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THE ESSAYS OF
WILLIAM

HAZLITT

A SELECTION:
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
CATHERINE MACDONALD MACLEAN

MACDONALD : LONDON

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pure ' that lighted up my early path ? " His greatest pleasure in these years was reading. Among his red-letter days were the one in which he discovered the little duodecimo volume of *The Tatler* in his father's library, and the one in which the first of the little dusty duodecimos in which *Tom Jones* was issued in 1792 arrived at the parsonage at Wem. Shortly after this he read *Joseph Andrews* and the works of Smollett and Sterne, but *Tom Jones* remained for him the book which first gave him the delight of feeling that the world of flesh and blood could be recreated in literature. During these years his life was in all respects sheltered. His relationships with all around him were happy. With his father, especially, his companionship was close.

In his fifteenth year he seemed to those around him to alter greatly. He became nervous and irritable, inclined to " shut himself up " from the rest of the family during the day and to sally forth at night for solitary walks or to let loose his energy by scampering about the fields in the moonlight " like any wild thing." His companionship with his father was interrupted. It had been taken for granted by his family that he would enter the Unitarian ministry, and up to this time he had given no one any cause to doubt his fitness for this vocation. Now he began to absent himself from family prayers and from chapel. By this time he had begun to think for himself, and he may have been troubled by scruples of his own as to his fitness for the career chosen for him. Nevertheless in the autumn Of 1793 he set out for the New College at Hackney, which offered a five-year course to Divinity students. Many able men had given their services to this College, including Dr. Price, Dr. Kippis, and the stormy and saintly Gilbert Wakefield. When Hazlitt went up to it Dr. Abraham Rees was the resident Tutor, and Priestley read lectures on History. To Hazlitt it seemed chaotic after his sheltered life at Wem, but it had its share in forming him, for the three things it strove most to inculcate in its students were—

independence of thought, the love of Truth for its own sake, and mental courage.

While Hazlitt was there he thought much about systems of Government, and began work on an "Essay on Laws" which was to form part of a more elaborate "Essay on the Political State of Man." He was preoccupied, too, with the study of philosophy. Some of his tutors were great admirers of Locke and Hartley, but Hazlitt found himself challenging the interpretation of mind given by the empiricists. From the English philosophers he passed on to the French, and as he ranged through them his dissatisfaction increased. It seemed to him that everywhere, in Helvetius, Condillac, Mirabaud, Baron D'Holbach, La Rochefoucault, Condorcet and others, he came up against the doctrine "that Man is a purely sensual and selfish animal, governed solely by a regard to his immediate gratification or future interest." As he had been nurtured in faith in the gradual improvement and the ultimate perfectibility of Man this seemed to him a doctrine of despair, and he resolved to combat it. In challenging it he had already found the theme of his first book: "The Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind."

In the meantime, his emotional life was being profoundly affected by the acting of Mrs. Siddons. Her influence on him preceded that of Rousseau and of Burke, and was no less lasting.

He was much affected, too, by his first reading of a translation of *Die Rauber*. Afterwards he wrote of it:

"*The Robbers* was the first play I ever read; and the effect it produced upon me was the greatest. It stunned me like a blow, and I have not recovered enough from it to describe how it was. There are impressions which neither time nor circumstances can efface."

Schiller, he says, left on him "a deep sense of suffering and a lasting desire after good."

After a couple of years at Hackney he could no longer

conceal from himself that he had made a false start in life. He felt himself to be totally unfitted for the life of a Unitarian minister, and painful though it was to him to frustrate his father's dearest desire he was driven by his integrity to withdraw from a false position. In the summer of 1795 he left the College.

For the next two years he laboured, for the most part vainly, as he had no words at his command to express the tenuity of his ideas, to write that Essay on the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind with which he was to wrestle for the next ten years. The barren effort reduced him almost to despair. Apart from this he had enough to distress him, for he was living in a state of painful isolation. From being the pride and the hope of his family he had become its problem. To his father he was a disappointment; to his friends he seemed in danger of becoming a non-descript, living on his parents; among many of his acquaintances—he says—with a touch of bitterness—he "passed for an idiot." During these years, being cut off from the human contacts he needed, he steeped himself in Burke and Rousseau, and learned much from them both. He read with passion, training on them that sensibility in which lies the power of his criticism to quicken; and he read both with extreme delight yet his isolation continued until chance brought Coleridge to preach at the Unitarian chapel in Shrewsbury in January 1798.

On the morning of the 14th Hazlitt walked from Wem to Shrewsbury to hear what the unknown poet had to say; was conscious the moment he heard Coleridge speak that he was in the presence of genius, and that as he listened he was experiencing something like an intellectual and emotional rebirth. This consciousness deepened when Coleridge came out to Wem and he listened to the words that fell from the poet's lips and rustled round the little wainscoted parlour of the parsonage like "silken sounds." Hazlitt dated his intellectual maturity from that hour. Towards the end of his life, when reviewing his literary

pilgrimage, he wrote : " . . . till I became acquainted with the author of *The Ancient Mariner* I could neither write nor speak/y His own words are needed to make intelligible the kind of enlightenment that came to him from Coleridge : " the light of his genius shone into my soul, like the sun's rays glittering in the puddles of the road." From the outset he saw Coleridge through " the fine medium of passion."

Towards the end of May he paid a three- weeks'-visit to his new friend, who was then living in a cottage at Nether Stowey, in Somerset; met Wordsworth, who tenanted the mansion-house of Alfoxden, on the lowest reach of the Quantocks, three miles distant from Coleridge's poor cottage ; and was initiated into the subtleties of poetry and criticism by the two greatest poets of his day. Here was indeed a reversal of his lot. Almost within a day his isolation had been exchanged for close communion with two master minds.

By this time he had almost given up hope of earning a livelihood by his pen, and had agreed to study painting, with a view to making a livingjts a portrait-painter(In the autumn of 1798 he began life again as a student in London., this time as a student of art. He now found himself in a world in which all the values of the sect in which he had been bred were reversed. Little was heard of integrity of living or Christian duties. Integrity of art seemed to be the sole integrity that was valued.)Among the painters his most interesting contacts were with the silver-tongued, bitter-tongued Northcote and with the passionate intimidating Fuseli; but of far greater influence in moulding his personality was the crude unfashioned life of the schools of art.(The year which had brought him his First Acquaintance with poets

prostitutes, for the womenjwho posed for the students were prostitutes past their prime. Up to this time Hazlitt had been sheltered from contact with the grosser forms of evih On coming into contact with them his idealism received a shock sufficiently painful to haunt his memory for some

time, and strong enough to set up some reaction in his mind which led to a readjustment, if not to an entire reversal, of many of his cherished values

When he began to study painting he was not specially interested in it. Now and again he would find himself wondering whether anyone could possibly feel the same stimulus in painting, the same anguish, excitement and uneasy delight as he had experienced in his attempts at writing. In December 1798 the opening of an exhibition of Italian pictures in Pall Mall (most of which had come from the Orleans collection in Paris) altered his point of view, for it awakened him to the poetry of painting. In the two following years he flung himself with passionate absorption into the study of the new art he had set himself to master. In 1801 he was making his first attempts at portrait-painting. In May 1802 he might consider himself as having won his credentials as an artist, for a portrait he had painted of his father was hung in the Exhibition. In October 1802, when Paris was thrown open by the Treaty of Amiens and on tiptoe to welcome the many visitors who thronged to her, he went to the Louvre, which as the result of Buonaparte's conquests had been enriched by most of the masterpieces of European art, to study the treasures there. His initiation into the " universe of art " contained in the galleries of the Louvre was one of the transcendent experiences of his life. Living bare and hard, absorbed in painting from morning until the unwelcome cry : *Quatre heures pas sees ! Il faut fermer, citoyens !* " forced him to depart, paying his way by copying some of his favourite masterpieces, he remained in Paris during four months of intense and absorbing happiness. {These months in Republican Paris were the months in which his very remarkable education, an education which was mainly that of the operation of contrasts on a temperament of extreme sensibility, was completed. Wordsworth claimed that genius thrives best on alternate rest and excitation. Hazlitt's sensibility, the source of his genius, was nourished rather by contrasts. The insecurity

of his earliest years followed by the enclosed security of his boyhood at Wem; the sectarian College and the Schools of Art; the Hebrew prophets and the French philosophers; Burke and Rousseau; theologians to whom a poet seemed but a trifler with realities and two great poets who saw life as coextensive with poetry; metaphysicians to whom words seemed too gross for the conveyance of their thoughts and painters who rejected words as the mere ghosts of the forms and colours they sought to reproduce—all had had their share in the making of him) In a sense, his education was never complete, for he continued to learn through the imagination and the passions to the last years of his life, but when he returned from Paris to England in February 1803 his education in the formal sense of the word was complete.

He set at once about earning his living by portrait-painting and writing. His portrait-painting led to a renewal of contact with the two poets who had effected his development so deeply. In July he was at Keswick, where Coleridge was then living, and engaged in painting portraits of Coleridge and Wordsworth, who had settled at Grasmere. Later in the year he met Southey. By this time Hazlitt's development had been such that his sympathies with Coleridge and Wordsworth were somewhat less than imperfect. Coleridge found him "jealous, gloomy, and of an irritable pride," and accused the man whom he had left in 1798 an idealist in his conception of Woman of having become "addicted to women as objects of sexual Indulgence." Hazlitt had also returned from Paris filled with an admiration that came near to worship of Buonaparte, whom both Coleridge and Wordsworth detested. The renewal in May of the war with France had filled him with a desperate regret, whereas Coleridge took pride in his share in bringing it about. Coleridge seemed to Hazlitt one of the bigots of the war. Hazlitt had come to seem to Coleridge one of "the bigots of the Revolution." It was not only Coleridge who took exception, in that year of

war-excitation, to his opinions. The wandering Jacobin painter whose eyes became suffused with light at the mention of the Louvre, and who saw in Buonaparte not the bloodthirsty monster of English caricature but the slight figure in blue he had glimpsed in the streets of Paris, completely unassuming in dress and demeanour, and distinguished only by the poise of the head, "the fine iron binding about his face," and the halo of almost miraculous achievement—became unpopular in the Lake district in the course of the autumn. In pecember he was driven out of it, the immediate cause of tne hue and cry against him being an *amourette* which terminated humiliatingly for him and left him with a permanent sense of sexual humiliation.

(The great gain the following years brought him was the friendship of Charles and Mary Lamb. He passed his time between Wem and London, engaged in painting and in various laborious literary tasks which brought him little money or reputation) He succeeded at last in finishing his Essay on The Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind, which was published in 1805 as *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. In 1806 he published his first political Essay: *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*; in 1807 *An Abridgment of the Light of Nature Pursued*, by Abraham Tucker, Esq.; *A Reply to the Essay on Population*, by the Rev. T. R. Malthus, in which he appeared for the first time as the special pleader for the poor of his day; and a compilation of Parliamentary speeches under the title: *The Eloquence of the British Senate*. The "Characters" of Chatham, Burke, Fox, and Pitt which he wrote for this volume show that by this time he had mastered the art of writing.

On May 1st, 1808, he married Sarah Stoddart, one of Mary Lamb's friends, but in many ways the exact opposite to Mary Lamb, for she had little delicacy and no sensibility. Hazlitt, who was by this time all at 'sea in his relationships with women, could hardly have chosen a woman whose temperament was likely to jar more on his own. After his

marriage he made his home for four years at Winterslow, where his wife had a cottage and which he came to love almost as much as he had loved Wem. He continued to pass his time in painting and writing. By this time he had a great desire to begin work on a History of Modern English Philosophy. He wanted to work for what he, like Coleridge, regarded as "the Permanent"; but being unable to obtain sufficient support for this venture, and having no private means that would sustain him while the work was in progress, he was ready to undertake any literary labour, including translation, which would bring in a little money. Among the works he completed at Winterslow were: *A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue*, published in 1810, and a hastily compiled *Life of Thomas Holcroft*, scarcely worthy of either Hazlitt or the struggling valiant Holcroft, which was not published till 1816. In the spring of 1811 he came to the conclusion that he would never become a great painter, and as he could not bear to become a mediocre one, he gave up painting altogether{(For the remainder of his life literature was the sole source of his livelihood) }

In the course of this year he converted some of the material he had gathered for his History of English Philosophy into a set of Lectures. He began to deliver these at the Russell Institution, Great Coram Street, in January 1812. In October 1812, in consequence of a strong recommendation from Charles Lamb, he was engaged as a Parliamentary reporter on *The Morning Chronicle*, the leading Whig daily) Shortly afterwards he rented Number 19 York Street, Westminster, from Jeremy Bentham, and brought his wife and his son William, who had been born in the September of the previous year, up to town. For the next seven years this house, which had once been Milton's, was his home. It proved to be not only the first but the last home he was able to make for himself in London.

He found his work in the House dull, for he hated commonplace, and he complained that the House of Commons

hated " anything *but* a commonplace" but he quickly made an entry for himself into a department of the newspaper which interested him greatly In September 1813 he became its dramatic critic.) Then for a time he was " in a honeymoon of authorship" From the moment he wrote his notice of *The Beggar's Opera* he was no longer obscure. The originality of his criticism was at once recognised, and as the town was pleased with him the Editor was pleased with him also and gave him plenty to do, " Something I did, *took*, and I was called upon to do a number of things all at once. I was in the middle of the stream, and must sink or swim,' he told Northcote afterwards when describing how he had been precipitated into journalism. Elsewhere he spoke of the work which launched him into this new career as " some trifle " written for *The Morning Chronicle*.

It was clear, from what he wrote of *The Beggar's Opera*, that he was fully as much interested in Literature as in Theatre. (Shortly afterwards, when he wrote on the stage version of *Antony and Cleopatra*, he gave the actors only a few lines, but his comments on the folly of mixing the gold of Shakespeare with " the heavy tinsel " of Dryden and the comparison of Shakespeare and Dryden which followed showed that a literary critic of the first rank had arrived. Within a short space of time he was entrusted not only with dramatic criticism, but with literary criticism, criticism of art, and political commentary. On all these subjects he wrote with equal ease. It was to *The Morning Chronicle* also that he contributed his first essay : *On the Love of Life*. In this, slight though it was, he anticipated the method he afterwards perfected in his greater Essays, advancing an opinion or a paradox, elucidating the principle underlying the statement, and illustrating it from the life around him. The originality of this method of probing truth and of turning a metaphysical argument into an entertainment was at once recognised by the finest essayists of his day)

Shortly after the abdication of Napoleon a coolness which developed between Hazlitt and Perry, the first of

the editors for whom he worked, led to the discontinuance of his work for the *Chronicle*. This was not altogether a misfortune for him, for it sent him on to editors better qualified than Perry to note the way in which he probed human nature, even in work that was light enough to pass as entertainment, and the way in which everything he touched now turned to literature in his hands. These were Leigh Hunt of *The Examiner* and John Scott of *The Champion*. His connection with *The Examiner*, from 1814 onwards, tended to develop him as an essayist, while he became the art critic of *The Champion*. (His articles on Edmund Kean written for *The Morning Chronicle* had won him a great reputation as a critic of acting at the beginning of the year ; his article on Benjamin West's " Christ Rejected," written for *The Champion*, won him reputation as a critic of art before the end of 1814.) Earlier in the year he had said of West, with that biting laconicism which was so peculiarly his own : " He is great only by the acre." In his article on " Christ Rejected " he laughed to scorn West's claim that the picture was epic in character. In the faces he found, not expression but " the mask of expression," and his pronouncement was that " without faces " one of these so-called " Epic " compositions was " not a picture but a map."

In the beginning; of 1815 Hazlitt was invited to contribute to *The Edinburgh Kevuew*. This was reckoned an enviable distinction, for the *Edinburgh* reviewers might all claim to have won their spurs on the field of letters. His first article, one of considerable authority, *On Standard Novels and Romances*, appeared in the February number. In the following month, shortly after Napoleon's landing at Frejus, he severed his connection with *The Champion*, owing to radical differences of opinion with its editor as to the issues raised by Napoleon's return. In the meantime, his connection with *The Examiner* became closer. In March he became its regular dramatic critic. For a time Leigh Hunt had done the dramatic criticism himself. (Hazlitt said of Hunt's

criticism that it had "the true pineapple flavour" a phrase which reflects with complete exactitude and felicity the light charm of Hunt's work. Of his own it might be said that it had the true pomegranate flavour and colour. It is the least anaemic criticism in the world. Cut into it where you will, it is red.)

Since the abdication of Napoleon Hazlitt had been discredited and all but silenced as a political commentator, his editors regarding his articles as "gunpowder stuff" much likelier to expose him to the charge of being "a Jacobin and a raving blockhead" than to do good to himself or anybody else. His desperate sorrow after Waterloo at what he regarded as the final defeat of the cause of the peoples of Europe seemed fantastic even to his friends and he was felt to be "eaten up with passion" on any issue affecting the fate of Napoleon. In the course of 1816, however, Leigh Hunt gradually became more and more disillusioned as to the nature of the "settlement" which had been made in Europe, and in the autumn of the year he permitted Hazlitt to return to regular political journalism. Then the "devils and burgundy" came back to *The Examiner* office with a vengeance. Yet Hazlitt's political articles, fiery though they were, were not mere explosions of feeling, but like all his greater essays, expositions of "an abstract metaphysical principle" he had reasoned out for himself. {In' his belief in the principle he elucidated in his political writings he was more than a century ahead of his time. He held that all nations were part of what he called "the great Society of mankind"; that each nation, therefore, while it had a right to the pursuit of its own happiness and interests had no right to the pursuit of these at the cost of trespassing against the general "Society of Mankind"): that rather all nations should be sworn to defend against the unjust aggressions or encroachments of any single member of the Society, the Society as a whole. Man's primary loyalty, therefore, deeper even than his loyalty to his country, should be to the Society as a

INTRODUCTION TO HAZLITT

whole. The spirit of implacability, the spirit of acquisitiveness, exclusive patriotism, and an exclusive conception of Liberty—all jeopardised the Society of Mankind as a whole, for they must inevitably lead in time to war on such a scale as to " shut the gates of mercy on mankind." Of exclusive patriotism he said that it " would transform that principle which was intended for the tutelary genius of nations into the destroying demon of the world." He cried out against an exclusive conception of Liberty as something which might endanger the very conception of Liberty itself, seeing Liberty was one and indivisible :

" Let no country go about to enslave another with impunity, for out of the very dregs of rottenness and debasement will arise a low creeping fog of servility, a stench of corruption, to choak the life of liberty, wherever it comes."

He protested against the formula of " Legitimacy " through which the " Settlement " of Europe had been effected as an annulment of the liberties for which the peoples of Europe had fought:

" The chain in which they hung up the murdered corpse of Human Liberty is all that remains of it, and my Lord Shallow keeps the key of it."

For the rest, the objects of his attack were : class selfishness carried to the point where it endangered the unity and the integrity of the nation ; vested interests that excluded care for the nation as a whole; servility in public life; the spirit of lying in the conduct of politics ; the indifference of the Government to the distresses of the nation; its inertia in relieving the extreme sufferings of the poor; and the extensions of power it sought as its failure to govern equitably became more and more glaring At a time when Habeas Corpus was suspended he wrote in an article attacking the Spy-System which the Government employed and defended:

"Hunger is not disloyalty. Nor. can we admit that a Government having reduced a country to a state of unparalleled distress . . . is a reason for giving a *carte blanche* to the Government. At this rate, the worse the Government, the more firmly it ought to be rooted; the greater the abuse of confidence, the more blind and unlimited the confidence ought to *be*; and any administration need only bring a nation to the brink of ruin, in order to have a right to plunge it into the depths of slavery."

Hazlitt's chosen task of neutralising what he called " the servile intellect of the -country " brought him into collision with the three poets he had known in his youth, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey, all of whom—he felt—had gone over to " the unclean side," the side of Power, Place, and Pay. He retorted on Southey's. threats against the liberty of the press with a spate of blistering invective :

"Are we not to cry out while an impudent, hypocritical, malignant renegade is putting his gag in our mouth and getting his thumb-screws ready ? . . . Before he puts down the liberty of the press, the press shall put him down, with all his hireling and changeling crew."

He assailed Coleridge's *Lay Sermon* and its " diagonal side-long movement between truth and falsehood " with, merciless raillery, for he felt it to be hypocritical, and hypocrisy ever seemed to him the one pure evil:

" Compared with such powers of inconceivable mental refinement hypocrisy is a great baby, a gross dunce, a clumsy devil!"

He tapped on the steely front of the rhetoric of Wordsworth's *Thanksgiving Ode* with crisp matter-of-fact words that made it ring, hollow. He countered Wordsworth's:

" We bow our beads before Thee, and we laud
And magnify thy name, Almighty God !

*But thy most dreadful instrument
In working out a pure intent,
Is Map—arrayed for mutual slaughter,—
Yea, Carnage is thy daughter ! "*

with : " War in itself is a thriving, sensible traffic only for cannibals." In the meantime, the Tory press, more especially *The Quarterly Review* and, later, *Blackwood's Magazine* (against which he brought a suit that was settled out of court for damages of £100 and all expenses) openly set out to cancel his existence as a writer. Every time he published a book " Gifford was unmuzzled."

Yet the two volumes he published in 1817, *The Round Table*, a collection of Essays, and *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, a set of penetrating studies written under the stimulus of Edmund Kean's acting and Charles Lamb's conversation and dedicated to Lamb " as a Mark of Old Friendship and lasting Esteem," survived the misrepresentations of dishonest criticism and added to his reputation.(Keats, on whom his influence was profound, was not the only one who by this time delighted in the author's "depth of taste." A selection of Hazlitt's dramatic criticism, published in 1818 as : *A View of the English Stage*, won great praise because of its power to stimulate. Miss Mitford wrote of it: "So poignant is he, and so rich, everything seems insipid after him.")

He was not without his " sports and his recreations " during these strenuous years. He liked watching cricket and fives, but his favourite game was rackets. To him the face of a rackets-player seemed " the face of a friend." His play was nothing if not temperamental. It was reckoned spectacular, and it always drew a crowd of onlookers. Even if he had made no impression on his contemporaries by his writing, he would have left some memory of the desperation of his play at rackets in the fives'-court in St. Martin's Lane, of which he said that it should have inscribed over its door: " Who enters here, forgets himself, his

country, and his friends ! " He played the game with his mind as well as with his body, with his spirit too, for he believed that faith was as great a factor in victory as skill: " If you believe you can win, you can win. Faith is necessary to victory." What he valued most in any game was courage. In his beautiful obituary essay on John Cavanagh, the fives' player, he celebrated his friend as " the best *up-hill* player in the world."

It was the courage displayed in boxing also that he found exhilarating. " This is the high and heroic state of fman ! " he thought as he watched the great match at Hungerford between Tom Hickman and Bill Neate which he has painted rather than described in his incomparable Essay: *The Fight*.

During 1818 and 1819 Hazlitt's main work was lecturing on English literature.) In these years he delivered three courses of lectures at the Surrey Institution, the first, *On the English Poets*, published in 1818 ; the second, *On the English Comic Writers*, published in 1819; the third, *On the Dramatic Literature of the Reign of Elizabeth*, published in 1820. These were pronounced by one of the most discriminating of critics to be " exquisitely entertaining." In 1819 he published also his *Political Essays* and the *Letter to William Gifford, Esq.*, which made Keats cry out in a rapture after he had copied over a page of it in a letter to his brother George : " This is the sort of *feu de joie* he keeps up." In an earlier sketch of the Editor of *The Quarterly Review* Hazlitt had described Gifford as " a character nicely differing from that of a Government spy—the invisible link that connects literature with the police." In the *Letter* he summed up Gifford's relationship to his patrons in the Government with inspired laconicism : " to crawl and lick the dust is all they expect of you, and all you can do."

It is part of the secret of the freshness of Hazlitt's writing that he never remained too long at any one kind of work. He gave up dramatic criticism in the summer of 1817, to

the great regret of *The Times*, whose dramatic critic he had been for a short time that year. In 1820 he gave up lecturing and returned to dramatic criticism with renewed zest. Throughout this year he was "Mr. Drama" of *The London Magazine*, newly-founded under the editorship of John Scott. From June onwards he also contributed to the *London* a series of delightful essays under the general title "Table-Talk" i. Many of these were included in the volumes of essays he published in 1821 and 1822 as *Table-Talk* or *Original Essays*.) The third of his contributions to the (*London* {*On the Conversation of Authors*}) charmed Charles and Mary Lamb, who said that it would be "a treasure" to them for ever, and all old "Mitre-Courtiers" were warm in its praise. John Scott himself described the fifth of the series, *On the Pleasure of Painting*, as "a *chef d'oeuvre* of a Table-Talk" and went on to say that it was "the best yet."

(By this time Hazlitt was at the height of his fame) But his private life had been disintegrating, and this was presently to precipitate him into an experience which exposed him to the displeasure of his friends and the derision of his foes—and which brought him very low before he had done with it. At the close of 1819 he was a man without a home, having separated from the woman who had long been to him "A Wife and No Wife" and given up the house in Westminster. His father, who had always stimulated him to honourable achievement but who had acted as a brake on his intransigence, recklessness and eccentricity, died on July 16th, 1820. Hazlitt was then doubly a man without a home. In August he took rooms at Number 9 Southampton Buildings, Holborn, in the house of Micaiah Walker, a tailor whose wife added to the family income by taking lodgers. A few days after his arrival he met the daughter of the house, a singularly graceful girl of about twenty years of age, and fell in love with her almost at first sight. (By the end of the year his love had developed into a passion) Whether Sarah in her coquetries and her

fluctuations of feeling towards him was or was not contemptible need not be discussed here ; but the passion she inspired in Hazlitt, even if it seemed contemptible at the time to his friends and his foes alike, was anything but contemptible. That he was himself to some extent aware of its quality is shown by his confession: "I am in some sense proud that I can feel this dreadful passion—it makes me a kind of peer in the kingdom of love." (it cannot be disregarded in any interpretation of Hazlitt, for its intensity developed him both as a man and as a writer—and all his greatest work was done in the years which followed it., Tormented though he was by it at the time, he was never lacking in the knowledge that through it he had been swept towards the high-water mark of his existence. When the extremity of his distress had passed he wrote:

" When we hear complaints of the wretchedness or vanity of human life, the proper answer to them would be that there is hardly any one who at some time or other *has not been in love*. If we consider the high abstraction of this feeling, its depth, its purity, its voluptuous refinement, even in the meanest breast, how sacred and how sweet it is, this alone may reconcile us to the lot of humanity."

Driven by his passion, in the course of 1821 he persuaded his wife to divorce him, under Scots law.) In January 1822 he went to Scotland to put in the term of residence necessary to bring him within the jurisdiction of the Scots law of divorce. By the middle of July the divorce proceedings were concluded. (Hazlitt was now a free man, but on his return to London he found that Sarah, who was by this time worn out by his vehemence, would have none of him. For almost six months he had been in such a frenzy of nervous tension that he had been unable to write, although his livelihood depended on his pen and he was in desperate need of money. After his final rejection he broke down completely) Some years before he had been warned by

John Scott of the way he injured himself by "his practice of living—as it were—upon essences." For two years he had lived almost wholly "upon essences." The sense of frustration which now pressed upon him acted on these so as to turn them into a burning poison. He behaved as if the general coherence of his mind were affected. One of his truest friends, Bryan Waller Procter, thought that on the subject of his frustration he was for a time "substantially insane."

"The passions intercept and warp the natural progress of life. They paralyse all that is not devoted to their tyranny and caprice," Hazlitt had written in the early days of his love-frenzy. In the height of it he had cried out to P. G. Patmore, in whom he confided: "Treat me as a child." Before the end of 1822 although still very sick of mind he was trying to cure himself by drawing towards the true sources of his strength, Nature, books, and Art. At the close of his essay, *On a Landscape of Nicolas Poussin*, contributed to the "London in August 1821, he had written:

"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."

At the close of 1822 he began to seek these out, and to describe the galleries which contained them. These articles were afterwards published in 1824 as *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England*.

About this time also, turning for consolation to the memories of his youth, he wrote, for Leigh Hunt's and Byron's ill-starred venture, *The Liberal*, in his essay, *My First Acquaintance With Poets*, that amazing sketch of the poet-preacher who had released him from the intellectual constriction of his youth, which has done more than any other piece of writing to impress upon the world the marvel of Coleridge's personality.

In May 1823 he published anonymously *Liber Amoris*, a study of his love-frenzy in the form of fiction. Some of Hazlitt's critics have poured scorn on this ; others have all but ignored it; by a few it has been praised highly as a work of art. It contains many passages of singular beauty, but it is not quite a work of art, nor has it the complete integrity of Hazlitt's other work, for in it to some extent he edited his passion and the letters in which he had expressed the series of moods occasioned by it. In this process the raw but authentic cry of tortured sensuality in one of his letters : "I saw a picture of her naked figure the other day at Dalkeith Palace, and it drove me mad," is altered in *Liber Amoris* into a eulogy of the grace of Sarah's form. The wild innocence of passion is here wronged by translation into the language of compliment. In the meantime, while *Liber Amoris* was drawing all eyes to it and the hue and cry of Hazlitt's enemies against this strange and inconceivably pathetic book was at its height, there dropped from the press almost unnoticed his *Characteristics: In the Manner of Rochefoucault's Maxims*, published anonymously also, a book of superlative quality and of complete integrity, which showed that Hazlitt had at last coped with his experience and extracted from it a bitter-sweet essence both of knowledge and wisdom. It leaves unsaid little that can be said about the reaction or involution of the passions which can co-exist within the passion of love. One theme on which his own appalling explosions of hatred had forced him to meditate was the intertwining of hatred with love. What he says on this is profound, from the opening statement : " We may hate and love the same person, nay, even at the same moment,"—to his conclusion: " Revenge against the object of our love is madness." Rare indeed are the books for which it can be claimed that they contain " the precious life-blood of a master spirit." *Characteristics* is one of these.

****** To have all the world against us is trying to a man's temper and philosophy. . . . It is like striking the actual

world from under our feet: the void that is left, the death-like pause, the chilling suspense, is fearful," Hazlitt wrote some years afterwards.. In the autumn of 1823 he was still in this void, uncheered except for a fine public gesture of friendship from Charles Lamb. (In the spring of 1824 he attempted to escape from it, through a marriage of companionship with a very charming woman, Isabella Bridgewater, who for her part) "pale and spectre-thin" though he had become, the mere husk of the man he had once been, '(had fallen in love with him for his writings." On the last day of July he set out with her for Paris, where he revisited the Louvre and mourned its altered estate) was charmed by the acting of Madame Pasta (the last except for "young Kemble," as he called Fanny Kemble, of his theatrical loves), because of its complete and flawless integrity; and formed a friendship with Stendhal, with whose interests and temperament he had much in common. In January 1825 [he left Paris to make a tour of Italy in his wife's company.) At Florence he made the acquaintance of Landor, whom much liked and to whom he gave in the course of the spring, a copy of a series of brilliant and penetrating studies of his famous contemporaries which he had just published under the title : *the Spirit of the Age*. At Rome he lived in the house which had been Savatolovator's. He made a pilgrimage to Venice to see once more Titian's "Saint Peter Martyr," which he had first seen - and had come near to worshipping on the day he had first entered the Louvre in October 1802. He had always felt that there was no picture in the world to be compared with this for greatness, with the exception of Raphael's "Transfiguration." In the early summer he crossed into Switzerland with his "fellow-traveller," as he always calls his wife in his account of these wanderings, and settled with her in rooms in a farm-house near Vevey. (the fifteen weeks he spent there were the most easeful he had spent for years, a quiet interlude in what Proctor called his "stormy, anxious, uncomfortable life." "Days, weeks, months, and

even years," he says, " might have passed on much in the same manner," were it not that by this time he was longing to collect material for the major work, which he hoped would be the justification of his existence as a writer. (The task 'to which he had set himself, although he was singularly lacking in the sheer narrative power essential to its successful accomplishment, was a biography of Napoleon. In the autumn he returned to England where he arranged for the publication of his record of his travels, *Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy*, in 1826, and of a volume of essays of greater range and depth than any he had as yet published, *The Plain Speaker*))

(in July 1826 he set out once more for Paris, this time 'to write Buonaparte,") For the remaining years of his life the writing of this book was his main task, although he was never free, even when he was most deeply engaged on it, from the necessity of earning his living by journalism. It became in his hands less a biography in the ordinary sense of the word than a great biographical-epic *manque*. Carlyle, who owed more to its passionate pages than he realised, afterwards picked up the smoky flare of the chapters in which Hazlitt described the fever and the glory of the French Revolution, and used it as kindling for his own cloud-swept blaze.

(By the summer of 1827 the first two volumes of the *Napoleon* were ready and placed in the printers' hands for publication the following year) In the autumn Hazlitt's wife left him, the chief cause of her desertion being that his son, now the object of his deepest tenderness, made himself odious to her. He then returned to England, alone, to push on with the "dogged prose" of the remaining volumes of his *Napoleon* in the solitude of Winterslow. While there he fell very ill. On December 7th he wrote to his publisher: "I have been nearly in the other world. My regret was, 'to die and leave the world rough copy.' Otherwise I had thought of an epitaph and a good end."

But the end was not yet. (Two further years of severe

toil awaited him. Because of the failure of his publishers, and the loss of the £200 for which he had contracted with them for the* first half of his *Napoleon*, he was "driven to great straits " for money and had to return to weekly journalism or even the writing of what he regarded as " Ephemerides " which had been his lot in earlier years. The double effort of this work and of the continuous labour on the last two volumes of the *Napoleon* broke his strength. Yet the quality of his work never flagged. The last of the volumes in which he collected his journalistic work, *Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A.*, a set of dialogues between Hazlitt and his friend, the old artist, covered a very wide range of subjects—" painting, poetry, prose, plays, politics, parliamentary speakers, metaphysical lore, books, men, and things."

(By the beginning of 1830 he had completed the text of his *Napoleon*, but his strength was now far spent) He continued his regular journalistic work, despite some interruption from illness, until April 1830. Then the life in him began to run down. In May he was very ill, and illness continued to gain on him (throughout the summer) At the end of July the Revolution of the Three Days revived him, and was the immediate inspiration of the last, and. one of the most beautiful of all his essays: *The Letter-Bell*. It was to him—he said—" like a resurrection from the dead," yet it could not bind him to life. He lived to see in August the rising of the distressed peasantry in the southern counties of England, whose cause he had so often pled, but not to comment on it. His mind still retained its power, but by this time the vital force in him was ebbing away. He died at the age of fifty-two, worn out by pain and fatigue, emotional stress and mental strain, on September 18 th, 1830, on the eve of the publication of the last two volumes of the biographical epic which he hoped would be a covenant between himself and his readers for. ever, but which most of his readers have agreed to ignore on the eve, too, of a further movement in the history of the enfranchisement

XXXvi INTRODUCTION TO HAZLITT

of Man. He had claimed to have begun his life with the dawn of a new era. Its sun was setting as his life passed. Within a week and a day of his death *The Examiner* was to declare: " Napoleon and his biographer both belong to an era which has passed away.")

CATHERINE MACDONALD MACLEAN

The Letter-Bell^x

COMPLAINTS are frequently made of the vanity and shortness of human life, when, if we examine its smallest details, they present a world by themselves. The most trifling objects, retraced with the eye of memory, assume the vividness, the delicacy, and importance of insects seen through a magnifying glass. There is no end of the brilliance or the variety. The habitual feeling of the love of life may be compared to "one entire and perfect chrysolite," which, if analysed, breaks into a thousand shining fragments. Ask the sum-total of the value in human life, and we are puzzled with the length of the account, and the multiplicity of items in it: take any one of them apart, and it is wonderful what matter for reflection will be found in it. As I write this, the *Letter-Bell* passes; it has a lively, pleasant sound with it, and not only fills the street with its importunate clamour, but rings clear through the length of many half-forgotten years. It strikes upon the ear, it vibrates to the brain, it wakes me from the dream of time, it flings me back upon my first entrance into life, the period of my first coming up to town, when all around was strange, uncertain, adverse—a hubbub of confused noises, a chaos of shifting objects—and when this sound alone, startling me with a recollection of a letter I had to send to the friends I had lately left, brought me as it were to myself, made me feel that I had links still connecting me with the universe, and gave me hope and patience to persevere. At that loud-tinkling, interrupted sound, the long line of blue hills near the place where I was brought up waves in the horizon, a golden sunset hovers

¹ Written during the summer of 1830/ *The Letter-Bell* was one of Madia's *hat* essays, and appeared posthumously in the *Monthly Magazine* of March 1831.

over them, the dwarf-oaks rustle their red leaves in the evening breeze, and the road from Wem to Shrewsbury, by which I first set out on my journey' through life, stares me in the face as plain, but, from time and change, not less visionary and mysterious than the pictures in the *'Pilgrim's Progress'*. Or if the Letter-Bell does not lead me a dance into the country, it fixes me in the thick of my town recollections, I know not how long ago. It was a kind of alarm to break off from my work when there happened to be company to dinner or when I was going to the play. *That* was going to the play, indeed, when I went twice a year, and had not been more than half a dozen times in my life. Even the idea that any one else in the house was going, was a sort of reflected enjoyment, and conjured up a lively anticipation of the scene. I remember a Miss D—, a maiden lady from Wales (who in her early youth was to have been married to an earl), tantalised me greatly in this way, by talking all day of going to see Mrs. Siddons' "airs and graces" at night in some favourite part; and when the Letter-Bell announced that the time was approaching, and its last receding sound lingered on the ear, or was lost in silence, how anxious and uneasy I became, lest she and her companion should not be in time to get good places—lest the curtain should draw up before they arrived—and lest I should lose one line or look in the intelligent report which I should hear the next morning ! The punctuating of time at that early period—everything that gives it an articulate voice—seems of the utmost consequence; for we do not know what scenes in the *ideal* world may run out of them: a world of interest may hang upon every instant, and we can hardly sustain the weight of future years which are contained in embryo in the most minute and inconsiderable passing events. How often have I put off writing a letter till it was too late ! How often have I had to run after the postman with it—now missing, now recovering the sound of his bell—breathless, angry with myself—then hearing the welcome sound come full round a corner—and seeing the

scarlet costume which set all my fears and self-reproaches at rest! I do not recollect having ever repented giving a letter to the postman or wishing to retrieve it after he had once deposited it in his bag. What I have once set my hand to, I take the consequences of, and have been always pretty much of the same humour in this respect. I am not like the person who, having sent off a letter to his mistress, who resided a hundred and twenty miles in the country, and disapproving, on second thoughts, of some expressions contained in it, took a post-chaise and four to follow and intercept it the next morning. At other times, I have sat and watched the decaying embers in a little back painting-room (just as the wintry day declined), and brooded over the half-finished copy of a Rembrandt, or a landscape by Vangoyen, placing it where it might catch a dim gleam of light from the fire; while the Letter-Bell was the only sound that drew my thoughts to the world without, and reminded me that I had a task to perform in it. As to that landscape, methinks I see it now—

*" The slow canal, the yellow-blossomed vale.
The willow-tufted bank, the gliding sail"*

There was a windmill, too, with a poor low clay-built cottage beside it: how delighted I was when I had made the tremulous, undulating reflection in the water, and saw the-dull canvas.become a lucid mirror of the commonest features of nature! Certainly, painting gives one a strong interest in nature and humanity (it is not the *dandy-school* of morals or sentiment)—

*" While with an eye made quiet by the power
of harmony and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things"*

Perhaps there is no part of a painter's life (if we must tell " the secrets of the prison-house ") in which he has more enjoyment of himself and his art, than that in which, after his work is over, and with furtive, sidelong glances at what

he has done, he is employed in washing his brushes and cleaning his pallet for the day. Afterwards, when he gets a servant in livery to do this for him, he may have other and more ostensible sources of satisfaction—greater splendour, wealth, or fame; but he will not be so wholly in his art, nor will his art have such a hold on him as when he was too poor to transfer its meanest drudgery to others—too humble to despise aught that had to do with the object of his glory and his pride, with that on which all his projects of ambition or pleasure were founded. "Entire affection scorneth nicer hands." When the professor is above this mechanical part of his business, it may have become a *stalking-horse* to other worldly schemes, but is no longer his *hobby-horse* and the delight of his inmost thoughts.

I used sometimes to hurry through this part of my occupation, while the Letter-Bell (which was my dinner-bell) summoned me to the fraternal board, where youth and hope

" *Made good digestion wait on appetite*
And health on both; "

or oftener I put it off till after dinner, that I might loiter longer and with more luxurious indolence over it, and connect it with the thoughts of my next day's labours.

The dustman's bell, with its heavy monotonous noise, and the brisk, lively tinkle of the muffin-bell, have something in them, but not much. They will bear dilating upon with the utmost licence of inventive prose. All things are not alike *conductors* to the imagination. A learned Scotch professor found fault with an ingenious friend and arch-critic, for cultivating a rookery on his grounds: the professor declared "he would as soon think of encouraging a froggery." This was barbarous as it was senseless. Strange, that a country that has produced the *Scotch Novels* and *Gertrude of Wyoming* should want sentiment 1

The postman's double-knock at the door the next morning is "more german to the matter." How that knock often

goes to the heart ! We distinguish to a nicety the arrival of the Twopenny or the General Post. The summons of the latter is louder and heavier, as bringing news from a greater distance, and as, the longer it has been delayed, fraught with a deeper interest. We catch the sound of what is to be paid—eight-pence, nine-pence, a shilling—and our hopes generally rise with the postage. How we are provoked at the delay in getting change—at the servant who does not hear the door ! Then if the postman passes, and we do not hear the expected knock, what a pang there¹ is ! It is like the silence of death—of hope ! We think he does it on purpose, and enjoys all the misery of our suspense. I have sometimes walked out to see the Mail-Coach pass, by which I had sent a letter, or to meet it when I expected one. I never see a Mail-Coach, for this reason, but I look at it as the bearer of glad tidings—the messenger of fate. I have reason to say so. The finest sight in the metropolis is that of the Mail-Coaches setting off from Piccadilly. The horses paw the ground, and are impatient to be gone, as if conscious of the precious burden they convey. There is a peculiar secrecy and despatch, significant and full of meaning, in all the proceedings concerning them. Even the outside passengers have an erect and supercilious air, as if proof against the accidents of the journey. In fact, it seems indifferent whether they are to encounter the summer's heat or winter's cold, since they are borne on through the air in a winged chariot. The Mail-Carts drive up ; the transfer of packages is made ; and, at a signal given, they start off, bearing the irrevocable scrolls that give wings to thought, and that bind or sever hearts for ever. How 'we hate the Putney and Brentford stages that draw up in a line after they are gone ! Some persons think the sublimest object in nature is a ship launched on the bosom of the ocean ; but give me, for my private satisfaction, the Mail-Coaches that pour down Piccadilly, of an evening, tear up the pavement, and devour the way before them to the Land's-End !

In Cowper's time, Mail-Coaches were hardly set up ;

but he has beautifully described the coming-in of the Post-Boy:—

*" Hark ! 'tis the twanging horn o'er yonder bridge.
That with its wearisome but needful length
Bestrides the wintry flood, in which the moon
Sees her unwrinkled face reflected bright;
He comes, the herald of a noisy world,
With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks ;
News from all nations lumbering at his back.
True to his charge, the close-packed load behind.
Yet careless what he brings, his one concern
Is to conduct it to the destined inn ;
And having dropped the expected bag, pass on.
He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch !
Cold and yet cheerful; messenger of grief
Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some ;
To him indifferent whether grief or joy.
Houses in ashes and the fall of stocks,
Births, deaths, and marriages, epistles wet
With tears that trickled down the writer's cheeks
Fast as the periods from his fluent quill,
Or charged with amorous sighs of absent swains
Or nymphs responsive, equally affect
His horse and him, unconscious of them all,"*

And yet, notwithstanding this, and so many other passages that seem like the very "marrow of our being, Lord Byron denies that Cowper was a poet!—The Mail-Coach is an improvement on the Post-Boy; but I fear it will hardly bear so poetical a description. The picturesque and dramatic do not keep pace with the useful and mechanical. The telegraphs that lately communicated the intelligence of the new revolution to all France within a few hours, are a wonderful contrivance; but they are less striking and appalling than the beacon-fires (mentioned by Æschylus), which, lighted from hill-top to hill-top, announced the taking of Troy, and the return of Agamemnon.

On Going a Journey¹

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 impaired "*

that I absent myself from the town for a while, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of

¹On Going a Journey appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine* of January 1822.

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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 J 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 sumless treasures," 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 commonplaces, 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 o' 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 brook 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 this 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 recall 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 Coleridge, 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 streams, with flow'rs as many
As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;
Here be all new delists, cool streams and wells;
Arbours o' ergrown with woodbines, caves and dells;
Choose where thou wilt, whilst 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 'Phoebe² bunting in a grove,
First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes
She took eternal fire that never dies;
How she conveyed 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."*¹

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 myself.

In general, a good thing spoils out-of-door prospects : it should be reserved for Table-talk. Lamb 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 approach of nightfall, 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 1" These eventful moments in our lives' history are too precious, too full of solid, heartfelt 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!

¹ Fletcher's " Faithful Shepherdess."

Sancho in such a situation once fixed on 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 profam I* ("Avaunt! avaunt! ye unhallowed.") 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 someone 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 circumspection and confine." The *incognito* of an inn is one of its striking privileges—"lord of one's self, uncumbered 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 sweetbreads, 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 commonplaces 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 a 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 Bridgwater, 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 10th 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 birthday, 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 I

There is hardly anything 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 Fopling Flutter, "all is a desert." All that part of the map that we do not see before us is 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, land 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 piecemeal. 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. 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*—showed 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 cottages—was at home in the Bodleian ; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powdered Cicerone that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to commonplace beauties in matchless pictufes. As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country withdht 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 language, 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 I—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 connections.. 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 recall 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 anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!

On Actors and Acting¹

PLAYERS are " the abstracts and brief chronicles of the times," the motley representatives of human nature. They are the only honest hypocrites. Their life is a voluntary dream, a studied madness. The height of their ambition is to be *beside themselves*. To-day kings, to-morrow beggars, it is only when they are themselves' that they are nothing. Made up of mimic laughter and tears, passing from the extremes of joy or woe at the prompter's call, they wear the livery of other men's fortunes ; their very thoughts are not their own. They are, as it were, train-bearers in the pageant of life, and hold a glass up to humanity, frailer than itself. We see ourselves at second-hand in them; they show us all that we are, all that we wish to be, and all that we dread to be. The stage is an epitome, a bettered likeness, of the world, with the dull part left out; and indeed_x with this omission, it is nearly big enough to hold all the rest. What brings the resemblance nearer is, that, as *they* imitate us, we, in our turn, imitate them. How many fine gentlemen do we owe to the stage! How many romantic lovers are mere Romeos in masquerade! How many soft bosoms have heaved with Juliet's sighs ! They teach us when to laugh and when to weep, when to love and when to hate, upon principle and with a good grace. Wherever there is a play-house the world will go on not amiss. The stage not only refines the manriers, but it is the best teacher of morals, for it is the truest and most intelligible picture of life. It stamps the image of vtetue on the mind by first softening the rude materials of which it is composed by a sense of pleasure. It regulates the passions by giving a loose to the imagination.

¹*On Actors and Acting* appeared in *The Examiner* of 5th January, 1817, and was reprinted in *The Round Tabk* in the same year.

It points out the selfish and depraved to our detestation, the amiable and generous to our admiration; and if it clothes the more seductive vices with the borrowed graces of wit and fancy, even those graces operate as a diversion to the coarser poison of experience and bad example, and often prevent or carry off the infection by inoculating the mind with a certain taste and elegance. To show how little we agree with the common declamations against the immoral tendency of the stage on this score, we will hazard a conjecture that the acting of the *' Beggar's Opera " a certain number of nights every year since it was first brought out has done more towards putting down the practice of highway robbery than all the gibbets that ever were erected. A person after seeing this piece is too deeply imbued with a sense of humanity, is in too good humour with himself and the rest of the world, to set about cutting throats or rifling pockets. Whatever makes a jest of vice leaves it too much a matter of indifference for any one in his senses to rush desperately on his ruin for its sake. We suspect that just the contrary effect must be produced by the representation of " George Barnwell," which is too much in the style of the ordinary's sermon to meet with any better success. The mind, in such cases, instead of being deterred by the alarming consequences held out to it, revolts against the denunciation of them as an insult offered to its freewill, and, in a spirit of defiance, returns a practical answer to them by daring the worst than can happen. The most striking lesson ever read to levity and licentiousness is in the last act of " The Inconstant," where young Mirabel is preserved by the fidelity of his mistress, Orinda, in the disguise of a page, from the hands of assassins, into whose power he has been allured by the temptations of vice and beauty. There never was a rake who did not become in imagination a reformed man during the representation of the last trying scenes of this admirable comedy.

If the stage is useful as a school of instruction, it is no less so as a source of amusement. It is the source of the greatest

enjoyment at the time, and a never-failing fund of agreeable reflection afterwards. The merits of a new play or of a new actor are always among the first topics of polite conversation. One way in which public exhibitions contribute to refine and humanise mankind is by supplying them with ideas and subjects of conversation and interest in common. The progress of civilisation is in proportion to the number of commonplaces current in society. For instance, if we meet with a stranger at an inn or in a stage-coach, who knows nothing but his own affairs, his shop, his customers, his farm, his pigs, his poultry, we can carry on no conversation with him on these local and personal matters ; the only way is to let him have all the talk to himself. But if he has fortunately ever seen Mr. Liston act, this is an immediate topic of mutual conversation, and we agree together the rest of the evening in discussing the merits of that inimitable actor, with the same satisfaction as in talking over the affairs of the most intimate friend.

If the stage thus introduces us familiarly to our contemporaries, it also brings us acquainted with former times. It is an interesting revival of past ages, manners, opinions, dresses, persons, and actions—whether it carries us back to the wars of York and Lancaster, or half-way back to the heroic times of Greece and Rome, in some translation from the French, or quite back to the age of Charles II. in the scenes of Congreve and of Etherege (the gay Sir George !)—happy age, when kings and nobles led purely ornamental lives; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study went no further than the choice of a sword-knot or the adjustment of a side-curl; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing eloquence of dress ; and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies in giddy mazes through the walks of St. James's Park I

A good company of comedians, a theatre royal judiciously managed, is your true Heralds' College—the only Anti-quarian Society that is worth a rush. It is for this reason

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that there is such an air of romance about players, and that it is pleasanter to see them, even in their own persons, than any of the three learned professions. We feel more respect for John Kemble in a plain coat than for the Lord Chancellor on the woolsack. He is surrounded, to our eyes, with a greater number of imposing recollections; he is a more revered piece of formality—a more complicated tissue of costume. We do not know whether to look upon this accomplished actor as Pierre, or King John, or Coriolanus, or Cato, or Leontes, or the Stranger. But we see in him a stately hieroglyphic of humanity, a living monument of departed greatness, a sombre comment on the rise and fall of kings. We look after him till he is out of sight as we listen to a story of one of Ossian's heroes, to "a tale of other times 1 "

One of the most affecting things we know is to see a favourite actor take leave of the stage. We were present not long ago when Mr. Bannister quitted it. We do not wonder that his feelings were overpowered on the occasion: ours were nearly so too. We remembered him, in the first hey-day of our youthful spirits, in "The Prize," in which he played so delightfully with that fine old croaker Suett, and Madame Storace—in the farce of "My Grandmother," in the "Son-in-Law," in Autolycus, and in Scrub, in which our satisfaction was at its height. At that time King, and Parsons, and Dodd, and Quick, and Edwin, were in the full vigour of their reputation, who are now all gone. We still feel the vivid delight with which we used to see their names in the playbills as we went along to the theatre. Bannister was one of the last of these that remained; and we parted with him as we should with one of our oldest and best friends. The most pleasant feature in the profession of a player, and which indeed is peculiar to it, is, that we not only admire the talents of those who adorn it, but we contract a personal intimacy with them. There is no class of society whom so many persons regard with affection as actors. We greet them on the stage; we like to meet them

in the streets; they almost always recall to us pleasant associations ; and we feel our gratitude excited without the uneasiness of a sense of obligation. The very gaiety and popularity, however, which surround the life of a favourite performer make the retiring from it a very serious business. It glances a mortifying reflection on the shortness of human life and the vanity of human pleasures. Something reminds us that " all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." *

It has been considered as the misfortune of first-rate talents for the stage that they leave no record behind them except that of vague rumour, and that the genius of a great actor perishes with him, " leaving the world no copy." This is a misfortune, or at least an unpleasant circumstance: to actors ; but it is, perhaps, an advantage to the stage. It leaves an opening to originality. The stage is always beginning anew; the candidates for theatrical reputation are always setting out afresh, unencumbered by the affectation of the faults or the excellences of their predecessors. In this respect we should imagine that the average quantity of dramatic talent remains more nearly the same than that in any other walk of art. In no other instance do the complaints of the degeneracy of the moderns seem so unfounded as in this ; and Colley Cibber's account of the regular decline of the stage, from the time of Shakspeare to that of Charles I I . , and from the time of Charles I I . to the beginning of George I I . , appears quite ridiculous. The stage is a place where genius is sure to' come upon its legs, in a generation or two at furthest. In the other arts (as painting and poetry) it has been contended that what has been well done already, by giving rise to endless vapid imitations, is an obstacle to what might be done well hereafter; that the models or *chefs-d'auvre* of art, where they are accumulated, choke up the path to excellence ; and that .the works of genius, where they can be tendered permanent and handed down from age to age, not only prevent, but render superfluous, future productions of the same kind. We have not, Neither do we

want, two Shakspeares, two Miltons, two Raphaels, any more than we require two suns in the same sphere. Even Miss O'Neill stands a little in the way of our recollections of Mrs. Siddons. But Mr. Kean is an excellent substitute for the memory of Garrick, whom we never saw. When an author dies it is no matter, for his works remain. When a great actor dies there is a void produced in society, a gap which requires to be filled up. Who does not go to see Kdan ? Who, if Garrick were alive, would go to see him ? At least one or the other must have quitted the stage. We have seen what a ferment has been excited among our living artists by the exhibition of the works of the old masters at the British Gallery. What would the actors say to it if, by any spell or power of necromancy, all the celebrated actors for the last hundred years could be made to appear again on the boards of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, for the last time, in all their most brilliant parts ? What a rich treat to the town, what a feast for the critics, to go and see Betterton, and Booth, and Wilks, and Sandford, and Nokes, and Leigh, and Penkethman, and Bullock, and Estcourt, and Dogget, and Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Montfort, and Mrs. Oldfield, and Mrs. Bracegirdle, and Mrs. Cibber, and Cibber himself, the prince of coxcombs, and Mackttn, and Quin, and Rich, and Mrs. Clive, and Mrs. Pritchard, and Mrs. Abington, and Weston, and Shutter, and Garrick, and all the rest of those who " gladdened life, and whose deaths eclipsed the gaiety of nations ! " We should certainly be there. We should buy a ticket for the season. We should enjoy *our hundred days* again. We should not lose a single night. We would not, for a great deal, be absent from Betterton's Hamlet or his Brutus, or from Booth's Cato, as it was first acted to the contending applause of Whigs and Tories. We should be in the first row when Mrs. Barry (who was kept by Lord Rochester, and with whom Otway was in love) played Monimia or Belvidera; and we suppose we should go to see Mrs. Braaegirdle (with whom all the world was in love) in all her parts. We should then know exactly whether

Penkethman's manner of picking a chicken and Bullock's mode of devouring asparagus answered to the ingenious account of them in the *Tatler*; and whether Dogget was equal to Dowton—whether Mrs. Montfort or Mrs. Abington was the finest lady—whether Wilks or Cibber was the best Sir Harry Wildair—whether Macklin was really "the Jew that Shakspeare drew," and whether Garrick was, upon the whole, so great an actor as the world have made him out. Many people have a strong desire to pry into the secrets of futurity : for our own part, we should be satisfied if we had the power to recall the dead, and live the past over again as often as we pleased. Players, after all, have little reason to complain of their hard-earned, short-lived popularity. One thunder of applause from pit, boxes, and gallery is equal to a whole immortality of posthumous fame ; and when we hear an actor, whose modesty is equal to his merit, declare that he would like to see a dog wag his tail in approbation, what must he feel when he sees the whole house in a roar ! Besides, Fame, as if their reputation had been entrusted to her alone, has been particularly careful of the renown of her theatrical favourites ; she forgets one by one, and year by year, those who have been great lawyers, great statesmen, and great warriors in their day, but the name of Garrick still survives with the works of Reynolds and of Johnson.

Actors have been accused, as a profession, of being extravagant and dissipated. While they are said to be so, as a piece of common cant, they are likely to continue so. But there is a sentence in Shakspeare which should be stuck as a label in the mouths of our beadles and whippers-in of morality : " The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not; and our vices would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues." With respect to the extravagance of actors, as a traditional character, it is not to be wondered at. They live from hand to mouth: they plunge from want into luxury; they have no means

of making money *breed*, and all professions that do not live by turning money into money, or have not a certainty of accumulating it in the end by parsimony, spend it. Uncertain of the future, they make sure of the present moment. This is not unwise. Chilled with poverty, steeped in contempt, they sometimes pass into the sunshine of fortune, and are lifted to the very pinnacle of public favour; yet even there cannot calculate on the continuance of success, but are, "like the giddy sailor on the mast, ready with every blast to topple down into the fatal bowels of the deep." Besides, if the young enthusiast who is smitten with the stage, and with the public as a mistress, were naturally a close *hunks*, he would become or remain a city clerk, instead of turning player. Again, with respect to the habit of convivial indulgence, an actor, to be a good one, must have a great spirit of enjoyment in himself, strong impulses, strong passions, and a strong sense of pleasure; for it is his business to imitate the passions, and to communicate pleasure to others. A man of genius is not a machine. The neglected actor may be excused if he drinks oblivion of his disappointments; the successful one, if he quaffs the applause of the world, and enjoys the friendship of those who are the friends of the favourites of fortune, in draughts of nectar. There is no path so steep as that of fame : no labour so hard as the pursuit of excellence. The intellectual excitement inseparable from those professions which call forth all our sensibility to pleasure and pain requires some corresponding physical excitement to support our failure, and hot a little to allay the ferment of the spirits attendant on success. If there is any tendency to dissipation beyond this in the profession of a player, it is owing to the prejudices entertained against them—to that spirit of bigotry which, in a neighbouring country, would deny actors Christian burial after their death, and to that cant of criticism which, in our own, slurs over their characters, while living, with a half-witted jest.

A London engagement is generally considered by actors

as the *m plus ultra* of their ambition, as " a consummation devoutly to be wished," as the great prize in the lottery of their professional life. But this appears to us, who are not in the secret, to be rather the prose termination of their adventurous career; it is the provincial commencement that is the poetical and truly enviable part of it. After that, they have comparatively little to hope or fear. " The wine of life is drunk, and but the lees remain." In London they become gentlemen, and the King's servants; but it is the romantic mixture of the hero and the vagabond that constitutes the essence of the player's life. It is the transition from their real to their assumed characters, from the contempt of the world to the applause of the multitude, that gives its zest to the latter, and raises them as much above common humanity at night, as in the daytime they are depressed below it. " Hurried from fierce extremes, by contrast made more fierce,"—it is rags and a flock-bed which give their splendour to a plume of feathers and a throne. We should suppose, that if the most admired actor on the London stage were brought to confession on this point, he would acknowledge that all the applause he had received from " brilliant and overflowing audiences " was nothing to the light-headed intoxication of unlooked-for success in a barn. In town, actors are criticised : in country-places, they are wondered at, or hooted at; it is of little consequence which, so that the interval is not too long between. For ourselves, we own that the description of the strolling player in *Gil Bias*, soaking his dry crusts in the well by the roadside, presents to us a perfect picture of human felicity.

On Mr. Kean's lagoon¹

WE CERTAINLY think Mr. Kean's performance of the part of lagoon one of the most extraordinary exhibitions on the stage. There is no one within our remembrance who has so completely foiled the critics as this celebrated actor. One sagacious person imagines that he must perform a part in a certain manner; another virtuoso chalks out a different path for him; and when the time comes, he does the whole off in a way that neither of them had the least conception of, and which both of them are therefore very ready to condemn as entirely wrong. It was ever the trick of genius to be thus. We confess that Mr. Kean has thrown us out more than once. For instance, we are very much inclined to adopt the opinion of a contemporary critic, that his Riccardi was not gay enough, and that his lagoon is not grave enough. This he may perhaps conceive to be the mere caprice of idle criticism; but we will try to give our reasons, and shall leave them to Mr. Kean's better judgment.

It is to be remembered, then, that Richard was a princely villain, borne along in a sort of triumphal car of royal state, buoyed up with the hopes and privileges of his birth, reposing even on the sanctity of religion, trampling on his devoted victims without remorse, and who looked out and laughed from the high watch-tower of his confidence and his expectations on the desolation and misery he had caused around him. He held on his way, unquestioned, "hedged in with the divinity of kings," amenable to no tribunal, and abusing his power *in contempt of mankind*. But as for lagoon,

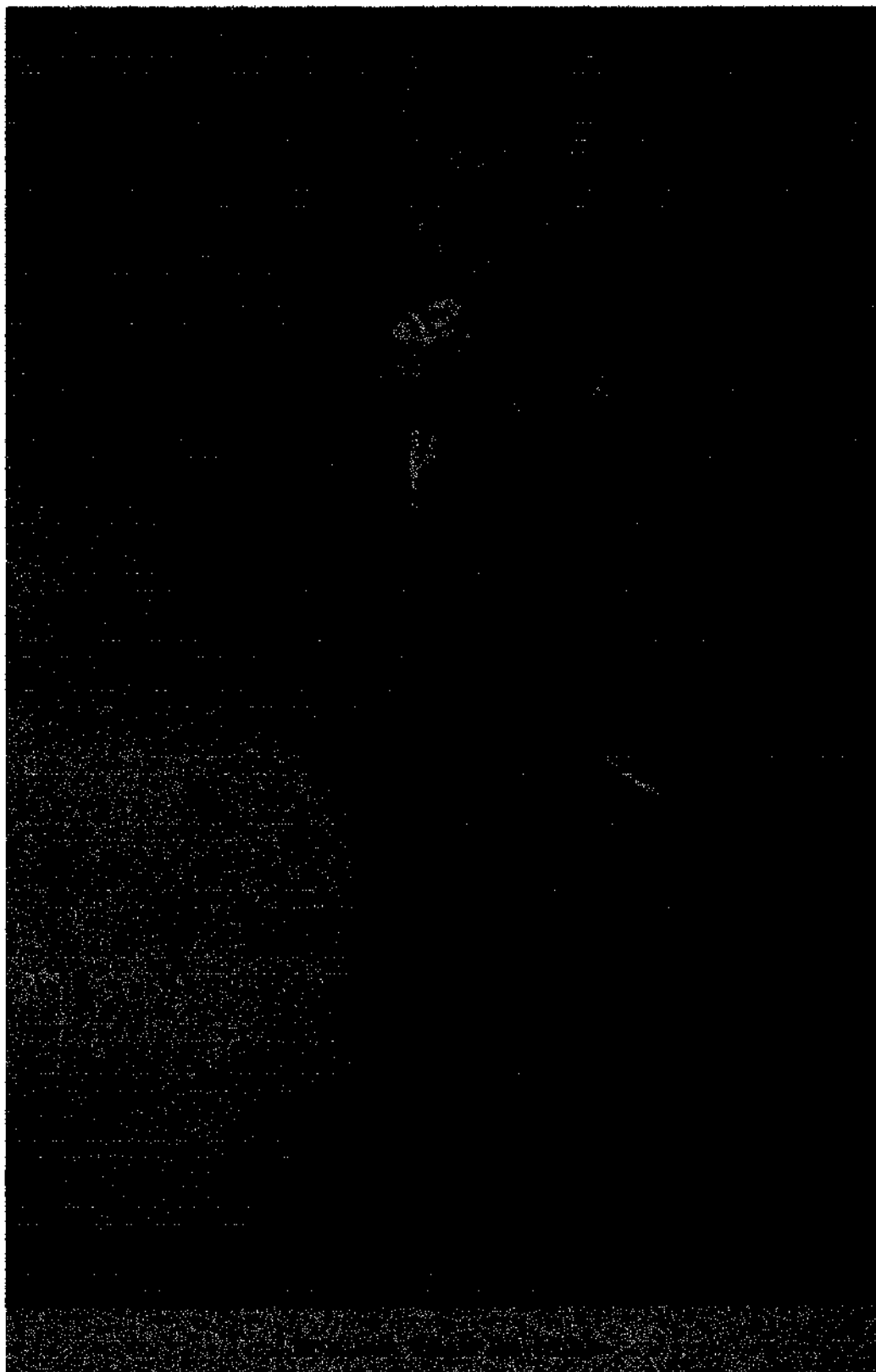
¹ This essay *On Mr. Kean's lagoon* appeared in *The Examiner* of 24th July, 1814; a continuation of the essay, comprising mainly an analysis of the character of lagoon, followed in *The Examiner* of 7th August, 1814, and is reprinted in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, edited by P. P. Howe, vol. v (21 volumes, London, 1930).

we conceive differently of him. He had not the same natural advantages. He was a mere-adventurer in mischief—a painstaking, plodding knave, without patent or pedigree, who was obliged to work his uphill way by wit, not by will, and to be the founder of his own fortune. He was, if we may be allowed a vulgar allusion, a sort of prototype of¹ modern Jacobinism, who thought that talents ought to decide the place—a man of " morbid sensibility " (in the fashionable phrase), full of distrust, of hatred, of anxious and corroding thoughts, and who, though he might assume a temporary superiority over others by superior adroitness, and pride himself in his skill, could not be supposed to assume it as a matter of course, as if he had been entitled to it from his birth.

