WILLIAM HAZLITT

LECTURES ON ENGLISH POETS & THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

INTRODUCTION BY CATHERINE MACDONALD MACLEAN, M.A., D.LITT., F.R.S.L.



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Contents of this Volume

LECTURES ON THE ENGLISH POETS

I. Introductory—On Poetry in General
II. On Chaucer and Spenser
III. On Shakespeare and Milton
IV. On Dryden and Pope
V. On Thomson and Cowper
VI. On Swift, Young, Gray, Collins, etc.
VII. On Burns, and the Old English Ballads
VIII. On the Living Poets.

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

Jeremy Bentham; William Godwin; Mr Coleridge; the Rev. Mr Irving; the late Mr Horne Tooke; Sir Walter Scott; Lord Byron; Mr Southey; Mr Wordsworth; Sir James Macintosh; Mr Malthus; Mr Gifford; Mr Jeffrey; Mr Brougham–Sir F. Burdett; Lord Eldon–Mr Wilberforce; Mr Canning; Mr Campbell–Mr Crabbe; Mr T. Moore–Mr Leigh Hunt; Elia–Geoffrey Crayon.

See back flap for details of the Everyman editions of the poets discussed in these lectures

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EVERYMAN, I will go with thee,

and be thy guide,

In thy most need to go by thy side

WILLIAM HAZLITT

Born in 1778 and educated for the Unitarian ministry. Studied painting, wrote dramatic criticisms. Continental tour, 1824–5. Died in 1830.

WILLIAM HAZLITT

Lectures on the English Poets

The Spirit of the Age:

OR CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITS

INTRODUCTION BY

CATHERINE MACDONALD MACLEAN,

M.A., D.LITT., F.R.S.L.



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INTRODUCTION

It is part of the secret of the vitality of Hazlitt's writing that he never remained long enough at one type of work to become stale. His mind had rich resources. From the end of 1813, when his article on *The Beggar's Opera* brought him into sudden favour, to 1817, he had earned most of his livelihood as a journalist. Early in 1818 he gave up most of this work for lecturing on English literature. Between January 1818 and Christmas 1819 he delivered at the Surrey Institution, near Blackfriars Bridge, three courses of lectures, for which it has been claimed that 'there had been no such body of vital comment since the prefaces of Dryden.'

When Hazlitt began to lecture on English literature he was just rising into fame. He was known as a literary critic of singular penetration, as a dramatic critic whose word could make or mar the fortunes of an actor, as a redoubtable critic of art, as a formidable political commentator and as an Essayist of great originality. It is therefore not surprising that those who were drawn to his lectures should be as varied as the themes on which he had touched. On the evening of Tuesday, 13th January 1818, he faced an audience composed partly of Dissenters, who approved of his advocacy of religious freedom but had no sympathy with his love of the theatre; of pious Quakers, who supported his pleas for social justice but had no sympathy with his passionate concern for the arts; of 'well-dressed' and 'respectable' citizens bent on improving their minds; of some of the painters, poets and writers of the day; of a few enemies who came to jeer; a few half-friends who came to carp; and a few genuine friends who thought his conversation matchless, and who looked forward to hearing it range over English poetry. John Keats, arriving so late for the second lecture that he met the lecturer coming out, was 'pounced upon'—he said—by a group of the friends surrounding Hazlitt, including John Hunt and his son Henry, John Landseer and his sons Thomas and Edwin, young William Bewick, who thought Hazlitt 'the Shakespeare prose writer' of the age, Charles Wells, 'aye and more.'

The most experienced lecturer in the world might have found some difficulty in welding such a mixed audience into a unity, but Hazlitt succeeded in commanding its attention as if it were one man. Here the experience of his journalistic years helped him. He had learned that the uninterrupted movement of thought wearied the reader, and so he punctuated it with lighter matter, 'like the blue and red flowers in corn, pleasing to those who care only for amusement.' He had learned also the art of attracting by repelling, or of stimulating attention by flicking at the prejudices of his readers. He made such use of this stimulus in his first course of lectures that he sometimes provoked angry scenes. He had a regular battle of wills with the pious among his audience when he read aloud almost thirty of Gay's ribald lines on Blackmore. When he dismissed Hannah More with the remark: 'She has written a great deal that I have never read,' one of her admirers called out indignantly: 'More pity for you!' Even Crabb Robinson, much to his own astonishment, was betrayed into hissing when Wordsworth came under the lecturer's fire. All these things are witnesses to Hazlitt's power of holding his audience. Crabb Robinson, when he had attended Coleridge's lectures, had sometimes found himself inclined to doze. No one dozed at Hazlitt's. And even the pious whom at times he antagonized had their turn of being delighted. When he read from Cowper's *Truth* the lines comparing Voltaire to his disadvantage with the poor cottager who

> Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—

they burst into what Talfourd calls 'a joyous shout' of approval.

Hazlitt's lectures were above all stimulating. When read, they have no less power to stimulate than when they filled the hall of the Surrey Institution—as one hostile critic complained —with 'the uproar of a one-shilling gallery.' Their great merit was what has been finely called their 'catholic enjoying spirit.' Literature had been a lifelong passion with Hazlitt. His aim in lecturing was to share with others what he had enjoyed himself. Although at his first lecture he was 'pallid as death'—as William Bewick has recorded—and suffering from extreme nervousness, once he launched into his subject it was a delight to him to give expression to 'that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power' which certain poets awakened in him. It was his consciousness of this delight which made

him claim: 'If I did not write these Lectures to please myself, I . . . am sure I should please nobody else.' He knew exactly what he wanted to do. 'I conceive,' he wrote, 'that what I have undertaken to do . . . is merely to read over a set of works with the audience, as I would do with a friend, to point out a favourite passage, to explain an objection; or if a remark or a theory occurs, to state it in illustration of the subject, but neither to tire him nor puzzle myself with pedantic rules and pragmatical formulas of criticism that can do no good to any body.' His lectures fulfil to the letter this conception of his task. He not only read long extracts from the Poets to his audience, but two entire narrative poems, *Tam o' Shanter* and *Hartleap Well*; in pointing out his favourite passages he brought to light excellences that had been obscured, like the intensity of certain passages in Chaucer and their 'deep pathos'; he brushed aside impatiently the trivialities of critical discussion that obscured rather than illumined the quality of the poetry, and 'the mechanical and instrumental part' of criticism; where he advanced a theory in illustration of his subject he gave examples of its operation some of which show extraordinary delicacy of insight and sensibility, as when he supported his claim that poetry shows up the mirror to Nature, 'seen through the fine medium of passion,' by reference to certain lines of the soliloquy of Iachimo watching the sleeping Imogen:

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

His audience kept steadily increasing throughout his lectures. In the last, delivered on the first Tuesday of March, the hall was 'crowded to the very ceiling.' In this, 'On the Living Poets,' as in his first great opening lecture, 'On Poetry in General,' he fairly swept his listeners 'within the estuary of the passions.' Crabb Robinson censured the descant on Coleridge with which it concluded as 'outrageous eulogy.' But by this time Coleridge was amongst those whom Hazlitt himself saw only 'through the fine medium of passion.'

Early in 1824 Hazlitt began to contribute to *The New Monthly Magazine* studies of his famed contemporaries, under the general title *The Spirit of the Age*. In January his 'Jeremy Bentham' appeared; in February his very amusing, grim-grotesque 'Edward Irving'; in March his 'Horne Tooke,'

which Charles Lamb pronounced 'a matchless portrait'; in April his 'Sir Walter Scott'; in July his 'Lord Eldon.' By this time, as the impulse underlying his work gradually became clear to him, his original plan of contributing a number of separate sketches to *The New Monthly Magazine* became somewhat modified. He conceived the idea of supplementing these articles with a series of studies of his contemporaries, linked together by the point of view from which each was considered, the extent of their response to or reaction against what he considered to be the Spirit of the Age, the hope for the betterment of the lot of mankind which had come in with 'the grand whirling movements of the French Revolution.' In this way, what had begun as occasional writing took on the character of work that was organic, and the book developed from this occasional writing, *The Spirit of the Age*, became a piece of history written not from the closet but by one who had shared to the full in the repercussions of the movements of feeling and the reactions against them which were recorded. The book is amazing in the immediacy of its impact. It takes the reader right into the heart of these stormy times. To read it is to realize, despite the impression Hazlitt sometimes gives that he had dreamed or loitered his life away, how deeply he had shared in the hopes, and the despairs too, of the times, and how full and varied his life had been. 'Much had he seen and known!'

Shortly after its publication Hazlitt wrote to Landor: 'You can hardly suppose the depression of body and mind under which I wrote some of these articles.' No one, enjoying the wit and sparkle of the book, could guess at this depression. *The Spirit of the Age* is the most brilliant and colourful of all Hazlitt's books. It is the effect of the fusion of all his gifts, in their maturity. The Metaphysician, the Critic, the political Commentator and the Essayist—all had their share in it. All Hazlitt had succeeded in doing as a writer had enriched it. Perhaps I should add that all he had failed to do as a painter enriched it even more. In his youth Hazlitt had tried to earn his living as a portrait-painter, and had given up the attempt because he had lost hope of ever becoming a great painter. Surely, in *The Spirit of the Age* the portrait-painter *manqué* did something which might have consoled him for his failure to express himself on canvas, and which might have assured him that he too had his place among the true historical painters. Using words instead of colours, he succeeded through their

medium in doing what he had failed to do in oils. Bentham's lack-lustre eye, the quivering lip of Charles Fox, Moore's *mignon* figure, the falcon glance of Southey, the 'comfortable double-chin' of Benjamin Franklin, Lamb's 'fine Titian head, full of dumb eloquence'—all these have been pictured. Even the language in which the ideas are released is a series of word-pictures. For none of his writings could Hazlitt claim more justly that they were 'the thoughts of a metaphysician expressed by a painter.'

Brilliant though the portraiture is in this book, it is never metallic. *The Spirit of the Age* is the work of one who had experienced much, but it is also the work of one in whom experience had brought about some softening of feeling towards his fellow mortals, as compared with the inveteracy or recklessness of earlier years. This is specially noticeable in his study of Southey, in the exquisite criticism of Campbell's poetry, and in the tone of what Hazlitt wrote of Wordsworth. He went out of his way to apologize for the attack on Wordsworth's limitations, in his lecture 'On the Living Poets,' confessing that the substance of it had been 'mere epigrams and *jeux-d'esprit*.' At the same time he claimed that these, if 'far from truth,' were also 'free from malice.' This claim, that they were 'free from malice,' may be made even for the harsher portraits, of Malthus, Eldon and Gifford, because all that Hazlitt said was referable to principle. The harshest study of all, that of Gifford, was the effect not of malice, but of the contempt felt by one who always took 'high ground' in his literary criticism for the subserviency which lent itself to the degradation of literary criticism into a political tool. Measureless contempt is not malice.

