1811 **The Spy.** No. 52

Saturday, August 24.

Respicere ad longæ jussit spatia ultima vitæ.

JUV.

THE Spy must now, though with great reluctance, bid adieu to his readers; and will, therefore, for this once, address them in his real character;–like the culprit who has always persisted in maintaining an untruth, until his last moments, when he is obliged to speak, or for evermore be silent;–then it is that almighty truth prevails: of course, the last speech and confession of every person is sealed with a stamp so sacred, that the surmises of doubt are hushed to silence. This, then, is the last speech and testimony of the Spy to his kind and benevolent readers: in that capacity he will never address them more. They will, therefore, believe him sincere, when leaving them his warmest wishes and assurances, that in whatever vocation he next appears, their favours will be doubly dear to him;–that the first complimentary calls he makes will be at those hospitable doors where he has already been so long admitted as a welcome guest; and he will be more proud of a situation at the corners of their chimneys than those of any other person.

His efforts have, without doubt, met with at least as much encouragement as they deserved; he frankly acknowledges that encouragement has not been much to boast of: as his name became known the number of his subscribers diminished. The learned, the enlightened, and polite circles of this flourishing metropolis, disdained either to be amused or instructed by the ebullitions of humble genius. Enemies, swelling with the most rancorous spite, grunted in every corner; and from none has the Spy suffered so much injury and blame, as from some pretended friends, who were indeed liberal in their advices, and ardent in their professions of friendship, yet took every method in their power to lessen the work in the esteem of others, by branding its author with designs the most subversive of all civility and decorum, and which, of all others, were the most distant from his heart. As they, however, did all for the best–all out of pure friendship for the author–and told him his faults with the utmost freedom–of course they conceived suspicion could never rest upon them.–It did light upon them. The Spy selected some of his essays, which he was certain were his worst, and insinuated that they were the productions of such and such gentlemen, famous for

their literary abilities. Their excellencies were so *apparent!* and so *striking!* that they even made the tears stream from the cheeks of the ladies on reading them, and manifested to the gentlemen that every sentence bespoke the hand of a master.

As a further proof, the best papers were selected from the works of Johnson and Addison, and shewn to these infallible monitors, in the Spy's own handwriting, as his own productions, and their opinions of them asked with the utmost seriousness, as of pieces concerning whose merits the author himself was not certain. He was soon convinced, to his utter astonishment, by arguments he could not controvert, that they were dull monotonous stuff; that the humour was coarse,–the grammar incorrect,–and that the philosophy contained in them was either inaccurate or inconsistent with common sense; and, in a word, that, besides being blurred with the most fulsome egotism, every sentence manifested a total ignorance of the principles of composition. Who could be blamed for giving up the counsels of such friends? This is no chimera or jest, but a positive truth: a part of one of these papers is published, mutilated so by their alterations, that it will scarcely be discovered, and of that, and another, the Spy has yet the copies, which he corrected as they dictated.

There have still, however, been a few, and not a very few either, who have stood the Spy's most strenuous advocates through good report, and through bad report. Of these he has been careful to preserve the names, and these names he will ever cherish with the most grateful remembrance; and were he certain that they would regret the discontinuation of the Spy, and feel the same disappointment on missing it on a Saturday evening, that they would do on being deprived of an old friend or dependant, whose conversation, though not without faults, was become familiar and dear to them, he would, in his turn, experience sensations such as none save an enthusiast in the pursuits of literature can enjoy; and he may surely be allowed to indulge the hope so congenial to the soul of every candidate for literary honours, that the awards of posterity will in part justify that cause which his friends have maintained against such odds. They have had, at all events, the honour of patronizing an undertaking quite new in the records of literature; for that a common shepherd who never was at school, who went to service at seven years of age, and could neither write nor read with accuracy when twenty, yet who, smitten with an unconquerable thirst after knowledge, should run away from his master, leave his native mountains, and his flocks to wander where they chose, come to the

metropolis with his plaid wrapt round his shoulders, and all at once set up for a connoisseur in manners, taste, and genius, has certainly much more the appearance of a romance than a matter of fact. Yet a matter of fact it certainly is, and such a person is the editor of the Spy.

He, indeed, expected no indulgence on that score, which he testified by giving his papers, even to his intimate acquaintances, anonymously; and as he could not conceive that ever he would be suspected as the writer, determined to remain in concealment; his first printer and publisher did not even know who the editor was, but took him always for one who transacted business between them, in order to keep the real one concealed. The inquiries concerning the author, and the observations on the work which he witnessed in that shop, were certainly the most amusing scenes that can well be conceived.