We do not here mean to enter into the characters of the two men, but something must be allowed to the difference of their situations. There might be the same insensibility in both as to the end in view, but there could not well be the same security as to the success of the means. Iago had to pass through a different ordeal: he had no appliances and means to boot—no royal road to the completion of his tragedy. His pretensions were not backed by authority; they were baptised at the font; they were not holy-water-proof. He had the whole to answer for in his own person, and could not shift the responsibility to the heads of others. Mr. Kean's Richard was therefore, we think, deficient in something of that regal jollity and reeling triumph of success which the part would bear; but this we can easily account for, because it is the traditional commonplace idea of the character, that he is to " play the dog—to bite and snarl." The extreme unconcern and laboured levity of his Iago, on the contrary, is a refinement and original device of the actor's own mind, and therefore deserves consideration. The character of Iago, in fact, belongs to a class of characters common to Shakespear, and at the same time peculiar to him--nameiy, *that* of great intellectual activity, accompanied with a total want of moral principle, and therefore

displaying itself at the constant expense of others, making use of reason as a pander to will, employing its ingenuity and its resources to palliate its own crimes and aggravate the faults of others, and seeking to confound the practical distinctions of right and wrong by referring them to some overstrained standard of speculative refinement.

Some persons, more nice than wise, have thought the whole of the character of Iago unnatural. Shakespear, who was quite as good a philosopher as he was a poet, thought otherwise. He knew that the love of power, which is another name for the love of mischief, was natural to man. He would know this as well or better than if it had been demonstrated to him by a logical diagram, merely from seeing children paddle in the dirt, or kill flies for sport. We might ask those who think the character of Iago not natural, why they go to see it performed, but from the interest it excites, the sharper edge which it sets on their curiosity and imagination? Why do we go to see tragedies in general, why do we always read the accounts in the newspapers of dreadful fires and shocking murders, but for the same reason? Why do so many persons frequent executions and trials, or why do the lower classes almost universally take delight in barbarous sports and cruelty to animals, but because there is a natural tendency in the mind to strong excitement, a desire to have its faculties roused and stimulated to the utmost? Whenever this principle is not under the restraint of humanity or the sense of moral obligation, there are no excesses to which it will not of itself give rise, without the assistance of any other motive, either of passion or self-interest. Iago is only an extreme instance of the kind—thai is, of diseased intellectual 'activity, with an almost perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or rather with'a preference for the latter, because it falls more in (with his favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts, and scope to his actions. Be it observed, too (for the sake of those who are for squaring all human actions by the maxims of Rochefoucault), that he is quite or nearly as



indifferent to his own fate as to that of others ; that he runs all risks for a trifling and doubtful advantage ; and is himself the dupe and victim of his ruling passion—an incorrigible love of mischief, an insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous kind. Our " ancient " is a philosopher, who fancies that a lie that kills has more point in it than an alliteration or an antithesis ; who thinks a fatal experiment on the peace of a family a better thing than watching the palpitations in the heart of a flea in an air-pump ; who plots the ruin of his friends as an exercise for his understanding, and stabs men in the dark to prevent ennui. Now this, though it be sport, yet it is dreadful sport. There is no room for trifling and indifference, nor scarcely for the appearance of it ; the very object of his whole plot is to keep his faculties stretched on the rack, in a state of watch and ward, in a sort of breathless suspense, without a moment's interval of repose. He has a desperate stake to play for, like a man who fences with poisoned weapons, and has business enough on his hands to call for the whole stock of his sober circumspection, his dark duplicity, and insidious gravity. He resembles a man who sits down to play at chess for the sake of the difficulty and complication of the game, and who immediately becomes absorbed in it. His amusements, if they are amusements, are severe and saturnine—even his wit blisters. His gaiety arises from the success of his treachery ; his ease from the sense of the tortures of others. Even, if other circumstances permitted it, the part he has to play with Othello requires that he should assume the most serious concern, and something of the plausibility of a confessor. " His cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam." He is repeatedly called " honest Iago," which looks as if there were something suspicious in his appearance, which admitted a different construction. The tone which he adopts in the scenes with Roderigo, Desdemona, and Cassio is only a relaxation from the more arduous business of the play. Yet there is in all his conversation an inveterate

misanthropy, a licentious keenness of perception, which is always sagacious of evil, and snuffs up the tainted scent of its quarry with rancorous delight. An exuberance of spleen is the essence of the character. The view which we have here taken of the subject (if at all correct) will not therefore justify the extreme alteration which Mr. Kean has introduced into the part.

Actors in general have been struck only with the wickedness of the character, and have exhibited an assassin going to the place of execution. Mr. Kean has abstracted the wit of the character, makes Iago appear throughout an excellent good fellow and lively bottle-companion. But though we do not wish him to be represented as a monster or fiend, we see no reason why he should instantly be converted into a pattern of comic gaiety and good-humour. The light which illumines the character should rather resemble the flashes of lightning in the murky sky, which make the darkness more terrible. Mr. Kean's Iago is, we suspect, too much in the sun. His manner of acting the part would have suited better with the character of Edmund in *King Lear*, who, though in other respects much the same, has a spice of gallantry in his constitution, and has the favour and countenance of the ladies, which always gives a man the smug appearance of a bridegroom.

Antony and Cleopatra¹

SHAKESPEAR'S tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra* was brought out last night at Covent-Garden with alterations, and with considerable additions from Dryden's *All for Love*. The piece seems to have been in some measure got up for the occasion, as there are several claptraps in the speeches, which admit of an obvious allusion to passing characters and events, and which were eagerly seized by the audience. Of the execution of the task which the compiler has imposed upon himself, we cannot speak in terms of much praise. Almost all the transpositions of passages which he has attempted, are, we think, injudicious and injurious to the effect. Thus the rich and poetical description of the person of Cleopatra, in the beginning of the second act—"The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, burnt on the water," etc. which prepares the way for, and almost seems to justify the subsequent infatuation of Antony, is here postponed till near the catastrophe, where it answers no end, and excites little interest. It would also have been much better, if the author had contented himself merely with omitting certain passages, which he might deem objectionable to a modern audience, without encumbering either the plot or dialogue with any foreign interpolation. He might have separated the gold of Shakespear from the alloy which at times accompanies it, but he ought not to have mixed it up with the heavy tinsel of Dryden. We cannot approve of the attempt to effect "an amalgamation of the wonderful powers" of these writers, who are, in the preface to the printed play, classed together as "two of England's greatest poets." There is not the slightest

¹This notice of *Antony and Cleopatra* appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* of 16th November, 1813.

comparison between them, either in kind or degree. There is all the difference between them, that can subsist between artificial and natural passion. Dryden never goes out of himself: he is a man of strong sense and powerful feeling, reasoning upon what he should feel in certain situations, and expressing himself in studied declamation, in general topics, expanding and varying the stock of his own ideas, so as to produce a tolerable resemblance to those of mankind in different situations, and building up, by the aid of logic and rhetoric—that is, by means of certain truths and images, generally known and easily applied, a stately and impressive poem. Whereas Shakespear does not suppose himself to be others, but at once *becomes* them. His imagination passes out of himself into them, and as it were, transmits to him their feelings and circumstances. Nothing is made out by inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis, but all comes immediately from Nature—the thoughts, the images, the very words are hers. His plays can only be compared with Nature—they are unlike every thing else.

Antony and Cleopatra, though not in the first order of Shakespear's productions, is one of the best of his historical plays. It is every where full of that pervading comprehensive power, by which the poet, seemed to identify himself with time and nature. The pomp and voluptuous charms of Cleopatra are displayed in all their force and lustre, as well as the effeminate grandeur of the soul of Marc Antony. The repentance of Enobarbus after his treachery to his master, the most beautiful and affecting part of the play, is here, for some reason, entirely omitted. Nothing can have more local truth and perfect character than the passage in which Cleopatra is represented as conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence. "He's speaking now, or murmuring—where's my serpent of old Nile?" Or again, when she says to Antony, after the defeat of Actium, and his resolution to risk another fight «"It is my birth-day; I had thought to have held it poor, but since my Lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra."

The transition, in the present compilation, from these flashes of genius which lay open the inmost soul, to the forced mechanical style and architectural dialogue of Dryden, is abrupt and painful.

The play was got up with every advantage of external pomp and decoration. Mr. Young, as Marc Antony, exhibited a just and impressive picture of the Roman hero, struggling between the dictates of his love and honour. Mrs. M'Gibbon was a respectable and interesting representative of Octavia. Mrs. Faucit's Cleopatra conveyed at least a reflex image of the voluptuous magnificence of the Queen of Egypt. In the ironical scenes with Antony, her manner sometimes bordered too much on the affected levity of a modern fine lady, and wanted the passion and dignity of the enamoured and haughty sovereign. In the part of Ventidius, we are sorry to say that we think Mr. Terry was by no means successful. His manner had all the turbulent ferocity of a gloomy savage, none of the lofty firmness of the Roman Senator. The expression of the passion was every where too coarse and too physical; his muscles assumed a preternatural rigidity, and the mode in which he articulated every sentence was distinct, almost to dislocation. The house, however; seemed to be of a different opinion; for, in the several scenes with Mr. Young, he was loudly and tumultuously applauded.

The Beggar's Opera¹

The Beggar's Opera was acted at Covent-Garden last night, for the purpose of introducing Miss Stephens in the character of Polly. The play itself is among the most popular of our dramas, and one which the public are always glad to have some new excuse for seeing acted again. Its merits are peculiarly its own. It not only delights, but instructs us, without our knowing how, and though it is at first view equally offensive to good taste and common decency. The materials, indeed, of which it is composed, the scenes, characters, and incidents, are in general of the lowest and most disgusting kind; but the author, by the sentiments and reflections which he has put into the mouths of highwaymen, turnkeys, their wives and daughters, has converted the motley groupe into a set of fine gentlemen and ladies, satirists and philosophers-. What is still more extraordinary, he has effected this transformation without once violating probability, or "o'erstepping the modesty of nature." In fact, Gay has in this instance turned the tables on the critics; and by the assumed licence of the mock-heroic style, has enabled himself to *do justice to nature*, that is, to give all the force, truth, and locality of real feeling to the thoughts and expressions, without being called to the bar of false taste, and affected delicacy. We might particularly refer to Polly's description of the death of her lover, and to the song, "Woman is like the fair dower in its lustre," the extreme beauty and feeling of which are only equalled by their characteristic propriety and *naivete*. Every line of this sterling Comedy sparkles with wit, and is fraught with the keenest and bitterest invective.

It has been said by a great moralist, "There is some soul

¹ This notice of *The Beggar's Opera* appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* of 23rd October, 1813.

of goodness in things evil; " and *The Beggar's Opera* is a good-natured, but severe comment on this text. The poet has thrown all the gaiety and sunshine of the imagination, the intoxication of pleasure, and the vanity of despair, round the short-lived existence of his heroes, while Peachum and Lockitt are seen in the background, parcelling out their months and weeks between them. The general view of human life is of the most refined and abstracted kind. With the happiest art, the author has brought out the good qualities and interesting emotions almost inseparable from humanity in the lowest situations, and with the same penetrating glance, has detected the disguises which rank and circumstance lend to exalted vice. It may be said that the moral of the piece (which some respectable critics have been at a loss to discover) is *to shew the vulgarity of vice*; or that the sophisms with which the great and powerful palliate their violations of integrity and decorum, are, in fact, common to them with the vilest, most abandoned and contemptible of the species. What can be more galling than the arguments used by these would-be politicians, to prove that in hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery, they are far behind some of their betters? The exclamation of Mrs. Peachum, when her daughter marries Macheath, "Hussey, hussey, you will be as ill used and as much neglected as if you had married a Lord," is worth all Miss Hannah More's laboured invectives on the laxity of the manners of high life!

The innocent and amiable Polly found a most interesting, representative in Miss Stephens. Her acting throughout was simple, unaffected, graceful, and full of tenderness. Her tones in speaking, though low, and suited to the gentleness of the character, were distinct, and varied with great flexibility. She will lose by her performance of this part, none of the reputation she has gained in *Mandane*. The manner in which she gave the song in the first act, "But he so teased me," etc. was sweetness itself: the notes undulated through the house, amidst murmurs of rapturous applause. She gave equal animation and feeling

to the favourite air, " Cease your funning." To this, however, as well as to some other of the songs, a more dramatic effect might perhaps be given. There is a severity of feeling, and a plaintive sadness, both in the words and music of the songs in this Opera, on which too much stress cannot be laid.

Oct. 30.

Miss Stephens made her appearance again last night at Covent-Garden, in Polly, with additional lustre. Her timidity was overcome, and her voice was exerted in all its force and sweetness. We find so much real taste, elegance, and feeling, in this very delightful singer, that we cannot help repeating our praise of her, though, perhaps, by so doing, we shall only irritate the sullen fury of certain formidable critics, at the appearance of a new favourite of the public. We are aware that there is a class of connoisseurs whose envy it might be prudent to disarm, by some compromise with their perverted taste; who are horror-struck at grace and beauty, and who can only find relief and repose in the consoling thoughts of deformity and defect; whose blood curdles into poison at deserved reputation, who shudder at every temptation to *admire*, as an unpardonable crime, and shrink from whatever gives delight to others, with more than monkish self-denial. These kind of critics are well described by Moliere, as displaying, on all occasions, an invincible hatred for what the rest of the world admire, and an inconceivable partiality for those perfections which none but themselves can discover. The secret both of their affection and enmity is the same—their pride is mortified with whatever can give pleasure, and soothed with what excites only pity or indifference. They search out with scrupulous malice, the smallest defect or excess of every kind; it is only when it becomes painfully oppressive to every one else, that they are reconciled to it. A critic of this order is dissatisfied with the *embonpoint* of Miss Stephens; while his eye reposes with perfect self-complacency on the little round graces of Mrs. Liston's person!

The Indian Jugglers¹

COMING forward and seating himself on the ground in his white dress and tightened turban, the chief of the Indian Jugglers begins with tossing up two brass balls, which is what any of us could do, and concludes with keeping up four at the same time, which is what none of us could do to save our lives, nor if we were to take our whole lives to do it in. Is it then a trifling power we see at work, or is it not something next to miraculous? It is the utmost stretch of human ingenuity, which nothing but the bending the faculties of body and mind to it from the tenderest infancy with incessant, ever anxious application up to manhood can accomplish or make even a slight approach to. Man, thou art a wonderful animal, and thy ways, are past finding out! Thou canst do strange things, but thou turnest them to little account!—To conceive of this effort of extraordinary dexterity distracts the imagination and makes admiration breathless. Yet it costs nothing to the performer, any more than if it were a mere mechanical deception with which he had nothing to do but to watch and laugh at the astonishment of the spectators. A single error of a hair's-breadth, of the smallest conceivable portion, of time, would be fatal: the precision of the movements must be like a mathematical truth, their rapidity is like lightning. To catch four balls in succession in less than a second of time, and deliver them back so as to return with seeming consciousness to the hand again, to make them revolve round him at certain intervals, like the planets in

¹ *The Indian jugglers* appeared in the first volume of Hazlitt's *Table -Talk*, published in the spring of 1821. In this essay he embodied his obituary notice of John Cavanagh, the fives player, published in *The Examiner* of 7th February, 1819.

their spheres, to make them chase one another like sparkles of fire, or shoot up like flowers or meteors, to throw, them behind his back and twine them round his neck like ribbons or like serpents, to do what appears, an impossibility, and to do it with all the ease, the grace, the carelessness imaginable, to laugh at, to play with the glittering mockeries, to follow them with his eye as if he could fascinate them with its lambent fire, or as if he had only to see that they kept time with the music on the stage—there is something in all this which he who does not admire may be quite sure he never really admired anything in the whole course of his life. It is skill surmounting difficulty, and beauty triumphing over skill. It seems as if the difficulty once mastered naturally resolved itself into ease and grace, and as if to be overcome at all, it must be overcome without an effort. The smallest awkwardness or want of pliancy or self-possession would stop the whole process. It is the work of witchcraft, and yet sport for children. Some of the other feats are quite as curious and wonderful, such as the balancing the artificial tree and shooting a bird from each branch through a quill; though none of them have the elegance or facility of the keeping up of the brass balls. You are in pain for the result and glad when the experiment is over; they are not accompanied with the same unmixed, unchecked delight as the former; and I would not give much to be merely astonished without being pleased at the same time. As to the swallowing of the sword, the police ought to interfere to prevent it. When I saw the Indian Juggler do the same things before, his feet were bare, and he had large rings on his toes, which kept, turning round all the time of the performance, as if they moved of themselves.—The hearing a speech in Parliament, drawled or stammered out by the Honourable Member or the Noble Lord, the ringing the changes on their commonplaces, which any one could repeat after them as well as they, stirs me, not a jot, shakes not my good opinion of myself; but the seeing the Indian Jugglers .does. It makes me ashamed

of myself. I ask what there is that I can do as well as this ? Nothing. What have I been doing all my life ? Have I been idle, or have I nothing to shew for all my labour and pains ? Or have I passed my time in pouring words like water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up a hill and then down again, trying to prove an argument in the teeth of facts, and looking for causes in the dark, and not finding them ? Is there no one thing in which I can challenge competition, that I can bring as an instance of exact perfection, in which others cannot find a flaw ? The utmost I can pretend to is to write a description of what this fellow can do. I can write a book : so can many others who have not even learned to spell. what abortions-are-these Essays!. What cross, what ill pieced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions ! How little is made out, and that little how ill ! Yet they are" the best I can do. I endeavour to recollect all I have ever observed or thought upon a subject, and to express it as nearly as I can. Instead of writing on four subjects at a time, it is as much as I can manage to keep the thread of one discourse clear and unentangled. I have also time on my hands to correct my opinions, and polish my periods: but the one I cannot, and the other I will not do. I am fond of arguing : yet with a good deal of pains and practice it is often as much as I can do to beat my man ; though he may be an indifferent hand. A common fencer would disarm his adversary in the twinkling of an eye, unless he were a professor like himself. A stroke of wit will sometimes produce this effect, but there is no such power or superiority in sense or reasoning. There is no complete mastery of execution to be shown there : and you hardly know the professor from the impudent pretender or the mere clown.

¹ The celebrated Peter Pindar (Dr. Wolcot) first discovered and brought out the talents of the late Mr. Opie, the painter. He was a poor Cornish boy, and was out *it* work in the fields, when the poet went in search of him. " Well, my lad, can you go and bring me your very best picture ? " The other flew like lightning, and soon came back with what he considered as his masterpiece. The stranger looked at it, and the young artist, after waiting

I have always had this feeling of the inefficacy and slow progress of intellectual compared to mechanical excellence, and it has always made me somewhat dissatisfied. It is a great many years since I saw Richer, the famous rope-dancer, perform at Sadler's Wells. He was matchless in his art, and added to his extraordinary skill exquisite ease, and unaffected, natural grace. I was at that time employed in copying a half-length picture of Sir Joshua Reynolds's; and it put me out of conceit with it. How ill this part was made out in the drawing I How heavy, how slovenly this other was painted ! I could not help saying to myself, " If the rope-dancer had performed his task in this manner, leaving so many gaps and botches in his work, he would have broken his neck long ago; I should never have seen that vigorous elasticity of nerve and precision of movement ! "—Is it then so easy an undertaking (comparatively) to dance on a tight-rope ? Let anyone who thinks so get up and try. There is the thing. It is that which at first we cannot do at all, which in the end is done to such perfection. To account for this in some degree, I might observe that mechanical dexterity is confined to doing some one particular thing, which you can repeat as often as you please, in which you know whether you succeed or fail, and where the point of perfection consists in succeeding in a given undertaking.—In mechanical efforts, you improve by perpetual practice, and you do so infallibly, because the object to be attained is not a matter of taste or fancy or opinion, but of actual experiment, in which you must either do the thing or not do it. If a man is put to aim at a mark with a bow and arrow, he must hit it or miss it, that's certain. He cannot deceive himself, and go on shooting wide or falling short, and still fancy that he is making progress. The distinction between right and wrong, between true and false,

for some time without his giving any opinion, at length exclaimed eagerly, " Well, what do you think of it ? "—" Think of it ? " said Wolcot, " why, I think you ought to be ashamed of it—that you who might do so well, do no better ! " The same answer would have applied to this artist's latest performances, that had been suggested by one or his earliest efforts.

is here palpable; and he must either correct his aim or persevere in his error with his eyes open, for which there is neither excuse nor temptation. If a man is learning to dance on a rope, if he does not mind what he is about, he will break his neck. After that, it will be in vain for him to argue that he did not make a false step. His situation is not like that of Goldsmith's pedagogue;—

*" In argument they own 'd his wondrous skill,
And e'en though vanquish'd, he could argue still."*

Danger is a good teacher, and makes apt scholars. so are disgrace, defeat, exposure to immediate scorn" " laughte*- There is no opportunity in such cases for self-delusion, no idling time away, no being off your guard (or you must take the consequences)—neither is there any room for humour or caprice or prejudice. If the Indian Juggler were to play tricks in throwing up the three case-knives, which keep their positions like the leaves of a crocus in the air, he would cut his fingers. I can make a very bad antithesis without cutting my fingers. The tact of style is more ambiguous than that of double-edged instruments. If the Juggler were told that by flinging himself under the wheels of the Jaggernaut, when the idol issues forth on a gaudy day, he would immediately be transported into Paradise, he might believe it, and nobody could disprove it. So the Brahmins may say what they please on that subject, may build up dogmas and mysteries without end, and not be detected; but their ingenious countryman cannot persuade the frequenters of the Olympic Theatre that he performs a number of astonishing feats without actually giving proofs of what he says,— There is then in this sort of manual dexterity, first a gradual aptitude acquired to a given exertion of muscular power. from constant repetition. and in the next place , an *exact* knowledge how *much* is still .ranging and necessary to be supplied The obvious test is to increase the effort or nicety of the operation, and still to find it come true. The muscles

ply instinctively to the dictates of habit, Certain movements and impressions of the hand and eye, having been repeated together an infinite number of times, are unconsciously but unavoidably cemented into closer and closer union; the limbs require little more than to be put in motion for them to follow a regular track with ease and certainty; so that the mere intention of the will acts mathematically like touching the spring of a machine, and you come with Locksley in *Ivanboe*, in shooting at a mark, "to allow for the wind."

Farther, what is meant by perfection in mechanical exercises is the performing certain feats to a uniform nicety, that is, in fact, undertaking no more than you can perform. You task yourself, the limit you fix is optional, and no more than human industry and skill can attain to; but you have no abstract, independent standard of difficulty or excellence (other than the extent of your own powers). Thus he who can keep up four brass balls does this *to perfection*; but he cannot keep up five at the same instant, and would fail every time he attempted it. That is, the mechanical performer undertakes to emulate himself, not to equal another. The artist undertakes to do what is done, and this it appears is the difficulty—viz., to copy what is set before us in the face of nature or "human face divine," entire and without a blemish, than to keep up **four** brass balls at the same instant, for the one is done by the power of human skill and industry, and the other never was nor will be. Upon the whole, therefore, I have more respect for Reynolds than I have for Richer; for, happen how it will, there have been more people in the world who could dance on a rope like the one than who could paint like Sir Joshua. The latter was but a bungler in his profession to the other, it is true; but then he had a harder task-master to obey, whose will was more wayward and obscure, and whose instructions it was more difficult to practise.

¹ If two persons play against each other at any game, one of them necessarily fails.

You can put a child apprentice to a tumbler or rope-dancer with a comfortable prospect of success, if they are but sound of wind and limb ; but you cannot do the same thing in painting. The odds are a million to one. You may make indeed as many Haydons and H——s as you put into that sort of machine, but not one Reynolds amongst them all, with his grace, his grandeur, his blandness of *gusto*, " in tones and gestures hit," unless you could make the man over again. To snatch this grace beyond the of-art, is then the height of art—where fine art begins, and where mecKanical skill ends The soft suffusion oFthe soul, the speechless breathing eloquence, the looks " commercing with the skies," the ever-shifting forms of an eternal principle, that which is seen but for a moment, but dwells in the heart always, and is only seized as it passes by strong and secret sympathy, must be taught by nature and genius, not by rules or study. It is suggested by feeling, not by laborious microscopic inspection; in seeking for it without, we lose the harmonious clue to it within; and in aiming to grasp the substance, we let the very spirit of art evaporate. In a word, the objects of fine art are not the objects of sight but as these last are the objects of taste and imagination, that is, as they appeal to the sense of beauty, of pleasure, and of power in the human breast, and are explained by that finer sense, and revealed in their inner structure to the eye in return. Nature is also a language. Objects, like words, have a meaning; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language, which he can only do by knowing its application to a thousand other objects in a thousand other situations. Thus the eye is too blind a guide of itself to distinguish between the warm or cold tone of a deep-blue sky, but another sense acts as a monitor to it, and does not err. The colour of the leaves in autumn would be nothing without the feeling that accompanies it ; but it is that feeling that stamps them on the canvas, faded, seated, blighted, shrinking from the winter's flaw, and makes the sight as true as touch—

*" And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
Cling to each leaf and hang on every bough."*

The more ethereal, evanescent, more refined and sublime part of art is the seeing nature through the medium of sentiment and passion, as each object is a symbol of the affections and a link in the chain of our endless being. But the unravelling this mysterious web of thought and feeling is alone in the Muse'S gift, namely, in the power of that trembling sensibility which is awake to every change and every modification of its ever-varying impressions, that

" Thrills in each nerve, and lives along the line."

This power is indifferently called genius, imagination, feeling, taste; but the manner in which it acts upon the mind can neither be defined by abstract rules, as is the case in science, nor verified by continual unvarying experiments, as is the case in mechanical performances. The mechanical excellence of the Dutch painters in colouring and handling is that which comes the nearest in fine art to the perfection of certain manual exhibitions of skill. The truth of the effect and the facility with which it is produced are equally admirable. Up to a certain point, everything is faultless. The hand and eye have done their part. There is only a want of taste and genius. It is after we enter upon that enchanted ground that the human mind begins to droop and flag as in a strange road, or in a thick mist, benighted and making little way with many attempts and many failures, and that the best of us only escape with half a triumph. The undefined and the imaginary are the regions that we must pass like Satan, difficult and doubtful, " half flying, half on foot." The object in sense is a positive thing, and execution comes with practice.

Cleverness is a certain *knack* or aptitude at doing certain things, which depend more on a particular adroitness and off-hand readiness than on force or perseverance, such as making puns, making epigrams, making extempore verses,

mimicking the company, mimicking a style, etc. Cleverness is either liveliness and smartness, or something answering to *rieight of hand*, like letting a glass fall sideways off a table, or else a trick, like knowing the secret spring of a watch. Accomplishments are certain external graces, which are to be learned from others, and which are easily displayed to the admiration of the beholder—namely, dancing, riding, fencing, music, and so on. These ornamental acquirements are only proper to those who are at ease in mind and fortune. I know an individual who, if he had been born to an estate of five thousand a year, would have been the most accomplished gentleman of the age. He would have been the delight and envy of the circle in which he moved—would have graced by his manners the liberality flowing from the openness of his heart, would have laughed with the women, have argued with the men, have said good things and written agreeable ones, have taken a hand at piquet or the lead at the harpsichord, and have set and sung his own verses—*nuga canom*—with tenderness and spirit; a Rochester without the vice, a modern Surrey! As it is, all these capabilities of excellence stand in his way. He is too versatile for a professional man, not dull enough for a political drudge, too gay to be happy, too thoughtless to be rich. He wants the enthusiasm of the poet, the severity of the prose-writer, and the application of the man of business.—Talent is the capacity of doing anything that depends on application and industry, such as writing a criticism, making a speech, studying the law. Talent differs from genius, as voluntary differs from involuntary power. Ingenuity is genius in trifles, geeatness is genius in undertakings of much pith and moment. A clever or ingenious man is one who can do anything well, whether it is worth doing or not; a great man is one who can do that which when done is of the highest importance. Themistocles said he could not play on the flute, but that he could make of a small city a great one. This gives one a pretty good idea of the distinction in question.

Greatness is great power, producing great effects. It is not enough that a man has great power in himself, he must show it to all the world in a way that cannot be hid or gainsaid. He must fill up a certain idea in the public mind. I have no other notion of greatness than this two-fold definition, great results springing from great inherent energy. The great in visible objects has relation to that which extends over space : the great in mental ones has to do with space and time. No man is truly great who is great only in his life-time. The test of greatness is the page of history. Nothing can be said to be great that has a distinct limit, or that borders on something evidently greater than itself. Besides, what is short-lived and pampered into mere notoriety, is of a gross and vulgar quality in itself. A Lord Mayor is hardly a great man. A city orator or patriot of the day only show, by reaching the height of their wishes, the distance they are from any true ambition. Popularity is neither fame nor greatness. A king (as such) is not a great man. He has great power, but it is not his own. He merely wields the lever of the state, which a child, an idiot, or a madman can do. It is the office, not the man we gaze at. Any one else in the same situation would be just as much an object of abject curiosity. We laugh at the country girl who having seen a king expressed her disappointment by saying, " Why, he is only a man ! " Yet, knowing this, we run to see a king as if he was something more than a man. —To display the greatest powers, unless they are applied to great purposes, makes nothing for the character of greatness. To throw a barley-corn through the eye of a needle, to multiply nine figures by nine in the memory, argues definite dexterity of body and capacity of mind, but nothing comes of either. There is a surprising power at work, but the effects are not proportionate, or such as take hold of the imagination. To impress the idea of power on others, they must be made in some way to feel it. It must be communicated to their understandings in the shape of an increase of knowledge, or it must subdue and overawe them

by subjecting their wills. Admiration to be solid and lasting must be founded on proofs from which we have no means of escaping ; it is neither a slight nor a voluntary gift. A mathematician who solves a profound problem, a poet who creates an image of beauty in the mind that was not there before, imparts knowledge and power to others, in which his greatness and his fame consists, and on which it reposes. Jedediah Buxton will be forgotten; but Napier's bones will live. Lawgivers, philosophers, founders of religion, conquerors and heroes, inventors and great geniuses in arts and sciences, are great men, for they are great public benefactors, or formidable scourges to mankind. Among ourselves, Shakespear, Newton, Bacon, Milton, Cromwell, were great men, for they showed great power by acts and thoughts, which have not yet been consigned to oblivion. They must needs be men of lofty stature, whose shadows lengthen out to remote posterity. A great farce-writer may be a great man; for Moliere was but a great farce-writer. In my mind, the author of *Don Quixote* was a great man. So have there been many others. A great chess-player is not a great man, for he leaves the world as he found it. No act terminating in itself constitutes greatness. This will apply to all displays of power or trials of skill, which are confined to the momentary, individual effort, and construct no permanent image or trophy of themselves without them. Is not an actor, then, a great man, because " he dies and leaves the world no copy ? " I must make an exception for Mrs. Siddons, or else give up my definition of greatness for her sake. A man at the top of his profession is not therefore a great man. He is great in his way, but that is all, unless he shows the marks of a great moving intellect, so that we trace the master-mind, and can sympathise with the springs that urge him on. The rest is but a craft or *mystery*. John Hunter was a great man—that any one might see without the smallest skill in surgery. His style and manner showed the man. He would set about cutting up the carcase of a whale with the same greatness

of gusto that Michael Angelo would have hewn a block of marble. Lord Nelson was a great naval commander; but for myself, I have not much opinion of a seafaring life. Sir Humphry Davy is a great chemist, but I am not sure that he is a great man. I am not a bit the wiser for any of his discoveries; I never met with any one that was. But it is in the nature of greatness to propagate an idea of itself, as wave impels wave, circle without circle. It is a contradiction in terms for a coxcomb to be a great man. A really great man has always an idea of something greater than himself. I have observed that certain sectaries and polemical writers have no higher compliment to pay their most shining lights than to say that "such a one was a considerable man in his day." Some new elucidation of a text sets aside the authority of the old interpretation, and a "great scholar's memory outlives him half a century," at the utmost. A rich man is not a great man, except to his dependants and his steward. A lord is a great man in the idea we have of his ancestry, and probably of himself, if we know nothing of him but his title. I have heard a story of two bishops, one of whom said (speaking of St. Peter's at Rome) that when he first entered it, he was rather awestruck, but that as he walked up it, his mind seemed to swell and dilate with it, and at last to fill the whole building: the other said that as he saw more of it, he appeared to himself to grow less and less every step he took, and in the end to dwindle into nothing. This was in some respects a striking picture of a great and little mind—for greatness sympathises with greatness, and littleness shrinks into itself. The one might have become a Wolsey; the other was only fit to become a Mendicant Friar—or there might have been court-reasons for making him a bishop. The French have to me a character of littleness in all about them; but they have produced three great men that belong to every country, Moliere, Rabelais, and Montaigne.

To return from this digression, and conclude the Essay. A singular instance of manual dexterity was shown in the

person of the late John Cavanagh, whom I have several times seen. His death was celebrated at the time in an article in the *Examiner* newspaper (Feb. 7, 1819), written apparently between jest and earnest: but as it is *pat* to our purpose, and falls in with my own way of considering such subjects, I shall here take leave to quote it.

" Died at his house in Burbage Street, St. Giles's, John Cavanagh, the famous hand fives-player. When a person dies, who does any one thing better than any one else in the world, which so many others are trying to do well, it leaves a gap in society. It is not likely that any one will now see the game of fives played in its perfection for many years to come—for Cavanagh is dead, and has not left his peer behind him. It may be said that there are things of more importance than striking a ball against a wall—there are things indeed that make more noise and do as little good, such as making war and peace, making speeches and answering them, making verses and blotting them; making money and throwing it away. But the game of fives is what no one despises who has ever played at it. It is the finest exercise for the body, and the best relaxation for the mind. The Roman poet said that 'Care mounted behind the horseman and stuck to his skirts.' But this remark would not have applied to the fives-player. He who takes to playing at fives is twice young. He feels neither the past nor future 'in the instant.' Debts, taxes, * domestic treason, foreign levy, nothing can touch him further.' He has no other wish, no other thought, from the moment the game begins, but that of striking the ball, of placing it, of *making* it I This Cavanagh was sure to do. Whenever he touched the ball, there was an end of the chase. His eye was certain, his hand fatal, his presence of mind complete. He could do what he pleased, and he always knew exactly what to do. He saw the whole game, and played it; took instant advantage of his adversary's weakness, and recovered balls, as if by a miracle and from sudden thought, that every one gave for lost. He had equal power and skill, quickness and

judgment. He could either outwit his antagonist by finesse, or beat him by main strength. Sometimes, when he seemed preparing to send the ball with the full swing of his arm, he would -by a slight turn of his wrist drop it within an inch of the line. In general, the ball came down from his hand, as if from a racket, in a straight horizontal line; so that it was in vain to attempt to overtake or stop it. As it was said of a great orator that he never was at a loss for a word, and for the properest word, so Cavanagh always could tell the degree of force necessary to be given to a ball, and the precise direction in which it should be sent. He did his work with the greatest ease; never took more pains than was necessary; and while others were fagging themselves to death, was as cool and collected as if he had just entered the court. His style of play was as remarkable as his power of execution. He had no affectation, no trifling. He did not throw away the game to show off an attitude, or try an experiment. He was a fine, sensible, manly player, who did what he could, but that was more than any one else could even affect to do. His blows were not undecided and ineffectual—lumbering like Mr. Wordsworth's epic poetry, nor wavering like Mr. Coleridge's lyric prose, nor short of the mark like Mr. Brougham's speeches, nor wide of it like Mr. Canning's wit, nor foul like the *Quarterly*, nor *let* balls like the *Edinburgh Review*. Cobbett and Junius together would have made a Cavanagh. He was the best *up-hill* player in the world; even when his adversary was fourteen, he would play on the same or better, and as he never flung away the game through carelessness and conceit, he never gave it up through laziness or want of heart. The only peculiarity of his play was that he never *volleyed*, but let the balls hop; but if they rose an inch from the ground, he never missed having them. There was not only nobody equal, but nobody second to him. It is supposed that he could give any other player half the game, or beat them with his left hand. His service was tremendous. He once played Woodward and Meredith together (two of

the best players in England) in the Fives-court, St. Martin's Street, and made seven-and-twenty aces following by services alone—a thing unheard of. He another time played Peru, who was considered a first-rate fives-player, a match of the best out of five games, and in the three first games, which of course decided the match, Peru got only one ace. Cavanagh was an Irishman by birth, and a house-painter by profession. He had once laid aside his working-dress, and walked up, in his smartest clothes, to the Rosemary Branch to have an afternoon's pleasure. A person accosted him, and asked him if he would have a game. So they agreed to play for half-a-crown a game, and a bottle of cider. The first game began—it was seven, eight, ten, thirteen, fourteen, all. Cavanagh won it. The next was the same. They played on, and each game was hardly contested. 'There,' said the unconscious fives-player, * there was a stroke that Cavanagh could not take : I never played better in my life, and yet I can't win a game. I don't know how it is !' However, they played on, Cavanagh winning every game, and the bystanders drinking the cider and laughing all the time. In the twelfth game, when Cavanagh was only four, and the stranger thirteen, a person came in, and said, 'What ! are you here, Cavanagh ?' The words were no sooner pronounced than the astonished player let the ball drop from his hand, and saying, 'What ! have I been breaking my heart all this time to beat Cavanagh ?' refused to make another effort. 'And yet, I give you my word,' said Cavanagh, telling the story with some triumph, 'I played all the while with my clenched fist.'—He used frequently to play matches at Copenhagen House for wagers and dinners. The wall against which they play is the same that supports the kitchen chimney, and when the wall resounded louder than usual, the cooks exclaimed, 'Those are the Irishman's balls,' and the -joints trembled on the spit !—Goldsmith consoled himself that there were places where he too was admired; and Cavanagh was the admiration of all the fives-courts where he ever played. Mr. Powell,

when he played matches in the Court in St. Martin's Street, used to fill his gallery at half-a-crown a-head, with amateurs and admirers of talent in whatever department it is shown. He could not have shown himself in any ground in England but he would have been immediately surrounded with inquisitive gazers, trying to find out in what part of his frame his unrivalled skill lay, as politicians wonder to see the balance of Europe suspended in Lord Castlereagh's face, and admire the trophies of the British Navy lurking under Mr. Croker's hanging brow. Now, Cavanagh was as good-looking a man as the Noble Lord, and much better looking than the Right Hon. Secretary. He had a clear, open countenance, and did not look sideways or down, like Mr. Murray, the bookseller. He was a young fellow of sense, humour, and courage. He once had a quarrel with a waterman at Hungerford Stairs, and, they say, served him out in great style. In a word, there are hundreds at this day who cannot mention his name without admiration, as the best fives-player that perhaps ever lived (the greatest excellence of which they have any notion)—and the noisy shout of the ring happily stood him in stead of the unheard voice of posterity !—The only person who seems to have excelled as much in another way as Cavanagh did in his was the late John Davies, the racket-player. It was remarked of him that he did not seem to follow the ball, but the ball seemed to follow him. Give him a foot of wall, and he was sure to make the ball. The four best racket-players of that day were Jack Spines, Jem Harding, Armitage, and Church. Davies could give any one of these two hands a time—that is, half the game,—and each of these, at their best, could give the best player now in London the same odds. Such are the gradations in all exertions of human skill and art. He once played four capital players together, and beat them. He was also a first-rate tennis-player, and an excellent fives-player. In the Fleet or King's Bench, he would have stood against Powell, who was reckoned the best open-ground player of his time* This last-mentioned

player is at present the keeper of the Fives-court, and we might recommend to him for a motto over his door—'Who enters here, forgets himself, his country, and his friends.' And the best of it is, that by the calculation of the odds, none of the three are worth remembering!—Cavanagh died from the bursting of a blood-vessel, which prevented him from playing for the last two or three years. This, he was often heard to say, he thought hard upon him. He was fast recovering, however, when he was suddenly carried off, to the regret of all who knew him. As Mr. Peel made it a qualification of the present Speaker, Mr. Manners Sutton, that he was an excellent moral character, so Jack Cavanagh was a zealous Catholic, and could not be persuaded to eat meat on a Friday, the day on which he died. We have paid this willing tribute to his memory.

" *Let no rude hand deface it,*
And his forlorn ' Hic Jacet.' "

On Disagreeable People ¹

THOSE people who are uncomfortable in themselves are disagreeable to others. I do not here mean to speak of persons who offend intentionally, or are obnoxious to dislike from some palpable defect of mind or body, ugliness, pride, ill-humour, etc. ; but of those who are disagreeable in spite of themselves, and, as it might appear, with almost every qualification to recommend them to others. This want of success is owing chiefly to something in what is called their *manner*; and this again has its foundation in a certain cross-grained and unsociable state of feeling on their part, which influences us, perhaps, without our distinctly adverting to it. The mind is a finer instrument than we sometimes suppose it, and is not only swayed by overt acts and tangible proofs, but has an instinctive feeling of the air of truth. We find many individuals in whose company we pass our time, and have no particular fault to find with their understandings or character, and yet we are never thoroughly satisfied with them: the reason will turn out to be, upon examination, that they are never thoroughly satisfied with themselves, but uneasy and out of sorts all the time; and this makes us uneasy with them, without our reflecting on, or being able to, discover the cause.

Thus, for instance, we meet with persons who do us a number of kindnesses, who show us every mark of respect and good-will, who are friendly and serviceable—and yet we do not feel grateful to them, after all. We reproach ourselves with this as caprice or insensibility, and try to get the better of it; but there is something in their way of doing things that prevents us from feeling cordial or

¹ *On Disagreeable People* appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* of August 1827.

sincerely obliged to them. We think them very worthy people, and would be glad of an opportunity to do them a good turn if it were in our power; but we cannot get beyond this : the utmost we can do is to save appearances, and not come to an open rupture with them. The truth is, in all such cases, we do not sympathize (as we ought) with them, because they do not sympathize (as they ought) with us. They have done what they did from a sense of duty in a cold dry manner, or from a meddlesome busy-body humour; or to show their superiority over us, or to patronize our infirmity; or they have dropped some hint by the way, or blundered upon some topic they should not, and have shown, by one means or other, that they were occupied with anything but the pleasure they were affording us, or a delicate attention to our feelings. Such persons may be styled *friendly grievances*. They are commonly people of low spirits and disappointed views, who see the discouraging side of human life, and, with the best intentions in the world, contrive to make everything they have to do with uncomfortable. They are alive to your distress, and take pains to remove it; but they have no satisfaction in the gaiety and ease they have communicated, and are on the *look-out* for some new occasion of signalizing their zeal; nor are they backward to insinuate that you will soon have need of their assistance, to guard you against running into fresh difficulties, or to extricate you from them. From large benevolence of soul and "discourse of reason, looking before and after," they are continually reminding you of something that has gone wrong in time past, or that may do so in that which is to come, and are surprised that their awkward hints, sly innuendos, blunt questions, and solemn features do not excite all the complacency and mutual good understanding in you which it is intended that they should. When they make themselves miserable on your account, it is hard that you will not lend them your countenance and support. This deplorable humour of theirs does not hit anyone else. They are useful, but not agreeable people;

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they may assist you in your affairs, but they depress and tyrannize over your feelings. When they have made you happy, they will not let you be so—have no enjoyment of the good they have done—will on no account part with their melancholy and desponding tone—and, by their mawkish insensibility and doleful grimaces, throw a damp over the triumph they are called upon to celebrate. They would keep you in hot water, that they may help you out of it. They will nurse you in a fit of sickness (congenial sufferers !)—arbitrate a law-suit for you, and embroil you deeper—procure you a loan of money ;—but all the while they are only delighted with rubbing the sore place, and casting the colour of your mental or other disorders. " The whole need not a physician ; " and, being once placed at ease and comfort, they have no farther use for you as subjects for their singular beneficence, and you are not sorry to be quit of their tiresome interference. The old proverb, *A friend in need is a friend indeed*, is not verified in them. The class of persons here spoken of are the very reverse of *summer-friends*, who court you in prosperity, flatter your vanity, are the humble servants of your follies, never see or allude to anything wrong, minister to your gaiety, smooth over every difficulty, and, with the slightest approach of misfortune or of anything unpleasant, take French leave—

" As when, in prime of June, a burnish'd fly,
Sprung from the meads, o'er which he sweeps along,
Cheer'd by the breathing bloom and vital sky,
Tunes up, amid these airy halls, his song,
Soothing at first the gay reposing throng ;
And oft he sips their bowl, or, nearly drown'd,
He thence recovering drives their beds among,
And scares their tender sleep with trump profound;
Then out again he flies, to wing his mazyround."¹

However we may despise such tfflers, yet we regret them more than those well-meaning friends on whom a dull

* Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, Canto i., st. 64.

melancholy vapour hangs, that drags them and every one about them to the ground.

Again, there are those who might be very agreeable people, if they had but spirit to be so ; but there is a narrow, unaspiring, under-bred tone in all they say or do. They have great sense and information—abound in a knowledge of character—have a fund of anecdote—are unexceptionable in manners and appearance—and yet we cannot make up our minds to like them : we are not glad to see them, nor sorry when they go away. Our familiarity with them, however great, wants the principle of cement, which is a certain appearance of frank cordiality and social enjoyment. They have no pleasure in the subject of their own thoughts, and therefore can communicate none to others. There is a dry, husky, grating manner, a pettiness of detail—a tenaciousness of particulars, however trifling or unpleasant—a disposition to cavil—an aversion to enlarged and liberal views of things—in short, a hard, painful, unbending *matter-of-factness* from which the spirit and effect are banished and the letter only is attended to, which makes it impossible to sympathize with their discourse. To make conversation interesting or agreeable, there is required either the habitual tone of good company, which gives a favourable colouring to everything—or the warmth and enthusiasm of genius, which, though it may occasionally offend or be thrown off its guard, makes amends by its rapturous flights, and flings a glancing light upon all things. The literal and *dogged* style of conversation resembles that of a French picture, or its mechanical fidelity is like evidence given in a court of justice, or a police report.

From the literal to the plain-spoken, the transition is easy. The most efficient weapon of offence is truth. Those who deal in dry and repulsive matters-of-fact, tire out their friends; those who blurt out hard and home truths, make themselves mortal enemies wherever they come. There are your blunt, honest creatures, who omit no opportunity of letting you know their minds, and are sure to tell you all

the ill, and conceal all the good they hear of you. They would not flatter you for the world, and to caution you against the malice of others, they think the province of a friend. This is not candour, but impudence ; and yet they think it odd you are not charmed with their unreserved communicativeness of disposition. Gossips and tale-bearers, on the contrary, who supply the *tittle-tattle* of the neighbourhood, flatter you to your face, and laugh at you behind your back, are welcome and agreeable guests in all companies. Though you know it will be your turn next, yet for the sake of the immediate gratification, you are contented to pay your share of the public tax upon character, and are better pleased with the falsehoods that never reach your ears, than with the truths that others (less complaisant and more sincere) utter to your face—so short-sighted and willing to be imposed upon is our self-love! There is a man, who has the air of not being convinced without an argument: you avoid him as if he were a lion in your path. There is another, who asks you fifty questions as to the commonest things you advance : you would sooner pardon a fellow who held a pisto'l to your breast and demanded your money. No one regards a turnpike-keeper, or a custom-house officer with a friendly eye : he who stops you in an excursion of fancy, or ransacks the articles of your belief obstinately and churlishly, to distinguish the spurious from the genuine, is still more your foe. These inquisitors and cross-examiners upon system make ten enemies for every controversy in which they engage. The world dread nothing so much as being convinced of their errors. In doing them this piece of service, you make war equally on their prejudices, their interests, their pride, and indolence. You not only set up for a superiority of understanding over them, which they hate, but you deprive them of their ordinary grounds of action, their topics of discourse, of their confidence in themselves, and those to whom they have been accustomed to look up to for instruction and advice. It is making children of them. You unhinge all their

established opinions and trains of thought; and after leaving them in this listless, vacant, unsettled state—dissatisfied with their own notions and shocked at yours—you expect them to court and be delighted with your company, because, forsooth, you have only expressed your sincere and conscientious convictions. Mankind are not deceived by professions, unless they choose. They think that this pill of true doctrine, however it may be gilded over, is full of gall and bitterness to them; and, again, it is a maxim of which the vulgar are firmly persuaded, that plain-speaking (as it is called), nine parts in ten, is spleen and self-opinion; and the other part, perhaps, honesty. Those who will not abate an inch in argument, and are always seeking to recover the wind of you, are, in the eye of the world, disagreeable, unconscionable people, who ought to be *sent to Coventry*', or left to wrangle by themselves. No persons, however, are more averse to contradiction than these same dogmatists. What shows our susceptibility on this point is, that there is no flattery so adroit or effectual as that of implicit assent. Any one, however mean his capacity or ill-qualified to judge, who gives way to all our sentiments, and never seems to think but as we do, is indeed an *alter idem*—another self; and we admit him without scruple into our entire confidence, "yea, into our heart of hearts."

It is the same in books. Those which, under the disguise of plain speaking, vent paradoxes, and set their faces against the "common sense" of mankind, are neither "the volumes

" *that enrich the shops,*
That pass with approbation through the land; "

nor, I fear, can it be added—

" *That bring their authors an immortal fame* "

They excite a clamour and opposition at first, and are in general soon consigned to oblivion. Even if the opinions are in the end adopted, the authors gain little by it, and their names remain in their original obloquy; for the public

will own no obligations to such ungracious benefactors. In like manner, there are many books written in a very delightful vein, though with little in them, and that are accordingly popular. Their principle is to please, and not to offend; and they succeed in both objects. We are contented with the deference shown to our feelings for the time, and grant a truce both to wit and wisdom. The "courteous reader" and the good-natured author are well matched in this instance, and find their account in mutual tenderness and forbearance to each other's infirmities. I am not sure that Walton's *Angler* is not a book of this last description—

*"That dallies with the innocence of thought,
Like the old time."*

Hobbes and Mandeville are in the opposite extreme, and have met with a correspondent fate. The *Tatler* and *Spectator* are in the golden mean, carry instruction as far as it can go without shocking, and give the most exquisite pleasure without one particle of pain. "*Desire to please*", and *you will infallibly please* " is a maxim equally applicable to the study or the drawing-room. Thus, also, we see actors of very small pretensions, and who have scarce any other merit than that of being on good terms with themselves, and in high good humour with their parts (though they hardly understand a word of them), who are universal favourites with the audience. Others, who are masters of their art, and in whom no slip or flaw can be detected, you have no pleasure in seeing, from something dry, repulsive, and unconciliating in their manner; and you almost hate the very mention of their names, as an unavailing appeal to your candid decision in their favour, and as taxing you with injustice for refusing it.

We may observe persons who seem to take a particular delight in the *disagreeable*. They catch all sorts of uncouth tones and gestures, the manners and dialect of clowns and hoydens, and aim at vulgarity as desperately as others ape gentility, ("This is what is often understood by a *love of low*

life.) They say the most unwarrantable things, without meaning or feeling what they say. What startles or shocks other people, is to them a sport—an amusing excitement—a filip to their constitutions; and from the bluntness of their perceptions, and a certain wilfulness of spirit, not being able to enter into the refined and agreeable, they make a merit of despising everything of the kind. Masculine women, for example, are those who, not being distinguished by the charms and delicacy of the sex, affect a superiority over it by throwing aside all decorum. We also find another class, who continually do and say what they ought not, and what they do not intend, and who are governed almost entirely by an instinct of absurdity. Owing to a perversity of imagination or irritability of nerve, the idea that a thing is improper acts as a provocation to it: the fear of committing a blunder is so strong, that in their agitation they *bolt* out whatever is uppermost in their minds, before they are aware of the consequence. The dread of something wrong haunts and rivets their attention to it; and an uneasy, morbid apprehensiveness of temper takes away their self-possession, and hurries them into the very mistakes they are most anxious to avoid.

If we look about us, and ask who are the agreeable and disagreeable people in the world, we shall see that it does not so much depend on their virtues or vices—their understanding or stupidity—as on the degree of pleasure or pain they seem to feel in ordinary social intercourse. What signify all the good qualities any one possesses, if he is none the better for them himself? If the cause is so delightful, the effect ought to be so too. We enjoy a friend's society only in proportion as he is satisfied with ours. Even wit, however it may startle, is only agreeable as it is sheathed in good-humour. There are a kind of *intellectual stammerers*, who are delivered of their good things with pain and effort; and consequently what costs them such evident uneasiness does not impart urmixed delight to the bystanders. There are those, on the contrary, whose sallies cost them nothing

—who abound in a flow of pleasantry and good-humour; and who float down the stream with them carelessly and triumphantly—

" *Wit at the helm, and Pleasure at the prow.*"

Perhaps it may be said of English wit in general, that it too much resembles pointed lead : after all, there is something heavy and dull in it ! The race of small wits are not the least agreeable people in the world. They have their little joke to themselves, enjoy it, and do not set up any preposterous pretensions to thwart the current of our self-love. Toad-eating is accounted a thriving profession; and a *butt*, according to the *Spectator*, is a highly useful member of society—as one who takes whatever is said of him in good part, and as necessary to conduct off the spleen and superfluous petulance of the company. Opposed to these are the swaggering bullies—the licensed wits—the free-thinkers—the loud talkers, who, in the jockey phrase, have *lost their mouths*, and cannot be reined in by any regard to decency or common-sense. The more obnoxious the subject the more are they charmed with it, converting their want of feeling into a proof of superiority to vulgar prejudice and squeamish affection. But there, is an unseemly exposure of the mind, as well as of the body. There are some objects that shock the sense, and cannot with propriety be mentioned : there are naked truths that offend the mind, and ought to be kept out of sight as much as possible. For human nature cannot bear to be too hardly pressed upon. One of these cynical truisms, when brought forward to the world, may be forgiven as a slip of the pen: a succession of them, denoting a deliberate purpose and *malice prepense*, must ruin any writer. Lord Byron had got into an irregular course of these a little before his death—seemed desirous, in imitation of Mr. Shelley, to run the gauntlet of public obloquy—and, at the same time, wishing to screen himself from the censure he defied, dedicated his *Cain* to Sir Walter Scott—a pretty god-father to such a bantling I

Some persons are of so teasing and fidgety a turn of mind, that they do not give you a moment's rest. Everything goes wrong with them. They complain of a headache or the weather. They take up a book, and lay it down again—venture an opinion, and retract it before they have half done—offer to serve you, and prevent some one else from doing it. If you dine with them at a tavern, in order to be more at your ease, the fish is too little done—the sauce is not the right one ; they ask for a sort of wine which they think is not to be had, or if it is, after some trouble, procured, do not touch it; they give the waiter fifty" contradictory orders, and are restless and sit on thorns the whole of dinner-time. All this is owing to a want of robust health, and of a strong spirit of enjoyment: it is a fastidious habit of mind, produced by a valetudinary habit of body : they are out of sorts with everything, and of course their ill-humour and captiousness communicates itself to you, who are as little delighted with them as they are with other things. Another sort of people, equally objectionable with this helpless class, who are disconcerted by a shower of rain or stopped by an insect's wing, are those who, in the opposite spirit, will have everything their own way, and carry all before them—who cannot brook the slightest shadow of opposition—who are always in the heat of 'ih argument—who knit their brows and clench their teeth in some speculative discussion, as if they were engaged in a personal quarrel—and who, though successful over almost every competitor, seem still to resent the very offer of resistance to their supposed authority, and are as angry as if they had sustained some premeditated injury. There is an impatience of temper and an intolerance of opinion in this that conciliates neither our affection nor esteem. To such persons nothing appears of any moment but the indulgence of a domineering intellectual superiority, to the disregard and discomfiture of their own and everybody else's comfort. Mounted on an abstract proposition, they trample on every courtesy and decency of behaviour; and

though, perhaps, they do not intend the gross personalities they are guilty of, yet they cannot be acquitted of a want of due consideration for others, and of an intolerable egotism in the support of truth and justice. You may hear one of these Quixotic declaimers pleading the cause of humanity in a voice of thunder, or expatiating on the beauty of a Guido with features distorted with rage and scorn. This is not a very amiable or edifying spectacle.

There are persons who cannot make friends. Who are they? Those who cannot be friends. It is not the want of understanding or good-nature, of entertaining or useful qualities, that you complain of: on the contrary, they have probably many points of attraction; but they have one that neutralizes all these—they care nothing about you, and are neither the better nor worse for what you think of them. They manifest no joy at your approach; and when you leave them, it is with a feeling that they can do just as well without you. This is not sullenness, nor indifference, nor absence of mind; but they are intent solely on their own thoughts, and you are merely one of the subjects they exercise them upon.. They live in society as in a solitude; and, however their brain works, their pulse beats neither faster nor slower for the common accidents of life. There **t**herefore, something cold and repulsive in the air that is about them—like that of marble. In a word, they are *modern philosophers*; and the modern philosopher is what the pedant was of old—a being who lives in a world of his own, and has no correspondence with this. It is not that such persons have not done you services—you acknowledge it; it is not that they have said severe things of you—you submit to it as a necessary evil: but it is the cool manner in which the whole is done that annoys you—the speculating upon you, as if you were nobody—the regarding you, with a view to an experiment in *corpore vili*—the principle of dissection—the determination to spare no blemishes—to cut you down to your real standard;—in short, the utter absence of the partiality of friendship, the blind enthusiasm of affection, or

the delicacy of common decency, that whether they "hew you as a carcase fit for hounds, or carve you as a dish fit for the gods," the operation on your feelings and your sense of obligation is just the same ; and, whether they are demons or angels in themselves, you wish them equally *at the devil!*

Other persons of worth and sense give way to mere violence of temperament (with which the understanding has nothing to do)—are burnt up with a perpetual fury—repel and throw you to a distance by their restless, whirling motion—so that you dare not go near them, or feel as uneasy in their company as if you stood on the edge of a volcano. They have their *tempora mollia fandi*; but then what a stir may you not expect the next moment! Nothing is less inviting or less comfortable than this state of uncertainty and apprehension. Then there are those who never approach you without the most alarming advice or information, telling you that you are in a dying way, or that your affairs are on the point of ruin, by way of disburdening their consciences ; and others, who give you to understand much the same thing as a good joke, out of sheer impertinence, constitutional vivacity, and want of something to say. All these, it must be confessed, are disagreeable people ; and you repay their over-anxiety or total forgetfulness of you, by a determination to *cut* them as speedily as possible. We meet with instances of persons who overpower you by a sort of boisterous mirth and rude animal spirits, with whose ordinary state of excitement it is as impossible to keep up as with that of any one really intoxicated ; and with others who seem scarce alive—who take no pleasure or interest in anything—who are born to exemplify the maxim,

" *Not to admire is all the art I know*
To make men happy, or to keep them so,"—

and whose mawkish insensibility or sullen scorn are equally annoying. In general, all people brought up in remote country places, where life is crude and harsh—all sectaries—

all partisans of a losing cause, are discontented and disagreeable. Commend me above all to the Westminster School of Reform, whose blood runs as cold in their veins as the torpedo's, and whose touch jars like it. Catholics are, upon the whole, more amiable than Protestants—foreigners than English people. Among ourselves, the Scotch, as a nation, are particularly disagreeable. They hate every appearance of comfort themselves and refuse it to others. Their climate, their religion, and their habits are equally averse to pleasure. Their manners are either distinguished by a fawning sycophancy (to gain their own ends, and conceal their natural defects), that makes one sick; or by a morose, unbending callousness, that makes one shudder. I had forgot to mention two other descriptions of persons who fall under the scope of this essay:—those who take up a subject, and run on with it interminably, without knowing whether their hearers care one word about it, or in the least minding what reception their oratory meets with—these are pretty generally voted *bored* (mostly German ones);—and others, who may be designated as practical paradox-mongers—who discard the "milk of human kindness," and an attention to common observances, from all their actions, as effeminate and puling—who wear an out-of-the-way hat as a mark of superior understanding, and carry home a handkerchief-full of mushrooms in the top of it as an original discovery—who give you craw-fish for supper instead of lobsters; seek their company in a garret and over a gin-bottle, to avoid the imputation of affecting genteel society; and discard their friends after a term of years, and warn others against them, as being *honest fellows*, which is thought a vulgar prejudice. This is carrying the harsh and repulsive even beyond the disagreeable—to the hateful. Such persons are generally people of commonplace understandings, obtuse feelings, and inordinate vanity. They are formidable if they get you in their power—otherwise, they are only to be laughed at.

There are a vast number who **are** disagreeable from

meanness of spirit, downright insolence, from slovenliness of dress or disgusting tricks, from folly or ignorance ; but these causes are positive moral or physical defects, and I only meant to speak of that repulsiveness of manners which arises from want of tact and sympathy with others. So far of friendship: a word, if I durst, of love. Gallantry to women (the sure road to their favour) is nothing but the appearance of extreme devotion to all their wants and wishes—a delight in their satisfaction, and a confidence in yourself, as being able to contribute towards it. The slightest indifference with regard to them, or distrust of yourself, are equally fatal. The amiable is the voluptuous in looks, manner, or words. No face that exhibits this kind of expression—whether lively or serious, obvious or suppressed, will be thought ugly—no address, awkward—no lover who approaches every woman he meets as his mistress, will be unsuccessful. Diffidence and awkwardness are the two antidotes to love.

To please universally, we must be pleased with ourselves and others. There should be a tinge of the coxcomb, an oil of self-complacency, an anticipation of success—there should be no gloom, no moroseness, no shyness—in short, there should be very little of the Englishman, and a good deal of the Frenchman. But though, I believe, this is the receipt, we are none the nearer making use of it. It is impossible for those who are naturally disagreeable ever to become otherwise. This is some consolation, as it may save a world of useless pains and anxiety. "*Desire to please, and you will infallibly please*" is a true maxim ; but it does not follow that it is in the power of all to practise it. A vain man, who thinks he is endeavouring to please, is only endeavouring to shine, and is still farther from the mark. An irritable man, who puts a check upon himself, only grows dull, and loses spirit to be anything. Good temper and a happy turn of mind (which are the indispensable requisites) can no more be commanded than good health or good looks; and though the plain and sickly need not

distort their features, and may abstain from excess, this is all they can do. The utmost a disagreeable person can do is to hope, by care and study, to become less disagreeable than he is, and to pass unnoticed in society. With this negative character he should be contented, and may build his fame and happiness on other things.

I will conclude with a description of men who neither please nor aspire to please anybody, and who can come in nowhere so properly as at the fag-end of an essay : — I mean that class of discontented but amusing persons, who are infatuated with their own ill success, and reduced to despair by a lucky turn in their favour. While all goes well, they axe */ike fish out of water*. They have no reliance on or sympathy with their good fortune, nor look upon it as a momentary delusion. Let a doubt be thrown on the question, and they begin to be full of lively apprehensions again : let all their hopes vanish, and they feel themselves on firm ground once more. From want of spirit, or from habit, their imaginations cannot rise above the low ground of humility,—cannot reflect the gay, flaunting tints of the fancy—flag and droop into despondency—and can neither indulge the expectation, nor employ the means of success. Even when it is within their reach, they dare not lay hands upon it ; and shrink from unlooked-for bursts of prosperity, as something of which they are both ashamed and unworthy. The class of *croakers* here spoken of are less delighted with other people's misfortunes than with their own. Their neighbours may have some pretensions—they have none. Querulous complaints and anticipations of discomfort are the food on which they live ; and they at last acquire a passion for that which is the favourite theme of their thoughts, and can no more do without it than without the pinch of snuff with which they season their conversation, and enliven the pauses of their daily prognostics.

The Fight¹

"———*The fight, the fight's the thing,
Wherein I ll catch the conscience of the king*"

Where there's a will there's a way.—I said so to myself, as I walked down Chancery Lane, about half-past six o'clock on Monday, the 10th of December, to inquire at Jack Randall's where the fight the next day was to be; and I found the proverb nothing "musty" in the present instance. I was determined to see this fight, come what would, and see it I did, in great style. It was my *first fight*, yet it more than answered my expectations. Ladies! it is to you I dedicate this description; nor let it seem out of character for the fair to notice the exploits of the brave. Courage and modesty are the old English virtues; and may they never look cold and askance on one another! Think, ye fairest of the fair, loveliest of the lovely kind, ye practisers of soft enchantment, how many more ye kill with poisoned baits than ever fell in the ring; and listen with subdued air and without shuddering, to a tale tragic only in appearance, and sacred to the FANCY!