What has done more than any of these biting character-sketches to expose Hazlitt to the charge of writing with malice, even with wanton malice, is the attack appended to his delightful estimate of Sir Walter Scott as a writer. Various critics have professed themselves unable to understand the tone of this attack or to point to any provocation which could justify it. To Hazlitt's contemporaries the provocation was all too clear. The political weapon he was known to despise above all others was slander, which he judged most contemptible when it took the form of anonymous calumny. Like many another, he had received a great shock when it had become known, in the autumn of 1821, that Scott was among those who financed a disreputable sheet called *The Beacon*, which directed 'an

organized system of blackguardism' against the opponents of Toryism. Scott was at the time challenged by one whose reputation 'had been struck at' by 'a secret and envenomed blow,' but friends had bestirred themselves to safeguard him from the chances of a duel. *The Beacon* had been discontinued, but had been succeeded by a similar sheet called *The Sentinel*, said to be the work of the same 'junto of secret libellers.' James Stuart of Dunearn, the leader of the Opposition in Fife, on discovering that Sir Alexander Boswell had been his most persistent calumniator in its pages, had challenged Boswell, and killed him in a duel, in March 1822. When Hazlitt had been in Edinburgh in June 1822, the trial for murder of Stuart—whose acquittal owed much to Jeffrey's eloquence—had been the all-engrossing subject of conversation.

Until the exposure of Scott's association with *The Beacon* Hazlitt's criticism of him had been unflawed in its admiration. After this exposure he was careful to dissociate his admiration of the author of the novels from his scorn of the politician who had any connection with *The Beacon* or *The Sentinel*. From this time henceforth his attacks on Scott's political character were constant.

It is only just to add that his praise of the beloved writer was equally constant; and his compliments were 'divine.' In the year following the publication of *The Spirit of the Age* he described the author of *Waverley* as one who had 'five hundred hearts beating in his bosom.' This is perhaps the finest tribute ever paid to the genius of Scott. Indeed, the noblest praise in that age of bitter political faction was given to Scott, as to Burke, by the man who was implacable in his political hostility to both.

CATHERINE MACDONALD MACLEAN.

1959.

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Lectures on the English Poets

Published in 1818 in one 8vo volume with the following title-page: 'Lectures on the English Poets. Delivered at the Surrey Institution. By William Hazlitt. London: Printed for Taylor and Hessey, 93, Fleet Street. 1818.' The volume was printed by T. Miller, Noble Street, Cheapside. A second edition, partly reset, correcting the 'Errata,' and effecting other slight changes, was published in 1819. Of this the present issue is a reprint. On the verso of the half-title of both editions appears the following advertisement: 'This day is published, Characters of Shakespear's Plays, By William Hazlitt. Second edition, 8vo, price 10*s.* 6*d.* boards.'

The Spirit of the Age

Published (anonymously) early in 1825 in one 8vo volume with the following title-page: 'The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits. "To know another well were to know one's self." London: Printed for Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street. 1825.' The volume was printed by S. & R. Bentley, Dorset Street. Shortly after its publication Hazlitt, who was in Paris, prepared for A. & W. Galignani two small 8vo volumes with the same title and motto and with his name on the title-page. In this edition the order of the essays was drastically rearranged, an addition was made to the essay on Coleridge, and the 'Character of Cobbett' (omitted from the Paris edition of *Table Talk*, which he prepared at the same time) was included, together with the 'Character of Mr Canning' from *The Examiner* of 11th July 1824, which was otherwise not republished during his lifetime. Later in the same year the second English edition appeared, the title-page now reading: 'The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits. "To know a man well, were to know himself." Hamlet. Second Edition. London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street. 1825.' The printers were again S. & R. Bentley. In this edition, which was reset throughout in 12mo, the order of the essays followed, with a few changes, that of the first English edition (the 'Errata' list of which was corrected), the essay on Coleridge was revised in accordance with the Paris text, and the essay on Cobbett was included. The present text reproduces that of the second English edition with the substitution of the essay on Canning for that on Cobbett.

CONTENTS

PAGE

Introduction by Catherine Macdonald Maclean . . v

LECTURES ON THE ENGLISH POETS

LECTURE PAGE

I. Introductory—On Poetry in General . . 1
II. On Chaucer and Spenser 19
III. On Shakspeare and Milton 44
IV. On Dryden and Pope 68
V. On Thomson and Cowper 85
VI. On Swift, Young, Gray, Collins, etc. . . 104
VII. On Burns, and the Old English Ballads . 123
VIII. On the Living Poets 143

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

Jeremy Bentham 171
William Godwin 182
Mr. Coleridge 194
Rev. Mr. Irving 204
The Late Mr. Horne Tooke 213
Sir Walter Scott 223
Lord Byron 235
Mr. Southey 244
Mr. Wordsworth 252
Sir James Macintosh 261
Mr. Malthus 269
Mr. Gifford 280
Mr. Jeffrey 292
Mr. Brougham—Sir F. Burdett 300
Lord Eldon—Mr. Wilberforce 307
Mr. Canning 316
Mr. Campbell—Mr. Crabbe 325
Mr. T. Moore—Mr. Leigh Hunt 335
Elia—Geoffrey Crayon 344

LECTURES ON THE ENGLISH POETS

LECTURES ON

THE ENGLISH POETS

LECTURE I.—INTRODUCTORY

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 any thing 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 of 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, 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 unwieldly 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 Molière'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 choleric 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 any thing. 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 ecstacy 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 shews 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, or analyze the distinctions of the 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 it, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity, by conforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things,

as reason and history do.' It is strictly the language of the imagination; and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, 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 suppos'd a bear!'

When Iachimo says of Imogen,

> '——The flame o' th' taper
> Bows toward 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 speaker's 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 any thing 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!

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! 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!' 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 supposed ingratitude, which had pressed upon it for years. What a fine return of the passion upon itself is that in Othello—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
> Farewel the tranquil mind. Farewel content;
> Farewel the plumed troops and the big war,
> That make ambition virtue! Oh farewel!
> Farewel 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,
> Farewel! Othello's occupation's gone!'

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!'—

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 shews 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 any thing 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 trade 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 nicknames 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.

> 'Masterless 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 any thing, 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 show,—

> '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 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 strike 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 presents, 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 into a machine that carries us safely and insipidly from one end of life to the other, in a very comfortable prose style.

> 'Obscurity her curtain round them drew,
> And siren Sloth a dull quietus sung.'

The remarks which have been here made, would, in some measure, lead to a solution of the question of the comparative merits of painting and poetry. I do not mean to give any preference, but it should seem that the argument which has been sometimes set up, that painting must affect the imagination more strongly, because it represents the image more distinctly, is not well founded. We may assume without much temerity, that poetry is more poetical than painting. When artists or connoisseurs talk on stilts about the poetry of painting, they shew that they know little about poetry, and have little love for the art. Painting gives the object itself; poetry what it implies. Painting embodies what a thing contains in itself: poetry suggests what exists out of it, in any manner connected with it. But this last is the proper province of the imagination. Again, as it relates to passion, painting gives the event, poetry the progress of events: but it is during the progress, in the interval of expectation and suspense, while our hopes and fears are strained to the highest pitch of breathless agony, that the pinch of the interest lies.

> 'Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
> The mortal instruments are then in council;
> And the state of man, like to a little kingdom,
> Suffers then the nature of an insurrection.'

But by the time that the picture is painted, all is over. Faces are the best part of a picture; but even faces are not what we chiefly remember in what interests us most.—But it may be asked then, Is

there anything better than Claude Lorraine's landscapes, than Titian's portraits, than Raphael's cartoons, or the Greek statues? Of the two first I shall say nothing, as they are evidently picturesque, rather than imaginative. Raphael's cartoons are certainly the finest comments that ever were made on the Scriptures. Would their effect be the same, if we were not acquainted with the text? But the New Testament existed before the cartoons. There is one subject of which there is no cartoon, Christ washing the feet of the disciples the night before his death. But that chapter does not need a commentary! It is for want of some such resting place for the imagination that the Greek statues are little else than specious forms. They are marble to the touch and to the heart. They have not an informing principle within them. In their faultless excellence they appear sufficient to themselves. By their beauty they are raised above the frailties of passion or suffering. By their beauty they are deified. But they are not objects of religious faith to us, and their forms are a reproach to common humanity. They seem to have no sympathy with us, and not to want our admiration.

Poetry in its matter and form is natural imagery or feeling, combined with passion and fancy. In its mode of conveyance, it combines the ordinary use of language with musical expression. There is a question of long standing, in what the essence of poetry consists; or what it is that determines why one set of ideas should be expressed in prose, another in verse. Milton has told us his idea of poetry in a single line—

> 'Thoughts that voluntary move
> Harmonious numbers.'

As there are certain sounds that excite certain movements, and the song and dance go together, so there are, no doubt, certain thoughts that lead to certain tones of voice, or modulations of sound, and change 'the words of Mercury into the songs of Apollo.' There is a striking instance of this adaptation of the movement of sound and rhythm to the subject, in Spenser's description of the Satyrs accompanying Una to the cave of Sylvanus.

> '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 crown'd.

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, cometh 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 abruptnesses 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,' &c.

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 the 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 for ever 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 a prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean, in an uninhabited wilderness, without redemption. In the midst of the greatest composures 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.' P. 50.

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 lag 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,

[1] Burke's writings are not poetry, notwithstanding the vividness of the fancy, because the subject matter is abstruse 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 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.

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 estriches, 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 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 every thing: '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 any thing 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 thraldom 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 every thing 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 own 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 lustihead, 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 shew 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!'

LECTURE II

ON CHAUCER AND SPENSER

Having, in the former Lecture, given some account of the nature of poetry in general, I shall proceed, in the next place, to a more particular consideration of the genius and history of English poetry. I shall take, as the subject of the present lecture, Chaucer and Spenser, two out of four of the greatest names in poetry, which this country has to boast. Both of them, however, were much indebted to the early poets of Italy, and may be considered as belonging, in a certain degree, to the same school. The freedom and copiousness with which our most original writers, in former periods, availed themselves of the productions of their predecessors, frequently transcribing whole passages, without scruple or acknowledgment, may appear contrary to the etiquette of modern literature, when the whole stock of poetical common-places has become public property, and no one is compelled to trade upon any particular author. But it is not so much a subject of wonder, at a time when to read and write was of itself an honorary distinction, when learning was almost as great a rarity as genius, and when in fact those who first transplanted the beauties of other languages into their own, might be considered as public benefactors, and the founders of a national literature.—There are poets older than Chaucer, and in the interval between him and Spenser; but their genius was not such as to place them in any point of comparison with either of these celebrated men; and an inquiry into their particular merits or defects might seem rather to belong to the province of the antiquary, than be thought generally interesting to the lovers of poetry in the present day.

