obeys the imagination rather than the intention of the striker. A run of luck is a fore-runner of success, and courage is as much wanted as skill. No one is however free from nervous sensations at times. A good player may not be able to strike a single stroke if another comes into the court that he has a particular dread of; and it frequently so happens that a player cannot beat another even, though he can give half the game to an equal player, because he has some associations of jealousy or personal pique against the first which he has not towards the last. *Sed hæc hæctenus.* Chess is a game I do not understand, and have not comprehension enough to play at. But I believe, though it is so much less a thing of chance than science or skill, eager players pass whole nights in marching and counter-marching their men and check-mating a successful adversary, supposing that at a certain point of the game, they had determined upon making a particular move instead of the one which they actually did make. I have heard a story of two persons playing at back-gammon, one of whom was so

enraged at losing his match at a particular point of the game, that he took the board and threw it out of the window. It fell upon the head of one of the passengers in the street, who came up to demand instant satisfaction for the affront and injury he had sustained. The losing gamester only asked him if he understood back-gammon, and finding that he did, said, that if upon seeing the state of the game he did not excuse the extravagance of his conduct, he would give him any other satisfaction he wished for. The tables were accordingly brought, and the situation of the two contending parties being explained, the gentleman put up his sword, and went away perfectly satisfied.—To return from this, which to some will seem a digression, and to others will serve as a confirmation of the doctrine I am insisting on.

It is not then the value of the object, but the time and pains bestowed upon it, that determines the sense and degree of our loss. Many men set their minds only on trifles, and have not a compass of soul to take an interest in any thing truly great and important beyond forms and *minutiæ*. Such persons are really men of little minds, or may be complimented with the title of great children,

“ Pleased with a feather, tickled with a straw.”

M 2

Larger objects elude their grasp, while they fasten eagerly on the light and insignificant. They fidget themselves and others to death with incessant anxiety about nothing. A part of their dress that is awry keeps them in a fever of restlessness and impatience; they sit picking their teeth, or paring their nails, or stirring the fire, or brushing a speck of dirt off their coats, while the house or the world tumbling about their ears would not rouse them from their morbid insensibility. They cannot sit still on their chairs for their lives, though, if there were any thing for them to do, they would become immoveable. Their nerves are as irritable as their imaginations are callous and inert. They are addicted to an inveterate habit of littleness and perversity, which rejects every other motive to action or object of contemplation but the daily, teasing, contemptible, familiar, favourite sources of uneasiness and dissatisfaction. When they are of a sanguine instead of a morbid temperament, they become *quidnuncs* and virtuosos—collectors of caterpillars and odd volumes, makers of fishing-rods and curious in watch-chains. Will Wimble dabbled in this way, to his immortal honour. But many others have been less successful. There are those who build their fame on epigrams or epitaphs, and others

who devote their lives to writing the Lord's Prayer in little. Some poets compose and sing their own verses. Which character would they have us think most highly of—the poet or the musician? The Great is One. Some there are who feel more pride in sealing a letter with a head of Homer than ever that old blind bard did in reciting his Iliad. These raise a huge opinion of themselves out of nothing, as there are those who shrink from their own merits into the shade of unconquerable humility. I know one person at least, who would rather be the author of an unsuccessful farce than of a successful tragedy. Repeated mortification has produced an inverted ambition in his mind, and made failure the bitter test of desert. He cannot lift his drooping head to gaze on the gaudy crown of popularity placed within his reach, but casts a pensive, rivetted look downwards to the modest flowers which the multitude trample under their feet. If he had a piece likely to succeed, coming out under all advantages, he would damn it by some ill-timed, wilful jest, and lose the favour of the public, to preserve the sense of his personal identity. “Misfortune,” Shakespear says, “brings a man acquainted with strange bed-fellows:” and it makes our thoughts traitors to ourselves.—

It is a maxim with many—"Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves." Those only put it in practice successfully who think more of the pence than of the pounds. To such, a large sum is less than a small one. Great speculations, great returns are to them extravagant or imaginary: a few hundreds a year are something *snug* and comfortable. Persons who have been used to a petty, huckstering way of life cannot enlarge their apprehensions to a notion of any thing better. Instead of launching out into greater expense and liberality with the tide of fortune, they draw back with the fear of consequences, and think to succeed on a broader scale by dint of meanness and parsimony. My uncle Toby frequently caught Trim standing up behind his chair, when he had told him to be seated. What the corporal did out of respect, others would do out of servility. The menial character does not wear out in three or four generations. You cannot keep some people out of the kitchen, merely because their grandfathers or grandmothers came out of it. A poor man and his wife walking along in the neighbourhood of Portland-place, he said to her peevishly, "What is the use of walking along these fine streets and squares? Let us turn down some alley!"

He felt he should be more at home there. L—— said of an old acquaintance of his, that when he was young, he wanted to be a tailor, but had not spirit! This is the misery of unequal matches. The woman cannot easily forget, or think that others forget, her origin; and with perhaps superior sense and beauty, keeps painfully in the back-ground. It is worse when she braves this conscious feeling, and displays all the insolence of the upstart and affected fine-lady. But shouldst thou ever, my Infelice, grace my home with thy loved presence, as thou hast cheered my hopes with thy smile, thou wilt conquer all hearts with thy prevailing gentleness, and I will shew the world what Shakespear's women were!—Some gallants set their hearts on princesses; others descend in imagination to women of quality; others are mad after opera-singers. For my part, I am shy even of actresses, and should not think of leaving my card with Madame V——. I am for none of these *bonnes fortunes*; but for a list of humble beauties, servant-maids and shepherd-girls, with their red elbows, hard hands, black stockings and mob-caps, I could furnish out a gallery equal to Cowley's, and paint them half as well. Oh! might I but attempt a description of some of them in poetic prose, Don Juan would forget

his Julia, and Mr. Davison might both print and publish this volume. I agree so far with Horace, and differ with Montaigne. I admire the Clementinas and Clarissas at a distance: the Pamelas and Fannys of Richardson and Fielding make my blood tingle. I have written love-letters to such in my time, *d'un pathétique à faire fendre les rochers*, and with about as much effect as if they had been addressed to stone. The simpletons only laughed, and said, that "those were not the sort of things to gain the affections." I wish I had kept copies in my own justification. What is worse, I have an utter aversion to *blue-stockings*. I do not care a fig for any woman that knows even what *an author* means. If I know that she has read any thing I have written, I cut her acquaintance immediately. This sort of literary intercourse with me passes for nothing. Her critical and scientific acquirements are *carrying coals to Newcastle*. I do not want to be told that I have published such or such a work. I knew all this before. It makes no addition to my sense of power. I do not wish the affair to be brought about in that way. I would have her read my soul: she should understand the language of the heart: she should know what I am, as if she were another self! She should

love me for myself alone. I like myself without any reason:—I would have her do so too. This is not very reasonable. I abstract from my temptations to admire all the circumstances of dress, birth, breeding, fortune; and I would not willingly put forward my own pretensions, whatever they may be. The image of some fair creature is engraven on my inmost soul; it is on that I build my claim to her regard, and expect her to see into my heart, as I see her form always before me. Wherever she treads, pale primroses, like her face, vernal hyacinths, like her brow, spring up beneath her feet, and music hangs on every bough: but all is cold, barren, and desolate without her. Thus I feel and thus I think. But have I ever told her so? No. Or if I did, would she understand it? No. I “hunt the wind, I worship a statue, cry aloud to the desert.” To see beauty is not to be beautiful, to pine in love is not to be loved again.—I always was inclined to raise and magnify the power of Love. I thought that his sweet power should only be exerted to join together the loveliest forms and fondest hearts; that none but those in whom his Godhead shone outwardly, and was inly felt, should ever partake of his triumphs; and I stood and gazed at a distance, as unworthy to

mingle in so bright a throng, and did not (even for a moment) wish to tarnish the glory of so fair a vision by being myself admitted into it. I say this was my notion once, but God knows it was one of the errors of my youth. For coming nearer to look, I saw the maimed, the blind, and the halt enter in, the crooked and the dwarf, the ugly, the old and impotent, the man of pleasure and the man of the world, the dapper and the pert, the vain and shallow boaster, the fool and the pedant, the ignorant and brutal, and all that is farthest removed from earth's fairest-born, and the pride of human life. Seeing all these enter the courts of Love, and thinking that I also might venture in under favour of the crowd, but finding myself rejected, I fancied (I might be wrong) that it was not so much because I was below, as above the common standard. I did feel, but I was ashamed to feel, mortified at my repulse, when I saw the meanest of mankind, the very scum and refuse, all creeping things and every obscene creature, enter in before me. I seemed a species by myself. I took a pride even in my disgrace: and concluded I had elsewhere my inheritance! The only thing I ever piqued myself upon was the writing the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*—a work that no woman ever read, or would

ever comprehend the meaning of. But if I do not build my claim to regard on the pretensions I have, how can I build it on those I am totally without? Or why do I complain and expect to gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Thought has in me cancelled pleasure; and this dark forehead, bent upon truth, is the rock on which all affection has split. And thus I waste my life in one long sigh; nor ever (till too late) beheld a gentle face turned gently upon mine!.....But no! not too late, if that face, pure, modest, downcast, tender, with angel sweetness, not only gladdens the prospect of the future, but sheds its radiance on the past, smiling in tears. A purple light hovers round my head. The air of love is in the room. As I look at my long-neglected copy of the Death of Clorinda, golden gleams play upon the canvas, as they used when I painted it. The flowers of Hope and Joy springing up in my mind, recal the time when they first bloomed there. The years that are fled knock at the door and enter. I am in the Louvre once more. The sun of Austerlitz has not set. It still shines here—in my heart; and he, the son of glory, is not dead, nor ever shall, to me. I am as when my life began. The rainbow is in the sky again. I see the skirts of the

departed years. All that I have thought and felt has not been in vain. I am not utterly worthless, unregarded; nor shall I die and wither of pure scorn. Now could I sit on the tomb of Liberty, and write a Hymn to Love. Oh! if I am deceived, let me be deceived still. Let me live in the Elysium of those soft looks; poison me with kisses, kill me with smiles; but still mock me with thy love*!

Poets chuse mistresses who have the fewest charms, that they may make something out of nothing. They succeed best in fiction, and they apply this rule to love. They make a Goddess of any dowdy. As Don Quixote said, in answer to the matter of fact remonstrances of Sancho, that Dulcinea del Toboso answered the purpose of signalling his valour just as well as the "fairest princess under sky," so any of the fair sex will serve them to write about just as well as another. They take some awkward thing and dress her up in fine words, as children dress up a wooden doll in fine clothes. Perhaps, a fine head of hair, a taper waist, or some other circumstance strikes them, and they make the rest out according to their fancies. They have

* I beg the reader to consider this passage merely as a specimen of the mock-heroic style, and as having nothing to do with any real facts or feelings.

a wonderful knack of supplying deficiencies in the subjects of their idolatry out of the storehouse of their imaginations. They presently translate their favourites to the skies, where they figure with Berenice's locks and Ariadne's crown. This predilection for the unprepossessing and insignificant, I take to arise not merely from a desire in poets to have some subject to exercise their inventive talents upon, but from their jealousy of any pretensions (even those of beauty in the other sex) that might interfere with the continual incense offered to their personal vanity.

Cardinal Mazarine never thought any thing of Cardinal de Retz, after he told him that he had written for the last thirty years of his life with the same pen. Some Italian poet going to present a copy of verses to the Pope, and finding, as he was looking them over in the coach as he went, a mistake of a single letter in the printing, broke his heart of vexation and chagrin. A still more remarkable case of literary disappointment occurs in the history of a countryman of his, which I cannot refrain from giving here, as I find it related. "Anthony Codrus Urceus, a most learned and unfortunate Italian, born near Modena, 1446, was a striking instance," says his biographer, "of

the miseries men bring upon themselves by setting their affections unreasonably on trifles. This learned man lived at Forli, and had an apartment in the palace. His room was so very dark, that he was forced to use a candle in the day-time; and one day, going abroad without putting it out, his library was set on fire, and some papers which he had prepared for the press were burned. The instant he was informed of this ill news, he was affected even to madness. He ran furiously to the palace, and stopping at the door of his apartment, he cried aloud, 'Christ Jesus! what mighty crime have I committed! whom of your followers have I ever injured, that you thus rage with inexpiable hatred against me?' Then turning himself to an image of the Virgin Mary near at hand, 'Virgin (says he) hear what I have to say, for I speak in earnest, and with a composed spirit: if I shall happen to address you in my dying moments, I humbly intreat you not to hear me, nor receive me into Heaven, for I am determined to spend all eternity in Hell!' Those who heard these blasphemous expressions endeavoured to comfort him; but all to no purpose: for, the society of mankind being no longer supportable to him, he left the city, and retired, like a savage, to the deep solitude of a wood. Some

say that he was murdered there by ruffians: others, that he died at Bologna in 1500, after much contrition and penitence."

Perhaps the censure passed at the outset of the anecdote on this unfortunate person is unfounded and severe, when it is said that he brought his miseries on himself "by having set his affections unreasonably on trifles." To others it might appear so: but to himself the labour of a whole life was hardly a trifle. His passion was not a causeless one, though carried to such frantic excess. The story of Sir Isaac Newton presents a strong contrast to the last-mentioned one, who on going into his study and finding that his dog Tray had thrown down a candle on the table, and burnt some papers of great value, contented himself with exclaiming, "Ah! Tray, you don't know the mischief you have done!" Many persons would not forgive the overturning a cup of chocolate so soon.

I remember hearing an instance some years ago of a man of character and property, who through unexpected losses had been condemned to a long and heart-breaking imprisonment, which he bore with exemplary fortitude. At the end of four years, by the interest and exertions of friends, he obtained his discharge with every prospect of beginning the world

afresh, and had made his arrangements for leaving his irksome abode, and meeting his wife and family at a distance of two hundred miles by a certain day. Owing to the miscarriage of a letter, some signature necessary to the completion of the business did not arrive in time, and on account of the informality which had thus arisen, he could not set out home till the return of the post, which was four days longer. His spirit could not brook the delay. He had wound himself up to the last pitch of expectation; he had, as it were, calculated his patience to hold out to a certain point, and then to throw down his load for ever, and he could not find resolution to resume it for a few hours beyond this. He put an end to the intolerable conflict of hope and disappointment in a fit of excruciating anguish. Woes that we have time to foresee and leisure to contemplate break their force by being spread over a larger surface, and borne at intervals; but those that come upon us suddenly, for however short a time, seem to insult us by their unnecessary and uncalled-for intrusion; and the very prospect of relief, when held out and then withdrawn from us, to however small a distance, only frets impatience into agony by tantalising our hopes and wishes; and to rend asunder the thin partition that

separates us from our favourite object, we are ready to burst even the fetters of life itself!

I am not aware that any one has demonstrated how it is that a stronger capacity is required for the conduct of great affairs than of small ones. The organs of the mind, like the pupil of the eye, may be contracted or dilated to view a broader or a narrower surface, and yet find sufficient variety to occupy its attention in each. The material universe is infinitely divisible, and so is the texture of human affairs. We take things in the gross or in the detail, according to the occasion. I think I could as soon get up the budget of Ways and Means for the current year, as be sure of making both ends meet, and paying my rent at quarter-day in a paltry huckster's shop. Great objects move on by their own weight and impulse: great power turns aside petty obstacles; and he, who wields it, is often but the puppet of circumstances, like the fly on the wheel that said, "What a dust we raise!" It is easier to ruin a kingdom and aggrandise one's own pride and prejudices than to set up a green-grocer's stall. An idiot or a madman may do this at any time, whose word is law, and whose nod is fate. Nay, he whose look is obedience, and who understands the silent wishes of the great, may easily

trample on the necks and tread out the liberties of a mighty nation, deriding their strength, and hating it the more from a consciousness of his own meanness. Power is not wisdom, it is true; but it equally ensures its own objects. It does not exact, but dispenses with talent. When a man creates this power, or new-moulds the state by sage counsels and bold enterprises, it is a different thing from overturning it with the levers that are put into his baby hands. In general, however, it may be argued that great transactions and complicated concerns ask more genius to conduct them than smaller ones, for this reason, *viz.* that the mind must be able either to embrace a greater variety of details in a more extensive range of objects, or must have a greater faculty of generalising, or a greater depth of insight into ruling principles, and so come at true results in that way. Buonaparte knew every thing, even to the names of our cadets in the East-India service; but he failed in this, that he did not calculate the resistance which barbarism makes to refinement. He thought that the Russians could not burn Moscow, because the Parisians could not burn Paris. The French think every thing must be French. The Cossacks, alas! do not conform to etiquette: the rudeness of the seasons knows

no rules of politeness!—Some artists think it a test of genius to paint a large picture, and I grant the truth of this position, if the large picture contains more than a small one. It is not the size of the canvas, but the quantity of truth and nature put into it, that settles the point. It is a mistake, common enough on this subject, to suppose that a miniature is more finished than an oil-picture. The miniature is inferior to the oil-picture only because it is less finished, because it cannot follow nature into so many individual and exact particulars. The proof of which is, that the copy of a good portrait will always make a highly finished miniature (see for example Mr. Bone's enamels), whereas the copy of a good miniature, if enlarged to the size of life, will make but a very sorry portrait. Several of our best artists, who are fond of painting large figures, invert this reasoning. They make the whole figure gigantic, not that they may have room for nature, but for the motion of their brush (as if they were painting the side of a house), regarding the extent of canvas they have to cover as an excuse for their slovenly and hasty manner of getting over it; and thus, in fact, leave their pictures nothing at last but over-grown miniatures, but huge caricatures. It is not necessary

in any case (either in a larger or a smaller compass) to go into the details, so as to lose sight of the effect, and decompose the face into porous and transparent molecules, in the manner of Denner, who painted what he saw through a magnifying glass. The painter's eye need not be a microscope, but I contend that it should be a looking-glass, bright, clear, lucid. The *little* in art begins with insignificant parts, with what does not tell in connection with other parts. The true artist will paint not material points, but *moral quantities*. In a word, wherever there is feeling or expression in a muscle or a vein, there is grandeur and refinement too.—I will conclude these remarks with an account of the manner in which the ancient sculptors combined great and little things in such matters. “That the name of Phidias,” says Pliny, “is illustrious among all the nations that have heard of the fame of the Olympian Jupiter, no one doubts; but in order that those may know that he is deservedly praised who have not even seen his works, we shall offer a few arguments, and those of his genius only: nor to this purpose shall we insist on the beauty of the Olympian Jupiter, nor on the magnitude of the Minerva at Athens, though it is twenty-six cubits in height (about thirty-five feet), and is made of

ivory and gold : but we shall refer to the shield, on which the battle of the Amazons is carved on the outer side : on the inside of the same is the fight of the Gods and Giants ; and on the sandals, that between the Centaurs and Lapithæ ; so well did every part of that work display the powers of the art. Again, the sculptures on the pedestal he called the birth of Pandora : there are to be seen in number thirty Gods, the figure of Victory being particularly admirable : the learned also admire the figures of the serpent and the brazen sphinx, writhing under the spear. These things are mentioned, in passing, of an artist never enough to be commended, that it may be seen that he shewed the same magnificence even in small things.”—*Pliny's Natural History*, Book 36.

ESSAY VIII.
ON FAMILIAR STYLE.

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IT is not easy to write a familiar style. Many people mistake a familiar for a vulgar style, and suppose that to write without affectation is to write at random. On the contrary, there is nothing that requires more precision, and, if I may so say, purity of expression, than the style I am speaking of. It utterly rejects not only all unmeaning pomp, but all low, cant phrases, and loose, unconnected, *slipshod* allusions. It is not to take the first word that offers, but the best word in common use; it is not to throw words together in any combinations we please, but to follow and avail ourselves of the true idiom of the language. To write a genuine familiar or truly English style, is to write as any one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes. Or to give another illus-

tration, to write naturally is the same thing in regard to common conversation, as to read naturally is in regard to common speech. It does not follow that it is an easy thing to give the true accent and inflection to the words you utter, because you do not attempt to rise above the level of ordinary life and colloquial speaking. You do not assume indeed the solemnity of the pulpit, or the tone of stage-declamation: neither are you at liberty to gabble on at a venture, without emphasis or discretion, or to resort to vulgar dialect or clownish pronunciation. You must steer a middle course. You are tied down to a given and appropriate articulation, which is determined by the habitual associations between sense and sound, and which you can only hit by entering into the author's meaning, as you must find the proper words and style to express yourself by fixing your thoughts on the subject you have to write about. Any one may mouth out a passage with a theatrical cadence, or get upon stilts to tell his thoughts: but to write or speak with propriety and simplicity is a more difficult task. Thus it is easy to affect a pompous style, to use a word twice as big as the thing you want to express: it is not so easy to pitch upon the very word that exactly fits it. Out of eight or ten words equally

common, equally intelligible, with nearly equal pretensions, it is a matter of some nicety and discrimination to pick out the very one, the preferableness of which is scarcely perceptible, but decisive. The reason why I object to Dr. Johnson's style is, that there is no discrimination, no selection, no variety in it. He uses none but "tall, opaque words," taken from the "first row of the rubric:"—words with the greatest number of syllables, or Latin phrases with merely English terminations. If a fine style depended on this sort of arbitrary pretension, it would be fair to judge of an author's elegance by the measurement of his words, and the substitution of foreign circumlocutions (with no precise associations) for the mother-tongue*. How simple is it to be dignified without ease, to be pompous without meaning! Surely, it is but a mechanical rule for avoiding what is low to be always pedantic and affected. It is clear you cannot use a vulgar English word, if you never use a common English word at all. A fine tact is shewn in adhering to those which are perfectly common, and yet never

* I have heard of such a thing as an author, who makes it a rule never to admit a monosyllable into his vapid verse. Yet the charm and sweetness of Marlow's lines depended often on their being made up almost entirely of monosyllables.

falling into any expressions which are debased by disgusting circumstances, or which owe their signification and point to technical or professional allusions. A truly natural or familiar style can never be quaint or vulgar, for this reason, that it is of universal force and applicability, and that quaintness and vulgarity arise out of the immediate connection of certain words with coarse and disagreeable, or with confined ideas. The last form what we understand by *cant* or *slang* phrases.—To give an example of what is not very clear in the general statement. I should say that the phrase *To cut with a knife*, or *To cut a piece of wood*, is perfectly free from vulgarity, because it is perfectly common: but to *cut an acquaintance* is not quite unexceptionable, because it is not perfectly common or intelligible, and has hardly yet escaped out of the limits of slang phraseology. I should hardly therefore use the word in this sense without putting it in italics as a license of expression, to be received *cum grano salis*. All provincial or bye-phrases come under the same mark of reprobation—all such as the writer transfers to the page from his fire-side or a particular *coterie*, or that he invents for his own sole use and convenience. I conceive that words are like money, not the worse for being

common, but that it is the stamp of custom alone that gives them circulation or value. I am fastidious in this respect, and would almost as soon coin the currency of the realm as counterfeit the King's English. I never invented or gave a new and unauthorised meaning to any word but one single one (the term *impersonal* applied to feelings) and that was in an abstruse metaphysical discussion to express a very difficult distinction. I have been (I know) loudly accused of revelling in vulgarisms and broken English. I cannot speak to that point: but so far I plead guilty to the determined use of acknowledged idioms and common elliptical expressions. I am not sure that the critics in question know the one from the other, that is, can distinguish any medium between formal pedantry and the most barbarous solecism. As an author, I endeavour to employ plain words and popular modes of construction, as were I a chapman and dealer, I should common weights and measures.

The proper force of words lies not in the words themselves, but in their application. A word may be a fine-sounding word, of an unusual length, and very imposing from its learning and novelty, and yet in the connection in which it is introduced, may be quite pointless

and irrelevant. It is not pomp or pretension, but the adaptation of the expression to the idea that clenches a writer's meaning:—as it is not the size or glossiness of the materials, but their being fitted each to its place, that gives strength to the arch; or as the pegs and nails are as necessary to the support of the building as the larger timbers, and more so than the mere shewy, unsubstantial ornaments. I hate any thing that occupies more space than it is worth. I hate to see a load of band-boxes go along the street, and I hate to see a parcel of big words without any thing in them. A person who does not deliberately dispose of all his thoughts alike in cumbrous draperies and flimsy disguises, may strike out twenty varieties of familiar every-day language, each coming somewhat nearer to the feeling he wants to convey, and at last not hit upon that particular and only one, which may be said to be identical with the exact impression in his mind. This would seem to shew that Mr. Cobbett is hardly right in saying that the first word that occurs is always the best. It may be a very good one; and yet a better may present itself on reflection or from time to time. It should be suggested naturally, however, and spontaneously, from a fresh and lively conception of the subject. We seldom

succeed by trying at improvement, or by merely substituting one word for another that we are not satisfied with, as we cannot recollect the name of a place or person by merely plaguing ourselves about it. We wander farther from the point by persisting in a wrong scent; but it starts up accidentally in the memory when we least expected it, by touching some link in the chain of previous association.