I was going down Chancery Lane, thinking to ask at Jack Randall's where the fight was to be, when looking through

¹*The Fight* appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine* of February 1822. The meeting between Neate and Hickman took place at Hungerford, Berkshire, on 10th December, 1821. In the original version Hazlitt's travelling companion to Hungerford, Joe Parkes, was called Joe Toms; Pigott, his companion on the return journey, has been identified by P. P. Howe in his *Life of Hazlitt* (revised ed., 1928) as Peter George Patmore, father of Coventry Patmore, the Victorian poet. Cyrus Redding, the assistant editor of the *New Monthly*, considered *The Fight* "a very vulgar thing for us" and proposed to return the manuscript to Hazlitt, but the editor, Thomas Campbell, the Scottish poet, said, "No, no, it is a picture of manners—your {i.e. English} manners. It is a history painting; let us insert it."

the glass-door of the *Hole in the Wall*, I heard a gentleman asking the same question at Mrs. Randall, as the author of *Waverley* would express it. Now Mrs. Randall stood answering the gentleman's question, with all the authenticity of the lady of the Champion of the Light Weights. Thinks I, I'll wait till this person comes out, and learn from him how it is. For to say a truth, I was not fond of going into this house of call for heroes and philosophers, ever since the owner of it (for Jack is no gentleman) threatened once upon a time to kick me out of doors for wanting a mutton-chop at his hospitable board, when the conqueror in thirteen battles was more full of *blue ruin* than of good manners. I was the more mortified at this repulse, inasmuch as I had heard Mr. James Simpkins, hosier in the Strand, one day when the character of the *Hole in the Wall* was brought in question, observe—"The house is a very good house, and the company quite genteel: I have been there myself!" Remembering this unkind treatment of mine host, to which mine hostess was also a party, and not wishing to put her in unquiet thoughts at a time jubilant like the present, I waited at the door, when, who should issue forth but my friend Joe Parkes, and, seeing him turn suddenly up Chancery Lane with that quick jerk and impatient stride which distinguish a lover of the FANCY, I said, "I'll be hanged if that fellow is not going to the fight, and is on his way to get me to go with him." So it proved in effect, and we agreed to adjourn to my lodgings to discuss measures with that cordiality which makes old friends like new, and new friends like old, on great occasions. We are cold to others only when we are dull in ourselves, and have neither thoughts nor feelings to impart to them. Give a man a topic in his head, a throb of pleasure in his heart, and he will be glad to share it with the first person he meets. Joe and I, though we seldom meet, were an *alter idem* on this memorable occasion, and had not an idea that we did not candidly impart; and "so carelessly did we fleet the time," that I wish no better, when there is another fight, than to

have him for a companion on my journey down, and to return with my friend Jack Pigott, talking of what was to happen or of what did happen, with a noble subject always at hand, and liberty to digress to others whenever they offered. Indeed, on my repeating the lines from Spenser in an involuntary fit of enthusiasm,

*" What more felicity can fall to creature,
Than to enjoy delight with liberty ? "*

my last-named ingenious friend stopped me by saying that this, translated into the vulgate, meant "*Going to see a fight.*"

Joe and I could not settle about the method of going, down. He said there was a caravan, he understood, to start from Tom Belcher's at two, which would go there *right out* and back again the next day. Now, I never travel all night, and said I should get a cast to Newbury by one of the mails. Joe swore the thing was impossible, and I could only answer that I had made up my mind to it. In short, he seemed to me to waver, said he only came to see if I was going, had letters to write, a cause coming on the day after, and faintly said at parting (for I was bent on setting out that moment)—" Well, we meet at Philippi ? " I made the best of my way to Piccadilly. The mail-coach stand was bare. " They are all gone," said I — " this is always the way with me—in the instant I lose the future—if I had not. stayed to pour out that last cup of tea, I should have been just in time ; "—and cursing my folly and ill-luck together, without inquiring at the coach-office whether the mails were gone or not, I walked on in despite, and to punish my own diiutoriness and want of determination. At any rate, I would not turn back : I might get to Hounslow, or perhaps farther, to be on my road the next morning. I passed Hyde Park corner (my Rubicon), and trusted to fortune. Suddenly I heard the clattering of a Brentford stage, and the fight rushed full upon my fancy. I argued (not unwisely) that even a Brentford coachman was better company than my own thoughts (such as they were just then), and at his

invitation mounted the box with him. I immediately stated my case to him—namely, my quarrel with myself for missing the Bath or Bristol mail, and my determination to get on, in consequence as well as I could, without any disparagement or insulting comparison between longer or shorter stages. It is a maxim with me that stage-coaches, and consequently stage-coachmen, are respectable in proportion to the distance they have to travel: so I said nothing on that subject to my Brentford friend. Any incipient tendency to an abstract proposition, or (as he might have construed it) to a personal reflection of this kind, was however nipped in the bud ; for I had no sooner declared indignantly that I had missed the mails, than he flatly denied that they were gone along, and lo ! at the instant three of them drove by in rapid, provoking, orderly succession, as if they would devour the ground before them. Here again I seemed in the contradictory situation of the man in Dryden who exclaims,

" I follow Fate, which does too hard pursue ! "

If I had stopped to inquire at the White Horse Cellar, which would not have taken me a minute, I should now have been driving down the road in all the dignified unconcern and *ideal* perfection of mechanical conveyance. The Bath mail I had set my mind upon, and I had missed it, as I miss everything else, by my own absurdity, in putting the will for the deed, and aiming at ends without employing means. " Sir," said he of the Brentford, " the Bath mail will be up presently, my brother-in-law drives it, and I will engage to stop him if there is a place empty." I almost doubted my good genius ; but, sure enough, up it drove like lightning, and stopped directly at the call of the Brentford Jehu. I would not have believed this possible, but the brother-in-law of a mail-coach driver is himself no mean man. I was transferred without loss of time from the top of one coach to that of the other, desired the guard to pay my fare to the Brentford coachman for me as I had no change, was accommodated with a great coat, put up my umbrella to keep off a drizzling

mist, and we began to cut through the air like an arrow. The mile-stones disappeared one after another, the rain kept off; Tom Turtle,¹ the trainer, sat before me on the coach-box, with whom I exchanged civilities as a gentleman going to the fight; the passion that had transported me an hour before was subdued to pensive regret and conjectural musing on the next day's battle; I was promised a place inside at Reading, and upon the whole, I thought myself a lucky fellow. Such is the force of imagination! On the outside of any other coach on the 10th of December, with a Scotch mist drizzling through the cloudy moonlight air, I should have been cold, comfortless, impatient, and, no doubt, wet through; but seated on the Royal mail, I felt warm and comfortable, the air did me good, the ride did me good, I was pleased with the progress we had made, and confident that all would go well through the journey. When I got inside at Reading, I found Turtle and a stout valetudinarian, whose costume bespoke him one of the FANCY, and who had risen from a three months' sick bed to get into the mail to see the fight. They were intimate, and we fell into a lively discourse. My friend the trainer was confined in his topics to fighting dogs and men, to bears and badgers; beyond this he was "quite chap-fallen," had not a word to throw at a dog, or indeed very wisely fell asleep, when any other game was started. The whole art of training (I, however, learnt from him) consists in two things, exercise and abstinence, abstinence and exercise, repeated alternately and without end. A yolk of an *egg* with a spoonful of rum in it is the first thing in a morning, and then a walk of six miles till breakfast. This meal consists of a plentiful supply of tea and toast and beef-steaks. Then another six or seven miles till dinner-time, and another supply of solid beef or mutton with a pint of porter, and perhaps, at the utmost, a couple of glasses of sherry. Martin trains on water, but this increases his infirmity on another very dangerous side. The Gasman takes now and

¹ John Thurtell, to wit.

then a chirping glass (under the rose) to console him, during a six weeks' probation, for the absence of Mrs. Hickman—an agreeable woman, with (I understand) a pretty fortune of two hundred pounds. How matter presses on me ! What stubborn things are facts ! How inexhaustible is nature and art ! " It is well," as I once heard Mr. Richmond observe, " to see a variety." He was speaking of cock-fighting as an edifying spectacle. I cannot deny but that one learns more of what *is* (I do not say of what *ought to be*) in this desultory mode of practical study, than from reading the same book twice over, even though it should be a moral treatise. Where was I ? I was sitting at dinner with the candidate for the honours of the ring, " where good digestion waits on appetite, and health on both." Then follows an hour of social chat and native glee; and afterwards, to another breathing over heathy hill or dale. Back to supper, and then to bed, and up by six again—our hero

*" Follows so the ever-running sun,
With profitable ardour "—*

to the day that brings him victory or defeat in the green fairy circle. Is not this life more sweet than mine ? I was going to say; but I will not libel any life by comparing it to mine, which is (at the date of these presents) bitter as coloquintida and the dregs of aconitum !

The invalid in the Bath mail soared a pitch above the trainer, and did not sleep so sound, because he had " more figures and more fantasies." We talked the hours away merrily. He had faith in surgery, for he had three ribs set right, that had been broken in a *turn-up* at Belcher's, but thought physicians old women, for they had no antidote in their catalogue for brandy. An indigestion is an excellent common-place for two people that never met before. By way of ingratiating myself, I told him the story of my doctor, who, on my earnestly representing to him that I thought his regimen had done me harm, assured me that

the whole pharmacopoeia contained nothing comparable to the prescription he had given me; and, as a proof of its undoubted efficacy, said, that " he had had one gentleman with my complaint under his hands for the last fifteen years." This anecdote made my companion shake the rough sides of his three greatcoats with boisterous laughter; and Turtle, starting out of his sleep, swore he knew how the fight would go, for he had had a dream about it. Sure enough the rascal told us how the three first rounds went off, but " his dream," like others, " denoted a foregone conclusion." He knew his men. The moon now rose in silver state, and I ventured, with some hesitation, to point out this object of placid beauty, with the blue serene beyond, to the man of science, to which his ear he " seriously inclined," the more as it gave promise *d'un beau jour* for the morrow, and showed the ring undrenched by envious showers, arrayed in sunny smiles. Just then, all going on well, I thought of my friend Joe, whom I had left behind, and said innocently, " There was a blockhead of a fellow I left in town, who said there was no possibility of getting down by the mail, and talked of going by a caravan from Belcher's at two in the morning, after he had written some letters." " Why," said he of the lapels, " I should not wonder if that was the-very person we saw running about like mad from one coach-door to another, and asking if any one had seen a friend of his, a gentleman going to the fight, whom he had missed stupidly enough by staying to write a note." " Pray, sir," said my fellow-traveller, " had he a plaid-cloak on ? " " Why, no," said I, " not at the time I left him, but he very well might afterwards, for he offered to lend me one." The plaid-cloak, and the letter decided the thing. Joe, sure enough, was in the Bristol mail, which preceded us by about fifty yards. This was droll enough. We had now but a few miles to our place of destination, and the first thing I did on alighting at Newbury, both coaches stopping at the same time, was to call out, ' Pray is there a gentleman in that mail of thje name of

Parkes ? " " No," said Joe, borrowing something of the vein of Gilpin, " for I have just got out." " Well! " says he, " this is lucky; but you don't know how vexed I was to miss you : for," added he, lowering his voice, " do you know when I left you I went to Belcher's to ask about the caravan, and Mrs. Belcher said very obligingly, she couldn't tell about that, but there were two gentlemen who had taken places by the mail and were gone on in a landau, and she could frank us. It's a pity I didn't meet with you ; we could then have got down for nothing. But *mum's the word.*" It's the devil for any one to tell me a secret, for it is sure to come out in print. I do not care so much to gratify a friend, but the public ear is too great a temptation to me.

Our present business was to get beds and supper at an inn; but this was no easy task. The public-houses were full, and where you saw a light at a private house, and people poking their heads out of the casement to see what was going on, they instantly put them in and shut the window, the moment you seemed advancing with a suspicious overture for accommodation. Our guard and coachman thundered away at the outer gate of the Crown for some time without effect—such was the greater noise within; and when the doors' were unbarred, and we got admittance, we found a party assembled in the kitchen round a good hospitable fire, some sleeping, others drinking, others talking on politics and on the fight. A tall English yeoman (something like Matthews in the face, and quite as great a wag)—

" *A lusty man to ben an abbot able,—*"

was making such a prodigious noise about rent and taxes, **and** the price of corn now and formerly, that he had prevented us from being heard at the gate. The first thing **I heard** him say was to a shuffling fellow who wanted to be off a bet for a shilling glass of brandy and water—" Confound it, man, don't be *insipid* ! " Thinks I, that is a good **phrase**. It was a good omen. He kept it up so all night,

nor flinched with the approach of morning. He was a fine fellow, with sense, wit, and spirit, a hearty body and a joyous mind, free-spoken, frank, convivial—one of that true English breed that went with Harry the Fifth to the siege of Harfleur—"standing like greyhounds in the slips," etc. We ordered tea and eggs (beds were soon found to be out of the question), and this fellow's conversation was *sauce piquante*. It did one's heart good to see him brandish his oaken towel and to hear him talk. He made mince-meat of a drunken, stupid, red-faced, quarrelsome, /rowsy farmer, whose nose "he moralized into a thousand similes," making it out a firebrand like Bardolph's. "I'll tell you what, my friend," says he, "the landlady has only to keep you here to save fire and candle. If one was to touch your nose, it would go off like a piece of charcoal." At this the other only grinned like an idiot, the sole variety in his purple face being his little peering grey eyes and yellow teeth, called for another glass, swore he would not stand it, and after many attempts to provoke his humorous antagonist to single combat, which the other turned off (after working him up to a ludicrous pitch of choler) with great adroitness, he fell quietly asleep with a glass of liquor in his hand, which he could not lift to his head. His laughing persecutor made a speech over him, and turning to the opposite side of the room, where they were all sleeping in the midst of this "loud and furious fun," said—"There's a scene, by G—d, for Hogarth to paint. I think he and Shakspeare were our two best men at copying life." This confirmed me in my good opinion of him. Hogarth, Shakspeare, and Nature, were just enough for him (indeed for any man) to know. I said, "You read Cobbett, don't you? At least," says I, "you talk just as well as he writes." He seemed to doubt this. But I said, "We have an hour to spare: if yqu'll get pen, ink, and paper, and keep on talking, I'll write down what you say; and if it doesn't make a capital *Political Register*, I'll forfeit my head. You have kept me alive to-night, however. I don't know what I should have done

without you." He did not dislike this view of the thing, nor my asking if he was not about the size of Jem Belcher; and told me soon afterwards, in the confidence of friendship, that "the circumstance which had given him nearly the greatest concern in his life, was Cribb's beating Jem after he had lost his eye by racket-playing."—The morning dawns; that dim but yet clear light appears, which weighs like solid bars of metal on the sleepless eyelids; the guests drop down from their chambers one by one—but it was too late to think of going to bed now (the clock was on the stroke of seven), we had nothing for it but to find a barber's (the pole that glittered in the morning sun lighted us to his shop), and then a nine miles' march to Hungerford. The day was fine, the sky was blue, the mists were retiring from the marshy ground, the path was tolerably dry, the sitting-up all night had not done us much harm—at least the cause was good; we talked of this and that with amicable difference, roving and sipping of many subjects, but still invariably we returned to the fight. At length, a mile to the left of Hungerford, on a gentle eminence, we saw the ring surrounded by covered carts, gigs, and carriages, of which hundreds had passed us on the road; Joe gave a youthful shout, and we hastened down a narrow lane to the scene of action.

Reader, have you ever seen a fight? If not, you have a pleasure to come, at least if it is a fight like that between the Gasman and Bill Neate. The crowd was very great when we arrived on the spot; open carriages were coming up, with streamers flying and music playing, and the country-people were pouring in over hedge and ditch in all directions, to see their hero beat or be beaten. The odds were still on Gas, but only about five to four. Qulty had been down to try Neate, and had backed him considerably, which **was* a damper to the sanguine confidence of the adverse party. About £200,000 were pending. The Gas says, he has lost £3,000, which were promised him by different gentlemen if he had won. He had presumed too much on

himself, which had made others presume on him. This spirited and formidable young fellow seems to have taken for his motto the old maxim, that "there are three things necessary to success in life—*Impudence I Impudence! Impudence!*" It is so in matters of opinion, but not in the *Fancy*, which is the most practical of all things, though even here confidence is half the battle, but only half. Our friend had vapoured and swaggered too much, as if he wanted to grin and bully his adversary out of the fight. "Alas! the Bristol man was not so tamed!"—"This is the *gyave-digger*" (would Tom Hickman exclaim in the moments of intoxication from gin and success, showing his tremendous right hand), "this will send many of them to their long homes; I haven't done with them yet!" Why should he—though he had licked four of the best men within the hour—why should he threaten to inflict dishonourable chastisement on my old master Richmond, a veteran going off the stage, and who has borne his sable honours meekly? Magnanimity, my dear Tom, and bravery, should be inseparable. Or why should he go up to his antagonist, the first time he ever saw him at the Fives Court, and measuring him from head to foot with a glance of contempt, as Achilles surveyed Hector, say to him, "What, are you Bill Neate? I'll knock more blood out of that great carcase of thine, this day fortnight, than you ever knock'd out of a bullock's!" It was not manly—'twas not fighter-like. If he was sure of the victory (as he was not), the less said about it the better. Modesty should accompany the *Fancy* as its shadow. The best men were always the best behaved. Jem Belcher, the Game Chicken (before whom the Gasman could not have lived) were civil, silent men. So is Cribb, so is Tom Belcher, the most elegant of sparrers, and not a man for every one to take by the nose. I enlarged on this topic in the mail (while Turtle was asleep), and said very wisely (as I thought) that impertinence was a part of no profession. A boxer was bound to beat his man, but not to thrust his fist, either actually or by implication, in every

one's face. Even a highwayman, in the way of trade, may blow out your brains, but if he uses foul language at the same time, I should say he was no gentleman. A boxer, I would infer, need not be a blackguard or a coxcomb, more than another. Perhaps I press this point too much on a fallen man—Mr. Thomas Hickman has by this time learnt that'first of all lessons, " That man was made to mourn." He has lost nothing by the late fight but his presumption; and that every man may do as well without! By an over-display of this quality, however, the public had been prejudiced against him, and the *knowing ones* were taken in. Few but those who had bet on him wished Gas to win. With my own prepossessions on the subject, the result of the nth of December appeared to me as fine a piece of poetical justice as I had ever witnessed. The difference of weight between the two combatants (14 stones to 12) was nothing to the sporting men. Great, heavy, clumsy, long-armed Bill Neate kicked the beam in the scale of the Gasman's vanity. The amateurs were frightened at his big words, and thought they would make up for the difference of six feet and five feet nine. Truly, the *Fancy* are not men of imagination. They judge of what has been, and cannot conceive of anything that is to be. The Gasman had won hitherto; therefore he must beat a man half as big again as himself—and that to a certainty. Besides, there are as many feuds, factions, prejudices, pedantic notions in the *Fancy* as in the state or in the schools. Mr. Gully is almost the only cool, sensible man among them, who exercises an unbiassed discretion, and is not slave to his passions in these matters. But enough of reflections, and to our tale. The day, as I have said, was fine for a December morning. The grass was wet, and the ground miry, and ploughed up with multitudinous feet, except that, within the ring itself, there was a spot of virgin-green, closed in and unprofaned by vulgar tread, that shone with dazzling brightness in the mid-day sun. For it was now noon, and we had an hour to wait. This is the trying time. It is then the heart sickens,

as you think what the two champions are about, and how short a time will determine their fate. After the first blow is struck, there is no opportunity for nervous apprehensions; you are swallowed up in the immediate interest of the scene—but

*" Between the acting of a dreadful thing,
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream."*

I found it so as I felt the sun's rays clinging to my back, and saw the white wintry clouds sink below the verge of the horizon. " So," I thought, " my fairest hopes have faded from my sight !—so will the Gasman's glory, or that of his adversary, vanish in an hour ' The swells were parading in their white box-coats, the outer ring was cleared with some bruises on the heads and shins of the rustic assembly (for the *cockneys* had been distanced by the sixty-six miles); the time drew near; I had got a good stand ; a bustle, a buzz, ran through the crowd; and from the opposite side entered Neate, between his second and bottle-holder. He rolled along, swathed in his loose greatcoat, his knock-knees bending under his huge bulk; and, with a modest, cheerful air, threw-his hat into the ring. He then just looked round, and begun quietly to undress ; when from the other side there was a similar rush and an opening made, and the Gasman came forward with a conscious air of anticipated triumph, too much like the cock-of-the-walk. He strutted about more than became a hero, sucked oranges with a supercilious air, and threw away the skin with a toss of his head, and went up and looked at Neate, which was an act of supererogation. The only sensible thing he did was, as he strode away from the modern Ajax, to fling .out his arms, as if he wanted to try whether they would do their work that day. By this time they had stripped, and presented a strong contrast in appearance. If Neate was like Ajax, " **with Atlantean** shoulders, fit to bear " the pugilistic **reputation of all Bristol, Hickman might be compared to Diomed,light,**

vigorous, elastic, and his back glistened in the sun, as he moved about, like a panther's hide. There was now a dead pause—attention was awe-struck. Who at that moment, big with a great event, did not draw his breath short—did not feel his heart throb? All was ready. They tossed up for the sun, and the Gasman won. They were led up to the *scratch*—shook hands, and went at it.

In the first round every one thought it was all over. After making play a short time, the Gasman flew at his adversary like a tiger, struck five blows in as many seconds, three first, and then following him as he staggered back, two more, right and left, and down he fell, a mighty ruin. There was a shout, and I said, "There is no standing this." Neate seemed like a lifeless lump of flesh and bone, round which the Gasman's blows played with the rapidity of electricity or lightning, and you imagined he would only be lifted up to be knocked down again. It was as if Hickman held a sword or a fire in that right hand of his, and directed it against an unarmed body. They met again, and Neate seemed, not cowed, but particularly cautious. I saw his teeth clenched together and his brows knit close against the sun. He held out both his arms at full length straight before him, like two sledge hammers, and raised his left an inch or two higher. The Gasman could not get over this guard—they struck mutually and fell, but without advantage on either side. It was the same in the next round; but the balance of power was thus restored—the fate of the battle was suspended. No one could tell how it would end. This was the only moment in which opinion was divided; for, in the next, the Gasman aiming a mortal blow at his adversary's neck, with his right hand, and failing from the length he had to reach, the other returned it with his left at full swing, planted a tremendous blow on his cheek-bone and eyebrow, and made a red ruin of that side of his face. The Gasman went down, and there was another shout—a roar of triumph as the waves of fortune rolled tumultuously from side to side. This was a settler. Hickman

got up, and "grinned horrible a ghastly smile," yet he was evidently dashed in his opinion of himself; it was the first time he had ever been so punished; all one side of his face was perfect scarlet, and his right eye was closed in dingy blackness, as he advanced to the fight, less confident, but still determined. After one or two rounds, not receiving another such remembrancer, he rallied and went at it with his former impetuosity. But in vain. His strength had been weakened—his blows could not tell at such a distance—he was obliged to fling himself at his adversary, and could not strike from his feet; and almost as regularly as he flew at him with his right hand, Neate warded the blow, or drew back out of its reach, and felled him with the return of his left. There was little cautious sparring—no half-hits—no tapping and trifling, none of the *petit-maitreship* of the art—they were almost all knock-down blows :—the fight was a good stand-up fight. The wonder was the half-minute time. If there had been a minute or more allowed between each round, it would have been intelligible how they should by degrees recover strength and resolution; but to see two men smashed to the ground, smeared with gore, stunned, senseless, the breath beaten out of their bodies ; and then, before you recover from the shock, to see them rise up with new strength and courage, stand ready to inflict or receive mortal offence, and rush upon each other "like two clouds over the Caspian"—this is the most astonishing thing of all:—this is the high and heroic state of man 1 From this time forward the event became more certain every round ; and about the twelfth it seemed as if it must have been over. Hickman generally stood with his back to me ; but in the scuffle, he had changed positions, and Neate just then made a tremendous lunge at him, and hit him full in the face. It was doubtful whether he would fall backwards or forwards; he hung suspended for a minute or two, and then fell back, throwing his hands in the air, and with his face lifted up to the sky. I never saw anything more terrific than his aspect just before he fell.

All traces of life, of natural expression, were gone from him. His face was like a human skull, a death's head spouting blood. The eyes were filled with blood, the nose streamed with blood, the mouth gaped blood. He was not like an actual man, but like a preternatural, spectral appearance, or like one of the figures in Dante's *Inferno*. Yet he fought on after this for several rounds, still striking the first desperate blow, and Neate standing on the defensive, and using the same cautious guard to the last, as if he had still all his work to do; and it was not till the Gasman was so stunned in the seventeenth or eighteenth round, that his senses forsook him, and he could not come to time, that the battle was declared over.¹ Ye who despise the Fancy, do something to show as much *pluck*, or as much self-possession as this, before you assume a superiority which you have never given a single proof of by any one action in the whole course of your lives!—When the Gasman came to himself, the first words he uttered were, "Where am I? What is the matter?" "Nothing is the matter, Tom,—you have lost the battle, but you are the bravest man alive." And Jackson whispered to him, "I am collecting a purse for you, Tom."—Vain sounds, and unheard at that moment! Neate instantly went up and shook him cordially by the hand, and seeing some old acquaintance, began to flourish with his fists, calling out, "Ah! you always said I couldn't fight—what do you think now?" But all in good-humour, and without any appearance of arrogance; only it was evident Bill Neate was pleased that he had won the fight. When it was over, I asked Cribb if he did not think it was a good one? He said, "*Pretty well!*" The carrier-pigeons now mounted into the air, and one of them flew with the

¹ Scroggins said of the Gasman, that he thought he was a man of that courage, that if his hands were cut off he would still fight on with the stumps—like that of Widdrington—

———"In doleful dumps,
Who, when his legs were smitten off,
Still fought upon bis stumps"

news of her husband's victory to the bosom of Mrs. Neate. Alas, for Mrs. Hickman I

Mais au revoir, as Sir Fopling Flutter says. I went down with Joe Parkes ; I returned with Jack Pigott, whom I met on the ground. Parkes is a rattle-brain; Pigott is a sentimentalist. Now, under favour, I am a sentimentalist too—therefore I say nothing, but that the interest of the excursion did not flag as I came back. Pigott and I marched along the causeway leading from Hungerford to Newbury, now observing the effect of a brilliant sun on the tawny meads or moss-coloured cottages, now exulting in the fight, now digressing to some topic of general and elegant literature. My friend was dressed in character for the occasion, or like one of the Fancy; that is, with a double portion of great-coats, clogs, and overhauls : and just as we had agreed with a couple of country-lads to carry his superfluous wearing-apparel to the next town, we were overtaken by a return post-chaise, into which I got, Pigott preferring a seat on the bar. There were two strangers already in the chaise, and on their observing they supposed I had been to the fight, I said I had, and concluded they had done the same. They appeared, however, a little shy and sore on the subject; and it was not till after several hints dropped, and questions put, that it turned out that they had missed it. One of these friends had undertaken to drive the other there in his gig : they had set out, to make sure work, the day before at three in the afternoon. The owner of the one-horse vehicle scorned to ask his way, and drove right on to Bagshot, instead of turning off at Hounslow : there they stopped all night, and set off the next day across the country to Reading, from whence they took coach, and got down within a mile or two of Hungerford, just half-an-hour after the fight was over. This might be safely set down as one of the miseries of human life. We parted with these two gentlemen who had ben to see the fight, but had returned as they went, at Wolhampton, where we were promised beds (an irresistible temptation, for Pigott had passed the

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preceding night at Hungerford as we had done at Newbury), and we turned into an old bow-windowed parlour with a carpet and a snug fire; and after devouring a quantity of tea, toast, and eggs, sat down to consider, during an hour of philosophic leisure, what we should have for-supper. In the midst of an Epicurean deliberation between a roasted fowl and mutton chops with mashed potatoes, we were interrupted by an inroad of Goths and Vandals—*O procul este pro/am*—not real flash-men, but interlopers, noisy pretenders, butchers from Tothill Fields, brokers from Whitechapel, who called immediately for pipes and tobacco, hoping it would not be disagreeable to the gentlemen, and began to insist that it was *a cross*. Pigott withdrew from the smoke and noise into another room, and left me to dispute the point with them for a couple of hours *sans intermission* by the dial. The next morning we rose refreshed; and on observing that Jack had a pocket volume in his hand, in which he read in the intervals of our discourse, I inquired what it was, and learned to my particular satisfaction that it was a volume of the *New E/oise*. Ladies, after this, will you contend that a love for the Fancy is incompatible with the cultivation of sentiment?—We jogged on as before, my friend setting me up in a genteel drab great coat and green silk handkerchief (which I must say became me exceedingly), and after stretching our legs for a few miles, and seeing Jack Randall, Ned Turner, and Scroggins pass on the top of one of the Bath coaches, we engaged with the driver of the second to take us to London for the usual fee. I got inside, and found three other passengers. One of them was an old gentleman with an aquiline nose, powdered hair, and a pig-tail, and who looked as if he had played many a rubber at the Bath rooms. I said to myself, he is very like Mr. Windham; I wish he would enter into conversation, that I might hear what fine observations would come from those **finely-turned features**. **However, nothing passed, till,** stopping to dine at Reading, some inquiry was made by the company about the fight, and I gave (as the reader may

believe) an eloquent and animated description of it. When we got into the coach again, the old gentleman, after a graceful exordium, said he had, when a boy, been to a fight between the famous Broughton and George Stevenson, who was called the *Fighting Coachman*, in the year 1770, with the late Mr. Windham. This beginning flattered the spirit of prophecy with me, and riveted my attention. He went on—"George Stevenson was coachman to a friend of my father's. He was an old man when I saw him, some years afterwards. He took hold of his own arm and said, * there was muscle here once, but now it is no more than this young gentleman's.' He added, ' Well, no matter; I have been here long, I am willing to go hence, and I hope I have done no more harm than another man.' Once," said my unknown companion, " I asked him if he had ever beat Broughton? He said Yes; that he had fought with him three times, and the last time he fairly beat him, though the world did not allow it. * I'll tell you how it was, master. When the seconds lifted us up in the last round, we were so exhausted that neither of us could stand, and we fell upon one another, and as Master Broughton fell uppermost, the mob gave it in his favour, and he was said to have won the battle. But the fact was, that as his second (John Cuthbert) lifted him up, he said to him, " I'll fight no more, I've had enough;" which,' says Stevenson, * you know gave me the victory. And to prove to you that this was the case, when John Cuthbert was on his death-bed, and they asked him" if there was anything on his mind which he wished to confess, he answered, " Yes, that there was one thing he wished to set right, for that certainly Master Stevenson won that last fight with Master Broughton; for he whispered him as he lifted him up in the last round of all, that he had had enough.' " " This," said the Bath gentleman, " was a bit of human nature;" and I have written this account of the fight on purpose that it might not be lost to the world. He also stated as a proof of the candour of mind in this class of men, that Stevenson acknowledged

that Broughton could have beat him in his best day; but that he (Broughton) was getting old in their last encounter. When we stopped in Piccadilly, I wanted to ask the gentleman some questions about the late Mr. Windham, but had not courage. I got out, resigned my coat and green silk handkerchief to Pigott (loth to part with these ornaments of life), and walked home in high spirits.

P.S.—Joe called upon me the next day, to ask me if I did not think the fight was a complete thing? I said I thought it was. I hope he will relish my account of it.

On Reading Old Books¹

I HATE to read new books. There are twenty or thirty volumes that I have read over and over again, and these are the only ones that I have any desire ever to read at all. It was a long time before I could bring myself to sit down to the *Tales of My Landlord*, but now that author's works have made a considerable addition to my scanty library. I am told that some of Lady Morgan's are good, and have been recommended to look into *Anastasius*; but I have not yet ventured upon that task. A lady, the other day, could not refrain from expressing her surprise to a friend, who said he had been reading *Delphine* :—she asked, — If it had not been published some time back? Women judge of books as they do of fashions or complexions, which are admired only "in their newest gloss." That is not my way. I am not one of those who trouble the circulating libraries much, or pester the booksellers for mail-coach copies of standard periodical publications. I cannot say that I am greatly addicted to black-letter, but I profess myself well versed in the marble bindings of Andrew Millar, in the middle of the last century; nor does my taste revolt at Thurloe's *State Papers*, in Russia leather; or an ample impression of Sir W[illiam] Temple's *Essays*, with a portrait after Sir Godfrey Kneller, in front. I do not think altogether the worse of a book for having survived the author a generation or two. I have more confidence in the dead than the living. Contemporary writers may generally be divided into two classes—one's friends or one's foes. Of the first we are compelled to think too well, and of the last we are disposed to think too ill, to receive much genuine pleasure from the perusal, or to judge fairly of the

¹*On Reading Old Books* appeared in the "London Magazine of February 1821.

merits of either. One candidate for literary fame, who happens to be of our acquaintance, writes finely, and like a man of genius ; but unfortunately has a foolish face, which spoils a delicate passage; . another inspires us with the highest respect for his personal talents and character, but does not quite come up to our expectations in print. All these contradictions and petty details interrupt the calm current of our reflections. If you want to know what any of the author's, were who lived before our time, and are still objects of anxious inquiry, you have only to look into their works. But the dust and smoke and noise of modern literature have nothing in common with the pure, silent air of immortality.

When I take up a work that I have read before, (the oftener the better,) I know what I have to expect. The satisfaction is not lessened by being anticipated. When the entertainment is altogether new, I sit down to it as I should to a strange dish—turn and pick out a bit here and there, and am in doubt what to think of the composition. There is a want of confidence and security to second appetite. New-fangled books are also like made-dishes in this respect, that they are generally little else than hashes and *refaccimentos* of what has been served up entire and in a more natural state at other times. Besides, in thus turning to a well-known author, there is not only an assurance that my time will not be thrown away, or my palate nauseated, with the most insipid or vilest trash, but I shake hands with, and look an old, tried, and valued friend in the face, converse with, and chat the hours away. It is true, we form dear friendships with such ideal guests—dearer, alas ! and more lasting, than those with our most intimate acquaintance. In reading a book which is an old favourite with me (say the first novel I ever read) I not only have the pleasure of imagination and of a critical relish of the work, but the pleasures of memory added to it. It recalls the same feelings and associations which I had in first reading it, and which I can never have again in any other way. Standard

productions of this kind are links in the chain of our conscious being. They bind together the different scattered divisions of our personal identity. They are landmarks and guides in our journey through life. They are pegs and loops on which we can hang up, or from which we can take down, at pleasure, the wardrobe of a moral imagination, the relics of our best affections, the tokens and records of our happiest hours. They are "for thoughts and for remembrance!" They are like Fortunatus's Wishing Cap—they give us the best riches—those of Fancy; and transport us, not over half the globe, but (which is better) over half our lives, at a word's notice!

My father Shandy solaced himself with *Bruscombille*. Give me for this purpose a volume of "*Peregrine Pickle* or *Tom Jones*. Open either of them anywhere—at the *Memoirs of Lady Vane*, or the adventures at the masquerade with *Lady Bellaston*, or the disputes between *Thwackum* and *Square*, or the escape of *Molly Seagrim*, or the incident of *Sophia* and her muff, or the edifying prolixity of her aunt's lecture—and there I find the same delightful, busy, bustling scene as ever, and feel myself the same as when I was first introduced into the midst of it. Nay, sometimes the sight of an odd volume of these good old English authors on a stall, or the name lettered on the back among others on the shelves of a library, answers the purpose, revives the whole train of ideas, and sets "the puppets dallying." Twenty years are struck off the list, and I am a child again. A sage philosopher, who was not a very wise man, said, that he should like very well to be young again, if he could take his experience along with him. This ingenious person did not seem to be aware, by the gravity of his remark, that the great advantage of being young is to be without this weight of experience, which he would fain place upon the shoulders of youth, and which never comes too late with years. Oh! what a privilege to be able to let this hump, like *Christian's* burthen, drop from off one's back, and transport oneself, by the help of a little musty

duodecimo, to the time when "ignorance was bliss," and when we first got a peep at the raree-show of the world, through the glass of fiction—gazing at mankind, as we "do at wild beasts in a menagerie, through the bars of their cages—or at curiosities in a museum, that we must not touch ! For myself, not only are the old ideas of the contents of the work brought back to my mind in all their vividness, but the old associations of the faces and persons of those I then knew, as they were in their lifetime—the place where I sat to read the volume, the day when I got it, the feeling of the air, the fields, the sky—return, and all my early impressions with them. This is better to me—those places, those times, those persons, and those feelings that come across me as I retrace the story and devour the page, are to me better far than the wet sheets of the last new novel from the Ballantyne press, to say nothing of the Minerva press in Leadenhall Street. It is like visiting the scenes of early youth. I think of the time "when I was in my father's house, and my path ran down with butter and honey"—when I was a little, thoughtless child, and had no other wish or care but to con my daily task, and be happy I *Tom Jones*, I remember, was the first work that broke the spell. It came down in numbers once a fortnight, in Cooke's pocket-edition, embellished with cuts. I had hitherto read only in school-books, and a tiresome ecclesiastical history (with the exception of Mrs. Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest*) : but this had a different relish with it—"sweet in the mouth," though not "bitter in the belly." It smacked of the world I lived in, and in which I was to live—and showed me groups, "gay creatures" not "of the element," but of the earth; not "living in the clouds," but travelling the same road that I did;—some that had passed on before me, and others that might soon overtake me. My heart had palpitated at the thoughts of a boarding-school ball; or gala-day at Midsummer or Christmas : but the world I had found out in Cooke's edition of the *British Novelists* was to me a dance through life, a

perpetual gala-day. The sixpenny numbers of this work regularly contrived to leave off just in the middle of a sentence, and in the nick of a story, where Tom Jones discovers Square behind the blanket; or where Parson Adams, in the inextricable confusion of events, very undesignedly gets to bed to Mrs. Slip-slop. Let me caution the reader against this impression of Joseph Andrews; for there is a picture of Fanny in it which he should not set his heart on, lest he should never meet with anything like it; or if he should, it would, perhaps, be better for him that he had not. It was just like——! With what eagerness I used to look forward to the next number, and open the prints 1 Ah! never again shall I feel the enthusiastic delight with which I gazed at the figures, and anticipated the story and adventures of Major Bath and Commodore Trunnion, of Trim and my Uncle Toby, of Don Quixote and Sancho and Dapple, of Gil Bias and Dame Lorenza Sephora, of Laura and the fair Lucretia, whose lips open and shut like buds of roses. To what nameless ideas did they give rise—with what airy delights I filled up the outlines, as I hung in silence over the page! Let me still recall them, that they may breathe fresh life into me, and that I may live that birthday of thought and romantic pleasure over again 1 Talk of the *ideal*! This is the only true ideal—the heavenly tints of Fancy reflected in the bubbles that float upon the spring-tide of human life.

*" Oh! Memory! shield me from the world's poor. strife,
And give those scenes thine everlasting life! "*

The paradox with which I set out is, I hope, less startling than it was; the reader will, by this time, have been let into my secret. Much about the same time, or I believe rather earlier, I took a particular satisfaction in reading Chubb's *Tracts*, and I often think I will get them agpin to wade through. There is a high gusto of polemical divinity in them; and you fancy that you hear a club of shoemakers aft Salisbury debating a disputable text from

one of St. Paul's Epistles in a workmanlike style, with equal shrewdness and pertinacity. I cannot say much for my metaphysical studies, into which I launched shortly after with great ardour, so as to make a toil of a pleasure. I was presently entangled in the briars and thorns of subtle distinctions—of "fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute," though I cannot add that "in their wandering mazes I found no end;" for I did arrive at some very satisfactory and potent conclusions; nor will I go so far, however ungrateful the subject might seem, as to exclaim with Marlowe's Faustus—"Would I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book"—that is, never studied such authors as Hartley, Hume, Berkeley, etc. Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding* is, however, a work from which I never derived either pleasure or profit; and Hobbes, dry and powerful as he is, I did not read till long afterwards. I read a few poets, which did not much hit my taste—for I would have the reader understand, I am deficient in the faculty of imagination; but I fell early upon French romances and philosophy, and devoured them tooth-and-nail. Many a dainty repast have I made of the *New E/oise*;—the description of the kiss; the *promenade sur l'eau*; the letter of St. Preux, recalling the time of their first loves; and the account of Julia's death; these I read over and over again with unspeakable delight and wonder. Some years after, when I met with this work again, I found I had lost nearly my whole relish for it (except some few parts), and was, I remember, very much mortified with the change in my taste, which I sought to attribute to the smallness and gilt edges of the edition I had bought, and its being perfumed with rose-leaves. Nothing could exceed the gravity, the solemnity with which I carried home and read the Dedication to the *Social Contract*, with some other pieces of the same author, which I had picked up at a stall in a coarse leather cover. Of the *Confessions* I have spoken elsewhere, and may repeat what I have said—"Sweet is the dew of their memory, and pleasant the balm of their

recollection ! " Their beauties are not " scattered like stray-gifts o'er the earth," but sown thick on the page, rich and rare. I wish I had never read the *Emilius*, or read it with implicit faith. I had no occasion to pamper my natural aversion to affectation or pretence, by romantic and artificial means. I had better have formed myself on the model of Sir Fopling or Sir Plume, (There is a class of persons whose virtues and most shining qualities sink in, and are concealed by, an absorbent ground of modesty and reserve; and such a one I do, without vanity, profess myself.¹ Now these are the very persons who are likely to attach themselves to the character of *Emilius*, and of whom it is sure to be the bane. This dull, phlegmatic, retiring humour is not in a fair way to be corrected, but confirmed and rendered desperate, by being in that work held up as an object of imitation, as an example of simplicity and magnanimity—by coming upon us with all the recommendations of novelty, surprise, and superiority to the prejudices of the world—by being stuck upon a pedestal, made amiable, dazzling, a *leurre de dupe* \ The reliance on solid worth which it inculcates, the preference of sober truth to gaudy tinsel, hangs like a mill stone round the neck of the imagination—"a load to sink a navy"—impedes our progress, and blocks up every prospect in life. A man, to get on, to be successful, conspicuous, applauded, should not retire upon the centre of his conscious resources, but be always at the circumference of appearances. He must envelop himself in a halo of mystery—he must ride in an equipage of opinion—he must walk with a train of self-conceit following him—he must not strip himself to a buff-jerkin, to the doublet and hose of his real merits, but must surround himself with a *cortege* of prejudices, like the signs of the Zodiac—he must seem anything but what he is, and then he may pass

¹ Nearly the same sentiment was wittily and happily expressed by a friend, who had some lottery puffs, which he had been employed to write, returned on his hands for their too great severity of thought and classical terseness of style, and who observed on that occasion, that " Modest merit never can succeed I "

for anything he pleases. The world loves to be amused by hollow professions, to be deceived by flattering appearances, to live in a state of hallucination; and can forgive everything but the plain, downright, simple, honest truth—such as we see it chalked out in the character of Emilius.—To return from this digression, which is a little out of place here.

Books have in a great measure lost their power over me; nor can I revive the same interest in them as formerly. I perceive when a thing is good, rather than feel it. It is true,

" *Martian Colonna is a dainty book ;* "

and the reading of Mr. Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* lately made me regret that I was not young again. The beautiful and tender images there conjured up, "come like shadows—so depart." The "tiger-moth's wings!" which he has spread over his rich poetic blazonry, just flit across my fancy; the gorgeous twilight window which he has painted over again in his verse, to me " blushes " almost in vain " with blood of queens and kings." I know how I should have felt at one time in reading such passages; and that is all. The sharp luscious flavour, the fine *aroma* is fled, and nothing but the stalk, the bran, the husk of literature is left. If any one were to ask me what I read now, I might answer with my Lord Hamlet in the play,— " Words, words, words."—" What is the matter ? "—" *Nothing !* "—They have scarce a meaning. But it was not always so. There was a time when, to my thinking, every word was a flower or a pearl, like those which dropped from the mouth of the little peasant-girl in the Fairy Tale, or like those that fall from the great preacher in the Caledonian Chapel I drank of the stream of knowledge that tempted, but did not mock my lips, as of the river of life, freely. How eagerly I slaked my thirst of German sentiment, " as the hart that panteth for the water-springs;" how I bathed and revelled, and added my floods of tears to Goethe's *Sorrows of Werter*, and to Schiller's *Robbers*—

" *Giving my stock of more to that which had too much!* "

I read, and assented with all my soul to Coleridge's fine Sonnet, beginning—

" *Schiller! that hour I would have wistfd to die,
If through the shuddering midnight I had sent,
From the dark dungeon of the tow'r time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famish' d father's cry!* "

I believe I may date my insight into the mysteries of poetry from the commencement of my acquaintance with the authors of the *Lyrical Ballads*; at least, my discrimination of the higher sorts—not my predilection for such writers as Goldsmith or Pope : nor do I imagine they will say I got my liking for the novelists, or the comic writers—for the characters of Valentine, Tattle, or Miss Prue—from them. If so, I must have got from them what they never had themselves. In points where poetic diction and conception are concerned, I may be at a loss, and liable to be imposed upon : but in forming an estimate of passages relating to common life and manners, I cannot think I am a plagiarist from any man. I there " know my cue without a prompter." I may say of such studies, *Intus et in cute*. I am just able to admire those literal touches of observation and description which persons of loftier pretensions overlook and despise. I think I comprehend something of the characteristic part of Shakspeare; and in him indeed all is characteristic, even the nonsense and poetry. I believe it was the celebrated Sir Humphry Davy who used to say, that Shakspeare was more a metaphysician than a poet. At any rate, it was not ill said. I wish that I had sooner known the dramatic writers contemporary with Shakspeare; for in looking them over about a year ago, I almost revived my old passion for reading, and my old delight in books, though they were very nearly new to me. The Periodical Essayists I read long ago. The *Spectator* I liked extremely: but the *Tatler* took my fancy most.

I read the others soon after, the *Rambler*, the *Adventurer*, the *World*, the *Connoisseur*. I was not sorry to get to the end of them, and have no desire to go regularly through them again. I consider myself a thorough adept in Richardson. I like the longest of his novels best, and think no part of them tedious ; nor should I ask to have anything better to do than to read them from beginning to end, to take them up when I chose, and lay them down when I was tired, in some old family mansion in the country, till every word and syllable relating to the bright Clarissa, the divine Clementina, the beautiful Pamela, " with every trick and line of their sweet favour," were once more " graven in my heart's table."¹ I have a sneaking kindness for Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigny*—for the deserted mansion, and straggling gilliflowers on the mouldering garden-wall; and still more for his *Man of Feeling*; not that it is better, nor so good; but at the time I read it, I sometimes thought of the heroine, Miss Walton, and of Miss——together, and " that ligament, fine as it was, was never broken ! "—One of the poets that I have always read with most pleasure, and can wander about in for ever with a sort of voluptuous indolence, is Spenser; and I like Chaucer even better. The only writer among the Italians I can pretend to any knowledge of, is Boccaccio, and of him I cannot express half my admiration. His story of the Hawk I could read and think of from day to day, just as I would look at a picture of Titian's!

I remember, as long ago as the year 1798, going to a neighbouring town (Shrewsbury, where Farquhar, has laid the plot of his *Recruiting Officer*) and bringing home with

¹ During the peace of Amiens, a young English officer, of the name of Lovelace, was presented at Buonaparte's levee. Instead of the usual question, " Where have you served, Sir ? " the First Consul immediately addressed him, " I perceive your name, Sir, is the same as that of the hero of Richardson's Romance ! Here was a Consul. The young man's uncle, who was called Lovelace, told me this anecdote while we were stopping together at Calais. I had also been thinking that his was the same name as that of the hero of Richardson's Romance. This is one of my reasons for liking Buonaparte.

me, " at one proud swoop," a copy of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and another of Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*—both which I have still, and I still recollect, when I see the covers, the pleasure with which I dipped into them as I returned with my double prize. I was set up for one while. That time is past " with all its giddy raptures: " but I am still anxious to preserve its memory, " embalmed with odours."—With respect to the first of these works, I would be permitted to remark here in passing, that it is a sufficient answer to the German criticism which has since been started against the character of Satan (viz., that it is not one of disgusting deformity, or pure, defecated malice), to say that Milton has there drawn, not the abstract principle of evil, not a devil incarnate, but a fallen angel . This is the scriptural account, and the poet has followed it. We may safely retain such passages as that well-known one—

"———*His form bad not yet lost
All her original brightness; nor appear'd
Less than archangel ruin'd; and the excess
Of glory obscur'd*"—

for the theory, which is opposed to them, " falls flat upon the grunsel edge, and shames its worshippers." Let us hear no more, then, of this monkish cant, and bigoted outcry for the restoration of the horns and tail of the devil!—Again, as to the other work, Burke's *Reflections*, I took a particular pride and pleasure in it, and read it to myself and others for months afterwards. I had reason 'for my prejudice in favour of this author. To understand an adversary is some praise; to admire him is more. I thought I did both : I knew I did one. From the first time I ever cast my eyes on anything of Burke's (which was an extract from his " Letter to a Noble Lord " in a three-times-a-week paper, the *St. James's Chronicle*, in 1796), I said to myself, " This is true eloquence: this is a man pouring out his mind on paper." All other style seemed to me pedantic and impertinent. Dr. Johnson's was walking on stilts ; and

even Junius (who was at that time a favourite with me), with all his terseness, shrunk up into little antithetic points and well-trimmed sentences. But Burke's style was forked and playful as the lightning, crested like the serpent. He delivered plain things on a plain ground; but when he rose, there was no end of his flights and circumgyrations—and in this very Letter, " he, like an eagle in a dove-cot, fluttered *his* Volscians " (the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale) " in Corioli." I did not care for his doctrines. I was then, and am still, proof against their contagion; but I admired the author, and was considered as not a very staunch partisan of the opposite side, though I thought myself that an abstract proposition was one thing, a masterly transition, a brilliant metaphor, another. I conceived, too, that he might be wrong in his main argument, and yet deliver fifty truths in arriving at a false conclusion. I remember Coleridge assuring me, as a poetical and political set-off to my sceptical admiration, that Wordsworth had written an " Essay on Marriage," which, for manly thought and nervous expression, he deemed incomparably superior. As I had not, at that time, seen any specimens of Mr. Wordsworth's prose style, I could not express my doubts on the subject. If there are greater prose-writers than Burke, they either lie out of my course of study, or are beyond my sphere of comprehension. I am too old to be a convert to a new mythology of genius. The niches are occupied, the tables are full. If such is still my admiration of this man's misapplied powers, what must it have been at a time when I myself was in vain trying, year after year, to write a single essay, nay, a single page or sentence; when I regarded the wonders of his pen with the longing eyes of one who was dumb and a changeling; and when to be able to convey the slightest conception of my meaning to others in words, was the height of an almost hopeless ambition! But I never measured others' excellences by my own defects : though a sense of my own incapacity, and of the steep, impassable ascent from me to them, made me regard

them with greater awe and fondness. I have thus run through most of my early studies and favourite authors, some of whom I have since criticised more at large. Whether those observations will survive me, I neither know nor do I much care: but to the works themselves, "worthy of all acceptance," and to the feelings they have always excited in me since I could distinguish a meaning in language, nothing shall ever prevent me from looking back with gratitude and triumph. To have lived in the cultivation of an intimacy with such works, and to have familiarly relished such names, is riot to have lived quite in vain.

There are other authors whom I have never read, and yet whom I have frequently had a great desire to read, from some circumstance relating to them. Among these is Lord Clarendon's *History of the Grand Rebellion*, after which I have a hankering, from hearing it spoken of by good judges—from my interest in the events, and knowledge of the characters from other sources, and from having seen fine portraits of most of them. I like to read a well-penned character, and Clarendon is said to have been a master in his way. I should like to read Froissart's *Chronicles*, Holinshed and Stowe, and Fuller's *Worthies*. I intend, whenever I can, to read Beaumont and Fletcher all through. There are fifty-two of their plays, and I have only read a dozen or fourteen of them. "A Wife for a Month" and "Thierry and Theodoret" are, I am told, delicious, and I can believe it. I should like to read the speeches in *Thucydides*, and Guicciardini's *History of Florence*, and *Don Quixote* in the original. I have often thought of reading the *Loves of Persiles and Sigismunda*, and the *Galatea* of the same author. But I somehow reserve them like "another Yarrow." I should also like to read the last new novel (if I could be sure it was so) of the author of *Waverley*:—no one would be more glad than I to find it the best!

On Poetry in General*

THE BEST general notion which I can give of poetry is that it is the natural impression of any object or event, by its vividness exciting an involuntary movement of imagination and passion, and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice, or sounds, expressing it.

In treating of poetry, I shall speak first of the subject-matter of it, next of the forms of expression to which it gives birth, and afterwards of its connection with harmony of sound.

Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men ; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. He who has a contempt for poetry cannot have much respect for himself, or for anything else. It is not a mere frivolous accomplishment (as some persons have been led to imagine), the trifling amusement of a few idle readers or leisure hours—it has been the study and delight of mankind in all ages. Many people suppose that poetry is something to be found only in books, contained in lines of ten syllables, with like endings : but wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, as in the motion of a wave in the sea, in the growth of a flower that " spreads its sweet-leaves to the air, and dedicates its beauty to the sun,"—*there* is poetry,

¹*On Poetry in General* was the introductory lecture in Hazlitt's series of *Lectures on the English Poets*, delivered during January and February 1818 at the Surrey Institution, Great Surrey Street, near Blackfriars Bridge, and published later in the same year.

in its birth. If history is a grave study, poetry may be said to be a graver: its materials lie deeper, and are spread wider. History treats, for the most part, of the cumbrous and unwieldy masses of things, the empty cases in which the affairs of the world are packed, under the heads of intrigue or war, in different states, and from century to century : but there is no thought or feeling that can have entered into the mind of man, which he would be eager to communicate to others, or which they would listen to with delight, that is not a fit subject for poetry. It is not a branch of authorship : it is " the stuff of which our life is made." The rest is " mere oblivion," a dead letter : for all that is worth remembering in life is the poetry of it. Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness, are all poetry. Poetry is that fine particle within us that expands, rarefies, refines, raises our whole being: without it " man's life is poor as beast's." Man is a poetical animal: and those of us who do not study the principles of poetry act upon them all our lives, like Moliere's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who had always spoken prose without knowing it. The child is a poet, in fact, when he first plays at hide-and-seek, or repeats the story of Jack the Giant-killer; the shepherd-boy is a poet, when he first crowns his mistress with a garland of flowers; the countryman, when he stops to look at the rainbow; the city-apprentice, when he gazes after the Lord-Mayor's show; the miser, when he hugs his gold; the courtier,* who builds his hopes upon a smile; the savage, who paints his idol with blood; the slave, who worships a tyrant, or the tyrant, who fancies himself a god;—the vain, the ambitious, the proud, the cholerick man, the hero and the coward, the beggar and the king, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, all live in a world of their own making; and the poet does no more than describe what all the others think and act. If his art is folly and madness, it is folly and madness at second hand. " There is warrant

for it." Poets alone have not "such seething brains, such shaping fantasies, that apprehend more than cooler reason" can.

*"The lunatic; the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold ;
The madman. While the lover, all as frantic',
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to
heav'n ;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination"*

If poetry is a dream, the business of life is much the same. If it is a fiction, made up of what we wish things to be, and fancy that they are, because we wish them so, there is no other nor better reality. Ariosto has described the loves of Angelica and Medoro : but was not Medoro, who carved the name of his mistress on the barks of trees, as much enamoured of her charms as he ? Homer has celebrated the anger of Achilles : but was not the hero as mad as the poet ? Plato banished the poets from his Commonwealth, lest their descriptions of the natural man should spoil his mathematical man, who was to be without passions and affections, who was neither to laugh nor weep, to feel sorrow nor anger, to be cast down nor elated by anything. This was a chimera, however, which never existed but in the brain of the inventor; and Homer's poetical world has outlived Plato's philosophical Republic.

Poetry then is an imitation of Nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man's nature. We shape things according to our wishes and fancies, without poetry; but poetry is the most emphatical language that can be found

for those creations of the mind " which ecstasy is very cunning in." Neither a mere description of natural objects, nor a mere delineation of natural feelings, however distinct or forcible, constitutes the ultimate end and aim of poetry, without the heightenings of the imagination. The light of poetry is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that, while it shows us the object, throws a sparkling radiance on all around it; the flame of the passions, communicated to the imagination, reveals to us, as with a flash of lightning, the inmost recesses of thought, and penetrates our whole being. Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms; feelings, as they suggest forms or other feelings. Poetry puts a spirit of life and motion into the universe. It describes the flowing, not the fixed. It does not define the limits of sense, nor analyze the distinctions of understanding, but signifies the excess of the imagination beyond the actual or ordinary impression of any object or feeling. The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power that cannot be contained within itself; that is impatient of all limit; that (as flame bends to flame) strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur; to enshrine itself, as it were, in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances. Poetry, according to Lord Bacon, for this reason, " has something divine in n, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity, by cmforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, mstead of subjecting the soul to external things, as reason and history do." It is strictly the language of the imaginations and the imagination is that faculty which represents obje ts, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power. This language is not the less true to nature, because it is false in point of fact; but so much the more true and natural, if it conveys the impression

which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind. Let an object, for instance, be presented to the senses in a state of agitation or fear—and the imagination will distort or magnify the object, and convert it into the likeness of whatever is most proper to encourage the fear. " Our eyes are made the fools " of our other faculties. This is the universal law of the imagination,

*" That if it would but apprehend some joy ,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy :
Or in the night imagining some fear,
How easy is each bush supposed a bear I "*

When Iachimo says of Imogen,

*"— The flame o' th taper
Bows towards her, and would under-peep her lids
To see the enclosed lights "—*

this passionate interpretation of the motion of the flame to accord with the speakers own feelings is true poetry. The lover, equally with the poet, speaks of the auburn tresses of his mistress as locks of shining gold, because the least tinge of yellow in the hair has, from novelty and a sense of personal beauty, a more lustrous effect to the imagination than the purest gold. We compare a man of gigantic stature to a tower: not that he is anything like so large, but because the excess of his size beyond what we are accustomed to expect, or the usual size of things of the same class, produces by contrast a greater feeling of magnitude and ponderous strength than another object of ten times the same dimensions. The intensity of the feeling makes up for the disproportion of the objects. Things are equal to the imagination, which have the power of affecting the mind with an equal degree of terror, admiration, delight, or love. When Lear calls upon the heavens to avenge his cause, " for they are old like him," there is nothing extravagant or impious in this sublime identification of his age with theirs ; for there is no other image which could

do justice to the agonising sense of his wrongs and his despair 1

Poetry is the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling. As in describing natural objects, it impregnates sensible impressions with the forms of fancy, so it describes the feelings of pleasure or pain, by blending them with the strongest movements of passion, and the most striking forms of nature. Tragic poetry, which is the most impassioned species of it, strives to carry on the feeling to the utmost point of sublimity or pathos, by all the force of comparison or contrast; loses the sense of present suffering in the imaginary exaggeration of it; exhausts the terror or pity by an unlimited indulgence of it; grapples with impossibilities in its desperate impatience of restraint; throws us back upon the past, forward into the future; brings every moment of our being or object of nature in startling review before us ; and in the rapid whirl of events, lifts us from the depths of woe to the highest contemplations on human life. When Lear says, of Edgar, " Nothing but his unkind daughters could have brought him to this;" what a bewildered amazement, what a wrench of the imagination, that cannot be brought to conceive of any other cause of misery than that which has bowed it down, and absorbs all other sorrow in its own 1 His sorrow, like a flood, supplies the sources of all other sorrow. Again, when he exclaims in the mad scene, " The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me I " it is passion lending occasion to imagination to make every creature in league against him, conjuring up ingratitude and insult in their least looked-for and most galling shapes, searching every thread and fibre of his heart, and finding out the last remaining image of respect or attachment in the bottom of his breast, only to torture and kill it! In like manner, the " So I am " of Cordelia gushes from her heart like a torrent of tears, relieving it of a weight of love and of suppose ingratitude, which had pressed upon it for years. What a fine return of the passion upon itself is that in Othello

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—with what a mingled agony of regret and despair he clings to the last traces of departed happiness—when he exclaims,

—" *Oh now', for ever*
Farewell the tranquil mind. Farewell content;
Farewell the plumed troops and the big war.
That make ambition virtue ! Oh farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war:
And O, you mortal engines, whose rude throats
Th' immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone I"

How his passion lashes itself up and swells and rages like a tide in its sounding course, when in answer to the doubts expressed of his returning love, he says,

" *Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,*
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont:
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up."—

The climax of his expostulation afterwards with Desdemona is at that line,

" *But there where I had garner'd up my heart,*
To be discarded thence I"

One mode in which the dramatic exhibition of passion excites our sympathy without raising our disgust is that, in proportion as it sharpens the *edge* of calamity and disappointment, it strengthens the desire of good. It enhances our consciousness of the blessing, by making us sensible of **the** magnitude of the loss. The storm of passion lays bare

and shows us the rich depths of the human soul; the whole of our existence, the sum total of our passions and pursuits, of that which we desire and that which we dread, is brought before us by contrast; the action and re-action are equal; the keenness of immediate suffering only gives us a more intense aspiration after, and a more intimate participation with, the antagonist world of good; makes us drink deeper of the cup of human life ; tugs at the heart-strings ; loosens the pressure about them; and calls the springs of thought and feeling into play with tenfold force.

Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of our constitution, in order to be perfect. The domestic or prose tragedy, which is thought to be the most natural, is in this sense the least so, because it appeals almost exclusively to one of these faculties, our sensibility. The tragedies of Moore and Lillo, for this reason, however affecting at the time, oppress and lie like a dead weight upon the mind, a load of misery which it is unable to throw off; the tragedy of Shakspeare, which is true poetry, stirs our inmost affections ; abstracts evil from itself by combining it with all the forms of imagination, and with the deepest workings of the heart, and rouses the whole man within us.

The pleasure, however, derived from tragic poetry is not anything peculiar to it as poetry, as a fictitious and fanciful thing. It is not an anomaly of the imagination. It has its source and ground-work in the common love of strong excitement. As Mr. Burke observes, people flock to see a tragedy; but, if there were a public execution in the next street, the theatre would very soon be empty. It is not then the difference between fiction and reality that solves the difficulty. Children are satisfied with the stories of ghosts and witches in plain prose; nor do the hawkers of full, true* and particular accounts of murders and executions about the streets find it necessary to have them turned into

penny ballads, before they can dispose of these interesting and authentic documents. The grave politician drives a thriving tale of abuse and calumnies poured out against those whom he makes his enemies for no other end than that he may live by them. The popular preacher makes less frequent mention of heaven than of hell. Oaths and nick-names are only a more vulgar sort of poetry or rhetoric. We are as fond of indulging our violent passions as of reading a description of those of others. We are as prone to make a torment of our fears as to luxuriate in our hopes of good. If it be asked, Why we do so ? the best answer will be, Because we cannot help it. The sense of power is as strong a principle in the mind as the love of pleasure. Objects of terror and pity exercise the same despotic control over it as those of love or beauty. It is as natural to hate as to love, to despise as to admire, to express our hatred or contempt, as our love or admiration.

*" Master/ess passion sways us to the mood
Of what it likes or loathes "*

Not that we like what we loathe ; but we like to indulge our hatred and scorn of it ; to dwell upon it, to exasperate our idea of it by every refinement of ingenuity and extravagance of illustration, to make it a bugbear to ourselves, to point it out to others in all the splendour of deformity, to embody it to the senses, to stigmatise it by name, to grapple with it in thought, in action, to sharpen our intellect, to arm our will against it, to know the worst we have to contend with, and to contend with it to the utmost. Poetry is only the highest eloquence of passion, the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of anything, whether pleasurable or painful, mean or dignified, delightful or distressing. It is the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feeling we have, and of which we cannot get rid in any other way, that gives an instant " satisfaction to the thought." This is equally the origin of wit and fancy, of comedy and tragedy,

of the sublime and pathetic. When Pope says of the Lord Mayor's shew,—

*" Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
But lives in Settle's numbers one day more ; "*

—when Collins makes Danger, " with limbs of giant mould, "

*—" Throw him on the steep
Of some loose hanging rock asleep ; "*

when Lear calls out, in extreme anguish,

*" Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend.
How much more hideous shew'st thou in a child
Than the sea-monster !— "*

—the passion of contempt in the one case, of terror in the other, and of indignation in the last, is perfectly satisfied. We see the thing ourselves, and shew it to others as we feel it to exist, and as, in spite of ourselves, we are compelled to think of it. The imagination, by thus embodying and turning them to shape, gives an obvious relief to the indistinct and importunate cravings of the will.—We do not wish the thing to be so; but we wish it to appear such as it is. For knowledge is conscious power; and the mind is no longer, in this case, the dupe, though it may be the victim, of vice or folly.

Poetry is in all its shapes the language of the imagination and the passions, of fancy and will. Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the outcry which has been sometimes raised by frigid and pedantic critics, for reducing the language of poetry to the standard of common sense and reason : for the end and use of poetry, " both at the first and now, was and is to hold the mirror up to nature," seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by means of literal truth or abstract reason. The painter of history might as well be required to represent the face of a person who has just trod upon a

serpent with the still-life expression of a common portrait, as the poet to describe the most striking and vivid impressions which things can be supposed to make upon the mind in the language of common conversation. Let who will strip nature of the colours and the shapes of fancy, the poet is not bound to do so ; the impressions of common sense and strong imagination, that is, of passion and indifference, cannot be the same, and they must have a separate language to do justice to either. Objects must stroke differently upon the mind, independently of what they are in themselves, as long as we have a different interest in them, as we see them in a different point of view, nearer or at a greater distance (morally or physically speaking) from novelty, from old acquaintance from our ignorance of them, from our fear of their consequences, from contrast, from unexpected likeness. We can no more take away the faculty of the imagination than we can see all objects without light or shade. Some things must dazzle us by their preternatural light; others must hold us in suspense, and tempt our curiosity to explore their obscurity. Those who would dispel these various illusions, to give us their drab-coloured creation in their stead, are not very wise. Let the naturalist, if he will, catch the glow-worm, carry it home with him in a box, and find it next morning nothing but a little grey worm; let the poet or the lover of poetry visit it at evening, when beneath the scented hawthorn and the crescent moon it has built itself a palace of emerald light. This is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm represents, and that not the least interesting ; so poetry is one part of the history of the human mind, though it is neither science nor philosophy. It cannot be concealed, however, that the progress of knowledge and refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination, and to clip the wings of poetry. The province of the imagination is principally visionary, the unknown and undefined; the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries, and strips them of their fanciful

pretensions. Hence the history of religious and poetical enthusiasm is much the same; and both have received a sensible shock from the progress of experimental philosophy. It is the undefined and uncommon that gives birth and scope to the imagination ; we can only fancy what we do not know. As in looking into the mazes of a tangled wood we fill them with what shapes we please, with ravenous beasts, with caverns vast, and drear enchantments, so, in our ignorance of the world about us, we make gods or devils of the first object we see, and set no bounds to the wilful suggestions of our hopes and fears.