Chaucer (who has been very properly considered as the father of English poetry) preceded Spenser by two centuries. He is supposed to have been born in London, in the year 1328, during the reign of Edward III. and to have died in 1400, at the age of seventy-two. He received a learned education at one, or at both of the universities, and travelled early into Italy, where he became thoroughly imbued with the spirit and excellences of the great Italian poets and prose-writers, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccace; and is said to have had a personal interview with one of these, Petrarch. He was connected, by marriage, with the famous John of Gaunt, through whose interest he was introduced into several public employments. Chaucer was an active partisan, a religious reformer, and from the share he took in some disturbances, on one occasion, he was obliged to fly the country.

On his return, he was imprisoned, and made his peace with government, as it is said, by a discovery of his associates. Fortitude does not appear, at any time, to have been the distinguishing virtue of poets —There is, however, an obvious similarity between the practical turn of Chaucer's mind and restless impatience of his character, and the tone of his writings. Yet it would be too much to attribute the one to the other as cause and effect: for Spenser, whose poetical temperament was as effeminate as Chaucer's was stern and masculine, was equally engaged in public affairs, and had mixed equally in the great world. So much does native disposition predominate over accidental circumstances, moulding them to its previous bent and purposes! For while Chaucer's intercourse with the busy world, and collision with the actual passions and conflicting interests of others, seemed to brace the sinews of his understanding, and gave to his writings the air of a man who describes persons and things that he had known and been intimately concerned in; the same opportunities, operating on a differently constituted frame, only served to alienate Spenser's mind the more from the 'close-pent up' scenes of ordinary life, and to make him 'rive their concealing continents,' to give himself up to the unrestrained indulgence of 'flowery tenderness.'

It is not possible for any two writers to be more opposite in this respect. Spenser delighted in luxurious enjoyment; Chaucer, in severe activity of mind. As Spenser was the most romantic and visionary, Chaucer was the most practical of all the great poets, the most a man of business and the world. His poetry reads like history. Every thing has a downright reality; at least in the relator's mind. A simile, or a sentiment, is as if it were given in upon evidence. Thus he describes Cressid's first avowal of her love.

> 'And as the new abashed nightingale,
> That stinteth first when she beginneth sing,
> When that she heareth any herde's tale,
> Or in the hedges any wight stirring,
> And after, sicker, doth her voice outring;
> Right so Cresseide, when that her dread stent,
> Open'd her heart, and told him her intent.'

This is so true and natural, and beautifully simple, that the two things seem identified with each other. Again, it is said in the Knight's Tale—

> 'Thus passeth yere by yere, and day by day,
> Till it felle ones in a morwe of May,
> That Emelie that fayrer was to sene
> Than is the lilie upon his stalke grene;

And fresher than the May with floures newe,
For with the rose-colour strof hire hewe:
I n'ot which was the finer of hem two.'

This scrupulousness about the literal preference, as if some question of matter of fact was at issue, is remarkable. I might mention that other, where he compares the meeting between Palamon and Arcite to a hunter waiting for a lion in a gap;—

'That stondeth at a gap with a spere,
Whan hunted is the lion or the bere,
And hereth him come rushing in the greves,
And breking both the boughes and the leves:'—

or that still finer one of Constance, when she is condemned to death:—

'Have ye not seen somtime a pale face
(Among a prees) of him that hath been lad
Toward his deth, wheras he geteth no grace,
And swiche a colour in his face hath had,
Men mighten know him that was so bestad,
Amonges all the faces in that route;
So stant Custance, and loketh hire aboute.'

The beauty, the pathos here does not seem to be of the poet's seeking, but a part of the necessary texture of the fable. He speaks of what he wishes to describe with the accuracy, the discrimination of one who relates what has happened to himself, or has had the best information from those who have been eye-witnesses of it. The strokes of his pencil always tell. He dwells only on the essential, on that which would be interesting to the persons really concerned: yet as he never omits any material circumstance, he is prolix from the number of points on which he touches, without being diffuse on any one; and is sometimes tedious from the fidelity with which he adheres to his subject, as other writers are from the frequency of their digressions from it. The chain of his story is composed of a number of fine links, closely connected together, and rivetted by a single blow. There is an instance of the minuteness which he introduces into his most serious descriptions in his account of Palamon when left alone in his cell:

'Swiche sorrow he maketh that the grete tour
Resouned of his yelling and clamour:
The pure fetters on his shinnes grete
Were of his bitter salte teres wete.'

The mention of this last circumstance looks like a part of the instructions he had to follow, which he had no discretionary power to leave out or introduce at pleasure. He is contented to find grace and beauty in truth. He exhibits for the most part the naked object, with little drapery thrown over it. His metaphors, which are few, are not for ornament, but use, and as like as possible to the things themselves. He does not affect to shew his power over the reader's mind, but the power which his subject has over his own. The readers of Chaucer's poetry feel more nearly what the persons he describes must have felt, than perhaps those of any other poet. His sentiments are not voluntary effusions of the poet's fancy, but founded on the natural impulses and habitual prejudices of the characters he has to represent. There is an inveteracy of purpose, a sincerity of feeling, which never relaxes or grows vapid, in whatever they do or say. There is no artificial, pompous display, but a strict parsimony of the poet's materials, like the rude simplicity of the age in which he lived. His poetry resembles the root just springing from the ground, rather than the full-blown flower. His muse is no 'babbling gossip of the air,' fluent and redundant; but, like a stammerer, or a dumb person, that has just found the use of speech, crowds many things together with eager haste, with anxious pauses, and fond repetitions to prevent mistake. His words point as an index to the objects, like the eye or finger. There were none of the common-places of poetic diction in our author's time, no reflected lights of fancy, no borrowed roseate tints; he was obliged to inspect things for himself, to look narrowly, and almost to handle the object, as in the obscurity of morning we partly see and partly grope our way; so that his descriptions have a sort of tangible character belonging to them, and produce the effect of sculpture on the mind. Chaucer had an equal eye for truth of nature and discrimination of character; and his interest in what he saw gave new distinctness and force to his power of observation. The picturesque and the dramatic are in him closely blended together, and hardly distinguishable; for he principally describes external appearances as indicating character, as symbols of internal sentiment. There is a meaning in what he sees; and it is this which catches his eye by sympathy. Thus the costume and dress of the Canterbury Pilgrims—of the Knight—the Squire—the Oxford Scholar—the Gap-toothed Wife of Bath, and the rest, speak for themselves. To take one or two of these at random:

> 'There was also a nonne, a Prioresse,
> That of hire smiling was ful simple and coy;
> Hire gretest othe n'as but by seint Eloy:

And she was cleped Madame Eglentine.
Ful wel she sange the service divine
Entuned in hire nose ful swetely;
And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
For Frenche of Paris was to hire unknowe.
At mete was she wel ytaughte withalle;
She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.

* * * * * * *

And sikerly she was of great disport,
And ful plesant, and amiable of port,
And peined hire to contrefeten chere
Of court, and ben estatelich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.
But for to speken of hire conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous
Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde.
Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, and milk, and wastel brede.
But sore wept she if on of hem were dede,
Or if men smote it with a yerde smert:
And all was conscience and tendre herte.
Ful semely hire wimple ypinched was;
Hire nose tretis; hire eyen grey as glas;
Hire mouth ful smale; and therto soft and red;
But sickerly she hadde a fayre forehed.
It was almost a spanne brode, I trowe.'

A Monk there was, a fayre for the maistrie,
An out-rider, that loved venerie:
A manly man, to ben an abbot able.
Ful many a deinte hors hadde he in stable:
And whan he rode, men mighte his bridel here,
Gingeling in a whistling wind as clere,
And eke as loude, as doth the chapell belle,
Ther as this lord was keper of the celle.
The reule of Seint Maure and of Seint Benedit,
Because that it was olde and somdele streit,
This ilke monk lette olde thinges pace,
And held after the newe world the trace.
He yave not of the text a pulled hen,
That saith, that hunters ben not holy men;—
Therfore he was a prickasoure a right:
Greihoundes he hadde as swift as foul of flight:
Of pricking and of hunting for the hare
Was all his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.

I saw his sleves purfiled at the hond
With gris, and that the finest of the lond.
And for to fasten his hood under his chinne,
He had of gold ywrought a curious pinne:
A love-knotte in the greter end ther was.
His hed was balled, and shone as any glas,
And eke his face, as it hadde ben anoint.
He was a lord ful fat and in good point.
His eyen stepe, and rolling in his hed,
That stemed as a forneis of a led.
His botes souple, his hors in gret estat,
Now certainly he was a fayre prelat.
He was not pale as a forpined gost.
A fat swan loved he best of any rost.
His palfrey was as broune as is a bery.'

The Serjeant at Law is the same identical individual as Lawyer Dowling in Tom Jones, who wished to divide himself into a hundred pieces, to be in a hundred places at once.

'No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as,
And yet he semed besier than he was.'

The Frankelein, in 'whose hous it snewed of mete and drinke'; the Shipman, 'who rode upon a rouncie, as he couthe'; the Doctour of Phisike, 'whose studie was but litel of the Bible'; the Wif of Bath, in

'All whose parish ther was non,
That to the offring before hire shulde gon,
And if ther did, certain so wroth was she,
That she was out of alle charitee;'

—the poure Persone of a toun, 'whose parish was wide, and houses fer asonder'; the Miller, and the Reve, 'a slendre colerike man,' are all of the same stamp. They are every one samples of a kind; abstract definitions of a species. Chaucer, it has been said, numbered the classes of men, as Linnæus numbered the plants. Most of them remain to this day: others that are obsolete, and may well be dispensed with, still live in his descriptions of them. Such is the Sompnoure:

'A Sompnoure was ther with us in that place,
That hadde a fire-red cherubinnes face,
For sauseflеme he was, with eyen narwe,
As hote he was, and likerous as a sparwe,
With scalled browes blake, and pilled berd:
Of his visage children were sore aferd.

Ther n'as quicksilver, litarge, ne brimston,
Boras, ceruse, ne oile of tartre non,
Ne oinement that wolde clense or bite,
That him might helpen of his whelkes white,
Ne of the knobbes sitting on his chekes.
Wel loved he garlike, onions, and lekes,
And for to drinke strong win as rede as blood.
Than wolde he speke, and crie as he were wood.
And whan that he wel dronken had the win,
Than wold he speken no word but Latin.
A fewe termes coude he, two or three,
That he had lerned out of som decree;
No wonder is, he heard it all the day.—
In danger hadde he at his owen gise
The yonge girles of the diocise,
And knew hir conseil, and was of hir rede.
A gerlond hadde he sette upon his hede
As gret as it were for an alestake:
A bokeler hadde he made him of a cake.
With him ther rode a gentil Pardonere—
That hadde a vois as smale as hath a gote.'