He is, however, willing to believe, that these considerations will account in part for some inadvertencies which raised such a prejudice against the Spy on its first outset. It is hoped the candid reader will easily discover that these never have proceeded from the slightest intention of injuring the cause of virtue and truth, but either from inattention or mere simplicity of heart. To write an occasional essay is an easy matter, but to be *obliged* to write one of such length is more difficult than most people seem inclined to believe; and why should it excite wonder that a stranger in travelling over a field, where every object is new to him, should sometimes take a view of them from a wrong point? The maxim of Horace may surely be applied without offence:–

> "*Ubi plura nitent in caurem non ego paucis,*
> *Offendar maculis quas at incuria fudit,*
> *Aut humana paru cavit natura.*"

Thus far may be said in justification of those papers, that in no one instance is the cause of religion, virtue, or benevolence injured or violated, but always encouraged, however ineffectively; therefore, though the Spy merits not admiration, he is at least entitled to kindness for his good intentions.

He is deeply indebted to a few ladies and gentlemen for their liberal support, to whose exertions the work certainly owes a large proportion of the little merit it lays claim to. It was intended, and indeed promised, that the names of contributors should appear in the index, each affixed to the title of his essay; but upon second thoughts, it appears proper to defer it to a future edition, when the

errors in the composition and printing will likewise be carefully corrected.

The papers which have given the greatest personal offence, are those of Mr. Shuffleton, which clamour obliged the editor reluctantly to discontinue. Of all the poets and poetesses whose works are there emblematically introduced, one gentleman alone stood the test, and his firmness was even by himself attributed to forgiveness; all the rest, male and female, tossed up their noses, and pronounced the writer an ignorant and incorrigible barbarian.–The Spy acknowledges himself the author of these papers, and adheres to the figurative characters which he has there given of the poetical works of these authors. He knows it is expected in a future edition that they will all be altered–they never shall–though the entreaties of respected friends prevailed on him to relinquish a topic which was his favourite one, what he has published, he has published; and no private considerations shall induce him to an act of such apparent servility, as that of making a renunciation; and those who are so grossly ignorant as to suppose the figurative characteristics of the poetry, as having the smallest reference to the personal characters of the authors of these poems, are below arguing with. Since it is of late become fashionable for some great poets to give an estimate of their own wonderful powers and abilities in periodical works of distinction, surely others have a right to give likewise their own estimates of the works of such bards. It is truly amusing to see how artfully a gentleman can place himself at the head of a school, and make himself appear as the greatest genius ever existed; with what address he can paint his failings as beauties, and depict his greatest excellencies as slight defects, finding fault only with those parts which every one must admire.–The design is certainly an original, though not a very creditable one; great authors cannot remain always concealed, let them be as cautious as they will, the smallest incident assists curiosity in making the discovery.

The Spy must now hasten to conclude his paper, and with it his work, yet with feelings which convince him of the truth of the old adage, that the idea that any thing is the last, brings with it a degree of pain to the reflecting mind, for in truth, the consideration that this is his last paper, gives more pain to his mind than he is willing to acknowledge; and his only comfort is in the hope of a fellow-feeling in his readers, and that they too will be sorry when they are informed that they have the Spy's last paper in their hands–that they will read this paper over with greater attention than they read any of the others, and will set a higher value upon the work in general

than they ever did before. Peace to the gentle bosom where these kind regrets are cherished–may it never feel a loss more severe, nor a pang more poignant–may the close of every succeeding week arrive fraught with reflections more elevated, and the dawn of every new one produce contemplations more rational and refined, than by the loss of the Spy they are deprived of.

From the boldness of such an attempt by an illiterate person, it will naturally be expected, that the Spy should make some acknowledgements, if not absolutely cringe to the critics; but the truth is, he expects only such mercy as an intruder deserves, either to keep his ground by main force, or be kicked out of the premises of genius and learning, bruised and maimed.–He whose confidence in his own merit incites him to meet, without any apparent sense of inferiority, those who flattered themselves with their own dignity, may justly be considered as an insolent leveller, impatient of the just prerogatives of rank and wealth, eager to usurp the station to which he has no right, and to confound the subordinations of society; and who would contribute to the exaltation of that spirit which even want and calamity are not able to restrain? But no better success will commonly be found to attend servility and dejection, which tend only to give pride the confidence to treat them with contempt. A request made with diffidence and timidity is easily denied, because the petitioner himself seems to doubt of its fitness. The Spy is therefore determined, that though he is weak and friendless, the honourable fraternity shall at least find that he does not want courage, and that the smallest injury shall not be inflicted on him with impunity.