There are those who hoard up and make a cautious display of nothing but rich and rare phraseology;—ancient medals, obscure coins, and Spanish pieces of eight. They are very curious to inspect; but I myself would neither offer nor take them in the course of exchange. A sprinkling of archaisms is not amiss; but a tissue of obsolete expressions is more fit *for keep than wear*. I do not say I would not use any phrase that had been brought into fashion before the middle or the end of the last century; but I should be shy of using any that had not been employed by any approved author during the whole of that time. Words, like clothes, get old-fashioned, or mean and ridiculous, when they have been for some time laid aside. Mr. Lamb is the only imitator of old English style I can read with pleasure; and he is so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his authors, that the

idea of imitation is almost done away. There is an inward unction, a marrowy vein both in the thought and feeling, an intuition, deep and lively, of his subject, that carries off any quaintness or awkwardness arising from an antiquated style and dress. The matter is completely his own, though the manner is assumed. Perhaps his ideas are altogether so marked and individual, as to require their point and pungency to be neutralised by the affectation of a singular but traditional form of conveyance. Tricked out in the prevailing costume, they would probably seem more startling and out of the way. The old English authors, Burton, Fuller, Coryate, Sir Thomas Brown, are a kind of mediators between us and the more eccentric and whimsical modern, reconciling us to his peculiarities. I do not however know how far this is the case or not, till he condescends to write like one of us. I must confess that what I like best of his papers under the signature of Elia (still I do not presume, amidst such excellence, to decide what is most excellent) is the account of *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist*, which is also the most free from obsolete allusions and turns of expression—

“ A well of native English undefiled.”

To those acquainted with his admired proto-

types, these Essays of the ingenious and highly gifted author have the same sort of charm and relish, that Erasmus's Colloquies or a fine piece of modern Latin have to the classical scholar. Certainly, I do not know any borrowed pencil that has more power or felicity of execution than the one of which I have here been speaking.

It is as easy to write a gaudy style without ideas, as it is to spread a pallet of shewy colours, or to smear in a flaunting transparency. "What do you read?"—"Words, words, words."—"What is the matter?"—"Nothing," it might be answered. The florid style is the reverse of the familiar. The last is employed as an unvarnished medium to convey ideas; the first is resorted to as a spangled veil to conceal the want of them. When there is nothing to be set down but words, it costs little to have them fine. Look through the dictionary, and cull out a *florilegium*, rival the *tulippomania*. Rouge high enough, and never mind the natural complexion. The vulgar, who are not in the secret, will admire the look of preternatural health and vigour; and the fashionable, who regard only appearances, will be delighted with the imposition. Keep to your sounding generalities, your tinkling phrases, and all will be well.

Swell out an unmeaning truism to a perfect tympany of style. A thought, a distinction is the rock on which all this brittle cargo of verbiage splits at once. Such writers have merely *verbal* imaginations, that retain nothing but words. Or their puny thoughts have dragon-wings, all green and gold. They soar far above the vulgar failing of the *Sermo humi obrepens*—their most ordinary speech is never short of an hyperbole, splendid, imposing, vague, incomprehensible, magniloquent, a cento of sounding common-places. If some of us, whose “ambition is more lowly,” pry a little too narrowly into nooks and corners to pick up a number of “unconsidered trifles,” they never once direct their eyes or lift their hands to seize on any but the most gorgeous, tarnished, thread-bare patch-work set of phrases, the left-off finery of poetic extravagance, transmitted down through successive generations of barren pretenders. If they criticise actors and actresses, a huddled phantasmagoria of feathers, spangles, floods of light, and oceans of sound float before their morbid sense, which they paint in the style of Ancient Pistol. Not a glimpse can you get of the merits or defects of the performers: they are hidden in a profusion of barbarous epithets and wilful rhodomontade. Our hypercritics

are not thinking of these little fantoccini beings—

“That strut and fret their hour upon the stage”—

but of tall phantoms of words, abstractions, *genera* and *species*, sweeping clauses, periods that unite the Poles, forced alliterations, astounding antitheses—

“And on their pens *Fustian* sits plumed.”

If they describe kings and queens, it is an Eastern pageant. The Coronation at either House is nothing to it. We get at four repeated images—a curtain, a throne, a sceptre, and a foot-stool. These are with them the wardrobe of a lofty imagination; and they turn their servile strains to servile uses. Do we read a description of pictures? It is not a reflection of tones and hues which “nature’s own sweet and cunning hand laid on,” but piles of precious stones, rubies, pearls, emeralds, Golconda’s mines, and all the blazonry of art. Such persons are in fact besotted with words, and their brains are turned with the glittering, but empty and sterile phantoms of things. Personifications, capital letters, seas of sunbeams, visions of glory, shining inscriptions, the figures of a transparency, Britannia with her shield, or Hope

leaning on an anchor; make up their stock in trade. They may be considered as *hieroglyphical* writers. Images stand out in their minds isolated and important merely in themselves, without any ground-work of feeling—there is no context in their imaginations. Words affect them in the same way, by the mere sound, that is, by their possible, not by their actual application to the subject in hand. They are fascinated by first appearances, and have no sense of consequences. Nothing more is meant by them than meets the ear: they understand or feel nothing more than meets their eye. The web and texture of the universe, and of the heart of man, is a mystery to them: they have no faculty that strikes a chord in unison with it. They cannot get beyond the daubings of fancy, the varnish of sentiment. Objects are not linked to feelings, words to things, but images revolve in splendid mockery, words represent themselves in their strange rhapsodies. The categories of such a mind are pride and ignorance—pride in outside show, to which they sacrifice every thing, and ignorance of the true worth and hidden structure both of words and things. With a sovereign contempt for what is familiar and natural, they are the slaves of vulgar affectation—of a routine of high-flown

phrases. Scorning to imitate realities, they are unable to invent any thing, to strike out one original idea. They are not copyists of nature, it is true: but they are the poorest of all plagiarists, the plagiarists of words. All is far-fetched, dear-bought, artificial, oriental in subject and allusion: all is mechanical, conventional, vapid, formal, pedantic in style and execution. They startle and confound the understanding of the reader, by the remoteness and obscurity of their illustrations: they soothe the ear by the monotony of the same everlasting round of circuitous metaphors. They are the *mock-school* in poetry and prose. They flounder about between fustian in expression, and bathos in sentiment. They tantalise the fancy, but never reach the head nor touch the heart. Their Temple of Fame is like a shadowy structure raised by Dulness to Vanity, or like Cowper's description of the Empress of Russia's palace of ice, "as worthless as in shew 'twas glittering"—

“ It smiled, and it was cold !”

ESSAY IX.
ON EFFEMINACY OF CHARACTER.

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EFFEMINACY of character arises from a prevalence of the sensibility over the will: or it consists in a want of fortitude to bear pain or to undergo fatigue, however urgent the occasion. We meet with instances of people who cannot lift up a little finger to save themselves from ruin, nor give up the smallest indulgence for the sake of any other person. They cannot put themselves out of their way on any account. No one makes a greater outcry when the day of reckoning comes, or affects greater compassion for the mischiefs they have occasioned; but till the time comes, they feel nothing, they care for nothing. They live in the present moment, are the creatures of the present impulse (whatever it may be)—and beyond that, the universe is nothing to them. The slightest toy countervails the empire of the world; they will not forego the smallest inclination they feel, for any object that can be proposed to them, or

any reasons that can be urged for it. You might as well ask of the gossamer not to wanton in the idle summer air, or of the moth not to play with the flame that scorches it, as ask of these persons to put off any enjoyment for a single instant, or to gird themselves up to any enterprise of pith or moment. They have been so used to a studied succession of agreeable sensations, that the shortest pause is a privation which they can by no means endure—it is like tearing them from their very existence—they have been so inured to ease and indolence, that the most trifling effort is like one of the tasks of Hercules, a thing of impossibility, at which they shudder. They lie on beds of roses, and spread their gauze wings to the sun and summer gale, and cannot bear to put their tender feet to the ground, much less to encounter the thorns and briers of the world. Life for them

——“rolls o'er Elysian flowers its amber stream”——

and they have no fancy for fishing in troubled waters. The ordinary state of existence they regard as something importunate and vain, and out of nature. What must they think of its trials and sharp vicissitudes? Instead of voluntarily embracing pain, or labour, or danger, or death, every sensation must be wound up to

the highest pitch of voluptuous refinement, every motion must be grace and elegance; they live in a luxurious, endless dream, or

“ Die of a rose in aromatic pain !”

Siren sounds must float around them; smiling forms must every where meet their sight; they must tread a soft measure on painted carpets or smooth-shaven lawns; books, arts, jests, laughter, occupy every thought and hour—what have they to do with the drudgery, the struggles, the poverty, the disease or anguish, which are the common lot of humanity! These things are intolerable to them, even in imagination. They disturb the enchantment in which they are lapt. They cause a wrinkle in the clear and polished surface of their existence. They exclaim with impatience and in agony, “ Oh, leave me to my repose !” How “ they shall discourse the freezing hours away, when wind and rain beat dark December down,” or “ bide the pelting of the pitiless storm,” gives them no concern, it never once enters their heads. They close the shutters, draw the curtains, and enjoy or shut out the whistling of the approaching tempest. “ They take no thought for the morrow,” not they. They do not anticipate evils. Let them come when they

will come, they will not run to meet them. Nay more, they will not move one step to prevent them, nor let any one else. The mention of such things is shocking; the very supposition is a nuisance that must not be tolerated. The idea of the trouble, the precautions, the negotiations necessary to obviate disagreeable consequences oppresses them to death, is an exertion too great for their enervated imaginations. They are not like Master Barnardine in *Measure for Measure*, who would not "get up to be hanged"—they would not get up to avoid being hanged. They are completely wrapped up in themselves; but then all their self-love is concentrated in the present minute. They have worked up their effeminate and fastidious appetite of enjoyment to such a pitch, that the whole of their existence, every moment of it, must be made up of these exquisite indulgences; or they will fling it all away, with indifference and scorn. They stake their entire welfare on the gratification of the passing instant. Their senses, their vanity, their thoughtless gaiety have been pampered till they ache at the smallest suspension of their perpetual dose of excitement, and they will purchase the hollow happiness of the next five minutes, by a mortgage on the independence and comfort of years.

They must have their will in every thing, or they grow sullen and peevish like spoiled children. Whatever they set their eyes on, or make up their minds to, they must have that instant. They may pay for it hereafter. But that is no matter. They snatch a joy beyond the reach of fate, and consider the present time sacred, inviolable, unaccountable to that hard, churlish, niggard, inexorable task-master, the future. *Now or never* is their motto. They are madly devoted to the play-thing, the ruling passion of the moment. What is to happen to them a week hence is as if it were to happen to them a thousand years hence. They put off the consideration for another day, and their heedless unconcern laughs at it as a fable. Their life is "a cell of ignorance, travelling a-bed;" their existence is ephemeral; their thoughts are insect-winged, their identity expires with the whim, the folly, the passion of the hour.

Nothing but a miracle can rouse such people from their lethargy. It is not to be expected, nor is it even possible in the natural course of things. Pope's striking exclamation,

" Oh ! blindness to the future kindly given,
That each may fill the circuit mark'd by Heaven!"

hardly applies here ; namely, to evils that stare us in the face, and that might be averted with the least prudence or resolution. But nothing can be done. How should it? A slight evil, a distant danger will not move them ; and a more imminent one only makes them turn away from it in greater precipitation and alarm. The more desperate their affairs grow, the more averse they are to look into them ; and the greater the effort required to retrieve them, the more incapable they are of it. At first, they will not do any thing ; and afterwards, it is too late. The very motives that imperiously urge them to self-reflection and amendment, combine with their natural disposition to prevent it. This amounts pretty nearly to a mathematical demonstration. Ease, vanity, pleasure, are the ruling passions in such cases. How will you conquer these, or wean their infatuated votaries from them ? By the dread of hardship, disgrace, pain ? They turn from them and you who point them out as the alternative, with sickly disgust ; and instead of a stronger effort of courage or self-denial to avert the crisis, hasten it by a wilful determination to pamper the disease in every way, and arm themselves, not with fortitude to bear or to repel the consequences, but

with judicial blindness to their approach. Will you rouse the indolent procrastinator to an irksome but necessary effort, by shewing him how much he has to do? He will only draw back the more for all your intreaties and representations. If of a sanguine turn, he will make a slight attempt at a new plan of life, be satisfied with the first appearance of reform, and relapse into indolence again. If timid and undecided, the hopelessness of the undertaking will put him out of heart with it, and he will stand still in despair. Will you save a vain man from ruin, by pointing out the obloquy and ridicule that await him in his present career? He smiles at your forebodings as fantastical; or the more they are realised around him, the more he is impelled to keep out the galling conviction, and the more fondly he clings to flattery and death. He will not make a bold and resolute attempt to recover his reputation, because that would imply that it was capable of being soiled or injured; or he no sooner meditates some desultory project, than he takes credit to himself for the execution, and is delighted to wear his unearned laurels while the thing is barely talked of. The chance of success relieves the uneasiness of his apprehensions; so that he makes use of the interval only to flatter his

favourite infirmity again. Would you wean a man from sensual excesses by the inevitable consequences to which they lead?—What holds more antipathy to pleasure than pain? The mind given up to self-indulgence, revolts at suffering; and throws it from it as an unaccountable anomaly, as a piece of injustice when it comes. Much less will it acknowledge any affinity with or subjection to it as a mere threat. If the prediction does not immediately come true, we laugh at the prophet of ill: if it is verified, we hate our adviser proportionably, hug our vices the closer, and hold them dearer and more precious, the more they cost us. We resent wholesome counsel as an impertinence, and consider those who warn us of impending mischief, as if they had brought it on our heads. We cry out with the poetical enthusiast—

“ And let us nurse the fond deceit ;
 And what if we must die in sorrow ?
 Who would not cherish dreams so sweet,
 Though grief and pain should come to-morrow ? ”

But oh thou! who didst lend me speech when I was dumb, to whom I owe it that I have not crept on my belly all the days of my life like the serpent, but sometimes lift my forked crest or tread the empyrean, wake thou out of thy mid-day slumbers! Shake off the heavy honey-

dew of thy soul, no longer lulled with that Circean cup, drinking thy own thoughts with thy own ears, but start up in thy promised likeness, and shake the pillared rottenness of the world! Leave not thy sounding words in air, write them in marble, and teach the coming age heroic truths! Up, and wake the echoes of Time! Rich in deepest lore, die not the bedrid churl of knowledge, leaving the survivors unblest! Set, set as thou didst rise in pomp and gladness! Dart like the sun-flower one broad, golden flash of light; and ere thou ascendest thy native sky, shew us the steps by which thou didst scale the Heaven of philosophy, with Truth and Fancy for thy equal guides, that we may catch thy mantle, rainbow-dipped, and still read thy words dear to Memory, dearer to Fame!

There is another branch of this character, which is the trifling or dilatory character. Such persons are always creating difficulties, and unable or unwilling to remove them. They cannot brush aside a cobweb, and are stopped by an insect's wing. Their character is imbecility, rather than effeminacy. The want of energy and resolution in the persons last described, arises from the habitual and inveterate predominance of other feelings and motives; in

these it is a mere want of energy and resolution, that is, an inherent natural defect of vigour of nerve and voluntary power. There is a specific levity about such persons, so that you cannot propel them to any object, or give them a decided *momentum* in any direction or pursuit. They turn back, as it were, on the occasion that should project them forward with manly force and vehemence. They shrink from intrepidity of purpose, and are alarmed at the idea of attaining their end too soon. They will not act with steadiness or spirit, either for themselves or you. If you chalk out a line of conduct for them, or commission them to execute a certain task, they are sure to conjure up some insignificant objection or fanciful impediment in the way, and are withheld from striking an effectual blow by mere feebleness of character. They may be officious, good-natured, friendly, generous in disposition, but they are of no use to any one. They will put themselves to twice the trouble you desire, not to carry your point, but to defeat it; and in obviating needless objections, neglect the main business. If they do what you want, it is neither at the time nor in the manner that you wish. This timidity amounts to treachery; for by always anticipating some misfortune or disgrace, they realise their

unmeaning apprehensions. The little bears sway in their minds over the great: a small inconvenience outweighs a solid and indispensable advantage; and their strongest bias is uniformly derived from the weakest motive. They hesitate about the best way of beginning a thing till the opportunity for action is lost, and are less anxious about its being done than the precise manner of doing it. They will destroy a passage sooner than let an objectionable word pass; and are much less concerned about the truth or the beauty of an image, than about the reception it will meet with from the critics. They alter what they write, not because it is, but because it may possibly be wrong; and in their tremulous solicitude to avoid imaginary blunders, run into real ones. What is curious enough is, that with all this caution and delicacy, they are continually liable to extraordinary oversights. They are in fact so full of all sorts of idle apprehensions, that they do not know how to distinguish real from imaginary grounds of apprehension; and they often give some unaccountable offence either from assuming a sudden boldness half in sport, or while they are secretly pluming themselves on their dexterity in avoiding every thing exceptionable; and the same distraction of motive and short-sightedness which

gets them into scrapes, hinders them from seeing their way out of them. Such persons (often of ingenious and susceptible minds) are constantly at cross-purposes with themselves and others; will neither do things nor let others do them; and whether they succeed or fail, never feel confident or at their ease. They spoil the freshness and originality of their own thoughts by asking contradictory advice; and in befriending others, while they are *about it and about it*, you might have done the thing yourself a dozen times over.

There is nothing more to be esteemed than a manly firmness and decision of character. I like a person who knows his own mind and sticks to it; who sees at once what is to be done in given circumstances and does it. He does not beat about the bush for difficulties or excuses, but goes the shortest and most effectual way to work to attain his own ends, or to accomplish a useful object. If he can serve you, he will do so; if he cannot, he will say so without keeping you in needless suspense, or laying you under pretended obligations. The applying to him in any laudable undertaking is not like stirring "a dish of skimmed milk." There is stuff in him, and it is of the right practicable sort. He is not all his life at hawk and buzzard

whether he shall be a Whig or a Tory, a friend or a foe, a knave or a fool, but thinks that life is short, and that there is no time to play fantastic tricks in it, to tamper with principles, or trifle with individual feelings. If he gives you a character, he does not add a damning clause to it: he does not pick holes in you lest others should, or anticipate objections lest he should be thought to be blinded by a childish partiality. His object is to serve you; and not to play a game into your enemies' hands.

“ A generous friendship no cold medium knows,
Burns with one love, with one resentment glows.”

I should be sorry for any one to say what he did not think of me; but I should not be pleased to see him slink out of his acknowledged opinion, lest it should not be confirmed by malice or stupidity. He who is well acquainted and well inclined to you ought to give the tone, not to receive it from others, and may set it to what key he pleases in certain cases.

There are those of whom it has been said, that to them an obligation is a reason for not doing any thing, and there are others who are invariably led to do the reverse of what they should. The last are perverse, the first impracticable people. Opposed to the effeminate in disposition and manners are the coarse and

brutal. As those were all softness and smoothness, these affect or are naturally attracted to whatever is vulgar and violent, harsh and repulsive in tone, in modes of speech, in forms of address, in gesture and behaviour. Thus there are some who ape the lisping of the fine lady, the drawling of the fine gentleman, and others who all their lives delight in and catch the uncouth dialect, the manners and expressions of clowns and hoydens. They are governed by an instinct of the disagreeable, by an appetite and headlong rage for violating decorum, and hurting other people's feelings, their own being excited and enlivened by the shock. They deal in some truths, unpleasant reflections, and unwelcome matters of fact, as the others are all compliment and complaisance, insincerity and insipidity.

We may observe an effeminacy of style, in some degree corresponding to effeminacy of character. Writers of this stamp are great interliners of what they indite, alterers of indifferent phrases, and the plague of printers' devils. By an effeminate style I would be understood to mean one that is all florid, all fine; that cloy's by its sweetness, and tires by its insipidity. Such are what Dryden calls "calm, peaceable writers." They only aim to

please, and never offend by truth or disturb by singularity. Every thought must be beautiful *per se*, every expression equally fine. They do not delight in vulgarisms, but in common places, and dress out unmeaning forms in all the colours of the rainbow. They do not go out of their way to think—that would startle the indolence of the reader: they cannot express a trite thought in common words—that would be a sacrifice of their own vanity. They are not sparing of tinsel, for it costs nothing. Their works should be printed, as they generally are, on hot-pressed paper, with vignette margins. The Della Cruscan school comes under this description, but is now nearly exploded. Lord Byron is a pampered and aristocratic writer, but he is not effeminate, or we should not have his works with only the printer's name to them! I cannot help thinking that the fault of Mr. Keats's poems was a deficiency in masculine energy of style. He had beauty, tenderness, delicacy, in an uncommon degree, but there was a want of strength and substance. His *Endymion* is a very delightful description of the illusions of a youthful imagination, given up to airy dreams—we have flowers, clouds, rainbows, moonlight, all sweet sounds and smells, and Oreads and Dryads flitting by—but there is nothing tangible in it,

nothing marked or palpable—we have none of the hardy spirit or rigid forms of antiquity. He painted his own thoughts and character; and did not transport himself into the fabulous and heroic ages. There is a want of action, of character, and so far, of imagination, but there is exquisite fancy. All is soft and fleshy, without bone or muscle. We see in him the youth, without the manhood of poetry. His genius breathed “ vernal delight and joy.”—“ Like Maia’s son he stood and shook his plumes,” with fragrance filled. His mind was redolent of spring. He had not the fierceness of summer, nor the richness of autumn, and winter he seemed not to have known, till he felt the icy hand of death!



ESSAY X.

WHY DISTANT OBJECTS PLEASE.

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DISTANT objects please, because, in the first place, they imply an idea of space and magnitude, and because, not being obtruded too close upon the eye, we clothe them with the indistinct and airy colours of fancy. In looking at the misty mountain-tops that bound the horizon, the mind is as it were conscious of all the conceivable objects and interests that lie between; we imagine all sorts of adventures in the interim; strain our hopes and wishes to reach the air-drawn circle, or to “descry new lands, rivers, and mountains,” stretching far beyond it: our feelings carried out of themselves lose their grossness and their husk, are rarefied, expanded, melt into softness and brighten into beauty, turning to ethereal mould, sky-tinctured. We drink the air before us, and borrow a more refined existence from objects that hover on the brink of nothing. Where the landscape fades from the dull sight, we fill

the thin, viewless space with shapes of unknown good, and tinge the hazy prospect with hopes and wishes and more charming fears.

“ But thou, oh Hope! with eyes so fair,
What was thy delighted measure?
Still it whisper'd promised pleasure,
And bade the lovely scenes at distance hail!”

Whatever is placed beyond the reach of sense and knowledge, whatever is imperfectly discerned, the fancy pieces out at its leisure; and all but the present moment, but the present spot, passion claims for its own, and brooding over it with wings outspread, stamps it with an image of itself. Passion is lord of infinite space, and distant objects please because they border on its confines, and are moulded by its touch. When I was a boy, I lived within sight of a range of lofty hills, whose blue tops blending with the setting sun had often tempted my longing eyes and wandering feet. At last I put my project in execution, and on a nearer approach, instead of glimmering air woven into fantastic shapes, found them huge lumpish heaps of discoloured earth. I learnt from this (in part) to leave “Yarrow unvisited,” and not idly to disturb a dream of good!

Distance of time has much the same effect

as distance of place. It is not surprising that fancy colours the prospect of the future as it thinks good, when it even effaces the forms of memory. Time takes out the sting of pain; our sorrows after a certain period have been so often steeped in a medium of thought and passion, that they “unmould their essence;” and all that remains of our original impressions is what we would wish them to have been. Not only the untried steep ascent before us, but the rude, unsightly masses of our past experience presently resume their power of deception over the eye: the golden cloud soon rests upon their heads, and the purple light of fancy clothes their barren sides! Thus we pass on, while both ends of our existence touch upon Heaven! —There is (so to speak) “a mighty stream of tendency” to good in the human mind, upon which all objects float and are imperceptibly borne along: and though in the voyage of life we meet with strong rebuffs, with rocks and quicksands, yet there is “a tide in the affairs men,” a heaving and a restless aspiration of the soul, by means of which, “with sails and tackle torn,” the wreck and scattered fragments of our entire being drift into the port and haven of our desires! In all that relates to the affections, we put the will for the deed:—so that

the instant the pressure of unwelcome circumstances is removed, the mind recoils from their hold, recovers its elasticity, and re-unites itself to that image of good, which is but a reflection and configuration of its own nature. Seen in the distance, in the long perspective of waning years, the meanest incidents, enlarged and enriched by countless recollections, become interesting; the most painful, broken and softened by time, soothe. How any object, that unexpectedly brings back to us old scenes and associations, startles the mind! What a yearning it creates within us; what a longing to leap the intermediate space! How fondly we cling to, and try to revive the impression of all that we then were!

“ Such tricks hath strong imagination ! ”

In truth, we impose upon ourselves, and know not what we wish. It is a cunning artifice, a quaint delusion, by which, in pretending to be what we were at a particular moment of time, we would fain be all that we have since been, and have our lives to come over again. It is not the little, glimmering, almost annihilated speck in the distance, that rivets our attention and “ hangs upon the beatings of our hearts : ” it is the interval that separates us from it, and

of which it is the trembling boundary, that excites all this coil and mighty pudder in the breast. Into that great gap in our being "come thronging soft desires" and infinite regrets. It is the contrast, the change from what we then were, that arms the half-extinguished recollection with its giant-strength, and lifts the fabric of the affections from its shadowy base. In contemplating its utmost verge, we overlook the map of our existence, and re-tread, in apprehension, the journey of life. So it is that in early youth we strain our eager sight after the pursuits of manhood; and, as we are sliding off the stage, strive to gather up the toys and flowers that pleased our thoughtless childhood.

When I was quite a boy, my father used to take me to the Montpelier Tea-gardens at Walworth. Do I go there now? No; the place is deserted, and its borders and its beds o'erturned. Is there, then, nothing that can

" Bring back the hour
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower?"