It would be a curious speculation (at least for those who think that the characters of men never change, though manners, opinions, and institutions may) to know what has become of this character of the Sompnoure in the present day; whether or not it has any technical representative in existing professions; into what channels and conduits it has withdrawn itself, where it lurks unseen in cunning obscurity, or else shews its face boldly, pampered into all the insolence of office, in some other shape, as it is deterred or encouraged by circumstances. *Chaucer's characters modernised*, upon this principle of historic derivation, would be an useful addition to our knowledge of human nature. But who is there to undertake it?

The descriptions of the equipage, and accoutrements of the two kings of Thrace and Inde, in the Knight's Tale, are as striking and grand, as the others are lively and natural:

'Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon
Licurge himself, the grete king of Trace:
Blake was his berd, and manly was his face
The cercles of his eyen in his hed
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,
And like a griffon loked he about,
With kemped heres on his browes stout;
His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,
His shouldres brode, his armes round and longe.

And as the guise was in his contree,
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,
With foure white bolles in the trais.
Instede of cote-armure on his harnais,
With nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake for old.
His longe here was kempt behind his bak,
As any ravenes fether it shone for blake.
A wreth of gold arm-gret, of huge weight,
Upon his hed sate full of stones bright,
Of fine rubins and of diamants.
About his char ther wenten white alauns,
Twenty and mo, as gret as any stere,
To hunten at the leon or the dere,
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound.—
With Arcita, in stories as men find,
The grete Emetrius, the king of Inde,
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,
Covered with cloth of gold diapred wele,
Came riding like the god of armes Mars.
His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tars,
Couched with perles, white, and round and grete.
His sadel was of brent gold new ybete;
A mantelet upon his shouldres hanging
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.
His crispe here like ringes was yronne,
And that was yelwe, and glitered as the Sonne.
His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin,
A fewe fraknes in his face yspreint,
Betwixen yelwe and blake somdel ymeint,
And as a leon he his loking caste.
Of five and twenty yere his age I caste.
His berd was wel begonnen for to spring;
His vois was as a trompe thondering.
Upon his hed he wered of laurer grene
A gerlond freshe and lusty for to sene.
Upon his hond he bare for his deduit
An egle tame, as any lily whit.—
About this king ther ran on every part
Ful many a tame leon and leopart.'

What a deal of terrible beauty there is contained in this description! The imagination of a poet brings such objects before us, as when we look at wild beasts in a menagerie; their claws are pared, their eyes glitter like harmless lightning; but we gaze at them with a pleasing awe, clothed in beauty, formidable in the sense of abstract power.

Chaucer's descriptions of natural scenery possess the same sort of

characteristic excellence, or what might be termed *gusto*. They have a local truth and freshness, which gives the very feeling of the air, the coolness or moisture of the ground. Inanimate objects are thus made to have a fellow-feeling in the interest of the story; and render back the sentiment of the speaker's mind. One of the finest parts of Chaucer is of this mixed kind. It is the beginning of the Flower and the Leaf, where he describes the delight of that young beauty, shrouded in her bower, and listening, in the morning of the year, to the singing of the nightingale; while her joy rises with the rising song, and gushes out afresh at every pause, and is borne along with the full tide of pleasure, and still increases and repeats, and prolongs itself, and knows no ebb. The coolness of the arbour, its retirement, the early time of the day, the sudden starting up of the birds in the neighbouring bushes, the eager delight with which they devour and rend the opening buds and flowers, are expressed with a truth and feeling, which make the whole appear like the recollection of an actual scene:

'Which as me thought was right a pleasing sight,
And eke the briddes song for to here,
Would haue rejoyced any earthly wight,
And I that couth not yet in no manere
Heare the nightingale of all the yeare,
Ful busily herkened with herte and with eare,
If I her voice perceiue coud any where.

And I that all this pleasaunt sight sie,
Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire
Of the eglentere, that certainely
There is no herte I deme in such dispaire,
Ne with thoughts froward and contraire,
So ouerlaid, but it should soone haue bote,
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

And as I stood and cast aside mine eie,
I was ware of the fairest medler tree
That ever yet in all my life I sie
As full of blossomes as it might be,
Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile
Fro bough to bough, and as him list he eet
Here and there of buds and floures sweet.

And to the herber side was joyning
This faire tree, of which I haue you told,
And at the last the brid began to sing,
Whan he had eaten what he eat wold,
So passing sweetly, that by manifold
It was more pleasaunt than I coud deuise.
And whan his song was ended in this wise,

The nightingale with so merry a note
Answered him, that all the wood rong
So sodainly, that as it were a sote,
I stood astonied, so was I with the song
Thorow rauished, that till late and long,
I ne wist in what place I was, ne where,
And ayen me thought she song euen by mine ere.

Wherefore I waited about busily
On euery side, if I her might see,
And at the last I gan full well aspie
Where she sat in a fresh grene laurer tree,
On the further side euen right by me,
That gaue so passing a delicious smell,
According to the eglentere full well.

Whereof I had so inly great pleasure,
That as me thought I surely rauished was
Into Paradice, where my desire
Was for to be, and no ferther passe
As for that day, and on the sote grasse,
I sat me downe, for as for mine entent,
The birds song was more conuenient,

And more pleasaunt to me by manifold,
Than meat or drinke, or any other thing,
Thereto the herber was so fresh and cold,
The wholesome sauours eke so comforting,
That as I demed, sith the beginning
Of the world was neur seene or than
So pleasaunt a ground of none earthly man.

And as I sat the birds harkening thus,
Me thought that I heard voices sodainly,
The most sweetest and most delicious
That euer any wight I trow truly
Heard in their life, for the armony
And sweet accord was in so good musike,
That the uoice to angels was most like.'

There is here no affected rapture, no flowery sentiment: the whole is an ebullition of natural delight 'welling out of the heart,' like water from a crystal spring. Nature is the soul of art: there is a strength as well as a simplicity in the imagination that reposes entirely on nature, that nothing else can supply. It was the same trust in nature, and reliance on his subject, which enabled Chaucer to describe the grief and patience of Griselda; the faith of Constance; and the

heroic perseverance of the little child, who, going to school through the streets of Jewry,

'Oh *Alma Redemptoris mater*, loudly sung,'

and who after his death still triumphed in his song. Chaucer has more of this deep, internal, sustained sentiment, than any other writer, except Boccaccio. In depth of simple pathos, and intensity of conception, never swerving from his subject, I think no other writer comes near him, not even the Greek tragedians. I wish to be allowed to give one or two instances of what I mean. I will take the following from the Knight's Tale. The distress of Arcite, in consequence of his banishment from his love, is thus described:

'Whan that Arcite to Thebes comen was,
Ful oft a day he swelt and said Alas,
For sene his lady shall be never mo.
And shortly to concluden all his wo,
So mochel sorwe hadde never creature,
That is or shall be, while the world may dure.
His slepe, his mete, his drinke is him byraft.
That lene he wex, and drie as is a shaft.
His eyen holwe, and grisly to behold,
His hewe salwe, and pale as ashen cold,
And solitary he was, and ever alone,
And wailing all the night, making his mone.
And if he herde song or instrument,
Than wold he wepe, he mighte not be stent.
So feble were his spirites, and so low,
And changed so, that no man coude know
His speche ne his vois, though men it herd.'

This picture of the sinking of the heart, of the wasting away of the body and mind, of the gradual failure of all the faculties under the contagion of a rankling sorrow, cannot be surpassed. Of the same kind is his farewell to his mistress, after he has gained her hand and lost his life in the combat:

'Alas the wo! alas the peines stronge,
That I for you have suffered, and so longe!
Alas the deth! alas min Emilie!
Alas departing of our compagnie:
Alas min hertes quene! alas my wif!
Min hertes ladie, ender of my lif!
What is this world? what axen men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Alone withouten any compagnie.'

The death of Arcite is the more affecting, as it comes after triumph and victory, after the pomp of sacrifice, the solemnities of prayer, the celebration of the gorgeous rites of chivalry. The descriptions of the three temples of Mars, of Venus, and Diana, of the ornaments and ceremonies used in each, with the reception given to the offerings of the lovers, have a beauty and grandeur, much of which is lost in Dryden's version. For instance, such lines as the following are not rendered with their true feeling.

'Why shulde I not as well eke tell you all
The purtreiture that was upon the wall
Within the temple of mighty Mars the rede—
That highte the gret temple of Mars in Trace
In thilke colde and frosty region,
Ther as Mars hath his sovereine mansion.
First on the wall was peinted a forest,
In which ther wonneth neyther man ne best,
With knotty knarry barrein trees old
Of stubbes sharpe and hideous to behold;
In which ther ran a romble and a swough,
As though a storme shuld bresten every bough.'

And again, among innumerable terrific images of death and slaughter painted on the wall, is this one:

'The statue of Mars upon a carte stood
Armed, and looked grim as he were wood.
A wolf ther stood beforne him at his fete
With eyen red, and of a man he ete.'

The story of Griselda is in Boccaccio; but the Clerk of Oxenforde, who tells it, professes to have learned it from Petrarch. This story has gone all over Europe, and has passed into a proverb. In spite of the barbarity of the circumstances, which are abominable, the sentiment remains unimpaired and unalterable. It is of that kind, 'that heaves no sigh, that sheds no tear'; but it hangs upon the beatings of the heart; it is a part of the very being; it is as inseparable from it as the breath we draw. It is still and calm as the face of death. Nothing can touch it in its ethereal purity: tender as the yielding flower, it is fixed as the marble firmament. The only remonstrance she makes, the only complaint she utters against all the ill-treatment she receives, is that single line where, when turned back naked to her father's house, she says,

'Let me not like a worm go by the way.

The first outline given of the character is inimitable:

'Nought fer fro thilke paleis honourable,
Wher as this markis shope his mariage,
Ther stood a thorpe, of sighte delitable,
In which that poure folk of that village
Hadden hir bestes and her herbergage,
And of hir labour toke hir sustenance,
After that the earthe yave hem habundance.

Among this poure folk ther dwelt a man,
Which that was holden pourest of hem all:
But highe God sometime senden can
His grace unto a litel oxes stall:
Janicola men of that thorpe him cali.
A doughter had he, faire ynough to sight,
And Grisildis this yonge maiden hight.

But for to speke of vertuous beautee,
Than was she on the fairest under Sonne:
Ful pourely yfostred up was she:
No likerous lust was in hire herte yronne;
Ful ofter of the well than of the tonne
She dranke, and for she wolde vertue plese,
She knew wel labour, but non idel ese.

