

BLACKWOOD'S
Edinburgh
MAGAZINE.

VOL. XI.

JANUARY—JUNE, 1822.



WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH;
AND
T. CADELL, STRAND, LONDON.

1822.

LETTER FROM LONDON.

Piccadilly, London, February 10, 1822.

TO C. NORTH, ESQ. EDINBURGH.

MY DEAR SIR—Are we to see you in town this spring? or is the gout inexorable? I know not, however, with what grace or chance of acceptance I can invite you, after the specimen you had last year of the intolerable simplicity, the primeval artlessness of our table in Piccadilly. My aunt, in spite of some thousands per annum, is, to be sure, a bitter old housekeeper, and nothing ever gave me so unequivocal a proof of the endurance of your ancient friendship for our family, as the forbearance, nay, the positive good temper, with which you swallowed those things which affected to be original dinners, but which you, and all of us knew, were nothing more than impudent *refacimientos* of certain joints, which had for the two former days been ruined in character, and dared not appear in their own likeness. It is quite admirable to think how you stood all this! you, who are used to such ingenious and abundant living; and should I last longer than the old lady, who, I suppose, is scraping in this ineffable way for me, I trust you will permit me to indemnify you for allowing your consideration of my feelings to hinder you from often rushing out, and balancing matters at the opposite coffee-house, which, to your large praise be it said, you never once shewed the least symptom of doing. There is, however, as old Shakespeare has it, "a soul of goodness in things evil." Your virtue was rewarded. You did not treat us with such delicate forbearance, or undergo so much abstinence for nothing; for I can declare, that "my young remembrance cannot parallel" such good looks in you, as you had on leaving London. The firmness and elasticity of your step was renewed—your eyes looked youthful, as well as critical—I could perceive something of that neat symmetry of ankle, which my late mother, when speaking of you, used occasionally to extol, but which I concluded was nothing more than an antique fiction, generated by that universal desire, which all old persons have of extolling every thing contemporary with their youth. I did not know that

The gout had mark'd your ankles for its own,

and had jealously concealed them with a thick veil. But though the austere discipline of our house in London had given you strength to shake off this tyrannical love, I feared for you when you should return to Edinburgh, and come again fairly within sight of the punch-bowls at Ambrose's; and I regret to see in the 58th Number of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, of which it seems you are the avowed Editor, (who would have thought at one time that our old friend, Mr North, would ever have resulted in an Editor?) that apprehensions are entertained by a person who signs himself "Morgan Odoherty," of the gout flying to your stomach. This shews what you have been at since we saw you in London, and gives likelihood to my distrust, of having your company here this year. All I hope is, that I shall not be informed some day that you have died of the disease which was fatal to Congreve, namely, "two bottles of port and an arm-chair." By the by, my dear Sir, you have puzzled me very much lately. I understand you not in your editorial capacity. You seem to be enveloped in conundrums, and inexplicable mysteries of whim. Who is this "Morgan Odoherty," who writes to you with such unrestrained familiarity? I never heard my aunt, nor either of my two deceased parents, speak of him; and considering the close connexion between you and my family, one would suppose, that so old and intimate a companion as "Morgan" assumes to be, could not have been unknown or uninteresting to them. But, if I may speak out, I am not without my suspicions that there is no such person; and there are not wanting other incredulous individuals, who carry their scepticism a little farther, and even doubt *your own existence*; for were this not the case, I am convinced they never could bring their minds to address a respectable, *real*, elderly gentleman like yourself, in such terms as, "Dear Kit,"—"Cock of the North,"—"Jolly Old Buck,"—"Prime One," and others equally liberty-taking and low. You have no one to thank for these freedoms but yourself.

Should the malady I dread keep you

a prisoner in Edinburgh, the disappointment will be no less to you than to myself; for I know you take a lively interest in whatever is going on here. You yearn to be occasionally among us; to make one in the numerous stir and ferment in the metropolis; to partake of our public amusements, (more especially when there is a fresh importation of Mademoiselles for the ballet at the opera-house,) and to look a little into some of our new books before the freshness of their spirit shall have evaporated in a journey to Edinburgh. I shall, therefore, out of the desire I have for your recreation, write down, from time to time, all I know of London interest, and talk to you with my pen, if I am denied the pleasure of an oral communion with you.