Oh! yes. I unlock the casket of memory, and draw back the warders of the brain; and there this scene of my infant wanderings still lives unfaded, or with fresher dyes. A new sense

comes upon me, as in a dream; a richer perfume, brighter colours start out; my eyes dazzle; my heart heaves with its new load of bliss, and I am a child again. My sensations are all glossy, spruce, voluptuous, and fine: they wear a candied coat, and are in holiday trim. I see the beds of larkspur with purple eyes; tall holy-oaks, red and yellow; the broad sun-flowers, caked in gold, with bees buzzing round them; wildernesses of pinks, and hot-glowing pionies; poppies run to seed; the sugared lily, and faint mignonette, all ranged in order, and as thick as they can grow; the box-tree borders; the gravel-walks, the painted alcove, the confectionary, the clotted cream:—I think I see them now with sparkling looks; or have they vanished while I have been writing this description of them? No matter; they will return again when I least think of them. All that I have observed since, of flowers and plants, and grass-plots, and of suburb delights, seems, to me, borrowed from “that first garden of my innocence”—to be slips and scions stolen from that bed of memory. In this manner the darlings of our childhood burnish out in the eye of after-years, and derive their sweetest perfume from the first heart-felt sigh of pleasure breathed upon them,

——“ like the sweet south,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour !”

If I have pleasure in a flower-garden, I have in a kitchen-garden too, and for the same reason. If I see a row of cabbage-plants or of peas or beans coming up, I immediately think of those which I used so carefully to water of an evening at W——m, when my day's tasks were done, and of the pain with which I saw them droop and hang down their leaves in the morning's sun. Again, I never see a child's kite in the air, but it seems to pull at my heart. It is to me “ a thing of life.” I feel the twinge at my elbow, the flutter and palpitation, with which I used to let go the string of my own, as it rose in the air and towered among the clouds. My little cargo of hopes and fears ascended with it; and as it made a part of my own consciousness then, it does so still, and appears “ like some gay creature of the element,” my playmate when life was young, and twin-born with my earliest recollections. I could enlarge on this subject of childish amusements, but Mr. Leigh Hunt has treated it so well, in a paper in the *Indicator*, on the productions of the toy-shops of the metropolis, that if I were to insist more on it, I should only pass for an imitator of that

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ingenious and agreeable writer, *and for an indifferent one into the bargain.*

Sounds, smells, and sometimes tastes, are remembered longer than visible objects, and serve, perhaps, better for links in the chain of association. The reason seems to be this: they are in their nature intermittent, and comparatively rare; whereas objects of sight are always before us, and, by their continuous succession, drive one another out. The eye is always open; and between any given impression and its recurrence a second time, fifty thousand other impressions have, in all likelihood, been stamped upon the sense and on the brain. The other senses are not so active or vigilant. They are but seldom called into play. The ear, for example, is oftener courted by silence than noise; and the sounds that break that silence sink deeper and more durably into the mind. I have a more present and lively recollection of certain scents, tastes, and sounds, for this reason, than I have of mere visible images, because they are more original, and less worn by frequent repetition. Where there is nothing interposed between any two impressions, whatever the distance of time that parts them, they naturally seem to touch; and the renewed impression recalls the former one in full force, without dis-

traction or competitor. The taste of barberries, which have hung out in the snow during the severity of a North American winter, I have in my mouth still, after an interval of thirty years; for I have met with no other taste, in all that time, at all like it. It remains by itself, almost like the impression of a sixth sense. But the colour is mixed up indiscriminately with the colours of many other berries, nor should I be able to distinguish it among them. The smell of a brick-kiln carries the evidence of its own identity with it: neither is it to me (from peculiar associations) unpleasant. The colour of brick-dust, on the contrary, is more common, and easily confounded with other colours. Raphael did not keep it quite distinct from his flesh-colour. I will not say that we have a more perfect recollection of the human voice than of that complex picture the human face, but I think the sudden hearing of a well-known voice has something in it more affecting and striking than the sudden meeting with the face: perhaps, indeed, this may be because we have a more familiar remembrance of the one than the other, and the voice takes us more by surprise on that account. I am by no means certain (generally speaking) that we have the ideas of the other senses so accurate and well-made out as those

of visible form : what I chiefly mean is, that the feelings belonging to the sensations of our other organs, when accidentally recalled, are kept more separate and pure. Musical sounds, probably, owe a good deal of their interest and romantic effect to the principle here spoken of. Were they constant, they would become indifferent, as we may find with respect to disagreeable noises, which we do not hear after a time. I know no situation more pitiable than that of a blind fiddler, who has but one sense left (if we except the sense of snuff-taking*) and who has that stunned or deafened by his own villanous noises. Shakespear says,

“ How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night!”

It has been observed, in explanation of this passage, that it is because in the day-time lovers are occupied with one another's faces, but that at night they can only distinguish the sound of each other's voices. I know not how this may be : but I have, ere now, heard a voice break so upon the silence,

“ To angels' 'twas most like,”

and charm the moonlight air with its balmy essence, that the budding leaves trembled to its

* See Wilkie's Blind Fiddler.

accents. Would I might have heard it once more whisper peace and hope (as erst when it was mingled with the breath of spring), and with its soft pulsations lift winged fancy to heaven! But it has ceased, or turned where I no more shall hear it!—Hence, also, we see what is the charm of the shepherd's pastoral reed; and why we hear him, as it were, piping to his flock, even in a picture. Our ears are fancy-stung! I remember once strolling along the margin of a stream, skirted with willows and plashy sedges, in one of those low sheltered valleys on Salisbury Plain, where the monks of former ages had planted chapels and built hermits' cells. There was a little parish-church near, but tall elms and quivering alders hid it from my sight, when, all of a sudden, I was startled by the sound of the full organ pealing on the ear, accompanied by rustic voices and the willing quire of village-maids and children. It rose, indeed, "like an exhalation of rich distilled perfumes." The dew from a thousand pastures was gathered in its softness; the silence of a thousand years spoke in it. It came upon the heart like the calm beauty of death: fancy caught the sound, and faith mounted on it to the skies. It filled the valley like a mist, and still poured out its endless chant, and still

it swells upon the ear, and wraps me in a golden trance, drowning the noisy tumult of the world!

There is a curious and interesting discussion, on the comparative distinctness of our visual and other external impressions, in Mr. Fearn's *Essay on Consciousness*, with which I shall try to descend from this rhapsody to the ground of common sense and plain reasoning again. After observing, a little before, that "nothing is more untrue than that sensations of vision do necessarily leave more vivid and durable ideas than those of grosser senses," he proceeds to give a number of illustrations in support of this position. "Notwithstanding," he says, "the advantages here enumerated in favour of sight, I think there is no doubt that a man will come to forget acquaintance, and many other visible objects, noticed in mature age, before he will in the least forget tastes and smells, of only moderate interest, encountered either in his childhood, or at any time since.

"In the course of voyaging to various distant regions, it has several times happened that I have eaten once or twice of different things that never came in my way before nor since. Some of these have been pleasant, and some scarce better than insipid; but I have no reason to think I have forgot, or much altered the ideas

left by those single impulses of taste ; though here the memory of them certainly has not been preserved by repetition. It is clear I must have seen, as well as tasted those things ; and I am decided that I remember the tastes with more precision than I do the visual sensations.

“ I remember having once, and only once, eat Kangaroo in New Holland ; and having once smelled a baker’s shop, having a peculiar odour, in the city of Bassorah. Now both these gross ideas remain with me quite as vivid as any visual ideas of those places ; and this could not be from repetition, but really from interest in the sensation.

“ Twenty-eight years ago, in the island of Jamaica, I partook (perhaps twice) of a certain fruit, of the taste of which I have now a very fresh idea ; and I could add other instances of that period.

“ I have had repeated proofs of having lost retention of visual objects, at various distances of time, though they had once been familiar. I have not, during thirty years, forgot the delicate, and in itself most trifling sensation, that the palm of my hand used to convey, when I was a boy, trying the different effects of what boys call *light* and *heavy* tops ; but I cannot remember within several shades of the brown

coat which I left off a week ago. If any man thinks he can do better, let him take an ideal survey of his wardrobe, and then actually refer to it for proof.

“ After retention of such ideas, it certainly would be very difficult to persuade me that feeling, taste, and smell can scarce be said to leave ideas, unless, indistinct and obscure ones. . .

“ Shew a Londoner correct models of twenty London churches, and, at the same time, a model of each, which differs, in several considerable features, from the truth, and I venture to say he shall not tell you, in any instance, which is the correct one, except by mere chance.

“ If he is an architect, he may be much more correct than any ordinary person : and this obviously is, because he has felt an interest in viewing these structures, which an ordinary person does not feel : and here interest is the sole reason of his remembering more correctly than his neighbour.

“ I once heard a person quaintly ask another, How many trees there are in St. Paul’s church-yard ? The question itself indicates that many cannot answer it ; and this is found to be the case with those who have passed the church an hundred times : whilst the cause is, that every individual in the busy stream which glides

past St. Paul's is engrossed in various other interests.

“ How often does it happen that we enter a well-known apartment, or meet a well-known friend, and receive some vague idea of visible difference, but cannot possibly find out *what* it is; until at length we come to perceive (or perhaps must be told) that some ornament or furniture is removed, altered, or added in the apartment; or that our friend has cut his hair, taken a wig, or has made any of twenty considerable alterations in his appearance. At other times, we have no perception of alteration whatever, though the like has taken place.

“ It is, however, certain, that sight, apposed with interest, can retain tolerably exact copies of sensations, especially if not too complex; such as of the human countenance and figure. Yet the voice will convince us, when the countenance will not; and he is reckoned an excellent painter, and no ordinary genius, who can make a tolerable likeness from memory. Nay, more, it is a conspicuous proof of the inaccuracy of visual ideas, that it is an effort of consummate art, attained by many years' practice, to take a strict likeness of the human countenance, even when the object is present; and among those cases, where the wilful cheat

of flattery has been avoided, we still find in how very few instances the best painters produce a likeness up to the life, though practice and interest join in the attempt.

“ I imagine an ordinary person would find it very difficult, supposing he had some knowledge of drawing, to afford, from memory, a tolerable sketch of such a familiar object as his curtain, his carpet, or his dressing-gown, if the pattern of either be at all various or irregular; yet he will instantly tell, with precision, either if his snuff or his wine has not the same character it had yesterday, though both these are compounds.

“ Beyond all this I may observe, that a draper, who is in the daily habit of such comparisons, cannot carry in his mind the particular shade of a colour during a second of time; and has no certainty of tolerably matching two simple colours, except by placing the patterns in contact.”—*Essay on Consciousness*, p. 303.

I will conclude the subject of this Essay with observing, that (as it appears to me) a nearer and more familiar acquaintance with persons has a different and more favourable effect than that with places or things. The latter improve (as an almost universal rule) by being removed to a distance: the former, generally at least,

gain by being brought nearer and more home to us. Report or imagination seldom raises any individual so high in our estimation as to disappoint us greatly when we are introduced to him: prejudice and malice constantly exaggerate defects beyond the reality. Ignorance alone makes monsters or bugbears: our actual acquaintances are all very common-place people. The thing is, that as a matter of hearsay or conjecture, we make abstractions of particular vices, and irritate ourselves against some particular quality or action of the person we dislike:—whereas, individuals are concrete existences, not arbitrary denominations or nicknames; and have innumerable other qualities, good, bad, and indifferent, besides the damning feature with which we fill up the portrait or caricature, in our previous fancies. We can scarcely hate any one that we know. An acute observer complained, that if there was any one to whom he had a particular spite, and a wish to let him see it, the moment he came to sit down with him, his enmity was disarmed by some unforeseen circumstance. If it was a Quarterly Reviewer, he was in other respects like any other man. Suppose, again, your adversary turns out a very ugly man, or wants an eye, you are balked in that way:—he is not what you expected, the object

of your abstract hatred and implacable disgust. He may be a very disagreeable person, but he is no longer the same. If you come into a room where a man is, you find, in general, that he has a nose upon his face. "There's sympathy!" This alone is a diversion to your unqualified contempt. He is stupid, and says nothing, but he seems to have something in him when he laughs. You had conceived of him as a rank Whig or Tory—yet he talks upon other subjects. You knew that he was a virulent party-writer; but you find that the man himself is a tame sort of animal enough. He does not bite. That's something. In short, you can make nothing of it. Even opposite vices balance one another. A man may be pert in company, but he is also dull; so that you cannot, though you try, hate him cordially, merely for the wish to be offensive. He is a knave. Granted. You learn, on a nearer acquaintance, what you did not know before—that he is a fool as well; so you forgive him. On the other hand, he may be a profligate public character, and may make no secret of it; but he gives you a hearty shake by the hand, speaks kindly to servants, and supports an aged father and mother. Politics apart, he is a very honest fellow. You are told that a person has carbuncles on his face; but

you have ocular proofs that he is sallow, and pale as a ghost. This does not much mend the matter ; but it blunts the edge of the ridicule, and turns your indignation against the inventor of the lie ; but he is ——, the editor of a Scotch magazine ; so you are just where you were. I am not very fond of anonymous criticism ; I want to know who the author can be : but the moment I learn this, I am satisfied. Even —— would do well to come out of his disguise. It is the mask only that we dread and hate : the man may have something human about him ! The notions, in short, which we entertain of people at a distance, or from partial representations, or from guess-work, are simple, uncompounded ideas, which answer to nothing in reality : those which we derive from experience are mixed modes, the only true, and, in general, the most favourable ones. Instead of naked deformity, or abstract perfection—

“ Those faultless monsters which the world ne'er saw”—

“ the web of our lives is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together : our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipt them not ; and our vices would despair, if they were not encouraged by our virtues.” This was truly and finely said

long ago, by one who knew the strong and weak points of human nature: but it is what sects, and parties, and those philosophers whose pride and boast it is to classify by nicknames, have yet to learn the meaning of!

ESSAY XI.
ON CORPORATE BODIES.

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ON CORPORATE BODIES.

“Corporate bodies have no soul.”

CORPORATE bodies are more corrupt and profligate than individuals, because they have more power to do mischief, and are less amenable to disgrace or punishment. They feel neither shame, remorse, gratitude, nor good-will. The principle of private or natural conscience is extinguished in each individual (we have no moral sense in the breasts of others), and nothing is considered but how the united efforts of the whole (released from idle scruples) may be best directed to the obtaining of political advantages and privileges to be shared as common spoil. Each member reaps the benefit, and lays the blame, if there is any, upon the rest. The *esprit de corps* becomes the ruling passion of every corporate body, compared with which the motives of delicacy or decorum towards others are looked upon as being both impertinent and

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improper. If any person sets up a plea of this sort in opposition to the rest, he is over-ruled, he gets ill-blood, and does no good: he is regarded as an interloper, a *black sheep* in the flock, and is either *sent to Coventry*, or obliged to acquiesce in the notions and wishes of those he associates and is expected to co-operate with. The refinements of private judgment are referred to and negatived in a committee of the whole body, while the projects and interests of the Corporation meet with a secret but powerful support in the self-love of the different members. Remonstrance—opposition, is fruitless, troublesome, invidious: it answers no one end: and a conformity to the sense of the company is found to be no less necessary to a reputation for good-fellowship than to a quiet life. “Self-love and social” here look like the same; and in consulting the interests of a particular class, which are also your own, there is even a show of public virtue. He who is a captious, impracticable, dissatisfied member of his little club or *coterie*, is immediately set down as a bad member of the community in general, as no friend to regularity and order, “a pestilent fellow,” and one who is incapable of sympathy, attachment, or cordial co-operation in any department or undertaking. Thus the most re-

fractory novice in such matters becomes weaned from his obligations to the larger society, which only breed him inconvenience without any adequate recompense, and wedded to a nearer and dearer one, where he finds every kind of comfort and consolation. He contracts the vague and unmeaning character of Man into the more emphatic title of Freeman and Alderman. The claims of an undefined humanity sit looser and looser upon him, at the same time that he draws the bands of his new engagements closer and tighter about him. He loses sight, by degrees, of all common sense and feeling in the petty squabbles, intrigues, feuds, and airs, of affected importance to which he has made himself an accessory. He is quite an altered man. "Really the society were under considerable obligations to him in that last business;" that is to say, in some paltry job or under-hand attempt to encroach upon the rights, or dictate to the understandings of the neighbourhood. In the mean time, they eat, drink, and carouse together. They wash down all minor animosities and unavoidable differences of opinion in pint-bumpers; and the complaints of the multitude are lost in the clatter of plates and the roaring of loyal catches at every quarter's meeting or mayor's feast. The town-hall reels with an unwieldy

sense of self-importance: "the very stones prate" of processions: the common pump creaks in concert with the uncorking of bottles and tapping of beer-barrels: the market-cross looks big with authority. Every thing has an ambiguous, upstart, repulsive air. Circle within circle is formed, an *imperium in imperio*: and the business is to exclude from the first circle all the notions, opinions, ideas, interests, and pretensions, of the second. Hence there arises not only an antipathy to common sense and decency in those things where there is a real opposition of interest or clashing of prejudice, but it becomes a habit and a favourite amusement in those who are "dressed in a little brief authority," to thwart, annoy, insult, and harass others on all occasions where the least opportunity or pretext for it occurs. Spite, bickerings, back-biting, insinuations, lies, jealousies, nicknames, are the order of the day, and nobody knows what it's all about. One would think that the mayor, aldermen, and liverymen, were a higher and more select species of animals than their townsmen; though there is no difference whatever but in their gowns and staff of office! This is the essence of the *esprit de corps*. It is certainly not a very delectable source of contemplation or subject to treat of.

Public bodies are so far worse than the individuals composing them, because the *official* takes place of the *moral sense*. The nerves that in themselves were soft and pliable enough, and responded naturally to the touch of pity, when fastened into a machine of that sort, become callous and rigid, and throw off every extraneous application that can be made to them with perfect apathy. An appeal is made to the ties of individual friendship: the body in general know nothing of them. A case has occurred which strongly called forth the compassion of the person who was witness of it: but the body (or any special deputation of them) were not present when it happened. These little weaknesses and “compunctious visitings of nature” are effectually guarded against, indeed, by the very rules and regulations of the society, as well as by its spirit. The individual is the creature of his feelings of all sorts, the sport of his vices and his virtues—like the fool in *Shakespeare*, “*motley’s his proper wear:*”—corporate bodies are dressed in a moral uniform; mixed motives do not operate there, frailty is made into a system, “diseases are turned into commodities.” Only so much of any one’s natural or genuine impulses can influence him in his artificial capacity as formally comes home to

the aggregate conscience of those with whom he acts, or bears upon the interests (real or pretended), the importance, respectability, and professed objects of the society. Beyond that point the nerve is bound up, the conscience is seared, and the torpedo-touch of so much inert matter operates to deaden the best feelings and harden the heart. Laughter and tears are said to be the characteristic signs of humanity. Laughter is common enough in such places as a set-off to the mock-gravity: but who ever saw a public body in tears? Nothing but a job or some knavery can keep them serious for ten minutes together*.

Such are the qualifications and the apprenticeship necessary to make a man tolerated, to enable him to pass as a cypher, or be admitted as a mere numerical unit, in any corporate

* We sometimes see a whole play-house in tears. But the audience at a theatre, though a public assembly, are not a public body. They are not incorporated into a frame-work of exclusive, narrow-minded interests of their own. Each individual looks out of his own insignificance at a scene, *ideal* perhaps, and foreign to himself, but true to nature; friends, strangers, meet on the common ground of humanity, and the tears that spring from their breasts are those which "sacred pity has engendered." They are a mixed multitude melted into sympathy by remote, imaginary events, not a combination cemented by petty views, and sordid, selfish prejudices.

body: to be a leader and dictator, he must be diplomatic in impertinence, and officious in every dirty work. He must not merely conform to established prejudices; he must flatter them. He must not merely be insensible to the demands of moderation and equity; he must be loud against them. He must not simply fall in with all sorts of contemptible cabals and intrigues; he must be indefatigable in fomenting them, and setting every body together by the ears. He must not only repeat, but invent lies. He must make speeches and write hand-bills; he must be devoted to the wishes and objects of the society, its creature, its jackall, its busy-body, its mouth-piece, its prompter; he must deal in law-cases, in demurrers, in charters, in traditions, in common-places, in logic and rhetoric—in every thing but common sense and honesty. He must (in Mr. Burke's phrase) "disembowel himself of his natural entrails, and be stuffed with paltry, blurred sheets of parchment about the rights" of the privileged few. He must be a concentrated essence, a varnished, powdered, representative of the vices, absurdities, hypocrisy, jealousy, pride, and pragmatism of his party. Such a one by bustle and self-importance and puffing, by flattering one to his face, and abusing another behind his

back, by lending himself to the weaknesses of some, and pampering the mischievous propensities of others, will pass for a great man in a little society.

Age does not improve the morality of public bodies. They grow more and more tenacious of their idle privileges and senseless self-consequence. They get weak and obstinate at the same time. Those, who belong to them, have all the upstart pride and pettifogging spirit of their present character ingrafted on the venerableness and superstitious sanctity of ancient institutions. They are naturally at issue, first with their neighbours, and next with their contemporaries, on all matters of common propriety and judgment. They become more attached to forms, the more obsolete they are; and the defence of every absurd and invidious distinction is a debt which (by implication) they owe to the dead as well as the living. What might once have been of serious practical utility they turn to farce, by retaining the letter when the spirit is gone: and they do this the more, the more glaring the inconsistency and want of sound reasoning; for they think they thus give proof of their zeal and attachment to the abstract principle on which old establishments exist, the ground of prescription and authority.

The greater the wrong, the greater the right, in all such cases. The *esprit de corps* does not take much merit to itself for upholding what is justifiable in any system, or the proceedings of any party, but for adhering to what is palpably injurious. You may exact the first from an enemy: the last is the province of a friend. It has been made a subject of complaint, that the champions of the Church, for example, who are advanced to dignities and honours, are hardly ever those who defend the common principles of Christianity, but those who volunteer to man the out-works, and set up ingenious excuses for the questionable points, the ticklish places in the established form of worship, that is, for those which are attacked from without, and are supposed in danger of being undermined by stratagem, or carried by assault!

The great resorts and seats of learning often outlive in this way the intention of the founders, as the world outgrows them. They may be said to resemble antiquated coquets of the last age, who think every thing ridiculous and intolerable but what was in fashion when they were young, and yet are standing proofs of the progress of taste, and the vanity of human pretensions. Our universities are, in a great measure, become cisterns to hold, not conduits to disperse

knowledge. The age has the start of them; that is, other sources of knowledge have been opened since their formation, to which the world have had access, and have drunk plentifully at those living fountains, but from which they are debarred by the tenor of their charter, and as a matter of dignity and privilege. They have grown poor, like the old grandees in some countries, by subsisting on the inheritance of learning, while the people have grown rich by trade. They are too much in the nature of *fixtures* in intellect: they stop the way in the road to truth; or at any rate (for they do not themselves advance) they can only be of service as a check-weight on the too hasty and rapid career of innovation. All that has been invented or thought in the last two hundred years they take no cognisance of, or as little as possible; they are above it; they stand upon the ancient land-marks, and will not budge; whatever was not known when they were first endowed, they are still in profound and lofty ignorance of. Yet in that period how much has been done in literature, arts, and science, of which (with the exception of mathematical knowledge, the hardest to gainsay or subject to the trammels of prejudice and barbarous *ipse dixit*) scarce any trace is to be found in the

authentic modes of study, and legitimate inquiry, which prevail at either of our Universities! The unavoidable aim of all corporate bodies of learning is not to grow wise, or teach others wisdom, but to prevent any one else from being or seeming wiser than themselves; in other words, their infallible tendency is in the end to suppress inquiry and darken knowledge, by setting limits to the mind of man, and saying to his proud spirit, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther!* It would not be an unedifying experiment to make a collection of the titles of works published in the course of the year by Members of the Universities. If any attempt is to be made to patch up an idle system in policy or legislation, or church-government, it is by a Member of the University: if any hashed-up speculation on an old exploded argument is to be brought forward "in spite of *shame*, in erring reason's spite," it is by a Member of the University: if a paltry project is ushered into the world for combining ancient prejudices with modern time-serving, it is by a Member of the University. Thus we get at a stated supply of annual Defences of the Sinking Fund, Thoughts on the Evils of Education, Treatises on Predestination, and Eulogies on Mr. Malthus, all from the same source, and through the same vent.

If they came from any other quarter nobody would look at them; but they have an *Imprimatur* from dulness and authority: we know that there is no offence in them; and they are stuck in the shop-windows, and read (in the intervals of Lord Byron's works, or the Scotch novels) in cathedral towns and close boroughs!