But though this mayden tendre were of age,
Yet in the brest of hire virginitee
Ther was enclosed sad and ripe corage:
And in gret reverence and charitee
Hire olde poure fader fostred she:
A few sheep spinning on the feld she kept,
She wolde not ben idel til she slept.

And whan she homward came she wolde bring
Wortes and other herbes times oft,
The which she shred and sethe for hire living,
And made hire bed ful hard, and nothing soft:
And ay she kept hire fadres lif on loft
With every obeisance and diligence,
That child may don to fadres reverence,

Upon Grisilde, this poure creature,
Ful often sithe this markis sette his sye,
As he on hunting rode paraventure:
And whan it fell that he might hire espie,
He not with wanton loking of folie
His eyen cast on hire, but in sad wise
Upon hire chere he wold him oft avise,

Commending in his herte hire womanhede,
And eke hire vertue, passing any wight
Of so yong age, as wel in chere as dede.
For though the people have no gret insight
In vertue, he considered ful right
Hire bountee, and disposed that he wold
Wedde hire only, if ever he wedden shold.

Grisilde of this (God wot) ful innocent,
That for hire shapen was all this array,
To fetchen water at a welle is went,
And cometh home as sone as ever she may.
For wel she had herd say, that thilke day
The markis shulde wedde, and, if she might,
She wolde fayn han seen som of that sight.

She thought, "I wol with other maidens stond,
That ben my felawes, in our dore, and see
The markisesse, and therto wol I fond
To don at home, as sone as it may be,
The labour which longeth unto me,
And than I may at leiser hire behold,
If she this way unto the castel hold."

And she wolde over the threswold gon,
The markis came and gan hire for to call,
And she set doun her water-pot anon
Beside the threswold in an oxes stall,
And doun upon hire knees she gan to fall.
And with sad countenance kneleth still,
Till she had herd what was the lordes will.'

The story of the little child slain in Jewry, (which is told by the Prioress, and worthy to be told by her who was 'all conscience and tender heart,') is not less touching than that of Griselda. It is simple and heroic to the last degree. The poetry of Chaucer has a religious sanctity about it, connected with the manners and superstitions of the age. It has all the spirit of martyrdom.

It has also all the extravagance and the utmost licentiousness of comic humour, equally arising out of the manners of the time. In this too Chaucer resembled Boccaccio that he excelled in both styles, and could pass at will 'from grave to gay, from lively to severe'; but he never confounded the two styles together (except from that involuntary and unconscious mixture of the pathetic and humorous, which is almost always to be found in nature,) and was exclusively taken up with what he set about, whether it was jest or earnest. The Wife of Bath's Prologue (which Pope has very admirably modern-

ised) is, perhaps, unequalled as a comic story. The Cock and the Fox is also excellent for lively strokes of character and satire. January and May is not so good as some of the others. Chaucer's versification, considering the time at which he wrote, and that versification is a thing in a great degree mechanical, is not one of his least merits. It has considerable strength and harmony, and its apparent deficiency in the latter respect arises chiefly from the alterations which have since taken place in the pronunciation or mode of accenting the words of the language. The best general rule for reading him is to pronounce the final *e*, as in reading Italian.

It was observed in the last Lecture that painting describes what the object is in itself, poetry what it implies or suggests. Chaucer's poetry is not, in general, the best confirmation of the truth of this distinction, for his poetry is more picturesque and historical than almost any other. But there is one instance in point which I cannot help giving in this place. It is the story of the three thieves who go in search of Death to kill him, and who meeting with him, are entangled in their fate by his words, without knowing him. In the printed catalogue to Mr. West's (in some respects very admirable) picture of Death on the Pale Horse, it is observed, that 'In poetry the same effect is produced by a few abrupt and rapid gleams of description, touching, as it were with fire, the features and edges of a general mass of awful obscurity; but in painting, such indistinctness would be a defect, and imply that the artist wanted the power to pourtray the conceptions of his fancy. Mr. West was of opinion that to delineate a physical form, which in its moral impression would approximate to that of the visionary Death of Milton, it was necessary to endow it, if possible, with the appearance of super-human strength and energy. He has therefore exerted the utmost force and perspicuity of his pencil on the central figure.'—One might suppose from this, that the way to represent a shadow was to make it as substantial as possible. Oh, no! Painting has its prerogatives, (and high ones they are) but they lie in representing the visible, not the invisible. The moral attributes of Death are powers and effects of an infinitely wide and general description, which no individual or physical form can possibly represent, but by a courtesy of speech, or by a distant analogy. The moral impression of Death is essentially visionary; its reality is in the mind's eye. Words are here the only *things*; and things, physical forms, the mere mockeries of the understanding. The less definite, the less bodily the conception, the more vast, unformed, and unsubstantial, the nearer does it approach to some resemblance of that omnipresent, lasting, universal, irresistible principle, which every where, and at some time or other, exerts its power over

all things. Death is a mighty abstraction, like Night, or Space, or Time. He is an ugly customer, who will not be invited to supper, or to sit for his picture. He is with us and about us, but we do not see him. He stalks on before us, and we do not mind him: he follows us close behind, and we do not turn to look back at him. We do not see him making faces at us in our life-time, nor perceive him afterwards sitting in mock-majesty, a twin-skeleton, beside us, tickling our bare ribs, and staring into our hollow eye-balls! Chaucer knew this. He makes three riotous companions go in search of Death to kill him, they meet with an old man whom they reproach with his age, and ask why he does not die, to which he answers thus:

'Ne Deth, alas! ne will not han my lif.
Thus walke I like a restless caitiff,
And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
I knocke with my staf, erlich and late,
And say to hire, "Leve mother, let me in.
Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin,
Alas! when shall my bones ben at reste?
Mother, with you wolde I changen my cheste,
That in my chambre longe time hath be,
Ye, for an heren cloute to wrap in me."
But yet to me she will not don that grace,
For which ful pale and welked is my face.'

They then ask the old man where they shall find out Death to kill him, and he sends them on an errand which ends in the death of all three. We hear no more of him, but it is Death that they have encountered!

The interval between Chaucer and Spenser is long and dreary. There is nothing to fill up the chasm but the names of Occleve, 'ancient Gower,' Lydgate, Wyatt, Surrey, and Sackville. Spenser flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was sent with Sir John Davies into Ireland, of which he has left behind him some tender recollections in his description of the bog of Allan, and a record in an ably written paper, containing observations on the state of that country and the means of improving it, which remain in full force to the present day. Spenser died at an obscure inn in London, it is supposed in distressed circumstances. The treatment he received from Burleigh is well known. Spenser, as well as Chaucer, was engaged in active life; but the genius of his poetry was not active: it is inspired by the love of ease, and relaxation from all the cares and business of life. Of all the poets, he is the most poetical. Though much later than Chaucer, his obligations to preceding writers were

less. He has in some measure borrowed the plan of his poem (as a number of distinct narratives) from Ariosto; but he has engrafted upon it an exuberance of fancy, and an endless voluptuousness of sentiment, which are not to be found in the Italian writer. Farther, Spenser is even more of an inventor in the subject-matter. There is an originality, richness, and variety in his allegorical personages and fictions, which almost vies with the splendor of the ancient mythology. If Ariosto transports us into the regions of romance, Spenser's poetry is all fairy-land. In Ariosto, we walk upon the ground, in a company, gay, fantastic, and adventurous enough. In Spenser, we wander in another world, among ideal beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills and fairer valleys. He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it; and fulfils the delightful promise of our youth. He waves his wand of enchantment—and at once embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects. The two worlds of reality and of fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem more distinct than his perceptions. He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness. In the Mask of Cupid he makes the God of Love 'clap on high his coloured winges *twain*': and it is said of Gluttony, in the Procession of the Passions,

'In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad.'

At times he becomes picturesque from his intense love of beauty; as where he compares Prince Arthur's crest to the appearance of the almond tree:

'Upon the top of all his lofty crest,
A bunch of hairs discolour'd diversely
With sprinkled pearl and gold full richly drest
Did shake and seem'd to daunce for jollity;
Like to an almond tree ymounted high
On top of green Selenis all alone,
With blossoms brave bedecked daintily;
Her tender locks do tremble every one
At every little breath that under heav'n is blown.'

The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind; and he is guided in his fantastic delineations by no rule but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination. He luxuriates equally in scenes of Eastern magnificence; or the still solitude of a hermit's cell—in the extremes of sensuality or refinement.

In reading the Faery Queen, you see a little withered old man by a wood-side opening a wicket, a giant, and a dwarf lagging far behind,

a damsel in a boat upon an enchanted lake, wood-nymphs, and satyrs; and all of a sudden you are transported into a lofty palace, with tapers burning, amidst knights and ladies, with dance and revelry, and song, 'and mask, and antique pageantry.' What can be more solitary, more shut up in itself, than his description of the house of Sleep, to which Archimago sends for a dream:

'And more to lull him in his slumber soft
A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down,
And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,
Mix'd with a murmuring wind, much like the sound
Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swound.
No other noise, nor people's troublous cries.
That still are wont t' annoy the walled town
Might there be heard; but careless Quiet lies
Wrapt in eternal silence, far from enemies.'

It is as if 'the honey-heavy dew of slumber' had settled on his pen in writing these lines. How different in the subject (and yet how like in beauty) is the following description of the Bower of Bliss:

'Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound
Of all that mote delight a dainty ear;
Such as at once might not on living ground,
Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere:
Right hard it was for wight which did it hear,
To tell what manner musicke that mote be;
For all that pleasing is to living eare
Was there consorted in one harmonee:
Birds, voices, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.

The joyous birdes shrouded in chearefull shade
Their notes unto the voice attempred sweet:
The angelical soft trembling voices made
To th' instruments divine respondence meet.
The silver sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmur of the water's fall;
The water's fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all.'

The remainder of the passage has all that voluptuous pathos, and languid brilliancy of fancy, in which this writer excelled:

'The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay;
Ah! see, whoso fayre thing dost thou fain to see,
In springing flower the image of thy day!
Ah! see the virgin rose, how sweetly she

Doth first peep forth with bashful modesty,
That fairer seems the less ye see her may!
Lo! see soon after, how more bold and free
Her bared bosom she doth broad display;
Lo! see soon after, how she fades and falls away!

So passeth in the passing of a day
Of mortal life the leaf, the bud, the flower;
Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
That erst was sought to deck both bed and bower
Of many a lady and many a paramour!
Gather therefore the rose whilst yet is prime,
For soon comes age that will her pride deflower;
Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time,
Whilst loving thou mayst loved be with equal crime.[1]

He ceased; and then gan all the quire of birds
Their divers notes to attune unto his lay,
As in approvance of his pleasing wordes.
The constant pair heard all that he did say,
Yet swerved not, but kept their forward way
Through many covert groves and thickets close,
In which they creeping did at last display[2]
That wanton lady with her lover loose,
Whose sleepy head she in her lap did soft dispose.