You must be careful how you wreak your disdain on the principles of Lord Byron's later poetry, as he will soon have it in his power to make fierce reprisals on you and the other dissenters. You have perhaps heard of the Journal which is to be written by him at Pisa, and sent over here for publication, in order that the balance of critical power may be restored, which has preponderated lately too much on the Tory side. In this great undertaking he has called to himself two allies, namely, Mr Byshe Shelly and Mr Leigh Hunt, the latter of whom has abandoned his suburban villa, (No. 13, Jisson Grove North,) to brave, with his wife and "Little Johnnys," a perilous voyage on the un-cockney ocean. The sphere of this poet's experience will now be nobly enlarged. No one must twist him any more about "poplar rows" and "beck gardens." He and his companions will now, like his own Nereids,

" turn
And toss upon the ocean's lifting billows,
Making them banks and pillows,
Upon whose springiness they lean and ride;
Some with an inward back; some upward-
eyed,
Feeling the sky; and some with sidelong
hips,
O'er which the surface of the water slips."
Foliage, p. xix.

His lordship of Newstead has sent Leigh a subsidy, and has likewise prepared, in a costly way, the lower part of his Pisan residence for the reception of his London ally. This is certainly very noble on the part of Byron; and if the story be true about the deception he had recourse to the other day, in order to serve a celebrated brother poet, who was invincibly punctilious, it is impossible to extol too highly his munificence and delicacy. I am glad to behold him arming himself, and I hope we shall see a "good fight." Southey does not go the right way to work with him. I have better confidence in your judgment and mettle.

Did it ever fall in your way to see a poem with this title, "Epipsychidion: Verses addressed to the noble and unfortunate Lady Emilia V——, now imprisoned in the convent of ——?" This little pamphlet is a threefold curiosity, on account of the impenetrable mysticism of its greater portion, the delicious beauty of the rest, and the object of the whole, which I take to be an endeavour to set aside the divine prohibition, that a man may not marry his own sister.* The poem was published anonymously, but as people began to apply it to a certain individual, and make their own inferences, it was, I believe, suddenly withdrawn from circulation. There

* Our readers will probably suspect, that our correspondent's intention is to attribute the poem in question to Lord Byron; but we venture to say, that there is nobody capable of wasting such poetry on such a theme, except only the unfortunate Mr Shelly. To this gentleman's genius we have always done justice; and hitherto we have really avoided—what the *Quarterly* (that contained in one Number, a string of filthy stories about him, boy and man) has more recently had the audacity to say it has avoided—the smallest allusion to his private character. But Percy Byshe Shelly has now published a long series of poems, the only object of which seems to be the promotion of ATHEISM and INCEST; and we can no longer hesitate to avow our belief, that he is as worthy of co-operating with the King of Cockaigne, as he is unworthy of co-operating with Lord Byron. Shelly is a man of genius, but he has no sort of sense or judgment. He is merely "an inspired idiot!" Leigh Hunt is a man of talents, but vanity and vulgarity neutralize all his efforts to pollute the public mind. Lord Byron we regard as not only a man of lofty genius, but of great shrewdness and knowledge of the world. What can HE seriously hope from associating his name with such people as these? CAIN is in some parts a reprehensible performance, but what a gulf profound between it and Queen Mab, or the Cenci, or this Epipsychidion!

Since we have mentioned Cain, we must say that the conduct of the Lord Chancellor, in regard to that poem, has filled us both with wonder and regret. The property

is no doubt but it comes from the Holy Pisan Alliance; and some of its insulated passages are worthy of the genius which dwells among the members of that body. I read this poem last night at the hushed and sleeping hour of twelve, and never was I so enchanted as in wandering among its strange, ethereal, dreamy fancies, some of which contain, in my opinion, the very soul and essence of ideal poetry. The following is the description of the place whither the poet proposes to fly with his mysterious mistress:—

“ It is an isle under Ionian skies,
 Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise;
 And, for the harbours are not safe and good,
 This land would have remain'd a solitude,
 But for some pastoral people native there,
 Who from the Elysian, clear, and golden air,
 Draw the last spirit of the age of gold,
 Simple and spirited, innocent and bold.
 The blue Ægean girds this chosen home,
 With ever-changing sound, and light, and foam,
 Kissing the sifted sands, and caverns hoar;
 And all the winds wandering along the shore
 Undulate with the undulating tide.
 There are thick woods, where sylvan forms abide;
 And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,
 As clear as elemental diamond,
 Or serene morning air; and, far beyond,
 The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer,
 (Which the rough shepherd treads but once a-year,)
 Pierce into glades, caverns, bowers, and halls,
 Built 'round with ivy, which the waterfalls
 Illuminating, with sound that never fails,
 Accompany the noon-day nightingales;
 And all the place is peopled with sweet airs;
 The light clear element which the isle wears,
 Is heavy with the scent of lemon flowers,
 * * * * *
 * * * * * and from the sky
 There fall clear exhalations, soft and bright,
 Veil after veil, each hiding some delight,
 Which sun or moon or zephyr draw aside,
 Till the isle's beauty, like a naked bride,
 Glowing at once with love and loveliness,
 Blushes and trembles at its own excess.”