It is, I understand and believe, pretty much the same in more modern institutions for the encouragement of the Fine Arts. The end is lost in the means: rules take place of nature and genius; cabal and bustle, and struggles for rank and precedence, supersede the study and the love of art. A Royal Academy is a kind of hospital and infirmary for the obliquities of taste and ingenuity—a receptacle where enthusiasm and originality stop and stagnate, and spread their influence no farther, instead of being a school founded for genius, or a temple built to fame. The generality of those who wriggle, or fawn, or beg their way to a seat there, live on their certificate of merit to a good old age, and are seldom heard of afterwards. If a man of sterling capacity gets among them, and minds his own business, he is nobody; he makes no figure in council, in voting, in resolutions or speeches. If he comes forward with plans and views for the good of the Academy and the

advancement of art, he is immediately set upon as a visionary, a fanatic, with notions hostile to the interest and credit of the existing members of the society. If he directs the ambition of the scholars to the study of History, this strikes at once at the emoluments of the profession, who are most of them (by God's will) portrait painters. If he eulogises the Antique, and speaks highly of the Old Masters, he is supposed to be actuated by envy to living painters and native talent. If, again, he insists on a knowledge of anatomy as essential to correct drawing, this would seem to imply a want of it in our most eminent designers. Every plan, suggestion, argument, that has the general purposes and principles of art for its object, is thwarted, scouted, ridiculed, slandered, as having a malignant aspect towards the profits and pretensions of the great mass of flourishing and respectable artists in the country. This leads to irritation and ill-will on all sides. The obstinacy of the constituted authorities keeps pace with the violence and extravagance opposed to it; and they lay all the blame on the folly and mistakes they have themselves occasioned or increased. It is considered as a personal quarrel, not a public question; by which means the dignity of the body is implicated in resenting

the slips and inadvertencies of its members, not in promoting their common and declared objects. In this sort of wretched *tracasserie* the Barrys and H——s stand no chance with the Catons, the Tubbs, and the F——s. Sir Joshua even was obliged to hold himself aloof from them, and Fuseli passes as a kind of non-descript, or one of his own grotesques. The air of an academy, in short, is not the air of genius and immortality; it is too close and heated, and impregnated with the notions of the common sort. A man steeped in a corrupt atmosphere of this description is no longer open to the genial impulses of nature and truth, nor sees visions of ideal beauty, nor dreams of antique grace and grandeur, nor has the finest works of art continually hovering and floating through his uplifted fancy; but the images that haunt it are rules of the academy, charters, inaugural speeches, resolutions passed or rescinded, cards of invitation to a council-meeting, or the annual dinner, prize-medals, and the king's diploma, constituting him a gentleman and esquire. He "wipes out all trivial, fond records;" all romantic aspirations; "the Raphael grace, the Guido air;" and the commands of the academy alone "must live within the book and volume of his brain, unmixed with

baser matter." It may be doubted whether any work of lasting reputation and universal interest can spring up in this soil, or ever has done in that of any academy. The last question is a matter of fact and history, not of mere opinion or prejudice; and may be ascertained as such accordingly. The mighty names of former times rose before the existence of academies; and the three greatest painters, undoubtedly, that this country has produced, Reynolds, Wilson, and Hogarth, were not "dandled and swaddled" into artists in any institution for the fine arts. I do not apprehend that the names of Chantry or Wilkie, (great as one, and considerable as the other of them is,) can be made use of in any way to impugn the jet of this argument. We may find a considerable improvement in some of our artists, when they get out of the vortex for a time. Sir Thomas Lawrence is all the better for having been abstracted for a year or two from Somerset-House; and Mr. Dawe, they say, has been doing wonders in the North. When will he return, and once more "bid Britannia rival Greece?"

Mr. Canning somewhere lays it down as a rule, that corporate bodies are necessarily correct and pure in their conduct, from the knowledge which the individuals composing them

have of one another, and the jealous vigilance they exercise over each other's motives and characters; whereas, people collected into mobs are disorderly and unprincipled from being utterly unknown and unaccountable to each other. This is a curious *pass* of wit. I differ with him in both parts of the dilemma. To begin with the first, and to handle it somewhat cavalierly, according to the model before us: we know, for instance, there is said to be honour among thieves, but very little honesty towards others. Their honour consists in the division of the booty, not in the mode of acquiring it: they do not (often) betray one another, but they will waylay a stranger, or knock out a traveller's brains: they may be depended on in giving the alarm when any of their posts are in danger of being surprised; and they will stand together for their ill-gotten gains to the last drop of their blood. Yet they form a distinct society, and are strictly responsible for their behaviour to one another and to their leader. They are not a mob, but a *gang*, completely in one another's power and secrets. Their familiarity, however, with the proceedings of the *corps*, does not lead them to expect or to exact from it a very high standard of moral honesty; that is out of the question; but they are sure to gain the good

opinion of their fellows by committing all sorts of depredations, fraud, and violence against the community at large. So (not to speak it profanely) some of Mr. C——'s friends may be very respectable people in their way—"all honourable men"—but their respectability is confined within party-limits; every one does not sympathise in the integrity of their views; the understanding between them and the public is not well-defined or reciprocal. Or, suppose a gang of pick-pockets hustle a passenger in the street, and the mob set upon them, and proceed to execute summary justice upon such as they can lay hands on, am I to conclude that the rogues are in the right, because theirs is a system of well-organised knavery, which they settled in the morning, with their eyes one upon the other, and which they regularly review at night, with a due estimate of each other's motives, character, and conduct in the business; and that the honest men are in the wrong, because they are a casual collection of unprejudiced, disinterested individuals, taken at a venture from the mass of the people, acting without concert or responsibility, on the spur of the occasion, and giving way to their instantaneous impulses and honest anger? Mobs, in fact, then, are almost always right in their

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feelings, and often in their judgments, on this very account—that being utterly unknown to and disconnected with each other, they have no point of union or principle of co-operation between them, but the natural sense of justice recognised by all persons in common. They appeal, at the first meeting, not to certain symbols and watch-words privately agreed upon, like Free-Masons, but to the maxims and instincts proper to all the world. They have no other clew to guide them to their object but either the dictates of the heart, or the universally understood sentiments of society, neither of which are likely to be in the wrong. The flame, which bursts out and blazes from popular sympathy, is made of honest, but homely materials. It is not kindled by sparks of wit or sophistry, nor damped by the cold calculations of self-interest. The multitude may be wantonly set on by others, as is too often the case, or be carried too far in the impulse of rage and disappointment; but their resentment, when they are left to themselves, is almost uniformly, in the first instance, excited by some evident abuse and wrong; and the excesses into which they run arise from that very want of foresight and regular system, which is a pledge of the uprightness and heartiness of their intentions.

In short, the only class of persons to whom the above courtly charge of sinister and corrupt motives is not applicable, is that body of individuals which usually goes by the name of the *People!*

ESSAY XII.

**WHETHER ACTORS OUGHT TO SIT
IN THE BOXES?**

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I THINK not; and that for the following reasons, as well as I can give them:—

Actors belong to the public: their persons are not their own property. They exhibit themselves on the stage: that is enough, without displaying themselves in the boxes of the theatre. I conceive that an actor, on account of the very circumstances of his profession, ought to keep himself as much *incognito* as possible. He plays a number of parts disguised, transformed into them as much as he can “by his so potent art,” and he should not disturb this borrowed impression by unmasking before company, more than he can help. Let him go into the pit, if he pleases, to see—not into the first circle, to be seen. He is seen enough without that: he is the centre of an illusion that he is bound to support, both, as it appears to me, by a certain

self-respect which should repel idle curiosity, and by a certain deference to the public, in whom he has inspired certain prejudices which he is covenanted not to break. He represents the majesty of successive kings; he takes the responsibility of heroes and lovers on himself; the mantle of genius and nature falls on his shoulders; we "pile millions" of associations on him, under which he should be "buried quick," and not perk out an inauspicious face upon us, with a plain-cut coat, to say—"What fools you all were!—I am not Hamlet the Dane!"

It is very well and in strict propriety for Mr. Matthews, in his *AT HOME*, after he has been imitating his inimitable Scotchwoman, to slip out as quick as lightning, and appear in the side-box shaking hands with our old friend Jack Bannister. It adds to our surprise at the versatility of his changes of place and appearance, and he had been before us in his own person during a great part of the evening. There was no harm done—no imaginary spell broken—no discontinuity of thought or sentiment. Mr. Matthews is himself (without offence be it spoken) both a cleverer and more respectable man than many of the characters he represents. Not so when

“ O'er the stage the Ghost of Hamlet stalks,
Othello rages, Desdemona mourns,
And poor Monimia pours her soul in love.”

A different feeling then prevails:—close, close the scene upon them, and never break that fine phantasmagoria of the brain. Or if it must be done at all, let us chuse some other time and place for it: let no one wantonly dash the Circean cup from our lips, or dissolve the spirit of enchantment in the very palace of enchantment. Go, Mr. —, and sit somewhere else! What a thing it is, for instance, for any part of an actor's dress to come off unexpectedly while he is playing! What a *cut* it is upon himself and the audience! What an effort he has to recover himself, and struggle through this exposure of the naked truth! It has been considered as one of the triumphs of Garrick's tragic power, that once, when he was playing Lear, his crown of straw came off, and nobody laughed or took the least notice, so much had he identified himself with the character. Was he, after this, to pay so little respect to the feelings he had inspired, as to tear off his tattered robes, and take the old, crazed king with him to play the fool in the boxes?

“ No; let him pass. Vex not his parting spirit,
Nor on the rack of this rough world
Stretch him out farther!”

Some lady is said to have fallen in love with Garrick from being present when he played the part of Romeo, on which he observed, that he would undertake to cure her of her folly if she would only come and see him in Abel Drugger. So the modern tragedian and fine gentleman, by appearing to advantage, and conspicuously, *in propria personâ*, may easily cure us of our predilection for all the principal characters he shines in. "Sir! do you think Alexander looked o' this fashion in his life-time, or was perfumed so? Had Julius Cæsar such a nose? or wore his frill as you do? You have slain I don't know how many heroes 'with a bare bodkin,' the gold pin in your shirt, and spoiled all the fine love speeches you will ever make by picking your teeth with that inimitable air!"

An actor, after having performed his part well, instead of courting farther distinction, should affect obscurity, and "steal most guilty-like away," conscious of admiration that he can support nowhere but in his proper sphere, and jealous of his own and others' good opinion of him, in proportion as he is a darling in the public eye. He cannot avoid attracting disproportionate attention: why should he wish to fix it on himself in a perfectly flat and insignificant part, viz. his own character? It was a bad custom to bring authors on the stage to

crown them. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico est.* Even professed critics, I think, should be shy of putting themselves forward to applaud loudly: any one in a crowd has "a voice potential", as the press: it is either committing their pretensions a little indiscreetly, or confirming their own judgment by a clapping of hands. If you only go and give the cue lustily, the house seems in wonderful accord with your opinions. An actor, like a king, should only appear on state occasions. He loses popularity by too much publicity; or, according to the proverb, *familiarity breeds contempt.* Both characters personate a certain abstract idea, are seen in a fictitious costume, and when they have "shuffled off this more than mortal coil," they had better keep out of the way—the acts and sentiments emanating from themselves will not carry on the illusion of our prepossessions. Ordinary transactions do not give scope to grace and dignity like romantic situations, or prepared pageants, and the *little* is apt to prevail over the *great*, if we come to count the instances.

The motto of a great actor should be *aut Cæsar aut nihil.* I do not see how with his crown, or plume of feathers, he can get through those little box-doors without stooping and squeezing his artificial importance to tatters.

The entrance of the stage is arched so high “that *players* may jet through, and keep their gorgeous turbans on, without good-morrow to the gods!”

The top-tragedian of the day has too large and splendid a train following him to have room for them in one of the dress-boxes. When he appears there, it should be enlarged express for the occasion: for at his heels march the figures, in full costume, of Cato, and Brutus, and Cassius, and of him with the falcon eye, and Othello, and Lear, and crook-backed Richard, and Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and numbers more, and demand entrance along with him, shadows to which he alone lends bodily substance! “The graves yawn and render up their dead to push us from our stools.” There is a mighty bustle at the door, a gibbering and squeaking in the lobbies. An actor’s retinue is imperial, it presses upon the imagination too much, and he should therefore slide unnoticed into the pit. Authors, who are in a manner his makers and masters, sit there contented—why should not he? “He is used to shew himself.” That then is the very reason he should conceal his person at other times. A habit of ostentation should not be reduced to a principle. If I had seen the late Gentleman Lewis fluttering in a prominent

situation in the boxes, I should have been puzzled whether to think of him as the Copper Captain, or as Bobadil, or Ranger, or young Rapid, or Lord Foppington, or fifty other whimsical characters: then I should have got Munden and Quick, and a parcel more of them in my head, till "my brain would have been like a smoke-jack:" I should not have known what to make of it; but if I had seen him in the pit, I should merely have eyed him with respectful curiosity, and have told every one that *that* was Gentleman Lewis. We should have concluded from the circumstance that he was a modest, sensible man: we all knew beforehand that he could show off whenever he pleased!

There is one class of performers that I think is quite exempt from the foregoing reasoning, I mean *retired actors*. Come when they will and where they will, they are welcome to their old friends. They have as good a right to sit in the boxes as children at the holidays. But they do not, somehow, come often. It is but a melancholy recollection with them:—

————— "Then sweet,
Now sad to think on!"

Mrs. Garrick still goes often, and hears the applause of her husband over again in the shouts

of the pit. Had Mrs. Pritchard or Mrs. Clive been living, I am afraid we should have seen little of them—it would have been too *home* a feeling with them. Mrs. Siddons seldom if ever goes, and yet she is almost the only thing left worth seeing there. She need not stay away on account of any theory that I can form. She is out of the pale of all theories, and annihilates all rules. Wherever she sits there is grace and grandeur, there is tragedy personified. Her seat is the undivided throne of the Tragic Muse. She had no need of the robes, the sweeping train, the ornaments of the stage; in herself she is as great as any being she ever represented in the ripeness and plenitude of her power! I should not, I confess, have had the same paramount abstracted feeling at seeing John Kemble there, whom I venerate at a distance, and should not have known whether he was playing off the great man or the great actor :—

“ A little more than kin, and less than kind.”

I know it may be said in answer to all this pretext of keeping the character of the player inviolate—“ What is there more common, in fact, than for the hero of a tragedy to speak the prologue, or than for the heroine, who has been stabbed or poisoned, to revive, and come for-

ward laughing in the epilogue?" As to the epilogue, it is spoken to get rid of the idea of the tragedy altogether, and to ward off the fury of the pit, who may be bent on its damnation. The greatest incongruity you can hit upon is, therefore, the most proper for this purpose. But I deny that the hero of a tragedy, or the principal character in it, is ever pitched upon to deliver the prologue. It is always, by prescription, some walking-shadow, some poor player, who cannot even spoil a part of any consequence. Is there not Mr. C——— always at hand for this purpose, whom the late king pronounced three times to be "a bad actor*?" What is there in common between that accustomed wave of the hand, and the cocked hat under

* Mr. Munden and Mr. C——— went one Sunday to Windsor, to see the King. They passed with other spectators once or twice: at last, his late majesty distinguished Munden in the crowd, and called him to him. After treating him with much cordial familiarity, the king said, "And, pray, who is that with you?" Munden, with many congées, and contortions of face, replied, "An please your majesty, it's Mr. C———, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane." "Oh! yes," said the king, "I know him well—a bad actor, a bad actor, a bad actor!" Why kings should repeat what they say three times, is odd: their saying it once is quite enough. I have always liked Mr. C———'s face since I heard this anecdote, and perhaps the telling it may have the same effect on other people.

the arm, and any passion or person that can be brought forward on the stage? It is not that we can be said to acquire a prejudice against so harmless an actor as Mr. C——; we are born with a prejudice against a speaker of prologues. It is an innate idea: a natural instinct: there is a particular organ in the brain provided for it. Do we not all hate a manager? It is not because he is insolent or impertinent, or fond of making ridiculous speeches, or a notorious puffer, or ignorant, or mean, or vain, but it is because we see him in a coat, waistcoat, and breeches. The stage is the world of fantasy: it is Queen Mab that has invited us to her revels there, and all that have to do with it should wear motley!

Lastly, there are some actors by profession, whose faces we like to see in the boxes or any where else; but it is because they are no actors, but rather gentlemen and scholars, and in their proper places in the boxes, or wherever they are. Does not an actor himself, I would ask, feel conscious and awkward in the boxes, if he thinks that he is known? And does he not sit there in spite of this uneasy feeling, and run the gauntlets of impertinent looks and whispers, only to get a little by-admiration, as he thinks? It is hardly to be supposed that he comes to see

the play, the show. He must have enough of plays and finery. But he wants to see a favourite (perhaps a rival) actor in a striking part. Then the place for him to do this is the pit. Painters, I know, always get as close up to a picture they want to copy as they can ; and I should imagine actors would want to do the same, in order to look into the texture and mechanism of their art. Even theatrical critics can make nothing of a part that they see from the boxes. If you sit in the stage-box, your attention is drawn off by the company and other circumstances. If you get to a distance (so as to be out of the reach of notice) you can neither hear nor see well. For myself, I would as soon take a seat on the top of the Monument to give an account of a first appearance, as go into the second or third tier of boxes to do it. I went, but the other day, with a box-ticket, to see Miss Fanny Brunton come out in Juliet, and Mr. Macready make a first appearance in Romeo ; and though I was told (by a tolerable judge) that the new Juliet was the most elegant figure on the stage, and that Mr. Macready's Romeo was quite beautiful, I vow to God I knew nothing of it. So little could I tell of the matter, that at one time I mistook Mr. Horrebow for Mr. Abbott. I have seen Mr. Kean play Sir

Giles Overreach one night from the front of the pit, and a few nights after from the front boxes, facing the stage. It was another thing altogether. That which had been so lately nothing but flesh and blood, a living fibre, "instinct with fire" and spirit, was no better than a little fantoccini figure, darting backwards and forwards on the stage, starting, screaming, and playing a number of fantastic tricks before the audience. I could account, in the latter instance, for the little approbation of the performance manifested around me, and also for the general scepticism with respect to Mr. Kean's acting, which has been said to prevail among those who cannot condescend to go into the pit, and have not interest in the orchestra—to see him act. They may then stay away altogether. His face is the running comment on his acting, which reconciles the audience to it. Without that index to his mind, you are not prepared for the vehemence and suddenness of his gestures; his pauses are long, abrupt, and unaccountable, if not filled up by the expression; it is in the working of his face that you see the writhing and coiling up of the passions before they make their serpent-spring; the lightning of his eye precedes the hoarse burst of thunder from his voice.

One may go into the boxes, indeed, and criticise acting and actors with Sterne's stop-watch, but no otherwise—" ' And between the nominative case and the verb (which, as your lordship knows, should agree together in number, person, &c.) there was a full pause of a second and two thirds.' ' But was the eye silent—did the look say nothing?'—' I looked only at the stop-watch, my lord.'—'Excellent critic!'—If any other actor, indeed, goes to see Mr. Kean act, with a view to *avoid imitation*, this may be the place, or rather it is the way to run into it, for you see only his extravagances and defects, which are the most easily carried away. Mr. Matthews may translate him into an AT HOME even from the *slips*!—Distinguished actors then ought, I conceive, to set the example of going into the pit, were it only for their own sakes. I remember a trifling circumstance, which I worked up at the time into a confirmation of this theory of mine, engrafted on old prejudice and tradition*. I had got into the middle of the pit, at considerable risk of broken bones, to see Mr. Kean in one of his early parts, when I perceived two young men seated a little be-

* The trunk-maker, I grant, in the Spectator's time, sat in the two-shilling gallery. But that was in the Spectator's time, and not in the days of Mr. Smirke and Mr. Wyatt.

hind me, with a certain space left round them. They were dressed in the height of the fashion, in light drab-coloured great coats, and with their shirt-sleeves drawn down over their hands, at a time when this was not so common as it has since become. I took them for younger sons of some old family at least. One of them, that was very good-looking, I thought might be Lord Byron, and his companion might be Mr. Hobhouse. They seemed to have wandered from another sphere to this our planet to witness a masterly performance to the utmost advantage. This stamped the thing. They were, undoubtedly, young men of rank and fashion; but their taste was greater than their regard for appearances. The pit was, after all, the true resort of thorough-bred critics and amateurs. When there was any thing worth seeing, this was the place; and I began to feel a sort of reflected importance in the consciousness that I also was a critic. Nobody sat near them—it would have seemed like an intrusion. Not a syllable was uttered.—They were two clerks in the Victualling Office!

What I would insist on, then, is this—that for Mr. Kean, or Mr. Young, or Mr. Macready, or any of those that are “cried out upon in the top of the compass” to obtrude themselves

voluntarily or ostentatiously upon our notice, when they are *out of character*, is a solecism in theatricals. For them to thrust themselves forward before the scenes, is to drag us behind them against our will, than which nothing can be more fatal to a true passion for the stage, and which is a privilege that should be kept sacred from impertinent curiosity. Oh! while I live, let me not be admitted (under special favour) to an actor's dressing-room. Let me not see how Cato painted, or how Cæsar combed! Let me not meet the prompt-boys in the passage, nor see the half-lighted candles stuck against the bare walls, nor hear the creaking of machines, or the fiddlers laughing; nor see a Columbine practising a pirouette in sober sadness, nor Mr. Grimaldi's face drop from mirth to sudden melancholy as he passes the side-scene, as if a shadow crossed it, nor witness the long-chinned generation of the pantomime sit twirling their thumbs, nor overlook the fellow who holds the candle for the moon in the scene between Lorenzo and Jessica! Spare me this insight into secrets I am not bound to know. The stage is not a mistress that we are sworn to undress. Why should we look behind the glass of fashion? Why should we prick the bubble that reflects the world, and turn it to a little

soap and water? Trust a little to first appearances—leave something to fancy. I observe that the great puppets of the real stage, who themselves play a grand part, like to get into the boxes over the stage; where they see nothing from the proper point of view, but peep and pry into what is going on like a magpie looking into a marrow-bone. This is just like them. So they look down upon human life, of which they are ignorant. They see the exits and entrances of the players, something that they suspect is meant to be kept from them (for they think they are always liable to be imposed upon): the petty pageant of an hour ends with each scene long before the catastrophe, and the tragedy of life is turned to farce under their eyes. These people laugh loud at a pantomime, and are delighted with clowns and pantaloons. They pay no attention to any thing else. The stage-boxes exist in contempt of the stage and common sense. The private boxes, on the contrary, should be reserved as the receptacle for the officers of state and great diplomatic characters, who wish to avoid, rather than court popular notice!

ESSAY XIII.

**ON THE DISADVANTAGES OF
INTELLECTUAL SUPERIORITY.**

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THE chief disadvantage of knowing more and seeing farther than others, is not to be generally understood. A man is, in consequence of this, liable to start paradoxes, which immediately transport him beyond the reach of the common-place reader. A person speaking once in a slighting manner of a very original-minded man, received for answer—"He strides on so far before you, that he dwindles in the distance!"

Petrarch complains, that "Nature had made him different from other people"—*singular' d'altra genti*. The great happiness of life is, to be neither better nor worse than the general run of those you meet with. If you are beneath them, you are trampled upon; if you are above them, you soon find a mortifying level in their indifference to what you particularly pique yourself upon. What is the use of being moral in a night-cellar, or wise in Bedlam? "To be honest, as this

world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand." So says Shakespear; and the commentators have not added that, under these circumstances, a man is more likely to become the butt of slander than the mark of admiration for being so. "How now, thou particular fellow*?" is the common answer to all such out-of-the-way pretensions. By not doing as those at Rome do, we cut ourselves off from good-fellowship and society. We speak another language, have notions of our own, and are treated as of a different species. Nothing can be more awkward than to intrude with any such far-fetched ideas among the common herd, who will be sure to

—— "Stand all astonied, like a sort of steers,
 'Mongst whom some beast of strange and foreign race
 Unwares is chanced, far straying from his peers:
 So will their ghastly gaze betray their hidden fears."

Ignorance of another's meaning is a sufficient cause of fear, and fear produces hatred: hence the suspicion and rancour entertained against all those who set up for greater refinement and wisdom than their neighbours. . It is in vain to

* Jack Cade's salutation to one who tries to recommend himself by saying he can write and read.—See HENRY VI. Part Second.

think of softening down this spirit of hostility by simplicity of manners, or by condescending to persons of low estate. The more you condescend, the more they will presume upon it; they will fear you less, but hate you more; and will be the more determined to take their revenge on you for a superiority as to which they are entirely in the dark, and of which you yourself seem to entertain considerable doubts. All the humility in the world will only pass for weakness and folly. They have no notion of such a thing. They always put their best foot forward; and argue that you would do the same if you had any such wonderful talents as people say. You had better, therefore, play off the great man at once—hector, swagger, talk big, and ride the high horse over them: you may by this means extort outward respect or common civility; but you will get nothing (with low people) by forbearance and goodnature but open insult or silent contempt. C—— always talks to people about what they don't understand: I, for one, endeavour to talk to them about what they do understand, and find I only get the more ill-will by it. They conceive I do not think them capable of any thing better; that I do not think it worth while, as the vulgar saying is, to *throw a word to a dog*. I once

complained of this to C——, thinking it hard I should be sent to Coventry for not making a prodigious display. He said, “As you assume a certain character, you ought to produce your credentials. It is a tax upon people’s good-nature to admit superiority of any kind, even where there is the most evident proof of it: but it is too hard a task for the imagination to admit it without any apparent ground at all.”

There is not a greater error than to suppose that you avoid the envy, malice, and uncharitableness, so common in the world, by going among people without pretensions. There are no people who have no pretensions; or the fewer their pretensions, the less they can afford to acknowledge yours without some sort of value received. The more information individuals possess, or the more they have refined upon any subject, the more readily can they conceive and admit the same kind of superiority to themselves that they feel over others. But from the low, dull, level sink of ignorance and vulgarity, no idea or love of excellence can arise. You think you are doing mighty well with them; that you are laying aside the buckram of pedantry and pretence, and getting the character of a plain, unassuming, good sort of fellow. It will not do. All the while that you are making

these familiar advances, and wanting to be at your ease, they are trying to recover the wind of you. You may forget that you are an author, an artist, or what not—they do not forget that they are nothing, nor bate one jot of their desire to prove you in the same predicament. They take hold of some circumstance in your dress; your manner of entering a room is different from that of other people; you do not eat vegetables—that's odd; you have a particular phrase, which they repeat, and this becomes a sort of standing joke; you look grave, or ill; you talk, or are more silent than usual; you are in or out of pocket: all these petty, inconsiderable circumstances, in which you resemble, or are unlike other people, form so many counts in the indictment which is going on in their imaginations against you, and are so many contradictions in your character. In any one else they would pass unnoticed, but in a person of whom they had heard so much, they cannot make them out at all. Meanwhile, those things in which you may really excel, go for nothing, because they cannot judge of them. They speak highly of some book which you do not like, and therefore you make no answer. You recommend them to go and see some picture, in which they do not find much to admire. How

are you to convince them that you are right? Can you make them perceive that the fault is in them, and not in the picture, unless you could give them your knowledge? They hardly distinguish the difference between a Correggio and a common daub. Does this bring you any nearer to an understanding? The more you know of the difference, the more deeply you feel it; or the more earnestly you wish to convey it, the farther do you find yourself removed to an immeasurable distance from the possibility of making them enter into views and feelings of which they have not even the first rudiments. You cannot make them see with your eyes, and must judge for themselves.