Upon a bed of roses she was laid
As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin;
And was arrayed or rather disarrayed,
All in a veil of silk and silver thin,
That hid no whit her alabaster skin,
But rather shewed more white, if more might be:
More subtle web Arachne cannot spin;
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched dew, do not in the air more lightly flee.

Her snowy breast was bare to greedy spoil
Of hungry eyes which n' ote therewith be fill'd,
And yet through languor of her late sweet toil
Few drops more clear than nectar forth distill'd,
That like pure Orient perles adown it trill'd;
And her fair eyes sweet smiling in delight
Moisten'd their fiery beams, with which she thrill'd
Frail hearts, yet quenched not; like starry light,
Which sparkling on the silent waves does seem more bright.'

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[1] Taken from Tasso.

[2] This word is an instance of those unwarrantable freedoms which Spenser sometimes took with language.

The finest things in Spenser are, the character of Una, in the first book; the House of Pride; the Cave of Mammon, and the Cave of Despair; the account of Memory, of whom it is said, among other things,

> 'The wars he well remember'd of King Nine,
> Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine';

the description of Belphœbe; the story of Florimel and the Witch's son; the Gardens of Adonis, and the Bower of Bliss; the Mask of Cupid; and Colin Clout's vision, in the last book. But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but that they cannot understand it on account of the allegory. They are afraid of the allegory, as if they thought it would bite them: they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pike-staff. It might as well be pretended that we cannot see Poussin's pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevents us from understanding Spenser. For instance, when Britomart, seated amidst the young warriors, lets fall her hair and discovers her sex, is it necessary to know the part she plays in the allegory, to understand the beauty of the following stanza?

> 'And eke that stranger knight amongst the rest
> Was for like need enforc'd to disarray.
> Tho when as vailed was her lofty crest,
> Her golden locks that were in trammels gay
> Upbounden, did themselves adown display,
> And raught unto her heels like sunny beams
> That in a cloud their light did long time stay;
> Their vapour faded, shew their golden gleams,
> And through the persant air shoot forth their azure streams.

Or is there any mystery in what is said of Belphœbe, that her hair was sprinkled with flowers and blossoms which had been entangled in it as she fled through the woods? Or is it necessary to have a more distinct idea of Proteus, than that which is given of him in his boat, with the frighted Florimel at his feet, while

> '—— the cold icicles from his rough beard
> Dropped adown upon her snowy breast!'

Or is it not a sufficient account of one of the sea-gods that pass by them, to say—

> 'That was Arion crowned:—
> So went he playing on the watery plain.'

Or to take the Procession of the Passions that draw the coach of Pride, in which the figures of Idleness, of Gluttony, of Lechery, of Avarice, of Envy, and of Wrath speak, one should think, plain enough for themselves; such as this of Gluttony:

'And by his side rode loathsome Gluttony,
Deformed creature, on a filthy swine;
His belly was up blown with luxury;
And eke with fatness swollen were his eyne;
And like a crane his neck was long and fine,
With which he swallowed up excessive feast,
For want whereof poor people oft did pine.

In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad;
For other clothes he could not wear for heat:
And on his head an ivy garland had,
From under which fast trickled down the sweat:
Still as he rode, he somewhat still did eat.
And in his hand did bear a bouzing can,
Of which he supt so oft, that on his seat
His drunken corse he scarce upholden can;
In shape and size more like a monster than a man.'

Or this of Lechery:

'And next to him rode lustfull Lechery
Upon a bearded goat, whose rugged hair
And whaly eyes (the sign of jealousy)
Was like the person's self whom he did bear:
Who rough and black, and filthy did appear.
Unseemly man to please fair lady's eye:
Yet he of ladies oft was loved dear,
When fairer faces were bid standen by:
O! who does know the bent of woman's fantasy?

In a green gown he clothed was full fair,
Which underneath did hide his filthiness;
And in his hand a burning heart he bare,
Full of vain follies and new fangleness;
For he was false and fraught with fickleness;
And learned had to love with secret looks;
And well could dance; and sing with ruefulness;
And fortunes tell; and read in loving books;
And thousand other ways to bait his fleshly hooks.

Inconstant man that loved all he saw,
And lusted after all that he did love;
Ne would his looser life be tied to law;
But joyed weak women's hearts to tempt and prove,
If from their loyal loves he might them move.'

This is pretty plain-spoken. Mr. Southey says of Spenser:

> '————Yet not more sweet
> Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise;
> High priest of all the Muses' mysteries!'

On the contrary, no one was more apt to pry into mysteries which do not strictly belong to the Muses.

Of the same kind with the Procession of the Passions, as little obscure, and still more beautiful, is the Mask of Cupid, with his train of votaries:

> 'The first was Fancy, like a lovely boy
> Of rare aspect, and beauty without peer;
>
> His garment neither was of silk nor say,
> But painted plumes in goodly order dight,
> Like as the sun-burnt Indians do array
> Their tawny bodies in their proudest plight:
> As those same plumes so seem'd he vain and light,
> That by his gait might easily appear;
> For still he far'd as dancing in delight,
> And in his hand a windy fan did bear
> That in the idle air he mov'd still here and there.
>
> And him beside march'd amorous Desire,
> Who seem'd of riper years than the other swain,
> Yet was that other swain this elder's sire,
> And gave him being, common to them twain:
> His garment was disguised very vain,
> And his embroidered bonnet sat awry;
> Twixt both his hands few sparks he close did strain,
> Which still he blew, and kindled busily,
> That soon they life conceiv'd and forth in flames did fly.
>
> Next after him went Doubt, who was yclad
> In a discolour'd coat of strange disguise,
> That at his back a broad capuccio had,
> And sleeves dependant *Albanese-wise*;
> He lookt askew with his mistrustful eyes,
> And nicely trod, as thorns lay in his way,
> Or that the floor to shrink he did avise;
> And on a broken reed he still did stay
> His feeble steps, which shrunk when hard thereon he lay.
>
> With him went Daunger, cloth'd in ragged weed,
> Made of bear's skin, that him more dreadful made;
> Yet his own face was dreadfull, ne did need
> Strange horror to deform his grisly shade;

A net in th' one hand, and a rusty blade
In th' other was; this Mischiefe, that Mishap;
With th' one his foes he threat'ned to invade,
With th' other he his friends meant to enwrap;
For whom he could not kill he practiz'd to entrap.

Next him was Fear, all arm'd from top to toe,
Yet thought himselfe not safe enough thereby,
But fear'd each shadow moving to and fro;
And his own arms when glittering he did spy
Or clashing heard, he fast away did fly,
As ashes pale of hue, and winged-heel'd;
And evermore on Daunger fixt his eye,
'Gainst whom he always bent a brazen shield,
Which his right hand unarmed fearfully did wield.

With him went Hope in rank, a handsome maid,
Of chearfull look and lovely to behold;
In silken samite she was light array'd,
And her fair locks were woven up in gold;
She always smil'd, and in her hand did hold
An holy-water sprinkle dipt in dew,
With which she sprinkled favours manifold
On whom she list, and did great liking shew,
Great liking unto many, but true love to few.

Next after them, the winged God himself
Came riding on a lion ravenous,
Taught to obey the menage of that elfe
That man and beast with power imperious
Subdueth to his kingdom tyrannous:
His blindfold eyes he bade awhile unbind,
That his proud spoil of that same dolorous
Fair dame he might behold in perfect kind;
Which seen, he much rejoiced in his cruel mind.

Of which full proud, himself uprearing high,
He looked round about with stern disdain,
And did survey his goodly company:
And marshalling the evil-ordered train,
With that the darts which his right hand did strain,
Full dreadfully he shook, that all did quake,
And clapt on high his colour'd winges twain,
That all his many it afraid did make:
Tho, blinding him again, his way he forth did take.'

The description of Hope, in this series of historical portraits, is one of the most beautiful in Spenser: and the triumph of Cupid at the mischief he has made, is worthy of the malicious urchin deity. In

reading these descriptions, one can hardly avoid being reminded of Rubens's allegorical pictures; but the account of Satyrane taming the lion's whelps and lugging the bear's cubs along in his arms while yet an infant, whom his mother so naturally advises to 'go seek some other play-fellows,' has even more of this high picturesque character. Nobody but Rubens could have painted the fancy of Spenser; and he could not have given the sentiment, the airy dream that hovers over it!

With all this, Spenser neither makes us laugh nor weep. The only jest in his poem is an allegorical play upon words, where he describes Malbecco as escaping in the herd of goats, 'by the help of his fayre hornes on hight.' But he has been unjustly charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. He has not indeed the pathos of immediate action or suffering, which is more properly the dramatic; but he has all the pathos of sentiment and romance—all that belongs to distant objects of terror, and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength, in like manner, is not strength of will or action, of bone and muscle, nor is it coarse and palpable—but it assumes a character of vastness and sublimity seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with the appalling associations of preternatural agency. We need only turn, in proof of this, to the Cave of Despair, or the Cave of Mammon, or to the account of the change of Malbecco into Jealousy. The following stanzas, in the description of the Cave of Mammon, the grisly house of Plutus, are unrivalled for the portentous massiness of the forms, the splendid chiaro-scuro, and shadowy horror.

'That house's form within was rude and strong,
Like an huge cave hewn out of rocky clift,
From whose rough vault the ragged breaches hung,
Embossed with massy gold of glorious gift,
And with rich metal loaded every rift,
That heavy ruin they did seem to threat:
And over them Arachne high did lift
Her cunning web, and spread her subtle net,
Enwrapped in foul smoke, and clouds more black than jet.

Both roof and floor, and walls were all of gold,
But overgrown with dust and old decay,[1]
And hid in darkness that none could behold

[1] 'That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
Tho' they are made and moulded of things past,
And give to Dust, that is a little gilt,
More laud than gold o'er-dusted.'
Troilus and Cressida.

The hue thereof: for view of cheerful day
Did never in that house itself display,
But a faint shadow of uncertain light;
Such as a lamp whose life doth fade away;
Or as the moon clothed with cloudy night
Does shew to him that walks in fear and sad affright.

* * * * * * *

And over all sad Horror with grim hue
Did always soar, beating his iron wings;
And after him owls and night-ravens flew,
The hateful messengers of heavy things,
Of death and dolour telling sad tidings;
Whiles sad Celleno, sitting on a clift,
A song of bitter bale and sorrow sings,
That heart of flint asunder could have rift;
Which having ended, after him she flieth swift.'