The character of a writer, especially of a periodical writer, has at least ten chances of being blasted for one of attaining eminence. He solicits the regard of a multitude fluctuating in pleasures, or immersed in business, without time for intellectual amusements. He appeals to judges prepossessed by passions, or corrupted by prejudices, which preclude their approbation of any new performance. Many are too indolent to read any thing till its reputation is established, others too envious to promote that fame which gives them pain by its increase. What appears new is opposed, because most are unwilling to be taught; and what is known is rejected, because it is not sufficiently considered, that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed. The learned are afraid to declare their opinion early, lest they should put their reputation to hazard; the ignorant always imagine themselves giving some proof of delicacy when they refuse to be pleased; and he that finds his way to reputation through all these obstructions, must acknowledge that he is indebted to other causes

besides his industry, originality, or wit. At all events, the reflection that a man has done all that he could do, is in some degree satisfactory. A little more than nothing is as much as can be expected from a being who, with respect to the multitudes around him, is himself little more than nothing. Every man is under obligations to the supreme master of the universe, to improve all the opportunities of good which are afforded him.–But he has no reason to repine, though his abilities are small, and his opportunities few. He that has improved the virtue or advanced the happiness of one fellow-creature–he that has ascertained a single moral proposition, or added one useful experiment to natural knowledge, may be contented with his own performance; and, with respect to others like himself, may demand, like Augustus, to be dismissed at his departure with applause. "*Est quodum prodire si non datur ultra.*"

The Spy had still a greater obstacle to surmount than any of these, and one which no periodical writer before him was perhaps ever necessitated to struggle with. The truth of this will be readily admitted, if the following considerations are impartially weighed. Surely he that has been confined from his infancy to the conversation of the lowest classes of mankind, must necessarily want those accomplishments which are the usual means of attracting favour; and, though truth, fortitude, and probity may be supposed to give an indisputable right to respect and kindness, they will not be distinguished by common eyes, unless they are brightened by elegance, but must be cast aside like unpolished gems, of which none but the artist knows the intrinsic value. The occasional impurity and harshness of his stile, must impair the force of his reasoning, and the ruggedness of his numbers, turn off the mind from the artifice of disposition, and the fertility of his invention. It is well known that few men have strength of reason to over-rule the perceptions of sense; and that fewer still have curiosity or benevolence to struggle long against first impressions; he therefore who fails at first to please by his polished address, is commonly at once rejected, and never obtains an opportunity of shewing his latent excellencies or essential qualities; when, to these considerations, is added the difficulty with which valuable or pleasing qualities force themselves into view, when they are obscured by indigence, and the little power which native beauty has to charm, without the ornaments which fortune bestows, the Spy's chance for literary eminence must appear a desperate cause. He is then utterly at a loss to conceive what estimate his friends will make of his intellects, when he assures them, that though he has all the disadvantages above supposed, and but a small share of the

qualifications, they are to him only so many motives for further exertion. The world has a thousand times witnessed what mighty things can be accomplished by the assistance of learning, but it has never yet ascertained how much may be accomplished without it. The pleasure then of making the experiment, though in a branch of literature which some may ridicule, and others despise, offers to him sufficient inducement for perseverance. The chief art of attaining eminence in any thing, is to attempt but little at a time. The widest excursions of the mind are made by short flights, often repeated; the most lofty fabrics of science have been formed by the continued accumulation of single propositions–the Spy may be worsted–he shall never be discouraged.

As the contemplation of the final end of any thing brings along with it feelings of regret, so should the end of every thing we witness, though ever so trivial, lead our contemplations to a survey of the final end of things more important to us. If this train of ideas is habitually cherished, it will naturally bring before the mind's eye, the approaching termination of every earthly enjoyment, which at present administers to the comfort of human existence, and finally the end of that existence itself, to which time is every moment wafting us nearer and nearer. When we leave a scene which we have long frequented, and every image of which is familiar to us–even though in that scene we have experienced little else save misery and disappointment; yet, when taking a last look of it, and knowing that it is to be the last, a soft sympathetic sorrow swells the heart, and often forces the sharp corrosive tear into the eye. When taking leave of a beloved friend, even though but for a short season, if an officious thought chances to intrude on the fancy, that it is possible we shall never see that friend again, how repulsive is every feeling of the heart to such an idea? But when we know that we never can see him again, though the mind is obliged to bend to the stroke, it is, of all other feelings, the most painful, and fraught with the most tender sorrow. Few there are who have not experienced these emotions, in a greater or lesser degree, yet how seldom have they been productive of the effects for which the author of our nature seems to have bestowed them. Surely the horror of mind attending a last adieu, has been meant as a monitor of a fast approaching day, when we must bid adieu to all who are near and dear to us in life.–That such an hour is posting towards us, we are all certain; and, how very near it may be, not one of us knows; and therefore, that the pangs of parting regret may be somewhat mollified, ought we not to be constantly endeavouring to secure some interest in that country in which

we all hope to find a final retreat, by gaining that friendship which alone can be of everlasting value to us? Then, on being forced from the embraces of our friends here, we know that we have one before us, to whose house we will be welcome; whose benevolent heart has already bled for us, and whose kind hand will at last wipe all the tears of sorrow from our eyes.