Intellectual is not like bodily strength. You have no hold of the understanding of others but by their sympathy. Your knowing, in fact, so much more about a subject does not give you a superiority, that is, a power over them, but only renders it the more impossible for you to make the least impression on them. Is it then an advantage to you? It may be, as it relates to your own private satisfaction, but it places a greater gulf between you and society. It throws stumbling blocks in your way at every turn. All that you take most pride and pleasure in is lost upon the vulgar eye. What they are pleased with

is a matter of indifference or of distaste to you. In seeing a number of persons turn over a portfolio of prints from different masters, what a trial it is to the patience, how it jars the nerves to hear them fall into raptures at some commonplace flimsy thing, and pass over some divine expression of countenance without notice, or with a remark that it is very singular-looking? How useless is it in such cases to fret or argue, or remonstrate? Is it not quite as well to be without all this hypercritical, fastidious knowledge, and to be pleased or displeased as it happens, or struck with the first fault or beauty that is pointed out by others? I would be glad almost to change my acquaintance with pictures, with books, and, certainly, what I know of mankind, for any body's ignorance of them!

It is recorded in the life of some worthy (whose name I forget) that he was one of those "who loved hospitality and respect:" and I profess to belong to the same classification of mankind. Civility is with me a jewel. I like a little comfortable cheer, and careless, indolent, chat. I hate to be always wise, or aiming at wisdom. I have enough to do with literary cabals, questions, critics, actors, essay-writing, without taking them out with me for recreation,

and into all companies. I wish at these times to pass for a good-humoured fellow; and good-will is all I ask in return to make good company. I do not desire to be always posing myself or others with the questions of fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute, &c. I must unbend sometimes. I must occasionally lie fallow. The kind of conversation that I affect most is what sort of a day it is, and whether it is likely to rain or hold up fine for to-morrow. This I consider as enjoying the *otium cum dignitate*, as the end and privilege of a life of study. I would resign myself to this state of easy indifference, but I find I cannot. I must maintain a certain pretension, which is far enough from my wish. I must be put on my defence, I must take up the gauntlet continually, or I find I lose ground. "I am nothing, if not critical." While I am thinking what o'clock it is, or how I came to blunder in quoting a well-known passage, as if I had done it on purpose, others are thinking whether I am not really as dull a fellow as I am sometimes said to be. If a drizzling shower patters against the windows, it puts me in mind of a mild spring rain, from which I retired twenty years ago, into a little public house near Wem in Shropshire, and while I saw the plants and shrubs before the door imbibe the dewy

moisture, quaffed a glass of sparkling ale, and walked home in the dusk of evening, brighter to me than noon-day suns at present are! Would I indulge this feeling? In vain. They ask me what news there is, and stare if I say I don't know. If a new actress has come out, why must I have seen her? If a new novel has appeared, why must I have read it? I, at one time, used to go and take a hand at cribbage with a friend, and afterwards discuss a cold sirloin of beef, and throw out a few lack-a-daisical remarks, in a way to please myself, but it would not do long. I set up little pretension, and therefore the little that I did set up was taken from me. As I said nothing on that subject myself, it was continually thrown in my teeth that I was *an author*. From having me at this disadvantage, my friend wanted to peg on a hole or two in the game, and was displeased if I would not let him. If I won of him, it was hard he should be beat by an author. If he won, it would be strange if he did not understand the game better than I did. If I mentioned my favourite game of rackets, there was a general silence, as if this was my weak point. If I complained of being ill, it was asked why I made myself so? If I said such an actor had played a part well, the answer was, there was

a different account in one of the newspapers: If any allusion was made to men of letters, there was a suppressed smile. If I told a humorous story, it was difficult to say whether the laugh was at me or at the narrative. The wife hated me for my ugly face: the servants because I could not always get them tickets for the play; and because they could not tell exactly what an author meant. If a paragraph appeared against any thing I had written, I found it was ready there before me, and I was to undergo a regular *roasting*. I submitted to all this till I was tired, and then I gave it up.

One of the miseries of intellectual pretensions is, that nine-tenths of those you come in contact with do not know whether you are an impostor or not. I dread that certain anonymous criticisms should get into the hands of servants where I go, or that my hatter or shoemaker should happen to read them, who cannot possibly tell whether they are well or ill founded. The ignorance of the world leaves one at the mercy of its malice. There are people whose good opinion or good will you want, setting aside all literary pretensions; and it is hard to lose by an ill report (which you have no means of rectifying) what you cannot gain by a good one. After a *diatribe* in the ———, (which is

taken in by a gentleman who occupies my old apartments on the first floor) my landlord brings me up his bill (of some standing), and on my offering to give him so much in money, and a note of hand for the rest, shakes his head, and says, he is afraid he could make no use of it. Soon after, the daughter comes in, and, on my mentioning the circumstance carelessly to her, replies gravely, "that indeed her father has been almost ruined by bills." *This is the unkindest cut of all.* It is in vain for me to endeavour to explain that the publication in which I am abused is a mere government engine—an organ of a political faction. They know nothing about that. They only know such and such imputations are thrown out; and the more I try to remove them, the more they think there is some truth in them. Perhaps the people of the house are strong Tories—government-agents of some sort. Is it for me to enlighten their ignorance? If I say, I once wrote a thing called Prince Maurice's Parrot, and an Essay on the Regal Character, in the former of which allusion is made to a noble marquis, and in the latter to a great personage (so at least, I am told, it has been construed), and that Mr. Croker has peremptory instructions to retaliate; they cannot conceive what connexion there can be between

me and such distinguished characters. I can get no farther. Such is the misery of pretensions beyond your situation, and which are not backed by any external symbols of wealth or rank, intelligible to all mankind!

The impertinence of admiration is scarcely more tolerable than the demonstrations of contempt. I have known a person, whom I had never seen before, besiege me all dinner-time with asking, what articles I had written in the *Edinburgh Review*? I was at last ashamed to answer to my splendid sins in that way. Others will pick out something not yours, and say, they are sure no one else could write it. By the first sentence they can always tell your style. Now I hate my style to be known; as I hate all *idiosyncrasy*. These obsequious flatterers could not pay me a worse compliment. Then there are those who make a point of reading every thing you write (which is fulsome); while others, more provoking, regularly lend your works to a friend as soon as they receive them. They pretty well know your notions on the different subjects, from having heard you talk about them. Besides, they have a greater value for your personal character than they have for your writings. You explain things better in a common way, when you are not aiming at effect. Others tell

you of the faults they have heard found with your last book, and that they defend your style in general from a charge of obscurity. A friend once told me of a quarrel he had had with a near relation, who denied that I knew how to spell the commonest words. These are comfortable confidential communications, to which authors, who have their friends and excusers, are subject. A gentleman told me, that a lady had objected to my use of the word *learneder*, as bad grammar. He said, he thought it a pity that I did not take more care, but that the lady was perhaps prejudiced, as her husband held a government-office. I looked for the word, and found it in a motto from Butler. I was piqued, and desired him to tell the fair critic, that the fault was not in me, but in one who had far more wit, more learning, and loyalty than I could pretend to. Then, again, some will pick out the flattest thing of yours they can find, to load it with panegyrics; and others tell you (by way of letting you see how high they rank your capacity), that your best passages are failures. L—— has a knack of tasting (or as he would say, *palating*) the insipid: L. H. has a trick of turning away from the relishing morsels you put on his plate. There is no getting the start of some people. Do what you will, they can

do it better ; meet with what success you may, their own good opinion stands them in better stead, and runs before the applause of the world. I once shewed a person of this over-weening turn (with no small triumph I confess) a letter of a very flattering description I had received from the celebrated Count Stendhal, dated Rome. He returned it with a smile of indifference, and said, he had had a letter from Rome himself the day before, from his friend S——! I did not think this “germane to the matter.” G——dw——n pretends I never wrote any thing worth a farthing but my answers to *Vetus*, and that I fail altogether when I attempt to write an essay, or any thing in a short compass.

What can one do in such cases? Shall I confess a weakness? The only set-off I know to these rebuffs and mortifications, is sometimes in an accidental notice or involuntary mark of distinction from a stranger. I feel the force of Horace’s *digito monstrari*—I like to be pointed out in the street, or to hear people ask in Mr. Powell’s court, *which is Mr. H——?* This is to me a pleasing extension of one’s personal identity. Your name so repeated leaves an echo like music on the ear : it stirs the blood like the sound of a trumpet. It shews that other people are curious to see you ; that they think of you,

and feel an interest in you without your knowing it. This is a bolster to lean upon; a lining to your poor, shivering, threadbare opinion of yourself. You want some such cordial to exhausted spirits, and relief to the dreariness of abstract speculation. You are something; and, from occupying a place in the thoughts of others, think less contemptuously of yourself. You are the better able to run the gauntlet of prejudice and vulgar abuse. It is pleasant in this way to have your opinion quoted against yourself, and your own sayings repeated to you as good things. I was once talking with an intelligent man in the pit, and criticising Mr. Knight's performance of Filch. "Ah!" he said, "little Simmons was the fellow to play that character." He added, "There was a most excellent remark made upon his acting it in the EXAMINER (I think it was)—*That he looked as if he had the gallows in one eye and a pretty girl in the other.*" I said nothing, but was in remarkably good humour the rest of the evening. I have seldom been in a company where fives-playing has been talked of, but some one has asked, in the course of it, "Pray did any one ever see an account of one Cavanagh, that appeared some time back in most of the papers? Is it known who wrote it?" These are trying moments. I had a triumph over a

person, whose name I will not mention, on the following occasion. I happened to be saying something about Burke, and was expressing my opinion of his talents in no measured terms, when this gentleman interrupted me by saying, he thought, for his part, that Burke had been greatly over-rated, and then added, in a careless way, "Pray did you read a character of him in the last number of the ————?" "I wrote it!"—I could not resist the antithesis, but was afterwards ashamed of my momentary petulance. Yet no one, that I find, ever spares me.

Some persons seek out and obtrude themselves on public characters, in order, as it might seem, to pick out their failings, and afterwards betray them. Appearances are for it, but truth and a better knowledge of nature are against this interpretation of the matter. Sycophants and flatterers are undesignedly treacherous and fickle. They are prone to admire inordinately at first, and not finding a constant supply of food for this kind of sickly appetite, take a distaste to the object of their idolatry. To be even with themselves for their credulity, they sharpen their wits to spy out faults, and are delighted to find that this answers better than their first employment. It is a course of study, "lively,

audible, and full of vent." They have the organ of wonder and the organ of fear in a prominent degree. The first requires new objects of admiration to satisfy its uneasy cravings: the second makes them crouch to power wherever its shifting standard appears, and willing to curry favour with all parties, and ready to betray any out of sheer weakness and servility. I do not think they mean any harm. At least, I can look at this obliquity with indifference in my own particular case. I have been more disposed to resent it as I have seen it practised upon others, where I have been better able to judge of the extent of the mischief, and the heartlessness and idiot folly it discovered.

I do not think great intellectual attainments are any recommendation to the women. They puzzle them, and are a diversion to the main question. If scholars talk to ladies of what they understand, their hearers are none the wiser: if they talk of other things, they only prove themselves fools. The conversation between Angelica and Foresight, in *Love for Love*, is a receipt in full for all such overstrained nonsense: while he is wandering among the signs of the zodiac, she is standing a tip-toe on the earth. It has been remarked that poets do not choose mistresses very wisely. I believe it is

not choice, but necessity. If they could throw the handkerchief like the Grand Turk, I imagine we should see scarce mortals, but rather goddesses, surrounding their steps, and each exclaiming, with Lord Byron's own Ionian maid—

“ So shalt thou find me ever at thy side,
Here and hereafter, if the last may be !”

Ah! no, these are bespoke, carried off by men of mortal, not ethereal mould, and thenceforth the poet, from whose mind the ideas of love and beauty are inseparable as dreams from sleep, goes on the forlorn hope of the passion, and dresses up the first Dulcinea, that will take compassion on him, in all the colours of fancy. What boots it to complain if the delusion lasts for life, and the rainbow still paints its form in the cloud?

There is one mistake I would wish, if possible, to correct. Men of letters, artists, and others, not succeeding with women in a certain rank of life, think the objection is to their want of fortune, and that they shall stand a better chance by descending lower, where only their good qualities or talents will be thought of. Oh! worse and worse. The objection is to themselves, not to their fortune—to their abstraction, to their absence of mind, to their un-

intelligible and romantic notions. Women of education may have a glimpse of their meaning, may get a clue to their character, but to all others they are thick darkness. If the mistress smiles at their *ideal* advances, the maid will laugh outright; she will throw water over you, get her little sister to listen, send her sweetheart to ask you what you mean, will set the village or the house upon your back; it will be a farce, a comedy, a standing jest for a year, and then the murder will out. Scholars should be sworn at Highgate. They are no match for chamber maids, or wenches at lodging-houses. They had better try their hands on heiresses or ladies of quality. These last have high notions of themselves that may fit some of your epithets! They are above mortality, so are your thoughts! But with low life, trick, ignorance, and cunning, you have nothing in common. Whoever you are, that think you can make a compromise or a conquest there by good nature, or good sense, be warned by a friendly voice, and retreat in time from the unequal contest.

If, as I have said above, scholars are no match for chambermaids, on the other hand, gentlemen are no match for blackguards. The former are on their honour, act on the square; the latter take all advantages, and have no idea of any

other principle. It is astonishing how soon a fellow without education will learn to cheat. He is impervious to any ray of liberal knowledge; his understanding is

“Not pierceable by power of any star”—

but it is porous to all sorts of tricks, chicanery, stratagems, and knavery, by which any thing is to be got. Mrs. Peachum, indeed, says, that “to succeed at the gaming-table, the candidate should have the education of a nobleman.” I do not know how far this example contradicts my theory. I think it is a rule that men in business should not be taught other things. Any one will be almost sure to make money who has no other idea in his head. A college-education, or intense study of abstract truth, will not enable a man to drive a bargain, to over-reach another, or even to guard himself from being over-reached. As Shakespear says, that “to have a good face is the effect of study, but reading and writing come by nature:” so it might be argued, that to be a knave is the gift of fortune, but to play the fool to advantage it is necessary to be a learned man. The best politicians are not those who are deeply grounded in mathematical or in ethical science. Rules stand in the way of expediency. Many a man

has been hindered from pushing his fortune in the world by an early cultivation of his moral sense, and has repented of it at leisure during the rest of his life. A shrewd man said of my father, that he would not send a son of his to school to him on any account, for that by teaching him to speak the truth, he would disqualify him from getting his living in the world!

It is hardly necessary to add any illustration to prove that the most original and profound teachers are not always the most successful or popular writers. This is not merely a temporary disadvantage; but many great philosophers have not only been scouted while they were living, but forgotten as soon as they were dead. The name of Hobbes is perhaps sufficient to explain this assertion. But I do not wish to go farther into this part of the subject, which is obvious in itself. I have said, I believe, enough to take off the air of paradox which hangs over the title of this Essay.

ESSAY XIV.
ON PATRONAGE AND PUFFING.



ESSAY XIV.

ON PATRONAGE AND PUFFING.

“A gentle husher, Vanity by name.”—SPENSER.

A LADY was complaining to a friend of mine of the credulity of people in attending to quack advertisements, and wondering who could be taken in by them—“for that she had never bought but one half-guinea bottle of Dr. ——’s Elixir of Life, and it had done her no sort of good!” This anecdote seemed to explain pretty well what made it worth the doctor’s while to advertise his wares in every newspaper in the kingdom. He would no doubt be satisfied if every delicate, sceptical invalid, in his majesty’s dominions, gave his Elixir one trial, merely to show the absurdity of the thing. We affect to laugh at the folly of those who put faith in nostrums, but are willing to see ourselves whether there is any truth in them.

There is a strong tendency in the human

mind to flatter itself with secret hopes, with some lucky reservation in our own favour, though reason may point out the grossness of the trick in general; and, besides, there is a wonderful power in words, formed into regular propositions, and printed in capital letters, to draw the assent after them, till we have proof of their fallacy. The ignorant and idle believe what they read, as Scotch philosophers demonstrate the existence of a material world, and other learned propositions, from the evidence of their senses. The ocular proof is all that is wanting in either case. As hypocrisy is said to be the highest compliment to virtue, the art of lying is the strongest acknowledgment of the force of truth. We can hardly *believe* a thing to be a lie, though we *know* it to be so. The "puff direct," even as it stands in the columns of the Times newspaper, branded with the title of Advertisement before it, claims some sort of attention and respect for the merits that it discloses, though we think the candidate for public favour and support has hit upon (perhaps) an injudicious way of laying them before the world. Still there may be something in them; and even the outrageous improbability and extravagance of the statement on the very face of it, stagger us, and leave a hankering to inquire

farther into it, because we think the advertiser would hardly have the impudence to hazard such barefaced absurdities without some foundation. Such is the strength of the association between words and things in the mind—so much oftener must our credulity have been justified by the event than imposed upon. If every second story we heard was an invention, we should lose our mechanical disposition to trust to the meaning of sounds, just as when we have met with a number of counterfeit pieces of coin, we suspect good ones; but our implicit assent to what we hear is a proof how much more sincerity and good faith there is in the sum total of our dealings with one another, than artifice and imposture.

“To elevate and surprise” is the great art of quackery and puffing; to raise a lively and exaggerated image in the mind, and take it by surprise before it can recover breath, as it were; so that by having been caught in the trap, it is unwilling to retract entirely—has a secret desire to find itself in the right, and a determination to see whether it is or not. Describe a picture as *lofty*, *imposing*, and *grand*, these words excite certain ideas in the mind like the sound of a trumpet, which are not to be quelled, except by seeing the picture itself, nor even then if it

is viewed by the help of a catalogue, written expressly for the occasion by the artist himself. It is not to be supposed that *he* would say such things of his picture, unless they were allowed by all the world; and he repeats them, on this gentle understanding, till all the world allows them*. So reputation runs in a vicious circle, and merit limps behind it, mortified and abashed at its own insignificance. It has been said that the test of fame or popularity is to consider the number of times your name is repeated by others, or is brought to their recollection in the course of a year. At this rate, a man has his reputation in his own hands, and by the help of puffing and the press, may forestall the voice of posterity, and stun the "groundling" ear of his contemporaries. A name let off in your hearing continually, with some bouncing epithet affixed to it, startles you like the report of a pistol close at your ear: you cannot help the effect upon the imagination, though you know it is perfectly harmless—*vox et præterea nihil*. So, if you see the same name staring you in the face in great letters, at the corner of every

* It is calculated that West cleared some hundred pounds by the catalogues that sold of his great picture of Death riding on the pale Horse.

street, you involuntarily think the owner of it must be a great man to occupy so large a space in the eye of the town. The appeal is made, in the first instance, to the senses, but it sinks below the surface into the mind. There are some, indeed, who publish their own disgrace, and make their names a common by-word and nuisance, notoriety being all that they want. A quack gets himself surreptitiously dubbed Doctor or Knight; and though you may laugh in his face, it pays expenses. Parolles and his drum typify many a modern adventurer, and court-candidate, for unearned laurels and unblushing honours. Of all puffs, lottery-puffs are the most ingenious and most innocent. A collection of them would make an amusing *Vade mecum*. They are still various and the same, with that infinite *ruse* with which they lull the reader at the outset out of all suspicion, the insinuating turn in the middle, the home-thrust at the ruling passion at last, by which your spare cash is conjured clean out of the pocket in spite of resolution, by the same stale, well-known, thousandth-time repeated, artifice of *All prizes* and *No blanks*—a self-evident imposition! Nothing, however, can be a stronger proof of the power of fascinating the public judgment through the eye alone. I know a gentleman

who amassed a considerable fortune (so as to be able to keep his carriage) by printing nothing but lottery placards and hand-bills of a colossal size. Another friend of mine (of no mean talents) was applied to (as a snug thing in the way of business) to write regular lottery-puffs for a large house in the city, and on having a parcel of samples returned on his hands as done in too severe and terse a style, complained quaintly enough, "*That modest merit never could succeed!*" Even Lord Byron, as he tells us, has been accused of writing lottery-puffs. There are various ways of playing one's self off before the public, and keeping one's name alive. The newspapers, the lamp-posts, the walls of empty houses, the shutters of windows, the blank covers of magazines and reviews, are open to every one. I have heard of a man of literary celebrity sitting in his study writing letters of remonstrance to himself, on the gross defects of a plan of education he had just published, and which remained unsold on the bookseller's counter. Another feigned himself dead in order to see what would be said of him in the newspapers, and to excite a sensation in this way. A flashy pamphlet has been run to a five-and-thirtieth edition, and thus ensured the writer a "deathless date" among political charlatans, by regularly striking

off a new title-page to every fifty or a hundred copies that were sold. This is a vile practice. It is an erroneous idea got abroad (and which I will contradict here) that paragraphs are paid for in the leading Journals. It is quite out of the question. A favourable notice of an author, an actress, &c. may be inserted through interest or to oblige a friend, but it must invariably be done for *love*, not *money*!

When I formerly had to do with these sort of critical verdicts, I was generally sent out of the way when any *debutant* had a friend at court, and was to be tenderly handled. For the rest, or those of robust constitutions, I had *carte blanche* given me. Sometimes I ran out of the course, to be sure. Poor Perry! what bitter complaints he used to make, that by *running-a-muck* at lords and Scotchmen I should not leave him a place to dine out at! The expression of his face at these moments, as if he should shortly be without a friend in the world, was truly pitiable. What squabbles we used to have about Kean and Miss Stephens, the only theatrical favourites I ever had! Mrs. Billington had got some notion that Miss Stephens would never make a singer, and it was the torment of Perry's life (as he told me in confidence) that he could not get any two people to be of the same opi-

nion on any one point. I shall not easily forget bringing him my account of her first appearance in the Beggar's Opera. I have reason to remember that article: it was almost the last I ever wrote with any pleasure to myself. I had been down on a visit to my friends near Chertsey, and, on my return, had stopped at an inn at Kingston-upon-Thames, where I had got the Beggar's Opera, and had read it overnight. The next day I walked cheerfully to town. It was a fine sunny morning, in the end of autumn, and as I repeated the beautiful song, "Life knows no return of spring," I meditated my next day's criticism, trying to do all the justice I could to so inviting a subject. I was not a little proud of it by anticipation. I had just then begun to stammer out my sentiments on paper, and was in a kind of honey-moon of authorship. But soon after, my final hopes of happiness, and of human liberty, were blighted nearly at the same time; and since then I have had no pleasure in any thing:—

"And Love himself can flatter me no more."

It was not so ten years since (ten short years since.—Ah! how fast those years run that hurry us away from our last fond dream of bliss!) when I loitered along thy green retreats, oh!

Twickenham, and conned over (with enthusiastic delight) the chequered view, which one of thy favourites drew of human life! I deposited my account of the play at the Morning Chronicle Office in the afternoon, and went to see Miss Stephens as Polly. Those were happy times, in which she first came out in this character, in Mandane, where she sang the delicious air, "If o'er the cruel tyrant, Love," (so as it can never be sung again), in Love in a Village, where the scene opened with her and Miss Matthews in a painted garden of roses and honeysuckles, and "Hope, thou nurse of young Desire," thrilled from two sweet voices in turn. Oh! may my ears sometimes still drink the same sweet sounds, embalmed with the spirit of youth, of health, and joy, but in the thoughts of an instant, but in a dream of fancy, and I shall hardly need to complain! When I got back, after the play, Perry called out, with his cordial, grating voice, "Well, how did she do?" and on my speaking in high terms, answered, that "he had been to dine with his friend the Duke, that some conversation had passed on the subject, he was afraid it was not the thing, it was not the true *sostenuto* style; but as I had written the article" (holding my peroration on the Beggar's Opera carelessly in his hand) "it might pass!" I could

perceive that the rogue licked his lips at it, and had already in imagination "bought golden opinions of all sorts of people" by this very criticism, and I had the satisfaction the next day to meet Miss Stephens coming out of the Editor's room, who had been to thank him for his very flattering account of her.

I was sent to see Kean the first night of his performance in Shylock, when there were about a hundred people in the pit, but from his masterly and spirited delivery of the first striking speech, "On such a day you called me dog," &c. I perceived it was a hollow thing. So it was given out in the Chronicle, but Perry was continually at me as other people were at him, and was afraid it would not last. It was to no purpose I said *it would last*: yet I am in the right hitherto. It has been said, ridiculously, that Mr. Kean was written up in the Chronicle. I beg leave to state my opinion that no actor can be written up or down by a paper. An author may be puffed into notice, or damned by criticism, because his book may not have been read. An artist may be over-rated, or undeservedly decried, because the public is not much accustomed to see or judge of pictures. But an actor is judged by his peers, the play-going public, and must stand or fall by his own merits or de-

fects. The critic may give the tone or have a casting voice where popular opinion is divided ; but he can no more *force* that opinion either way, or wrest it from its base in common-sense and feeling, than he can move Stonehenge. Mr. Kean had, however, physical disadvantages and strong prejudices to encounter, and so far the *liberal* and *independent* part of the press might have been of service in helping him to his seat in the public favour. May he long keep it with dignity and firmness*!