The Cave of Despair is described with equal gloominess and power of fancy; and the fine moral declamation of the owner of it, on the evils of life, almost makes one in love with death. In the story of Malbecco, who is haunted by jealousy, and in vain strives to run away from his own thoughts—

'High over hill and over dale he flies'—

the truth of human passion and the preternatural ending are equally striking.—It is not fair to compare Spenser with Shakspeare, in point of interest. A fairer comparison would be with Comus; and the result would not be unfavourable to Spenser. There is only one work of the same allegorical kind, which has more interest than Spenser (with scarcely less imagination): and that is the Pilgrim's Progress. The three first books of the Faery Queen are very superior to the three last. One would think that Pope, who used to ask if any one had ever read the Faery Queen through, had only dipped into these last. The only things in them equal to the former, are the account of Talus, the Iron Man, and the delightful episode of Pastorella.

The language of Spenser is full, and copious, to overflowing: it is less pure and idiomatic than Chaucer's, and is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from the different languages of Europe, both ancient and modern. He was, probably, seduced into a certain license of expression by the difficulty of filling up the moulds of his complicated rhymed stanza from the limited resources of his native language. This stanza, with alternate and repeatedly recurring rhymes, is borrowed from the Italians. It was peculiarly fitted to

their language, which abounds in similar vowel terminations, and is as little adapted to ours, from the stubborn, unaccommodating resistance which the consonant endings of the northern languages make to this sort of endless sing-song.—Not that I would, on that account, part with the stanza of Spenser. We are, perhaps, indebted to this very necessity of finding out new forms of expression, and to the occasional faults to which it led, for a poetical language rich and varied and magnificent beyond all former, and almost all later example. His versification is, at once, the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, 'in many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out'—that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation—dwelling on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakspeare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea: but the effect is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled.

LECTURE III

ON SHAKSPEARE AND MILTON

In looking back to the great works of genius in former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has since been made in poetry, and in the arts of imitation in general. But this is perhaps a foolish wonder. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact, than the supposition that in what we understand by the *fine arts*, as painting, and poetry, relative perfection is only the result of repeated efforts in successive periods, and that what has been once well done, constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical, or definite, but depends on feeling, taste, and genius, very soon becomes stationary, or retrograde, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is a vulgar error, which has grown up, like many

others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite distinct, without taking into the account the difference in the nature of the things, or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons, finding what wonderful advances have been made in biblical criticism, in chemistry, in mechanics, in geometry, astronomy, &c. *i.e.* in things depending on mere inquiry and experiment, or on absolute demonstration, have been led hastily to conclude, that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all other arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time. We look back upon the theological creed of our ancestors, and their discoveries in natural philosophy, with a smile of pity: science, and the arts connected with it, have all had their infancy, their youth, and manhood, and seem to contain in them no principle of limitation or decay: and, inquiring no farther about the matter, we infer, in the intoxication of our pride, and the height of our self-congratulation, that the same progress has been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face, that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth, and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after. This is the peculiar distinction and privilege of each, of science and of art:—of the one, never to attain its utmost limit of perfection; and of the other, to arrive at it almost at once. Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, Dante, and Ariosto, (Milton alone was of a later age, and not the worse for it)—Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Cervantes, and Boccaccio, the Greek sculptors and tragedians,—all lived near the beginning of their arts—perfected, and all but created them. These giant-sons of genius stand indeed upon the earth, but they tower above their fellows; and the long line of their successors, in different ages, does not interpose any object to obstruct their view, or lessen their brightness. In strength and stature they are unrivalled; in grace and beauty they have not been surpassed. In after-ages, and more refined periods, (as they are called) great men have arisen, one by one, as it were by throes and at intervals; though in general the best of these cultivated and artificial minds were of an inferior order; as Tasso and Pope, among poets; Guido and Vandyke, among painters. But

in the earlier stages of the arts, as soon as the first mechanical difficulties had been got over, and the language was sufficiently acquired, they rose by clusters, and in constellations, never so to rise again!

The arts of painting and poetry are conversant with the world of thought within us, and with the world of sense around us—with what we know, and see, and feel intimately. They flow from the sacred shrine of our own breasts, and are kindled at the living lamp of nature. But the pulse of the passions assuredly beat as high, the depths and soundings of the human heart were as well understood three thousand, or three hundred years ago, as they are at present: the face of nature, and 'the human face divine' shone as bright then as they have ever done. But it is *their* light, reflected by true genius on art, that marks out its path before it, and sheds a glory round the Muses' feet, like that which

> 'Circled Una's angel face,
> And made a sunshine in the shady place.'

The four greatest names in English poetry, are almost the four first we come to—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton. There are no others that can really be put in competition with these. The two last have had justice done them by the voice of common fame. Their names are blazoned in the very firmament of reputation; while the two first (though 'the fault has been more in their stars than in themselves that they are underlings') either never emerged far above the horizon, or were too soon involved in the obscurity of time. The three first of these are excluded from Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets (Shakspeare indeed is so from the dramatic form of his compositions): and the fourth, Milton, is admitted with a reluctant and churlish welcome.

In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manners, or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakspeare as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term); and Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are; Spenser, as we wish them to be; Shakspeare, as they would be; and Milton as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all: but the principle or moving power, to which this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer, was habit, or inveterate prejudice; in Spenser, novelty, and the love of the marvellous; in Shakspeare, it was the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances; and in Milton, only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity; of Spenser, remoteness; of Milton,

elevation; of Shakspeare, every thing.—It has been said by some critic, that Shakspeare was distinguished from the other dramatic writers of his day only by his wit; that they had all his other qualities but that; that one writer had as much sense, another as much fancy, another as much knowledge of character, another the same depth of passion, and another as great a power of language. This statement is not true; nor is the inference from it well-founded, even if it were. This person does not seem to have been aware that, upon his own shewing, the great distinction of Shakspeare's genius was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age, and not his differing from them in one accidental particular. But to have done with such minute and literal trifling.

The striking peculiarity of Shakspeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. He had 'a mind reflecting ages past,' and present:—all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar: 'All corners of the earth, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave,' are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew, as those which they did not know, or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call, and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies 'nodded to him, and did him curtesies': and the night-hag bestrode the blast at the command of 'his so potent art.' The world of spirits lay open to him, like the world of real men and women: and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other; for if the preternatural characters he describes could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel, and act, as he makes

them. He had only to think of any thing in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, 'subject to the same skyey influences,' the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality. Thus the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, 'his frequent haunts and ancient neighbourhood,' are given with a miraculous truth of nature, and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole 'coheres semblably together' in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say,—you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decypher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the bye-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So (as it has been ingeniously remarked) when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, 'Me and thy *crying* self,' flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy, and places the first and most trying scene of his misfortunes before us, with all that he must have suffered in the interval. How well the silent anguish of Macduff is conveyed to the reader, by the friendly expostulation of Malcolm—'What! man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows!' Again, Hamlet, in the scene with Rosencrans and Guildenstern, somewhat abruptly concludes his fine soliloquy on life by saying, 'Man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.' Which is explained by their answer—'My lord, we had no such stuff in our thoughts. But we smiled to think, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you, whom we met on the way':—as if while Hamlet was making this speech, his two old schoolfellows from Wittenberg had been really standing by, and he had seen them smiling by stealth, at the idea of the players crossing their minds. It is not 'a combination and a form' of words, a set speech or two, a preconcerted theory of a character, that will do this: but all the persons concerned must have been present in the poet's imagination, as at a kind of rehearsal; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion, and have been observed by others, passed through his, and is made known to the

reader.—I may add in passing, that Shakspeare always gives the best directions for the costume and carriage of his heroes. Thus to take one example, Ophelia gives the following account of Hamlet; and as Ophelia had seen Hamlet, I should think her word ought to be taken against that of any modern authority.

> '*Ophelia.* My lord, as I was reading in my closet,
> Prince Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
> No hat upon his head, his stockings loose,
> Ungartred, and down-gyved to his ancle,
> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
> And with a look so piteous,
> As if he had been sent from hell
> To speak of horrors, thus he comes before me.
> *Polonius.* Mad for thy love!
> *Oph.* My lord, I do not know,
> But truly I do fear it.
> *Pol.* What said he?
> *Oph.* He took me by the wrist, and held me hard
> Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
> And with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
> He falls to such perusal of my face,
> As he would draw it: long staid he so;
> At last, a little shaking of my arm,
> And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
> He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound,
> As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
> And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
> And with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
> He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
> For out of doors he went without their help,
> And to the last bended their light on me.'
>
> *Act. II. Scene* 1.

How after this airy, fantastic idea of irregular grace and bewildered melancholy any one can play Hamlet, as we have seen it played, with strut, and stare, and antic right-angled sharp-pointed gestures, it is difficult to say, unless it be that Hamlet is not bound, by the prompter's cue, to study the part of Ophelia. The account of Ophelia's death begins thus:

> 'There is a willow hanging o'er a brook,
> That shows its hoary leaves in the glassy stream.'—

Now this is an instance of the same unconscious power of mind which is as true to nature as itself. The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath, and it is this part of them which would appear

'hoary' in the reflection in the brook. The same sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the mind's eye, is observable in the speech of Cleopatra, when conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence:—'He's speaking now, or murmuring, where's my serpent of old Nile?' How fine to make Cleopatra have this consciousness of her own character, and to make her feel that it is this for which Antony is in love with her! She says, after the battle of Actium, when Antony has resolved 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.' What other poet would have thought of such a casual resource of the imagination, or would have dared to avail himself of it? The thing happens in the play as it might have happened in fact.—That which, perhaps, more than any thing else distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakspeare from all others, is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and overheard what passed. As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it: so the dialogues in Shakspeare are carried on without any consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort. In the world of his imagination, every thing has a life, a place, and being of its own!

Chaucer's characters are sufficiently distinct from one another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions. They are consistent, but uniform; we get no new idea of

them from first to last; they are not placed in different lights, nor are their subordinate *traits* brought out in new situations; they are like portraits or physiognomical studies, with the distinguishing features marked with inconceivable truth and precision, but that preserve the same unaltered air and attitude. Shakspeare's are historical figures, equally true and correct, but put into action, where every nerve and muscle is displayed in the struggle with others, with all the effect of collision and contrast, with every variety of light and shade. Chaucer's characters are narrative, Shakspeare's dramatic, Milton's epic. That is, Chaucer told only as much of his story as he pleased, as was required for a particular purpose. He answered for his characters himself. In Shakspeare they are introduced upon the stage, are liable to be asked all sorts of questions, and are forced to answer for themselves. In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakspeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact with it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances. Milton took only a few simple principles of character, and raised them to the utmost conceivable grandeur, and refined them from every base alloy. His imagination, 'nigh sphered in Heaven,' claimed kindred only with what he saw from that height, and could raise to the same elevation with itself. He sat retired and kept his state alone, 'playing with wisdom'; while Shakspeare mingled with the crowd, and played the host, 'to make society the sweeter welcome.'