*" And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
Hang on each leaf and cling to every bough. "*

There can never be another Jacob's dream. Since that time the heavens have gone farther off, and grown astronomical. They have become averse to the imagination, nor will they return to us on the squares of the distances, or on Doctor Chalmers's Discourses. Rembrandt's picture brings the matter nearer to us.—It is not only the progress of mechanical knowledge, but the necessary advances of civilization, that are unfavourable to the spirit of poetry. We not only stand in less awe of the preternatural world, but we can calculate more surely, and look with more indifference, upon the regular routine of this. The heroes of the fabulous ages rid the world of monsters and giants. At present we are less exposed to the vicissitudes of good or evil, to the incursions of wild beasts or " bandit fierce," or to the unmitigated fury of the elements. The time has been that " our fell of hair would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir as life were in it." But the police spoils all; and we now hardly so much as dream of a midnight murder. *Macbeth* is only tolerated in this country for the sake of the music; and in the United States of America, where the philosophical principles of government are carried still farther in theory and practice, we find that the *Beggar's Opera* is hooted from the stage. Society, by degrees, is constructed

*" So from the ground she fearless doth arise,
 And walketh forth without suspect of crime.
 They, all as glad as birds of joyous prime,
 Thence lead her forth, about her dancing round,
 Shouting and singing all a shepherd's rhyme ;
 And with green branches strewing all the ground,
 Do worship her as queen with olive garland crowtd.*

*" And all the way their merry pipes they sound,
 That all the woods and doubled echoes ring ;
 And with their horned feet do wear the ground,
 "Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant spring ;
 So towards old Sylvanus they her bring,
 Who, with the noise awaked, comout out. "*
Faery Queen, b. i., c. vi.

On the contrary, there is nothing either musical or natural in the ordinary construction of language. It is a thing altogether arbitrary and conventional. Neither in the sounds themselves, which are the voluntary signs of certain ideas, nor in their grammatical arrangements in common speech, is there any principle of natural imitation, or correspondence to the individual ideas, or to the tone of feeling with which they are conveyed, to others. The jerks, the breaks, the inequalities, and harshnesses of prose, are fatal to the flow of a poetical imagination, as a jolting road or a stumbling horse disturbs the reverie of an absent man. But poetry makes these odds all even. It is the music of language, answering to the music of the mind, untying, as it were, " the secret soul of harmony." Wherever any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it, and brood over it, melting the heart in tenderness, or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm;—wherever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong and repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous, or gradually varied according to the occasion, to the sounds

that express it—this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion. Mad people sing. As often as articulation passes naturally into intonation, there poetry begins. Where one idea gives a tone and colour to others, where one feeling melts others into it, there can be no reason why the same principle should not be extended to the sounds by which the voice utters these emotions of the soul, and blends syllables and lines into each other. It is to supply the inherent defect of harmony in the customary mechanism of language, to make the sound an echo to the sense, when the sense becomes a sort of echo to itself—to mingle the tide of verse, "the golden cadences of poetry," with the tide of feeling, flowing and murmuring as it flows—in short, to take the language of the imagination from off the ground, and enable it to spread its wings where it may indulge its own impulses—

*" Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air "—*

without being stopped, or fretted, or diverted with the abruptness and petty obstacles, and discordant flats and sharps of prose, that poetry was invented. It is to common language what springs are to a carriage, or wings to feet. In ordinary speech we arrive at a certain harmony by the modulations of the voice* in poetry the same thing is done systematically by a regular collocation of syllables. It has been well observed, that every one who declaims warmly, or grows intent upon a subject, rises into a sort of blank verse or measured prose. The merchant, as described in Chaucer, went on his way "sounding always the increase of his winning." Every prose-writer has more or less of rhythmical adaptation, except poets, who, when deprived of the regular mechanism of verse, seem to have no principle of modulation left in their writings.

An excuse might be made for rhyme in the same manner. It is but fair that the ear should linger on the sounds that delight it, or avail itself of the same brilliant coincidence and unexpected recurrence of syllables, that have been displayed in the invention and collocation of images. It is allowed that rhyme assists the memory; and a man of wit and shrewdness has been heard to say that the only four good lines of poetry are the well-known ones which tell the number of days in the months of the year.

" *Thirty days hath September* " etc.

But if the jingle of names assists the memory, may it not also quicken the fancy ? and there are other things worth having at our fingers' ends besides the contents of the almanac.—Pope's versification is tiresome, from its excessive sweetness and uniformity. Shakspeare's blank verse is the perfection of dramatic dialogue.

All is not poetry that passes for such; nor does, verse make the whole difference between poetry and prose. The *Iliad* does not cease to be poetry in a literal translation; and Addison's *Campaign* has been very properly denominated a Gazette in rhyme. Common prose differs from poetry, as treating for the most part either of such trite, familiar, and irksome matters of fact as convey no extraordinary impulse to the imagination, or else of such difficult and laborious processes of the understanding as do not admit of the wayward or violent movements either of the imagination or the passions.

I will mention three works which come as near to poetry as possible without absolutely being so, namely, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the *Tales of Boccaccio*. Chaucer and Dryden have translated some of the last into English rhyme, but the essence and power of poetry was there before. That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with indescribable longings, is poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by being " married to immortal verse." If it is of

the essence of poetry to strike and fix the imagination, whether we will or no, to make the eye of childhood glisten with the starting tear, to be never thought of afterwards with indifference, John Bunyan and Daniel Defoe may be permitted to pass for poets in their way. The mixture of fancy and reality in the *Pilgrim's Progress* was never equalled in any allegory. His pilgrims walk above the earth, and yet are on it. What zeal, what beauty, what truth of fiction ! What deep feeling in the description of Christian's swimming across the water at last, and in the picture of the Shining Ones within the gates, with wings at their backs and garlands on their heads, who are to wipe all tears from his eyes ! The writer's genius, though not " dipped in dews of Castalie," was baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The prints in this book are no small part of it. If the confinement of Philoctetes in the island of Lemnos was a subject for the most beautiful of all the Greek tragedies, what shall we say to Robinson Crusoe in his ? Take the speech of the Greek hero on leaving his cave, beautiful as it is, and compare it with the reflections of the English adventurer in his solitary place of confinement. The thoughts of home, and of all from which he is forever cut off, swell and press against his bosom, as the heaving ocean rolls its ceaseless tide against the rocky shore, and the very beatings of his heart become audible in the eternal silence that surrounds him. Thus he says:

"As I walked about, either in my hunting, or for viewing the country, the anguish of my soul at my condition would break out upon me on a sudden, and my very heart would die within me to think of the woods, the mountains, the deserts I was in; and how I was prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean, in an uninhabited wilderness; without redemption. In the midst of the greatest composure of my mind, this would break out upon-me like a storm, and make me wring my hands, and weep like

a child. Sometimes it would take me in the middle of my work, and I would immediately sit down and sigh, and look upon the ground for an hour or two together, and this was still worse to me, for if I could burst into tears or vent myself in words, it would go off, and the grief, having exhausted itself, would abate."

The story of his adventures would not make a poem like the *Odyssey*, it is true; but the relator had the true genius of a poet. It has been made a question whether Richardson's romances are poetry; and the answer, perhaps, is that they are not poetry, because they are not romance. The interest is worked up to an inconceivable height; but it is by an infinite number of little things, by incessant labour and calls upon the attention, by a repetition of blows that have no rebound in them. The sympathy excited is not a voluntary contribution, but a tax. Nothing is unforced and spontaneous. There is a want of elasticity and motion. The story does not "give an echo to the seat where love is throned." The heart does not answer of itself like a chord in music. The fancy does not run on before the writer with breathless expectation, but is dragged along with an infinite number of pins and wheels, like those with which the Lilliputians dragged Gulliver pinioned to the royal palace.—Sir Charles Grandison is a coxcomb. What sort of a figure would he cut, translated into an epic poem, by the side of Achilles? Clarissa, the divine Clarissa, is too interesting by half. She is interesting in her ruffles, in her gloves, her samplers, her aunts and uncles—she is interesting in all that is uninteresting. Such things, however intensely they may be brought home to us, are not conductors to the imagination. There is infinite truth and feeling in Richardson; but it is extracted from a *caput mortuum* of circumstances: it does not evaporate of itself. His poetical genius is like Ariel confined in a pine-tree, and requires an artificial process to let it out. Shakspeare says—

*" Our poesy is as a gum
Which issues whence 'tis nourished, our gentle flame
Provokes itself, and, like the current, flies
Each bound it chafes."*¹

I shall conclude this general account with some remarks on four of the principal works of poetry in the world, at different periods of history—Homer, the Bible, Dante, and, let me add,. Ossian. In Homer, the principle of action or life is predominant; in the Bible, the principle of faith and the idea of Providence; Dante is a personification of blind will; and in Ossian we see the decay of life, and the fag end of the world. Homer's poetry is the heroic; it is full of life and action : it is bright as the day, strong as a river. In the vigour of his intellect, he grapples with all the objects of nature, and enters into all the relations of social life. He saw many countries, and the manners of many men; and he has brought them all together in his poem. He describes his heroes going to battle with a prodigality of life, arising from an exuberance of animal spirits : we see them before us, their number, and their order of battle, poured out upon the plain " all plumed like ostriches, like eagles newly bathed, wanton as goats, wild as young bulls, youthful as May, and gorgeous as the sun at midsummer," covered with glittering armour, with dust and blood; while the gods quaff their nectar in golden cups, or mingle in the fray; and the old men assembled on the walls of Troy rise up with reverence as Helen passes by them. The multitude of things in Homer is wonderful; their splendour, their truth, their force, and variety. His poetry is, like his religion, the poetry of number and form : he describes the bodies as well as the souls of men.

The poetry of the Bible is that of imagination and of

¹ Burke's writings are not poetry, notwithstanding the vividness of the fancy, because the subject matter is a bstrifile and dry, not natural, but artificial. The difference between poetry and eloquence is that the one is the eloquence of the imagination, and the other of the understanding. Eloquence tries to persuade the will, and convince the reason: poetry produces its effect by instantaneous sympathy. Nothing is a subject for poetry that admits.of a

faith : it is abstract and disembodied : it is not. the poetry of form, but of power, not of multitude, but of immensity. It does not divide into many, but aggrandizes into one. Its ideas of nature are like its ideas of God. It is not the poetry of social life, but of solitude : each man seems alone in the world, with the original forms of nature, the rocks, the earth, and the sky. It is not the poetry of action or heroic enterprise, but of faith in a supreme Providence, and resignation to the power that governs the universe. As the idea of God was removed farther from humanity and a scattered polytheism, it became more profound and intense, as it became more universal, for the Infinite is present to everything: " If we fly into the uttermost parts of the earth, it is there also; if we turn to the east or the west, we cannot escape from it." Man is thus aggrandised in the image of his Maker. The history of the patriarchs is of this kind; they are founders of a chosen race of people, the inheritors of the earth; they exist in the generations which are to come after them. Their poetry, like their religious creed, is vast, unformed, obscure, and infinite; a vision is upon it—an invisible hand is suspended over it. The spirit of the Christian religion consists in the glory hereafter to be revealed; but in the Hebrew dispensation, Providence took an immediate share in the affairs of this life. Jacob's dream arose out of this intimate communion between heaven and earth; it was this that let down, in the sight of the youthful patriarch, a golden ladder from the sky to the earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it, and shed a light upon the lonely place, which can never pass away. The story of Ruth, again, is as if all the depth of natural affection in the human race was involved in her breast. There are descriptions in the book of Job more prodigal of imagery, more intense in passion, than anything

dispute. Poets are in general bad prose-writers, because their images, though fine in themselves, are not to the purpose, and do not carry on the argument. The French poetry wants the forms of the imagination. It is didactic more than dramatic. And some of our own poetry, which has been most admired, is only poetry in the rhyme, and in the studied use of poetic diction.

in Homer, as that of the state of his prosperity, and of the vision that came upon him by night. The metaphors in the Old Testament are more boldly figurative. Things were collected more into masses, and gave a greater *momentum* to the imagination.

Dante was the father of modern poetry, and he may therefore claim a place in this connection. His poem is the first great step from Gothic darkness and barbarism; and the struggle of thought in it to burst the thralldom in which the human mind had been so long held, is felt in every page. He stood bewildered, not appalled, on that dark shore which separates the ancient and the modern world; and saw the glories of antiquity dawning through the abyss of time, while revelation opened its passage to the other world. He was lost in wonder at what had been done before him, and he dared to emulate it. Dante seems to have been indebted to the Bible for the gloomy tone of his mind, as well as for the prophetic fury which exalts and kindles his poetry; but he is utterly unlike Homer. His genius is not a sparkling flame, but the sullen heat of a furnace. He is power, passion, self-will personified. In all that relates to the descriptive or fanciful part of poetry he bears no comparison to many who had gone before, or who have come after him; but there is a gloomy abstraction in his conceptions, which lies like a dead weight upon the mind; a benumbing stupor, a breathless awe, from the intensity of the impression; a terrible obscurity, like that which oppresses us in dreams; an identity of interest, which moulds every object to its own purposes, and clothes all things with the passions and imaginations of the human soul,—that make amends for all other deficiencies. The immediate objects he presents to the mind are not much in themselves; they want grandeur, beauty, and order; but they become everything by the force of the character he impresses upon them. His mind lends its own power to the objects which it contemplates, instead of borrowing it from them. He takes advantage even of the nakedness and

dreary vacuity of his subject. His imagination peoples the shades of death, and broods over the silent air. He is the severest of all writers, the most hard and impenetrable, the most opposite to the flowery and glittering; who relies most on his power, and the sense of it in others, and who leaves most room to the imagination of his readers. Dante's only endeavour is to interest; and he interests by exciting our sympathy with the emotion by which he is himself possessed. He does not place before us the objects by which that emotion has been created; but he seizes on the attention, by shewing us the effect they produce on his feelings; and his poetry accordingly gives the same thrilling and overwhelming sensation which is caught by gazing on the face of a person who has seen some object of horror. The improbability of the events, the abruptness and monotony in the *Inferno*, are excessive : but the interest never flags, from the continued earnestness of the author's mind. Dante's great power is in combining internal feelings with external objects. Thus the gate of hell, on which that withering inscription is written, seems to be endowed with speech and consciousness, and to utter its dread warning, not without a sense of mortal woes. This author habitually unites the absolutely local and individual with the greatest wildness and mysticism. In the midst of the obscure and shadowy regions of the lower world, a tomb suddenly rises up with the inscription, " I am the tomb of Pope Anastasius the Sixth: " and half the personages whom he has crowded into the *Inferno* are his own acquaintance. All this perhaps tends to heighten the effect by the bold intermixture of realities, and by an appeal, as it were, to the individual knowledge and experience of the reader. He affords few subjects for picture. There is, indeed, one gigantic one, that of Count Ugolino, of which Michael Angelo made a bas-relief, and which Sir Joshua Reynolds ought not to have painted.

Another writer whom I shall mention last, and whom I cannot persuade myself to think a mere modern in the

groundwork, is Ossian. He is a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers. As Homer is the first vigour and lustihood, Ossian is the decay and old age of poetry. He lives only in the recollection and regret of the past. There is one impression which he conveys more entirely than all other poets, namely, the sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country—he is even without God in the world. He converses only with the spirits of the departed; with the motionless and silent clouds. The cold moonlight sheds its faint lustre on his head, the fox peeps out of the ruined tower; the thistle waves its beard to the wandering gale; and the strings of his harp seem, as the hand of age, as the tale of other times, passes over them, to sigh and rustle like the dry reeds in the winter's wind. The feeling of cheerless desolation, of the loss of the pith and sap of existence, of the annihilation of the substance, and the clinging to the shadow of all things as in a mock-embrace, is here perfect. In this way, the lamentation of Selma for the loss of Salgar is the finest of all. If it were indeed possible to show that this writer was nothing, it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart, another confirmation of that feeling which makes him so often complain, "Roll on, ye dark brown years, ye bring no joy on your wing to Ossian!"

On the Pleasure of Painting¹

" THERE is a pleasure in painting which none but painters know." In writing, you have to contend with the world ; in painting, you have only to carry on a friendly strife with Nature. You sit down to your task, and are happy. From the moment that you take up the pencil, and look Nature in the face, you are at peace with your own heart. No angry passions rise to disturb the silent progress of the work, to shake the hand, or dim the brow; no irritable humours are set afloat: you have no absurd opinions to combat, no point to strain, no adversary to crush, no fool to annoy—you are actuated by fear or favour to no man. There is " no juggling here," no sophistry, no intrigue, no tampering with the evidence, no attempt to make black white, or white black: but you resign yourself into the hands of a greater power, that of Nature, with the simplicity of a child, and the devotion of an enthusiast—" study with joy her manner, and with rapture taste her style." The mind is calm, and full at the same time. The hand and eye are equally employed. In tracing the commonest object, a plant or the stump of a tree, you learn something every moment. You perceive unexpected differences, and discover likenesses where you looked for no such thing. You try to set down what you see—find out your error, and correct it. You need not play tricks, or purposely mistake : with all your pains, you are still far short of the mark. Patience grows out of the endless pursuits, and turns it into a luxury. A streak in a flower, a wrinkle in a leaf, a tinge in a cloud, a stain in an old wall or ruin grey, are seized with avidity as the *spolia optima* of this sort of mental war-

¹ *On the Pleasure of Painting* appeared in the *London Magazine* of December 1820. In this magazine Lamb's *Essays of Elia* and De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* first appeared.

fare, and furnish our labour for another half day. The hours pass away untold, without chagrin, and without weariness; nor would you ever wish to pass them otherwise. Innocence is joined with industry, pleasure with business; and the mind is satisfied, though it is not engaged in thinking or in doing any mischief.¹

I have not much pleasure in writing, these Essays, or in reading them afterwards; though I own I now and then meet with a phrase that I like, or a thought that strikes me as a true one. But after I begin them, I am only anxious to get to the end of them, which I am not sure I shall do, for I seldom see my way a page or even a sentence beforehand; and when I have as by a miracle escaped, I trouble myself little more about them. I sometimes have to write them twice over: then it is necessary to read the *proof*, to prevent mistakes by the printer; so that by the time they appear in a tangible shape, and one can con them over with a conscious, sidelong glance to the public approbation, they have lost their gloss and relish, and become "more

¹ There is a passage in Werter which contains a very pleasing illustration of this doctrine, and is as follows.

"About a league from the town is a place called Walheim. It is very agreeably situated on the side of a hill: from one of the paths which leads out of the village, you have a view of the whole country; and there is a good old woman who sells wine, coffee, and tea there: but better than all this are two lime-trees before the church, which spread their branches over a little green, surrounded by barns and cottages. I have seen few places more retired and peaceful. I send for a chair and table from the old woman's, and there I drink my coffee and read Homer. It was by accident that I discovered this place one fine afternoon: all was perfect stillness; every body was in the fields, except a little boy about four years old, who was sitting on the ground, and holding between his knees a child of about six months; he pressed it to his bosom with his little arms, which made a sort of great chair for it, and notwithstanding the vivacity which sparkled in his eyes, he sat perfectly still. Quite delighted with the scene, I sat down on a plough opposite, and had great pleasure in drawing this little picture of brotherly tenderness. I added a bit of the hedge, the barn-door, and some broken cart-wheels, without any order, just as they happened to lie; and in about an hour I found I had made a drawing of great expression and very correct design, without having put in anything of my own. This confirmed me in the resolution I had made before, only to copy nature for the future. Nature is inexhaustible, and alone forms the greatest masters. Say what you will of rules, they alter the true features, and the natural expression." P. 15.

tedious than a twice-told tale." For a person to read his own works over with any great delight, he ought first to forget that he ever wrote them. Familiarity naturally breeds contempt. It is, in fact, like poring fondly over a piece of blank paper; from repetition, the words convey no distinct meaning to the mind, are mere idle sounds, except that our vanity claims an interest and property in them. I have more satisfaction in my own thoughts than in dictating them to others: words are necessary to explain the impression of certain things upon me to the reader, but they rather weaken and draw a veil over than strengthen it to myself. However, I might say with the poet, " My mind to me a kingdom is," yet I have little ambition " to set a throne or chair of state in the understandings of other men." The ideas we cherish most, exist best in a kind of shadowy abstraction,

" Pure in the last recesses of the mind; "

and derive neither force nor interest from being exposed to public view. They are old familiar acquaintance, and any change in them, arising from the adventitious ornaments of style or dress, is little to their advantage. After I have once written on a subject, it goes out of my mind: my feelings about it have been melted down into words, and *them* I forget. I have, as it were, discharged my memory of its old habitual reckoning, and rubbed out the score of real sentiment. For the future, it exists only for the sake of others.—But I cannot say, from my own experience, that the same process takes place in transferring our ideas to canvas; they gain more than they lose in the mechanical transformation. One is never tired of painting, "because you have to set down not what you knew already, but what you have just discovered. In the former case, you translate feelings into words; in the latter, names into things. There is a continual creation out of nothing going on. With every stroke of the brush, a new field of inquiry is laid open; new difficulties arise, and new triumphs are prepared over them. By comparing the imitation with the original, you

see what you have done, and how much you have still to do. The test of the senses is severer than that of fancy, and an over-match even for the delusions of our self-love. One part of a picture shames another, and you determine to paint up to yourself, if you cannot come up to Nature. Every object becomes lustrous, from the light thrown back upon it by the mirror of art: and by the aid of the pencil we may be said to touch and handle the objects of sight. The air-drawn visions that hover on the verge of existence have a bodily presence given them on the canvas: the form of beauty is changed into a substance: the dream and the glory of the universe is made "palpable to feeling as to sight."—And see I a rainbow starts from the canvas, with all its humid train of glory, as if it were drawn from its cloudy arch in heaven. The spangled landscape glitters with drops of dew after the shower. The "fleecy fools" show their coats in the gleams of the setting sun. The shepherds pipe their farewell notes in the fresh evening air. And is this bright vision made from a dead dull blank, like a bubble reflecting the mighty fabric of the universe? Who would think this miracle of Rubens' pencil possible to be performed? Who, having seen it, would not spend his life to do the like? See how the rich fallows, the bare stubble-field, the scanty harvest-home, drag in Rembrandt's landscapes! How often have I looked at them and Nature, and tried to do the same, till the very "light thickened," and there was an earthiness in the feeling of the air! There is no end of the refinements of art and Nature in this respect. One may look at the misty glimmering horizon till the eye dazzles and the imagination is lost, in hopes to transfer the whole interminable expanse at one blow upon canvas. Wilson said, he used to try to paint the effect of the motes dancing in the setting sun. At another time, a friend coming into his painting-room when he was sitting on the ground in a melancholy posture, observed that his picture looked like a landscape after a shower: he started up with the greatest delight, and said, "That is the effect I intended

to produce, but thought I had failed." Wilson was neglected ; and, by degrees, neglected his art to apply himself to brandy. His hand became unsteady, so that it was only by repeated attempts that he could reach the place, or produce the effect he aimed at; and when he had done a little to a picture, he would say to any acquaintance who chanced to drop in, " I have painted enough for one day : come, let us go somewhere." It was not, so Claude left his pictures, or his studies on the banks of the Tiber, to go in search of other enjoyments, or ceased to gaze upon the glittering sunny vales and distant hills; and while his eye drank in the clear sparkling hues and lovely forms of Nature, his hand stamped them on the lucid canvas to last there for ever !—One of the most delightful parts of my life was one fine summer, when I used to walk out of an evening to catch the last light of the sun, gemming the green slopes or russet lawns, and gilding tower or tree, while the blue sky gradually turning to purple and gold, or skirted with dusky grey, hung its broad marble pavement over all, as we see it in the great master of Italian landscape. But to come to a more particular explanation of the subject.

The first head I ever tried to paint was an old woman with the upper part of the face shaded by her bonnet, and I certainly laboured it with great perseverance. It took me numberless sittings to do it. I have it by me still, and sometimes look at it with surprise, to think how much pains were thrown away to little purpose,—yet not altogether in vain if it taught me to see good in everything, and to know that there is nothing vulgar in Nature seen with the eye of science or of true art. Refinement creates beauty everywhere : it is the grossness of the spectator that discovers nothing but grossness in the object. Be this as it may, I spared no pains to do my best. If-art was long, I thought that life was so too at that moment. I got in the general effect the first day; and pleased and surprised enough I was at my success. The rest was a work of time—of weeks, and months (if need were) of patient toil and careful

finishing. I had seen an old head by Rembrandt at Burleigh House, and if I could produce a head at all like Rembrandt in a year, in my life-time, it would be glory and felicity, and wealth and fame enough for me ! The head I had seen at Burleigh was an exact and wonderful facsimile of Nature, and I resolved to make mine (as nearly as I could) an exact facsimile of Nature. I did not then, nor do I now believe, with Sir Joshua, that the perfection of art consists in giving general appearances without individual details, but in giving general appearances with individual details. Otherwise, I had done my work the first day. But I saw something more in Nature than general effect, and I thought it worth my while to give it in the picture. There was a gorgeous effect of light and shade: but there was a delicacy as well as depth in the *chiaro scuro*, which I was bound to follow into all its dim and scarce perceptible variety of tone and shadow. Then I had to make the transition from a strong light to as dark a shade, preserving the masses, but gradually softening off the intermediate parts. It was so in Nature : the difficulty was to make it so in the copy. I tried, and failed again and again; I strove harder, and succeeded as I thought. The wrinkles in Rembrandt were not hard lines ; but broken and irregular. I saw the same appearance in Nature, and strained every nerve to give it. If I could hit off this edgy appearance, and insert the reflected light in the furrows of old age in half a morning. I did not think I had lost a day. Beneath the shrivelled yellow parchment look of the skin, there was here and there a streak of the blood colour tinging the face; this I made a point of conveying, and did not cease to compare what I saw with what I did (with jealous lynx-eyed watchfulness) till I succeeded to the best of my ability and judgment. How many revisions were there ! How many attempts to catch an expression which I had seen the day before! How often did we try to get the old position, and wait for the return of the same light! There was a puckering up of the lips, a cautious introversion of the eye*under the shadow of the bonnet,

indicative of the feebleness and suspicion of old age, which at last we managed, after many trials and some quarrels, to a tolerable nicety. The picture was never finished, and I might have gone on with it to the present hour.¹ I used to set it on the ground when my day's work was done, and saw revealed to me with swimming eyes the birth of new hopes, and of a new world of objects. The painter thus learns to look at Nature with different eyes. He before saw her "as in a glass darkly, but now face to face." He understands the texture and meaning of the visible universe, and "sees into the life of things," not by the help of mechanical instruments, but of the improved exercise of his faculties, and an intimate sympathy with Nature. The meanest thing is not lost upon him, for he looks at it with an eye to itself, not merely to his own vanity or interest, or the opinion of the world. Even where there is neither beauty nor use—if that ever were—still there is truth, and a sufficient source of gratification in the indulgence of curiosity and activity of mind. The humblest painter is a true scholar; and the best of scholars—the scholar of Nature. For myself, and for the real comfort and satisfaction of the thing, I had rather have been Jan Steen, or Gerard Dow, than the greatest casuist or philologist that ever lived. The painter does not view things in clouds or "mist, the common gloss of theologians," but applies the same standard of truth and disinterested spirit of inquiry, that influence his daily practice, to other subjects. He perceives form, he distinguishes character. He reads men and books with an intuitive eye. He is a critic as well as a connoisseur. The conclusions he draws are clear and convincing, because they are taken from the things themselves. He is not a fanatic, a dupe, or a slave : for the habit of seeing for himself also disposes him to judge for himself. The most sensible men I know (taken as a class) are painters:

¹ It is at present coveted with a thick slough of oil and varnish (the perishable vehicle of the English school) like an envelope of gold-beater's skin, so as to be hardly visible.

that is, they are the most lively observers of what passes in the world about them, and the closest observers of **what** passes in their own minds. From their profession they in general mix more with the world than authors ; and if they have not the same fund of acquired knowledge, are obliged to rely more on individual sagacity. I might mention the names of Opie, Fuseli, Northcote, as persons distinguished for striking description and acquaintance with the subtle traits of character.¹ Painters in ordinary society, or in obscure situations where their value is not known, and they are treated with neglect and indifference, have sometimes a forward self-sufficiency of manner: but this is not so much their fault as that of others. Perhaps their want of regular education may also be in fault in such cases. Richardson, who is very tenacious of the respect in which the profession ought to be held, tells a story of Michael Angelo, that after a quarrel between him and Pope Julius II, " upon account of a slight the artist conceived the pontiff had put upon him, Michael Angelo was introduced by a bishop, who, thinking to serve the artist by it, made it an argument that the Pope should be reconciled to him, because men of his profession were commonly ignorant, and of no consequence otherwise: •his holiness, enraged at the bishop, struck him with his staff, and told him it was he that was the blockhead, and affronted the man himself would not offend; the prelate was driven out of the chamber, and Michael Angelo had the Pope's benediction accompanied with presents. This bishop had fallen into the vulgar error, and was rebuked accordingly." ,

Besides the exercise of the mind, painting exercises the body. It is a mechanical as well as a liberal art. To do anything, to dig a hole in the ground', to plant a cabbage, to

¹ Men in business, who are answerable with their fortunes for the consequences of their opinions and are therefore accustomed to ascertain pretty accurately the grounds on which they act, before they commit themselves on the event, are often men of remarkably quick and sound judgments. Artists in like manner must know tolerably well what they are about, *before they* can bring the result of their observations to the test of ocular demonstration.

hit a mark, to move a shuttle, to work a pattern,—in a word, to attempt to produce any effect, and to *succeed*, has something in it that gratifies the love of power, and carries off the restless activity of the mind of man. Indolence is a delightful but distressing state : we must be doing something to be happy. Action is no less necessary than thought to the instinctive tendencies of the human frame; and painting combines them both incessantly.¹ The hand furnishes a practical test of the correctness of the eye ; and the eye thus admonished, imposes fresh tasks of skill and industry upon the hand. Every stroke tells, as the verifying of a new truth; and every new observation, the instant it is made, passes into an act and emanation of the will. Every step is nearer what we wish, and yet there is always more to do. In spite of the facility, the fluttering grace, the evanescent hues, that play round the pencil of Rubens and Vandyke, however I may admire, I do not envy them this power so much as I do the slow, patient, laborious execution of Correggio, Leonardo da Vinci, and Andrea del Sarto, where every touch appears conscious of its charge, emulous of truth, and where the painful artist has so distinctly wrought,

" that you might say almost his picture thought ! "

In the one case, the colours seem breathed on the canvas as by magic, the work and the wonder of a moment; in the other, they seem inlaid in the body of the work, and as if it took the artist years of unremitting labour, and of delightful never-ending progress to perfection.² Who would wish ever to come to the close of such works,—not to dwell on them, to return to them, to be wedded to them to the last ? Rubens, with his florid, rapid style, complained that when he had just learned his art, he should be forced

¹ The famous Schiller used to say, that he found the great happiness of life, after all, to consist in the discharge of some mechanical duty.

² The rich *impasting* of Titian and Giorgione combines something of the advantages of both these styles, the felicity of the one with the carefulness of the other, and is perhaps to be preferred to either.

to die. Leonardo, in the slow advances of his, had lived long enough!

Painting is not, like writing, what is properly understood by a sedentary employment. It requires not indeed a strong, but a continued and steady exertion of muscular power. The "precision and delicacy of the manual operation makes up for the want of vehemence,—as to balance himself for any time in the same position the rope-dancer must strain every nerve. Painting for a whole morning gives one as excellent an appetite for one's dinner, as old Abraham Tucker acquired for his by riding over Banstead Downs. It is related of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that " he took no other exercise than what he used in his painting-room,"—the writer means, in walking backwards and forwards to look at his picture ; but the act of painting itself, of laying on the colours in the proper place, and proper quantity, was a much harder exercise than this alternate receding from and returning to the picture. This last would be rather a relaxation and relief than an effort. It is not to be wondered at, that an artist like Sir Joshua, who delighted so much in the sensual and practical part of his art, should have found himself at a considerable loss when the decay of his sight precluded him, for the last year or two of his life, from the following up of his profession,—" the source," according to his own remark, " of thirty years' uninterrupted enjoyment and prosperity to him." It is only those who never think at all, or else who have accustomed themselves to brood incessantly on abstract ideas, that never feel *ennui*.

To give one instance more, and then I will have done with this rambling discourse. One of my first attempts was a picture of my father, who was then in a green old age, with strong-marked features, and scarred with the small-pox. I drew it with a broad light crossing the face, looking down, with spectacles oh, reading. The book was Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, in a fine old binding, with Gribelin's etchings. My father would as lieve it had been any other book; but for him to read was to be content, was " richer

fineless." The sketch promised well; and I set to work to finish it, determined to spare no time nor pains. My father was willing to sit as long as I pleased; for there is a natural desire in the mind of man to sit for one's picture, to be the object of continued attention, to have one's likeness multiplied; and besides his satisfaction in the picture, he had some pride in the artist, though he would rather I should have written a sermon than painted like Rembrandt or like Raphael. Those winter days, with the gleams of sunshine coming through the chapel-windows, and cheered by the notes of the robin-redbreast in our garden (that "ever in the haunch of winter sings")—as my afternoon's work drew to a close,—were among the happiest of my life. When I gave the effect I intended to any part of the picture for which I had prepared my colours, when I imitated the roughness of the skin by a lucky stroke of the pencil, when I hit the clear pearly tone of a vein, when I gave the ruddy complexion of health, the blood circulating under the broad shadows of one side of the face, I thought my fortune made; or rather it was already more than made, in my fancying that I might one day be able to say with Correggio, "*"/ also am a painter!*" It was an idle thought, a boy's conceit; but it did not make me less happy at the time. I used regularly to set my work in the chair to look at it through the long evenings; and many a time did I return to take leave of it before I could go to bed at night. I remember sending it with a throbbing heart to the Exhibition, and seeing it hung up there by the side of one of the Honourable Mr. Skeffington (now Sir George). There was nothing in common between them, but that they were the portraits of two very good-natured men. I think, but I am not sure, that I finished this portrait (or another afterwards) on the same day that the news of the battle of Austerlitz came; „I walked out in the afternoon, and, as I returned, saw the evening star set over a poor man's cottage with other thoughts and feelings than I shall ever have again. Oh for the revolution of the great

Platonic year, that those times might come over again 1 I could sleep out the three hundred and sixty-five thousand intervening years very contentedly!—The picture is left: the table, the chair, the window where I learned to construe Livy, the chapel where my father preached, remain where they were; but he himself is gone to rest, full of years, of faith, of hope, and charity !

The painter not only takes a delight in Nature, he has a new and exquisite source of pleasure opened to him in the study and contemplation of works of art—

*" Whatever Lorraine light touch'd with soff ning hue.
Or savage Rosa dash'd, or learned Poussin drew."*

He turns aside to view a country-gentleman's seat with eager looks, thinking it may contain some of the rich products of art. There is an air round Lord Radnor's park, for there hang the two Claudes, the Morning and Evening of the Roman Empire—round Wilton-house, for there is Vandyke's picture of the Pembroke family—round Blenheim, for there is his picture of the Duke of Buckingham's children, and the most magnificent collection of Rubenses in the world—at Knowsley, for there is Rembrandt's Hand-writing on the Wall—and at Burleigh, for there are some of Guido's angelic heads. The young artist makes a pilgrimage to each of these places, eyes them wistfully at a distance, " bosomed high in tufted trees," and feels an interest in them of which the owner is scarce conscious: he enters the well-swept walks and echoing arch-ways, passes the threshold, is led through wainscoted rooms, is shown the furniture, the rich hangings, the tapestry, the massy services of plate—and, at last, is ushered into the room where his treasure is, the idol of his vows—some speaking face or bright landscape! It is stamped on his brain, and lives there thenceforward, a tally for Nature, and a test of art. He furnishes out the chambers of the mind from the spoils of time, picks and chooses which shall have the best places—nearest his heart. He goes away richer than he came, richer than the

possessor; and thinks that he may one day return, when he perhaps shall have done something like them, or even from failure shall have learned to admire truth and genius more.

My first initiation in the mysteries of the art was at the Orleans Gallery: it was there I formed my taste, such as it is ; so that I am irreclaimably of the old school in painting. I was staggered when I saw the works there collected, and looked at them with wondering and with longing eyes. A mist passed away from my sight: the scales fell off. A new sense came upon me, a new heaven and a new earth stood before me. I saw the soul speaking in the face—"hands that the rod of empire had swayed " in mighty ages past—* ' a forked mountain or blue promontory,"

—" *with trees upoft*

That nod unto the world and mock our eyes with air "

Old Time had unlocked his treasures, and Fame stood portress at the door. We had all heard of the names of Titian, Raphael, Guido, Domenichino, the Caracci—but to see them face to face, to be in the same room with their deathless productions, was like breaking some mighty spell—was almost an effect of necromancy ! From that time I lived in a world of pictures. Battles, sieges, speeches in parliament seemed mere idle noise and fury, "signifying nothing," compared with those mighty works and dreaded names that spoke to me in the eternal silence of thought. This was the more remarkable, as it was but a short time before that I was not only totally ignorant of, but insensible to the beauties of art. As an instance, I remember that one afternoon I was reading the *Provoked Husband* with the highest relish, with a green woody landscape of Ruysdael or Hobbema just before me, at which I looked off the book now and then, and wondered what there could be in that sort of work to satisfy or delight the mind—at the same time asking myself, as a speculative question, whether I should ever feel an interest in it like what I took in reading Vanbrugh and Cibber ?

I had made some progress in painting when I went to the Louvre to study, and I never did anything afterwards. I never shall forget conning over the Catalogue which a friend lent me just before I set out. The pictures, the names of the painters, seemed to relish in the mouth. There was one of Titian's Mistress at her toilette. Even the colours with which the painter had adorned her hair were not more golden, more amiable to sight, than those which played round and tantalised my fancy ere I saw the picture. There were two portraits by the same hand—"A young Nobleman with a glove"—another, "A companion to it"—I read the description over and over with fond expectancy, and filled up the imaginary outline with whatever I could conceive of grace, and dignity, and an antique *gusto*—all but equal to the original. There was the Transfiguration too. With what awe I saw it in my mind's eye, and was overshadowed with the spirit of the artist! Not to have been disappointed with these works afterwards, was the highest compliment I can pay to their transcendent merits. Indeed, it was from seeing other works of the same great masters that I had formed a vague, but no disparaging idea of these.—The first day I got there, I was kept for some time in the French Exhibition-room, and thought I should not be able to get a sight of the old masters. I just caught a peep at them through the door (vile hindrance!) like looking out of purgatory into paradise—from Poussin's noble mellow-looking landscapes to where Rubens hung out his gaudy banner, and down the glimmering vista to the rich jewels of Titian and the Italian school. At last, by much importunity I was admitted, and lost not an instant in making use of my new privilege.—It was *un beau jour* to me. I marched delighted through a quarter of a mile of the proudest efforts of the mind of man, a whole creation of genius, a universe of art! I ran the gauntlet of all the schools from the bottom to the top; arid in the end got admitted into the inner room, where they had been repairing some of their greatest works. Here the Transfiguration, the St.

Peter Martyr, and the St. Jerome of Domenichino stood on the floor, as if they had bent their knees, like camels stooping, to unlade their riches to the spectator. On one side, on an easel, stood Hippolito de Medici (a portrait by Titian) with a boar-spear in his hand, looking through those he saw, till you turned away from the keen glance : and thrown together in heaps were landscapes of the same hand, green pastoral hills and vales, and shepherds piping to their mild mistresses underneath the flowering shade. Reader, "if thou hast not seen the Louvre, thou art damned!"—for thou hast not seen the choicest remains of the works of art; or thou hast not seen all these together, with their mutually reflected glories. I say nothing of the statues ; for I know but little of sculpture, and never liked any till I saw the Elgin Marbles. . . . Here, for four months together, I strolled and studied, and daily heard the warning sound—"*Quatres heures passees, il faut fermer, Citoyens*" (ah ! why did they ever change their style?) muttered in coarse provincial French; and brought away with me some loose draughts and fragments, which I have been forced to part with, like drops of life-blood, for "hard money." How often, thou tenantless mansion of godlike magnificence—how often has my heart since gone a pilgrimage to thee I

It has been made a question, whether the artist, or the mere man of taste and natural sensibility, receives most pleasure from the contemplation of works of art? and I think this question might be answered by another as a sort of *experimentum cruets**, namely, whether any one out of that "number numberless" of mere gentlemen and amateurs, who visited Paris at the period here spoken of, felt as much interest, as much pride or pleasure in this display of the most striking monuments of art as the humblest student would ? The first entrance into the Louvre would be only one of the events of his journey, not an event in his life, remembered ever after with thankfulness and regret. He would explore it with the same unmeaning curiosity and idle wonder as he would the Regalia in the Tower, or the Botanic Garden in

the Thuilleries, but not with the fond enthusiasm of an artist. How should he? His is "casual fruition, joyless, unendeared." But the painter is wedded to his art, the mistress, queen, and idol of his soul. He has embarked his all in it, fame, time, fortune, peace of mind, his hopes in youth, his consolation in age : and shall he not feel a more intense interest in whatever relates to it than the mere indolent trifler? Natural sensibility alone, without the entire application of the mind to that one object, will not enable the possessor to sympathise with all the degrees of beauty and power in the conceptions of a Titian or a Correggio; but it is he only who does this, who follows them into all their force and matchless grace, that does or can feel their full value. Knowledge is pleasure as well as power. No one but the artist who has studied Nature and contended with the difficulties of art, can be aware of the beauties, or intoxicated with a passion for painting. No one who has not devoted his life and soul to the pursuit of art, can feel the same exultation in its brightest ornaments and loftiest triumphs which an artist does. Where the treasure is, there the heart is also. It is now seventeen years since I was studying in the Louvre (and I have long since given up all thoughts of the art as a profession), but long after I returned, and even still, I sometimes dream of being there again—of asking for the old pictures—and not finding them, or finding them changed or faded from what they were, I cry myself awake ! What gentleman-amateur ever does this at such a distance of time,—that is, ever received pleasure or took interest enough in them to produce so lasting an impression ?

But it is said that if a person had the same natural taste, and the same acquired knowledge as an artist, without the petty interests and technical notions, he would derive a purer pleasure from seeing a fine portrait, a fine landscape, and so on. This however is not so much begging the question as asking an impossibility: he cannot have the same insight into the end without having studied **the**

means ; nor the same love of art without the same habitual and exclusive attachment to it. Painters are, no doubt, often actuated by jealousy, partiality, and a sordid attention to that only which they find useful to themselves in painting. W———has been seen poring over the texture of a Dutch cabinet-picture, so that he could not see the picture itself. But this is the perversion and pedantry of the profession, not its true or genuine spirit. If W———had never looked at anything but megilps and handling, he never would have put the soul of life and manners into his pictures, as he has done. Another objection is, that the instrumental parts of the art, the means, the first rudiments, paints, oils, and brushes, are painful and disgusting; and that the consciousness of the difficulty and anxiety with which perfection has been attained, must take away from the pleasure of the finest performance. This, however, is only an additional proof of the greater pleasure derived by the artist from his profession; for these things which are said to interfere with and destroy the common interest in works of art, do not disturb him; he never once thinks of them, he is absorbed in the pursuit of a higher object; he is intent, not on the means but the end; he is taken up, not with the difficulties, but with the triumph over them. As in the case of the anatomist, who overlooks many things in the eagerness of his search after abstract truth; or the alchemist who, while he is raking into his soot and furnaces, lives in a golden dream; a lesser gives way to a greater object. But it is pretended that the painter may be supposed to submit to the unpleasant part of the process only for the sake of the fame or profit in view. So far is this from being a true state of the case, that I will venture to say, in the instance of a friend of mine who has lately succeeded in an important undertaking in his art, that not all the fame he has acquired, not all the money he has received from thousands of admiring spectators, not all the newspaper puffs,—not even the praise of the *Edinburgh Review*,—not all these, put together, ever gave him at any time the same genuine,

undoubted satisfaction as any one half-hour employed in the ardent and propitious pursuit of his art—in finishing to his heart's content a foot, a hand, or even a piece of drapery. What is the state of mind of an artist while he is at work ? He is then in the act of realising the highest idea he can form of beauty or grandeur: he conceives, he embodies that which he understands and loves best: that is, he is in full and perfect possession of that which is to him the source of the highest happiness and intellectual excitement which he can enjoy.

In short, as a conclusion to this argument, I will mention a circumstance which fell under my knowledge the other day. A friend had bought a print of Titian's *Mistress*, the same to which I have alluded above. He was anxious to show it to me on this account. I told him it was a spirited engraving, but it had not the look of the original. I believe he thought this fastidious, till I offered to show him a rough sketch of it, which I had by me. Having seen this, he said he perceived exactly what I meant, and could not bear to look at the print afterwards. He had good sense enough to see the difference in the individual instance ; but a person better acquainted with Titian's manner and with art in general, that is, of a more cultivated and refined taste, would know that it was a bad print, without having any immediate model to compare it with. He would perceive with a glance of the eye, with a sort of instinctive feeling, that it was hard, and without that bland, expansive, and nameless expression which always distinguished Titian's most famous works. Any one who is accustomed to a head in a picture can never reconcile himself to a print from it: but to the ignorant they are both the same. To a vulgar eye there is no difference between a Guido and a daub, between a penny-print or the vilest scrawl, and the most finished performance. In other words, all that excellence which lies between these two extremes,—all, at least, that marks the excess above mediocrity,—all that constitutes true beauty, harmony, refinement, grandeur, is lost upon the common

observer. But it is from this point that the delight, the glowing raptures of the true adept commence. An uninformed spectator may like an ordinary drawing better than the ablest connoisseur; but for that very reason he cannot like the highest specimens of art so well. The refinements not only of execution but of truth and Nature are inaccessible to unpractised eyes. The exquisite gradations in a sky of Claude's are not perceived by such persons, and consequently the harmony cannot be felt. Where there is no conscious apprehension, there can be no conscious pleasure. Wonder at the first sight of works of art may be the effect of ignorance and novelty; but real admiration and permanent delight in them are the growth of taste and knowledge. "I would not wish to have your eyes," said a good-natured man to a critic, who was finding fault with a picture, in which the other saw no blemish. Why so? The idea which prevented him from admiring this inferior production was a higher idea of truth and beauty which was ever present with him, and a continual source of pleasing and lofty contemplations. It may be different in a taste for outward luxuries and the privations of mere sense; but the idea of perfection, which acts as an intellectual foil, is always an addition, a support, and a proud consolation!

Richardson, in his *Essays*, which ought to be better known, has left some striking examples of the felicity and infelicity of artists, both as it relates to their external fortune, and to the practice of their art. In speaking of *the knowledge of hands*, he exclaims—"When one is considering a picture or a drawing, one at the same time thinks this was done by him¹ who had many extraordinary endowments of body and mind, but was withal very capricious; who was honoured in life and death, expiring in the arms of one of the greatest princes of that age, Francis I., King of France, who loved him as a friend. Another is of him² who lived a long and happy life, beloved of Charles V., emperor; and many others of the first princes of Europe. When one has another

¹ Leonardo da Vinci.

² Titian.

in hand, we think that this was done by one¹ who so excelled in three arts, as that any of them in that degree had rendered him worthy of immortality ; and one moreover that durst contend with his sovereign (one of the haughtiest popes that ever was) upon a slight offered to him, and extricated himself with honour. Another is the work of him² who, without any one exterior advantage but mere strength of genius, had the most sublime imaginations, and executed them accordingly, yet lived and died obscurely. Another we shall consider as the work of him³ who restored Painting when it had almost sunk; of him whom art made honourable, but who, neglecting and despising greatness with a sort of cynical pride, was treated suitably to the figure he gave himself, not his intrinsic worth ; which, not having philosophy enough to bear it, broke his heart. Another is done by one⁴ who (on the contrary) was a fine gentleman, and lived in great magnificence, and was much honoured by his own and foreign princes; who was a courtier, a statesman, and a painter; and so much all these, that when he acted in either character, *that* seemed to be his business, and the others his diversion. I say when one thus reflects, besides the pleasure arising from the beauties and excellences of the work, the fine ideas it gives us of natural things, the noble way of thinking it may suggest to us, an additional pleasure results from the above considerations. But, oh 1 the pleasure, when a connoisseur and lover of art has before him a picture or drawing, of which he can say this is the hand, these are the thoughts of him⁵ who was one of the politest, best-natured gentlemen that ever was ; and beloved and assisted by the greatest wits and the greatest men then in Rome : of him who lived in great fame, honour, and magnificence, and died extremely lamented ; and missed a Cardinal's hat only by dying a few months too soon; but was particularly esteemed and favoured by two Popes, the only ones who filled the chair

¹ Michael Angelo.²

Annibal Caracci.

⁵

Rafaellc.

² Corieggio.

* Rubens.

of St. Peter in his time, and as great men as ever sat there since that apostle, if at least he ever did : one, in short, who could have been a Leonardo, a Michael Angelo, a Titian, a Correggio, a Parmegiano, an Annibal, a Rubens, or any other whom he pleased, but none of them could ever have been a Rafaëlle."

The same writer speaks feelingly of the change in the style of different artists from their change of fortune, and as, the circumstances are little known, I will quote the passage relating to two of them.

" Guido Reni from a prince-like affluence of fortune (the just reward of his angelic works) fell to a condition like that of a hired servant to one who supplied him with money for what he did at a fixed rate ; and that by his being bewitched with a passion for gaming, whereby he lost vast sums of money; and even what he got in this his state of servitude by day, he commonly lost at night: nor could he ever be cured of this cursed madness. Those of his works, therefore, which he did in this unhappy part of his life, may easily be conceived to be in a different style to what he did before, which in some things, that is, in the airs of his heads (in the gracious kind), had a delicacy in them peculiar to himself, and almost more than human. But I must not multiply instances. Parmegiano is one that alone takes in all the several kinds of variation, and all the degrees of goodness, from the lowest of the indifferent up to the sublime. I can produce evident proofs of this in so easy a gradation, that one cannot but deny but that he that did this, might do that, and very probably did so : and thus one may ascend and descend, like the angels on Jacob's ladder, whose foot was upon the earth, but its top reached to Heaven.

" And this great man had his unlucky circumstance : he "became mad after the philosopher's stone, and did but very little in painting or. drawing afterwards. Judge what that "was, and whether there was not an alteration of style from what he had done, before this devil possessed him. His creditors endeavoured to exorcise him, and did him some

good, for he set himself to work again in his own way : but if a drawing I have of a Lucretia be that he made for his last picture, as it probably is (Vasari says that was the subject of it), it is an evident proof of his decay: it is good indeed, but it wants much of the delicacy which is commonly seen in his works; and so I always thought before I knew or imagined it to be done in this his ebb of genius."

We have had two artists of our own country, whose fate has been as singular as it was hard. Gandy was a portrait-painter in the beginning of the last century, whose heads were said to have come near to Rembrandt's, and he was the undoubted prototype of Sir Joshua Reynolds's style. Yet his name has scarcely been heard of; and his reputation, like his works, never extended beyond his own country. What did he think of himself and of a fame so bounded ! Did he ever dream he was indeed an artist ? Or how did this feeling in him differ from the vulgar conceit of the lowest pretender ? The best known of his works is a portrait of an alderman of Exeter, in some public building in that city.

Poor Dan Stringer! Forty years ago he had the finest hand and the clearest eye of any artist of his time, and produced heads and drawings that would not have disgraced a brighter period in the art. But he fell a martyr (like Burns) to the society of country-gentlemen, and then of those whom they would consider as more his equals. I saw him many years ago, when he treated the masterly sketches he had by him (one in particular of the group of citizens in Shakespear " swallowing the tailor's news ") as " bastards of his genius, not his children " ; and seemed to have given up all thoughts of his art. Whether he is since dead, I cannot say: the world do not so much as know that he ever lived 1

On a Landscape of Nicolas Poussin¹

" 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 awakened 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

¹On a Landscape of Nicolas Poussin appeared in the *London Magazine* of August 1821.

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 recall 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."¹

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.

¹ Everything 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 anyone 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.

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 Nicolas Poussin, on the contrary, everything 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 everywhere 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' 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' 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 wine-press) 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 prospects speak (and for ever will speak on) of ages past to ages yet to come I¹

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, 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 I What forms are there woven into the memory ! What looks, which only the answering looks of the spectator can express 1 What intellectual stores have been yearly poured forth from the shrine of ancient art 1 The works are various, but the names the same—heaps of Rembrandts frowning from the darkened walls, Rubens' 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

¹ 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.

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 houses 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 !

On Hogarth's " Marriage a la Mode " ¹

THE SUPERIORITY of the pictures of Hogarth to the common prints is confined chiefly to the " Marriage a la mode." We shall attempt to illustrate a few of their most striking excellences, more particularly with reference to the expression of character. Their merits are indeed so prominent, and have been so often discussed, that it may be thought difficult to point out any new beauties; but they contain so much truth of nature, they present the objects to the eye under so many aspects and bearings, admit of so many constructions, and are so pregnant with meaning, that the subject is in a manner inexhaustible.

Boccaccio, the most refined and sentimental of all the novel-writers, has been stigmatised as a mere inventor of licentious tales, because readers in general have only seized on those things in his works which were suited to their own taste, and have reflected their own grossness back upon the writer. So it has happened that the majority of critics having been most struck with the strong and decided expression in Hogarth, the extreme delicacy and subtle gradations of character in his pictures have almost entirely escaped them. In the first picture of the " Marriage a la mode " the three figures of the young nobleman, his intended bride, and her innamorato the lawyer, show how much Hogarth excelled in the power of giving soft and effeminate expression. They have, however, been less noticed than the other figures, which tell a plainer story and convey a more palpable moral. Nothing can be more finely managed than the differences of character in these delicate personages. The beau sits smiling

¹ On Hogarth's " Marriage A la Mode " appeared in *The Examiner* of 19th June, 1814.

at the looking-glass, with a reflected simper of self-admiration and a languishing inclination of the head, while the rest of his body is perked up on his high heels with a certain air of tiptoe elevation. He is the Narcissus of the reign of George I I. , whose powdered peruke, ruffles, gold lace, and patches divide his self-love unequally with his own person—the true Sir Plume of his day :

*" Of amber-lidded snuff-box justly vain,
And the nice conduct of a clouded cane."*

There is the same felicity in the figure and attitude of the bride courted by the lawyer. There is the utmost flexibility and yielding softness in her whole person, a listless languor and tremulous suspense in the expression of her face. It is the precise look and air which Pope has given to his favourite, Belinda, just at the moment of the " Rape of the Lock." The heightened glow, the forward intelligence, and loosened soul of love in the same face, in the assignation scene before the masquerade, form a fine and instructive contrast to the delicacy, timidity, and coy reluctance expressed in the first. The lawyer in both pictures is much the same—perhaps too much so ;. though even this unmoved, unaltered appearance may be designed as characteristic. In both cases he has " a person and a smooth dispose, framed to make woman false." He is full of that easy good-humour and easy good opinion of himself with which the sex are delighted. There is not a sharp angle in his face to obstruct his success or give a hint of doubt or difficulty. His whole aspect is round and rosy, lively and unmeaning, happy without the least expense of thought, careless and inviting, and conveys a perfect idea of the uninterrupted glide and pleasing murmur of the soft periods that flow from his tongue.

The expression of the bride in the morning scene is the most highly seasoned, and at the same time the most vulgar in the series. The figure, face, and attitude of the husband are inimitable. Hogarth has with great skill contrasted the pale countenance of the husband with the yellow-whitish

colour of the marble chimney-piece behind him in such a manner as to preserve the fleshy tone of the former. The airy splendour of the view of the inner room in this picture is probably not exceeded by any of the productions of the Flemish School.

The young girl in the third picture, who is represented as the victim of fashionable profligacy, is unquestionably one of the artist's *chefs-d'oeuvre*. The exquisite delicacy of the painting is only surpassed by the felicity and subtlety of the conception. Nothing can be more striking than the contrast between the extreme softness of her person and the hardened indifference of her character. The vacant stillness, the docility to vice, the premature suppression of youthful sensibility, the doll-like mechanism of the whole figure, which seems to have no other feeling but a sickly sense of pain—show the deepest insight into human nature, and into the effects of those refinements in depravity by which it has been good-naturedly asserted that "vice loses half its evil by losing all its grossness." The story of this picture is in some parts very obscure and enigmatical. It is certain that the nobleman is not looking straight forward to the quack, whom he seems to have been threatening with his cane, but that his eyes are turned up with an ironical leer of triumph to the procuress. The commanding attitude and size of this woman—the swelling circumference of her dress, spread out like a turkey-cock's feathers—the fierce, ungovernable, inveterate malignity of her countenance, which hardly needs the comment of the clasp-knife to explain her purpose—are all admirable in themselves, and still more so they are opposed to the mute insensibility, the as elegant negligence of the dress, and the childish figure of the girl who is supposed to be *her protegee*. As for the quack, there can be no doubt entertained about him. His face seems as if it were composed of salve, and his features exhibit" all the chaos and confusion of the most gross, ignorant, and impudent empiricism.

The gradations of ridiculous affectation in the music scene

are finely imagined and preserved. The preposterous, overstrained admiration of the lady of quality; the sentimental, insipid, patient delight of the man with his hair in papers and sipping his tea; the pert, smirking, conceited, half-distorted approbation of the figure next to him; the transition to the total insensibility of the round face in profile, and then to the wonder of the negro boy at the rapture of his mistress, form a perfect whole. The sanguine complexion and flame-coloured hair of the female virtuoso throw an additional light on the character. This is lost in the print. The continuing the red colour of the hair into the back of the chair has been pointed out as one of those instances of alliteration in colouring of which these pictures are everywhere full. The gross, bloated appearance of the Italian singer is well relieved by the hard features of the instrumental performer behind him, which might be carved of wood. The negro boy holding the chocolate, both in expression, colour, and execution, is a masterpiece. The gay, lively derision of the other negro boy, playing with the Actseon, is an ingenious contrast to the profound amazement of the first. Some account has already been given of the two lovers in this picture. It is curious to observe the infinite activity of mind which the artist displays on every occasion. An instance occurs in the present picture. He has so contrived the papers in the hair of the bride as to make them look almost like a wreath of half-blown flowers, while those which he has placed on the head of the musical amateur very much resemble a *cheval de frise* of horns, which adorn and fortify the lack-lustre expression and mild resignation of the face beneath.

The night scene is inferior to the rest of the series. The attitude of the husband, who is just killed, is one in which it would be impossible for him to stand or even to fall. It resembles the loose pasteboard figures they make for children. The characters in the last picture, in which the wife dies, are all masterly. We would particularly refer to the captious, petulant self-sufficiency of the apothecary,

whose face and figure are constructed on exact physiological principles, and to the fine example of passive obedience and non-resistance in the servant, whom he is taking to task, and whose coat of green-and-yellow livery is as long and melancholy as his face. The disconsolate look, the haggard eyes, the open mouth, the comb sticking in the hair, the broken, gapped teeth, which, as it were, hitch in an answer—everything about him denotes the utmost perplexity and dismay. The harmony and gradations of colour in this picture are uniformly preserved with the greatest nicety, and are well worthy the attention of the artist.

It has been observed that Hogarth's pictures are exceedingly unlike any other representations of the same kind of subjects—that they form a class, and have a character peculiar to themselves. It may be worth while to consider in what this general distinction consists.

In the first place, they are, in the strictest sense, *historical* pictures ; and if what Fielding says be true, that his novel of *Tom Jones* ought to be regarded as an epic prose poem, because it contained a regular development of fable, manners, character, and passion, the compositions of Hogarth will, in like manner, be found to have a higher claim to the title of epic pictures than many which have of late arrogated that denomination to themselves. When we say that Hogarth treated his subjects historically, we mean that his works represent the manners and humours of mankind in action, and their characters by varied expression. Everything in his pictures has life and motion in it. Not only does the business of the scene never stand still, but every feature and muscle is put into full play; the exact feeling of the moment is brought out and carried to its utmost height, and then instantly seized and stamped on the canvas for ever. The expression is always taken *en passant*, in a state of progress or change, and, as it were, at the salient point. Besides the excellence of each individual face, the reflection of the expression from face to face, the contrast and struggle of

particular motives and feelings in the different actors in the scene—as of anger, contempt, laughter, compassion—are conveyed in the happiest and most lively manner. His figures are not like the background on which they are painted : even the pictures on the wall have a peculiar look of their own. Again, with the rapidity, variety, and scope of history, Hogarth's heads have all the reality and correctness of portraits. He gives the extremes of character and expression, but he gives them with perfect truth and accuracy. This is, in fact, what distinguishes his compositions from all others of the same kind, that they are equally remote from caricature, and from mere still life. It of course happens in subjects from common life, that the painter can procure real models, and he can get them to sit as long as he pleases. Hence, in general, those attitudes and expressions have been chosen which could be assumed the longest, and in imitating which the artist, by taking pains and time, might produce almost as complete facsimiles as he could of a flower or a flower-pot, of a damask curtain or a china vase. The copy was as perfect and as uninteresting in the one case as in the other. On the contrary, subjects of drollery and ridicule, affording frequent examples of strange deformity and peculiarity of features, these have been eagerly seized by another class of artists, who, without subjecting themselves to the laborious drudgery of the Dutch School and their imitators, have produced our popular caricatures, by rudely copying or exaggerating the casual irregularities of the human countenance. Hogarth has equally avoided the faults of both these styles—the insipid tameness of the one, and the gross vulgarity of the other—so as to give to the productions of his pencil equal solidity and effect. For his faces go to the very verge of caricature, and yet never (we believe in any single instance) go beyond it: they take the very widest latitude, and yet we always see the links which bind them to nature : they bear all the marks and carry all the conviction of reality with them, as if we had seen the actual faces for the first time,

from the precision, consistency, and good sense with which the whole and every part is made out. They exhibit the most uncommon features with the most uncommon expressions, but which are yet as familiar and intelligible as possible, because with all the boldness they have all the truth of nature. Hogarth has left behind him as many of these memorable faces, in their memorable moments, as perhaps most of us remember in the course of our lives, and has thus doubled the quantity of our observation.

We have attempted to point out the fund of observation, physical and moral, contained in one set of Hogarth's pictures, the "Marriage a la mode." The rest would furnish as many topics to descant upon, were the patience of the reader as inexhaustible as the painter's invention. But as this is not the case, we shall content ourselves with barely referring to some of those figures in the other pictures which appear the most striking, and which we see not only while we are looking at them, but which we have before us at all other times. For instance, who having seen can easily forget that exquisite frost-piece of religion and morality, and antiquated prude in the morning scene? or that striking commentary on *the good old times*, the little wretched appendage of a footboy, who crawls half famished and half frozen behind her? The French man and woman in the "Noon" are the perfection of flighty affectation and studied grimace; the amiable *fraternisation* of the two old women saluting each other is not enough to be admired; and in the little master, in the same national group, we see the early promise and personification of that eternal principle of wondrous self-complacency, proof against all circumstances, and which makes the French the only people who are vain even of being cuckolded and being conquered. Or shall we prefer to this the outrageous distress and unmitigated terrors of the boy, who has dropped his dish of meat, and who seems red all over with shame and vexation, and bursting with the noise he makes? Or what can be better than the good housewifery of the girl underneath, who is

devouring the lucky fragments ?—or than the plump, ripe, florid, luscious look of the servant-wench, embraced by a greasy rascal of an Othello, with her pie-dish tottering like her virtue, and with the most precious parts of its contents running over ? Just—no, not quite—as good is the joke of the woman overhead, who, having quarrelled with her husband, is throwing their Sunday's dinner out of the window, to complete this chapter of accidents of baked dishes. The husband in the evening scene is certainly as meek as any recorded in history; but we cannot say that we admire this picture, or the night scene after it. But then, in the "Taste in High Life," there is that inimitable pair, differing only in sex, congratulating and delighting one another by "all the mutually reflected charities" of folly and affectation—with the young lady coloured like a rose, dandling her little, black, pug-faced, white-teethed, chuckling favourite, and with the portrait of Monsieur Des Noyers in the background, dancing in a grand ballet, surrounded by butterflies. And again, in "The Election Dinner," is the immortal cobbler, surrounded by his peers, who, "frequent and full"—

"In loud recess and brawling conclave sit"—

the Jew in the second picture, a very Jew in grain—innumerable fine sketches of heads in the "Polling for Votes," of which the nobleman overlooking the caricaturist is the best; and then the irresistible, tumultuous display of broad humour in the "Chairing the Member," which is, perhaps, of all Hogarth's pictures, the most full of laughable incidents and situations—the yellow, rusty-faced thresher, with his swinging flail, breaking the head of one of the chairmen, and his redoubted antagonist, the sailor, with his oak-stick, and stumping wooden leg, a supplemental cudgel—the persevering ecstasy of the hobbling blind fiddler, who, in the fray, appears to have been trod upon by the artificial excrescence of the honest ter—Monsieur the monkey, with piteous aspect, speculating the impending disaster of the

triumphant candidate, and his brother, Bruin, appropriating the paunch—the precipitous flight of the pigs, souse over head into the water, the fine lady fainting, with vermilion lips, and the two chimney-sweepers, satirical young rogues 1 We had almost forgot " The Politician," who is burning a hole through his hat with a candle in reading the newspaper; and the chickens, in the " March to Finchley," wandering in search of their lost dam, which is found in the pocket of the sergeant. Of the pictures in the " Rake's Progress " we shall not here say anything, because we think them, on the whole, inferior to the prints, and because they have already been criticised by a writer, to whom we could add nothing, in a paper which ought to be read by every lover of Hogarth and of English genius.¹

¹ See an " Essay on the Genius of Hogarth," by C. Lamb, published in a periodical work called the *deflector*.