It was pretended by the Covent-garden people, and some others at the time, that Mr. Kean's popularity was a mere effect of love of novelty, a nine days' wonder, like the rage after Master Betty's acting, and would be as soon over. The comparison did not hold. Master Betty's acting was so far wonderful, and drew crowds to see it as a mere singularity, because he was a boy. Mr. Kean was a grown man,

* I cannot say how in this respect it might have fared if a Mr. M——, a fat gentleman, who might not have "liked you lean and hungry Roscius," had continued in the theatrical department of Mr. Perry's paper at the time of this actor's first appearance ; but I had been put upon this duty just before, and afterwards Mr. M——'s *spare* talents were not in much request. This, I believe, is the reason why he takes pains every now and then to inform the readers of the *Courier* that it is impossible for any one to understand a word that I write.

and there was no rule or precedent established in the ordinary course of nature why some other man should not appear in tragedy as great as John Kemble. Farther, Master Betty's acting was a singular phenomenon, but it was also as beautiful as it was singular. I saw him in the part of Douglas, and he seemed almost like "some gay creature of the element," moving about gracefully, with all the flexibility of youth, and murmuring *Æolian* sounds with plaintive tenderness. I shall never forget the way in which he repeated the line in which Young Norval says, speaking of the fate of two brothers :

" And in my mind happy was he that died !"

The tones fell and seemed to linger prophetic on my ear. Perhaps the wonder was made greater than it was. Boys at that age can often read remarkably well, and certainly are not without natural grace and sweetness of voice. The Westminster school-boys are a better company of comedians than we find at most of our theatres. As to the understanding a part like Douglas, at least, I see no difficulty on that score. I myself used to recite the speech in Enfield's Speaker with good emphasis and discretion when at school, and entered, about the same age, into the wild sweetness of the senti-

ments in Mrs. Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest*, I am sure, quite as much as I should do now. Yet the same experiment has been often tried since, and has uniformly failed*.

It was soon after this that Coleridge returned from Italy, and he got one day into a long *tirade* to explain what a ridiculous farce the whole was, and how all the people abroad were shocked at the *gullibility* of the English nation, who on this and every other occasion were open to the artifices of all sorts of quacks, wondering how any persons with the smallest pretensions to common sense could for a moment suppose

* I (not very long ago) had the pleasure of spending an evening with Mr. Betty, when we had some "good talk" about the good old times of acting. I wanted to insinuate that I had been a sneaking admirer, but could not bring it in. As, however, we were putting on our great coats down stairs, I ventured to break the ice by saying, "There is one actor of that period of whom we have not made honourable mention, I mean Master Betty." "Oh!" he said, "I have forgot all that." I replied, that he might, but that I could not forget the pleasure I had had in seeing him. On which he turned off, and shaking his sides heartily, and with no measured demand upon his lungs, called out, "Oh, memory! memory!" in a way that showed he felt the full force of the allusion. I found afterwards that the subject did not offend, and we were to have drunk some Burton-ale together the following evening, but were prevented. I hope he will consider that the engagement still stands good.

that a boy could act the characters of men without any of their knowledge, their experience, or their passions. We made some faint resistance, but in vain. The discourse then took a turn, and Coleridge began a laboured eulogy on some promising youth, the son of an English artist, whom he had met in Italy, and who had wandered all over the Campagna with him, whose talents, he assured us, were the admiration of all Rome, and whose early designs had almost all the grace and purity of Raphael's. At last, some one interrupted the endless theme by saying a little impatiently, "Why just now you would not let us believe our own eyes and ears about young Betty, because you have a theory against premature talents, and now you start a boy phenomenon, that nobody knows any thing about but yourself—a young artist that, you tell us, is to rival Raphael!" The truth is, we like to have something to admire ourselves, as well as to make other people gape and stare at; but then it must be a discovery of our own, an idol of our own making and setting up:—if others stumble on the discovery before us, or join in crying it up to the skies, we then set to work to prove that this is a vulgar delusion, and show our sagacity and freedom from prejudice by pulling it in

pieces with all the coolness imaginable. Whether we blow the bubble or crush it in our hands, vanity and the desire of empty distinction are equally at the bottom of our sanguine credulity or fastidious scepticism. There are some who always fall in with the fashionable prejudice as others affect singularity of opinion on all such points, according as they think they have more or less wit to judge for themselves.

If a little varnishing and daubing, a little puffing and quacking, and giving yourself a good name, and getting a friend to speak a word for you, is excusable in any profession, it is, I think, in that of painting. Painting is an occult science, and requires a little ostentation and mock-gravity in the professor. A man may here rival Katterfelto, "with his hair on end at his own wonders, wondering for his bread;" for, if he does not, he may in the end go without it. He may ride on a high trotting horse, in green spectacles, and attract notice to his person any how he can, if he only works hard at his profession. If "it only is when he is *out* he is acting," let him make the fools stare, but give others something worth looking at. Good Mr. Carver and Gilder, good Mr. Printer's Devil, good Mr. Bill-sticker, "do me your offices" unmolested! Painting is a plain ground,

and requires a great many heraldic quarterings and facings to set it off. Lay on, and do not spare. No man's merit can be fairly judged of, if he is not known; and how can he be known, if he keeps entirely in the back ground*? A great name in art goes but a little way, is chilled as it creeps along the surface of the world, without something to revive and make it blaze out with fresh splendor. Fame is here almost obscurity. It is long before your name affixed to a sterling design will be spelt out by an un-discerning, regardless public. Have it proclaimed, therefore, as a necessary precaution, by sound of trumpet at the corners of the street, let it be stuck as a label in your mouth, carry it on a placard at your back. Otherwise, the world will never trouble themselves about you, or will very soon forget you. A celebrated artist of the present day, whose name is engraved at the bottom of some of the most touching specimens of English art, once had a frame-maker call on him, who, on entering his room, exclaimed with some surprise, "What,

* Sir Joshua, who was not a vain man, purchased a tawdry sheriff's carriage, soon after he took his house in Leicester-fields, and desired his sister to ride about in it, in order that people might ask, "Whose it was?" and the answer would be, "It belongs to the great painter!"

are you a painter, sir?" The other made answer, a little startled in his turn, "Why, didn't you know that? Did you never see my name at the bottom of prints?" He could not recollect that he had. "And yet you sell picture-frames and prints?" "Yes." "What painters' names then did he recollect: Did he know West's?" "Oh! yes." "And Opie's?" "Yes." "And Fuseli's?" "Oh! yes." "But you never heard of me?" "I cannot say that I ever did!" It was plain, from this conversation, that Mr. N—— had not kept company enough with picture-dealers and newspaper critics. On another occasion, a country-gentleman, who was sitting to him for his portrait, asked him if he had any pictures in the Exhibition at Somerset-house, and on his replying in the affirmative, desired to know what they were. He mentioned among others, "The Marriage of Two Children;" on which the gentleman expressed great surprise, and said that was the very picture his wife was always teasing him to go and have another look at, though he had never noticed the painter's name. When the public are so eager to be amused, and care so little who it is that amuses them, it is not amiss to remind them of it now and then; or even to have a starling taught to repeat the name, to which

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they owe such misprized obligations, in their drowsy ears. On any other principle, I cannot conceive how painters (not without genius or industry) can fling themselves at the head of the public in the manner they do, having lives written of themselves, busts made of themselves, prints stuck in the shop-windows of themselves, and their names placed in "the first row of the rubric," with those of Rubens, Raphael, and Michael Angelo, swearing by themselves or their proxies that these glorified spirits would do well to leave the abodes of the blest in order to stand in mute wonder and with uplifted hands before some production of theirs, which is yet hardly dry! Oh! whatever you do, leave that string untouched. It will jar the rash and unhallowed hand that meddles with it. Profane not the mighty dead by mixing them up with the uncanonized living. Leave yourself a reversion in immortality, beyond the noisy clamour of the day. Do not quite lose your respect for public opinion by making it in all cases a palpable cheat, the echo of your own lungs that are hoarse with calling on the world to admire. Do not think to bully posterity, or to cozen your contemporaries. Be not always anticipating the effect of your picture on the town—think more about deserving success than commanding

it. In issuing so many promissory notes upon the bank of fame, do not forget you have to pay in sterling gold. Believe that there is something in the pursuit of high art, beyond the manufacture of a paragraph or the collection of receipts at the door of an exhibition. Venerate art as art. Study the works of others, and inquire into those of nature. Gaze at beauty, Become great by great efforts, and not by pompous pretensions. Do not think the world was blind to merit before your time, nor make the reputation of great geniuses the stalking horse to your vanity. You have done enough to insure yourself attention : you have now only to do something to deserve it, and to make good all that you have aspired to do !

There is a silent and systematic assumption of superiority which is as barefaced and unprincipled an imposture as the most impudent puffing. You may, by a tacit or avowed censure on all other arts, on all works of art, on all other pretensions, tastes, talents, but your own, produce a complete ostracism in the world of intellect, and leave yourself and your own performances alone standing, a mighty monument in an universal waste and wreck of genius. By cutting away the rude block and removing the rubbish from around it, the idol

may be effectually exposed to view, placed on its pedestal of pride, without any other assistance. This method is more inexcusable than the other. For there is no egotism or vanity so hateful as that which strikes at our satisfaction in every thing else, and derives its nourishment from preying, like the vampyre, on the carcase of others' reputation. I would rather, in a word, that a man should talk for ever of himself with vapid senseless assurance, than preserve a malignant, heartless silence, when the merit of a rival is mentioned. I have seen instances of both, and can judge pretty well between them.

There is no great harm in putting forward one's own pretensions (of whatever kind) if this does not bear a sour, malignant aspect towards others. Every one sets himself off to the best advantage he can, and tries to steal a march upon public opinion. In this sense, too, "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Life itself is a piece of harmless quackery. A great house over your head is of no use but to announce the great man within. Dress, equipage, title, livery-servants, are only so many quack advertisements and assumptions of the question of merit. The star that glitters at the breast would be worth nothing but as a badge of personal distinction ;

and the crown itself is but a symbol of the virtues, which the possessor inherits from a long line of illustrious ancestors! How much honour and honesty have been forfeited to be graced with a title or a ribbon; how much genius and worth have sunk to the grave, without an escutcheon and without an epitaph!

As men of rank and fortune keep lacqueys to reinforce their claims to self-respect, so men of genius sometimes surround themselves with a *coterie* of admirers to increase their reputation with the public. These *proneurs*, or satellites, repeat all their good things, laugh loud at all their jokes, and remember all their oracular decrees. They are their shadows and echoes. They talk of them in all companies, and bring back word of all that has been said about them. They hawk the good qualities of their patrons, as shopmen and *barkers* tease you to buy goods. I have no notion of this vanity at second-hand; nor can I see how this servile testimony from inferiors ("some followers of mine own") can be a proof of merit. It may soothe the ear; but that it should impose on the understanding, I own surprises me: yet there are persons who cannot exist without a *cortege* of this kind about them, in which they smiling read the opinion of the world, in the midst of all sorts of rancorous abuse and hostility, as

Otho called for his mirror in the Illyrian field. One good thing is, that this evil, in some degree, cures itself; and when a man has been nearly ruined by a herd of these sycophants, he finds them leaving him, like thriftless dependents, for some more eligible situation, carrying away with them all the tattle they can pick up, and some left-off suit of finery. The same proneness to adulation which made them lick the dust before one idol, makes them bow as low to the rising Sun; they are as lavish of detraction as they were prurient with praise; and the *protégé* and admirer of the editor of the —— figures in Blackwood's train. The man is a lacquey, and it is of little consequence whose livery he wears!

I would advise those who volunteer the office of puffing, to go the whole length of it. No half-measures will do. Lay it on thick and three-fold, or not at all. If you are once harnessed into that vehicle, it will be in vain for you to think of stopping. You must drive to the devil at once. The mighty Tamburlane, to whose car you are yoked, cries out,

“Holloa, you pamper'd jades of Asia,
Can you not drive but twenty miles a day?”

He has you on the hip, for you have pledged your taste and judgment to his genius. Never

fear but he will drive this wedge. If you are once screwed into such a machine, you must extricate yourself by main force. No hyperboles are too much: any drawback, any admiration on this side idolatry, is high treason. It is an unpardonable offence to say that the last production of your patron is not so good as the one before it; or that a performer shines more in one character than another. I remember once hearing a player declare that he never looked into any newspapers or magazines on account of the abuse that was always levelled at himself in them, though there were not less than three persons in company, who made it their business through these conduit pipes of fame to "cry him up to the top of the compass." This sort of expectation is a little *exigeante!*

One fashionable mode of acquiring reputation is by patronising it. This may be from various motives, real good nature, good taste, vanity, or pride. I shall only speak of the spurious ones in this place. The quack and the *would-be* patron are well met. The house of the latter is a sort of curiosity-shop or *menagerie*, where all sort of intellectual pretenders and grotesques, musical children, arithmetical prodigies, occult philosophers, lecturers, *accoucheurs*, apes, chemists, fiddlers, and buffoons are to be seen for

the asking, and are shown to the company for nothing. The folding-doors are thrown open, and display a collection that the world cannot parallel again. There may be a few persons of common sense and established reputation, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, otherwise it is a mere scramble or lottery. The professed encourager of *virtù* and letters, being disappointed of the great names, sends out into the highways for the halt, the lame, and the blind, for all who pretend to distinction, defects, and obliquities, for all the disposable vanity or affectation floating on the town, in hopes that, among so many oddities, chance may bring some jewel or treasure to his door, which he may have the good fortune to appropriate in some way to his own use, or the credit of displaying to others. The art is to encourage rising genius—to bring forward doubtful and unnoticed merit. You thus get a set of novices and raw pretenders about you, whose actual productions do not interfere with your self love, and whose future efforts may reflect credit on your singular sagacity and faculty for finding out talent in the germ; and in the next place, by having them completely in your power, you are at liberty to dismiss them whenever you will, and to supply the deficiency by a new set of wondering, unwashed faces, in a rapid

succession ; an “ aiery of children,” embryo actors, artists, poets, or philosophers. Like unfledged birds they are hatched, nursed, and fed by hand ; this gives room for a vast deal of management, meddling, care, and condescending solicitude, but the instant the callow brood are fledged, they are driven from the nest, and forced to shift for themselves in the wide world. One sterling production decides the question between them and their patrons, and from that time they become the property of the public. Thus a succession of importunate, hungry, idle, over-weening candidates for fame, are encouraged by these fickle keepers, only to be betrayed, and left to starve or beg, or pine in obscurity, while the man of merit and respectability is neglected, discountenanced, and stigmatised, because he will not lend himself as a tool to this system of splendid imposition, or pamper the luxury and weaknesses of the Vulgar Great. When a young artist is too independent to subscribe to the dogmas of his superiors, or fulfils their predictions and prognostics of wonderful contingent talent too soon, so as to get out of leading strings, and lean on public opinion for partial support, exceptions are taken to his dress, dialect, or manners, and he is expelled the circle with a character for ingratitude

and treachery. None can procure toleration long but those who do not contradict the opinions, or excite the jealousy of their betters. One independent step is an appeal from them to the public, their natural and hated rivals, and annuls the contract between them, which implies ostentatious countenance on the one part, and servile submission on the other. But enough of this.

The patronage of men of talent, even when it proceeds from vanity, is often carried on with a spirit of generosity and magnificence, as long as these are in difficulties and a state of dependence: but as the principle of action in this case is a love of power, the complacency in the object of friendly regard ceases with the opportunity or necessity for the same manifest display of power; and when the unfortunate *protégé* is just coming to land, and expects a last helping hand, he is, to his surprise, pushed back, in order that he may be saved from drowning once more. You are not hauled ashore, as you had supposed, by these kind friends, as a mutual triumph after all your struggles and their exertions in your behalf. It is a piece of presumption in you to be seen walking on *terra-firma*: you are required, at the risk of their friendship, to be always swimming in troubled waters, that they may have the credit of throw-

ing out ropes, and sending out life-boats to you, without ever bringing you ashore. Your successes, your reputation, which you think would please them, as justifying their good opinion, are coldly received, and looked at askance, because they remove your dependence on them: if you are under a cloud, they do all they can to keep you there by their good-will: they are so sensible of your gratitude that they wish your obligations never to cease, and take care you shall owe no one else a good turn; and provided you are compelled or contented to remain always in poverty, obscurity, and disgrace, they will continue your very good friends and humble servants to command, to the end of the chapter. The tenure of these indentures is hard. Such persons will wilfully forfeit the gratitude created by years of friendship, by refusing to perform the last act of kindness that is likely ever to be demanded of them: will lend you money, if you have no chance of repaying them; will give you their good word, if nobody will believe it; and the only thing they do not forgive is an attempt or probability on your part, of being able to repay your obligations. There is something disinterested in all this: at least, it does not show a cowardly or mercenary disposition, but it savours too much

of arrogance and arbitrary pretension. It throws a damning light on this question to consider who are mostly the subjects of the patronage of the great, and in the habit of receiving cards of invitation to splendid dinners. I confess, for one, I am not on the list; at which I do not grieve much, nor wonder at all. Authors, in general, are not in much request. Dr. Johnson was asked why he was not more frequently invited; and he said, "Because great lords and ladies do not like to have their mouths stopped." Garrick was not in this predicament: he could amuse the company in the drawing-room by imitating the great moralist and lexicographer, and make the negro boy, in the court-yard, die with laughing to see him take off the swelling airs and strut of the turkey-cock. This was clever and amusing, but it did not involve an opinion, it did not lead to a difference of sentiment, in which the owner of the house might be found in the wrong. Players, singers, dancers, are hand and glove with the great. They embellish, and have an *eclat* in their names, but do not come into collision. Eminent portrait-painters, again, are tolerated, because they come into personal contact with the great: and sculptors hold equality with lords when they have a certain quantity of solid marble in their workshops to answer for

the solidity of their pretensions. People of fashion and property must have something to show for their patronage, something visible or tangible. A sentiment is a visionary thing; an argument may lead to dangerous consequences, and those who are likely to broach either one or the other, are not, therefore, fit for good company in general. Poets, and men of genius, who find their way there, soon find their way out. They are not of *that ilk*, with some exceptions. Painters who come in contact with majesty get on by servility or buffoonery, by letting themselves down in some way. Sir Joshua was never a favourite at court. He kept too much at a distance. Beechey gained a vast deal of favour by familiarity, and lost it by taking too great freedoms*. West ingra-

* Sharp became a great favourite of the king on the following occasion. It was the custom, when the king went through the lobbies of the palace, for those who preceded him to cry out, "Sharp, sharp, look sharp," in order to clear the way. Mr. Sharp, who was waiting in a room just by (preparing some colours), hearing his name repeated so urgently, ran out in great haste, and came up with all his force against the king, who was passing the door at the time. The young artist was knocked down in the encounter, and the attendants were in the greatest consternation; but the king laughed heartily at the adventure, and took great notice of the unfortunate subject of it from that time forward.

tiated himself in the same quarter by means of practices as little creditable to himself as his august employer, namely, by playing the hypocrite, and professing sentiments the reverse of those he naturally felt. Kings (I know not how justly) have been said to be lovers of low company, and low conversation. They are also said to be fond of dirty practical jokes. If the fact is so, the reason is as follows. From the elevation of their rank, aided by pride and flattery, they look down on the rest of mankind, and would not be thought to have all their advantages for nothing. They wish to maintain the same precedence in private life that belongs to them as a matter of outward ceremony. This pretension they cannot keep up by fair means; for in wit or argument they are not superior to the common run of men. They therefore answer a repartee by a practical joke, which turns the laugh against others, and cannot be retaliated with safety. That is, they avail themselves of the privilege of their situation to take liberties, and degrade those about them, as they can only keep up the idea of their own dignity by proportionably lowering their company.

ESSAY XV.
ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF
CHARACTER.

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It is astonishing, with all our opportunities and practice, how little we know of this subject. For myself, I feel that the more I learn, the less I understand it.

I remember, several years ago, a conversation in the *Diligence* coming from Paris, in which, on its being mentioned that a man had married his wife after thirteen years' courtship, a fellow-countryman of mine observed, that "then, at least, he would be acquainted with her character;" when a Monsieur P——, inventor and proprietor of the *Invisible Girl*, made answer; "No, not at all; for that the very next day she might turn out the very reverse of the character that she had appeared in during all the preceding time*." I could not help admiring the superior sagacity of the French juggler, and it

* "It is not a year or two shows us a man."—ÆMILIA, in OTHELLO.

struck me then that we could never be sure when we had got at the bottom of this riddle.

There are various ways of getting at a knowledge of character—by looks, words, actions. The first of these, which seems the most superficial, is perhaps the safest, and least liable to deceive: nay, it is that which mankind, in spite of their pretending to the contrary, most generally go by. Professions pass for nothing, and actions may be counterfeited: but a man cannot help his looks. “Speech,” said a celebrated wit, “was given to man to conceal his thoughts.” Yet I do not know that the greatest hypocrites are the least silent. The mouth of Cromwell is pursed up in the portraits of him, as if he was afraid to trust himself with words. Lord Chesterfield advises us, if we wish to know the real sentiments of the person we are conversing with, to look in his face, for he can more easily command his words than his features. A man’s whole life may be a lie to himself and others: and yet a picture painted of him by a great artist would probably stamp his true character on the canvas, and betray the secret to posterity. Men’s opinions were divided, in their life-times, about such prominent personages as Charles V. and Ignatius Loyola, partly, no doubt, from passion and interest, but partly from contradic-

tory evidence in their ostensible conduct: the spectator, who has ever seen their pictures by Titian, judges of them at once, and truly. I had rather leave a good portrait of myself behind me than have a fine epitaph. The face, for the most part, tells what we have thought and felt—the rest is nothing. I have a higher idea of Donne from a rude, half-effaced outline of him prefixed to his poems than from any thing he ever wrote. Cæsar's Commentaries would not have redeemed him in my opinion, if the bust of him had resembled the Duke of ———. My old friend, Fawcett, used to say, that if Sir Isaac Newton himself had lisped, he could not have thought any thing of him. So I cannot persuade myself that any one is a great man, who looks like a fool. In this I may be wrong.

First impressions are often the truest, as we find (not unfrequently) to our cost, when we have been wheedled out of them by plausible professions or actions. A man's look is the work of years, it is stamped on his countenance by the events of his whole life; nay, more, by the hand of nature, and it is not to be got rid of easily. There is, as it has been remarked repeatedly, something in a person's appearance at first sight which we do not like, and that

gives us an odd twinge, but which is overlooked in a multiplicity of other circumstances, till the mask is taken off, and we see this lurking character verified in the plainest manner in the sequel. We are struck at first, and by chance, with what is peculiar and characteristic; also with permanent *traits* and general effect: this afterwards goes off in a set of unmeaning, common-place details. This sort of *prima facie* evidence then, shows what a man is, better than what he says or does; for it shows us the habit of his mind, which is the same under all circumstances and disguises. You will say, on the other hand, that there is no judging by appearances, as a general rule. No one, for instance, would take such a person for a very clever man without knowing who he was. Then, ten to one, he is not: he may have got the reputation; but it is a mistake. You say, there is Mr. —, undoubtedly a person of great genius: yet, except when excited by something extraordinary, he seems half dead. He has wit at will, yet wants life and spirit. He is capable of the most generous acts, yet meanness seems to cling to every motion. He looks like a poor creature—and in truth he is one! The first impression he gives you of him answers nearly to the feeling he has of his personal identity; and this

image of himself, rising from his thoughts, and shrouding his faculties, is that which sits with him in the house, walks out with him into the street, and haunts his bed-side. The best part of his existence is dull, cloudy, leaden: the flashes of light that proceed from it, or streak it here and there, may dazzle others, but do not deceive himself. Modesty is the lowest of the virtues, and is a real confession of the deficiency it indicates. He who undervalues himself is justly undervalued by others. Whatever good properties he may possess are, in fact, neutralised by a "cold rheum" running through his veins, and taking away the zest of his pretensions, the pith and marrow of his performances. What is it to me that I can write these TABLE-TALKS? It is true I can, by a reluctant effort, rake up a parcel of half-forgotten observations, but they do not float on the surface of my mind, nor stir it with any sense of pleasure, nor even of pride. Others have more property in them than I have: *they* may reap the benefit, *I* have only had the pain. Otherwise, they are to me as if they had never existed: nor should I know that I had ever thought at all, but that I am reminded of it by the strangeness of my appearance, and my unfitness for every thing else. Look in C——'s face while he is talking. His words are such

as might "create a soul under the ribs of death." His face is a blank. Which are we to consider as the true index of his mind? Pain, languor, shadowy remembrances, are the uneasy inmates there: his lips move mechanically!