The poet then describes a house built by some primeval being for the residence of his “*sister and his spouse*,” in which description the following exquisite lines occur:

“ Parasite flowers illumine with dewy gems
 The lampless halls, and when they fade, the sky
 Peeps through their winter-woof of tracery,
 With moonlight patches, or star-atoms keen,
 Or fragments of the day's intense serene;—
 Working mosaic on their Parian floors.
 * * * * *

This isle and house are mine, and I have vow'd
 Thee to be lady of the solitude;
 And I have fitted up some chambers there,
 Looking towards the golden eastern air,
 And level with the living winds.”

of Cain, we humbly think, ought to have been protected. In Mr Murray's hands, it was a book for gentlemen; but the Benbows will send it on tea-paper into the pot-houses, where nothing of it will be properly understood, and much of it absurdly misunderstood. There will now be an opportunity, however, for seeing on what principles the Constitutional Society really acts. C. NORTH.

There is no elderly gentleman in the kingdom, afflicted with good living and the gout, to whom I would confide such poetry as this, except yourself. On you it will not be wasted, even should it arrive while you are considering some bare problem in political economy. The knowledge of men and things, and of the serious business of life, which you have accumulated, together with your conviction, arising from experience, as to the merits of Punch and Arm-chairs, have not weaned your mind from the youthful delight in romantic poetry; and this alone makes you, if I may say so to your face, a "remarkable personage."

I was at the King's theatre the other night, to hear the new opera "Il Barone di Dolabeim," by Pacini, a meagre composer, whose work is a mere "pale reflex" of Rossini. None but great genuises should meddle with common-places; and as inferior ones can do nothing else, I suppose it would be better were they never to write at all. Pacini is nothing more than a maker of centos, and has no individuality of mind to give a tinge to what he borrows. Common-place is not necessarily a bad thing, nay, it may occasionally have its merits. The enjoyment resulting from it is of a luxurious and indolent kind: it does not task your thoughts; and you are pleased to be put into renewed intercourse with a pleasant acquaintance. But this must be done by the agency of a master, who has thoughts of his own, as well as perception of what is good in others. Nothing, for instance, can be more remarkable than the way in which Winter, the great musician, elevates and makes you love a common-place, rendering it tributary to a fresh sentiment, and illuminating it by the surrounding glory of his own original ideas. Milton did the same thing in poetry.

The ballet promises to be excellent this season. You recollect Mercan-

dotti, the beautiful Spanish girl, who was over here about five years ago, bewitching us all with the native grace and picturesqueness of her dancing? You and I were together at the opera-house the first night she "came out," as the phrase is; and we agreed in thinking her the most fascinating dancer we had ever seen. You, I remember, were quite absorbed and wrapt in the contemplation of one of her performances; and I don't wonder at it, for she was indeed a seducing creature, and the dance was the finest which has ever arisen from the romance and courtly amorousness of Spain. Nothing could be more exquisite than the way in which the young thing abandoned herself to the sentiment of this dance; her large black eyes swimming in correspondence to the beautiful movement of her figure (one of subduing luxury); and, as she wreathed the scarf about her waist, the "marmoreal depth" of her young bosom was alternately revealed and hidden. I have often repeated the memorable toast which sprung from your delight after supper, on the evening we saw the Spanish girl Mercandotti. — You will regret to hear that, in the interval between that time and this, she has been studying in some "Academy" of Paris; and has returned a cold, unfeeling, unsentimental, scholastic, laborious, French performer. My sister Jemima, however, says she is much improved, and that she was *vulgar* before.

How do you like Mrs Morgan's articles in the New Monthly Magazine? Let me hear from you soon.

Ever yours, my dear Sir,

JOHN JOHNES.

P. S.—I am charged to send Jemima's best regards to you, together with my Aunt's friendly remembrances. I wonder at the former, as the little puss seemed so utterly shocked, about a month ago, at the "real Irish melodies" in the Magazine.

TRANSLATION OF THE WINE-BIBBER'S GLORY.—(No. 60. p. 89.)

By Philip Potts, Esq. Holyhead.

****, but your Latin is not quite classical—somewhat raffish, my very good friend?

Transcat—it is good enough for an ungrateful world.

Then what a word "Portum" is! and "Claretum," still more abominable. Why, sir, it is worse and worse, as Lord Norbury said, when a witness confessed his name to be Shaughnessy O'Shaughnessy.