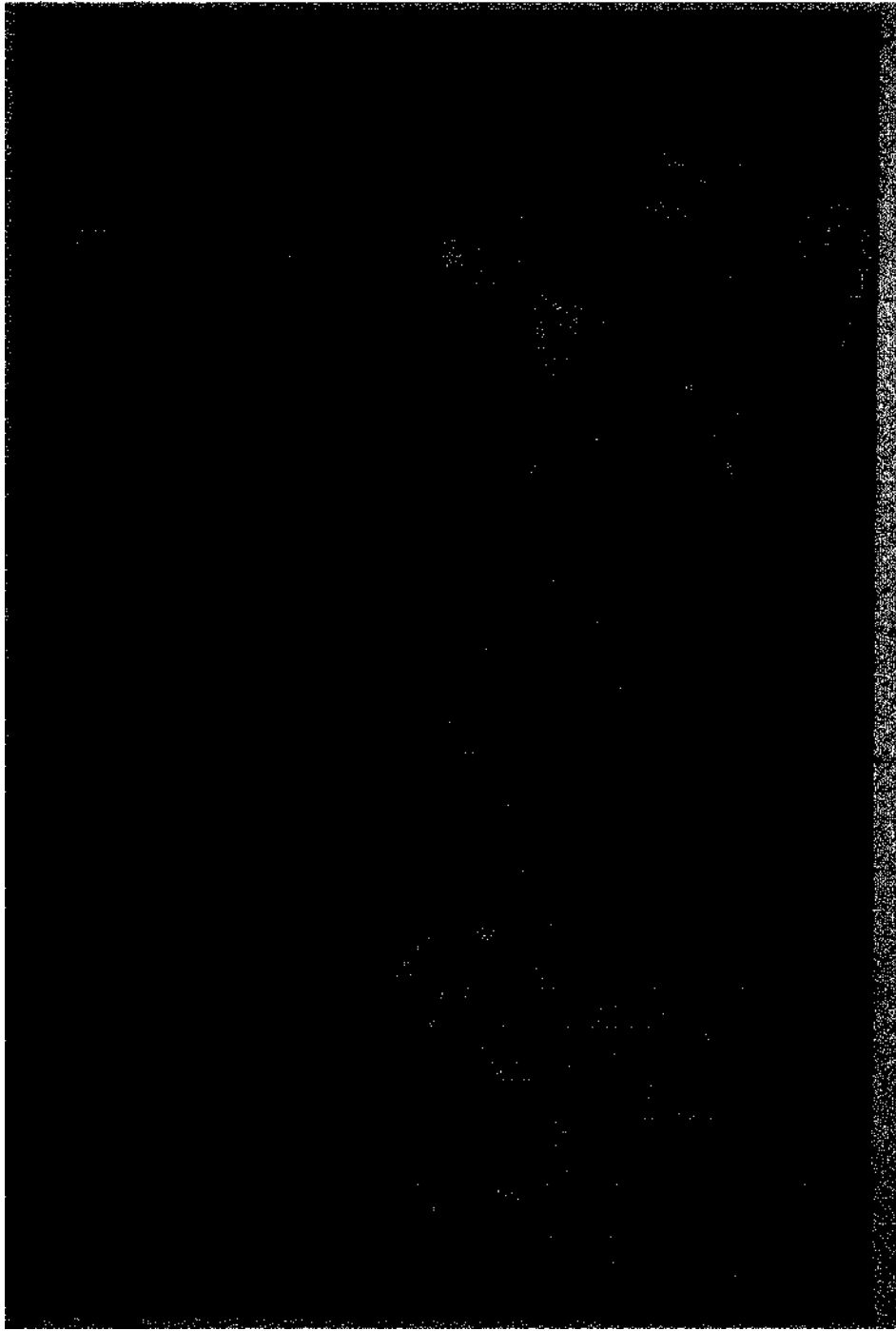
MARRIAGE A LA MODE

by

WILLIAM HOGARTH

- I. THE CONTRACT
2. BREAKFAST SCENE
3. SCENE WITH THE QUACK
4. TOILET SCENE
5. DEATH OF THE EARL
6. DEATH OF THE COUNTESS

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MARRIAGE A. LA MODE 1. The Contract
From the original by Hogarth in the 'Tate Gallery.

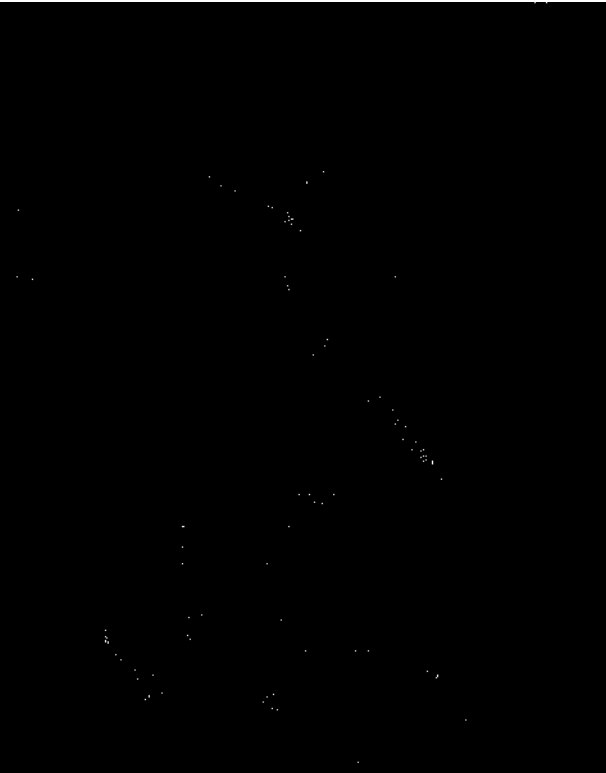


Figure 1. Shipping lanes and vessel movements in the North Atlantic Ocean.

the vessel's position, the vessel's speed, and the vessel's heading. The data is collected from a variety of sources, including satellite tracking, radar, and AIS (Automatic Identification System).

The data is then processed and analyzed to identify patterns and trends in vessel movements. This information is used to develop shipping lanes and to optimize shipping routes.

The data is also used to monitor and manage shipping traffic. This information is used to identify potential collisions and to coordinate vessel movements.

The data is also used to develop and improve shipping regulations. This information is used to identify areas where regulations need to be updated or strengthened.

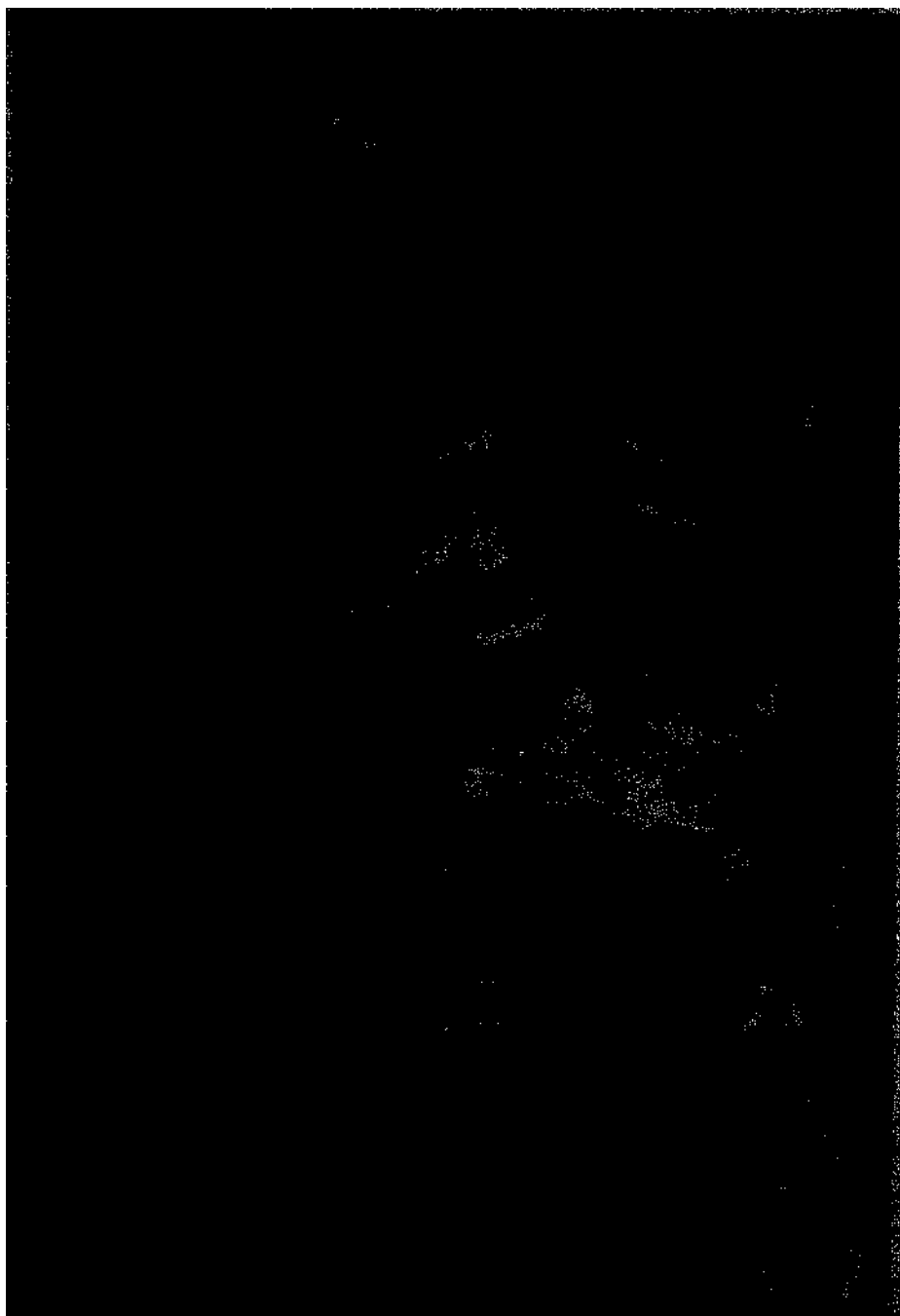
The data is also used to develop and improve shipping infrastructure. This information is used to identify areas where infrastructure needs to be upgraded or expanded.

The data is also used to develop and improve shipping safety. This information is used to identify areas where safety measures need to be improved or implemented.

The data is also used to develop and improve shipping security. This information is used to identify areas where security measures need to be improved or implemented.

The data is also used to develop and improve shipping efficiency. This information is used to identify areas where efficiency measures need to be improved or implemented.

The data is also used to develop and improve shipping sustainability. This information is used to identify areas where sustainability measures need to be improved or implemented.



A
M

On Depth and Superficiality¹

I WISH to make this Essay a sort of study of the meaning of several words, which have at different times a good deal puzzled me. Among these are the words, *wicked*, *false*, and *true*, as applied to feeling ; and lastly, *depth* and *shallowness*. It may amuse the reader to see the way in which I work out some of my conclusions underground, before throwing them up on the surface.

A great but useless thinker² once asked me, if I had ever known a child of a naturally wicked disposition ? and I answered, " Yes, that there was one in the house with me that cried from morning to night, *for spite*," I was laughed at for this answer, but still I do not repent it. It appeared to me that this child took a delight in tormenting itself and others ; that the love of tyrannising over others and subjecting them to its caprices was a full compensation for the beating it received, that the screams it uttered soothed its peevish, turbulent spirit, and that it had a positive pleasure in pain from the sense of power accompanying it. *His principiis nascuntur tyranni, his carnifex animus*. I was supposed to magnify and overrate the symptoms of the disease, and to make a childish humour into a bugbear ; but, indeed, I have no other idea of what is commonly understood by wickedness than that perversion of the will or love of mischief for its own sake, which constantly displays itself (though in trifles and on a ludicrously small scale) in early childhood. I have often been reproached with extravagance for considering things only in their abstract principles, and with heat and ill-temper, for getting into a passion abou 'a what no ways concerned me. If anyone wishes to and on

¹on Depth and Superficiality appeared in *The Plain Speaker*. by huge

²Cokrlidge-W. C. H.

indeed,

be

quite calm, they may cheat me in a bargain, or tread upon my toes; but a truth repelled, a sophism repeated, totally disconcerts me, and I lose all patience. I am not, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, *a good-natured man*; that is, many things annoy me besides what interferes with my own ease and interest. I hate a lie; a piece of injustice wounds me to the quick, though nothing but the report of it reach me. Therefore I have made many enemies and few friends; for the public know nothing of well-wishers, and keep a wary eye on those that would reform them. Coleridge used to complain of my irascibility in this respect, and not without reason. Would that he had possessed a little of my tenaciousness and jealousy of temper; and then, with his eloquence to paint the wrong, and acuteness to detect it, his country and the cause of liberty might not have fallen without a struggle! The craniologists give me *the organ of local memory*, of which faculty I have not a particle, though they may say that my frequent allusions to conversations that occurred many years ago prove the contrary. I once spent a whole evening with Dr. Spurzheim, and I utterly forget all that passed, except that the Doctor *waltzed* before we parted! The only faculty I do possess is that of a certain morbid interest in things, which makes me equally remember or anticipate by nervous analogy whatever touches it; and for this our nostrum-mongers have no specific organ, so that I am quite left out of their system. No wonder that I should pick a quarrel with it! It vexes me beyond all bearing to see children kill flies for sport; for the principle is the same as in the most deliberate and profligate acts of cruelty they can afterwards exercise upon their fellow-creatures. And yet I let moths burn themselves to death in a candle, for it makes me mad; and I say it is in vain to prevent fools from rushing upon destruction. The author
^cthe *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (who sees farther into such
 s than most people) could not understand why I
 bring a charge of *wickedness* against an infant before
 Deak, merely for squalling and straining its lungs

a little. If the child had been in pain or in fear, I should have said nothing, but it cried only to vent its passion and alarm the house, and I saw in its frantic screams and gestures that great baby, the world, tumbling about in its swaddling-clothes, and tormenting itself and others for the last six thousand years ! The plea of ignorance, of folly, of grossness, or selfishness makes nothing either way: it is the downright love of pain and mischief for the interest it excites, and the scope it gives to an abandoned will, that is the root of all the evil, and the original sin of human nature. There is a love of power in the mind independent of the love of good, and this love of power, when it comes to be opposed to the spirit of good, and is leagued with the spirit of evil to commit it with greediness, is wickedness. I know of no other definition of the term. A person who does not foresee consequences is a fool: he who cheats others to serve himself is a knave : he who is immersed in sensual pleasure is a brute; but he alone, who has a pleasure in injuring another, or in debasing himself, that is, who does a thing with a particular relish because he ought not, is properly wicked. This character implies the fiend at the bottom of it; and is mixed up pretty plentifully (according to my philosophy) in the untoward composition of human nature. It is this craving after what is prohibited, and the force of contrast adding its zest to the violations of reason and propriety, that accounts for the excesses of pride, of cruelty, and lust; and at the same time frets and vexes the surface of life with petty evils, and plants a canker in the bosom of our daily enjoyments. Take away the enormities dictated by the wanton and pampered pride of human will, glutting itself with the sacrifice of the welfare of others, or with the desecration of its own best feelings, and also the endless bickerings, heart-burnings, and disappointments produced by the spirit of contradiction on a smaller scale, and the life of man would " spin round on its soft axle," unharmed and free, neither appalled by huge crimes nor infested by insect follies. It might, indeed, be

monotonous and insipid; but it is the hankering after mischievous and violent excitement that leads to this result, that causes that indifference to good and proneness to evil, which is the very thing complained of. The griefs we suffer are for the most part of our own seeking and making; or we incur or inflict them, not to avert other impending evils, but to drive off *ennui*. There must be a spice of mischief and wilfulness thrown into the cup of our existence to give it its sharp taste and sparkling colour. I shall not go into a formal argument on this subject, for fear" of being tedious nor endeavour to enforce it by extreme cases, for fear of being disgusting; but shall content myself with some desultory and familiar illustrations of it.

I laugh at those who deny that we ever wantonly or unnecessarily inflict pain on others, when I see how fond we are of ingeniously tormenting ourselves. What is sullenness in children or grown people but revenge against ourselves? We had rather be the victims of this absurd and headstrong feeling, than give up an inveterate purpose, retract an error, or relax from the intensity of our will, whatever it may cost us. A surly man is his own enemy, and knowingly sacrifices his interest to his ill-humour, because he would at any time rather disoblige you than serve himself, as I believe I have already shewn in another place. The reason is, he has a natural aversion to everything agreeable or happy—he turns with disgust from every such feelings as not according with the severe tone of his mind—and it is in excluding all interchange of friendly affections or kind offices that the ruling bias and the chief satisfaction of his life consist. Is not every country town supplied with its scolds and scandalmongers? The first cannot cease from plaguing themselves and everybody about them with their senseless clamour, because the rage of words has become by habit and indulgence a thirst, a fever on their parched tongue; and the others continue to make enemies by some smart hit or sly insinuation at every third word they speak, because with every new enemy there is an additional sense

of power. One man will sooner part with his friend than his joke, because the stimulus of saying a good thing is irritated, instead of being repressed, by the fear of giving offence, and by the imprudence or unfairness of the remark. Malice often takes the garb of truth. We find a set of persons who pride themselves on being *plain-spoken people*, that is, who blurt out everything disagreeable to your face, by way of wounding your feelings and relieving their own, and this they call honesty. Even among philosophers we may have noticed those who are not contented to inform the understandings of their readers, unless they can shock their prejudices ; and among poets those who tamper with the rotten parts of their subject, adding to their fancies pretensions by trampling on the sense of shame. There are rigid reasoners who will not be turned aside from following up a logical argument by any regard to consequences, or the " compunctious visitings of nature " (such is their love of truth)-I never knew one of these scrupulous and hard-mouthed logicians who would not falsify the facts and distort the inference in order to arrive at a distressing and repulsive conclusion. Such is the fascination of what releases our own will from thralldom, and compels that of others reluctantly to submit to terms of our dictating ! We feel our own power, and disregard their weakness and effeminacy with prodigious self-complacency. Lord Give, when a boy, saw a butcher passing with a calf in a cart. A companion whom he had with him said, " I should not like to be that butcher! "—" I should not like to be that calf," replied the future Governor of India, laughing at all sympathy but that with his own sufferings. The " wicked " Lord Lyttleton (as he was called) dreamt a little before his death that he was confined in a huge subterranean vault (the inside of this round globe) where as far as eye could see, he could discern no living object, till at last he saw a female figure coming towards him, and who should it turn out to be, but Mother Brownrigg, whom of all people he most hated! That was the very reason why he dreamt of her.

*" You ask her crime : she whipped two 'prentices to death,
And hid them in the coal-hole"*

Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin.

I do not know that hers is exactly a case in point; but I conceive that in the well-known catastrophe here alluded to, words led to blows, bad usage brought on worse from mere irritation and opposition, and that, probably, even remorse and pity urged on to aggravated acts of cruelty and oppression, as the only means of drowning reflection on the past in the fury of present passion. I believe that remorse for past offences has sometimes made the greatest criminals, as the being unable to appease a wounded conscience renders men desperate; and if I hear a person express great impatience and uneasiness at some error that he is liable to, I am tolerably sure that the conflict will end in a repetition of the offence. If a man who got drunk over-night, repents bitterly next morning, he will *get* drunk again at night; for iboth in his repentance and his self-gratification he is led jaway by the feeling of the moment. But this is not wickedness, but despondency and want of strength of mind : and I only attribute wickedness to those who carry their wills in their hands, and who wantonly and deliberately suffer them to tyrannize over conscience, reason, and humanity, and who even draw an additional triumph from this degrading conquest. The wars, persecutions, and bloodshed occasioned by religion have generally turned on the most trifling differences in forms and ceremonies; which shows that it was not the vital interests of the questions that were at stake, but that these were made a handle and pretext to exercise cruelty and tyranny on the score of the most trivial and doubtful points of faith. There seems to be a love of absurdity and falsehood as Well as mischief in the human mind, and the most ridiculous as well as barbarous superstitions have on this account been the most acceptable to it. A lie is welcome to it, for it is, as it were, its own offspring ; and *it* likes to believe, as well as act, whatever it

pleases, and in the pure spirit of contradiction. The old idolatry took vast hold of the earliest ages; for to believe that a painted stone or wood was a God (in the teeth of the fact) was a fine exercise of the imagination;' and modern fanaticism thrives in proportion to the quantity of contradictions and nonsense it pours down the throats of the gaping multitude, and the jargon and mysticism it offers to their wonder and credulity. *Credo quia impossibik est*, is the standing motto of bigotry and superstition; that is, I believe, because to do so is a favourite act of the will, and to do so in defiance of common sense and reason enhances the pleasure and the merit (tenfold) of this indulgence of blind faith and headstrong imagination. Methodism, in particular, which at once absolves the understanding from the rules of reasoning, and the conscience from the restraints of morality, throwing the whole responsibility upon a vicarious righteousness and an abstract belief, must, besides its rant, its vulgarity, and its amatory style, have a double charm both for saints and sinners. I have also observed a sort of *fatuity*, an indolence or indocility of the will to circumstances, which I think has a considerable share in the common affairs of life. I would willingly compound for all the mischiefs that are done me voluntarily, if I could escape those which are done me without any motive at all, or even with the best intentions. For instance, if I go to a distance where I am anxious to receive an answer to my letters, I am sure to be kept in suspense. My friends are aware of this, as also, of my impatience and irritability; and they cannot prevail on themselves to put an end to this dramatic situation of the parties. There is pleasure (an innocent and well-meaning one) in keeping a friend in suspense, in not putting one's-self out of one's way for his ill humours and apprehensions (though one would not for the world do him a serious injury), as there is in dangling the finny prey at the end of a hook, or in twirling round a cock-chaffer after sticking a pin through him at the end of a string—there is no malice in the case, no deliberate cruelty, but the buzzing

noise and the secret consciousness of superiority to any annoyance or inconvenience ourselves lull the mind into a delightful state of listless torpor and indifference. If a letter requires an immediate answer, send it by a private hand to save postage. If our messenger falls sick or breaks a leg and begs us to forward it by some other means, return it him again, and insist on its being conveyed according to its first destination. His cure may be slow but sure. In the meantime our friend can wait. We have done our duty in writing the letter, and are in no hurry to *receive* it! We know the contents, and they are matters of perfect indifference to us. No harm is meant by all this, but a great deal of mischief may accrue. There is, in short, a sluggishness and untractableness about the will, that does not easily put itself in the situation of others, and that consults its own bias best by giving itself no trouble about them. Human life is so far a game of cross-purposes. If we wish a thing to be kept secret, it is sure to transpire : if we wish it to be known, not a syllable is breathed about it. This is not meant; but it happens so from mere simplicity and thoughtlessness. No one has ever yet seen through all the intricate folds and delicate involutions of our self-love, which is wrapped up in a set of smooth flimsy pretexts like some precious jewel in covers of silver paper.

I proceed to say something of the words *false* and *true*, as applied to moral feelings. It may be argued that this is a distinction without a difference; for that as feelings only exist by being felt, wherever, and in so far as they exist, they must be true, and that there can be no falsehood or deception in the question. The distinction between true and false pleasure, between real and seeming good, would be thus done away with; for the reality and the appearance are here the same. And this would be the case if our sensations were simple and detached, and one had no influence on another. But it is in their secret and close dependence one on another, that **the** distinction **here** spoken of takes its rise. That then is *true* or *pure* pleasure that has no alloy or drawback in

some other consideration; that is free from remorse and alarm; and that will bear the soberest reflection; because there is nothing that, upon examination, can be found acting indirectly to check and throw a damp upon it. On the other hand, we justly call those pleasures *false* and *hollow*, not merely which are momentary and ready to elude our grasp, but which, even at the time, are accompanied with such a consciousness of other circumstances as must embitter and undermine them. For instance, putting morality quite out of the question; is there not an undeniable and wide difference between the gaiety and animal spirits of one who indulges in a drunken debauch to celebrate some unexpected stroke of good fortune, and his who does the same thing to drown care for the loss of all he is worth? The outward objects, the immediate and more obvious sensations are, perhaps, very much the same in the latter case as in the former,—the rich viands, the sparkling wines, the social merriment, the wit, the loud laughter, and the maddening brain, but the still small voice is wanting, there is a reflection at bottom, that, however stifled and kept down, poisons and spoils all, even by the violent effort to keep it from intruding; the mirth in the one case is forced, in the other is natural; the one reveller is (we all know by experience) a gay, laughing wretch, the other a happy man. I profess to speak of human nature as I find it; and the circumstance that any distinction I can make may be favourable to the theories of virtue, will not prevent me from setting it down, from the fear of being charged with cant and prejudice. Even in a case less palpable than the one supposed, where "some sweet oblivious antidote" has been applied to the mind, and it is lulled to temporary forgetfulness of its immediate cause of sorrow, does it therefore cease to gnaw the heart by stealth; are no traces of it left in the care-worn brow or face; is the state of mind the same as it was; or is there the same buoyancy, freedom, and erectness of spirit as in more prosperous circumstances? On the contrary, it is torpid, vexed, and sad, enfeebled or

harassed, and weighed down by the corroding pressure of care, whether it thinks of it or not. The pulse beats slow and languid, the eye is dead; no object strikes us with the same alacrity; the avenues to joy or content are shut; and life becomes a burthen and a perplexing mystery. Even in sleep, we are haunted with the broken images of distress or the mockery of bliss, and we in vain try to still the idle tumult of the heart. The constantly tampering with the truth, the putting off the day of reckoning, the fear of looking our situation in the face, gives the mind a wandering and unsettled turn, makes our waking thoughts a troubled dream, or sometimes ends in madness, without any violent paroxysm, without any severe pang, without any *overt act*, but from that silent operation of the mind which preys internally upon itself, and works the decay of its powers the more fatally, because we dare not give it open and avowed scope. Do we not, in case of any untoward accident or event, know, when we wake in the morning, that something is the matter, before we recollect what it is? The mind no more recovers its confidence and serenity after a staggering blow, than the haggard cheek and sleepless eye their colour and vivacity, because we do not see them in the glass. Is it to be supposed that there is not a firm and healthy tone of the mind as well as of the body; or that when this has been deranged, we do not feel pain, lassitude, and fretful impatience, though the local cause or impression may have been withdrawn? Is the state of the mind or of the nervous system, and its disposition or indisposition to receive certain impressions from the remains of others still vibrating on it, nothing? Shall we say that the laugh of a madman is sincere; or that the wit we utter in our dreams is sterling? We often feel uneasy at something, without being able to tell why, or attribute it to a wrong cause. Our unconscious impressions necessarily give a colour to, and re-act upon our conscious ones; and it is only when these two sets of feeling are in accord, that our pleasures are true and sincere; where there is a discordance and misunderstanding

in this respect, they are said (not absurdly as is pretended) to be false and hollow. There is then a serenity of virtue, a peace of conscience, a confidence in success, and a pride of intellect, which subsist and are a strong source of satisfaction independently of outward and immediate objects, as the general health of the body gives a glow and animation to the whole frame, notwithstanding a scratch we may have received in our little finger, and certainly very different from a state of sickness and infirmity. The difficulty is not so much in supposing one mental cause or phenomenon to be affected and imperceptibly moulded by another, as in setting limits to the everlasting ramifications of our impressions, and in defining the obscure and intricate ways in which they communicate together. Suppose a man to labour under an habitual indigestion. Does it not oppress the very sun in the sky, beat down all his powers of enjoyment, and imprison all his faculties in a living tomb? Yet he perhaps long laboured under this disease, and felt its withering effects, before he was aware of the cause. It was not the less real on this account; nor did it interfere the less with the sincerity of his other pleasures, tarnish the face of nature, and throw a gloom over everything. "He was hurt, and knew it not." Let the pressure be removed, and he breathes freely again; his spirits run with a livelier current, and he greets nature with smiles; yet the change is in him, not in her. Do we not pass the same scenery that we have visited but a little before, and wonder that no object appears the same, because we have some secret cause of dissatisfaction? Let any one feel the force of disappointed affection, and he may forget and scorn his error, laugh and be gay to all outward appearance, but the heart is not the less seared and blighted ever after. The splendid banquet does not supply the loss of appetite, nor the spotless ermine cure the itching palm, nor gold nor jewels redeem a lost name, nor pleasure fill up the void of affection, nor passion stifle conscience. Moralists and divines say true, when they talk of the "unquenchable fire, and the worm that dies not." The human soul is not an

invention of priests, whatever fables they have engrafted on it; nor is there an end of all our natural sentiments because French philosophers have not been able to account for them! Hume, I think, somewhere contends that all satisfactions are equal,¹ because the cup can be no more than full. But surely, though this is the case, one cup holds more than another. As to mere negative satisfaction, the argument may be true. But as to positive satisfaction or enjoyment, I see no more how this must be equal, than how the heat of a furnace must in all cases be equally intense. Thus, for instance, there are many things with which we are contented, so as not to feel an uneasy desire after more, but yet we have a much higher relish of others. We may eat a mutton-chop without complaining, though we should consider a haunch of venison as a greater luxury if we had it. Again, in travelling abroad, the mind acquires a restless and vagabond habit. There is more of hurry and novelty, but less of sincerity and certainty in our pursuits than at home. We snatch hasty glances of a great variety of things, but want some central point of view. After making the grand tour, and seeing the finest sights in the world, we are glad to come back at last to our native place and our own fireside. Our associations with it are the most steadfast and habitual, we there feel most at home and at our ease, we have a resting place for the sole of our foot, the flutter of hope, anxiety, and disappointment is at an end, and whatever our satisfactions may be, we feel most confidence in them, and have the strongest conviction of their truth and reality. There is then a true and a false or spurious in sentiment as well as in reasoning, and I hope the train of thought I have here gone into may serve in some respects as a clue to explain it.

The hardest question remains behind. What is *depth* and what is *superficiality*? It is easy to answer that the one is what is obvious, familiar, and lies on the surface, and that the other is recondite and hid at the bottom of a subject.

¹ See also Search's (i.e. Abraham Tucker's) *Light of Nature Pursued*, in which the same sophism is insisted on.

The difficulty recurs—What is meant by lying on the surface, or being concealed below it, in moral and metaphysical questions ? Let us try for an analogy. *Depth* consists then in tracing any number of particular effects to a general principle, or in distinguishing an unknown cause from the individual and varying circumstances with which it is implicated, and under which it lurks unsuspected. It is in fact resolving the concrete into the abstract. Now this is a task of difficulty, not only because the abstract naturally merges in the concrete, and we do not well know how to set about separating what is thus jumbled or cemented together in a single object, and presented under a common aspect; but being scattered over a larger surface, and collected from a number of undefined sources, there must be a strong feeling of its weight and pressure, in order to dislocate it from the object and bind it into a principle. The impression of an abstract principle is faint and doubtful in each individual instance ; it becomes powerful and certain only by the repetition of the experiment, and by adding the last results to our first hazardous conjectures. We thus gain a distinct hold or clue to the demonstration, when a number of vague and imperfect reminiscences are united and drawn out together, by tenaciousness of memory and conscious feeling, in one continued act. So that the depth of the understanding or reasoning in such cases may be explained to mean, that there is a pile of *implicit* distinctions analyzed from a great variety of facts and observations, each supporting the other, and that the mind, instead of being led away by the last or first object or detached view of the subject that occurs, connects all these into a whole from the top to the bottom, and by its intimate sympathy with the most obscure and random impressions that tend to the same result, evolves a principle of abstract truth. Two circumstances are combined in a particular object to produce a given effect: how shall I know which is the true cause, but by finding it in another instance ? But the same effect is produced in a third object, which is without the concomitant

circumstance of the first or second case. I must then look out for some other latent cause in the rabble of contradictory pretensions huddled together, which I had not noticed before, and to which I am eventually led by finding a necessity for it. But if my memory fails me, or I do not seize on the true character of different feelings, I shall make little progress, or be quite thrown out in my reckoning. Insomuch that according to the general diffusion of any element of thought or feeling, and its floating through the mixed mass of human affairs, do we stand in need of a greater quantity of that refined experience I have spoken of, and of a quicker and firmer tact in connecting or distinguishing its results. However, I must make a reservation here. Both knowledge and sagacity are required, but sagacity abridges and anticipates the labour of knowledge, and sometimes jumps instinctively at a conclusion; that is, the strength or fineness of the feeling, by association or analogy, sooner elicits the recollection of a previous and forgotten one in different circumstances, and the two together, by a sort of internal evidence and collective force, stamp any proposed solution with the character of truth or falsehood. Original strength of impression is often (in usual questions at least) a substitute for accumulated weight of experience ; and intensity of feeling is so far synonymous with depth of understanding. It is that which here gives us a contentious and palpable consciousness of whatever affects it in the smallest or remotest manner, and leaves to us the hidden springs of thought and action through our sensibility and jealousy of whatever touches them.—To give illustration or two of this very abstruse subject.

Elegance is a word that means something different from ease, grace, beauty, dignity; yet it is akin to all these; but it seems more particularly to imply a sparkling brilliancy of effect with finish and precision. We do not apply the term to great things ; we should not call an epic poem or a head of Jupiter *elegant*, but we speak of an elegant copy of verses, an elegant headdress, an elegant fan, an elegant diamond

brooch, or bunch of flowers. In all these cases (and others where the same epithet is used) there is something little and comparatively trifling in the objects and the interest they inspire. So far I deal chiefly in examples, conjectures, and negatives. But this is far from a definition. I think I know what personal beauty is, because I can say in one word what I mean by it, viz., *harmony of form*; and this idea seems to me to answer to all the cases to which the term personal beauty is ever applied. Let us see if we cannot come to something equally definitive with respect to the other phrase. Sparkling effect, finish, and precision are characteristic, as I think, of elegance, but as yet I see no reason why they should be so, any more than why blue, red, and yellow should form the colours of the rainbow. I want a common idea as a link to connect them, or to serve as a substratum for the others. Now' suppose I say that elegance is beauty, or at least *the pleasurable* in little things : we then have a ground to rest upon at once. For elegance being beauty or pleasure in little or slight impressions, precision, finish, and, polished smoothness follow from this definition as matters of course. In other words, for a thing that is little to be beautiful, or at any rate to please,¹ it must have precision of outline, which in larger masses and gigantic forms is not so indispensable. In what is small, the parts must be finished, or they will offend. Lastly, in what is momentary and evanescent, as in dress, fashions, etc., there must be a glossy and sparkling effect, for brilliancy is the only virtue of novelty. That is to say, by getting the primary conditions or essential qualities of elegance in all circumstances whatever, we see how these branch off into minor divisions, in relation to form, details, colour, surface, etc., and rise from a common ground of abstraction into all the variety of consequences and examples. The Hercules is not elegant; the Venus is simply beautiful. The French, whose ideas of beauty or grandeur never amount to more than an elegance,

¹ I have said before that this is a study, not a perfect demonstration. I am no merchant in metaphysics.

have no relish for Rubens, nor will they understand this definition.

When Sir Isaac Newton saw the apple fall, it was a very simple and common observation, but it suggested to his mind the law that holds the universe together. What then was the process in this case? In general, when we see anything fall, we have the idea of a particular direction, of *up* and *down* associated with the motion by invariable and every day's experience. The earth is always (as we conceive) under our feet, and the sky above our heads, so that according to this local and habitual feeling, all heavy bodies must everlastingly fall in the same direction downwards, or parallel to the upright position of our bodies. Sir Isaac Newton by a bare effort of abstraction, or by a grasp of mind comprehending all the possible relations of things, got rid of this prejudice, turned the world as it were on its back, and saw the apple fall not *downwards*, but simply *towards* the earth, so that it would fall *upwards* on the same principle, if the earth were above it, or towards it at any rate in whatever direction it lay. This highly abstracted view of the case answered to all the phenomena of nature, and no other did; and this view he arrived at by a vast power of comprehension, retaining and reducing the contradictory phenomena of the universe under one law, and counteracting and banishing from his mind that almost invincible and instinctive association of *up* and *down* as it relates to the position of our own bodies and the gravitation of all others to the earth in the same direction. From a circumscribed and partial view we make that, which is general, particular: the great mathematician here spoken of, 'from a wide and comprehensive one, made it general again, or he perceived the essential condition or cause of a general effect, and that which acts indispensably in all circumstances, separate from other accidental and arbitrary ones.

I lately heard an anecdote related of an American lady (one of two sisters) who married young and well, and had

several children; her sister, however, was married soon after herself to a richer husband, and had a larger (if not finer) family, and after passing several years of constant repining and wretchedness, she died at length of pure envy. The circumstances are well known, and generally talked of. Some one said on hearing this, that it was a thing that could only happen in America ; that it was a trait of the republican character and institutions, where alone the principle of mutual jealousy, having no high and distant objects to fix upon, and divert it from immediate and private mortifications, seized upon the happiness or outward advantages even of the nearest connexions as its natural food, and having them constantly before its eyes, gnawed itself to death upon them. I assented to this remark, and I confess it struck me as showing a deep insight into human nature. Here was a sister envying a sister, and that not for objects that provoke strong passion, but for common and contentional advantages, till it ends in her death. They were also represented as good and respectable people. How then is this extraordinary development of an ordinary human frailty accounted for ? From the peculiar circumstances ? These were the country and state of society. It was in America that it happened. The democratic level, the flatness of imagery, the absence of those towering and artificial heights that in old and monarchical states act as conductors to attract and carry off the splenetic humours and rancorous hostilities of a whole people, and to make common and petty advantages sink into perfect insignificance, were full in the mind of the person who suggested the solution; and in this dearth of every other mark or vent for it, it was felt intuitively, that the natural spirit of envy and discontent would fasten upon those that were, next to it, and whose advantages, there being no great difference in point of elevation, would gall in proportion to their proximity and repeated recurrence. The remote and exalted advantages of birth and station in countries where the social fabric is constructed of lofty and unequal materials, necessarily carry

the mind out of its immediate and domestic circle ; whereas, take away those objects of imaginary spleen and moody speculation, and they leave, as the inevitable alternative, the envy and hatred of our friends and neighbours at every advantage we possess, as so many eye-sores and stumbling-blocks in their way, where these selfish principles have not been curbed or given way altogether to charity and benevolence. The fact, as stated in itself, is an anomaly: as thus explained, by combining it-with a general state of feeling in a country, it seems to point out a great principle in society. Now this solution would have been attained but for the deep impression which the operation of certain general causes of moral character had recently made, and the quickness with which the consequences of its removal were felt. I might give other instances, but these will be sufficient to explain the argument, or set others upon elucidating it more clearly.

Acuteness is depth, or sagacity in connecting individual effects with individual causes, or *vice versa*, as in stratagems of war, policy, and a knowledge of character and the world. Comprehension is the power of combining a vast number of particulars in some one view, as in mechanics, or the game of chess, but without referring them to any abstract or general principle. A *common-place* differs from an abstract discourse in this, that it is trite and vague, instead of being new and profound. It is a common-place at present to say that heavy bodies fall by attraction. It would always have been one to say that this falling is the effect of a law of nature, or the will of God. This is assigning a general but not adequate cause.

The depth of passion is where it takes hold of circumstances too remote or indifferent for notice from the force of association or analogy, and turns the current of other passions by its own. Dramatic power in the depth of the knowledge of the human heart, is chiefly shewn in tracing this effect. For instance, the fondness displayed by a mistress for a lover (as she is about to desert him for a rival) is not

mere hypocrisy or art to deceive him, but nature, or the reaction of her pity, or parting tenderness towards a person she is about to injure, but does not absolutely hate. Shakespeare is the only dramatic author who has laid open this reaction or involution of the passions in a manner worth speaking of. The rest are common-place declaimers, and may be very fine poets, but not deep philosophers. There is a depth even in superficiality, that is, the affections cling round obvious and familiar objects, not recondite and remote ones; and the intense continuity of feeling thus obtained, forms the depth of sentiment. It is that that redeems poetry and romance from the charge of superficiality. The habitual impressions of things are, as to feeling, the most refined ones. The painter also in his mind's eye penetrates beyond the surface or husk of the object, and sees into a labyrinth of forms, an abyss of colour. My head has grown giddy in following the windings of the drawing in Raphael, and I have gazed on the breadth of Titian, where infinite imperceptible gradations were blended in a common mass, as into a dazzling mirror. This idea is more easily transferred to Rembrandt's chiaroscuro, where the greatest clearness and the nicest distinctions are observed in the midst of obscurity. In a word, I suspect depth to be that strength and at the same time subtlety of impression, which will not suffer the slightest indication of thought or feeling to be lost, and gives warning of them, over whatever extent of surface they are diffused, or under whatever disguises of circumstances they lurk.

On the Knowledge of Character¹

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 she might turn out the very reverse of the character that she had appeared in during all the preceding time."² I could not help admiring the superior sagacity of the Frertch juggler, and it struck me then that we could never be sure jtfhen 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 a 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

¹*On the Knowledge of Character* was the first of eleven essays which Hazlitt, in a letter of March 1822, announced as recently completed for the second volume of his *Table-Talk*.

• " It is not a year or two shows us a man."—£milia, in *Othello*.

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 lifetimes, about such prominent personages as Charles V. and Ignatius Loyola, partly, no doubt, from passion and interest, but partly from contradictory 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 anything he ever wrote. Caesar's *Commentaries* would not have redeemed him in my opinion, if the bust of him had resembled the Duke of [Wellington]. My old friend Fawcett used to say, that if Sir Isaac Newton himself had lisped, he could not have thought anything 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 bedside. 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, neutralized 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 everything else. Look in C{oleridge}'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 mortals: 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 1 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, backward 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 everything 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 wondered 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, etc. 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 that way—they will not be baulked 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 goodwill, 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 anything 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 civilized 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
hike 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 willing' 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 of 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 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 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 *Lope 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 anything 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

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 of 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, everything; 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 anything 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. Out 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 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, etc., 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 anything 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 the 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 grandson, 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 biblical critics J 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 I

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 desperate 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 is 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 villainy, of "pure defecated evil" against himself. There are degrees in real crimes : we reason and moralize 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, etc. 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 I" 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*.¹ In the same spirit, and I conceive with great metaphysical truth, Mr. Coleridge, in his tragedy of *Remorse*, makes Ordonic (his chief character) wave the acknowledgment of his meditated guilt to his own mind, by putting into his mouth that striking soliloquy:

¹ 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 *Nevgatt Calendar* for the year 1758 or 59.

" Say, I had lay' d a body in the sun!
 Weill 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. 2.

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 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 excellences, 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 two-fold 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 anything extraordinary. Nature has done it for them. How little Shakespear seems to have thought of himself or of his fame I 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. Correggio 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 I

Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers ?¹

No REALLY great man ever thought himself so. The idea of greatness in the mind answers but ill to our knowledge—or to our ignorance of ourselves. What living prose-writer, for instance, would think of comparing himself with Burke ? Yet would it not have been equal presumption or egotism in him to fancy himself equal to those who had gone before him—Bolingbroke, or Johnson, or Sir William Temple ? Because his rank in letters is become a settled point with us, we conclude that it must have been quite as self-evident to him, and that he must have been perfectly conscious of his vast superiority to the rest of the world. Alas! not so. No man is truly himself but in the idea which others entertain of him. The mind, as well as the eye, " sees not itself, but by reflection from some other thing." What parity can there be between the effect of habitual composition on the mind of the individual, and the surprise occasioned by first reading a fine passage in an admired author; between what we do with ease, and what we thought it next to impossible ever to have done ; between the reverential awe we have for years encouraged, without seeing reason to alter it, for distinguished genius, and the slow, reluctant, unwelcome conviction that after infinite toil and repeated disappointments, and when it is too late and to little purpose, we have ourselves at length accomplished what we at first proposed; between the insignificance of our petty, personal pretensions, and the vastness and splendour which the atmosphere of imagination lends to an illustrious name ? He who comes up to

¹ *Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers ?* was written at Wintetslow in the autumn of 1823 and included in the two volumes of *The Plain Speaker*; Hazlitt's collection of " Opinions on Books, Men, and Things" published in 1826.

his own idea of greatness must always have had a very low standard of it in his mind. "What a pity," said some one, "that Milton had not the pleasure of reading 'Paradise Lost I' " He could not read it as we do, with the weight of impression that a hundred years of admiration have added to it—"a phoenix gazed by all"—with the sense of the number of editions it has passed through with still increasing reputation, with the tone of solidity, time-proof, which it has received from the breath of cold, envious maligners, with the sound which the voice of Fame has lent to every line of it! The writer of an ephemeral production may be as much dazzled with it as the public; it may sparkle in his own eyes for a moment, and be soon forgotten by every one else. But no one can anticipate the suffrages of posterity. Every man, in judging of himself, is his own contemporary. He may feel the gale of popularity, but he cannot tell how long it will last. His opinion of himself wants distance, wants time, wants numbers, to set it off and confirm it. He must be indifferent to his own merits before he can feel a confidence in them. Besides, everyone must be sensible of a thousand weaknesses and deficiencies in himself; whereas Genius only leaves behind it the monuments of its strength. A great name is an abstraction of some one excellence: but whoever fancies himself an abstraction of excellence, so far from being great, may be sure that he is a blockhead, equally ignorant of excellence or defect, of himself or others. Mr. Burke, besides being the author of the *Reflections*, and the *Letter to a Noble Lord*, had a wife and son; and had to think as much about them as we do about him. The imagination gains nothing by the minute details of personal knowledge.

On the other hand, it may be said that no man knows so well as the author of any performance what it has cost him, and the length of time and study devoted to it. This is one, among other reasons, why no man can pronounce an opinion upon himself. The happiness of the result bears no proportion to the difficulties overcome or the pains

taken. *Materiam superabat opus* (the workmanship surpasses the materials) is an old and fatal complaint. The definition of genius is that it acts unconsciously; and those who have produced immortal works have done so without knowing how or why. The greatest power operates unseen, and executes its appointed task with as little ostentation as difficulty. Whatever is done best is done from the natural bent and disposition of the mind. It is only where our incapacity begins that we begin to feel the obstacles, and to set an undue value on our triumph over them. Correggio, Michael Angelo, Rembrandt, did what they did without premeditation or effort—their works came from their minds as a natural birth—if you had asked them why they adopted this or that style, they would have answered, *because they could not help it*, and because they knew of no other. So Shakespear says :

" *Our poesy Is as a gum which oozes
From whence 'tis nourished: the fire i' the flint
Shows not till it be struck: our gentle flame
Provokes itself; and, like the current, flies
Each bound it chafes.*"

Shakespear himself was an example of his own rule, and appears to have owed almost everything to industry or design. His poetry flashes from him like the lightning from the summer-cloud, or the stroke from the sun-flower. When we look at the admirable comic designs of Hogarth, they seem from the unfinished state in which they are left, and from the freedom of the pencilling, to have cost him little trouble; whereas the "*Sigismunda*" is a very laboured and comparatively feeble performance, and he accordingly set great store by it. He also thought highly of his portraits, and boasted that "he could paint equal to Vandyke, give him his time, and let him choose his subject." This was the very reason why he could not. Vandyke's excellence consisted in this, that he could paint a fine portrait of anyone at sight: let him take ever so much pains or choose

ever so bad a subject, he could not help making something of it. His eye, his mind, his hand was cast in the mould of grace and delicacy. Milton, again, is understood to have preferred " *Paradise Regained* " to his other works. This, if so, was either because he himself was conscious of having failed in it, or because others thought he had. We are willing to think well of that which we know wants our favourable opinion, and to prop the rickety bantling. Every step taken, *invidt Minerva*, costs us something and is set down to account; whereas we are borne on the full tide of genius and success into the very haven of our desires almost imperceptibly. The strength of the impulse by which we are carried along prevents the sense of difficulty or resistance : the true inspiration of the Muse is soft and balmy as the air we breathe; and indeed leaves us little to boast of, for the effect hardly seems to be our own.

There are two persons who always appear to me to have worked under this involuntary, silent impulse more than any others; I mean Rembrandt and Correggio. It is not known that Correggio ever saw a picture of any great master. He lived and died obscurely in an obscure village. We have few of his works, but they are all perfect. What truth, what grace, what angelic sweetness are there! Not one line or tone that is not divinely soft or exquisitely fair; the painter's mind rejecting, by a natural process, all that is discordant, coarse, or unpleasing. The whole is an emanation of pure thought. The work grew under his hand as if of itself, and came out without a flaw, like the diamond from the rock. He knew not what he did; and looked at each modest grace as it stole from the canvas with anxious delight and wonder. Ah! gracious God! not he alone; how many more in all time have looked at their works with the same feelings, not knowing but they too may have done something divine, immortal, and finding in that sole doubt ample amends for pining solitude, for want, neglect, and an untimely fate. Oh I for one hour of that uneasy rapture, when the mind first thinks that it

has struck out something that may last for ever; when the germ of excellence bursts from nothing on the startled sight I Take, take away the gaudy triumphs of the world, the long deathless shout of fame, and give back that heart-felt sigh with which the youthful enthusiast first weds immortality as his secret bride ! And thou too, Rembrandt! Thou wert a man of genius if ever painter was a man of genius !—did this dream hang over you as you painted that strange picture of " Jacob's Ladder ? " Did your eye strain over those gradual dusky clouds into futurity, or did those white-vested, beaked figures babble to you of fame as they approached ? Did you know what you were about, or did you not paint much as it happened ? Oh ! if you had thought once about yourself, or anything but the subject, it would have been all over with "the glory, the intuition, the amenity," the dream had fled, the spell had been broken. The hills would not have looked like those we see in sleep—that tatterdemalion figure of Jacob, thrown on one side, would not have slept as if the breath was fairly taken out of his body. So much do Rembrandt's pictures savour of the soul and body of reality, that the thoughts seem identical with the objects—if there had been the least question what he should have done, or how he should do it, or how far he had succeeded, it would have spoiled everything. Lumps of light hung upon his pencil and fell upon his canvas like dew-drops: the shadowy veil was drawn over his backgrounds by the dull, obtuse finger of night, making darkness visible by still greater darkness that could only be felt!

Cervantes is another instance of a man of genius, whose work may be said to have sprung from his mind, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. Don Quixote and Sancho were a kind of twins ; and the jests of the latter, as he says, fell from him like drops of rain when he least thought of it. Shakespear's creations were more multiform, but equally natural and unstudied. Raphael and Milton seem partial exceptions to this rule. Their productions were the *composite order*; and those of the latter sometimes even

amount to centos. Accordingly, we find Milton quoted among those authors who have left proofs of their "enter-taining a high opinion of themselves, and of cherishing a strong aspiration after fame. Some of Shakespear's sonnets have been also cited to the same purpose; but they seem rather to convey wayward and dissatisfied complaints of his untoward fortune than anything like a triumphant and confident reliance on his future renown. He appears to have stood more alone and to have thought less about himself than any living being. One reason for this indifference may have been, that as a writer he was tolerably successful in his life-time, and no doubt produced his works with very great facility.

I hardly know whether to class Claude Lorraine as among those who succeeded most "through happiness or pains." It is certain that he imitated no one, and has had no successful imitator. The perfection of his landscapes seems to have been owing to an inherent quality of harmony, to an exquisite sense of delicacy in his mind. His monotony has been complained of, which is apparently produced from a preconceived idea in his mind; and not long ago I heard a person, not more distinguished for the subtilty than the *naivete* of his sarcasms, remark, "Oh! I never look at Claude : if one has seen one of his pictures, one has seen them all; they are every one alike : there is the same sky, the same climate, the same time of day, the same tree, and that tree is like a cabbage. To be sure, they say he did pretty well; but when a man is always doing one thing, he ought to do it pretty well." There is no occasion to write the name under this criticism, and the best answer to it is that it is true—his pictures always are the same, but we never wish them to be otherwise. Perfection is one thing. I confess I think that Claude knew this, and felt that his were the finest landscapes in the world—that ever had been, or would ever be.

I am not in the humour to pursue this argument any farther at present, but to write a digression. If the reader

is not already apprised of it, he will please to take notice that I write this at Winterslow. My style there is apt to be redundant. and excursive. At other times it may be cramped, dry, abrupt; but here it flows like a river, and overspreads its banks. I have not to seek for thoughts or hunt for images : they come of themselves, I inhale them with the breeze, and the silent groves are vocal with a thousand recollections—

*" And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
Hang on each leaf, and cling to ev'ry bough."*

Here I came fifteen years ago, a willing exile ; and as I trod the lengthened greensward by the low woodside, repeated the old line,

" My mind to me a kingdom is I "

I found it so then, before, and since; and shall I faint, now that I have poured out the spirit of that mind to the world, and treated many subjects with truth, with freedom, and power, because I have been followed with one cry of abuse ever since *for not being a Government tool* } Here I returned a few years after to finish some works I had undertaken, doubtful of the event, but determined to do my best; and wrote that character of Millimant which was once transcribed by fingers fairer than Aurora's, but no notice was taken of it, because I was not a Government tool, and must be supposed devoid of taste and elegance by all who aspired to these qualities in their own persons. Here I sketched my account of that old honest Signior Orlando Friscobaldo, which with its fine, racy, acrid tone that old crab-apple, Gifford, would have relished or pretended to relish, had I been a Government tool! Here, too, I have written *Table-Talks* without number, and as yet without a falling-off, till now that they are nearly done, or I should not make this boast. I could swear (were they not mine) the thoughts in many of them are founded as the

rock, free as air, the tone like an Italian picture. What then? Had the style been like polished steel, as firm and as bright, it would have availed me nothing, for I am not a Government tool! I had endeavoured to guide the taste of the English people to the best old English writers; but I had said that English kings did not reign by right divine, and that his present Majesty was descended from an Elector of Hanover in a right line; and no loyal subject would after this look into Webster or Decker because I had pointed them out. I had done something (more than anyone except Schlegel) to vindicate the *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* from the stigma of French criticism: but our Anti-Jacobin and Anti-Gallican writers soon found out that I had said and written that Frenchmen, Englishmen, men were not slaves by birthright. This was enough to *damn* the work. Such has been the head and front of my offending. While my friend Leigh Hunt was writing the *Descent of Liberty*, and strewing the march of the Allied Sovereigns with flowers, I sat by the waters of Babylon and hung my harp upon the willows. I knew all along there was but one alternative—the cause of kings or of mankind. This I foresaw, this I feared; the world would see it now, when it is too late. Therefore I lamented, and would take no comfort when the mighty fell, because we, all men, fell with him, like lightning from heaven, to grovel in the grave of Liberty, in the style of Legitimacy! There is but one question in the hearts of monarchs—whether mankind are their property or not. There was but this one question in mine. I had made an abstract, metaphysical principle of this question. I was not the dupe of the voice of the charmers. By my hatred of tyrants I knew what their hatred of the freeborn spirit of man must be, of the semblance, of the very name of Liberty and Humanity. And while others bowed their heads to the image of the BEAST, I spat upon it and buffeted it, and made mouths at it, and pointed at it, and drew aside the veil that then half concealed it but has been since thrown oft, and named it by its fight name; and it is not to

be supposed that my having penetrated their mystery would go unrequited by those whose darling and whose delight the idol, half-brute, half-demon, was, and who were ashamed to acknowledge the image and superscription as their own ! Two half-friends of mine, who would not make a whole one between them, agreed the other day that the indiscriminate, incessant abuse of what I write was mere prejudice and party spirit, and that what I do in periodicals and without a name does well, pays well, and is " cried out upon in the top of the compass." It is this indeed that has saved my shallow skiff from quite foundering on Tory spite and rancour; for when people have been reading and approving an article in a miscellaneous journal, it does not do to say when they discover the author afterwards (whatever might have been the case before) it is written by a blockhead; and even Mr. Jerdan recommends the volume of *Characteristics* as an excellent little work, because it has no cabalistic name in the title-page, and swears " there is a first-rate article of forty pages in the last number of the *Edinburgh* from Jeffrey's own hand," though when he learns against his will that it is mine, he devotes three successive numbers of the *Literary Gazette* to abuse " that *strange* article in the last number of the *Edinburgh Review*." Others who had not this advantage have fallen a sacrifice to the obloquy attached to the suspicion of doubting, or of being acquainted with anyone who is known to doubt, the divinity of kings. Poor Keats paid the forfeit of this *fa\$ majeste* with his health and life. What, though his verses were like the breath of spring, and many of his thoughts like flowers—would this, with the circle of critics that beset a throne, lessen the crime of their having been praised in the *Examiner*} The lively and most agreeable editor of that paper has in like manner been driven from his country and his friends who delighted in him, for no other reason than having written the *Story of Rimini*, and asserted ten years ago, " that the most accomplished prince in Europe was an Adonis of fifty! "

*"Return, Alpheus, the dread voice is past
That shrunk thy streams ; return, Sicilian Muse !"*

I look out of my window and see that a shower has just fallen : the fields look green after it, and a rosy cloud hangs over the brow of the hill; a lily expands its petals in the moisture, dressed in its lovely green and white; a shepherd boy has just brought some pieces of turf with daisies and grass for his young mistress to make a bed for her skylark, not doomed to dip his wings in the dappled dawn—my cloudy thoughts draw off, the storm of angry politics has blown over—Mr. Blackwood, I am yours—Mr. Croker, my service to you—Mr. T. Moore, I am alive and well—Really, it is wonderful how little the worse I am for fifteen years' wear and tear, how I came upon my legs again on the ground of truth and nature, and "look abroad into universality," forgetting that there is any such person as myself in the world !

I have let this passage stand (however critical) because it may serve as a practical illustration to show what authors really think of themselves when put upon the defensive—(I confess, the subject has nothing to do with the title at the head of the Essay!)—and as a warning to those who may reckon upon their fair portion of popularity, as the reward of the exercise of an independent spirit and such talents as they possess. It sometimes seems at first sight as if the low scurrility and jargon of abuse by which it is attempted to overlay all common sense and decency by the tissue of lies and nicknames everlastingly repeated and applied indiscriminately to all those who are not of the regular Government party, was peculiar to the present time, and the anomalous growth of modern criticism; but if we look back, we shall find the same system acted upon as often as power, prejudice, dulness, and spite found their account in playing the game into one another's hands—in decrying popular efforts, and in giving currency to every species of base metal that had their own conventional

stamp upon it. The names of Pope and Dryden were assailed with daily and unsparing abuse; the epithet A. P. E. was levelled at the sacred head of the former; and if even men like these, "having to deal with the consciousness of their own infirmities and the insolence and spurns of wanton enmity, must have found it hard to possess their souls in patience, any living writer amidst such contradictory evidence can scarcely expect to retain much calm, steady conviction of his own merits, or build himself a secure reversion in immortality.

However one may in a fit of spleen and impatience turn round and assert one's claims in the face of low-bred, hireling malice, I will here repeat what I set out with saying, that there never yet was a man of sense and proper spirit who would not decline rather than court a comparison with any of those names whose reputation he really emulates—who would not be sorry to suppose that any of the great heirs of memory had as many foibles as he knows himself to possess—and who would not shrink from including himself or being included by others in the same praise that was offered to long-established and universally-acknowledged merits, as a kind of profanation. Those who are ready to fancy themselves Raphaels and Homers are very inferior men indeed—they have not even an idea of the mighty names that "they take in vain." They are as deficient in pride as in modesty, and have not so much as served an apprenticeship to a true and honourable ambition. They mistake a momentary popularity for lasting renown, and a sanguine temperament for the inspirations of genius. The love of fame is too high and delicate a feeling in the mind to be mixed up with realities—it is a solitary abstraction, the secret sigh of the soul—

" /t is all one as we should love

A bright particular star, and think to wed it."

A name " fast-anchored in the deep abyss of time " is like a star twinkling in the firmament, cold, silent, distant, but

eternal and sublime ; and our transmitting one to posterity is as if we should contemplate our translation to the skies. If we are not contented with this feeling on the subject, we shall never sit in Cassiopeia's chair, nor will' our names, studding Ariadne's crown or streaming with Berenice's locks, ever make

*" the face of heaven so bright,
That birds shall sing, and think it were not night."*

Those who are in love only with noise and show, instead of devoting themselves to a life of study, had better hire a booth at Bartlemy Fair, or march at the head of a recruiting regiment with drums beating and colours flying!

It has been urged, that however little we may be disposed to indulge the reflection at other times or out of mere self-complacency, yet the mind cannot help being conscious of the effort required for any great work while it is about it, of

" The high endeavour and the glad success."

I grant that there is a sense of power in such cases, with the exception before stated; but then this very effort and state of excitement engrosses the mind at the time, and leaves it listless and exhausted afterwards. The energy we exert, or the high state of enjoyment we feel, puts us out of conceit with ourselves at other times : compared to what we are in the act of composition, we seem dull, commonplace people, generally speaking; and what we have been able to perform is rather matter of wonder than of self-congratulation to us. The stimulus of writing is like the stimulus of intoxication, with which we can hardly sympathise in our sober moments, when we are no longer under the inspiration of the demon, or when the virtue is gone out of us. While we are engaged in any work, we are thinking of the subject, and cannot stop to admire ourselves ; and when it is done, we look at it with comparative indifference. I will venture to say, that no one but

a pedant ever read his own works regularly through. They are not *his*—they are become mere words, waste-paper, and have none of the glow, the creative enthusiasm, the vehemence, and natural spirit with which he wrote them. When we have once committed our thoughts to paper, written them fairly out, and seen that they are right in the printing, if we are in our right wits, we have done with them for ever. I sometimes try to read an article I have written in some magazine or review—(for when they are bound up in a volume, I dread the very sight of them)—but stop after a sentence or two, and never recur to the task. I know pretty well what I have to say on the subject, and do not want to go to school to myself. It is the worst instance of the *bis repetita crumbe* in the world. I do not think that even painters have much delight in looking at their works after they are done. While they are in progress, there is a great degree of satisfaction in considering what has been done, or what is still to do—but this is hope, is reverie, and ceases with the completion of our efforts. I should not imagine Raphael or Correggio would have much pleasure in looking at their former works, though they might recollect the pleasure they had had in painting them; they might spy defects in them (for the idea of unattainable perfection still keeps pace with our actual approaches to it), and fancy that they were not worthy of immortality. The greatest portrait-painter the world ever saw used to write under his pictures, "*Titianus faciebat*" signifying that they were imperfect; and in his letter to Charles V. accompanying one of his most admired works, he only spoke of the time he had been about it. Annibal Caracci boasted that he could do like Titian and Correggio, and, like most boasters, was wrong.¹

The greatest pleasure in life is that of reading, while we are young. I have had as much of this pleasure as perhaps anyone. As I grow older, it fades; or else, the stronger

¹ See his spirited Letter to his cousin Ludovico, on seeing the pictures at Parma.

stimulus of writing takes off the edge of it. At present, I have neither time nor inclination for it: yet I should like to devote a year's entire leisure to a course of the English Novelists; and perhaps clap on that sly old knave, Sir Walter, to the end of the list. It is astonishing how I used formerly to relish the style of certain authors, at a time when I myself despaired of ever writing a single line. Probably this was the reason. It is not in mental as in natural ascent—intellectual objects seem higher when we survey them from below, than when we look down from any given elevation above the common level. My three favourite writers about the time I speak of were Burke, Junius, and Rousseau. I was never weary of admiring and wondering at the felicities of the style, the turns of expression, the refinements of thought and sentiment. I laid the book down to find out the secret of so much strength and beauty, and I took it up again in despair, to read on and admire. So I passed whole days, months, and I may add, years; and have only this to say now, that as my life began, so I could wish that it may end. The last time I tasted this luxury in its full perfection was one day after a sultry day's walk in summer between Farnham and Alton. I was fairly tired out; I walked into an inn-yard (I think at the latter place); I was shown by the waiter to what looked at first like common out-houses at the other end of it, but they turned out to be a suite of rooms, probably a hundred years old—the one I entered opened into an old-fashioned garden, embellished with beds of larkspur and a leaden Mercury; it was wainscoted, and there was a grave-looking, dark-coloured portrait of Charles II. hanging over the tiled chimney-piece. I had *Love for Love* in my pocket, and began to read; the coffee was brought in in a silver coffee-pot; the cream, the bread and butter, everything was excellent, and the flavour of Congreve's style prevailed over all. I prolonged the entertainment till a late hour, and relished this divine comedy better even than when I used to see it played by Miss Mellon, as Miss Prue; Bob

Palmer, as Tattle'; and Bannister, as Honest Ben. This circumstance happened just five years ago, and it seems like yesterday. If I count my life so by lustres, it will soon glide away; yet I shall not have to repine, if, while it lasts, it is enriched with a few such recollections!

Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen¹

" Come like shadows—so depart"

LAMB it was, I think, who suggested this subject, as well as the defence of Guy Faux, which I urged him to execute. As, however, he would undertake neither, I suppose I must do both, a task for which he would have been much fitter, no less from the temerity than the felicity of his pen—

*" Never so sure our rapture to create
As when it touch*d the brink of all we hate."*

Compared with him, I shall, I fear, make but a commonplace piece of business of it; but I should be loth the idea was entirely lost, and, besides, I may avail myself of some hints of his in the progress of it. I am sometimes, I suspect, a better reporter of the ideas of other people than expounder of my own. I pursue the one too far into paradox or mysticism; the others I am not bound to follow farther than I like, or than seems fair and reasonable.