There are people that we do not like, though we may have known them long, and have no fault to find with them, "their appearance, as we say, is so much against them." That is not all, if we could find it out. There is, generally, a reason for this prejudice; for nature is true to itself. They may be very good sort of people, too, in their way, but still something is the matter. There is a coldness, a selfishness, a levity, an insincerity, which we cannot fix upon any particular phrase or action, but we see it in their whole persons and deportment. One reason that we do not see it in any other way may be, that they are all the time trying to conceal this defect by every means in their power. There is, luckily, a sort of *second sight* in morals: we discern the lurking indications of temper and habit a long while before their palpable effects appear. I once used to meet with a person at an ordinary, a very civil, good-looking man in other respects, but with an odd look about his eyes, which I could not explain, as if he saw you under their fringed lids, and you could not

see him again : this man was a common sharper. The greatest hypocrite I ever knew was a little, demure, pretty, modest-looking girl, with eyes timidly cast upon the ground, and an air soft as enchantment; the only circumstance that could lead to a suspicion of her true character was a cold, sullen, watery, glazed look about the eyes, which she bent on vacancy, as if determined to avoid all explanation with yours. I might have spied in their glittering, motionless surface, the rocks and quicksands that awaited me below! We do not feel quite at ease in the company or friendship of those who have any natural obliquity or imperfection of person. The reason is, they are not on the best terms with themselves, and are sometimes apt to play off on others the tricks that nature has played them. This, however, is a remark that, perhaps, ought not to have been made. I know a person to whom it has been objected as a disqualification for friendship, that he never shakes you cordially by the hand. I own this is a damper to sanguine and florid temperaments, who abound in these practical demonstrations and "compliments extern." The same person, who testifies the least pleasure at meeting you, is the last to quit his seat in your company, grapples with a subject in conversation right earnestly, and is, I take it, back-

ward to give up a cause or a friend. Cold and distant in appearance, he piques himself on being the king of *good haters*, and a no less zealous partisan. The most phlegmatic constitutions often contain the most inflammable spirits—as fire is struck from the hardest flints.

And this is another reason that makes it difficult to judge of character. Extremes meet; and qualities display themselves by the most contradictory appearances. Any inclination, in consequence of being generally suppressed, vents itself the more violently when an opportunity presents itself: the greatest grossness sometimes accompanies the greatest refinement, as a natural relief, one to the other; and we find the most reserved and indifferent tempers at the beginning of an entertainment, or an acquaintance, turn out the most communicative and cordial at the end of it. Some spirits exhaust themselves at first: others gain strength by progression. Some minds have a greater facility of throwing off impressions, are, as it were, more transparent or porous than others. Thus the French present a marked contrast to the English in this respect. A Frenchman addresses you at once with a sort of lively indifference: an Englishman is more on his guard, feels his way, and is either exceedingly reserved, or lets

you into his whole confidence, which he cannot so well impart to an entire stranger. Again, a Frenchman is naturally humane: an Englishman is, I should say, only friendly by habit. His virtues and his vices cost him more than they do his more gay and volatile neighbours. An Englishman is said to speak his mind more plainly than others:—yes, if it will give you pain to hear it. He does not care whom he offends by his discourse: a foreigner generally strives to oblige in what he says. The French are accused of promising more than they perform. That may be, and yet they may perform as many good-natured acts as the English, if the latter are as averse to perform as they are to promise. Even the professions of the French may be sincere at the time, or arise out of the impulse of the moment; though their desire to serve you may be neither very violent nor very lasting. I cannot think, notwithstanding, that the French are not a serious people; nay, that they are not a more reflecting people than the common run of the English. Let those who think them merely light and mercurial, explain that enigma, their everlasting prosing tragedy. The English are considered as comparatively a slow, plodding people. If the French are quicker, they are also more plodding. See, for example,

how highly finished and elaborate their works of art are! How systematic and correct they aim at being in all their productions of a graver cast! "If the French have a fault," as Yorick said, "it is that they are too grave." With wit, sense, cheerfulness, patience, good-nature and refinement of manners, all they want is imagination and sturdiness of moral principle! Such are some of the contradictions in the character of the two nations, and so little does the character of either appear to have been understood! Nothing can be more ridiculous indeed than the way in which we exaggerate each other's vices and extenuate our own. The whole is an affair of prejudice on one side of the question, and of partiality on the other. Travellers who set out to carry back a true report of the case appear to lose not only the use of their understandings, but of their senses, the instant they set foot in a foreign land. The commonest facts and appearances are distorted, and discoloured. They go abroad with certain preconceived notions on the subject, and they make every thing answer, in reason's spite, to their favourite theory. In addition to the difficulty of explaining customs and manners foreign to our own, there are all the obstacles of wilful prepossession thrown in the way. It is not, therefore, much to be won-

dered at that nations have arrived at so little knowledge of one another's characters; and that, where the object has been to widen the breach between them, any slight differences that occur are easily blown into a blaze of fury by repeated misrepresentations, and all the exaggerations that malice or folly can invent!

This ignorance of character is not confined to foreign nations: we are ignorant of that of our own countrymen in a class a little below or above ourselves. We shall hardly pretend to pronounce magisterially on the good or bad qualities of strangers; and, at the same time, we are ignorant of those of our friends, of our kindred, and of our own. We are in all these cases either too near or too far off the object to judge of it properly.

Persons, for instance, in a higher or middle rank of life know little or nothing of the characters of those below them, as servants, country people, &c. I would lay it down in the first place as a general rule on this subject, that all uneducated people are hypocrites. Their sole business is to deceive. They conceive themselves in a state of hostility with others, and stratagems are fair in war. The inmates of the kitchen and the parlour are always (as far as respects their feelings and intentions towards

each other) in Hobbes's "state of nature." Servants and others in that line of life have nothing to exercise their spare talents for invention upon but those about them. Their superfluous electrical particles of wit and fancy are not carried off by those established and fashionable conductors, novels and romances. Their faculties are not buried in books, but all alive and stirring, erect and bristling like a cat's back. Their coarse conversation sparkles with "wild wit, invention ever new." Their betters try all they can to set themselves up above them, and they try all they can to pull them down to their own level. They do this by getting up a little comic interlude, a daily, domestic, homely drama out of the odds and ends of the family failings, of which there is in general a pretty plentiful supply, or make up the deficiency of materials out of their own heads. They turn the qualities of their masters and mistresses inside out, and any real kindness or condescension only sets them the more against you. They are not to be taken in in that way—they will not be balked in the spite they have to you. They only set to work with redoubled alacrity, to lessen the favour or to blacken your character. They feel themselves like a degraded *caste*, and cannot understand how the obligations can be all on one

side, and the advantages all on the other. You cannot come to equal terms with them—they reject all such overtures as insidious and hollow—nor can you ever calculate upon their gratitude or good-will, any more than if they were so many strolling Gipsies or wild Indians. They have no fellow-feeling, they keep no faith with the more privileged classes. They are in your power, and they endeavour to be even with you by trick and cunning, by lying and chicanery. In this they have nothing to restrain them. Their whole life is a succession of shifts, excuses, and expedients. The love of truth is a principle with those only who have made it their study, who have applied themselves to the pursuit of some art or science, where the intellect is severely tasked, and learns by habit to take a pride in, and to set a just value on, the correctness of its conclusions. To have a disinterested regard to truth, the mind must have contemplated it in abstract and remote questions; whereas the ignorant and vulgar are only conversant with those things in which their own interest is concerned. All their notions are local, personal, and consequently gross and selfish. They say whatever comes uppermost—turn whatever happens to their own account.

—and invent any story, or give any answer that suits their purposes. Instead of being bigoted to general principles, they trump up any lie for the occasion, and the more of a *thumper* it is, the better they like it; the more unlooked-for it is, why, so much the more of a *God-send!* They have no conscience about the matter; and if you find them out in any of their manoeuvres, are not ashamed of themselves, but angry with you. If you remonstrate with them, they laugh in your face. The only hold you have of them is their interest—you can but dismiss them from your employment; and *service is no inheritance*. If they affect any thing like decent remorse, and hope you will pass it over, all the while they are probably trying to recover the wind of you. Persons of liberal knowledge or sentiments have no kind of chance in this sort of mixed intercourse with these barbarians in civilised life. You cannot tell, by any signs or principles; what is passing in their minds. There is no common point of view between you. You have not the same topics to refer to, the same language to express yourself. Your interests, your feelings are quite distinct. You take certain things for granted as rules of action: they take nothing for granted but their

own ends, pick up all their knowledge out of their own occasions, are on the watch only for what they can catch—are.

“ Subtle as the fox for prey :

Like warlike as the wolf, for what they eat.”

They have indeed a regard to their character, as this last may affect their livelihood or advancement, none as it is connected with a sense of propriety; and this sets their mother-wit and native talents at work upon a double file of expedients, to bilk their consciences, and salve their reputation. In short, you never know where to have them, any more than if they were of a different species of animals; and in trusting to them, you are sure to be betrayed and overreached. You have other things to mind, they are thinking only of you, and how to turn you to advantage. *Give and take* is no maxim here. You can build nothing on your own moderation or on their false delicacy. After a familiar conversation with a waiter at a tavern, you overhear him calling you by some provoking nickname. If you make a present to the daughter of the house where you lodge, the mother is sure to recollect some addition to her bill. It is a running fight. In fact, there is a principle in human nature not willingly to endure the

idea of a superior, a sour jacobinical disposition to wipe out the score of obligation, or efface the tinsel of external advantages—and where others have the opportunity of coming in contact with us, they generally find the means to establish a sufficiently marked degree of degrading equality. No man is a hero to his valet-de-chambre, is an old maxim. A new illustration of this principle occurred the other day. While Mrs. Siddons was giving her readings of Shakespear to a brilliant and admiring drawing-room, one of the servants in the hall below was saying, “What, I find the old lady is making as much noise as ever!” So little is there in common between the different classes of society, and so impossible is it ever to unite the diversities of custom and knowledge which separate them.

Women, according to Mrs. Peachum, are “bitter bad judges” of the characters of men; and men are not much better of theirs, if we can form any guess from their choice in marriage. Love is proverbially blind. The whole is an affair of whim and fancy. Certain it is, that the greatest favourites with the other sex are not those who are most liked or respected among their own. I never knew but one clever man who was what is called a *lady's man*; and he (unfortunately for the argument) happened

to be a considerable coxcomb. It was by this irresistible quality, and not by the force of his genius, that he vanquished. Women seem to doubt their own judgments in love, and to take the opinion which a man entertains of his own prowess and accomplishments for granted. The wives of poets are (for the most part) mere pieces of furniture in the room. If you speak to them of their husbands' talents or reputation in the world, it is as if you made mention of some office that they held. It can hardly be otherwise, when the instant any subject is started or conversation arises, in which men are interested, or try one another's strength, the women leave the room, or attend to something else. The qualities then in which men are ambitious to excel, and which ensure the applause of the world, eloquence, genius, learning, integrity, are not those which gain the favour of the fair. I must not deny, however, that wit and courage have this effect. Neither is youth or beauty the sole passport to their affections.

“ The way of woman's will is hard to find,
Harder to hit.”

Yet there is some clue to this mystery, some determining cause; for we find that the same

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men are universal favourites with women, as others are uniformly disliked by them. Is not the load-stone that attracts so powerfully, and in all circumstances, a strong and undisguised bias towards them, a marked attention, a conscious preference of them to every other passing object or topic? I am not sure, but I incline to think so. The successful lover is the *cavalier servente* of all nations. The man of gallantry behaves as if he had made an assignation with every woman he addresses. An argument immediately draws off my attention from the prettiest woman in the room. I accordingly succeed better in argument—than in love!—I do not think that what is called *Love at first sight* is so great an absurdity as it is sometimes imagined to be. We generally make up our minds beforehand to the sort of person we should like, grave or gay, black, brown, or fair; with golden tresses or with raven locks;—and when we meet with a complete example of the qualities we admire, the bargain is soon struck. We have never seen any thing to come up to our newly discovered goddess before, but she is what we have been all our lives looking for. The idol we fall down and worship is an image familiar to our minds. It has been present to our waking thoughts, it has haunted us in our dreams, like

some fairy vision. Oh! thou, who, the first time I ever beheld thee, didst draw my soul into the circle of thy heavenly looks, and wave enchantment round me, do not think thy conquest less complete because it was instantaneous; for in that gentle form (as if another Imogen had entered) I saw all that I had ever loved of female grace, modesty, and sweetness!

I shall not say much of friendship as giving an insight into character, because it is often founded on mutual infirmities and prejudices. Friendships are frequently taken up on some sudden sympathy, and we see only as much as we please of one another's characters afterwards. Intimate friends are not fair witnesses to character, any more than professed enemies. They cool, indeed, in time, part, and retain only a rankling grudge at past errors and oversights. Their testimony in the latter case is not quite free from suspicion.

One would think that near relations, who live constantly together, and always have done so, must be pretty well acquainted with one another's characters. They are nearly in the dark about it. Familiarity confounds all traits of distinction: interest and prejudice take away the power of judging. We have no opinion on the subject, any more than of one another's

faces. The Penates, the household-gods, are veiled. We do not see the features of those we love, nor do we clearly distinguish their virtues or their vices. We take them as they are found in the lump:—by weight, and not by measure. We know all about the individuals, their sentiments, history, manners, words, actions, every thing: but we know all these too much as facts, as inveterate, habitual impressions, as clothed with too many associations, as sanctified with too many affections, as woven too much into the web of our hearts, to be able to pick out the different threads, to cast up the items of the debtor and creditor account, or to refer them to any general standard of right and wrong. Our impressions with respect to them are too strong, too real, too much *sui generis*, to be capable of a comparison with any thing but themselves. We hardly inquire whether those for whom we are thus interested, and to whom we are thus knit, are *better* or *worse* than others—the question is a kind of profanation—all we know is, they are *more* to us than any one else can be. Our sentiments of this kind are rooted and grow in us, and we cannot eradicate them by voluntary means. Besides, our judgments are bespoke, our interests take part with our blood. If any doubt arises, if the veil of

our implicit confidence is drawn aside by any accident for a moment, the shock is too great, like that of a dislocated limb, and we recoil on our habitual impressions again. Let not that veil ever be rent entirely asunder, so that those images may be left bare of reverential awe, and lose their religion: for nothing can ever support the desolation of the heart afterwards.

The greatest misfortune that can happen among relations is a different way of bringing up, so as to set one another's opinions and characters in an entirely new point of view. This often lets in an unwelcome day-light on the subject, and breeds schisms, coldness, and incurable heart-burnings in families. I have sometimes thought whether the progress of society and march of knowledge does not do more harm in this respect, by loosening the ties of domestic attachment, and preventing those who are most interested in, and anxious to think well of one another, from feeling a cordial sympathy and approbation of each other's sentiments, manners, views, &c. than it does good by any real advantage to the community at large. The son, for instance, is brought up to the church, and nothing can exceed the pride and pleasure the father takes in him, while all goes on well in this favourite direction. His notions change,

and he imbibes a taste for the Fine Arts. From this moment there is an end of any thing like the same unreserved communication between them. The young man may talk with enthusiasm of his "Rembrandts, Correggios, and stuff:" it is all *Hebrew* to the elder; and whatever satisfaction he may feel in hearing of his son's progress, or good wishes for his success, he is never reconciled to the new pursuit, he still hankers after the first object that he had set his mind upon. Again, the grandfather is a Calvinist, who never gets the better of his disappointment at his son's going over to the Unitarian side of the question. The matter rests here, till the grand-son, some years after, in the fashion of the day and "infinite agitation of men's wit," comes to doubt certain points in the creed in which he has been brought up, and the affair is all abroad again. Here are three generations made uncomfortable and in a manner set at variance, by a veering point of theology, and the officious meddling of biblical critics! Nothing, on the other hand, can be more wretched or common than that upstart pride and insolent good fortune which is ashamed of its origin; nor are there many things more awkward than the situation of rich and poor relations. Happy, much happier, are those tribes and people who

are confined to the same *caste* and way of life from sire to son, where prejudices are transmitted like instincts, and where the same unvarying standard of opinion and refinement blends countless generations in its improgressive, everlasting mould!

Not only is there a wilful and habitual blindness in near kindred to each other's defects, but an incapacity to judge from the quantity of materials, from the contradictoriness of the evidence. The chain of particulars is too long and massy for us to lift it or put it into the most approved ethical scales. The concrete result does not answer to any abstract theory, to any logical definition. There is black, and white, and grey, square and round—there are too many anomalies, too many redeeming points, in poor human nature, such as it actually is, for us to arrive at a smart, summary decision on it. We know too much to come to any hasty or partial conclusion. We do not pronounce upon the present act, because a hundred others rise up to contradict it. We suspend our judgments altogether, because in effect one thing unconsciously balances another; and perhaps this obstinate, pertinacious indecision would be the truest philosophy in other cases, where we dispose of the question of character easily, because

we have only the smallest part of the evidence to decide upon. Real character is not one thing, but a thousand things; actual qualities do not conform to any factitious standard in the mind, but rest upon their own truth and nature. The dull stupor under which we labour in respect of those whom we have the greatest opportunities of inspecting nearly, we should do well to imitate, before we give extreme and uncharitable verdicts against those whom we only see in passing, or at a distance. If we knew them better, we should be disposed to say less about them.

In the truth of things, there are none utterly worthless, none without some drawback on their pretensions, or some alloy of imperfection. It has been observed that a familiarity with the worst characters lessens our abhorrence of them; and a wonder is often expressed that the greatest criminals look like other men. The reason is that *they are like other men in many respects*. If a particular individual was merely the wretch we read of, or conceive in the abstract, that is, if he was the mere personified idea of the criminal brought to the bar, he would not disappoint the spectator, but would look like what he would be—a monster! But he has other qualities, ideas, feelings, nay, probably virtues, mixed up with the most profligate habits or de-

perate acts. This need not lessen our abhorrence of the crime, though it does of the criminal; for it has the latter effect only by showing him to us in different points of view, in which he appears a common mortal, and not the caricature of vice we took him for, or spotted all over with infamy. I do not at the same time think this a lax or dangerous, though it is a charitable view of the subject. In my opinion, no man ever answered in his own mind (except in the agonies of conscience or of repentance; in which latter case he throws the imputation from himself in another way) to the abstract idea of a *murderer*. He may have killed a man in self-defence, or "in the trade of war," or to save himself from starving, or in revenge for an injury, but always "so as with a difference," or from mixed and questionable motives. The individual, in reckoning with himself, always takes into the account the considerations of time, place, and circumstance, and never makes out a case of unmitigated, unprovoked villany, of "pure defecated evil" against himself. There are degrees in real crimes: we reason and moralise only by names and in classes. I should be loth, indeed, to say, that "whatever is, is right:" but almost every actual choice inclines

to it, with some sort of imperfect, unconscious bias. This is the reason, besides the ends of secrecy, of the invention of *slang* terms for different acts of profligacy committed by thieves, pickpockets, &c. The common names suggest associations of disgust in the minds of others, which those who live by them do not willingly recognise, and which they wish to sink in a technical phraseology. So there is a story of a fellow who, as he was writing down his confession of a murder, stopped to ask how the word *murder* was spelt; this, if true, was partly because his imagination was staggered by the recollection of the thing, and partly because he shrunk from the verbal admission of it. “*Amen* stuck in his throat!” The defence made by Eugene Aram of himself against a charge of murder, some years before, shows that he in imagination completely flung from himself the *nominal* crime imputed to him: he might, indeed, have staggered an old man with a blow, and buried his body in a cave, and lived ever since upon the money he found upon him, but there was “no malice in the case, none at all,” as Peachum says. The very coolness, subtlety, and circumspection of his defence (as masterly a legal document as there is upon record) prove that he

was guilty of the act, as much as they prove that he was unconscious of the *crime**. In the same spirit, and I conceive with great metaphysical truth, Mr. Coleridge, in his tragedy of *Remorse*, makes Ordonio (his chief character) wave the acknowledgment of his meditated guilt to his own mind, by putting into his mouth that striking soliloquy :

Say, I had lay'd a body in the sun !
 Well ! in a month there swarm forth from the corse
 A thousand, nay, ten thousand sentient beings
 In place of that one man. Say I had *kill'd* him !
 Yet who shall tell me, that each one and all
 Of these ten thousand lives is not as happy
 As that one life, which being push'd aside,
 Made room for these unnumber'd.—ACT II. SC. II.

I am not sure, indeed, that I have not got this whole train of speculation from him ; but I should not think the worse of it on that account. That gentleman, I recollect, once asked me whether I thought that the different members of a family really liked one another so well, or

* The bones of the murdered man were dug up in an old hermitage. On this, as one instance of the acuteness which he displayed all through the occasion, Aram remarks, " Where would you expect to find the bones of a man sooner than in a hermit's cell, except you were to look for them in a cemetery?" See NEWGATE CALENDAR for the year 1758 or 9.

had so much attachment as was generally supposed: and I said that I conceived the regard they had towards each other was expressed by the word *interest*, rather than by any other; which he said was the true answer. I do not know that I could mend it now. Natural affection is not pleasure in one another's company, nor admiration of one another's qualities; but it is an intimate and deep knowledge of the things that affect those, to whom we are bound by the nearest ties, with pleasure or pain; it is an anxious, uneasy, fellow-feeling with them, a jealous watchfulness over their good name, a tender and unconquerable yearning for their good. The love, in short, we bear them, is the nearest to that we bear ourselves. *Home*, according to the old saying, *is home, be it never so homely*. We love ourselves, not according to our deserts, but our cravings after good: so we love our immediate relations in the next degree (if not, even sometimes a higher one) because we know best what they have suffered and what sits nearest to their hearts. We are implicated, in fact, in their welfare, by habit and sympathy, as we are in our own.

If our devotion to our own interests is much the same as to theirs, we are ignorant of our own characters for the same reason. We are

parties too much concerned to return a fair verdict, and are too much in the secret of our own motives or situation not to be able to give a favourable turn to our actions. We exercise a liberal criticism upon ourselves, and put off the final decision to a late day. The field is large and open. Hamlet exclaims, with a noble magnanimity, "I count myself indifferent honest, and yet I could accuse me of such things!" If you could prove to a man that he is a knave, it would not make much difference in his opinion, his self-love is stronger than his love of virtue. Hypocrisy is generally used as a mask to deceive the world, not to impose on ourselves: for once detect the delinquent in his knavery, and he laughs in your face or glories in his iniquity. This at least happens except where there is a contradiction in the character, and our vices are involuntary, and at variance with our convictions. One great difficulty is to distinguish ostensible motives, or such as we acknowledge to ourselves, from tacit or secret springs of action. A man changes his opinion readily, he thinks it candour: it is levity of mind. For the most part, we are stunned and stupid in judging of ourselves. We are callous by custom to our defects or excellencies, unless where vanity steps in to exaggerate or extenuate them. I cannot conceive

how it is that people are in love with their own persons, or astonished at their own performances, which are but a nine days' wonder to every one else. In general it may be laid down that we are liable to this twofold mistake in judging of our own talents: we, in the first place, nurse the rickety bantling, we think much of that which has cost us much pains and labour, and comes against the grain; and we also set little store by what we do with most ease to ourselves, and therefore best. The works of the greatest genius are produced almost unconsciously, with an ignorance on the part of the persons themselves that they have done any thing extraordinary. Nature has done it for them. How little Shakespear seems to have thought of himself or of his fame! Yet, if "to know another well, were to know one's self," he must have been acquainted with his own pretensions and character, "who knew all qualities with a learned spirit." His eye seems never to have been bent upon himself, but outwards upon nature. A man, who thinks highly of himself, may almost set it down that it is without reason. Milton, notwithstanding, appears to have had a high opinion of himself, and to have made it good. He was conscious of his powers, and great by design. Perhaps his tenaciousness, on the score

of his own merit, might arise from an early habit of polemical writing, in which his pretensions were continually called to the bar of prejudice and party-spirit, and he had to plead not guilty to the indictment. Some men have died unconscious of immortality, as others have almost exhausted the sense of it in their life-times. Corregio might be mentioned as an instance of the one, Voltaire of the other.

There is nothing that helps a man in his conduct through life more than a knowledge of his own characteristic weaknesses (which, guarded against, become his strength), as there is nothing that tends more to the success of a man's talents than his knowing the limits of his faculties, which are thus concentrated on some practicable object. One man can do but one thing. Universal pretensions end in nothing. Or, as Butler has it, too much wit requires

“ As much again to govern it.”

There are those who have gone, for want of this self-knowledge, strangely out of their way, and others who have never found it. We find many who succeed in certain departments, and are yet melancholy and dissatisfied, because they failed in the one to which they first devoted themselves, like discarded lovers, who pine after

their scornful mistress. I will conclude with observing, that authors in general overrate the extent and value of posthumous fame : for what (as it has been asked) is the amount even of Shakespear's fame? That in that very country which boasts his genius and his birth, perhaps, scarce one person in ten has ever heard of his name, or read a syllable of his writings!

ESSAY XVI.

ON THE PICTURESQUE AND IDEAL.

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ESSAY XVI.

ON THE PICTURESQUE AND IDEAL.

A FRAGMENT.

THE natural in visible objects is whatever is ordinarily presented to the senses: the picturesque is that which stands out, and catches the attention by some striking peculiarity: the *ideal* is that which answers to the preconceived imagination and appetite in the mind for love and beauty. The picturesque depends chiefly on the principle of discrimination or contrast; the *ideal* on harmony and continuity of effect: the one surprises, the other satisfies the mind; the one starts off from a given point, the other reposes on itself; the one is determined by an excess of form, the other by a concentration of feeling.