ALAS! alas! the time draws nigh,
When low that beauteous form shall lie!
That eye that beams with love and duty,
Must quickly lose its beaming beauty!
That heart that beats so brisk and gaily,
Must turn a clod in yonder valley!
No more the morn shall dawn on thee,
But long thy starless night shall be,
Chill, chill, and damp, thy lonely room!
And hemlock o'er thy bosom bloom!
Oh then be wise! the time draws nigh,
When low that beauteous form shall lie!

But, Oh! within that lovely frame,
There dwells a spark of heavenly flame!
A spark shall ever, ever burn,
Shall smile o'er nature's closing urn,
And mix its beams in cloudless day,
When sun and stars have passed away.
To nurse that spark, that ray divine,
The task, the pleasing task be thine!
Then thy delights shall never die,
Though low that beauteous form shall lie.

THE END.

intends Glenegle to be situated somewhere near the coast in the Argyll district.

508(a) "She never told her love [...] Smiling at grief." from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, II.4.110–15.

510(b) *incog.* *incognito*, with his identity unknown or disguised.

511(b) a horse laugh a loud, coarse laugh.

512(b) letters of horning official Scottish legal documents charging a debtor to pay as demanded or be 'put to the horn', i.e. declared a rebel.

THE SPY, No. 52 (Saturday, 24 August 1811)

The Spy's Farewell to his Readers

Author: James Hogg–NLS, St Andrews, and Guelph marked copies.

Motto the source of this quotation has not been identified, and its meaning is not sufficiently clear out of context, but it must mean something like 'has bid me look back on the recent parts of a long life'.

515(b) a part of one of these papers is published there is apparently no paper by Addison published in the manner Hogg describes, but several by Johnson–the most notable of these is the 'New Year Paper' in No. 19 of *The Spy*, but see also Nos. 29, 35, 36, 39, and 48, as well as this very paper for other instances of the same practice.

516(a) his first printer and publisher James Robertson of 16 and 17 Nicolson Street published the first thirteen numbers of *The Spy*. A brief account of Hogg's relations with Robertson is given in the Introduction, pp. xx–xxiv.

516(c) The maxim of Horace from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, 350–52, meaning 'When there are many delights in a poem, I shall not be offended by a few slips that carelessness has let through, or that human frailty has allowed'.

516(d) and indeed promised see the editorial note to No. 26, which promises that 'a complete Index with the names of the Authors that are known will be given, when the volume is completed'.

517(a) greatest personal offence, [...] Mr. Shuffleton these papers appeared in Nos. 2, 5, and 10 of *The Spy*. Hogg seems to imply that his portrayal of each poet's muse in the guise of his mistress was taken by the authors concerned as equivalent to a charge of personal immorality. This is the only reference to the Shuffleton papers as being more offensive than other papers in *The Spy*. Hogg's *Memoir*, p. 20 implies that the paper which gave the greatest offence was in fact the 'Story of the Berwick-shire Farmer, continued' in No. 4 of *The Spy*: this view would appear to be confirmed by the 'Letter to the Spy on his former Numbers' in No. 7, and by the opening discussion of Hogg's paper in No. 32.

517(b–c) Since it is of late become fashionable [...] curiosity in making the discovery Hogg gives an explanation of this allusion himself in his *Anecdotes*, pp. 48–49. He had been hurt by an article in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* identified by Douglas S. Mack as appearing in vol. I pt. 2, pp. 417–43 of the volume for 1808 (see note in *Anecdotes*, p. 101). Hogg supposed that either Scott or Southey wrote the article, which he saw as placing him 'as the very dregs of all the poets of Britain' (p. 48).

518(c)–519(a) He solicits the regard [...] his industry, originality, or wit this passage is substantially taken from No. 3 of the *Rambler*.

519(a–b) A little more than nothing [...] demand like Augustus to be dismissed at his departure with applause Suetonius gives this anecdote in the section relating to Augustus in his *Lives of the Caesars*. The whole passage is substantially taken, however, from No. 89 of the *Idler*.

519(b) "*Est quodum prodire si non datur ultra.*" from Horace's *Epistles*, 1.1.32, meaning 'There is some good we can achieve, even if we may advance no further'.

Alas! alas! [...] *beauteous form shall lie*

Author: James Hogg–NLS marked copy. It is not headed as a separate item in No. 52 but forms the conclusion to 'The Spy's Farewell to his Readers' which all three marked copies attribute to Hogg. These lines were reprinted in Hogg's *Poetical Works*, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1822), IV, 235–36.