On the question being started, Ayrton said, " I suppose the two first persons you would choose to see would be the two greatest names in English literature, Sir Isaac Newton and Mr. Locke ? " In this Ayrton, as usual, reckoned without his host. Every one burst out a-laughing at the expression on Lamb's face, in which impatience was restrained by courtesy. " Yes, the greatest names," he stammered out hastily; " but they were not persons—not persons." " Not persons," said Ayrton, looking wise and foolish at the same time, afraid his triumph might be premature. " That is," rejoined Lamb, " not characters, you know. By Mr. Locke and Sir Isaac Newton, you mean the *Essay on the Human*

¹ *Of Persons One Would Wish to Hart Seen* appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine* of January 1826.

Understanding) and the *Prindpia*, which we have to this day. Beyond their contents there is nothing personally interesting in the men. But what we want to see any one *bodily* for, is when there is something peculiar, striking in the individuals, more than we can learn from their writings, and yet are curious to know. I dare say Locke and Newton were very like Kneller's portraits of them. But who could paint Shakspeare?—"Ay," retorted Ayrton, "there it is; then I suppose you would prefer seeing him and Milton instead?"—"No," said Lamb, "neither. I have seen so much of Shakspeare on the stage and on bookstalls, in frontispieces and on mantelpieces, that I am quite tired of the everlasting repetition: and as to Milton's face, the impressions that have come down to us of it I do not like; it is too starched and puritanical; and I should be afraid of losing some of the manna of his poetry in the leaven of his countenance and the precisian's band and gown."—"I shall guess no more," said Ayrton. "Who is it, then, you would like to see 'in his habit as he lived,' if you had your choice of the whole range of English literature?" Lamb then named Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville, the friend of Sir Philip Sidney, as the two worthies whom he should feel the greatest pleasure to encounter on the floor of his apartment in their nightgown and slippers and to exchange friendly greeting with them. At this Ayrton laughed outright, and conceived Lamb was jesting with him; but as no one followed his example, he thought there might be something in it, and waited for an explanation in a state of whimsical suspense. Lamb then (as well as I can remember a conversation that passed twenty years ago—how time slips!) went on as follows. "The reason why I pitch upon these two authors is, that their writings are riddles, and they themselves the most mysterious of personages. They resemble the soothsayers of old, who dealt in dark hints and doubtful oracles; and I should like to ask them the meaning of what no mortal but themselves, I should suppose, can fathom. There is Dr. Johnson: I have

no curiosity, no strange uncertainty about him; he and Boswell together have pretty well let me into the secret of what passed through his mind. He and other writers like him are sufficiently explicit: my friends, whose repose I should be tempted to disturb (were it in my power), are implicit, inextricable, inscrutable.

" When I look at that obscure but gorgeous prose composition, the *Urn-burial* I seem to myself to look into a deep abyss, at the bottom of which are hid pearls and rich treasure; or it is like a stately labyrinth of doubt and withering speculation, and I would invoke the spirit of the author to lead me through it. Besides, who would not be curious to see the lineaments of a man who, having himself been twice married, wished that mankind were propagated like trees ! As to Fulke Greville, he is like nothing but one of his own ' Prologues spoken by the ghost of an old king of Ormus,' a truly formidable and inviting personage : his style is apocalyptical, cabalistical, a knot worthy of such an apparition to untie ; and for the unravelling a passage or two, I would stand the brunt of an encounter with so portentous a commentator 1 " — " I am afraid, in that case," said Ayrton, " that if the mystery were once cleared up, the merit might be lost " ; and turning to me, whispered a friendly apprehension, that while Lamb continued to admire these old crabbed authors, he would never become a popular writer. Dr. Donne was mentioned as a writer of the same period, with a very interesting countenance, whose history was singular, and whose meaning was often quite as *uncome-atable*, without a personal citation from the dead, as that of any of his contemporaries. The volume was produced ; and while some one was expatiating on the exquisite simplicity and beauty of the portrait prefixed to the old edition, Ayrton got hold of the poetry, and exclaiming " What have we here ? " read the following:

*" Here lies a She-Sun and a He-Moon there—
She gives the best light to his spbear*

*Or each is bothy and all, and so
They unto one another nothing owe.^{3*1}*

There was no resisting this, till Lamb, seizing the volume, turned to the beautiful "Lines to his Mistress," dissuading her from accompanying him abroad, and read them with suffused features and a faltering tongue:

*" By our first strange and fatal interview,
By all desires which thereof did ensue,
By our long starving hopes, by that remorse
Which my words' masculine perswasive force
Begot in thee, and by the memory
Of hurts, which spies and rivals threatned me,
I calmly beg. But by thy father's wrath,
By all paines which want and divorcement hath,
I conjure thee ; and all the oathes which I
And thou have sworne to sealejoynt constancy
Here I unsweare, and overswear them thus—
Thou shalt not love by wayes so dangerous.
Temper, O fair love ! love's impetuous rage,
Be my true mistris still, not myfaigp'd Page ;
Tllgoe, and, by thy kinde leave, leave behinde
Thee ! onely worthy to nurse it in my minde.
Thirst to come backe ; O, if thou die before,
My soule, from other lands to thee shall soare.
Thy (else almighty) beau tie cannot move
Rage from the seas, nor thy love teach them love,
Nor tame wild Boreas' harshnesse : thou hast reade
How roughly hee inpeeces shivered
Fair Orithea, whom he swore he lov'd.
Fall ill or good, 'tis madnesse to have prov'd
Dangers unurg'd: Feed on this flattery,
That absent lovers one in th' other be.
Dissemble nothing, not a boy ; nor change
Thy bodie's habite, not minde ; be not strange*

¹ Epithakmion on Frederick, Count Palatini of the Rhyne, and the Lady Elizabeth.

*To thyself e onely. All will spie in thy face
 A blushing, womanly, discovering grace.
 RJchly-cloath'd apes are call'd apes, and as soon
 Eclips'd as bright, we call the moone the moon.
 Men of France, changeable camelions,
 Spittles of diseases, shops of fashions,
 Love's fuellers, and the rightest company
 Of players, which upon the world's stage be,
 Will quickly know thee . . .
 O stay here I for for thee
 England is onely a worthy gallerie,
 To walke in expectation ; till from thence
 Our greatest King call thee to his presence.
 When I am gone, dreame me some happinesse,
 Nor let thy lookes our long-hid love confesse,
 Nor praise, nor dispraise me ; nor blesse, nor curse
 Openly love's force, nor in bed fright thy nurse
 With midnight's startings, crying out, Oh, oh,
 Nurse, oh, my love is slaine, I saw him goe
 O'er the white Alpes alone ; I saw him, I,
 Assail'd, fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die.
 Augure me better chance, except dread Jove
 Thinke it enough for me to have had thy love."*

Someone then inquired of Lamb if we could not see from the window the Temple-walk in which Chaucer used to take his exercise; and on his name being put to the vote, I was pleased to find that there was a general sensation in his favour in all but Ayrton, who said something about the ruggedness of the metre, and even objected to the quaintness of the orthography. I was vexed at this superficial gloss, pertinaciously reducing everything to its own trite level, and asked " if he did not think it would be worth while to scan the eye that had first greeted the Muse in that dim twilight and early dawn of English literature; to see the head round which the visions of fancy must have played like gleams of inspiration or a sudden glory; to

watch those lips 'that' lisped in numbers, for the numbers came'—as by a miracle, or as if the dumb should speak ? Nor was it alone that he had been the first to tune his native tongue (however imperfectly to modern ears) ; but he was himself a noble, manly character, standing before his age and striving to advance it ; a pleasant humourist withal, who has not only handed down to us the living manners of his time, but had, no doubt, store of curious and quaint devices, and would make as hearty a companion as mine host of the Tabard. His interview with Petrarch is fraught with interest. Yet I would rather have seen Chaucer in company with the author of the *Decameron*, and have heard them exchange their best stories together—the *Squire's Tale* against the story of the *Falcon*, the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* against the *Adventures of Friar Albert*. How fine to see the high mysterious brow which learning then wore, relieved by the gay, familiar tone of men of the world, and by the courtesies of genius ! Surely, the thoughts and feelings which passed through the minds of these great revivers of learning, these Cadmuses who sowed the teeth of letters, must have stamped an expression on their features as different from the moderns as their books, and well worth the perusal. Dante," I continued," is as interesting a person as his own Ugolino, one whose lineaments curiosity would as eagerly devour in order to penetrate his spirit, and the only one of the Italian poets I should care much to see. There is a fine portrait of Ariosto by no less a hand than Titian's ; light, Moorish, spirited, but not answering our idea. The same artist's large colossal profile of Peter Aretine is the only likeness of the kind that has the effect of conversing with ' the mighty dead ; ' and this is truly spectral, ghastly, necromantic." Lamb put it to me if I should like to see Spenser as well as Chaucer ; and I answered, without hesitation, " No ; for that his beauties were ideal, visionary, not palpable or personal, and therefore connected with less curiosity about the man. His poetry was the essence of romance, a very halo round the bright orb of fancy ; and

•the bringing in the individual might dissolve the charm. No tones of voice could come up to the mellifluous cadence of his verse; no form but of a winged angel could vie with the airy shapes he has described. He was (to my apprehension) rather a 'creature of the element, that lived in the rainbow and played in the plighted clouds,' than an ordinary mortal. Or if he did appear, I should wish it to be as a mere vision, like one of his own pageants, and that he should pass by unquestioned like a dream or sound—

——' *That was Arion crown'd:*
So went he playing on the watry plain !"

Captain Burney muttered something about Columbus, and Martin Burney hinted at the Wandering Jew; but the last was set aside as spurious, and the first made over to the New World.

"I should like," said Mrs. Reynolds, "to have seen Pope talk with Patty Blount; and I *have* seen Goldsmith." Every one turned round to look at Mrs. Reynolds, as if by so doing they could get a sight at Goldsmith.

"Where," asked a harsh, croaking voice, "was Dr. Johnson in the years 1745-46? He did not write anything that we know of, nor is there any account of him in Bosweli during those two years. Was he in Scotland with the Pretender? He seems to have passed through the scenes in the Highlands in company with Bosweli, many years after, 'with lack-lustre eye,¹/₂ yet as if they were familiar to him, or associated in his mind with interests that he durst not explain. If so, it would be an additional reason for my liking him; and I would give something to have seen him seated in the tent with the youthful Majesty of Britain, and penning the Proclamation to all true subjects and adherents of the legitimate Government."

"I thought," said Ayrton, turning short round upon Lamb, "that you of the Lake School did not like Pope?"—"Not like Pope I My dear sir, you must be under a mistake—I can read him over and over for ever 1"—"Why,

certainly, the *Esray on Man* must be allowed to be a masterpiece."—" It may be so, but I seldom look into it."—" Oh ! then it's his Satires you admire ?"—" No, not his Satires, but his friendly Epistles and his compliments."—" Compliments ! I did not koïow he ever made any."—" The finest," said Lamb, " that were ever paid by the wit of man. Each of them is worth an estate for life—nay, is an immortality. There is that superb one to Lord Cornbury:

' *"Despise low joys, low gains ;
Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains ;
Be virtuous, and be happy for your pains?"*

Was there ever more artful insinuation of idolatrous praise ? And then that noble apotheosis of his friend Lord Mansfield (however little deserved), when, speaking of the House of Lords, he adds :

* *Conspicuous scene ! another yet is nigh,
(More silent far) where kings and poets lie ;
Where Murray {long enough his country's pride)
Shall be no more than Tully or than Hyde ! '*

And with what a fine turn of indignant flattery he addresses Lord Bolingbroke:

'*Why rail they then, if but one wreath of mine,
Oh ! all-accomplish'd St. John, deck thy shrine ? '*

Or turn," continued Lamb, with a slight hectic on his cheek and his eye glistening, " to his list of early friends :

' *But why then publish ? Granville the polite,
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write ;
Well-natured Garth inflamed with early praise,
And. Congreve loved, and Swift endured my lays :
The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read,
Ev'n mitred Rochester would nod the head ;
And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
Received with open arms one poet more.*

*Happy my studies, if by these approved I
 Happier their author; if by these beloved !
 From these the world will judge of men and books,
 Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks? "*

Here his voice totally failed him, and throwing down the book, he said, " Do you think I would not wish to have been friends with such a man as this ? "

" What say you to Dryden ? "—" He rather made a show of himself, and courted popularity in that lowest temple of fame, a coffee-shop, so as in some measure to vulgarise one's idea of him. Pope, on the contrary, reached the very *beau ideal* of what a poet's life should be; and his fame while living seemed to be an emanation from that which was to circle his name after death. He was so far enviable (and one would feel proud to have witnessed the rare spectacle in him) that he was almost the only poet and man of genius who met with his reward on this side of the tomb, who realised in friends, fortune, the esteem of the world, the most sanguine hope of a youthful ambition, and who found that sort of patronage from the great during his lifetime which they would be thought anxious to bestow upon him after his death. Read Gay's verses to him on his supposed return from Greece, after his translation of Homer was finished, and say if you would not gladly join the bright procession that welcomed him home, or see it once more land at Whitehall stairs."—" Still," said Mrs. Reynolds, " I would rather have seen him talking with Patty Blount, or riding by in a coronet-coach with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu!"

Erasmus Phillips, who was deep in a game of piquet at the other end of the room, whispered to Martin Burney to ask if Junius would not be a fit person to invoke from the dead. " Yes," said Lamb, " provided he would agree to lay aside his mask."

We were now at a stand for a short time, when Fielding was mentioned as a candidate; only one, however, seconded the proposition. " Richardson ? "—" By all means, but

only to look at him through the glass door of his back shop, hard at work upon one of his novels (the most extraordinary contrast that ever was presented between an author and his works); not to let him come behind his counter, lest he should want you to turn customer, or to go upstairs with him, lest he should offer to read the first manuscript of Sir Charles Grandison, which was originally written in eight-and-twenty volumes, octavo, or get out the letters of his female correspondents, to prove that Joseph Andrews was low."

There was but one statesman in the whole of English history that any one expressed the least desire to see—Oliver Cromwell, with his fine, frank, rough, pimply face, and wily policy; and one enthusiast, John Bunyan, the immortal author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. It seemed that if he came into the room, dreams would follow him, and that each person would nod under his golden cloud, "nigh-sphered in heaven," a canopy as strange and stately as any in Homer.

Of all persons near our own time, Garrick's name was received with the greatest enthusiasm, who was proposed by Barron Field. He presently superseded both Hogarth and Handel, who had been talked of, but then it was on condition that he should act in tragedy and comedy, in the play and the farce, *Lear* and *Wildair* and *Abel Dragger*. What a *sight for sore eyes* that would be! Who would not part with a year's income at least, almost with a year of his natural life, to be present at it? Besides, as he could not act alone, and recitations are unsatisfactory things, what a troop he must bring with him—the silver-tongued Barry, and Quin, and Shuter and Weston, and Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Pritchard, of whom I have heard my father speak as so great a favourite when he was young. This would indeed be a revival of the dead, the restoring of art; and so much the more desirable, as such is the lurking scepticism mingled with our overstrained admiration of past excellence, that though we have the speeches of Burke, the portraits of Reynolds, the writings of Goldsmith, and the conversation of Johnson, to

show what people could do at that periodj and to confirm the universal testimony to the merits of Garrick; yet, as it was before our time, we have our misgivings, as if he was probably, after all, little better than a Bartlemy-fair actor, dressed out to play *Macbeth* in a scarlet coat and laced cocked-hat. For one, I should like to have seen and heard with my own eyes and ears. Certainly, by all accounts, if any one was ever moved by the true histrionic *astus*, it was Garrick. When he followed the Ghost in *Hamlet*', he did not drop the sword, as most actors do, behind the scenes, but kept the point raised the whole way round, so fully was he possessed with the idea, or so anxious not to lose sight of his part for a moment. Once at a splendid dinner-party at Lord——'s, they suddenly missed Garrick, and could not imagine what was become of him, till they were drawn to the window by the convulsive screams and peals of laughter of a young negro boy, who was rolling on the ground in an ecstasy of delight to see Garrick mimicking a turkey-cock in the court-yard, with his coat-tail stuck out behind, and in a seeming flutter of feathered rage and pride. Of our party only two persons present had seen the British Roscius; and they seemed as willing as the rest to renew their acquaintance with their old favourite.

We were interrupted in the hey-day and mid-career of this fanciful speculation, by a grumbler in a corner, who declared it was a shame to make all this rout about a mere player and farce-writer, to the neglect and exclusion of the fine old dramatists, the contemporaries and rivals of Shakspeare. Lamb said he had anticipated this objection when he had named the author of *Mustapha* and *Alaham*; and, out of caprice, insisted upon keeping him to represent the set, in preference to the wild, hare-brained enthusiast, Kit Marlowe ; to the sexton of St. Ann's, Webster, with his melancholy yew-trees and death's heads ; to Decker, who was but a garrulous proser; to the voluminous Heywood; and even to Beaumont and Fletcher, whom we might offend by complimenting the wrong author on their joint productions.

Lord Brooke, on the contrary, stood quite by himself, or, in Cowley's words, was "a vast species alone." Some one hinted at the circumstance of his being a lord, which rather startled Lamb, but he said a *ghost* would perhaps dispense with strict etiquette, on being regularly addressed by his title. Ben Jonson divided our suffrages pretty equally. Some were afraid he would begin to traduce Shakspeare, who was not present to defend himself. "If he grows disagreeable," it was whispered aloud, "there is Godwin can match him." At length, his romantic visit to Drummond of Hawthornden was mentioned, and turned the scale in his favour.

Lamb inquired if there was any one that was hanged that I would choose to mention? And I answered, Eugene Aram. The name of the "Admirable Crichton" was suddenly started as a splendid example of *waste* talents, so different from the generality of his countrymen. This choice was mightily approved by a North-Briton present, who declared himself descended from that prodigy of learning and accomplishment, and said he had family plate in his possession as vouchers for the fact, with the initials A.C.—*Admirable Crichton!* Hunt laughed, or rather roared, as heartily at this as I should think he has done for many years.

The last-named Mitre-courtier¹ then wished to know whether there were any metaphysicians to whom one might be tempted to apply the wizard spell? I replied, there were only six in modern times deserving the name—Hobbes, Berkeley, Butler, Hartley, Hume, Leibnitz; and perhaps Jonathan Edwards, a Massachusetts man.⁸ As to the French,

¹ Lamb at this time occupied chambers in Mitre Court, Temple.

* Bacon is not included in this list, nor do I know where he should come in. It is not easy to make room for him and his reputation together. This great and celebrated man in some of his works recommends it to pour a bottle of claret into the ground of a morning, and to stand over it, inhaling the perfumes. So he sometimes enriched the dry and barren soil of speculation with the fine aromatic spirit of his genius. His *Essays* and his *Acquaintment of Looming* are works of vast depth and scope of observation. The last, though it contains no positive discoveries, is a noble chart of the human intellect, and a guide to all future inquirers.

who talked fluently of having *created* thiG science,, there was not a tittle in any of their writings that was not to be found literally in the authors I had mentioned. [Home Tooke, who might have a claim to come in under the head of Grammar, was still living.] None of these names seemed to excite much interest, and I did not plead for the re-appearance of those who might be thought best fitted by tne abstracted nature of their studies for the present spiritual and disembodied state, and who, even while on this living stage, were nearly divested of common flesh and blood. As Ayrton, with an uneasy, fidgety face, was about to put some question about Mr. Locke and Dugald Stewart, he was prevented by Martin Burney, who observed, " If J—was here, he would undoubtedly, be for having up those profound and redoubted socialists, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus." I said this might be fair enough in him who had read, or fancied he had read, the original works, but I did not see how we could have any right to call up these authors to give an account of themselves in person till we had looked into their writings.

By this time it should seem that some rumour of our whimsical deliberation had got wind, and had disturbed the *irritable genus* in their shadowy abodes, for we received messages from several candidates that we had just been thinking of. Gray declined our invitation, though he had not yet been asked ; Gay offered to come, and bring in his hand the Duchess of Bolton, the original Polly; Steele and Addison left their cards as Captain Sentry and Sir Roger de Coverley; Swift came in and sat down without speaking a word, and quitted the room as abruptly; Otway and Chatterton were seen lingering on the opposite side of the Styx, but could not muster enough between them to pay Charon his fare ; Thomson fell asleep in the boat, and was rowed back again; and Burns sent a low fellow, one John Barleycorn, an old companion of his, who had conducted him to the other world, to say that he had during his lifetime been drawn out of his retirement as a show, only to be made

an exciseman of, artd that he would rather remain where he was. He desired, however, to shake hands by his representative—the hand, thus held out, was in a burning fever, and shook prodigiously.

The room was hung round with several portraits of eminent painters. While we were debating whether we should demand speech with these masters of mute eloquence, whose features were so familiar to us, it seemed that all at once they glided from their frames, and seated themselves at some little distance from us. There was Leonardo, with his majestic beard and watchful eye, having a bust of Archimedes before him; next him was Raphael's graceful head turned round to the Fornarina; and on his other side was Lucretia Borgia, with calm, golden locks; Michael Angelo had placed the model of St. Peter's on the table before him; Correggio had an angel at his side; Titian was seated with his mistress between himself and Giorgione; Guido was accompanied by his own Aurora, who took a dice-box from him; Claude held a mirror in his hand; Rubens patted a beautiful panther (led in by a satyr) on the head; Vandyke appeared as his own Paris, and Rembrandt was hid under firs, gold chains, and jewels, which Sir Joshua eyed closely, holding his hand so as to shade his forehead. Not a word was spoken; and as we rose to do them homage, they still presented the same surface to the view. Not being *bona-fide* representations of living people, we got rid of the splendid apparitions by signs and dumb show. As soon as they had melted into thin air, there was a loud noise at the outer door, and we found it was Giotto, Cimabue, and Ghirlandaio, who had been raised from the dead by their earnest desire to see their illustrious successors—

" *Whose names on earth
In Fame's eternal records live for aye !* "

Finding them gone, they had no ambition to be seen after them, and mournfully withdrew. " Egad ! " said Lamb, " these are the very fellows I should like to have had some

talk with, to know how they could see to paint when all was dark around them."

"But shall we have nothing to say," interrogated G. J—, "to the *Legend of Good Women*?"—"Name, name, Mr. J—," cried Hunt in a boisterous tone of friendly exultation, "name as many as you please, without reserve or fear of molestation!" J——was perplexed between so many amiable recollections, that the name of the lady of his choice expired in a pensive whiff of his pipe; and Lamb impatiently declared for the Duchess of Newcastle. Mrs. Hutchinson was no sooner mentioned, than she carried the day from the Duchess. We were the less solicitous on this subject of filling up the posthumous lists of Good Women, as there was already one in the room as good, as sensible, and in all respects as exemplary, as the best of them could be for their lives! "I should like vastly to have seen Ninon de PEnclos," said that incomparable person; and this immediately put us in mind that we had neglected to pay honour due to our friends on the other side of the Channel: Voltaire, the patriarch of levity, and Rousseau, the father of sentiment; Montaigne and Rabelais (great in wisdom and in wit); Moliere and that illustrious group that are collected round him (in the print of that subject) to hear him read his comedy of the *Tartuffe* at the house of Ninon; Racine, La Fontaine, Rochefoucault, St. Evremont, etc.

"There is one person," said a shrill, querulous voice, "I would rather see than all these—Don Quixote I"

"Come, come I" said Hunt; "I thought we should have no heroes, real or fabulous. What say you, Mr. Lamb? Are you for ekeing out your shadowy list with such names as Alexander, Julius Caesar, Tamerlane, or Ghengis Khan?"—"Excuse me," said Lamb; "on the subject of characters in active life, plotters and disturbers of the world, I have a crotchet of my own, which I beg leave to reserve."—"No, no I come out with your worthies I"—"What do you think of Guy Fawkes and Judas Iscariot?" Hunt turned an eye upon him like a wild Indian, but cordial and full of

smothered glee. ' Your most exquisite reason!" was echoed on all sides; and Ayrton thought that Lamb had now fairly entangled himself. " Why, I cannot but think," retorted he of the wistful countenance, " that Guy Fawkes, that poor, fluttering, annual scarecrow of straw and rags, is an ill-used gentleman. I would give something to see him sitting pale and emaciated, surrounded by his matches and his barrels of gunpowder, and expecting the moment that was to transport him to Paradise for his heroic self-devotion; but if I say any more, there is that fellow Godwin will make something of it. And as to Judas Iscariot, my reason is different. I would fain see the face of him who, having dipped his hand in the same dish with the Son of Man, could afterwards betray him. I have no conception of such a thing; nor have I ever seen any picture (not even Leonardo's very fine one) that gave me the least idea of it."—" You have said enough, Mr. Lamb, to justify your choice."

" Oh 1 ever right, Menenius—ever right I "

" There is only one other person I can ever think of after this," continued Lamb; but without mentioning a name that once put on a semblance of mortality. " If Shakspeare was to come into the room, we should all rise up to meet him; but if that person was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of his garment! "

As a lady present seemed now to get uneasy at the turn the conversation had taken, we rose up to go. The morning broke with that dim, dubious light by which Giotto, Cimabue, and Ghirlandaio must have seen to paint their earliest works; and we parted to meet again and renew similar topics at night, the next night, and the night after that, till that night overspread Europe which saw no dawn. The same event, in truth, broke up our little Congress that broke up the great one. But that was to meet again: our deliberations have never been resumed.

On the Conversation of Authors¹

AN AUTHOR is bound to write—well or ill, wisely or foolishly: it is his trade. But I do not see that he is bound to talk, any more than he is bound to dance, or ride, or fence better than other people. Reading, study, silence, thought, are a bad introduction to loquacity. It would be sooner learnt of chambermaids and tapsters. He understands the art and mystery of his own profession, which is book-making: what right has anyone to expect or require him to do more—to make a bow gracefully on entering or leaving a room, to make love charmingly, or to make a fortune at all? In all things there is a division of labour. A lord is no less amorous for writing ridiculous love-letters, nor a General less successful for wanting wit and honesty. Why, then, may not a poor author say nothing, and yet pass muster? Set him on the top of a stage-coach, he will make no figure; he is *mum-chance*, while the slang-wit flies about as fast as the dust, with the crack of the whip and **the** clatter of the horses' heels: put him in a ring of boxers, he is a poor creature—

" And of his port as meek as is a maid"

Introduce him to a tea-party of milliners' girls, and they are ready to split their sides with laughing at him: over his bottle, he is dry: in the drawing-room, rude or awkward: he is too refined for the vulgar, too clownish for the fashionable:—" he is one that cannot make a good leg, one **that** cannot eat a mess of broth cleanly, one that cannot ride a horse without spur-galling, one that cannot salute a woman, and look on her directly: "—in courts, in camps,

¹ *On the Conversation of Authors* appeared in the *London Magazine* of September 1820.

THE CONVERSATION OF AUTHORS

in town and county, he is a cypher or a butt: he is good for nothing but a laughing-stock or a scare-crow. You can scarcely get a word out of him for love or money. He knows nothing. He has no notion of pleasure or business, or of what is going on in the world; he does not understand cookery (unless he is a doctor in divinity), nor surgery, nor chemistry (unless he is a *Quidnunc*), nor mechanics, nor husbandry and tillage (unless he is as great an admirer of Tull's *Husbandry*, and has profited as much by it as the philosopher of Botley)—no, nor music, painting, the Drama, nor the Fine Arts in general.

"What the deuce is it then, my good sir, that he does understand, or know anything about?"

"BOOKS, VENUS, BOOKS!"

"What books?"

"Not receipt-books, Madona, nor account-books, nor books of pharmacy, or the veterinary art (they belong to their respective callings and handicrafts), but books of liberal taste and general knowledge."

"What do you mean by that general knowledge which implies not a knowledge of things in general, but an ignorance (by your own account) of every one in particular: or by that liberal taste which scorns the pursuits and acquirements of the rest of the world in succession, and is confined exclusively, and by way of excellence, to what nobody takes an interest in but yourself, and a few idlers like yourself? Is this what the critics mean by the *belles-lettres*, and the study of humanity?"

Book-knowledge, in a word, then, is knowledge *communicable by books*, and it is general and liberal for this reason, that it is intelligible and interesting on the bare suggestion. That to which anyone feels a romantic attachment, merely from finding it in a book, must be interesting in itself: that which he constantly forms a lively and entire conception of, from seeing a few marks and scratches upon paper, must be taken from common nature: that which, the first time you meet with it, seizes upon the attention

as a curious speculation, must exercise the general faculties of the human mind. There are certain broader aspects of society and views of things common to every subject, and more or less cognizable to every mind; and these the scholar treats, and founds his claims to general attention upon them, without being chargeable with pedantry. The minute descriptions of fishing-tackle, of baits and flies in Walton's *Complete Angler*, make that work a great favourite with sportsmen : the alloy of an amiable humanity, and the modest but touching descriptions of familiar incidents and rural objects scattered through it, have made it an equal favourite with every reader of taste and feeling. Montaigne's *Essays*, Dilworth's *Spelling Book*, and Fearn's *Treatise on Contingent Remainders*, are all equally books, but not equally adapted for all classes of readers. The two last are of no use but to school-masters and lawyers: but the first is a work we may recommend to anyone to read who has ever thought at all, or who would learn to think justly on any subject. Persons of different trades and professions—the mechanic, the shop-keeper, the medical practitioner, the artist, etc., may all have great knowledge and ingenuity in their several vocations, the details of which will be very edifying to themselves, and just as incomprehensible to their neighbours : but over and above this professional and technical knowledge, they must be supposed to have a stock of common sense and common feeling to furnish subjects for common conversation, or to give them any pleasure in each other's company. It is to this common stock of ideas, spread over the surface, or striking its roots into the very centre of society, that the popular writer appeals, and not in vain; for he finds readers. It is of this finer essence of wisdom and humanity "ethereal mould, sky-tinctured," that books of the better sort are made. They contain the language of thought. It must happen that, in the course of time and the variety of human capacity, some persons will have struck out finer observations, reflections, and sentiments than others. These they have

committed to books of memory, have bequeathed as a lasting legacy to posterity ; ' and such persons have become standard authors. We visit at the shrine, drink in some measure of the inspiration, and cannot easily " breathe in other air less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits." Are we to be blamed for this because the vulgar and illiterate do not always understand us ? The fault is rather in them who are " confined and cabin'd in " each in their own particular sphere and compartment of ideas, and have not the same refined medium of communication or abstracted topics of discourse. Bring a number of literary, or of illiterate persons together, perfect strangers to each other, and see which party will make the best company. " Verily, we have our reward." We have made our election, and have no reason to repent it, if we were wise. But the misfortune is, we wish to have all the advantages on one side. We grudge, and cannot reconcile it to ourselves, that anyone " should go about to cozen fortune, without the stamp of learning ! " We think " because we are *scholars*, there shall be no more cakes and ale ! " We don't know how to account for it, that bar-maids should gossip, or ladies whisper, or bullies roar, or fools laugh, or knaves thrive, without having gone through the same course of select study that we have ! This vanity is preposterous, and carries its own punishment with it. Books are a world in themselves, it is true ; but they are not the only world. The world itself is a volume larger than all the libraries in it. Learning is a sacred deposit from the experience of ages ; but it has not put all future experience on the shelf, or debarred the common herd of mankind from the use of their hands, tongues, eyes, ears, or understandings. **Taste** is a luxury for the privileged few : but **it would be hard** upon those who have not the same standard of refinement in their own minds **that** we suppose ourselves to have, if this should prevent them from having recourse, **as usual, to their** old frolics, coarse jokes, **and** horse-play, **and** getting through the wear **and tear of the world, with such**

homely sayings and shrewd helps as they may. Happy is it, that the mass of mankind eat and drink, and sleep, and perform their several tasks, and do as they like without us—caring nothing for our scribblings, our carpings, and our quibbles ; and moving on the same, in spite of our fine-spun distinctions, fantastic theories, and lines of demarcation, which are like chalk-figures drawn on ballroom floors to be danced out before morning ! In the field opposite the window where I write this, there is a country-girl picking stones : in the one next it, there are several poor women weeding the blue and red flowers from the corn: farther on, are two boys, tending a flock of sheep. What do they know or care about what I am writing about them, or ever will ?—or what would they be the better for it, if they did ? Or why need we despise

*" The wretched slave,
Who like a lackey, from the rise to the set,
Sweats in the eye of Phoebus, and all night
Sleeps in Elysium ; next day, after dawn,
Doth rise, and help Hyperion to his horse ;
And follows so the ever-rmningyear
With profitable labour to his grave ? "*

Is not this life as sweet as writing Ephemerides ? But we put that which flutters the brain idly for a moment and then is heard no more, in competition with nature, which exists everywhere, and lasts always. We not only under-rate the force of nature, and make; too much of art—but we also over-rate our own accomplishments and advantages derived from art. In the presence of clownish ignorance, or of persons without any ggett pretensions, real or affected, we are very much inclined to take upon ourselves, as the virtual representatives of science, art, and literature. We have a strong itch to show off and do the honours of civilization for all the great men whose works we have ever read, and whose names Our auditors have never heard of, as noblemen's lacqueys, in the absence of their masters, give

themselves airs of superiority over everyone else. But though we have read Congreve, a stage-coachman may be an over-match for us in wit: though we are deep-versed in the excellence of Shakespeare's colloquial style, a village beldam may outscold us : though we have read Machiavel in the original Italian, we may be easily outwitted by a clown: and though we have cried our eyes out over the *New Ekise*, a poor shepherd-lad, who hardly knows how to spell his own name, may " tell his tale, under the hawthorn in the dale," and prove a more thriving wooer. What then is the advantage we possess over the meanest of the mean ? Why this, that we have read Congreve, Shakespeare, Machiavel, the *New Eloise* ;—not that we are to have their wit, genius, shrewdness, or melting tenderness.

From speculative pursuits we must be satisfied with speculative benefits. From reading too, we learn to write. If we have had the pleasure of studying the highest models of perfection in their kind, and can hope to leave anything ourselves, however slight, to be looked upon as a model, or even a good copy in its way, we may think ourselves pretty well off, without engrossing all the privileges of learning, and all the blessings of ignorance into the bargain.

It has been made a question whether there have not been individuals in common life of greater talents and powers of mind than the most celebrated writers—whether, for instance, such or such a Liverpool merchant, or Manchester manufacturer, was not a more sensible man than Montaigne, of a longer reach of understanding than the Viscount of St. Albans. There is no saying, unless some of these illustrious obscure had communicated their important discoveries to the world. But then they would have been authors I On the other hand, there is a set of critics who fall into the contrary error; and suppose that unless the proof of capacity is laid before all the world, the capacity itself cannot exist; looking upon all those who have not commenced authors, as literally " stocks and stones, and worse than senseless things." I remember trying to convince a

person of this class, that a young lady, whom he knew nothing of, the niece of a celebrated authoress, had just the same sort of fine *tact* and ironical turn in conversation, that her relative had shown in her writings when young. The only answer I could get was an incredulous smile, and the observation that when she wrote anything as good as [*Eve/ina*], or {*Cecilia*} he might think her as clever. I said all I meant was, that she had the same family talents, and asked whether he thought that if Miss [Burney] had not been very clever, as a mere girl, before she wrote her novels, she would ever have written them? It was all in vain. He still stuck to his text, and was convinced that the niece was a little fool compared to her aunt at the same age; and if he had known the aunt formerly, he would have had just the same opinion of *her*. My friend was one of those who have a settled persuasion that it is the book that makes the author, and not the author the book. That's a strange opinion for a great philosopher to hold. But he wilfully shuts his eyes to the germs and indistinct workings of genius, and treats them with supercilious indifference, till they stare him in the face through the press; and then takes cognizance only of the overt acts and published evidence. This is neither a proof of wisdom, nor the way to be wise. It is partly pedantry and prejudice, and partly feebleness of judgment, and want of magnanimity. He dares as little commit himself on the character of books, as of individuals, till they are stamped by the public. If you show him any work for his approbation, he asks, "Whose is the superscription?"—He judges of genius by its shadow, reputation—of the metal by the coin. He is just the reverse of another person whom I know—for, as G[odwin] never allows a particle of merit to anyone till it is acknowledged by the whole world, Q[oleridge] withholds his tribute of applause from every person in whom any mortal but himself can descry the least glimpse of understanding. He would be thought to look farther into a millstone than anybody else. He would have others see with his eyes and take their

opinions from him on trust, in spite of their senses. The more obscure and defective the indications of merit, the greater his sagacity and candour in being the first to point them out. He looks upon what he nicknames *a man of genius*, but as the breath of his nostrils, and the clay in the potter's hands. If any such inert, unconscious mass, under the fostering care of the modern Prometheus, is kindled into life,—begins to see, speak, and move, so as to attract the notice of other people,—our jealous patroniser of latent worth in that case throws aside, scorns, and hates his own handy-work; and deserts his intellectual offspring from the moment they can go alone and shift for themselves.—But to pass on to our more immediate subject.

The conversation of authors is not so good as might be imagined: but, such as it is (and with rare exceptions) it is better than any other. The proof of which is, that, when you are used to it, you cannot put up with any other. That of mixed company becomes utterly intolerable—you cannot sit out a common tea and card party, at least, if they pretend to talk at all. You are obliged in despair to cut all your old acquaintances who are not *aufait* on the prevailing and most smartly contested topics, who are not imbued with the high gusto of criticism and *virtu*. You cannot bear to hear a friend whom you have not seen for many years, tell at how much a yard he sells his laces and tapes, when he means to move into his next house, when he heard last from his relations in the coiyitry, whether trade is alive or dead, or whether Mr. Such-a-one gets to look old. This sort of neighbourly gossip will not go down after the high-raised tone of literary conversation. The last may be absurd, very unsatisfactory, and full of turbulence and heart-burnings; but it has a zest in it which more ordinary topics of news or family-affairs do not supply. Neither will the conversation of what, we understand by *gentlemen* and men of fashion, do after that of men of letters. It is flat, insipid, stale, and unprofitable, in the comparison. They talk about much the same things—pictures, poetry, politics, plays; but they do

it worse, and at a sort of vapid secondhand. They, in fact, talk out of newspapers and magazines, what *we write there*. They do not feel the same interest in the subjects they affect to handle with an air of fashionable condescension, nor have they the same knowledge of them, if they were ever so much in earnest in displaying it. If it were not for the wine and the dessert, no author in his senses would accept an invitation to a well-dressed dinner-party, except out of pure good-nature and unwillingness to disoblige by his refusal. Persons in high life talk almost entirely by rote. There are certain established modes of address, and certain answers to them expected as a matter of course, as a point of etiquette. The studied forms of politeness do not give the greatest possible scope to an exuberance of wit and fancy. The fear of giving offence destroys sincerity, and without sincerity there can be no true enjoyment of society, nor unfettered exertion of intellectual activity.—Those who have been accustomed to live with the great are hardly considered as conversible persons in literary society. They are not to be talked with, any more than puppets or echoes. They have no opinions but what will please; and you naturally turn away, as a waste of time and words, from attending to a person who just before assented to what you said, and whom you find the moment after, from something that unexpectedly or perhaps by design drops from him, to be of a totally different way of thinking. This *bush-fighting* is not regarded as fair play among scientific men. As fashionable conversation is a sacrifice to politeness, so the conversation of low life is nothing but rudeness. They contradict you without giving a reason, or if they do, it is a very bad one—swear, talk loud, repeat the same thing fifty times over, get to calling names, and from words proceed to blows. You cannot make companions of servants, or persons in an inferior station in life. You may talk to them on matters of business, and what they have to do for you (as lords talk to bruisers on subjects of *fancy*, or country squires to their grooms on horse-racing), but

out of that narrow sphere, to any general topic, you cannot lead them; the conversation soon flags, and you go back to the old question, or are obliged to break up the sitting for want of ideas in common.

The conversation of authors is better than that of most professions. It is better than that of lawyers, who talk nothing but *double entendre*—than that of physicians, who talk of the approaching deaths of the College, or the marriage of some new practitioner with some rich widow—than that of divines, who talk of the last place they dined at—than that of University-men, who make stale puns, repeat the refuse of London newspapers, and affect an ignorance of Greek and mathematics ; it is better than that of players, who talk of nothing but the Green-room, and rehearse the scholar, the wit, or the fine gentleman, like a part on the stage—or than that of ladies, who, whatever you talk of, think of nothing, and expect you to think of nothing, but themselves. It is not easy to keep up a conversation with women in company. It is thought a piece of rudeness to differ from them : it is not quite fair to ask them a reason for what they say. You are afraid of pressing too hard upon them : but where you cannot differ openly and unreservedly, you cannot heartily agree. It is not so in France. There the women talk of things in general, and reason better than the men in this country. They are mistresses of the intellectual foils. They are adepts in all the topics. They know what is to be said for and against all sorts of questions, and are lively and full of mischief into the bargain. They are very subtle. They put you to your trumps immediately. Your logic is more in requisition even than your gallantry. You must argue as well as bow yourself into the good graces of these modern Amazons. What a situation for an Englishman to be placed in!¹

¹ The topics of metaphysical argument having got into female society in France, is a proof how much they must have been discussed there generally, and how unfounded the charge is which we bring against them of excessive thoughtlessness and frivolity. The French (taken all together) are a more sensible, reflecting, and better informed people than the English. [1826.]

The fault of literary conversation in general is its too great tenaciousness. It fastens upon a subject, and will not let it go. It resembles a battle rather than a skirmish, and makes a toil of a pleasure. Perhaps it does this from necessity, from a consciousness of wanting the more familiar graces, the power to sport and trifle, to touch lightly and adorn agreeably, every view or turn of a question *en passant*, as it arises. Those who have a reputation to lose are too ambitious of shining, to please. "To excel in conversation," said an ingenious man, "one must not be always striving to say good things : to say one good thing, one must say many bad, and more indifferent ones." This desire to shine without the means at hand, often makes men silent:—

"The fear of being silent strikes us dumb."

A writer who has been accustomed to take a connected view of a difficult question and to work it out gradually in all its bearings, may be very deficient in that quickness and ease which men of the world, who are in the habit of hearing a variety of opinions, who pick up an observation on one subject, and another on another, and who care about none any farther than the passing away of an idle hour, usually acquire. An author has studied a particular point—he has read, he has inquired, he has thought a great deal upon it: he is not contented to take it up casually in common with others, to throw out a hint, to propose an objection: he will either remain silent, uneasy, and dissatisfied, or he will begin at the beginning, and go through with it to the end. He is for taking the whole responsibility upon himself. He would be thought to understand the subject better than others, or indeed would show that nobody else knows anything about it. There are always three or four points on which the literary novice at his first outset in life fancies he can enlighten every company, and bear down all opposition : but he is cured of this Quixotic and pugnacious spirit, as he goes more into the world, where he finds that there are other opinions and other pretensions to be

adjusted besides his own. When this asperity wears off, and a certain scholastic precocity is mellowed down, the conversation of men of letters becomes both interesting and instructive. Men of the world have no fixed principles, no ground-work of thought: mere scholars have too much an object, a theory always in view, to which they wrest everything, and not unfrequently, common sense itself. By mixing with society, they rub off their hardness of manner, and impracticable, offensive singularity, while they retain a greater depth and coherence of understanding. There is more to be learnt from them than from their books. This was a remark of Rousseau's, and it is a very true one. In the confidence and unreserve of private intercourse, they are more at liberty to say what they think, to put the subject in different and opposite points of view, to illustrate it more briefly and pithily by familiar expressions, by an appeal to individual character and personal knowledge—to bring in the limitation, to obviate misconception, to state difficulties on their own side of the argument, and answer them as well as they can. This would hardly agree with the prudery, and somewhat ostentatious claims of authorship. Dr. Johnson's conversation in Boswell's *Life* is much better than his published works: and the fragments of the opinions of celebrated men, preserved in their letters or in anecdotes of them, are justly sought after as invaluable for the same reason. For instance, what a fund of sense there is in Grimm's *Memoirs*! We thus get at the essence of what is contained in their more laboured productions, without the affectation or formality. Argument, again, is the death of conversation, if carried on in a spirit of hostility; but discussion is a pleasant and profitable thing, where you advance and defend your opinions as far as you can, and admit the truth of what is objected against them with equal impartiality: in short, where you do not pretend to set up for an oracle, but freely declare what you really know about any question, or suggest what has struck you as throwing a new light upon it, and let it pass for what it is worth.

This tone of conversation was well described by Dr. Johnson, when he said of some party at which he had been present the night before—" We had good talk, sir I " As a general rule, there is no conversation worth anything but between friends, or those who agree in the same leading views of a subject. Nothing was ever learnt by either side in a dispute. You contradict one another, will not allow a grain of sense in what your adversary advances, are blind to whatever makes against yourself, dare not look the question fairly in the face, so that you cannot avail yourself even of your real advantages, insist most on what you feel to be the weakest points of your argument, and get more and more absurd, dogmatical, and violent every moment. Disputes for victory generally end to the dissatisfaction of all parties ; and the one recorded in *Gil Bias* breaks up just as it ought. I once knew a very ingenious man, than whom, to take him in the way of common chit-chat or fireside gossip, no one could be more entertaining or rational. He would make an apt classical quotation, propose an explanation of a curious passage in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, detect a metaphysical error in Locke, would infer the volatility of the French character from the chapter in Sterne where the Count mistakes the feigned name of Yorick for a proof of his being the identical imaginary character in Hamlet (*Et vous foes Yorick I*)—thus confounding words with things twice over—but let a difference of opinion be once hitched in, and it was all over with him. His only object from that time was to shut out common sense, and to be proof against conviction. He would argue the most ridiculous point (such as that there were two original languages) for hours together, nay, through the horologe. You would not suppose it was the same person. He was like an obstinate run-away horse, that takes the bit in his mouth, and becomes mischievous and unmanageable. He had made up his mind to one thing—not to admit a single particle of what anyone else said for or against him. It was all the difference between a man drunk and sober, sane or

mad. It is the same when he once gets the pen in his hand. He has been trying to prove a contradiction in terms for the last ten years of his life, viz., that the Bourbons have the same right to the throne of France that the Brunswick family have to the throne of England. Many people think there is a want of honesty or a want of understanding in this. There is neither. But he will persist in an argument to the last pinch; he will yield, in absurdity, to no man !

This litigious humour is bad enough: but there is one character still worse—that of a person who goes into company, not to contradict, but to *talk at* you. This is the greatest nuisance in civilised society. Such a person does not come armed to defend himself at all points, but •to unsettle, if he can, and throw a slur on all your favourite opinions. If he has a notion that anyone in the room is fond of poetry, he immediately volunteers a contemptuous tirade against the idle jingle of verse. If he suspects you have a delight in pictures, he endeavours, not by fair argument, but by a side-wind, to put you out of conceit with so frivolous an art. If you have a taste for music, he does not think much good is to be done by this tickling of the ears. If you speak in praise of a comedy, he does not see the use of wit: if you say you have been to a tragedy, he shakes his head at this mockery of human misery, and thinks it ought to be prohibited. He tries to find out beforehand whatever it is that you take a particular pride or pleasure in, that he may annoy your self-love in the tenderest point (as if he were probing a wound) and make you dissatisfied with yourself and your pursuits for several days afterwards. A person might as well make a practice of throwing out scandalous aspersions against your dearest friends or nearest relations, by way of ingratiating himself into your favour. Such ill-timed impertinence is " villainous, and shews a pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it."

The soul of conversation is sympathy.—Authors should converse chiefly with authors, and their talk should be of books. " When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of

war." There is nothing so pedantic as pretending not to be pedantic. No man can get above his pursuit in life : it is getting above himself, which is impossible. There is a Free-masonry in all things. You can only speak to be understood, but this you cannot be, except by those who are in the secret. Hence an argument has been drawn to supersede the necessity of conversation altogether; for it has been said, that there is no use in talking to people of sense, who know all that you can tell them, nor to fools, who will not be instructed. There is, however, the smallest encouragement to proceed, when you are conscious that the more you really enter into a subject, the farther you will be from the comprehension of your hearers—and that the more proofs you give of any position, the more odd and out-of-the-way they will think your notions. C[oleridge] is the only person who can talk to all sorts of people, on all sorts of subjects, without caring a farthing for their understanding one word he says—and *be* talks only for admiration and to be listened to, and accordingly the least interruption puts him out. I firmly believe he would make just the same impression on half his audiences, if he purposely repeated absolute nonsense with the same voice and manner and inexhaustible flow of undulating speech 1 In general, wit shines only by reflection. You must take your cue from your company—must rise as they rise, and sink as they fall. You must see that your good things, your knowing allusions, are not flung away, like the pearls in the adage. What a check it is to be asked a foolish question; to find that the first principles are not understood 1 You are thrown on your back immediately, the conversation is stopped like a country-dance by those who do not know the figure. But when a set of adepts, of *illuminati*, get about a question, it is worth while to hear them talk. They may snarl and quarrel over it, like dogs; but they pick it bare to the bone, they masticate it thoroughly.

This was the case formerly at L[amb]*s—where we used to have many lively skirmishes at their Thursday evening

parties. I doubt whether the Small-coal man's musical parties could exceed them.¹ Oh! for the pen of John Buncle to consecrate a *petit souvenir* to their memory I—There was L[amb] himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men. He always made the best pun, and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half-sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears: and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a keen, laughing, hair-brained vein of home-felt truth! What choice venom! How often did we cut into the haunch of letters, while we discussed the haunch of mutton on the table! How we skimmed the cream of criticism! How we got into the heart of controversy! How we picked out the marrow of authors! "And, in our flowing cups, many a good name and true was freshly remembered." Recollect (most sage and critical reader) that in all this I was but a guest! Need I go over the names? They were but the old everlasting set—Milton and Shakespeare, Pope and Dryden, Steele and Addison, Swift and Gay, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Richardson, Hogarth's prints, Claude's landscapes, the Cartoons at Hampton Court, and all those things that, having once been, must ever be. The Scotch Novels had not then been heard of: so we said nothing about them. In general, we were hard upon the moderns. The author of the *Rambler* was only tolerated in Boswell's *Life* of him; and it was as much as anyone could do to edge in a word for *Junius*. L[amb] could not bear *Gil Bias*. This was a fault. I remember the greatest triumph I ever had was in persuading him, after some years' difficulty, that Fielding was better than Smollett. On one occasion, he was for making out a list of persons famous in history that one

¹ Thomas Britton, He was a native of Wellingborough, county Northampton. See a good account of him in *Reliquiae Hearnianae*, 1857, p. 339.—W. C. H.

would wish to see again—at the head of whom were Pontius Pilate, Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Faustus—but we black-balled most of his list. But with what a gusto would he describe his favourite authors, Donne, or Sir Philip Sidney, and call their most crabbed passages *delicious* \ He tried them on his palate as epicures taste olives, and his observations had a smack in them, like a roughness on the tongue. With what discrimination he hinted a defect in what he admired most—as in saying that the display of the sumptuous banquet in *Paradise Regained* was not in true keeping, as the simplest fare was all that was necessary to tempt the extremity of hunger—and stating that Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* were too much like married people. He has furnished many a text for C[oleridge] to preach upon. There was no fuss or cant about him: nor were his sweets or his sour sours ever diluted with one particle of affectation. I cannot say that the party at L[amb]'s were all of one description. There were honorary members, lay-brothers. Wit and good fellowship was the motto inscribed over the door. When a stranger came in, it was not asked, "Has he written anything?"—we were above that pedantry; but we waited to see what he could do. If he could take a hand at piquet, he was welcome to sit down. If a person liked anything, if he took snuff heartily, it was sufficient. He would understand, by analogy, the pungency of other things besides Irish blackguard or Scotch rappee. A character was good anywhere, in a room or on paper. But we abhorred insipidity, affectation, and fine gentlemen. There was one of our party who never failed to mark "two for his Nob" at cabbage, and he was thought no mean person. This was Ned P[hillips], and a better fellow in his way breathes not. There was [Rickman], who asserted some incredible matter of fact as a likely paradox, and settled all controversies by an *ipse dixit*, a *fiat* of his will, hammering out many a hard theory on the anvil of his brain—the Baron Munchausen of politics and practical philosophy: there was Captain [Burney], who had you at

an advantage by never understanding you:—there was Jem White, the Author of *Fa/staff's Letters*, who the other day left this dull world to go in search of more kindred spirits, "turning like the latter end of a lover's lute" :—there was A{yrton], who sometimes dropped in, the Will Honeycomb of our set—and Mrs. R[eynolds], who being of a quiet turn, loved to hear a noisy debate. An utterly uninformed person might have supposed this a scene of vulgar confusion and uproar. While the most critical question was pending, while the most difficult problem in philosophy was solving, P[hillips] cried out, "That's game," and M[artin] B[urney] muttered a quotation over the last remains of a veal-pie at a side table. Once, and once only, the literary interest overcame the general. For C {oleridge] was riding the high German horse, and demonstrating the Categories of the Transcendental Philosophy to the Author of the *Road to Ruin*: who insisted on his knowledge of German, and German metaphysics, having read the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the original. "My dear Mr. Holcroft," said C[oleridge], in a tone of infinitely provoking conciliation, "you really put me in mind of a sweet pretty German girl, about fifteen, that I met with in the Hartz forest in Germany—and who one day, as I was reading the *Limits of the Knowable and the Unknowable*, the profoundest of all his works, with great attention, came behind my chair, and leaning over, said, 'What, you read Kant? Why, I that am a German born, don't understand him I' " This was too much to bear, and Holcroft, starting up, called out in no measured tone, "Mr. C[oleridge], you are the most eloquent man I ever met with, and the most troublesome with your eloquence!" P[hillips] held the cribbage-peg that was to mark him game, suspended in his hand; and the whist table was silent for a moment. I saw Holcroft downstairs, and, on coming to the landing-place at Mitre Court, he stopped me to observe, that "he thought Mr. Qoleridge] a very clever man, with a great command of language, but that he feared he did not always affix very precise ideas to the words he used." After

he was gone, we had our laugh out, and went on with the argument on the nature of Reason, the Imagination, and the Will. I wish I could find a publisher for it: it would make a supplement to the *Biographia Literaria* in a volume-and-a-half octavo.

Those days are over! An event, the name of which I wish never to mention, broke up our party, like a bomb-shell thrown into the room: and now we seldom meet——

" *Like angels* visits, short and far between.* **

There is no longer the same set of persons, nor of associations. L[amb] does not live where he did. By shifting his abode, his notions seem less fixed. He does not wear his old snuff-coloured coat and breeches. It looks like an alteration in his style. An author and a wit should have a separate costume, a particular cloth: he should present something positive and singular to the mind, like Mr. Douce of the Museum. Our faith in the religion of letters will not bear to be taken to pieces, and put together again by caprice or accident. L[eigh] H[unt] goes there sometimes. He has a fine vinous spirit about him, and tropicgl blood in his veins: but he is better at his own table. He has a great flow of pleasantry and delightful animal spirits: but his hits do not tell like L[amb]'s; you cannot repeat them the next day. He requires not only to be appreciated but to have a select circle of admirers and devotees, to feel himself quite at home. He sits at the head of a party with great gaiety and grace; has an elegant manner and turn of features*; is never at a loss—*aliquando sufflaminandus erat*—has continual sportive sallies of wit or fancy; tells a story capitally; mimics an actor or an acquaintance to admiration; laughs with great glee and good humour at his own or other people's jokes; understands the point of an equivoque, or an observation immediately; has a taste and knowledge of books, of music, of medals; manages an argument adroitly; is genteel and gallant, and has a set of by-phrases and quaint allusions always at hand to produce a laugh:—if he has a fault, it is

that he does not listen so well as he speaks, is impatient of interruption, and is fond of being looked up to, without considering by whom. I believe, however, he has pretty well seen the folly of this. Neither is his ready display of personal accomplishment and variety of resources an advantage to his writings. They sometimes present a desultory and slipshod appearance, owing to this very circumstance. The same things that tell, perhaps, best to a private circle round the fireside, are not always intelligible to the public, nor does he take pains to make them so. He is too confident and secure of his audience. That which may be entertaining enough with the assistance of a certain liveliness of manner, may read very flat on paper, because it is abstracted from all the circumstances that had set it off to advantage. A writer should recollect that he has only to trust to the immediate impression of words, like a musician who sings without the accompaniment of an instrument. There is nothing to help out, or slubber over, the defects of the voice in the one case, nor of the style in the other. The reader may, if he pleases, get a very good idea of Lfeigh] [Hunt}'s conversation from a very agreeable paper he has lately published, called the *Indicator*, than which nothing can be more happily conceived or executed.

The art of conversation is the art of hearing as well as of being heard. Authors in general are not good listeners. Some of the best talkers are, on this account, the worst company; and some who are very indifferent, but very great talkers, are as bad. It is sometimes wonderful to see how a person, who has been entertaining or tiring a company by-the hour together, drops his countenance as if he had been shot, or had been seized with a sudden lock-jaw, the moment anyone interposes a single observation. The best converser I know is, however, the best listener. I mean Mr. Northcote, the painter. Painters by their profession are not bound to shine in conversation, and they shine the more. He lends his ear to an observation as if you had brought him a piece of news, and enters into it

with as much avidity and earnestness as if it interested himself personally. If he repeats an old remark or story, it is with the same freshness and point as for the first time. It always arises out of the occasion, and has the stamp of originality. There is no parroting of himself. His look is a continual, ever-varying history-piece of what passes in his mind. His face is as a book. There need no marks of interjection or interrogation to what he says. His manner is quite picturesque. There is an excess of character and *naivete* that never tires. His thoughts bubble up and sparkle like beads on old wine. The fund of anecdote, the collection of curious particulars, is enough to set up any common retailer of jests that dines out every day; but these are not strung together like a row of galley-slaves, but are always introduced to illustrate some argument or bring out some fine distinction of character. The mixture of spleen adds to the sharpness of the point, like poisoned arrows. Mr. Northcote enlarges with enthusiasm on the old painters, and tells good things of the new. The only thing he ever vexed me in was his liking the *Catalogue Raisonne'e*. I had almost as soon hear him talk of Titian's pictures (which he does with tears in his eyes, and looking just like them) as see the originals, and I had rather hear him talk of Sir Joshua's than see them. He is the last of that school who knew Goldsmith and Johnson. How finely he describes Pope 1 His elegance of mind, his figure, his character were not unlike his own. He does not resemble a modern Englishman, but puts one in mind of a Roman Cardinal or a Spanish Inquisitor. I never ate or drank with Mr. Northcote; but I have lived on his conversation with undiminished relish ever since I can remember,—and when I leave it, I come out into the street with feelings lighter and more ethereal than I have at any other time. One of his *tite-a-tetes* would at any time make an Essay; but he cannot write himself, because he loses himself, in the connecting passages, is fearful of the effect, and wants the habit of bringing his ideas into one focus or point of view. A *lens* is necessary to

collect* the diverging rays, the refracted and broken angular lights of conversation on paper. Contradiction is half the battle in talking—the being startled by what others say, and having to answer on the spot. You have to defend yourself, paragraph by paragraph, parenthesis within parenthesis. Perhaps it might be supposed that a person who excels in conversation and cannot write, would succeed better in dialogue. But the stimulus, the immediate irritation would be wanting; and the work would read flatter than ever, from not having the very thing it pretended to have.

Lively sallies and connected discourse are very different things. There are many persons of that impatient and restless turn of mind, that they cannot wait a moment for a conclusion, or follow up the thread of any argument. In the hurry of conversation their ideas are somehow huddled into sense ; but in the intervals of thought, leave a great gap between. Montesquieu said, he often lost an idea before he could find words for it: yet he dictated, by way of saving time, to an amanuensis. This last is, in my opinion, a vile method, and a solecism in authorship. Home Tooke, among other paradoxes, used to maintain, that no one could write a good style who was not in the habit of talking and hearing the sound of his own voice. He might as well have said that no one could relish a good style without reading it aloud, as we find common people do to assist their apprehension. But there is a method of trying periods on the ear, or weighing them with the scales of the breath: without any articulate sound. Authors, as they write, may be said to "hear a sound so fine, there's nothing lives 'twixt it and silence." Even musicians generally compose in their heads. I agree that no style is good that is not fit to be spoken or read aloud with effect. This holds true not only of emphasis and cadence, but also with regard to natural idiom and colloquial freedom. Sterne's was in this respect the best style that ever was written. You fancy that you hear the people talking. For a contrary reason, no

college-man writes a good style, or understands it when written. Fine writing is with him all verbiage and monotony—a translation into classical centos or hexameter-lines.

That which I have just mentioned is among many instances I could give of ingenious absurdities advanced by Mr. Tooke in the heat and pride of controversy. A person who knew him well, and greatly admired his talents, said of him that he never (to his recollection) heard him defend an opinion which he thought right, or in which he believed him to be himself sincere. He indeed provoked his antagonists into the toils by the very extravagance of his assertions, and the teasing sophistry by which he rendered them plausible. His temper was prompter to his skill. He had the manners of a man of the world, with great scholastic resources. He flung every one else off his guard, and was himself immovable. I never knew any one who did not admit his superiority in this kind of warfare. He put a full-stop to one of C[oleridge]'s long-winded prefatory apologies for his youth and inexperience, by saying abruptly, "Speak up, young man!" and, at another time, silenced a learned professor by desiring an explanation of a word which the other frequently used, and which, he said, he had been many years trying to get at the meaning of,—the copulative *Is*. He was the best intellectual fencer of his day. He made strange havoc of Fuseli's fantastic hieroglyphics, violent humours, and oddity of dialect. Curran, who was sometimes of the same party, was lively and animated in convivial conversation, but dull in argument; nay, averse to anything like reasoning or serious observation, and had the worst taste I ever knew. His favourite critical topics were to abuse Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Indeed, he confessed a want of sufficient acquaintance with books when he found himself in literary society in London. He and Sheridan once dined at John Kemble's with Mrs. Inchbald and Mary Woolstonecroft, when the discourse almost wholly turned on Love "from noon to

dewy eve, a summer's day 1" What a subject 1 What speakers, and what hearers 1 What would I not give to have been there, had I not learned it all from the bright eyes of Amaryllis, and may one day make a *Table-talk* of it! Peter Pindar was rich in anecdote and grotesque humour, and profound in technical knowledge both of music, poetry, and painting, but he was gross and overbearing. Wordsworth sometimes talks like a man inspired on subjects of poetry (his own out of the question)—Coleridge well on every subject, and G[o]ldwin on none. To finish this subject—Mrs. M[ontagu]'s conversation is as fine-cut as her features, and I like to sit in the room with that sort of coronet face. What she says leaves a flavour, like fine green tea. H[un]t's is like champagne, and N{orthcote}'s like anchovy sandwiches. H[a]yd[o]n's is like a game at trap-ball : L[amb]'s like snap-dragon : and my own (if I do not mistake the matter) is not very much unlike a game at ninepins I . . . One source of the conversation of authors is the character of other authors, and on that they are rich indeed. What things they say! What stories they tell of one another, more particularly of their friends ! If I durst only give some of these confidential communications ! . . . The reader may perhaps think the foregoing a specimen of them—but indeed he is mistaken.

I do not know of any greater impertinence, than for an obscure individual to set about pumping a character of celebrity. "Bring him to me," said a Doctor Tronchin, speaking of Rousseau, "that I may see whether he has anything in him." Before you can take measure of the capacity of others, you ought to be sure that they have not taken measure of yours. They may think you a spy on them, and may not like their company. If you really want to know whether another person can talk well, begin by saying a good thing yourself, and you will have a right to look for a rejoinder. "The best tennis-players," says Sir Fopiing Flutter, "make the best matches."

*" For wit is lilee a rest
Held up at tennis, which men do the best
With the best players"*

We hear it often said of a great author, or a great actress, that they are very stupid people in private. But he was a fool that said so. *Tell me your company, and I'll tell you your manners.* In conversation, as in other things, the action and reaction should bear a certain proportion to each other. Authors may, in some sense, be looked upon as foreigners, who are not naturalised even in their native soil. Lamb once came down into the country to see us.¹ He was "like the most capricious poet Ovid among the Goths." The country people thought him an oddity, and did not understand his jokes. It would be strange if they had; for he did not make any while he stayed. But when we crossed the country to Oxford, then he spoke a little. He and the old colleges were hail-fellow well met; and in the quadrangles, he "walked gowned."