The picturesque may be considered as something like an excrescence on the face of nature. It runs imperceptibly into the fantastical and grotesque. Fairies and satyrs are picturesque;

but they are scarcely *ideal*. They are an extreme and unique conception of a certain thing, but not of what the mind delights in, or broods fondly over. The image created by the artist's hand is not moulded and fashioned by the love of good and yearning after grace and beauty, but rather the contrary: that is, they are ideal deformity, not ideal beauty. Rubens was perhaps the most picturesque of painters; but he was almost the least *ideal*. So Rembrandt was (out of sight) the most picturesque of colourists; as Correggio was the most *ideal*. In other words, his composition of light and shade is more a whole, more in unison, more blended into the same harmonious feeling than Rembrandt's, who staggers by contrast, but does not soothe by gradation. Correggio's forms, indeed, had a picturesque air; for they often incline (even when most beautiful) to the quaintness of caricature. Vandyke, I think, was at once the least picturesque and least *ideal* of all the great painters. He was purely natural, and neither selected from outward forms nor added any thing from his own mind. He owes every thing to perfect truth, clearness, and transparency; and though his productions certainly arrest the eye, and strike in a room full of pictures, it is from the contrast they present to other pictures,

and from being stripped quite naked of all artificial advantages. They strike almost as a piece of white paper would, hung up in the same situation.—I began with saying that whatever stands out from a given line, and as it were projects upon the eye, is picturesque; and this holds true (comparatively) in form and colour. A rough terrier-dog, with the hair bristled and matted together, is picturesque. As we say, there is a decided character in it, a marked determination to an extreme point. A shock-dog is odd and disagreeable, but there is nothing picturesque in its appearance: it is a mere mass of flimsy confusion. A goat with projecting horns and pendent beard is a picturesque animal: a sheep is not. A horse is only picturesque from opposition of colour; as in Mr. Northcote's study of Gadshill, where the white horse's head coming against the dark scowling face of the man makes as fine a contrast as can be imagined. An old stump of a tree with rugged bark, and one or two straggling branches, a little stunted hedge-row line, marking the boundary of the horizon, a stubble-field, a winding path, a rock seen against the sky, are picturesque, because they have all of them prominence and a distinctive character of their own. They are not objects (to borrow Shakespear's phrase)

“of no mark or likelihood.” A country may be beautiful, romantic, or sublime, without being picturesque. The Lakes in the North of England are not picturesque, though certainly the most interesting sight in this country. To be a subject for painting, a prospect must present sharp striking points of view or singular forms, or one object must relieve and set off another. There must be distinct stages and salient points for the eye to rest upon or start from, in its progress over the expanse before it. The distance of a landscape will oftentimes look flat or heavy, that the trunk of a tree or a ruin in the foreground would immediately throw into perspective and turn to air. Rembrandt’s landscapes are the least picturesque in the world, except from the strait lines and sharp angles, the deep incision and dragging of his pencil, like a harrow over the ground, and the broad contrast of earth and sky. Earth, in his copies, is rough and hairy; and Pan has struck his hoof against it!—A camel is a picturesque ornament in a landscape or history-piece. This is not merely from its romantic and oriental character; for an elephant has not the same effect, and if introduced as a necessary appendage, is also an unwieldy incumbrance. A negro’s head in a group is picturesque from contrast: so are the spots on a

panther's hide. This was the principle that Paul Veronese went upon, who said the rule for composition was *black upon white, and white upon black*. He was a pretty good judge. His celebrated picture of the Marriage of Cana is in all likelihood the completest piece of workmanship extant in the art. When I saw it, it nearly covered one side of a large room in the Louvre (being itself forty feet by twenty)—and it seemed as if that side of the apartment was thrown open, and you looked out at the open sky, at buildings, marble pillars, galleries with people in them, emperors, female slaves, Turks, negroes, musicians, all the famous painters of the time, the tables loaded with viands, goblets, and dogs under them—a sparkling, overwhelming confusion, a bright, unexpected reality—the only fault you could find was that no miracle was going on in the faces of the spectators: the only miracle there was the picture itself! A French gentleman, who showed me this “triumph of painting” (as it has been called), perceiving I was struck with it, observed, “My wife admires it exceedingly for the facility of the execution.” I took this proof of sympathy for a compliment. It is said that when Humboldt, the celebrated traveller and naturalist, was introduced to Buonaparte, the Emperor

addressed him in these words—" *Vous aimez la botanique, Monsieur*"—and on the other's replying in the affirmative, added—" *Et ma femme aussi!*" This has been found fault with as a piece of brutality and insolence in the great man by bigoted critics, who do not know what a thing it is to get a Frenchwoman to agree with them in any point. For my part, I took the observation as it was meant, and it did not put me out of conceit with myself or the picture that Madame M—— liked it as well as *Monsieur l'Anglois*. Certainly, there could be no harm in that. By the side of it happened to be hung two allegorical pictures of Rubens (and in such matters he too was "no baby*")—I don't remember what the figures were, but the texture seemed of wool or cotton. The texture of the Paul Veronese was not wool or cotton, but stuff, jewels, flesh, marble, air, whatever composed the essence of the varied subjects, in endless relief and truth of handling. If the Fleming had seen his two allegories hanging where they did, he would, without a question, have wished them far enough.

I imagine that Rubens's landscapes are picturesque: Claude's are *ideal*. Rubens is always

* "And surely Mandricardo was no baby."

in extremes : Claude in the middle. Rubens carries some one peculiar quality or feature of nature to the utmost verge of probability : Claude balances and harmonises different forms and masses with laboured delicacy, so that nothing falls short, no one thing overpowers another. Rainbows, showers, partial gleams of sunshine, moon-light, are the means with which Rubens produces his most gorgeous and enchanting effects : there are neither rainbows, nor showers, nor sudden bursts of sunshine, nor glittering moon-beams in Claude. He is all softness and proportion ; the other is all spirit and brilliant excess. The two sides (for example) of one of Claude's landscapes balance one another, as in a scale of beauty : in Rubens the several objects are grouped and thrown together with capricious wantonness. Claude has more repose : Rubens more gaiety and extravagance. And here it might be asked, Is a rainbow a picturesque or an *ideal* object ? It seems to me to be both. It is an accident in nature ; but it is an inmate of the fancy. It startles and surprises the sense, but it soothes and tranquillises the spirit. It makes the eye glisten to behold it, but the mind turns to it long after it has faded from its place in the sky. It has both properties then of giving an extraordinary impulse to the mind by the

singularity of its appearance, and of riveting the imagination by its intense beauty. I may just notice here in passing, that I think the effect of moon-light is treated in an *ideal* manner in the well-known line in Shakespear—

“ See how the moonlight *sleeps* upon yon bank !”

The image is heightened by the exquisiteness of the expression beyond its natural beauty, and it seems as if there could be no end to the delight taken in it.—A number of sheep coming to a pool of water to drink, with shady trees in the back-ground, the rest of the flock following them, and the shepherd and his dog left carelessly behind, is surely the *ideal* in landscape-composition, if the *ideal* has its source in the interest excited by a subject, in its power of drawing the affections after it linked in a golden chain, and in the desire of the mind to dwell on it for ever. The *ideal*, in a word, is the height of the pleasing, that which satisfies and accords with the inmost longing of the soul: the picturesque is merely a sharper and bolder impression of reality. A morning mist drawing a slender veil over all objects is at once picturesque and *ideal*: for it in the first place excites immediate surprise and admiration, and in the next a wish for it to continue, and a fear lest it

should be too soon dissipated. Is the Cupid riding on a lion in the ceiling at Whitehall, and urging him with a spear over a precipice, with only clouds and sky beyond, most picturesque or *ideal*? It has every effect of startling contrast and situation, and yet inspires breathless expectation and wonder for the event. Rembrandt's Jacob's Dream, again, is both—fearful to the eye, but realising that loftiest vision of the soul. Take two faces in Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper, the Judas and the St. John; the one is all strength, repulsive character, the other is all divine grace and mild sensibility. The individual, the characteristic in painting, is that *which is* in a marked manner—the *ideal* is that which we wish any thing to be, and to contemplate without measure and without end. The first is truth, the last is good. The one appeals to the sense and understanding, the other to the will and the affections. The truly beautiful and grand attracts the mind to it by instinctive harmony, is absorbed in it, and nothing can ever part them afterwards. Look at a Madonna of Raphael's: what gives the *ideal* character to the expression,—the insatiable purpose of the soul, or its measureless content in the object of its contemplation? A portrait of Vandyke's is mere indifference and still-life

in the comparison : it has not in it the principle of growing and still unsatisfied desire. In the *ideal* there is no fixed stint or limit but the limit of possibility : it is the infinite with respect to human capacities and wishes. Love is for this reason an *ideal* passion. We give to it our all of hope, of fear, of present enjoyment, and stake our last chance of happiness wilfully and desperately upon it. A good authority puts into the mouth of one of his heroines—

“ My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep !”—

How many fair catechumens will there be found in all ages to repeat as much after Shakespear's Juliet !

ESSAY XVII.

ON THE FEAR OF DEATH.

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ON THE FEAR OF DEATH.

“And our little life is rounded with a sleep.”

PERHAPS the best cure for the fear of death is to reflect that life has a beginning as well as an end. There was a time when we were not: this gives us no concern—why then should it trouble us that a time will come when we shall cease to be? I have no wish to have been alive a hundred years ago, or in the reign of Queen Anne: why should I regret and lay it so much to heart that I shall not be alive a hundred years hence, in the reign of I cannot tell whom?

When Bickerstaff wrote his Essays, I knew nothing of the subjects of them: nay, much later, and but the other day, as it were, in the beginning of the reign of George III. when Goldsmith, Johnson, Burke, used to meet at the Globe, when Garrick was in his glory, and

Reynolds was over head and ears with his portraits, and Sterne brought out the volumes of *Tristram Shandy* year by year, it was without consulting me : I had not the slightest intimation of what was going on : the debates in the House of Commons on the American war, or the firing at Bunker's hill, disturbed not me : yet I thought this no evil—I neither ate, drank, nor was merry, yet I did not complain : I had not then looked out into this breathing world, yet I was well ; and the world did quite as well without me as I did without it ! Why then should I make all this outcry about parting with it, and being no worse off than I was before ? There is nothing in the recollection that at a certain time we were not come into the world, that “ the gorge rises at ”—why should we revolt at the idea that we must one day go out of it ? To die is only to be as we were before we were born ; yet no one feels any remorse, or regret, or repugnance, in contemplating this last idea. It is rather a relief and disburthening of the mind : it seems to have been holiday-time with us then : we were not called to appear upon the stage of life, to wear robes or tatters, to laugh or cry, be hooted or applauded ; we had lain *perdus* all this while, snug, out of harm's way ; and had slept out our thousands of centuries

without wanting to be waked up; at peace and free from care, in a long nonage, in a sleep deeper and calmer than that of infancy, wrapped in the softest and finest dust. And the worst that we dread is, after a short, fretful, feverish being, after vain hopes, and idle fears, to sink to final repose again, and forget the troubled dream of life! Ye armed men, knights templars, that sleep in the stone aisles of that old Temple church, where all is silent above, and where a deeper silence reigns below (not broken by the pealing organ), are ye not contented where ye lie? Or would you come out of your long homes to go to the Holy War? Or do ye complain that pain no longer visits you, that sickness has done its worst, that you have paid the last debt to nature, that you hear no more of the thickening phalanx of the foe, or your lady's waning love; and that while this ball of earth rolls its eternal round, no sound shall ever pierce through to disturb your lasting repose, fixed as the marble over your tombs, breathless as the grave that holds you! And thou, oh! thou, to whom my heart turns, and will turn while it has feeling left, who didst love in vain, and whose first was thy last sigh, wilt not thou too rest in peace (or wilt thou cry to me complaining from thy clay-cold bed) when

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that sad heart is no longer sad, and that sorrow is dead which thou wert only called into the world to feel!

It is certain that there is nothing in the idea of a pre-existent state that excites our longing like the prospect of a posthumous existence. We are satisfied to have begun life when we did; we have no ambition to have set out on our journey sooner; and feel that we have had quite enough to do to battle our way through since. We cannot say,

“The wars we well remember of King Nine,
Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine.”

Neither have we any wish: we are contented to read of them in story, and to stand and gaze at the vast sea of time that separates us from them. It was early days then: the world was not *well-aired* enough for us: we have no inclination to have been up and stirring. We do not consider the six thousand years of the world before we were born as so much time lost to us: we are perfectly indifferent about the matter. We do not grieve and lament that we did not happen to be in time to see the grand mask and pageant of human life going on in all that period; though we are mortified at being obliged to quit our stand before the rest of the procession passes.

It may be suggested in explanation of this difference, that we know from various records and traditions what happened in the time of Queen Anne, or even in the reigns of the Assyrian monarchs: but that we have no means of ascertaining what is to happen hereafter but by awaiting the event, and that our eagerness and curiosity are sharpened in proportion as we are in the dark about it. This is not at all the case; for at that rate we should be constantly wishing to make a voyage of discovery to Greenland or to the Moon, neither of which we have, in general, the least desire to do. Neither, in truth, have we any particular solicitude to pry into the secrets of futurity, but as a pretext for prolonging our own existence. It is not so much that we care to be alive a hundred or a thousand years hence, any more than to have been alive a hundred or a thousand years ago: but the thing lies here, that we would all of us wish the present moment to last for ever. We would be as we are, and would have the world remain just as it is, to please us.

“ The present eye catches the present object”—

to have and to hold while it may; and abhors, on any terms, to have it torn from us, and nothing left in its room. It is the pang of parting,

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the unloosing our grasp, the breaking asunder some strong tie, the leaving some cherished purpose unfulfilled, that creates the repugnance to go, and "makes calamity of so long life," as it often is.

————— "Oh! thou strong heart!

There's such a covenant 'twixt the world and thee,
They're loth to break!"

The love of life, then, is an habitual attachment, not an abstract principle. Simply *to be* does not "content man's natural desire:" we long to be in a certain time, place, and circumstance. We would much rather be now, "on this bank and shoal of time," than have our choice of any future period, than take a slice of fifty or sixty years out of the Millennium, for instance. This shows that our attachment is not confined either to *being* or to *well-being*; but that we have an inveterate prejudice in favour of our immediate existence, such as it is. The mountaineer will not leave his rock, nor the savage his hut; neither are we willing to give up our present mode of life, with all its advantages and disadvantages, for any other that could be substituted for it. No man would, I think, exchange his existence with any other man, however fortunate. We had as lief *not be*, as *not be ourselves*. There

are some persons of that reach of soul that they would like to live two hundred and fifty years hence, to see to what height of empire America will have grown up in that period, or whether the English constitution will last so long. These are points beyond me. But I confess I should like to live to see the downfall of the Bourbons. That is a vital question with me; and I shall like it the better, the sooner it happens!

No young man ever thinks he shall die. He may believe that others will, or assent to the doctrine that "all men are mortal" as an abstract proposition, but he is far enough from bringing it home to himself individually*. Youth, buoyant activity, and animal spirits, hold absolute antipathy with old age as well as with death; nor have we, in the hey-day of life, any more than in the thoughtlessness of childhood, the remotest conception how

"This sensible warm motion can become
A kneaded clod"—

nor how sanguine, florid health and vigour, shall "turn to withered, weak, and grey." Or if in a moment of idle speculation we indulge in this notion of the close of life as a theory, it is amazing at what a distance it seems; what a long, leisurely interval there is between; what

* "All men think all men mortal but themselves."—YOUNG.

a contrast its slow and solemn approach affords to our present gay dreams of existence! We eye the farthest verge of the horizon, and think what a way we shall have to look back upon, ere we arrive at our journey's end; and without our in the least suspecting it, the mists are at our feet, and the shadows of age encompass us. The two divisions of our lives have melted into each other: the extreme points close and meet with none of that romantic interval stretching out between them, that we had reckoned upon; and for the rich, melancholy, solemn hues of age, "the sear, the yellow leaf," the deepening shadows of an autumnal evening, we only feel a dank, cold mist, encircling all objects, after the spirit of youth is fled. There is no inducement to look forward; and what is worse, little interest in looking back to what has become so trite and common. The pleasures of our existence have worn themselves out, are "gone into the wastes of time," or have turned their indifferent side to us: the pains by their repeated blows have worn us out, and have left us neither spirit nor inclination to encounter them again in retrospect. We do not want to rip up old grievances, nor to renew our youth like the phoenix, nor to live our lives twice over. Once is enough. As the tree falls, so let it lie. Shut up the book and close the account once for all!

It has been thought by some that life is like the exploring of a passage that grows narrower and darker the farther we advance, without a possibility of ever turning back, and where we are stifled for want of breath at last. For myself, I do not complain of the greater thickness of the atmosphere as I approach the narrow house. I felt it more, formerly*, when the idea alone seemed to suppress a thousand rising hopes, and weighed upon the pulses of the blood. At present I rather feel a thinness and want of support, I stretch out my hand to some object and find none, I am too much in a world of abstraction; the naked map of life is spread out before me, and in the emptiness and desolation I see Death coming to meet me. In my youth I could not behold him for the crowd of objects and feelings, and Hope stood always between us, saying—"Never mind that old fellow!" If I had lived indeed, I should not care to die. But I do not like a contract of pleasure broken off unfulfilled, a marriage with joy unconsummated, a promise of happiness rescinded. My public and private hopes have been left a ruin, or remain only to mock me. I would wish them

* I remember once, in particular, having this feeling in reading Schiller's *Don Carlos*, where there is a description of death, in a degree that almost stifled me.

to be re-edified. I should like to see some prospect of good to mankind, such as my life began with. I should like to leave some sterling work behind me. I should like to have some friendly hand to consign me to the grave. On these conditions I am ready, if not willing, to depart. I shall then write on my tomb—GRATEFUL AND CONTENTED! But I have thought and suffered too much to be willing to have thought and suffered in vain.—In looking back, it sometimes appears to me as if I had in a manner slept out my life in a dream or shadow on the side of the hill of knowledge, where I have fed on books, on thoughts, on pictures, and only heard in half-murmurs the trampling of busy feet, or the noises of the throng below. Waked out of this dim, twilight existence, and startled with the passing scene, I have felt a wish to descend to the world of realities, and join in the chase. But I fear too late, and that I had better return to my bookish chimeras and indolence once more! *Zanetto, lascia le donne, et studia la matematica.* I will think of it.

It is not wonderful that the contemplation and fear of death become more familiar to us as we approach nearer to it: that life seems to ebb with the decay of blood and youthful spirits; and that as we find every thing about us sub-

ject to chance and change, as our strength and beauty die, as our hopes and passions, our friends and our affections leave us, we begin by degrees to feel ourselves mortal!

I have never seen death but once, and that was in an infant. It is years ago. The look was calm and placid, and the face was fair and firm. It was as if a waxen image had been laid out in the coffin, and strewed with innocent flowers. It was not like death, but more like an image of life! No breath moved the lips, no pulse stirred, no sight or sound would enter those eyes or ears more. While I looked at it, I saw no pain was there; it seemed to smile at the short pang of life which was over: but I could not bear the coffin-lid to be closed—it seemed to stifle me; and still as the nettles wave in a corner of the churchyard over his little grave, the welcome breeze helps to refresh me, and ease the tightness at my breast!

An ivory or marble image, like Chantry's monument of the two children, is contemplated with pure delight. Why do we not grieve and fret that the marble is not alive, or fancy that it has a shortness of breath? It never was alive; and it is the difficulty of making the transition from life to death, the struggle between the two in our imagination, that con-

finds their properties painfully together, and makes us conceive that the infant that is but just dead, still wants to breathe, to enjoy, and look about it, and is prevented by the icy hand of death, locking up its faculties and benumbing its senses ; so that, if it could, it would complain of its own hard state. Perhaps religious considerations reconcile the mind to this change sooner than any others, by representing the spirit as fled to another sphere, and leaving the body behind it. So in reflecting on death generally, we mix up the idea of life with it, and thus make it the ghastly monster it is. We think how we should feel, not how the dead feel.

“ Still from the tomb the voice of nature cries ;
Even in our ashes live their wonted fires !”

There is an admirable passage on this subject in TUCKER'S *Light of Nature Pursued*, which I shall transcribe, as by much the best illustration I can offer of it.

“ The melancholy appearance of a lifeless body, the mansion provided for it to inhabit, dark, cold, close and solitary, are shocking to the imagination ; but it is to the imagination only, not the understanding ; for whoever consults this faculty will see at first glance, that there is nothing dismal in all these circum-

stances : if the corpse were kept wrapped up in a warm bed, with a roasting fire in the chamber, it would feel no comfortable warmth therefrom ; were store of tapers lighted up as soon as day shuts in, it would see no objects to divert it ; were it left at large it would have no liberty, nor if surrounded with company would be cheered thereby ; neither are the distorted features expressions of pain, uneasiness, or distress. This every one knows, and will readily allow upon being suggested, yet still cannot behold, nor even cast a thought upon those objects without shuddering ; for knowing that a living person must suffer grievously under such appearances, they become habitually formidable to the mind, and strike a mechanical horror, which is increased by the customs of the world around us."

There is usually one pang added voluntarily and unnecessarily to the fear of death, by our affecting to compassionate the loss which others will have in us. If that were all, we might reasonably set our minds at rest. The pathetic exhortation on country tombstones, "Grieve not for me, my wife and children dear," &c. is for the most part speedily followed to the letter. We do not leave so great a void in society as we are inclined to imagine, partly to magnify our

own importance, and partly to console ourselves by sympathy. Even in the same family the gap is not so great; the wound closes up sooner than we should expect. Nay, *our room* is not unfrequently thought better than *our company*. People walk along the streets the day after our deaths just as they did before, and the crowd is not diminished. While we were living, the world seemed in a manner to exist only for us, for our delight and amusement, because it contributed to them. But our hearts cease to beat, and it goes on as usual, and thinks no more about us than it did in our life-time. The million are devoid of sentiment, and care as little for you or me as if we belonged to the moon. We live the week over in the Sunday's paper, or are decently interred in some obituary at the month's end! It is not surprising that we are forgotten so soon after we quit this mortal stage: we are scarcely noticed, while we are on it. It is not merely that our names are not known in China—they have hardly been heard of in the next street. We are hand and glove with the universe, and think the obligation is mutual. This is an evident fallacy. If this, however, does not trouble us now, it will not hereafter. A handful of dust can have no quarrel to pick with its neighbours, or complaint to make against

Providence, and might well exclaim, if it had but an understanding and a tongue, "Go thy ways, old world, swing round in blue ether, vobiscum to every age, you and I shall no more jostle!"

It is amazing how soon the rich and titled, and even some of those who have wielded great political power, are forgotten.

" A little rule, a little sway,
Is all the great and mighty have
Betwixt the cradle and the grave"—

and, after its short date, they hardly leave a name behind them. "A great man's memory may, at the common rate, survive him half a year." His heirs and successors take his titles, his power, and his wealth—all that made him considerable or courted by others; and he has left nothing else behind him either to delight or benefit the world. Posterity are not by any means so disinterested as they are supposed to be. They give their gratitude and admiration only in return for benefits conferred. They cherish the memory of those to whom they are indebted for instruction and delight; and they cherish it just in proportion to the instruction and delight they are conscious they receive. The sentiment of admiration springs immediately

from this ground; and cannot be otherwise than well founded*.

The effeminate clinging to life as such, as a general or abstract idea, is the effect of a highly civilised and artificial state of society. Men formerly plunged into all the vicissitudes and dangers of war, or staked their all upon a single die, or some one passion, which if they could not have gratified, life became a burthen to them—now our strongest passion is to think, our chief amusement is to read new plays, new poems, new novels, and this we may do at our leisure, in perfect security, *ad infinitum*. If we look into the old histories and romances, before the *belles-lettres* neutralised human affairs and reduced passion to a state of mental equivocation, we find the heroes and heroines not setting their lives “at a pin’s fee,” but rather courting opportunities of throwing them away in very

* It has been usual to raise a very unjust clamour against the enormous salaries of public singers, actors, and so on. This matter seems reducible to a *moral equation*. They are paid out of money raised by voluntary contributions in the strictest sense; and if they did not bring certain sums into the treasury, the Managers would not engage them. These sums are exactly in proportion to the number of individuals to whom their performance gives an extraordinary degree of pleasure. The talents of a singer, actor, &c. are therefore worth just as much as they will fetch.

wantonness of spirit. They raise their fondness for some favourite pursuit to its height, to a pitch of madness, and think no price too dear to pay for its full gratification. Every thing else is dross. They go to death as to a bridal bed, and sacrifice themselves or others without remorse at the shrine of love, of honour, of religion, or any other prevailing feeling. Romeo runs his "sea-sick, weary bark upon the rocks" of death, the instant he finds himself deprived of his Juliet; and she clasps his neck in their last agonies, and follows him to the same fatal shore. One strong idea takes possession of the mind and overrules every other; and even life itself, joyless without that, becomes an object of indifference or loathing. There is at least more of imagination in such a state of things, more vigour of feeling and promptitude to act than in our lingering, languid, protracted attachment to life for its own poor sake. It is, perhaps, also better, as well as more heroic, to strike at some daring or darling object, and if we fail in that, to take the consequences manfully, than to renew the lease of a tedious, spiritless, charmless existence, merely (as Pierre says) "to lose it afterwards in some vile brawl" for some worthless object. Was there not a spirit of martyrdom as well as a spice of the

reckless energy of barbarism in this bold defiance of death? Had not religion something to do with it; the implicit belief in a future life, which rendered this of less value, and embodied something beyond it to the imagination; so that the rough soldier, the infatuated lover, the valorous knight, &c. could afford to throw away the present venture, and take a leap into the arms of futurity, which the modern-sceptic skinks back from, with all his boasted reason and vain philosophy, weaker than a woman! I cannot help thinking so myself; but I have endeavoured to explain this point before, and will not enlarge farther on it here.

A life of action and danger moderates the dread of death. It not only gives us fortitude to bear pain, but teaches us at every step the precarious tenure on which we hold our present being. Sedentary and studious men are the most apprehensive on this score. Dr. Johnson was an instance in point. A few years seemed to him soon over, compared with those sweeping contemplations on time and infinity with which he had been used to pose himself. In the *still-life* of a man of letters, there was no obvious reason for a change. He might sit in an arm-chair and pour out cups of tea to all eternity. Would it had been possible for him to do so! The most

rational cure after all for the inordinate fear of death is to set a just value on life. If we merely wish to continue on the scene to indulge our headstrong humours and tormenting passions, we had better begone at once : and if we only cherish a fondness for existence according to the good we derive from it, the pang we feel at parting with it will not be very severe !

THE END.

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LONDON:

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