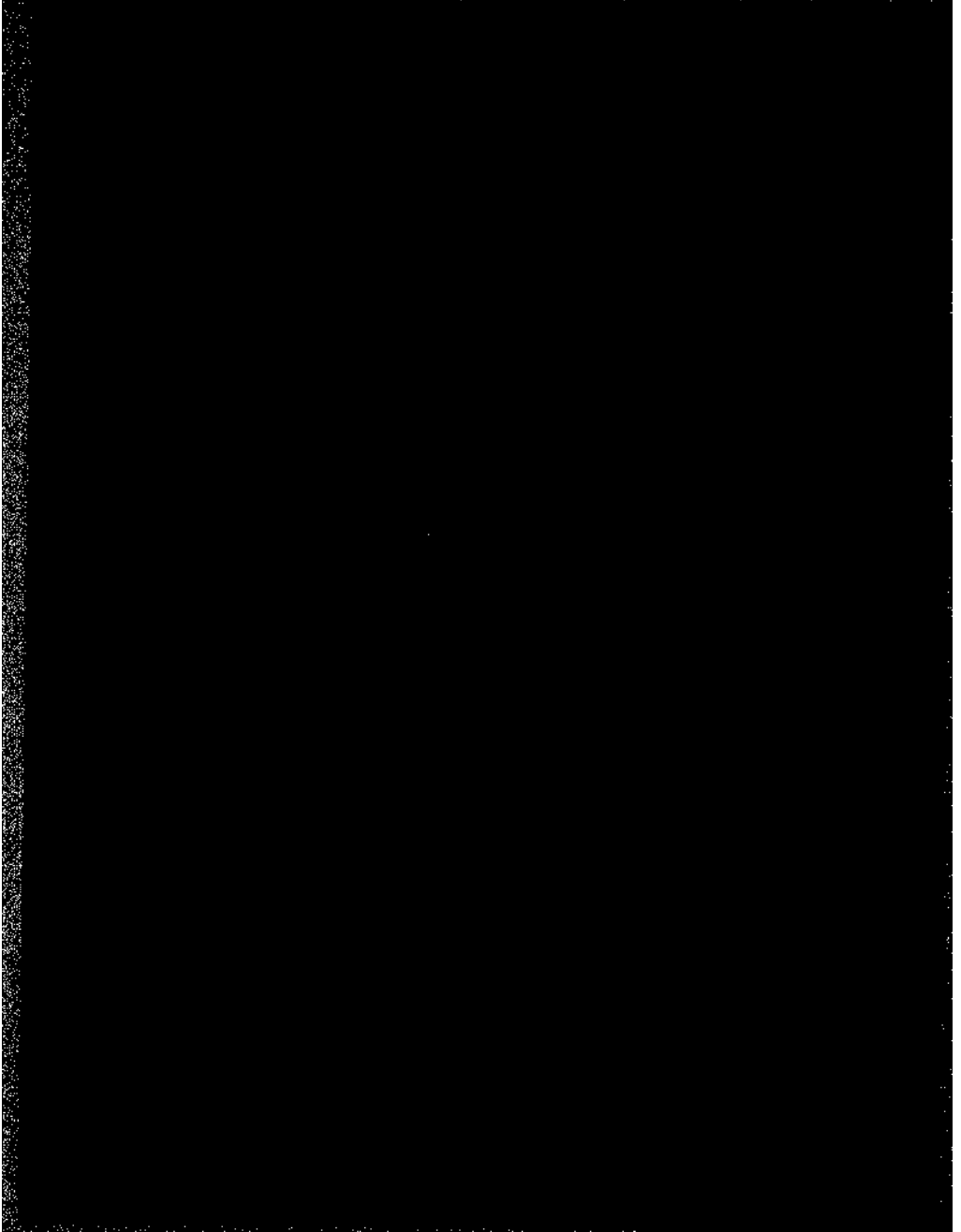
There is a character of a gentleman; so there is a character of a scholar, which is no less easily recognised. The one has an air of books about him, as the other has of good-breeding. The one wears his thoughts as the other does his clothes, gracefully; and even if they are a little old-fashioned, they are not ridiculous: they have had their day. The gentleman shews, by his manner, that he has been used to respect from others: the scholar that he lays claim to self-respect and to a certain independence of opinion. The one has been accustomed to the best company; the other has passed his time in cultivating an intimacy with the best authors. There is nothing forward or vulgar in the behaviour of the one; nothing shrewd or petulant in the observations of the other, as if he should astonish the bye-standers, or was astonished himself at his own discoveries. Good taste and good sense, like common politeness, are, or are supposed to be, matters of course. One

¹At Winterslow in 1809. [W. H., jun.]

is distinguished by an appearance of marked attention to every one present; the other manifests an habitual air of abstraction and absence of mind. The one is not an upstart, with all the self-important airs of the founder of his own fortune ; nor the other a self-taught man, with the repulsive self-sufficiency which arises from an ignorance of what hundreds have known before him. We must excuse perhaps a little conscious family-pride in the one, and a little harmless pedantry in the other. As there is a class of the first character which sinks into the mere gentleman, that is, which has nothing but this sense of respectability and propriety to support it—so the character of a scholar not unfrequently dwindles down into the shadow of a shade, till nothing is left of it but the mere book-worm. There is often something amiable as well as enviable in this last character. I know one such instance, at least. The person I mean has an admiration for learning, if he is only dazzled by its light. He lives among old authors, if he does not enter much into their spirit. He handles the covers, and turns over the page, and is familiar with the names and dates.* He is busy and self-involved. He hangs like a film and cobweb upon letters, or is like the dust upon the outside of knowledge, which should not be rudely brushed aside. He follows learning as its shadow; but as such, he is respectable. He browses on the husk and leaves of books, as the young fawn browses on the bark and leaves of trees. Such a one lives all his life in a dream of learning, and has never once had his sleep broken by a real sense of things. He believes implicitly in genius, truth, virtue, liberty, because he finds the names of these things in books. He thinks that love and friendship are the finest things imaginable, both in practice and theory. The legend of good women is to him no fiction. When he steals from the twilight of his cell, the scene breaks upon him like an illuminated missal, and all the people he sees are but so many figures in a *camera obscura*. He reads the world, like a favourite volume, only to find beauties in it, or like an edition of some old work

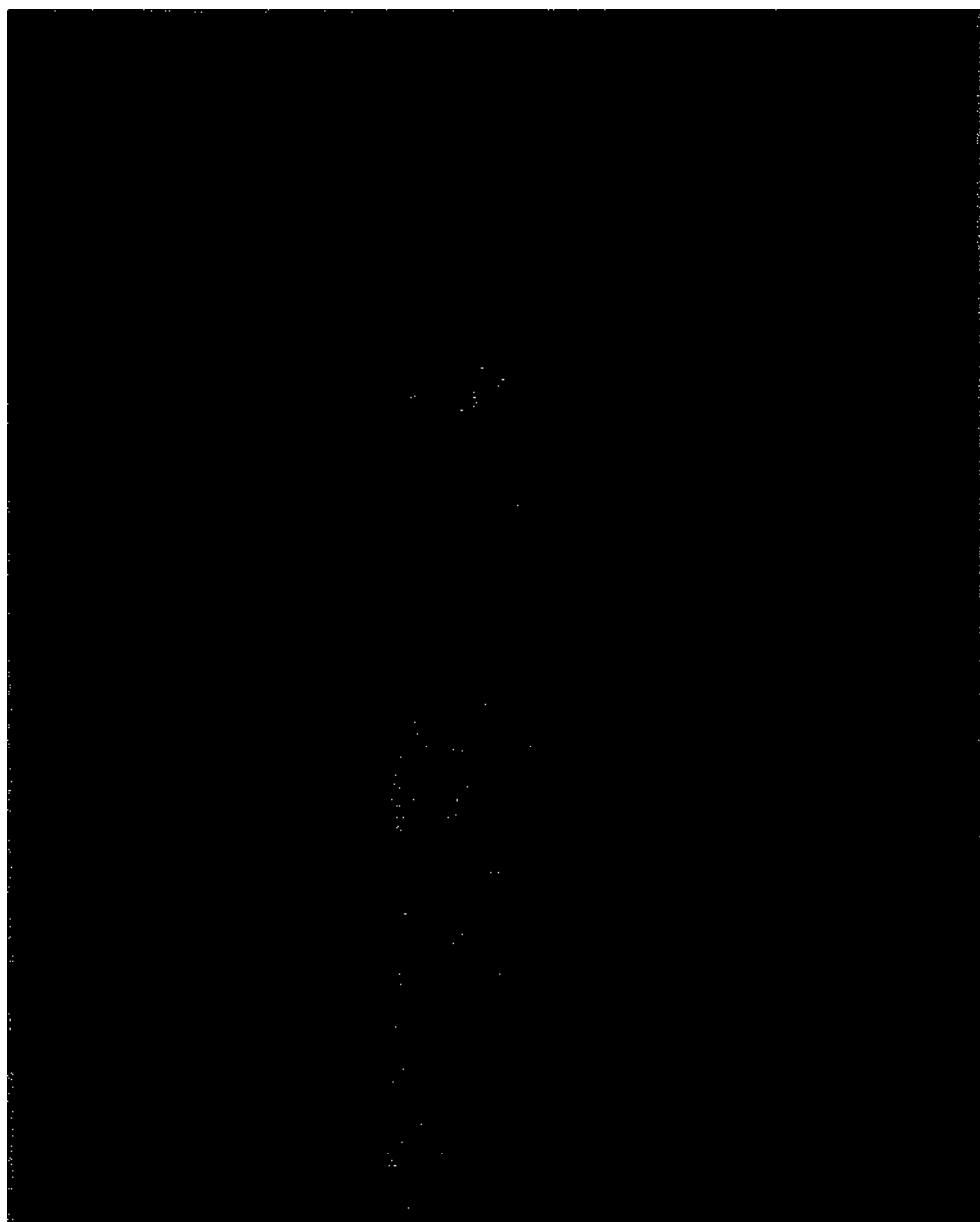
which he is preparing for the press, only to make emendations in it, and correct the errors that have inadvertently slipt in. He and his dog Tray are much the same honest, simple-hearted, faithful, affectionate creatures—if Tray could but read 1 His mind cannot take the impression of vice: but the gentleness of his nature turns gall to milk. He would not hurt a fly. He draws the picture of mankind from the guileless simplicity "of his own heart: and when he dies, his spirit will take its smiling leave, without having ever had an ill thought of others, or the consciousness of one in itself !





CHARLES LAMP.

From a painting by William Henzlett in the National Portrait Gallery.



from a painting by Robert Rauschenberg in the notional portrait Gallery

On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth*

No YOUNG man believes he shall ever die. It was a saying of my brother's, and a fine one. There is a feeling of Eternity in youth which makes us amends for everything. To be young is to be as one of the Immortals. One half of time indeed is spent—the other half remains in store for us with all its countless treasures, for there is no line drawn, and we see no limit to our hopes and Wishes. We make the coming age our own—

"The vasty the unbounded prospect lies before us"

Death, old age, are words without a meaning, a dream, a fiction, with which we have nothing to do. Others may have undergone, or may still undergo them—we "bear a charmed life," which laughs to scorn all such idle fancies. As, in setting out on a delightful journey, we strain our eager sight forward,

"Bidding the lovely scenes at distance hail,"

and see no end to prospect after prospect, new objects presenting themselves as we advance, so in the outset of life we see no end to our desires nor to the opportunities of gratifying them. We have as yet found no obstacle, no disposition to flag, and it seems that we can go on so for ever. We look round in a new world, full of life and motion, and ceaseless progress, and feel in ourselves all the vigour and spirit to keep pace with it, and do not foresee from any present signs how we shall be left behind in the race, decline into old age, and drop into the grave. It is the simplicity

¹On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth appeared in the *Montbly MagaZim* of March 1827.

and, as it were, abstractedness of our feelings in youth that (so to speak) identifies us with nature and (our experience being weak and our passions strong) makes us fancy ourselves immortal like it. Our short-lived connection with being, we fondly flatter ourselves, is an indissoluble and lasting union. As infants smile and sleep, we are rocked in the cradle of our desires, and hushed into fancied security by the roar of the universe around us—we quaff the cup of life with eager thirst without draining it, and joy and hope seem ever mantling to the brim—objects press around us, filling the mind with their magnitude and with the throng of desires that wait upon them, so that there is no room for the thoughts of death. We are too much dazzled by the gorgeousness and novelty of the bright waking dream about us to discern the dim shadow lingering for us in the distance. Nor would the hold that life has taken of us permit us to detach our thoughts that way, even if we could. We are too much absorbed in present objects and pursuits. While the spirit of youth remains unimpaired, ere "the wine of life is drunk," we are like people intoxicated or in a fever, who are hurried away by the violence of their own sensations : it is only as present objects begin to pall upon the sense, as we have been disappointed in our favourite pursuits, cut off from our closest ties, that we by degrees become, weaned from the world, that passion loosens its hold upon futurity, and that we begin to contemplate as in a glass darkly the possibility of parting with it for good. Till then, the example of others has no effect upon us. Casualties we avoid ; the slow approaches of age we play at *bide and seek* with. Like the foolish fat scullion in Sterne, who hears that Master Bobby is dead, our only reflection is, " So am not I ! " The idea of death, instead of staggering our confidence, only seems to strengthen and enhance our sense of the possession and enjoyment of life. Others may fall around us like leaves, or be mowed down by the scythe of Time like grass: these are but metaphors to the unreflecting, buoyant ears and overwhelming presumption of youth;

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It is not till we see the flowers of Love, Hope, and Joy withering around us, that we give up the flattering delusions that before led us on, and that the emptiness and dreariness of the prospect before us reconciles us hypothetically to the silence of the grave.

Life is indeed a strange gift, and its privileges are most mysterious. No wonder when it is first granted to us, that our gratitude, our admiration, and our delight should prevent us from reflecting on our own nothingness, or from thinking it will ever be recalled. Our first and strongest impressions are borrowed from the mighty scene that is opened to us, and we unconsciously transfer its durability as well as its splendour to ourselves. So newly found, we cannot think of parting with it yet, or at least put off that consideration *sine die*. Like a rustic at a fair, we are full of amazement and rapture, and have no thought of going home, or that it will soon be night. We know our existence only by ourselves, and confound our knowledge with the objects of it. We and Nature are therefore one. Otherwise the illusion, the "feast of reason and the flow of soul," to which we are invited, is a mockery and a cruel insult. We do not go from a play till the last act is ended, and the lights are about to be extinguished. But the fairy face of Nature still shines on: shall we be called away before the curtain falls, or ere we have scarce had a glimpse of what is going on? Like children, our step-mother Nature holds us up to see the raree-show of the universe, and then, as if we were a burden to her to support, lets us fall down again. Yet what brave sublunary things does not this pageant present, like a ball or *fite* of the universe 1

To see the golden sun, the azure sky, the outstretched ocean; to walk upon the green earth, and be lord of a thousand creatures; to look down yawning precipices or over distant sunny vales; to see the world spread out under one's feet on a map; to bring the stars near; to view the smallest insects through a microscope; to read history, **and** consider the revolutions of empire and the successions of

generations; to hear of the glory of Tyre, of Sidon, of Babylon, and of Susa, and to say all these were before me and are now nothing; to say I exist in such a point of time, and in such a point of place ; to be a spectator and a part of its ever-moving scene; to witness the change of season, of spring and autumn, of winter and summer; to feel hot and cold, pleasure and pain, beauty and deformity, right and wrong; to be sensible to the accidents of nature ; to consider the mighty world of eye and ear; to listen to the stock-dove's notes amid the forest deep; to journey over moor and mountain; to hear the midnight sainted choir; to visit lighted halls, or the cathedral's gloom, or sit in crowded theatres and see life itself mocked; to study the works of art and refine the sense of beauty to agony; to worship fame, and to dream of immortality; to look upon the Vatican, and to read Shakspeare; to gather up the wisdom of the ancients, and to pry into the future ; to listen to the trump of war, the shout of victory; to question history as to the movements of the human heart; to seek for truth ; to plead the cause of humanity; to overlook the world as if time and nature poured their treasures at our feet—to be and to do all this, and then in a moment to be nothing—to have it all snatched from us as by a juggler's trick, or a phantasmagoria 1 There is something in this transition from all to nothing that shocks us and damps the enthusiasm of youth new flushed with hope and pleasure, and we cast the comfortless thought as far from us as we can. In the first enjoyment of the state of life we discard the fear of debts and duns, and never think of the final payment of our great debt to Nature. Art we know is long; life, we flatter ourselves, should be so too. We see no end of the difficulties and delays we have to encounter : perfection is slow of attainment, and we must have time to accomplish it in. The fame of the great names we look up to is immortal: and shall not we who contemplate it imbibe a portion of ethereal fire, the *divina partikula aura*, which nothing can extinguish ? A wrinkle in

Rembrandt or in Nature takes whole days to resolve itself into its component parts, its softenings and its sharpnesses ; we refine upon our perfections, and unfold the intricacies of nature. What a prospect for the future ! What a task have we not begun ! And shall we be arrested in the middle of it ? We do not count our time thus employed lost, or our pains thrown away ; we do not flag or grow tired, but gain new vigour at our endless task. Shall Time, then, grudge us to finish what we have begun, and have formed a compact with Nature to do ? Why not fill up the blank that is left us in this manner ? I have looked for hours at a Rembrandt without being conscious of the flight of time, but with ever new wonder and delight, have thought that not only my own but another existence I could pass in the same manner. This rarefied, refined existence seemed to have no end, nor stint, nor principle of decay in it. The print would remain long after I who looked on it had become the prey of worms. The thing seems in itself out of all reason : health, strength, appetite are opposed to the idea of death, and we are not ready to credit it till we have found our illusions vanished, and our hopes grown cold. Objects in youth, from novelty, etc., are stamped upon*the brain with such force and integrity that one thinks nothing can remove or obliterate them. They are riveted there, and appear to us as an element of our nature. It must be a mere violence that destroys them, not a natural decay. In the very strength of this persuasion we seem to enjoy an age by anticipation. We melt down years into a single moment of intense sympathy, and by anticipating the fruits defy the ravages of time. If, then, a single moment of our lives is worth years, shall we set any limits to its total value and extent ? Again, does it not happen that so secure do we think ourselves of an indefinite period of existence, that at times, when left to ourselves, and impatient of novelty, we feel annoyed at what seems to us the slow and creeping progress of time, and argue that if it always moves at this tedious snail's pace it will never come to an end ? How

ready are we to sacrifice any space of time which separates us from a favourite object, little thinking that before long we shall find it move too fast.

For my part, I started in life with the French Revolution, and I have lived, alas ! to see the end of it. But I did not foresee this result. My sun arose with the first dawn of liberty, and I did not think how soon both must set. The new impulse to ardour given to men's minds imparted a congenial warmth and glow to mine; we were strong to run a race together, and I little dreamed that long before mine was set, the sun of liberty would turn to blood, or set once more in the night of despotism. Since then, I confess, I have no longer felt myself young, for with that my hopes fell.

I have since turned my thoughts to gathering up some of the fragments of my early recollections, and putting them into a form to which I might occasionally revert. The future was barred to my progress, and I turned for consolation and encouragement to the past. It is thus that, while we find our personal and substantial identity vanishing from us, we strive to gain a reflected and vicarious one in our thoughts: we do not like to perish wholly, and wish to bequeath our names, at least, to posterity. As long as we can make our cherished thoughts and nearest interests live in the minds of others, we do not appear to have retired altogether from the stage. We still occupy the breasts of others, and exert an influence and power over them, and it is only our bodies that are reduced to dust and powder. Our favourite speculations still find encouragement, and we make as great a figure in the eye of the world, or perhaps a greater, than in our lifetime. The demands of our self-love are thus satisfied, and these are the most imperious **and** unremitting. Besides, if by our intellectual superiority we survive ourselves in this world, by our virtues and faith we may attain an interest in another, and a higher state of being, and may thus be recipients at the same time of men and of angels.

*" E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires "*

As we grow old, our sense of the value of time becomes vivid. Nothing else, indeed, seems of any consequence. We can never cease wondering that that which has ever been should cease to be. We find many things remain the same : why then should there be change in us ? This adds a convulsive grasp of whatever is, a sense of a fallacious hollowness in all we see. Instead of the full, pulpy feeling of youth tasting existence and every object in it, all is flat and vapid,—a whited sepulchre, fair without but full of ravening and all uncleanness within. The world is a witch that puts us off with false shows and appearances. The simplicity of youth, the confiding expectation, the boundless raptures, are gone : we only think of getting out of it as well as we can, and without any great mischance or annoyance. The flush of illusion, even the complacent retrospect of past joys and hopes, is over: if we can slip out of life without indignity, can escape with little bodily infirmity, and frame our minds to the calm and respectable composure of *still-life* before we return to physical nothingness, it is as much as we can expect. We do not die wholly at our deaths : we have mouldered away gradually long before. Faculty after faculty, interest after interest, attachment after attachment disappear: we are torn from ourselves while living, year after year sees us no longer the same, and death only consigns the last fragment of what we were to the grave. That we should wear out by slow stages, and dwindle at last into nothing, is not wonderful, when even in our prime our strongest impressions leave little trace but for the moment, and we are the creatures of petty circumstance. How little effect is made on us in our best days by the books we have read, the scenes we have witnessed, the sensations we have gone through I Think only of the feelings we experience in reading a fine romance (one of Sir Walter's, for instance); what beauty, what sublimity, what interest,

what heart-rending emotions I. You would suppose the feelings you then experienced would last for ever, or subdue the mind to their own harmony and tone: while we are reading it seems as if nothing could ever put us out of our way, or trouble us:—the first splash of mud that we get on entering the street, the first twopence we are cheated out of, the feeling vanishes clean out of our minds, and we become the prey of petty and annoying circumstance. The mind soars to the lofty : it is-at home in the grovelling, the disagreeable, and the little. And yet we wonder that age should be feeble and querulous,—that the freshness of youth should fade away. Both worlds would hardly satisfy the extravagance of our desires and of our presumption.

On the Love of Life¹

IT IS OUR intention, in the course of these papers, occasionally to expose certain vulgar errors, which have crept into our reasonings on men and manners. Perhaps one of the most interesting of these is that which relates to the source of our general attachment to life. We are not going to enter into the question, whether life is, on the whole, to be regarded as a blessing, though we are by no means inclined to adopt the opinion of that sage, who thought "that the best thing that could have happened to a man was never to have been born, and the next best to have died the moment after he came into existence." The common argument, however, which is made use of to prove the value of life, from the strong desire which almost every one feels for its continuance, appears to be altogether inconclusive. The wise and the foolish, the weak and the strong, the lame and the blind, the prisoner and the free, the prosperous and the wretched, the beggar and the king, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, from the little child who tries to leap over his own shadow, to the old man who stumbles blindfold on his grave, all feel this desire in common. Our notions with respect to the importance of life, and our attachment to it, depend on a principle, which has very little to do with its happiness or its misery.

The love of life is, in general, the effect not of our enjoyments, but of our passions. We are not attached to it so much for its own sake, or as it is connected with happiness, as because it is necessary to action. Without life there **can**

¹ *On the Love of Life*, one of Hazlitt's earliest reflective essays, appeared on 25th January, 18x5, in *The Examiner*, the famous weekly paper edited by Leigh Hunt.

be no action—no objects of pursuit—no, restless desires—no tormenting passions. Hence it is that we fondly cling to it—that we dread its termination as the close, not of enjoyment, but of hope. The proof that our attachment to life is not absolutely owing to the immediate satisfaction we find in it is, that those persons are commonly found most loath to part with it who have the least enjoyment of it, and who have the greatest difficulties to struggle with, as losing gamesters are the most desperate. And farther, there are not many persons who, with all their pretended love of life, would not, if it had been in* their power, have melted down the longest life to a few hours. "The school-boy," says Addison, "counts the time till the return of the holidays; the minor longs to be of age; the lover is impatient till he is married."—"Hope and fantastic expectations spend much of our lives; and while with passion we look for a coronation, or the death of an enemy, or a day of joy, passing from fancy to possession without any intermediate notices, we throw away a precious year."

JEREMY TAYLOR.—We would willingly, and without remorse, sacrifice not only the present moment, but all the interval (no matter how long) that separates us from any favourite object. We chiefly look upon life, then, as the means to an end. Its common enjoyments and its daily evils are alike disregarded for any idle purpose we have in view. It should seem as if there were a few green sunny spots in the desert of life, to which we are always hastening forward: we eye them wistfully in the distance, and care not what perils or suffering we endure, so that we arrive at them at last. However weary we may be of the same stale round—however sick of the past—however hopeless of the future—the mind still revolts at the thought of death, because the fancied possibility of good, which always remains with life, gathers strength as it is about to be torn from us for ever, and the dullest scene looks bright compared with the darkness of the grave. Our reluctance to part with existence evidently does not depend on the calm and even current

of our lives, but on the force and impulse of the passions. Hence that indifference to death which has been sometimes remarked in people who lead a solitary and peaceful life in remote and barren districts. The pulse of life in them does not beat strong enough to occasion any violent revulsion of the frame when it ceases. He who treads the green mountain turf or he who sleeps beneath it, enjoys an almost equal quiet. The death of those persons has always been accounted happy, who had attained their utmost wishes, who had nothing left to regret or to desire. Our repugnance to death increases in proportion to our consciousness of having lived in vain—to the violence of our efforts, and the keenness of our disappointments—and to our earnest desire to find in the future, if possible, a rich amends for the past. We may be said to nurse our existence with the greatest tenderness, according to the pain it has cost us;" and feel at every step of our varying progress the truth of that line of the poet—

" An ounce of sweet is worth a pound of sour, "

The love of life is in fact the sum of all our passions and of all our enjoyments ; but these are by no means the same thing, for the vehemence of our passions is irritated, not less by disappointment than by the prospect of success. Nothing seems to be a match for this general tenaciousness of existence, but such an extremity either of bodily or mental suffering as destroys at once the power both of habit and imagination. In short, the question, whether life is accompanied with a greater quantity of pleasure or. pain, may be fairly set aside as frivolous, and of no practical utility; for our attachment to life depends on our interest in it; and it cannot be denied that we have more interest in this moving, busy scene, agitated with a thousand hopes and fears, and checkered with every diversity of joy and sorrow, than in a dreary blank. To be something is better than to be nothing, because we can feel no interest in *nothing*. Passion, imagination, self-will, the sense of power, the very

consciousness of our existence, bind us ,to life, and hold us fast in its chains, as by a magic spell, in spite of every other consideration. Nothing can be more philosophical than the reasoning which Milton puts into the mouth of the fallen angel:

—"*And that must end us, that must be our cure.
To be no more ; sad cure : for who would lose.
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
To perish rather, swallow'd up and lost
In the wide womb of uncreated night,
Devoid of sense and motion ? "*

Nearly the same account may be given in answer to the question which has been asked, *Why so few tyrants kill themselves ?* In the first place, they are never satisfied with the mischief they have done, and cannot quit their hold of power, after all sense of pleasure is fled' Besides, they absurdly argue from the means of happiness placed within their reach to the end itself; and, dazzled by the pomp and pageantry of a throne, cannot relinquish the persuasion that they *ought* to be happier than other men. The prejudice of opinion, which attaches us to life, is in them stronger than in others, and incorrigible to experience. The Great are life's fools—dupes of the splendid shadows that surround them, and wedded to the very mockeries of opinion.

Whatever is our situation or pursuit in life, the result will be much the same. The strength of the passion seldom corresponds to the pleasure we find in its indulgence. The miser " robs himself to increase his store "; the ambitious man toils up a slippery precipice only to be tumbled head-long from its height; the lover is infatuated with the charms of his mistress, exactly in proportion to the mortifications he has received from her. Even those who succeed in nothing, who, as it has been emphatically expressed,

—" *Aremade desperate by too quick a sense
Of constant infelicity ; cut off
From peace like exiles, on some barren rock.
Their life's sad prison, with no more of ease,
Than sentinels between two armies set; "*

are yet as unwilling as others to give over the unprofitable strife: their harassed feverish existence refuses rest, and frets the languor of exhausted hope into the torture of unavailing regret. The exile, who has been unexpectedly restored to his country and to liberty, often finds his courage fail with the accomplishment of all his wishes, and the struggle of life and hope ceases at the same instant.

We once more repeat that we do not, in the foregoing remarks, mean to enter into a comparative estimate of the value of human life, but merely to shew that the strength of our attachment to it is a very fallacious test of its happiness.

On Gusto¹

GUSTO in art is power or passion defining any object. It is not so difficult to explain this term in what relates to expression (of which it may be said to be the highest degree) as in what relates to things without expression, to the natural appearances of objects, as mere colour or form. In one sense, however (there is hardly any object entirely devoid of expression, without some character of power belonging to it, some precise association with pleasure or pain : and it is in giving this truth of character from the truth of feeling) whether in the highest or the lowest degree, but (always in the highest degree of which the subject is capable, that gusto consists.

There is a gusto in the colouring of Titian. Not only do his heads seem to think—his bodies seem to feel) This is what the Italians mean by the *morbidezza* of his flesh-colour. (it seems sensitive and alive all over; not merely to have the look and texture of flesh, but the feeling in itself. For example, the limbs of his female figures have a luxurious softness and delicacy, which appears conscious of the pleasure of the beholder. As the objects themselves in nature would produce an impression on the sense, distinct from every other object, and having something divine in it, which the heart owns and the imagination consecrates, the objects in the picture preserve the same impression, absolute, unimpaired, stamped with all the truth of passion, the pride of the eye, and the charm of beauty. Rubens makes his flesh-colour like flowers; Albano's is like ivory; Titian's is like flesh, and like nothing else. It is as different from that of other painters as the skin is from a piece of white or red drapery thrown over it.)The blood circulates

¹ On Gusto appeared in *The Examiner* on 26th May, 1816.

here and there, the, blue veins just appear, the rest is distinguished throughout only by that sort of tingling sensation to the eye, which the body feels within itself. This is gusto. (Vandyke's, flesh-colour, though it has great truth and purity, wants gusto. It has not the internal character, the living-principle in it. It is a smooth surface, not a warm, moving mass. It is painted without passion, with indifference. The hand only has been concerned) The impression slides off from the eye, and does not, like the tones of Titian's pencil, leave a sting behind it in the mind of the spectator.) The eye does not acquire a taste or appetite for what it sees. In a word, gusto in painting is where the impression made on one sense excites by affinity those of another.

Michael Angelo's forms are full of gusto. They everywhere "obtrude" the sense of power upon the eye. His limbs convey an idea of muscular strength, of moral grandeur, and even of intellectual dignity) they are firm, commanding, broad, and massy: capable of executing with ease the determined purposes of the will. His faces have no other expression than his figures, conscious power and capacity. They appear only to think what they shall do, and to know that they can do it. This is what is meant by saying that his style is hard and masculine) It is the reverse of Correggio's, which is effeminate. That is, the gusto of Michael Angelo consists in expressing energy of will without proportionate sensibility, Correggio's in expressing exquisite sensibility without energy of will. In Correggio's faces as well as figures we see neither bones nor muscles, but then what a soul is there, full of sweetness and of grace—pure, playful, soft, angelical! There is sentiment enough in a hand painted by Correggio) to set up a school of history painters. Whenever we look at the hands of Correggio's women or of "Raphael's, we always wish to touch them.

(Again, Titian's landscapes have a prodigious-gusto, both in the colouring and forms.) We shall never forget one that,

we saw many years ago in the Orleans Gallery of Acteon hunting.) (it had a brown, mellow autumnal look.) The sky was of the colour of stone. (The winds seemed to sing through the rustling branches of the trees and already you might hear the twanging of bows) resound through the tangled mazes of the wood. Mr. West, we understand, has this landscape. He will know if this description of it is just. The landscape background of the St. Peter Martyr is another well-known instance of the power of this great painter to give a romantic interest and an appropriate character to the objects of his pencil, where every circumstance adds to the effect of the scene,—the bold trunks of the tall forest trees, the trailing ground plants, with that cold convent spire rising in the distance, amidst the blue sapphire mountains and the golden sky.

Rubens has a great deal of gusto in his Fauns and Satyrs, and in all that expresses motion, but in nothing else, *Rembrandt* has it in everything ; everything in his pictures has a tangible character) If he puts a diamond in the ear of a Burgomaster's wife, it is of the first water ; (and his furs and stuffs are proof against a Russian winter. *Raphael's* gusto was only in expression ; he had no idea of the character of anything but the human form. The dryness and poverty of his style in other respects is a phenomenon in the art. His trees are like sprigs of grass stuck in a book of botanical specimens,) (Was it that *Raphael* never had time to go beyond the walls of Rome ?) That he was always in the streets, at church, or in the bath r? (He was not one of the society of Arcadians.¹

(*Claude's* landscapes, perfect as they are, want gusto.)

This is not easy to explain. They are perfect abstractions

¹ *Raphael* not only could not paint a landscape; he could not paint people in a landscape. He could not have painted the heads or the figures, or even the dresses of the St. Peter Martyr. His figures have always an *in-door* look, that is, a set, determined, voluntary, dramatic character, arising from their own passions, or a watchfulness of those of others, and want that wild uncertainty of expression, which is connected with the accidents of nature and the changes of the elements. He has nothing *romantic* about him.

of the visible images of things; (they speak the visible language of nature truly. They resemble a mirror or a microscope. To the eye only they are more perfect than any other landscapes that ever were or will be painted; they give more of nature, as cognizable by one sense alone; but they lay an equal stress on all visible impressions;; they do not interpret one sense by another; they do not distinguish the character of different objects as we are taught, and can only be taught, to distinguish them by their effect on the different senses. That is, his eye wanted imagination ; it did not strongly sympathize with his'other faculties. He saw the atmosphere, but he did not "feel it He painted the trunk of a tree or a rock in the foreground as smooth—with as complete an abstraction of the gross, tangible impression, as any other part of the picture :his trees are perfectly beautiful, but quite immoveable; they have a look of enchantment. In short, his landscapes are unequalled imitations of nature, released from its subjection to the elements,—as if all objects were become a delightful fairy vision, and the eye had rarefied and refined away the other senses.)

The gusto in the Greek statues is of a very singular kind, sense of perfect form nearly occupies the whole mind, and hardly suffers it to dwell on any other feeling. It seems enough for them *to be*, without acting or suffering. Their forms are ideal, spiritual. Their beauty is power. By their beauty they are raised above the frailties of pain or passion; by their beauty they are deified.

The infinite quantity of dramatic invention in Shakspeare takes from his gusto. The power he delights "to strow is not intense, but discursivey He never insists on anything as much as he might, except a quibble. Milton has great gusto. He repeats his blow twice; grapples with and exhausts his subject. His imagination has a double relish of its objects, an inveterate attachment to the things he describes, and to the words describing them.

—" *Or where Chine ses drive
With sails and wind their cany waggons light.*"

" *Wild above rule or art, enormous bliss*"

There is a gusto in Pope's compliments, in Dryden's satires, and Prior's tales ; and among prose-writers, Boccaccio and Rabelais had the most of it. We will only mention one other work which appears to us to be full of gusto, and that is the *Beggar's Opera*. If it is not,, we are altogether mistaken in our notions on this delicate subject.

Merry England¹

" St. George for Merry England ! "

THIS OLD-FASHIONED epithet might be supposed to have been bestowed ironically, or on the old principle—*Ut lucus a non lucendo*. Yet there is something in the sound that hits the fancy, and a sort of truth beyond appearances. To be sure, it is from a dull, homely ground that the gleams of mirth and jollity break out; but the streaks of light that tinge the evening sky are not the less striking on that account. The beams of the morning sun shining on the lonely glades, or through the idle branches of the tangled forest, the leisure, the freedom, " the pleasure of going and coming without knowing where," the troops of wild deer, the sports of the chase, and other rustic gambols were sufficient to justify the well-known appellation of " Merry Sherwood,"—and in like manner we may apply the phrase to *Merry England*. The smile is not the less sincere because it does not always play upon the cheek ; and the jest is not the less welcome, nor the laugh less hearty, because they happen to be a relief from care or leaden-eyed melancholy. The instances are the more precious as they are rare; and we look forward to them with the greater good will, or back upon them with the greater gratitude, as we drain the last drop in the cup with particular relish. If not always gay or in good spirits, we are glad when any occasion draws us out of our natural gloom, and disposed to make the most of it. We may say with *Silence* in the play: " I have been

¹*Merry England* was published in the *New Monthly Magazine* of December 1825, having been written at Vevey, where Hazlitt spent the latter part of the previous summer on his way back from Italy.

merry once ere now,"—and this once was to serve him all his life; for he was a person of wonderful silence and gravity, though " he chirped over his cups," and announced with characteristic glee that " there were pippins and cheese to come." *Silence* was in this sense a merry man, that is, he would be merry if he could, and a very great economy of wit, like very slender fare, was a banquet to him, from the simplicity of his taste and habits. " Continents," says Hobbes, " have most of what they contain "—and in this view it may be contended that the English are the merriest people in the world, since they only show it on high days and holidays. They are then like a school-boy let loose from school, or like a dog that has slipped his collar. They are not gay like the French, who are one eternal smile of self-complacency, tortured into affection, or spun out into languid indifference, nor are they voluptuous and immersed in sensual indolence like the Italians; but they have that sort of intermittent, fitful, irregular gaiety, which is neither worn out by habit, nor deadened by passion, but is sought with avidity as it takes the mind by surprise, is startled by a sense of oddity and incongruity, indulges its wayward humours or lively impulses, with perfect freedom and lightness of heart, and seizes occasion by the forelock that it may return to serious business with more cheerfulness, and have something to beguile the hours of thought or sadness. I do not see how there can be high spirits without low ones; and everything has its price according to circumstances. Perhaps we have to pay a heavier tax on pleasure than some others: what skills it, so long as our good spirits and good hearts enable us to bear it? " They " (the English), says Froissart, " amused themselves sadly after the fashion of their country "—*i/s se rejouissoient tristement selon la coutume de leur pays*. They have indeed a way of their own. Their mirth is a relaxation from gravity, a challenge to dull care to be gone; and one is not always clear at first whether the appeal is successful. The cloud may still hang on the brow; the ice may not thaw at once. To help them

out in their new character is an act of charity. Anything short of hanging or drowning is something to begin with. They do not enter into their amusements the less doggedly because they may plague others. They like a thing the better for hitting them a rap on the knuckles, for making their blood tingle. They do not dance or sing, but they make good cheer—"eat, drink, and are merry." No people are fonder of field-sports, Christmas gambols, or practical jests. Blindman's-buff, hunt-the-slipper, hot-cockles, and snap-dragon are all approved English games full of laughable surprises and "hair-breadth 'scapes," and serve to amuse the winter fireside after the roast-beef and plum-pudding, the spiced-ale and roasted crab thrown (hissing-hot) into the foaming tankard. Punch (not the liquor, but the puppet) is not, I fear, of English origin; but there is no place, I take it, where he finds himself more at home or meets a more joyous welcome, where he collects greater crowds at the corners of streets, where he opens the eyes or distends the cheeks wider, or where the bangs and blows, the uncouth gestures, ridiculous anger and screaming voice of the chief performer excite more boundless merriment or louder bursts of laughter among all ranks and sorts of people. An English theatre is the very throne of pantomime; nor do I believe that the gallery and boxes of Drury Lane or Covent Garden, filled on the proper occasion with holiday folks (big or little), yield the palm for undisguised, tumultuous, inextinguishable laughter to any spot in Europe. I do not speak of the refinement of the mirth (this is no fastidious speculation) but of its cordiality, on the return of those long-looked-for and licensed periods; and I may add here, by way of illustration, that the English common people are a sort of grown children, spoiled and sulky perhaps, but full of glee and merriment, when their attention is drawn off by some sudden and striking object. The May-pole is almost gone out of fashion among us; but May-day, besides its flowering hawthorns and its pearly dews, has still its boasted exhibition of painted chimney-sweepers and

their Jack-o'-the-Green, whose tawdry finery, bedizened faces, unwonted gestures, and short-lived pleasures call forth good-humoured smiles and looks of sympathy in the spectators. There is no place where trap-ball, fives, prison-base, football, quoits, bowls are better understood or more successfully practised; and the very names of a cricket-bat and ball make English fingers tingle. What happy days must " Long Robinson " have passed in getting ready his wickets and mending his bats, who, when two of the fingers of his right hand were struck off by the violence of a ball, had a screw fastened to it to hold the bat, and with the other hand still sent the ball thundering against the boards that bounded *Old Lord's cricket-ground*! What delightful hours must have been his in looking forward to the matches that were to come, in recounting the feats he had performed in those that were past ! I have myself whiled away whole mornings in seeing him strike the ball (like a countryman mowing with a scythe) to the farthest extremity of the smooth, level, sun-burnt ground, and with long, awkward strides count the notches that made victory sure! Then again, cudgel-playing, quarter-staff, bull and badger baiting, cock-fighting, are almost the peculiar diversions of this island, and often objected to us as barbarous and cruel; horse-racing is the delight and the ruin of numbers ; and the noble science of boxing is all our own. Foreigners can scarcely understand how we can squeeze pleasure out of this pastime ; the luxury of hard blows given or received; the joy of the ring ; the perseverance of the combatants. The English also excel, or are not excelled, in wiring a hare, in stalking a deer, in shooting, fishing, and hunting. England to this day boasts her Robin Hood and his merry men, that stout archer and outlaw, and patron-saint of the sporting-calendar. What a cheerful sound is that of the hunters, issuing from the autumnal wood and sweeping over hill and dale!

" A cry more tuneable
Was never halloo 'd to by hound or horn "

What sparkling richness in the scarlet coats of the riders, what a glittering confusion in the pack, what spirit in the horses, what eagerness in the followers on foot as they disperse over the plain, or force their way over hedge and ditch ! Surely the coloured prints and pictures of these, hung up in gentlemen's halls and village ale-houses, however humble, as works of art, have more life and health and spirit in them, and mark the pith and nerve of the national character more creditably than the mawkish, sentimental, affected designs of Theseus and Pirithous, and neas and Dido, pasted on foreign *salons a manger* and the interior of country houses. If our tastes are not epic, nor our pretensions lofty, they are simple and our own; and we may possibly enjoy our native rural sports, and the rude remembrances of them, with the truer relish on this account, that they are suited to us and we to them. The English nation, too, are naturally " brothers of the angle." This pursuit implies just that mixture of patience and pastime, of vacancy and thoughtfulness, of idleness and business, of pleasure and of pain, which is suited to the genius of an Englishman, and, as I suspect, of no one else in the same degree. He is eminently gifted to stand in the situation assigned by Dr. Johnson to the angler, " at one end of a rod with a worm at the other." I should suppose no other language than ours can show such a book as an often-mentioned one, Walton's *Complete Angler*,—so full of *na'ivete*, of unaffected sprightliness, of busy trifling, of dainty songs, of refreshing brooks, of shady arbours, of happy thoughts, and of the herb called *Heart's Ease* ! Some persons can see neither the wit nor wisdom of this genuine volume, as if a book as well as a man might not have a personal character belonging to it, amiable, venerable from the spirit of joy and thorough goodness it manifests, independently of acute remarks or scientific discoveries; others object to the cruelty of Walton's theory and practice of trout-fishing—for my part, I should as soon charge an infant with cruelty for killing a fly, and I feel the same sort of pleasure in reading his book as I

should have done in the company of this happy, child-like old man, watching his ruddy cheek, his laughing eye, the kindness of his heart, and the dexterity of his hand in seizing his finny prey ! It must be confessed there is often an odd sort of *materiality* in English sports and recreations. I have known several persons whose existence consisted wholly in manual exercises, and all whose enjoyments lay at their finger-ends. Their greatest happiness was in cutting a stick, in mending a cabbage-net, in digging a hole in the ground, in hitting a mark, turning a lathe, or in something else of the same kind, at which they had a certain *knack*. Well is it when we can amuse ourselves with such trifles and without injury to others ! This class of character, which the *Spectator* has immortalized in the person of Will Wimble, is still common among younger brothers and retired gentlemen of small incomes in town or country. The *Cockney* character is of our English growth, as this intimates a feverish, fidgety delight in rural sights and sounds, and a longing wish, after the turmoil and confinement of a city life, to transport one's self to the freedom and breathing sweetness of a country retreat. London is half suburbs. The suburbs of Paris are a desert; and you see nothing but crazy windmills, stone walls, and a few straggling visitants in spots where in England you would find a thousand villas, a thousand terraces, crowned with their own delights, or be stunned with the noise of bowling-greens and tea-gardens, or stifled with the fumes of tobacco mingling with fragrant shrubs, or the clouds of dust raised by half the population of the metropolis panting and toiling in search of a mouthful of fresh air. The Parisian is, perhaps, as well (or better) contented with himself wherever he is, stewed in his shop or his garret; the Londoner is miserable in these circumstances, and glad to escape from them. Let no one object to the gloomy appearance of a London Sunday, compared 'with a Parisian one. It is a part of our politics and our religion; we would not have James the First's *Book of Sports* thrust down our throats : and besides,

it is a part of our character to do one thing at a time, and not to be dancing a jig and on our knees in the same breath. It is true the Englishman spends his Sunday evening at the ale-house—

*" And e'en on Sunday
He drinks with Kirton Jean till Monday, "—*

but he only unbends and waxes mellow by degrees, and sits soaking till he can neither sit, stand, nor go ; it is his vice, and a beastly one it is, but not a proof of any inherent distaste to mirth or good fellowship. Neither can foreigners throw the carnival in our teeth with any effect: those who have seen it (at Florence, for example) will say that it is duller than anything in England. Our Bartholomew-Fair is Queen Mab herself to it! What can be duller than a parcel of masks moving about the streets and looking as grave and monotonous as possible from day to day, and with the same lifeless formality in their limbs and gestures as in their features ? One might as well expect variety and spirit in a procession of waxwork figures. We must be hard run indeed when we have recourse to a pasteboard proxy to set off our mirth: a mask may be a very good cover for licentiousness (though of that I saw no signs) but it is a very bad exponent of wit and humour. I should suppose there is more drollery and unction in the caricatures in Fores's shop-window than in all the masks in Italy, without exception.

The humour of English writing and description has often been wondered at; and it flows from the same source as the merry *traits* of our character. A degree of barbarism and rusticity seems necessary to the perfection of humour. The droll and laughable depend on peculiarity and incongruity of character. But with the progress and refinement, the peculiarities of individuals and of classes wear out or lose their sharp, abrupt edges ; nay, a certain slowness and dulness of understanding is required to be struck with odd and unaccountable appearances, for which a greater facility

of apprehension can sooner assign an explanation that breaks the force of the seeming absurdity, and to which a wider scope of imagination is more easily reconciled. Clowns and country people are more amused, are more disposed to laugh and make sport of the dress of strangers, because from their ignorance the surprise is greater, and they cannot conceive anything to be natural or proper to which they are unused. Without a given portion of hardness and repulsiveness of feeling the ludicrous cannot well exist. Wonder and curiosity, the attributes of inexperience, enter greatly into its composition. Now it appears to me that the English are (or were) just at that mean point between intelligence and obtuseness, which must produce the most abundant and happiest crop of humour. Absurdity and singularity glide over the French mind without jarring or jostling with it; or they evaporate in levity :—with the Italians they are lost in indolence or pleasure. The ludicrous takes hold of the English imagination, and clings to it with all its ramifications. We resent any difference or peculiarity of appearance at first, and yet, having not much malice at our hearts, we are glad to turn it into a jest—we are liable to be offended, and as willing to be pleased—struck with oddity from not knowing what to make of it, we wonder and burst out a laughing at the eccentricity of others, while we follow our own bent from wilfulness or simplicity, and thus afford them, in our turn, matter for the indulgence of the comic vein. It is possible that a greater refinement of manners may give birth to finer distinctions of satire and a nicer tact for the ridiculous : but our insular situation and character are, I should say, most likely to foster, as they have in fact fostered, the greatest quantity of natural and striking humour, in spite of our plodding tenaciousness and want of both gaiety and quickness of perception. A set of raw recruits, with their awkward movements and unbending joints, are laughable enough: but they cease to be so when they have once been drilled into discipline and uniformity. So it is with nations that lose their angular

points and grotesque qualities with education and intercourse : but it is in a mixed state of manners that comic humour chiefly flourishes, for, in order that the drollery may not be lost, we must have spectators of the passing scene who are able to appreciate and embody its most remarkable features—wits as well as *butts* for ridicule. I shall mention two names in this department which may serve to redeem the national character from absolute dullness and solemn pretence—Fielding and Hogarth. These were thorough specimens of true English humour; yet both were grave men. In reality, too high a pitch of animal spirits runs away with the imagination, instead of helping it to reach the goal; is inclined to take the jest for granted when it ought to work it out with patient and marked touches, and it ends in vapid flippancy and impertinence. Among our neighbours on the Continent, Moliere and Rabelais carried the freedom of wit and humour to an almost incredible height; but they rather belonged to the old French school, and even approach and exceed the English licence and extravagance of conception. I do not consider Congreve's wit (though he belongs to us) as coming under the articles here spoken of; for his genius is anything but *merry*. Lord Byron was in the habit of railing at the spirit of our good old comedy, and of abusing Shakspeare's Clowns and Fools, which he said the refinement of the French and Italian stage would not endure, and which only our grossness and puerile taste could tolerate. In this I agree with him; and it is *pat* to my purpose. I flatter myself that we are almost the only people who understand and relish *nonsense*. We are not "merry and wise," but indulge our mirth to excess and folly. When we trifle we trifle in good earnest; and having once relaxed our hold of the helm, drift idly down the stream, and, delighted with the change, are tossed about "by every little breath" of whim or caprice,

" *That under Heaven is blown* "

All we then want is to proclaim a truce with reason, and to be pleased with as little expense of thought or pretension to wisdom as possible. This licensed fooling is carried to its very utmost length in Shakspeare, and in some other of our elder dramatists, without, perhaps, sufficient warrant or the same excuse. Nothing can justify this extreme relaxation but extreme tension. Shakspeare's trifling does indeed tread upon the very borders of vacancy; his meaning often hangs by the very slenderest threads. For this he might be blamed if it did not take away our breath to follow his eagle flights, or if he did not at other times make the cordage of our hearts crack. After our heads ache with thinking, it is fair to play the fool. The clowns were as proper an appendage to the gravity of our antique literature as fools and dwarfs were to the stately dignity of courts and noble houses in former days. Of all people, they have the best right to claim a total exemption from rules and rigid formality, who, when they have anything of importance to do, set about it with the greatest earnestness and perseverance, and are generally grave and sober to a proverb. Swift, who wrote more idle or *nonsense* verses than any man, was the severest of moralists ; and his feelings and observations morbidly acute. Did not Lord Byron himself follow up his Childe Harold with his Don Juan ?—not that I insist on what he did as an illustration of the English character. He was one of the English Nobility, not one of the English people; and his occasional ease and familiarity were in my mind equally constrained and affected, whether in relation to the pretensions of his rank or the efforts of his genius.

They ask you in France how you pass your time in England without amusements; and can with difficulty believe that there are theatres in London, still less that they are larger and handsomer than those in Paris. That we should have comic actors, "they own, surprises them." They judge of the English character in the lump as one great jolter-head, containing all the stupidity of the country, as the larger ball at the top of the Dispensary in Warwick

Lane, from its resemblance to a gilded pill, has been made to represent the whole pharmacopoeia and professional quackery of the kingdom. They have no more notion, for instance, how we should have such an actor as Liston on our stage, than if we were to tell them we have parts performed by a sea-otter; nor, if they were to see him, would they be much the wiser, or know what to think of his unaccountable twitches of countenance or nondescript gestures, of his teeth chattering in his head, his eyes that seem dropping from their sockets, his nose that is tickled by a jest as by a feather, and shining with self-complacency as if oiled, his ignorant conceit, his gaping stupor, his lumpish vivacity in *Lubin hog* or *Tony Lumpkin*; for as our rivals do not wind up the machine to such a determined intensity of purpose, neither have they any idea of its running down to such degrees of imbecility and folly, or coming to an absolute *standstill* and lack of meaning, nor can they enter into or be amused with the contrast. No people ever laugh heartily who can give a reason for their doing so; and I believe the English in general are not yet in this predicament. They are not metaphysical, but very much in a state of nature; and this is one main ground why I give them credit for being merry, notwithstanding appearances. Their mirth is not the mirth of vice or, desperation, but of innocence and a native wildness. They do not cavil or boggle at niceties, or merely come to the edge of a joke, but break their necks over it with a wanton "Here goes," where others make a *pirouette* and stand upon decorum. The French cannot, however, be persuaded of the excellence of our comic stage, nor of the store we set by it. When they ask what amusements we have, it is plain they can never have heard of Mrs. Jordan, nor King, nor Bannister, nor Suett, nor Munden, nor Lewis, nor little Simmons, nor Dodd, and Parsons, and Emery, and Miss Pope, and Miss Farren, and all those who even in my time have gladdened a nation and "made life's business like a summer's dream." Can I think of them, and of their names

that glittered in the play-bills when I was young, exciting all the flutter of hope and expectation of seeing them in their favourite parts of *Nell*, or *Little Pickle*, or *Touchstone*, or *Sir Peter Teazle*, or *Lenitive* in the *Prize*, or *Lingo*, or *Crabtree*, or *Nipperkin*, or old *Dornton*, or *Ranger*, or the *Copper Captain*, or *Lord Sands*, or *Filch*, or *Moses*, or *Sir Andrew Aguecheek*, or *Acres*, or *Elbow*, or *Hodge*, or *F/ora*, or the *Duenna*, or *Loady Teazle*, or *I W y Griace*, or of the gaiety that sparkled in all eyes, and the delight that overflowed all hearts as they glanced before us in these parts,

" *Throwing a gaudy shadow upon life,*"—

and not feel my heart yearn within me, or couple the thoughts of England and* the spleen together? Our cloud has at least its rainbow tints; ours is not one long polar night of cold and dulness, but we have the gleaming fights of fancy to amuse us, the household fires of truth and genius to warm us. We can go to a play and see *Liston*; or stay at-home and read *Roderick Random*; or have *Hogarth's* prints of "*Marriage a la Mode*" hanging round our room. Tut! "*there's livens*" even in England as well as "*out of it.*" We are not quite the *forlorn hope* of humanity, the last of nations. The French look at us across the Channel, and, seeing nothing but water and a cloudy mist, think that this is England. If they have any farther idea of us, it is of *George I I I*. and our Jack tars, the House of Lords and House of Commons, and this is no great addition to us. To go beyond this, to talk of arts and elegances as having taken up their abode here, or to say that *Mrs. Abington* was equal to *Mademoiselle Mars*, and that we at one time got up the *School for Scandal*, as they do the *Misanthrope*, is to persuade them that *Iceland* is a pleasant winter-retreat, or to recommend the whale-fishery as a classical amusement. The French are the *cockneys* of Europe, and have no idea how anyone can exist out of Paris, or be alive without incessant grimace and *jabber*. Yet what imports it? What 1 though the joyous train I have just enumerated were,

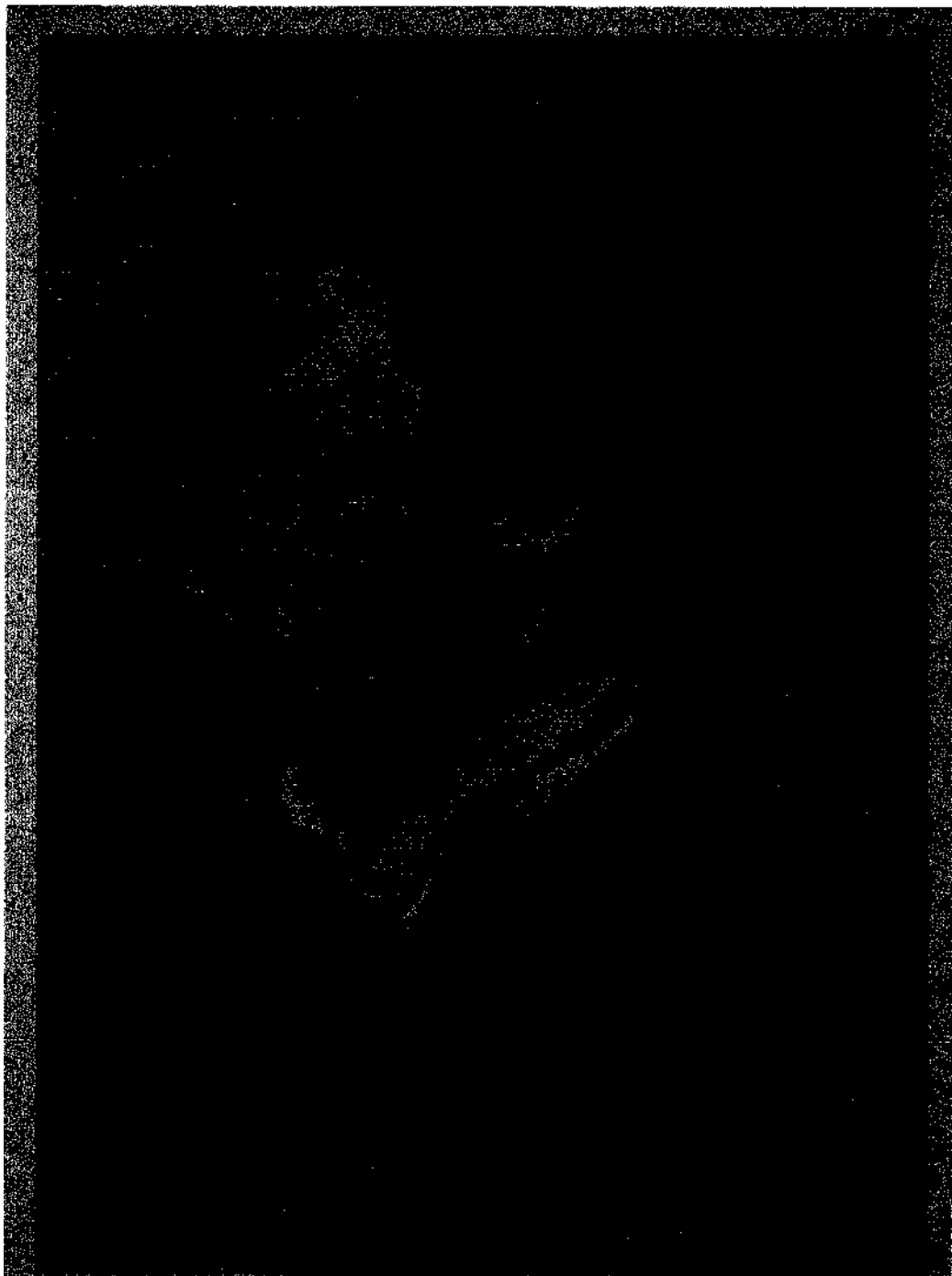
perhaps, never heard of in the precincts of the Palais Royal, is it not enough that they gave pleasure where they were to those who saw and heard them? Must our laugh, to be sincere, have its echo on the other side of the water? Had not the French their favourites and their enjoyments at the time, that we knew nothing of? Why then should we not have ours (and boast of them too) without their leave? A monopoly of self-conceit is not a monopoly of all other advantages. The English, when they go abroad, do not take away the prejudice against them by their looks. We seem duller and sadder than we are. As I write this, I am sitting in the open air in a beautiful valley, near Vevey: Clarens is on my left, the Dent de Jamant is behind me, the rocks of Meillerie opposite: under my feet is a green bank, enamelled with white and purple flowers, in which a dew-drop here and there still glitters with pearly light—

1
" *And gaudy butterflies flutter around.* "

Intent upon the scene and upon the thoughts that stir within me, I conjure up the cheerful passages of my life, and a crowd of happy images appear before me. No one would see it in my looks—my eyes grow dull and fixed, and I seem rooted to the spot, as all this phantasmagoria passes in review before me, glancing a reflex lustre on the face of the world and nature. But the traces of pleasure, in my case, sink into an absorbent ground of thoughtful melancholy, and require to be brought out by time and circumstances, or as (the critics tell you) by the *varnish* of style 1

The *comfort*, on which the English lay so much stress, is of the same character, and arises from the same source, as their mirth. Both exist by contrast and a sort of contradiction. The English are certainly the most uncomfortable of all people in themselves, and therefore it is that they stand in need of every kind of comfort and accommodation. The least thing puts them out of their way, and therefore everything must be in its place. They are mightily offended at disagreeable tastes and smells, and therefore they exact the

utmost neatness and nicety. They are sensible of heat and cold, and therefore they cannot exist unless everything is snug and warm, or else open and airy, where they are. They must have "all appliances and means to boot." They are afraid of interruption and intrusion, and therefore they shut themselves up in indoor enjoyments and by their own firesides. It is not that they require luxuries (for that implies a high degree of epicurean indulgence and gratification), but they cannot do without *their comforts*; that is, whatever tends to supply their physical wants and ward off physical pain and annoyance. As they have not a fund of animal spirits and enjoyments in themselves, they cling to external objects for support, and derive solid satisfaction from the ideas of order, cleanliness, plenty, property, and domestic quiet as they seek for diversion from odd accidents and grotesque surprises, and have the highest possible relish not of voluptuous softness, but of hard knocks and dry blows,, as one means, of ascertaining their personal identity.



HAZLITT AGED FOR a *drawing* by William Bewick in the *National portrait Gallery*.



On the Character of Burke¹

THERE is no single speech of Mr. Burke which can convey a satisfactory idea of his powers of mind: to do him justice, it would be necessary to quote all his works; the only specimen of Burke is, *all that he wrote*. With respect to most other speakers, a specimen is generally enough, or more than enough. When you are acquainted with their manner, and see what proficiency they have made in the mechanical exercise of their profession, with what facility they can borrow a simile, or round a period, how dexterously they can argue, and object, and rejoin, you are satisfied; there is no other difference in their speeches than what arises from the difference of the subjects. But this was not the case with Burke. * He brought his subjects along with him ; he drew his materials from himself. The only limits which circumscribed his variety were the stores of his own mind. His stock of ideas did not consist of a few meagre facts, meagrely stated, of half-a-dozen commonplaces tortured into a thousand different ways; but his mine of wealth was a profound understanding, inexhaustible as the human heart, and various as the sources of human nature. He therefore enriched every subject to which he applied himself, and new subjects were only the occasions of calling forth fresh powers of mind which had not been before exerted. It would therefore be in vain to look for the proof of his powers in any one of his speeches or writings : they all contain some additional proof of power. In speaking of Burke, then, I shall speak of the whole compass and circuit of his mind—not of that small part or section of him which I have been able to give: to do otherwise would be like the story of the man who put the brick in his pocket, thinking

¹On the Character of Burke appeared in *Eloquence of the British Senate*, 1807.

to show it as the model of a house. I have been able to manage pretty well with respect to all my other speakers, and curtailed them down without remorse. It was easy to reduce them within certain limits, to fix their spirit, and condense their variety; by having a certain quantity given, you might infer all the rest; it was only the same thing over again. But who can bind Proteus, or confine the roving flight of genius ?

Burke's writings are better than his speeches, and indeed his speeches are writings. But he seemed to feel himself more at ease, to have a fuller possession of his faculties in addressing the public, than in addressing the House of Commons. Burke was *raised* into public life; and he seems to have been prouder of this new dignity than became so great a man. For this reason, most of his speeches have a sort of parliamentary preamble to them : he seems fond of coqueting with the House of Commons, and is perpetually calling the Speaker out to dance a minuet with him before he begins. There is also something like an attempt to stimulate the superficial dulness of his hearers by exciting their surprise, by running into extravagance : and he sometimes demeans himself by condescending to what may be considered as bordering too much upon buffoonery, for the amusement of the company. Those lines of Milton were admirably applied to him by some one—"The elephant to make them sport wreathed his proboscis lithe." The truth is, that he was out of his place in the House of Commons ; he was eminently qualified to shine as a man of genius, as the instructor of mankind, as the brightest luminary of his age; but he had nothing in common with that motley crew of knights, citizens, and burgesses. He could not be said to be "native and endued unto that element." He was above it; and never appeared like himself, but when, forgetful of the idle clamours of party, and of the little views of little men, he appealed to his country, and the enlightened judgment of mankind.

I am not going to make an idle panegyric on Burke (he

has no need of it); but I cannot help looking upon him as the chief boast and ornament of the English House of Commons. What has been said of him is, I think, strictly true, that " he was the most eloquent man of his time: his wisdom was greater than his eloquence/' The only public man that in my opinion can be put in any competition with him, is Lord Chatham; and he moved in a sphere so very remote, that it is almost impossible to compare them. But though it would perhaps be difficult to determine which of them excelled most in his particular way, there is nothing in the world more easy than to point out in what their peculiar excellences consisted. They were in every respect the reverse of each other. Chatham's eloquence was popular: his wisdom was altogether plain and practical. Burke's eloquence was that of the poet; of the man of high and unbounded fancy : his wisdom was profound and contemplative. Chatham's eloquence was calculated to make men *act*: Burke's was calculated to make them *think*. Chatham could have roused the fury of a multitude, and wielded their physical energy as he pleased: Burke's eloquence carried conviction into the mind of the retired and lonely student, opened the recesses of the human breast, and lighted up the face of nature around him. Chatham supplied his hearers with motives to immediate action : Burke furnished them with *reasons* for action which might have little effect upon them at the time, but for which they would be the wiser and better all their lives after. In research, in originality, in variety of knowledge, in richness of invention, in depth and comprehension of mind, Burke had as much the advantage of Lord Chatham as he was excelled by him in plain common sense, in strong feeling, in steadiness of purpose, in vehemence, in warmth, in enthusiasm, and energy of mind. Burke was the man of genius, of fine sense, and subtle reasoning; Chatham was a man of clear understanding, of strong sense, and violent passions. Burke's mind was satisfied with speculation: Chatham's was essentially *active*; it could not rest without

an object. The power which governed Burke's mind was his Imagination; that which gave its *impetus* to Chatham was Will. The one was almost the creature of pure intellect, the other of physical temperament.

There are two very different ends which a man of genius may propose to himself, either in writing or speaking, and which will accordingly give birth to very different styles. He can have but one of these two objects ; either to enrich or strengthen the mind; either to furnish us with new ideas, to lead the mind into new trains of thought, to which it was before unused, and which it was incapable of striking out for itself; or else to collect and embody what we already knew, to rivet our old impressions more deeply; to make what was before plain still plainer, and to give to that which was familiar all the effect of novelty. In the one case we receive an accession to the stock of our ideas ; in the other, an additional degree of life and energy is infused into them : our thoughts continue to flow in the same channels, but their pulse is quickened and invigorated. I do not know how to distinguish these different styles better than by calling them severally the inventive and refined, or the impressive and vigorous styles. It is only the subject-matter of eloquence, however, which is allowed to be remote or obscure. The things themselves may be subtle and recondite, but they must be dragged out of their obscurity and brought struggling to the light; they must be rendered plain and palpable (as far as it is in the wit of man to do so), or they are no longer eloquence. That which by its natural impenetrability, and in spite of every effort, remains dark and difficult, which is impervious to every ray, on which the imagination can shed no lustre, which can be clothed with no beauty, is not a subject for the orator or poet. At the same time it cannot be expected that abstract truths or profound observations should ever be placed in the same strong and dazzling points of view as natural objects and mere matters of fact. It is enough if they receive a reflex and borrowed lustre, like that which

cheers the first dawn of morning, where the effect of surprise and novelty gilds every object, and the joy of beholding another world gradually emerging out of the gloom of night, "a new creation rescued from his reign," fills the mind with a sober rapture. Philosophical eloquence is in writing what *chiaroscuro* is in painting; he would be a fool who should object that the colours in the shaded part of a picture were not so bright as those on the opposite side; the eye of the connoisseur receives an equal delight from both, balancing the want of brilliancy and effect with the greater delicacy of the tints, and difficulty of the execution. In judging of Burke, therefore, we are to consider, first, the style of eloquence which he adopted, and, secondly, the effects which he produced with it. If he did not produce the same effects on vulgar minds as some others have done, it was not for want of power, but from the turn and direction of his mind.¹ It was because his subjects, his ideas, his arguments, were less vulgar. The question is not whether he brought certain truths equally home to us, but how much nearer he brought them than they were before. In my opinion, he united the two extremes of refinement and strength in a higher degree than any other writer whatever.

The subtlety of his mind was undoubtedly that which rendered Burke a less popular writer and speaker than he otherwise would have been. It weakened the impression of his observations upon others, but I cannot admit that it weakened the observations themselves; that it took anything from their real weight or solidity. Coarse minds think all that is subtle, futile: that because it is not gross and obvious and palpable to the senses, it is therefore light and frivolous, and of no importance in the real affairs of life; thus making their own confined understandings the measure of truth, and supposing that whatever they do not distinctly perceive, is nothing. Seneca, who was not one of the vulgar, also says, that subtle truths are those which have the least

¹For instance, he produced less effect on the mob that compose the English House of Commons than Chatham or Fox, or even Pitt.

substance in them, and consequently approach nearest to nonentity. But for my own part I cannot help thinking that the most important truths must be the most refined and subtle ; for that very reason, that they must comprehend a great number of particulars, and instead of referring to any distinct or positive fact, must point out the combined effects of an extensive chain of causes, operating gradually, remotely, and collectively, and therefore imperceptibly. General principles are not the less true or important because from their nature they elude immediate observation ; they are like the air, which is not the less necessary because we neither see nor feel it, or like that secret influence which binds the world together, and holds the planets in their orbits. The very same persons who are the most forward to laugh at all systematic reasoning as idle and impertinent, you will the* next moment hear exclaiming bitterly against the baleful effects of new-fangled systems of philosophy, or gravely descanting on the immense importance of instilling sound principles of morality into the mind. It would not be a bold conjecture, but an obvious truism, to say, that all the great changes which have been brought about in the mortal world, either for the better or worse, have been introduced, not by the bare statement of facts, which are things already known, and which must always operate nearly in the same manner, but by the development of certain opinions and abstract principles of reasoning on life and manners, or the origin of society and man's nature in general, which being obscure and uncertain, vary from time to time, and produce corresponding changes in the human mind. They are the wholesome dew and rain, or the mildew and pestilence that silently destroy. To this principle of generalization all wise lawgivers, and the systems of philosophers, owe their influence.

It has always been with me a test of the sense and candour of any one belonging to the opposite party, whether he allowed Burke to be a great man. Of all the-persons of this description that I have ever known, I never met with above

one or two who would make this concession; whether it was that party feelings ran too high to admit of any real candour, or whether it was owing to an essential vulgarity in their habits of thinking, they all seemed to be of opinion that he was a wild enthusiast, or a hollow sophist, who was to be answered by bits *of* facts, by smart logic, by shrewd questions, and idle songs. They looked upon him as a man of disordered intellects, because he reasoned in a style to which they had not been used, and which confounded their dim perceptions. If you said that though you differed with him in sentiment, yet you thought him an admirable reasoner, and a close observer of human nature, you were answered with a loud laugh, and some hackneyed quotation. " Alas ! Leviathan was not so tamed ! " They did not know whom they had to contend with. The corner-stone, which the builders rejected, became the head-corner, though to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; for, indeed, I cannot discover that he was much better understood by those of his own party, if we may judge from the little affinity there is between his mode of reasoning and theirs. The simple clue to all his reasonings on politics is, I think, as follows. He did not agree with some writers that that mode of government is necessarily the best which is the cheapest. He saw in the construction of society other principles at work, and other capacities of fulfilling the desires, and perfecting the nature of man, besides those of securing the equal enjoyment of the means of animal life, and doing this at as little expense as possible. He thought that the wants and happiness of men were not to be provided for, as we provide for those of a herd of cattle, merely by attending to their physical necessities. He thought more nobly of his fellows. He knew that man had affections and passions and powers of imagination, as well as hunger and thirst, and the sense of heat and cold. He took his idea of political society from the pattern of private life, wishing, as he himself expresses it, to incorporate the domestic charities with the orders of the state, and to blend them together.

He strove to establish an analogy between the compact that binds together the community at large*, and that which binds together the several families that compose it. He knew that the rules that form the basis of private morality are not founded in reason, that is, in the abstract properties of those things which are the subjects of them, but in the nature of man, and his capacity of being affected by certain things from habit, from imagination, and sentiment, as well as from reason.

Thus, the reason why a man ought to be attached to his wife and children is not, surely, that they are better than others (for in this case every one else ought to be of the same opinion), but because he must be chiefly interested in those things which are nearest to him, and with which he is best acquainted, since his understanding cannot reach equally to everything; because he must be most attached to those objects which he has known the longest, and which by their situation have actually affected him the most, not those which in themselves are the most affecting whether they have ever made any impression on him or no; that is, because he is by his nature the creature of habit and feeling, and because it is reasonable that he should act in conformity to his nature. Burke was so far right in saying that it is no objection to an institution that it is founded in *prejudice*', but the contrary, if that prejudice is natural and right; that is, if it arises from those circumstances which are properly subjects of feeling and association, not from any defect or perversion of the understanding in those things which fall strictly under its jurisdiction. On this profound maxim he took his stand. Thus he contended, that the prejudice in favour of nobility was natural and proper, and fit to be encouraged by the positive institutions of society: not on account of the real or personal merit of the individuals, but because such an institution has a tendency to enlarge and raise the mind, to keep alive the memory of past greatness, to connect the different ages of the world together, to carry back the imagination over a

long tract of time, and feed it with the contemplation of remote events : because it is natural to think highly of that which inspires us with high thoughts, which has been connected for many generations with splendour, and affluence, and dignity, and power, and privilege. He also conceived, that by transferring the respect from the person to the thing, and thus rendering it steady and permanent, the mind would be habitually formed to sentiments of deference, attachment, and fealty, to whatever else demanded its respect: that it would be led to fix its view on what was elevated and lofty, and be weaned from that low and narrow jealousy which never willingly or heartily admits of any superiority in others, and is glad of every opportunity to bring down all excellence to a level with its own miserable standard. Nobility did not, therefore, exist to the prejudice of the other orders of the state, but by, and for them. The inequality of the different orders of society did not destroy the unity and harmony of the whole. The health and well-being of the moral world was to be promoted by the same means as the beauty of the natural world; by contrast, by change, by light and shade, by variety of parts, by order and proportion. To think of reducing all mankind to the same insipid level, seemed to him the same absurdity as to destroy the inequalities of surface in a country, for the benefit of agriculture and commerce. In short, he believed that the interests of men in society should be consulted, and their several stations and employments assigned, with a view to their nature, not as physical, but as moral beings, so as to nourish their hopes, to lift their imagination, to enliven their fancy, to rouse their activity, to strengthen their virtue, and to furnish the greatest number of objects of pursuit and means of enjoyment to beings constituted as man is, consistently with the order and stability of the whole.

The same reasoning might be extended farther. I do not say that his arguments are conclusive : but they are profound and *true*, as far as they go. There may be disadvantages

and abuses necessarily interwoven with his scheme, *6t* opposite advantages of infinitely greater value, to be derived from another order of things and state of society. This, however, does not invalidate either the truth or importance of Burke's reasoning; since the advantages he points out as connected with the mixed form of government are really and necessarily inherent in it: since they are compatible, in the same degree, with no other; since the principle itself on which he rests his argument (whatever we may think of the application) is of the utmost weight and moment; and since, on whichever side the truth lies, it is impossible to make a fair decision without having the opposite side of the question clearly and fully stated to u. This Burke has done in a masterly manner. He presents to you one view or face of society. Let him who thinks he can, give the reverse side with equal force, beauty, and clearness. It is said, I know, that truth is *one*; but to this I cannot subscribe, for it appears to me that truth is *many*. There are as many truths as there are things and causes of action and contradictory principles at work in society. In making up the account of good and evil, indeed, the final result must be one way or the other; but the particulars on which that result depends are infinite and various.

It will be seen from what I have said, that I am very far from agreeing with those who think that Burke was a man without understanding, and a merely florid writer. There are two causes which have given rise to this calumny; namely, that narrowness of mind which leads men to suppose that the truth lies entirely on the side of their own opinions, and that whatever does not make for them is absurd and irrational; secondly, a trick we have of confounding reason with judgment, and supposing that it is merely the province of the understanding to pronounce sentence, and not to give evidence, or argue the case; in short, that it is a passive, not an active faculty. Thus there are persons who never run into any extravagance, because they are so buttressed up with the opinions of others on all

sides, that they cannot lean much to one side or the other; they are so little moved with any kind of reasoning, that they remain at an equal distance from every extreme, and are never very far from the truth, because the slowness of their faculties will not suffer them to make much progress in error. These are persons of great judgment. The scales of the mind are pretty sure to remain even, when there is nothing in them. In this sense of the word, Burke must be allowed to have wanted judgment, by all those who think that he was wrong in his conclusions. The accusation of want of judgment, in fact, only means that you yourself are of a different opinion. But if in arriving at one error he discovered a hundred truths, I should consider myself a hundred times more indebted to him than if, stumbling on that which I consider as the right side of the question, he had committed a hundred absurdities in striving to establish his point. I speak of him now merely as an author, or as far as I and other readers are concerned with him; at the same time, I should not differ from any one who may be disposed to contend that the consequences of his writings as instruments of political power have been tremendous, fatal, such as no exertion of wit or knowledge or genius can ever counteract or atone for.

Burke also gave a hold to his antagonists by mixing up sentiment and imagery with his reasoning; so that being unused to such a sight in the region of politics, they were deceived, and could not discern the fruit from the flowers. Gravity is the cloak of wisdom; and those who have nothing else think it an insult to affect the one without the other, because it destroys the only foundation on which their pretensions are built. The easiest part of reason is dulness; the generality of the world are therefore concerned in discouraging any example of unnecessary brilliancy that might tend to shew that the two things do not always go together. Burke in some measure dissolved the spell. It was discovered, that his gold was not the less valuable for being wrought into elegant shapes, and richly embossed

with curious figures ; that the solidity of a building is not destroyed by adding to it beauty and ornament; and that the strength of a man's understanding is not always to be estimated in exact proportion to his want of imagination. His understanding was not the less real, because it was not the only faculty he possessed. He justified the description of the poet,

*" How charming is divine philosophy !
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute ! "*

Those who object to this union of grace and beauty with reason, are in fact weak-sighted people, who cannot distinguish the noble and majestic form of Truth from that of her sister Folly, if they are dressed both alike ! But there is always a difference even in the adventitious ornaments they wear, which is sufficient to distinguish them.

Burke was so far from being a gaudy or flowery writer, that he was one of the severest writers we have. His words are the most like things; his style is the most strictly suited to the subject. He unites every extreme and every variety of composition; the lowest and the meanest words and descriptions with the highest. He exults in the display of power, in showing the extent, the force, and intensity of his ideas ; he is led on by the mere impulse and vehemence of his fancy, not by the affectation of dazzling his readers by gaudy conceits or pompous images. He was completely carried away by his subject. He had no other object but to produce the strongest impression on his reader, by giving the truest, the most characteristic, the fullest, and most forcible description of things, trusting to the power of his own mind to mould them into grace and beauty. He did not produce a splendid effect by setting fire to the light vapours that float in the regions of fancy, as the chemists make fine colours with phosphorus, but by the eagerness of his blows struck fire from the flint, and melted the hardest substances in the furnace of his imagination. The

wheels of his imagination did not catch fire from the rottenness of the materials, but from the rapidity of their motion. One would suppose, to hear people talk of Burke, that his style was such as would have suited the *Lady's Magazine*; soft, smooth, showy, tender, insipid, full of fine words, without any meaning. The essence of the gaudy or glittering style consists in producing a momentary effect by fine words and images brought together, without order or connection. Burke most frequently produced an effect by the remoteness and novelty of his combinations, by the force of contrast, by the striking manner in which the most opposite and unpromising materials were harmoniously blended together; not by laying his hands on all the fine things he could think of, but by bringing together those things which he knew would blaze out into glorious light by their collision. The florid style is a mixture of affectation and commonplace. Burke's was an union of untameable vigour and originality.

Burke was not a verbose writer. If he sometimes multiplies words, it is not for want of ideas, but because there are no words that fully express his ideas, and he tries to do it as well as he can by different ones. He had nothing of the *set* or formal style, the measured cadence, and stately phraseology of Johnson, and most of our modern writers. This style, which is what we understand by the *artificial*) is all in one key. It selects a certain set of words to represent all ideas whatever, as the most dignified and elegant, and excludes all others as low and vulgar. The words are not fitted to the things, but the things to the words. Everything is seen through a false medium. It is putting a mask on the face of nature, which may indeed hide some specks and blemishes, but takes away all beauty, delicacy, and variety. It destroys all dignity or elevation, because nothing can be raised where all is on a level, and completely destroys all force, expression, truth, and character, by arbitrarily confounding the differences of things, and reducing everything to the same insipid standard. To suppose that this stiff uniformity can add anything to real grace or dignity,

is like supposing that the human body, in order to be perfectly graceful, should never deviate from its upright posture. Another mischief of this method is, that it confounds all ranks in literature. Where there is no room for variety, no discrimination, no nicety to be shown in matching the idea with its proper word, there can be no room for taste or elegance. A man must easily learn the art of writing, when every sentence is to be cast in the same mould : where he is only allowed the use of one word he cannot choose wrong, nor will he be in much danger of making himself ridiculous by affectation or false glitter, when, whatever subject he treats of, he must treat of it in the same way. This indeed is to wear golden chains for the sake of ornament.

Burke was altogether free from the pedantry which I have here endeavoured to expose. His style was as original, as expressive, as rich and varied, as it was possible; his combinations were as exquisite, as playful, as happy, as unexpected, as bold and daring, as his fancy. If anything, he ran into the opposite extreme of too great an inequality, if truth and nature could ever be carried to an extreme. Those who are best acquainted with the writings and speeches of Burke will not think the praise I have here bestowed on them exaggerated. Some proof will be found of this in the following extracts. But the full proof must be sought in his works at large, and particularly in the *Thoughts on the Discontents*; in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*; in his *Letter to the Duke of Bedford*; and in the *Regicide Peace*. The two last of these are perhaps the most remarkable of all his writings, from the contrast they afford to each other. The one is the most delightful exhibition of wild and brilliant fancy that is to be found in English prose, but it is too much like a beautiful picture painted upon gauze; it wants something to support it: the other is without ornament, but it has all the solidity, the weight, the gravity of a judicial record. It seems to have been written with a certain constraint upon himself, and to show those who

said he could. *npt reason*, that his arguments might be stripped of their ornaments without losing anything of their force. It is certainly, of all his works, that in which he has shown most power of logical deduction, and the only one in which he has made any important use of facts. In general he certainly paid little attention to them: they were the playthings of his mind. He saw them as he pleased, not as they were; with the eye of the philosopher or the poet, regarding them only in their general principle, or as they might serve to decorate his subject. This is the natural consequence of much imagination: things that are probable are elevated into the rank of realities. To those who can reason on the essences of things, or who can invent according to nature, the experimental proof is of little value. This was the case with Burke. In the present instance, however, he seems to have forced his mind into the service of facts; and he succeeded completely. His comparison between our connection with France or Algiers, and his account of the conduct of the war, are as clear, as convincing, as forcible examples of this kind of reasoning, as are anywhere to be met with. Indeed I do not think there is anything in Fox (whose mind was purely historical), or in Chatham (who attended to feelings more than facts), that will bear a comparison with them.

Burke has been compared to Cicero—I do not know for what reason. Their excellences are as different, and indeed as opposite, as they can well be. Burke had not the polished elegance, the glossy neatness, the artful regularity, the exquisite modulation of Cicero: he had a thousand times more richness and originality of mind, more strength and pomp of diction.

It has been well observed, that the ancients had no word that properly expresses what we mean by the word *genius*. They perhaps had not the thing. Their minds appear to have been too exact, too retentive, too minute and subtle, too sensible to the external differences of things, too passive under their impressions, to admit of those bold and rapid

combinations, those lofty flights of fancy, which, glancing from heaven to earth, unite the most opposite extremes, and draw the happiest illustrations from things the most remote. Their ideas were kept too confined and distinct by the material form or vehicle in which they were conveyed, to unite cordially together, to be melted down in the imagination. Their metaphors are taken from things of the same class, not from things of different classes; the general analogy, not the individual feeling, directs them in their choice. Hence, as Dr. Johnson observed, their similes are either repetitions of the same idea, or so obvious and general as not to lend any additional force to it; as when a huntress is compared to Diana, or a warrior rushing into battle to a lion rushing on his prey. *Their forte* was exquisite art and perfect imitation. Witness their statues and other things of the same kind. But they had not that high and enthusiastic fancy which some of our own writers have shown. For the proof of this, let any one compare Milton and Shakespeare with Homer and Sophocles, or Burke with Cicero.

It may be asked whether Burke was a poet. He was so only in the general vividness of his fancy, and in richness of invention. There may be poetical passages in his works, but I certainly think that his writings in general are quite distinct from poetry; and that for the reason before given, namely, that the subject-matter of them is not poetical. The finest part of them are illustrations or personifications of dry abstract ideas;¹ and the union between the idea and the illustration is not of that perfect and pleasing kind as to constitute poetry, or indeed to be admissible, but for the effect intended to be produced by it; that is, by every means in our power to give animation and attraction to subjects in themselves barren of ornament, but which at the same time are pregnant with the most important consequences, and in which the understanding and the passions are equally interested.

¹As in the comparison of the British Constitution to the "proud keep of Windsor," etc., the most splendid passage in his works.

I have heard it Remarked by a person, to whose opinion I would sooner submit than to a general council of critics, that the sound of Burke's prose is not musical; that it wants cadence ; and that instead of being so lavish of his imagery as is generally supposed, he seemed to him to be rather parsimonious in the use of it, always expanding and making the most of his ideas. This may be true if we compare him with some of our poets, or perhaps with some of our early prose writers, but not if we compare him with any of our political writers or parliamentary speakers. There are some very fine things of Lord Bolingbroke's on the same subjects, but not equal to Burke's. As for Junius, he is at the head of his class ; but that class is not the highest. He has been said to have more dignity than Burke. Yes— if the stalk of a giant is less dignified than the strut of a *petit-maitre*. I do not mean to speak disrespectfully of Junius, but grandeur is not the character of his composition ; and if it is not to be found in Burke it is to be found nowhere.

On the Conduct of Life; or, Advice to a School-boy¹

M Y DEAR LITTLE FELLOW,—You are now going to settle at school, and may consider this as your first entrance into the world. As my health is so indifferent, and I may not be with you long, I wish to leave you some advice (the best I can) for your conduct in life, both that it may be of use to you, and as something to remember me by. I may at least be able to caution you against my own errors, if nothing else.

As we went along to your new place of destination, you often repeated that " You durst say they were a set of stupid, disagreeable people," meaning the people at the school. You were to blame in this. It is a good old rule to hope for the best. Always, my dear, believe things to be right till you find them the contrary ; and even then, instead of irritating yourself against them, endeavour to put up with them as well as you can, if you cannot alter them. You said, " You were sure you should not like the school where you were going." This was wrong. What you meant was that you did not like to leave home. But you could not tell whether you should like the school or not, till you had given it a trial. Otherwise, your saying that you should not like it was determining that you would not like it. Never anticipate evils; or, because you cannot have things exactly as you wish, make them out worse than they are, through mere spite and wilfulness.

You seemed at first to take no notice of your school-fellows, or rather to set yourself against them, because they

¹*OH The Conduct of Life ; or. Advice to a School-Boy* was written in February 1822 for the benefit of Hazlitt's own son, who printed it in his father's "*Literary Remains*, 1836.

were strangers to, you. They knew as little of you as you did of them; so that this would have been a reason for their keeping aloof from you as well, which you would have felt as a hardship. Learn never to conceive a prejudice against others, because you know nothing of them. It is bad reasoning, and makes enemies of half the world. Do not think ill of them, till they behave ill to you; and then strive to avoid the faults which you see in them. This will disarm their hostility sooner than pique or resentment or complaint.

I thought you were disposed to criticise the dress of some of the boys as not so good as your own. Never despise any one for anything that he cannot help—least of all, for his poverty. I would wish you to keep up appearances yourself as a defence against the idle sneers of the world, but I would not have you value yourself upon them. I hope you will neither be the dupe nor victim of vulgar prejudices. Instead of saying above—"Never despise any one for anything that he cannot help"—I might have said—"Never despise any one at all;" for contempt implies a triumph over and pleasure in the ill of another. It means that you are glad and congratulate yourself on their failings or misfortunes. The sense of inferiority in others, without this indirect appeal to our self-love, is a painful feeling, and not an exulting one.

You complain since, that the boys laugh at you and do not care about you, and that you are not treated as you were at home. My dear, that is one chief reason for your being sent to school, to inure you betimes to the unavoidable rubs and uncertain reception you may meet with in life. You cannot always be with me, and perhaps it is as well that you cannot. But you must not expect others to show the same concern about you as I should. You have hitherto been a spoiled child, and have been used to have your own way a good deal, both in the house and among your play-fellows, with whom you were too fond of being a leader: but you have good-nature and good sense, and

Will get the better of this in time. You have now got among other boys who are your equals, or bigger and stronger than yourself, and who have something else to attend to besides humouring your whims and fancies, and you feel this as a repulse or piece of injustice. But the first lesson to learn is that there are other people in the world besides yourself. There are a number of boys in the school where you are, whose amusements and pursuits (whatever they may be) are and ought to be of as much consequence to them as yours can be to you, and to which therefore you must give way in your turn. The more airs of childish self-importance you give yourself, you will only expose yourself to be the more thwarted and laughed at. True equality is the only true morality or true wisdom. Remember always that you are but one among others, and you can hardly mistake your place in society. In your father's house, you might do as you pleased : in the world, you will find competitors at every turn. You are not born a king's son, to destroy or dictate to millions : you can only expect to share their fate, or settle your differences amicably with them. You already find it so at school; and I wish you to be reconciled to your situation as soon and with as little pain as you can.

It was my misfortune, perhaps, to be bred up among Dissenters, who look with too jaundiced an eye at others, and set too high a value on their own peculiar pretensions. From being proscribed themselves, they learn to proscribe others; and come in the end to reduce all integrity of principle and soundness of opinion within the pale of their own little communion. Those who were out of it, and did not belong to the class of *Rational Dissenters*, I was led erroneously to look upon as hardly deserving the name of rational beings. Being thus satisfied as to the select few who are " the salt of the earth," it is easy to persuade ourselves that we are at the head of them, and to fancy ourselves of more importance in the scale of true desert than all the rest of the world put together, who do not interpret a certain text of Scripture in the manner that we have been taught to

do. You will (from the difference of education) be free from this bigotry, and will, I hope, avoid everything akin to the same exclusive and narrow-minded spirit. Think that the minds of men are various as their faces—that the modes and employments of life are numberless as they are necessary—that there is more than one class of merit—that through others may be wrong in some things, they are not so in all—and that countless races of men have been born, have lived and died, without ever hearing of any one of those points in which you take a just pride and pleasure—and you will not err on the side of that spiritual pride or intellectual coxcombry which has been so often the bane of the studious and learned !

I observe you have got a way of speaking of your school-fellows as "*that* Hoare, *that* Harris," and so on, as if you meant to mark them out for particular reprobation, or did not think them good enough for you. It is a bad habit to speak disrespectfully of others : for it will lead you to think and feel uncharitably towards them. Ill names beget ill blood. Even where there may be some repeated trifling provocation, it is better to be courteous, mild, and forbearing, than captious, impatient, and fretful. The faults of others too often arise out of our own ill-temper; or though they should be real, we shall not mend them by exasperating ourselves against them. Treat your playmates as Hamlet advises Polonius to treat the players, " according to your own dignity rather than their deserts." If you fly out at everything in them that you disapprove or think done on purpose to annoy you, you lie constantly at the mercy of their caprice, rudeness, or ill-nature. You should be more your own master.

Do not begin to quarrel with the world too soon: for, bad as it may be, it is the best we have to live in—here. If railing would have made it better, it would have been reformed long ago : but as this is not to be hoped for at present, the best way is to slide through it as contentedly and innocently as we may. The worst fault it has is want of

charity: and calling *knave* and *fool* at every turn will not cure this failing. Consider (as a matter of vanity) that if there were not so many knaves and fools as we find, the wise and honest would not be those rare and shining characters that they are allowed to be; and (as a matter of philosophy) that if the world be really incorrigible in this respect, it is a reflection to make one sad, not angry. We may laugh or weep at the madness of mankind : we have no right to vilify them, for our own sakes or theirs. Misanthropy is not the disgust of the mind at human nature, but with itself; or it is laying its own exaggerated vices and foul blots at the door of others 1 Do not, however, mistake what I have here said. I would not have you, when you grow up, adopt the low and sordid fashion of palliating existing abuses or of putting the best face upon the worst things. I only mean that indiscriminate unqualified satire can do little good, and that those who indulge in the most revolting speculations on human nature do not themselves always set the fairest examples, or strive to prevent its lower degradation. They seem rather willing to reduce it to their theoretical standard. For the rest, the very outcry that is made (if sincere) shows that things cannot be quite so bad as they are represented. The abstract hatred and scorn of vice implies the capacity for virtue: the impatience expressed at the most striking instances of deformity proves the innate idea and love of beauty in the human mind. The best antidote I can recommend to you hereafter against the disheartening effect of such writings as those of Rochefoucault, Mandeville, and others, will be to look at the pictures of Raphael and Correggio. You need not be altogether ashamed, my dear little boy, of belonging to a species which could produce such faces as those; nor despair of doing something worthy of a laudable ambition, when you see what such hands have wrought I You will, perhaps, one day have reason to thank me for this advice.

As to your studies and school-exercises, I wish you to learn Latin, French, and dancing. I would insist upon the

last more particularly, both because it is more likely to be neglected, and because it is of the greatest consequence to your success in life. Everything almost depends upon first impressions ; and these depend (besides *person*, which is not in our power) upon two things, *dress* and *address*, which every one may command with proper attention. These are the small coin in the intercourse of life which are continually in request; and perhaps you will find at the year's end, or towards the close of life, that the daily insults, coldness, or contempt, to which you have been exposed by a neglect of such superficial recommendations, are hardly atoned for by the few proofs of esteem or admiration which your integrity or talents have been able to extort in the course of it. When we habitually disregard those things which we know will ensure the favourable opinion of others, it shows we set that opinion at defiance, or consider ourselves above it, which no one ever did with impunity. An inattention to our own persons implies a disrespect to others, and may often be traced no less to a want of good-nature than of good sense. The old maxim—*Desire to please, and you will infallibly please*—explains the whole matter. If there is a tendency to vanity and affectation on this side of the question, there is an equal alloy of pride and obstinacy on the opposite one. Slovenliness may at any time be cured by an effort of resolution, but a graceful carriage requires an early habit, and in most cases the aid of the dancing-master. I would not have you, from not knowing how to enter a room properly, stumble at the very threshold in the good graces of those on whom it is possible the fate of your future life may depend. Nothing creates a greater prejudice against anyone than awkwardness. A person who is confused in manner and gesture seems to have done something wrong, or as if he was conscious of no one qualification to build a confidence in himself upon. On the other hand, openness, freedom, self-possession, set others at ease with you by snowing that you are on good terms with yourself. Grace in women gains the affections sooner, and secures

them longer, than anything else—it is an outward and visible sign of an inward harmony of soul—as the want of it in men, as if the mind and body equally hitched in difficulties and were distracted with doubts, is the greatest impediment in the career of gallantry and road to the female heart. Another thing I would caution you against is not to pore over your books till you are bent almost double—a habit you will never be able to get the better of, and which you will find of serious ill-consequence. *A stoop in the shoulders* sinks a man in public and in private estimation. You are at present straight enough, and you walk with boldness and spirit. Do nothing to take away the use of your limbs, or the spring and elasticity of your muscles. As to all worldly advantages, it is to the full of as much importance that your deportment should be erect and manly as your actions.

You will naturally find out all this, and fall into it, if your attention is drawn out sufficiently to what is passing around you; and this will be the case, unless you are absorbed too much in books and those sedentary studies,

" Which waste the marrow, and consume the brain"

You are, I think, too fond of reading as it is. As one means of avoiding excess in this way, I would wish you to make it a rule, never to read at meal-times, nor in company when there is any (even the most trivial) conversation going on, nor even to let your eagerness to learn encroach upon your play-hours. Books are but one inlet of knowledge; and the pores of the mind, like those of the body, should be left open to all impressions. I applied too close to my studies, soon after I was of your age, and hurt myself irreparably by it. Whatever may be the value of learning, health and good spirits are of more.

I would have you, as I said, make yourself master of French, because you may find it of use in the commerce of life; and I would have you learn Latin, partly because I learnt it myself, and I would not have you without any of the advantages or sources of knowledge that I possessed—it

would be a bar of separation between us—and secondly, because there is an atmosphere round this sort of classical ground, to which that of actual life is gross and vulgar. Shut out from this garden of early sweetness, we may well exclaim—

*" How shall we part and wander down
Into a lower world, to this obscure
And wild? How shall we breathe in other air
Less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits ? "*

I do not think the Classics so indispensable to the cultivation of your intellect as on another account, which I have seen explained elsewhere, and you will have no objection to turn with me" to the passages.

" The study of the Classics is less to be regarded as an exercise of the intellect, than as *a discipline of humanity*. The peculiar advantage of this mode of education consists not so much in strengthening the understanding, as in softening and refining the taste. It gives men liberal views; it accustoms the mind to take an interest in things foreign to itself; to love virtue for its own sake; to prefer fame to life, and glory to riches; and to fix our thoughts on the remote and permanent, instead of narrow and fleeting objects. It teaches us to believe that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all the shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinion, and raises us above that low and servile fear, which bows only to present power and upstart authority. Rome and Athens filled a place in the history of mankind, which can never be occupied again. They were two cities set on a hill, which could not be hid; all eyes have seen them, and their light shines like a mighty sea-mark into the abyss of time.

*" ' Still green with hays each ancient altar stands,
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands ;
Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,
Destructive war, and all-involving age.*

*Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days,
Immortal heirs of universal praise I
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow !'*

It is this feeling more than anything else which produces a marked difference between the study of the ancient and modern languages, and which, by the weight and importance of the consequences attached to the former, stamps every word with a monumental firmness. By conversing with the *mighty dead*, we imbibe sentiment with knowledge. We become strongly attached to those who can no longer either hurt or serve us, except through the influence which they exert over the mind. We feel the presence of that power which gives immortality to human thoughts and actions, and catch the flame of enthusiasm from all the nations and ages."

Because, however, you have learnt Latin and Greek, and can speak a different language, do not fancy yourself of a different order of beings from those you ordinarily converse with. They perhaps know and can do more *things* than you, though you have learnt a greater variety of *names* to express the same thing by. The great object, indeed, of these studies is, to be "a cure for a narrow and selfish spirit," and to carry the mind out of its petty and local prejudices to the idea of a more general humanity. Do not fancy, because you are intimate with Homer and Virgil, that your neighbours who can never attain the same posthumous fame are to be despised, like those impudent valets who live in noble families and look down upon every one else. Though you are master of Gcero's *Orations*, think it possible for a cobbler at a stall to be more eloquent than you. "But you are a scholar, and he is not." Well, then, you have that advantage over him, but it does not follow that you are to have every other. Look at the heads of the celebrated poets and philosophers of antiquity in the collection at Wilton, and you will say they answer to their works; but you will find

others in the same collection whose names have hardly come down to us that are equally fine, and cast in the same classic mould. Do you imagine that all the thoughts, genius, and capacity of those old and mighty nations are contained in a few odd volumes, to be thumbed by school-boys ? This reflection is not meant to lessen your admiration of the great names to which you will be accustomed to look up, but to direct it to that solid mass of intellect and power of which they were the most shining ornaments. I would wish you to excel in this sort of learning and to take a pleasure in it, because it is the path that has been chosen for you; but do not suppose that others do not excel equally in their line of study or exercise of skill, or that there is but one mode of excellence in the art or nature. You have, got on vastly beyond the point at which you set out; but others have been getting on as well as you in the same or other ways, and have kept pace with you. What then, you may ask, is the use of all the pains you have taken, if it gives you no superiority over mankind in general ? It is this—You have reaped all the benefit of improvement and knowledge yourself; and farther, if you had not moved forwards, you would by this time have been left behind. Envy no one, disparage no one, think yourself above no one. Their demerits will not piece out your deficiencies; nor is it a waste of time and labour for you to cultivate your own talents, because you cannot bespeak a monopoly of all advantages. You are more learned than many of your acquaintance who may be more active, healthy, witty, successful in business, or expert in some elegant or useful art than you; but you have no reason to complain, if you have attained the object of your ambition. Or if you should not be able to compass this from a want of genius or parts, yet learn, my child, to be contented with a mediocrity of acquirements. You may still be respectable in your conduct, and enjoy a tranquil obscurity, with more friends and fewer enemies than you might otherwise have had.

There is one almost certain drawback on a course of

scholastic study, that it unfits men for active life. The *ideal* is always at variance with the *practical*. The habit of fixing the attention on the imaginary and abstracted deprives the mind equally of energy and fortitude. By indulging our imaginations on fictions and chimeras, where we have it all our own way and are led on only by the pleasure of the prospect, we grow fastidious, effeminate, lapped in idle luxury, impatient of contradiction, and unable to sustain the shock of real adversity when it comes; as by being taken up with abstract reasoning or remote events in which we are merely passive spectators, we have no resources to provide against it, no readiness, or expedients for the occasion, or spirit to use them, even if they occur. We must think again before we determine, and thus the opportunity for action is lost. While we are considering the very best possible mode of gaining an object, we find that it has slipped through our fingers, or that others have laid rude, fearless hands upon it; The youthful tyro reluctantly discovers that the ways of the world are not his ways, nor their thoughts his thoughts. Perhaps the old monastic institutions were not in this respect unwise, which carried on to the end of life the secluded habits and romantic associations with which it began, and which created a privileged world for the inhabitants, distinct from the common world of men and women. You will bring with you from your books and solitary reveries a wrong measure of men and things, unless you correct it by careful experience and mixed observation. You will raise your standard of character as much too high at first as from disappointed expectation it will sink too low afterwards. The best qualifier of this theoretical *mania* and of the dreams of poets and moralists (who both treat of things as *they ought to be* and not as *they are*) is in one sense to be found in some of our own popular writers, such as our Novelists and periodical Essayists. But you had, after all, better wait and see what things are, than try to anticipate the results. You know more of a road by having travelled it than by all the conjectures and

descriptions in the world. You will find the business of life conducted on a much more varied and individual scale than you would expect. People will be concerned about a thousand things that you have no idea of, and will be utterly indifferent to what you feel the greatest interest in. You will find good and evil, folly and discretion, more mingled, and the shades of character running more into each other than they do in the ethical charts. No one is equally wise or guarded at all points, and it is seldom that anyone is quite a fool. Do not be surprised, when you go out into the world, to find men talk exceedingly well on different subjects, who do not derive their information immediately from books. In the first place, the light of books is diffused very much abroad in the world in conversation and at second-hand; and besides, common sense is not a monopoly, and experience and observation are sources of information open to the man of the world as well as to the retired student. If you know more of the outline and principles, he knows more of the details and "practique part of life." A man may discuss very agreeably the adventures, of a campaign in which he was engaged without having read the *Retreat of the Ten Thousand*, or give a singular account of the method of drying teas in China without being a profound chemist. It is the vice of scholars to suppose that there is no knowledge in the world but that of books. Do you avoid it, I conjure you; and thereby save yourself the pain and mortification that must otherwise ensue from finding out your mistake continually !

Gravity is one great ingredient in the conduct of life, and perhaps a certain share of it is hardly to be dispensed with. Few people can afford to be quite unaffected. At any rate,, do not put your worst qualities foremost. Do not seek to distinguish yourself by being ridiculous; nor entertain that miserable ambition to be the sport and butt of the company. By aiming at a certain standard of behaviour or intellect, you will at least show your taste and value for what is excellent. There are those who *blurt* out their good things.

with so little heed of what they are about that no one thinks anything of them ; as others by keeping their folly to themselves gain the reputation of wisdom. Do not, however, affect to speak only in oracles, or to deal in *bon-mots* : condescend to the level of the company, and be free and accessible to all persons. Express whatever occurs to you, that cannot offend others or hurt yourself. Keep some opinions to yourself. Say what you please of others, but never repeat what you hear said of them to themselves. If you have nothing yourself to offer, laugh with the witty—assent to the wise : they will not think the worse of you for it. Listen to information on subjects you are acquainted with, instead of always striving to lead the conversation to some favourite one of your own. By the last method you will shine, but will not improve. I am ashamed myself ever to open my lips on any question I have ever written upon. It is much more difficult to be able to converse on an equality with a number of persons in turn, than to soar above their heads, and excite the stupid gaze of all companies by bestriding some senseless topic of your own and confounding the understandings of those who are ignorant of it. Be not too fond of argument. Indeed, by going much into company (which I do not, however, wish you to do) you will be weaned from this practice, if you set out with it. Rather suggest what remarks may have occurred to you on a subject than aim at dictating your opinions to others or at defending yourself at all points. You will learn more by agreeing in the main with others and entering into their trains of thinking, than by contradicting and urging them to extremities. Avoid singularity of opinion as well as of everything else. Sound conclusions come with practical knowledge, rather than with speculative refinements; in what we really understand, we reason but little. Long-winded disputes fill up the place of common-sense and candid inquiry. Do not imagine that you will make people friends by showing your superiority over them: it is what they will neither admit nor forgive, unless you have a high

and acknowledged reputation beforehand, which renders this sort of petty vanity more inexcusable. Seek to gain the good-will of others rather than to extort their applause; and to this end, be neither too tenacious of your own claims, nor inclined to press too hard on their weaknesses.

Do not affect the society of your superiors in rank, nor court that of the great. There can be no real sympathy in either case. The first will consider you as a restraint upon them, and the last as an intruder, or *upon sufferance*. It is not a desirable distinction to be admitted into company as a man of talents. You are a mark for invidious observation. If you say nothing, or merely behave with common propriety and simplicity, you seem to have no business there. If you make a studied display of yourself, it is arrogating a consequence you have no right to. If you are contented to pass as an indifferent person, they despise you; if you distinguish yourself, and show more knowledge, wit, or taste than they do, they hate you for it. You have no alternative. I would rather be asked out to sing than to talk. Everyone does not pretend to a fine voice, but every one fancies he has as much understanding as another. Indeed, the secret of this sort of intercourse has been pretty well found out. Literary men are seldom invited to the tables of the great; they send for players and musicians, as they keep monkeys and parrots!

I would not, however, have you run away with a notion that the rich are knaves, or that lords are fools. They are for what I know as honest and as wise as other people. But it is a trick of our self-love, supposing that another has the decided advantage of us in one way, to strike a balance by taking it for granted (as a moral antithesis) that he must be as much beneath us in those* qualities on which we plume ourselves, and which we would appropriate almost entirely to our own use. It is hard indeed if others are raised above us not only by the gifts of fortune, but of understanding too. It is not to be credited. People have an unwillingness to admit that the House of Lords can be equal in talent to the House of Commons. So in the other sex,

if a woman is handsome, she is an idiot or no better than she should be: in ours, if a man is worth a million of money, he is a miser, a fellow that cannot spell his own name, or a poor creature in some way, to bring him to our level. This is malice, and not truth. Believe all the good you can of every one. Do not measure others by yourself. If they have advantages which you have not, let your liberality keep pace with their good fortune. Envy no one, and you need envy no one. If you have but the magnanimity to allow merit wherever you see it—understanding in a lord or wit in a cobbler—this temper of mind will stand you instead of many accomplishments. Think no man too happy. Raphael died young. Milton had the misfortune to be blind. If any one is vain or proud, it is from folly or ignorance. Those who pique themselves excessively on some one thing have but that one thing to pique themselves upon, as languages, mechanics, etc. I do not say that this is not an enviable delusion, where it is not liable to be disturbed ; but at present knowledge is too much diffused and pretensions come too much into collision for this to be long the case; and it is better not to form such a prejudice at first than to have it to undo all the rest of one's life. If you learn any two things, though they may put you out of conceit one with the other, they will effectually cure you of any conceit you might have of yourself by showing the variety and scope there is in the human mind beyond the limits you had set to it.

You were convinced the first day that you could not learn Latin, which now you find easy. Be taught from this, not to think other obstacles insurmountable that you may meet with in the course of your life, though they seem so at first sight.

Attend above all things to your health; or rather, do nothing wilfully to impair it. Use exercise, abstinence, and regular hours. Drink water when you are alone, and wine or very little spirits in company. It is the last that are ruinous by leading to an unlimited excess. There is not the

same headlong *impetus* in wine. But one glass of brandy and water makes you want another, that other makes you want a third, and so on in an increased proportion. Therefore no one can stop midway who does not possess the resolution to abstain altogether; for the inclination is sharpened with its indulgence. Never gamble. Or if you play for anything, never do so for what will give you uneasiness the next day. Be not precise in these matters ; but do not pass certain limits, which it is difficult to recover. Do nothing in the irritation of the moment, but take time to reflect. Because you have done one foolish thing do not do another; nor throw away your health, or reputation, or comfort, to thwart impertinent advice. Avoid a spirit of contradiction, both in words and actions. Do not aim at what is beyond your reach, but at what is within it. Indulge in calm and pleasing pursuits, rather than violent excitements ; and learn to conquer your own will, instead of striving to obtain the mastery of that of others.

With respect to your friends, I would wish you to choose them neither from caprice nor accident, and to adhere to them as long as you can. Do not make a surfeit of friendship, through over-sanguine enthusiasm, nor expect it to last for ever. Always speak well of those with whom you have once been intimate, or take some part of the censure you bestow on them to yourself. Never quarrel with tried friends, or those whom you wish to continue such. Wounds of this kind are sure to open again. When once the prejudice is removed that sheathes defects, familiarity only causes jealousy and distrust. Do not keep on with a mockery of friendship after the substance is gone—but part, while you can part friends. Burv the carcase of friendship : it is not worth embalming.

As to the books you will have to read by choice or for amusement, the best are the commonest. The names of many of them are already familiar to you. Read them as you grow up with all the satisfaction in your power, and make much of them. It is perhaps the greatest pleasure you will

have in life, the one you will think of longest, and repent of least. If my life had been more full of calamity than it has been (much more than I hope yours will be) I would live it over again, my poor little boy, to have read the books I did in my youth.

In politics I wish you to be an honest man, but no brawler. Hate injustice and falsehood for your own sake. Be neither a martyr nor a sycophant. Wish well to the world without expecting to see it much better than it is ; and do not gratify the enemies of liberty by putting yourself at their mercy, if it can be avoided with honour.

If you ever marry, I would wish you to marry the woman you like. Do not be guided by the recommendation of friends. Nothing will atone for or overcome an original distaste. It will only increase from intimacy; and if you are to live separate, it is better not to come together. There is no use in dragging a chain through life unless it binds one to the object we love. No woman ever married into a family above herself that did not try to make all the mischief she could in it. Be not in haste to marry, nor to engage your affections, where there is no probability of a return. Do not fancy every woman you see the heroine of a romance, a Sophia Western, a Clarissa, or a Julia; and yourself the potential hero of it, Tom Jones, Lovelace, or St. Preux. Avoid this error as you would shrink back from a precipice. AH your fine sentiments and romantic notions will (of themselves) make no more impression on one of these delicate creatures than on a piece of marble. Their soft bosoms are steel to your amorous refinements, if you have no other pretensions. It is not what you think of them that determines their choice, but what they think of you. Endeavour, if you would escape lingering torments, and the gnawing of the worm that dies not, to find out this, and to abide by the issue. We trifle with, make sport of, and despise those, who are attached to us, and follow those that fly from us. " We hunt the wind—we worship a statue—cry aloud to the desert." Do you, my dear boy, stop short

in this career if you find yourself setting out in it, and make up your mind to this—that, if a woman does not like you of her own accord, that is, from involuntary impressions, nothing you can say, or do, or suffer for her sake will make her, but will set her the more against you. So the song goes—

" *Quit, quit for shame ; this will not move :
If of herself she will not love,
Nothing will make her, the devil take her /* "

Your pain is her triumph; the more she feels you in her power, the worse she will treat you : the more you make it appear you deserve her regard, the more she will resent it as an imputation on her first judgment. Study first impressions above all things, for everything depends on them—in love especially. Women are armed by nature and education with a power of resisting the importunity of men, and they use this power according to their discretion. They enforce it to the utmost rigour of the law against those whom they do not like, and relax their extreme severity proportionably in favour of those that they do like, and who in general care as little about them. Hence we see so many desponding lovers and forlorn damsels. Love in women, at least, is either vanity, or interest, or fancy. It is a merely selfish feeling. It has nothing to do (I am sorry to say) with friendship, or esteem, or even pity. I once asked a girl, the pattern of her sex in shape and mind and attractions, whether she did not think Mr. Coleridge had done wrong in making the heroine of his beautiful ballad story of Genevieve take compassion on her hapless lover—

" *When on the yellow forest-leaves
A dying man he lay—*"

And whether she believed that any woman ever fell in love through a sense of compassion; and she made answer—
" Not if it was against her inclination !" I would take this lady's word/or *a thousand pound*, on this point. Pain holds

antipathy to pleasure ; pity is not akin to love; a dying man has more need of a nurse than of a mistress. There is no forcing liking. It is as little to be fostered by reason and good-nature as it can be controlled by prudence or propriety. It is a mere blind, headstrong impulse. Least of all, flatter yourself that talents or virtue will recommend you to the favour of the sex in lieu of exterior advantages. Oh ! no. Women care nothing about poets, or philosophers, or politicians. They go by a man's looks and manner. Richardson calls them " an eye-judging sex;" and I am sure he knew more about them than I can pretend to do. If you run away with a pedantic notion that they care a pin's point about your head or your heart, you will repent it too late. Some blue-stocking may have her vanity flattered by your reputation, or be edified by the solution of a metaphysical problem, or a critical remark, or a dissertation on the state of the nation, and fancy that she has a taste for intellect and is an epicure in sentiment. No true woman ever regarded anything but her lover's person and address. Gravity will here answer all the same purpose without understanding, gaiety without wit, folly without good-nature, and impudence without any other pretension. The natural and instinctive passion of love is excited by qualities not peculiar to artists, authors, and men of letters. It is not the jest but the laugh that follows, not the sentiment but the glance that accompanies it, that *tells*—in a word, the sense of actual enjoyment that imparts itself to others, and excites mutual understanding and inclination. Authors, on the other hand, feel nothing spontaneously. The common incidents and circumstances of life with which others are taken up, make no alteration in them, nor provoke any of the common expressions of surprise, joy, admiration, anger, or merriment. Nothing stirs their blood or accelerates their juices or tickles their veins. Instead of yielding to the first natural and lively impulses of things, in which they would find sympathy, they screw themselves up to some far-fetched view of the subject in order to be unintelligible. Realities

are not good enough for them, till they undergo the process of imagination and reflection. If you offer them your hand to shake, they will hardly take it ; for this does not amount to a proposition. If you enter their room suddenly, they testify neither surprise nor satisfaction: no new idea is elicited by it. Yet if you suppose this to be a repulse you are mistaken. They will enter into your affairs or combat your ideas with all the warmth and vehemence imaginable as soon as they have a subject started. But their faculty for thinking must be set in motion, before you can put any soul into them. They are intellectual dram-drinkers ; and without their necessary stimulus, are torpid, dead, insensible to everything. They have great life of mind, but none of body. They do not drift with the stream of company or of passing occurrences, but are straining at some hyberbole, or striking out a bye-path of their own. Follow them who list. Their minds are a sort of Herculaneum, full of old, petrified images ;—are set in stereotype, and little fitted to the ordinary occasions of life.

What chance, then, can they have with women, who deal only in the pantomime of discourse, in gesticulation and the flippant bye-play of the senses, "nods and winks and wreathed smiles ;" and to whom to offer a remark is an impertinence, or a reason an affront? The only way in which I ever knew mental qualities or distinction tell was in the clerical character; and women do certainly incline to this with some sort of favourable regard. Whether it is that the sanctity of pretension piques curiosity, or that the habitual submission of their understandings to their spiritual guides subdues the will, a popular preacher generally has the choice among the elite of his female flock. According to Mrs. Inchbald (see her *Simple Story*) there is another reason why religious courtship is not without its charms ! But as I do not intend you for the church, do not, in thinking to study yourself into the good graces of the fair, study yourself out of them, millions of miles. Do not place thought as a barrier between you and love: do not abstract yourself

into the regions of truth, far from the smile of earthly beauty. Let not the cloud sit upon your brow : let not the canker sink into your heart. Look up, laugh loud, talk big, keep the colour in your cheek and the fire in your eye, adorn your person, maintain your health, your beauty, and your animal spirits, and you will pass for a fine man. But should you let your blood stagnate in some deep metaphysical question, or refine too much in your ideas of the sex, forgetting yourself in a dream of exalted perfection, you will want an eye to cheer you, a hand to guide you, a bosom to lean on, and will stagger into your grave, old before your time, unloved and unlovely. If you feel that you have not the necessary advantages of person, confidence, and manner, and that it is *up-hill* work with you to gain the ear of beauty, quit the pursuit at once, and seek for other satisfactions and consolations.

A spider, my dear, the meanest creature that crawls or lives, has its mate or fellow : but a scholar has no mate or fellow. For myself, I had courted thought, I had felt pain; and Love turned away his face from me. I have gazed along the silent air for that smile which had lured me to my doom. I no more heard those accents which would have burst upon me like a voice from heaven. I loathed the light that shone on my disgrace. Hours, days, years passed away, and only turned false hope to fixed despair. And as my frail bark sails down the stream of time, the God of Love stands on the shore, and as I stretch out my hands to him in vain, claps his wings, and mocks me as I pass !

There is but one other point on which I meant to speak to you, and that is the choice of a profession. This, probably, had better be left to time or accident or your own inclination. You have a very fine ear, but I have somehow a prejudice against men-singers, and indeed against the stage altogether. It is an uncertain and ungrateful soil. All professions are bad that depend on reputation, which is " as often got without merit as lost without deserving." Yet I cannot easily reconcile myself to your being a slave to

business, and I shall be hardly able to leave you an independence. A situation in a public office is secure, but laborious and mechanical, and without the two great springs of life, Hope and Fear. Perhaps, however, it might ensure you a competence, and leave you leisure for some other favourite amusement or pursuit. I have said all reputation is hazardous, hard to win, harder to keep. Many never, attain a glimpse of what they have all their lives been looking for, and others survive a passing shadow of it. Yet if I were to name one pursuit rather than another, I should wish you to be a good painter, if such a thing could be hoped. I have failed in this myself, and should wish you to be able to do what I have not—to paint like Claude or Rembrandt or Guido or Vandyke, if it were possible. Artists, I think, who have succeeded in their chief object, live to be old, and are agreeable old men. Their minds keep alive to the last. Cosway's spirits never flagged till after ninety, and Nollekins, though nearly blind, passed all his mornings in giving directions about some group or bust in his workshop. You have seen Mr. Northcote, that delightful specimen of the last age. With what avidity he takes up his pencil, or lays it down again to talk of numberless things 1 His eye has not lost its lustre, nor "paled its ineffectual fire." His body is a shadow: he himself is a pure spirit. There is a kind of immortality about this sort of ideal and visionary existence that dallies with Fate and baffles the grim monster, Death. If I thought you could make as clever an artist and arrive at such an agreeable old age as Mr. Northcote, I should declare at once for your devoting yourself to this enchanting profession; and in that reliance, should feel less regret at some of my own disappointments, and little anxiety on your account I

A Farewell to Essay-Writing¹

" *This life is best, if quiet life is best.*"

FOOD, warmth, sleep, and a book ; these are all I at present ask—the *ultima Thule* of my wandering desires. Do you not then wish for

" *A friend in your retreat,
Whom you may whisper, solitude is sweet ?* "

Expected, well enough :—gone, still better. Such attractions are strengthened by distance. Nor a mistress ? " Beautiful mask! I know thee 1 " When I can judge of the heart from the face, of the thoughts from the lips, I may again trust myself. Instead of these give me the robin redbreast, pecking the crumbs at the door, or warbling on the leafless spray, the same glancing form that has followed me wherever I have been, and " done its spiriting gently ; " or the rich notes of the thrush that startle the ear of winter, and seem to have drunk up the full draught of joy from the very, sense of contrast. To these I adhere, and am faithful, for they are true to me ; and, dear in themselves, are dearer for the sake of what is departed, leading me back (by the hand) to that dreaming world,* in the innocence of which they sat and made sweet music, waking the promise of future years, and answered by the eager throbbings of my own breast.

¹A *Farewell to Essay-Writing* was completed at Winterslow on 20th February, 1828, and published in the *London Weekly Review* of 29th March following. Engaged on his *Life of Napoleon*, Hazlitt required leisure from incessant application to periodical journalism. In the opening lines of this essay " there is a note which we have never heard sounded by Hazlitt before. He is not now tempestuously breasting the Hill Difficulty. He is no longer steering uphillward. For the first time, as he crawls back to life ' with half-strung nerves and shattered strength,' his gaze is along the downward slope." {*Born Under Saturn : A Biography of William Fbxrlitt*, by Catherine Macdonald Maclean, London, 1943.)

But now "the credulous hope of mutual minds is o'er," and I turn back' from the world that has deceived me, to nature that lent it a false beauty, and that keeps up the illusion of the past. As I quaff my libations of tea in a morning, I love to watch the clouds sailing from the west, and fancy that "the" spring comes slowly up this way." In this hope, while "fields are dank and ways are mire," I follow the same direction to a neighbouring wood, where, having gained the dry, level greensward, I can see my way for a mile before me, closed in on each side by copse-wood, and ending in a point of light more or less brilliant, as the day is bright or cloudy. What a walk is this to me ! I have no need of book or companion—the days, the hours, the thoughts of my youth are at my side, and blend with the air that fans my cheek. Here I can saunter for hours, bending my eye forward, stopping and turning to look back, thinking to strike off into some less trodden path, yet hesitating to quit the one I am in, afraid to snap the brittle threads of memory. I remark the shining trunks and slender branches of the birch trees, waving in the idle breeze; or a pheasant springs up on whirring wing; or I recall the spot where I once found a wood-pigeon at the foot of a tree, weltering in its gore, and think how many seasons have flown since "it left its little life in air." Dates, names, faces come back—to what purpose ? Or why think of them now ? Or rather why not think of them oftener ? We walk through life, as through a narrow path, with a thin curtain drawn around it; behind are ranged rich portraits, airy harps are strung—yet we will not stretch forth our hands and lift aside the veil, to catch glimpses of the one, or sweep the chords of the other. As in a theatre, when the old-fashioned green curtain drew up, groups of figures, fantastic dresses, laughing faces, rich banquets, stately columns, gleaming vistas appeared beyond; so we have only at any time to "peep through the blanket of the past," to possess ourselves at once of all that has regaled our senses, that is stored up in our memory, that has struck our fancy, that has pierced

our hearts:—yet to all this we are indifferent, insensible, and seem intent only on the present vexation, the future disappointment. If there is a Titian hanging up in the room with me, I scarcely regard it: how then should I be expected to strain the mental eye so far, or to throw down, by the magic spells of the will, the stone-walls that enclose it in the Louvre ? There is one head there of which I have often thought, when looking at it, that nothing should ever disturb me again, and I would become the character it represents—such perfect calmness and self-possession reigns in it ! Why do I not hang an image of this in some dusky corner of my brain, and turn an eye upon it ever and anon, as I have need of some such talisman to calm my troubled thoughts ? The attempt is fruitless, if not natural; or, like that of the French, to hand garlands on the grave, and to conjure back the dead by miniature pictures of them while living ! It is only some actual coincidence or local association that tends, without violence, to " open all the cells where memory slept." I can easily, by stooping over the long-sprent grass and clay cold clod, recall the tufts of primroses, or purple hyacinths, that formerly grew on the same spot, and cover the bushes with leaves and singing-birds, as they were eighteen summers ago ; or prolonging my walk and hearing the sighing gale rustle through a tall, straight wood at the end of it, can fancy that I distinguish the cry of hounds, and the fatal group issuing from it, as in the tale of *Theodore and Honoria*. A moaning gust of wind aids the belief; I look once more to see whether the trees before me answer to the idea of the horror-stricken grove and an air-built city towers over their grey tops.

" *Of all the cities in Romanian lands,
The chief and most renown'd Ravenna stands.* "

I return home resolved to read the entire poem through, and, after dinner, drawing my chair to the fire, and holding a small print close to my eyes, launch into the full tide of Dryden's couplets (a stream of sound), comparing his

didactic and descriptive pomp with the simple pathos and picturesque truth of Boccaccio's story, and tasting with a pleasure, which none but an habitual reader can feel, some quaint examples of pronunciation in this accomplished versifier.

*" Which when Honoria view'd,
The fresh impulse her former fright renew d"*

*" And made th insult, which in his grief appears,
The means to mourn thee with my pious tears"*

These trifling instances of the wavering and unsettled state of the language give double effect to the firm and stately march of the verse, and make me dwell with a sort of tender interest on the difficulties and doubts of an earlier period of literature. They pronounced words then in a manner which we should laugh at now ; and they wrote verse in a manner which we can do anything but laugh at. The pride of a new acquisition seems to give fresh confidence to it ; to impel the rolling syllables through the moulds provided for them, and to overflow the envious bounds of rhyme into time-honoured triplets.

What sometimes surprises me in looking back to the past is, with the exception already stated, to find myself so little changed in the time. The same images and trains of thought stick by me: I have the same tastes, likings, sentiments, and wishes that I had then. One great ground of confidence and support has, indeed, been struck from under my feet; but I have made it up to myself by proportionable pertinacity of opinion. The success of the great cause, to which I had vowed myself, was to me more than all the world : I had a strength in its strength, a resource which I knew not of, till it failed me for the second time.

*" Fall'n was Glenartnfs stately tree !
Oh ! ne'er to see Lord Ronald more "*

It was not till I saw the axe laid to the root that I **found** the full extent of what I had to lose and suffer. But my

conviction of the right was only established by the triumph of the wrong ; and my earliest hopes will be my last regrets. One source of this unbendingness (which some may call obstinacy) is that, though living much alone, I have never worshipped the Echo. I see plainly enough that black is not white, that the grass is green, that kings are not their subjects; and, in such self-evident cases, do not think it necessary to collate my opinions with the received prejudices. In subtler questions, and matters that admit of doubt, as I do not impose my opinion on others without a reason, so I will not give up mine to them without a better reason; and a person calling me names, or giving himself airs of authority, does not convince me of his having taken more pains to find out the truth than I have, but the contrary. Mr. Gifford once said, that " while I was sitting over my gin and tobacco-pipes, I fancied myself a Leibnitz." He did not so much as know that I had ever read a metaphysical book :—was I, therefore, out of complaisance or deference to him, to forget whether I had or not? Leigh Hunt is puzzled to reconcile the shyness of my pretensions with the inveteracy and sturdiness of my principles. I should have thought they were nearly the same thing. Both from disposition and habit, I can *assume* nothing in word, look, or manner. I cannot steal a march upon public'opinion in any way. My standing upright, speaking loud, entering a room gracefully, proves nothing; therefore I neglect these ordinary means of recommending myself to the good graces and admiration of strangers (and, as it appears, even of philosophers and friends). Why? Because I have other resources, or, at least, am absorbed in other studies and pursuits. Suppose this absorption to be extreme, and even morbid—that I have brooded over an idea till it has become a kind of substance in my brain, that I have reasons for a thing which I have found out with much labour and pains, and to which I can scarcely do justice without the utmost violence of exertion (and that only to a few persons)—is this a reason for my playing off my out-of-the-way notions

in all companies, wearing a prim and self-complacent air, as if I were " the admired of all observers ? " or is it not rather an argument (together with a want of animal spirits), why I should retire into myself, and perhaps acquire a nervous and uneasy look, from a consciousness of the disproportion between the interest and conviction I feel on certain subjects, and my ability to communicate what weighs upon my own mind to others ? If my ideas, which I do not avouch, but suppose, lie below the surface, why am I to be always attempting to dazzle superficial people with them, or smiling, delighted, at my own want of success ?

In matters of taste and feeling, one proof that my conclusions have not been quite shallow or hasty, is the circumstance of their having been lasting. I have the same favourite books, pictures, passages that I ever had : I may, therefore, presume that they will last me my life—nay, I may indulge a hope that my thoughts will survive me. This continuity of impression is the only thing on which I pride myself. Even Lamb, whose relish of certain things is as keen and earnest as possible, takes a surfeit of admiration, and I should be afraid to ask about his select authors or particular friends, after a lapse of ten years. As to myself, anyone knows where to have me. What I have once made up my mind to, I abide by to the end of the chapter. One cause of my independence of opinion is, I believe, the liberty I give to others, or the very diffidence and distrust of making converts. I should be an excellent man on a jury. I might say little, but should starve " the other eleven obstinate fellows " out. I remember Mr. Godwin writing to Mr. Wordsworth, that " his tragedy of ' Antonio ' could not fail, of success." It was damned past all redemption. I said to Mr. Wordsworth that I thought this a natural consequence ; for how could anyone have a dramatic turn of mind who judged entirely of others from himself ? Mr. Godwin might be convinced of the excellence of his work ; but how could, he know that others would be convinced of it, unless *by* supposing that they were as wise as himself, **and** as infallible ;

critics of dramatic poetry—so many Aristotles sitting in judgment on Euripides ! This shows why pride is connected with shyness and reserve ; for the really proud have not so high an opinion of the generality as to suppose that they can understand them, or that there is any common measure between them. So Dryden exclaims of his opponents with bitter disdain—

" Nor can I think what thoughts they can conceive."

I have not sought to make partisans, still less did I dream of making enemies; and have therefore kept my opinions myself, whether they were currently adopted or not. To get others to come into our ways of thinking, we must go over to theirs ; and it is necessary to follow, in order to lead. At the time I lived here formerly, I had no suspicion that I should ever become a voluminous writer, yet I had just the same confidence in my feelings before I had ventured to air them in public as I have now. Neither the outcry *for* or *against* moves me a jot: I do not say that the one is not more agreeable than the other.

Not far from the spot where I write, I first read Chaucer's *Flower and Leafy* and was charmed with that young beauty, shrouded in her bower, and listening with ever-fresh delight to the repeated song of the nightingale close by her—the impression of the scene, the vernal landscape, the cool of the morning, the gushing notes of the songstress,

" And ay en methought she sung close by mine ear"

is as vivid as if it had been of yesterday; and nothing can persuade me that that is not a fine poem. I do not find this impression conveyed in Dryden's version, and therefore nothing can persuade me that that is as fine. I used to walk out at this time with Mr. and Miss Lamb of an evening, to look at the Claude Lorraine skies over our heads melting from azure into purple and gold, and to gather mushrooms, that sprung up at our feet, to throw into our hashed mutton at supper. I was at that time an enthusiastic admirer of

Claude, and could dwell for ever on one or two of **the** finest prints from him hung round my little room; the fleecy flocks, the bending trees, the winding streams, the groves, the nodding temples, the air-wove hills, and distant sunny vales; and tried to translate them into their lovely living hues. People then told me that Wilson was much superior to Claude : I did not believe them. Their pictures have since been seen together at the British Institution, and all the world have come into my opinion. I have not, on that account, given it up. I will not compare our hashed mutton with Amelia's ; but it put us in mind of it, and led to a discussion, sharply seasoned and well sustained, till midnight, the result of which appeared some years after in the *Edinburgh Review*. Have I a better opinion of those criticisms on that account or should I therefore maintain them with greater vehemence and tenaciousness ? Oh no ; both rather with less, now that they are before the public, and it is for them to make their election.

It is in looking back to such scenes that I draw my best consolation for the future. Later impressions come and go, and serve to fill up the intervals ; but these are my standing resource, my true classics. If I have had few real pleasures or advantages, my ideas, from their sinewy texture, have been to me in the nature of realities ; and if I should not be able to add to, the stock, I can live by husbanding *the* interest. As to my speculations, there is little to admire in them but my admiration of others ; and whether they have an echo in time to come or not, I have learned to set a grateful value on the past, and am content to wind up the account of what is personal only to myself and the immediate circle of objects in which I have moved, with an act of easy oblivion,

" And curtain-close such scene from every future view.

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