The passion in Shakspeare is of the same nature as his delineation of character. It is not some one habitual feeling or sentiment preying upon itself, growing out of itself, and moulding every thing to itself; it is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable with him; subject to all the fluctuations of caprice and accident; calling into play all the resources of the understanding and all the energies of the will; irritated by obstacles or yielding to them; rising from small beginnings to its utmost height; now drunk with hope, now stung to madness, now sunk in despair, now blown to air with a breath, now raging like a torrent. The human soul is made the sport of fortune, the prey of adversity: it is stretched on the wheel of destiny, in restless ecstacy. The passions are in a state of projection. Years are melted down to moments, and every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process. Thus after Iago has been boasting to himself of the effect of his poisonous

suggestions on the mind of Othello, 'which, with a little act upon the blood, will work like mines of sulphur,' he adds—

> 'Look where he comes! not poppy, nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the East,
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou ow'dst yesterday.'—

And he enters at this moment, like the crested serpent, crowned with his wrongs and raging for revenge! The whole depends upon the turn of a thought. A word, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame; and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano. The dialogues in Lear, in Macbeth, that between Brutus and Cassius, and nearly all those in Shakspeare, where the interest is wrought up to its highest pitch, afford examples of this dramatic fluctuation of passion. The interest in Chaucer is quite different; it is like the course of a river, strong, and full, and increasing. In Shakspeare, on the contrary, it is like the sea, agitated this way and that, and loud-lashed by furious storms; while in the still pauses of the blast, we distinguish only the cries of despair, or the silence of death! Milton, on the other hand, takes the imaginative part of passion—that which remains after the event, which the mind reposes on when all is over, which looks upon circumstances from the remotest elevation of thought and fancy, and abstracts them from the world of action to that of contemplation. The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by surprise, or force us upon action, 'while rage with rage doth sympathise'; the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fill us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight. There are certain objects that strike the imagination, and inspire awe in the very idea of them, independently of any dramatic interest, that is, of any connection with the vicissitudes of human life. For instance, we cannot think of the pyramids of Egypt, of a Gothic ruin, or an old Roman encampment, without a certain emotion, a sense of power and sublimity coming over the mind. The heavenly bodies that hang over our heads wherever we go, and 'in their untroubled element shall shine when we are laid in dust, and all our cares forgotten,' affect us in the same way. Thus Satan's address to the Sun has an epic, not a dramatic interest; for though the second person in the dialogue makes no answer and feels no concern, yet the eye of that vast luminary is upon him, like the eye of heaven, and seems conscious of what he says, like an universal presence. Dramatic poetry and epic, in their perfection, indeed, approximate to and

strengthen one another. Dramatic poetry borrows aid from the dignity of persons and things, as the heroic does from human passion, but in theory they are distinct.—When Richard II. calls for the looking-glass to contemplate his faded majesty in it, and bursts into that affecting exclamation: 'Oh, that I were a mockery-king of snow, to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke,' we have here the utmost force of human passion, combined with the ideas of regal splendour and fallen power. When Milton says of Satan:

> '—— His form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appear'd
> Less than archangel ruin'd, and th' excess
> Of glory obscur'd;'—

the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret, is perfect.

The great fault of a modern school of poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakspeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the Moods of their own Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms. They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry consolation of an unmanly triumph over fallen greatness; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, any thing superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world, they look upon with the most perfect indifference; and they are surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. 'With what measure they mete, it has been meted to them again.'—

Shakespeare's imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. 'It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.' Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes: or, as Puck says, in boasting of his own feats, 'puts a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes.'

He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while describing it; but the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and aptitude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle, and take the fancy prisoner in the same instant. I will mention one or two which are very striking, and not much known, out of Troilus and Cressida. Æneas says to Agamemnon,

> 'I ask that I may waken reverence,
> And on the cheek be ready with a blush
> Modest as morning, when she coldly eyes
> The youthful Phœbus.'

Ulysses urging Achilles to shew himself in the field, says—

> 'No man is the lord of anything,
> Till he communicate his parts to others:
> Nor doth he of himself know them for aught,
> Till he behold them formed in the applause,
> Where they 're extended! which like an arch reverberates
> The voice again, or like a gate of steel,
> Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
> Its figure and its heat.'

Patroclus gives the indolent warrior the same advice.

> 'Rouse yourself; and the weak wanton Cupid
> Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
> And like a dew-drop from the lion's mane
> Be shook to air.'

Shakspeare's language and versification are like the rest of him. He has a magic power over words: they come winged at his bidding; and seem to know their places. They are struck out at a heat, on the spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects. His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination, fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. His language is

hieroglyphical. It translates thoughts into visible images. It abounds in sudden transitions and elliptical expressions. This is the source of his mixed metaphors, which are only abbreviated forms of speech. These, however, give no pain from long custom. They have, in fact, become idioms in the language. They are the building, and not the scaffolding to thought. We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan and spell out the particular words and phrases, than the syllables of which they are composed. In trying to recollect any other author, one sometimes stumbles, in case of failure, on a word as good. In Shakspeare, any other word but the true one, is sure to be wrong. If any body, for instance, could not recollect the words of the following description,

'—— Light thickens,
And the crow makes wing to the rooky wood,'

he would be greatly at a loss to substitute others for them equally expressive of the feeling. These remarks, however, are strictly applicable only to the impassioned parts of Shakspeare's language, which flowed from the warmth and originality of his imagination, and were his own. The language used for prose conversation and ordinary business is sometimes technical, and involved in the affectation of the time. Compare, for example, Othello's apology to the senate, relating 'his whole course of love,' with some of the preceding parts relating to his appointment, and the official dispatches from Cyprus. In this respect, 'the business of the state does him offence.' His versification is no less powerful, sweet, and varied. It has every occasional excellence, of sullen intricacy, crabbed and perplexed, or of the smoothest and loftiest expansion—from the ease and familiarity of measured conversation to the lyrical sounds

'——Of ditties highly penned,
Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower,
With ravishing division to her lute.'

It is the only blank verse in the language, except Milton's, that for itself is readable. It is not stately and uniformly swelling like his, but varied and broken by the inequalities of the ground it has to pass over in its uncertain course,

'And so by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean.'

It remains to speak of the faults of Shakspeare. They are not so many or so great as they have been represented; what there are, are chiefly owing to the following causes:—The universality of his genius

was, perhaps, a disadvantage to his single works; the variety of his resources, sometimes diverting him from applying them to the most effectual purposes. He might be said to combine the powers of Æschylus and Aristophanes, of Dante and Rabelais, in his own mind. If he had been only half what he was, he would perhaps have appeared greater. The natural ease and indifference of his temper made him sometimes less scrupulous than he might have been. He is relaxed and careless in critical places; he is in earnest throughout only in Timon, Macbeth, and Lear. Again, he had no models of acknowledged excellence constantly in view to stimulate his efforts, and by all that appears, no love of fame. He wrote for the 'great vulgar and the small,' in his time, not for posterity. If Queen Elizabeth and the maids of honour laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied, and slept the next night well. He did not trouble himself about Voltaire's criticisms. He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things; and if his plays pleased others, not to quarrel with them himself. His very facility of production would make him set less value on his own excellences, and not care to distinguish nicely between what he did well or ill. His blunders in chronology and geography do not amount to above half a dozen, and they are offences against chronology and geography, not against poetry. As to the unities, he was right in setting them at defiance. He was fonder of puns than became so great a man. His barbarisms were those of his age. His genius was his own. He had no objection to float down with the stream of common taste and opinion: he rose above it by his own buoyancy, and an impulse which he could not keep under, in spite of himself or others, and 'his delights did shew most dolphin-like.'

He had an equal genius for comedy and tragedy; and his tragedies are better than his comedies, because tragedy is better than comedy. His female characters, which have been found fault with as insipid, are the finest in the world. Lastly, Shakspeare was the least of a coxcomb of any one that ever lived, and much of a gentleman.

Shakspeare discovers in his writings little religious enthusiasm, and an indifference to personal reputation; he had none of the bigotry of his age, and his political prejudices were not very strong. In these respects, as well as in every other, he formed a direct contrast to Milton. Milton's works are a perpetual invocation to the Muses; a hymn to Fame. He had his thoughts constantly fixed on the contemplation of the Hebrew theocracy, and of a perfect commonwealth; and he seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch of the ark of faith. His religious zeal infused its character into his im-

agination; so that he devotes himself with the same sense of duty to the cultivation of his genius, as he did to the exercise of virtue, or the good of his country. The spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet, vied with each other in his breast. His mind appears to have held equal communion with the inspired writers, and with the bards and sages of ancient Greece and Rome;—

> 'Blind Thamyris, and blind Mæonides,
> And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old.'

He had a high standard, with which he was always comparing himself, nothing short of which could satisfy his jealous ambition. He thought of nobler forms and nobler things than those he found about him. He lived apart, in the solitude of his own thoughts, carefully excluding from his mind whatever might distract its purposes or alloy its purity, or damp its zeal. 'With darkness and with dangers compassed round,' he had the mighty models of antiquity always present to his thoughts, and determined to raise a monument of equal height and glory, 'piling up every stone of lustre from the brook,' for the delight and wonder of posterity. He had girded himself up, and as it were, sanctified his genius to this service from his youth. 'For after,' he says, 'I had from my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences as my age could suffer, by sundry masters and teachers, it was found that whether aught was imposed upon me by them, or betaken to of my own choice, the style by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live; but much latelier, in the private academies of Italy, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout, met with acceptance above what was looked for; I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times as they should not willingly let it die. The accomplishment of these intentions, which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself anything worth to my country, lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet, I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours

of wine; like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs. Although it nothing content me to have disclosed thus much beforehand; but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies.'

So that of Spenser:

> 'The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought,
> And is with child of glorious great intent,
> Can never rest until it forth have brought
> The eternal brood of glory excellent.'

Milton, therefore, did not write from casual impulse, but after a severe examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to leave nothing undone which it was in his power to do. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost: he surrounds it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. He refines on his descriptions of beauty; loading sweets on sweets, till the sense aches at them; and raises his images of terror to a gigantic elevation, that 'makes Ossa like a wart.' In Milton, there is always an appearance of effort: in Shakespeare, scarcely any.

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or profane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer. He is a writer of centos, and yet in originality scarcely inferior to Homer. The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials. In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty intellect, that the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them. The quantity of art in him shews the strength of his genius: the weight of his intellectual obligations would have oppressed any other writer. Milton's learning has the

effect of intuition. He describes objects, of which he could only have read in books, with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature. He makes words tell as pictures.

> 'Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
> Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
> Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams.'

The word *lucid* here gives to the idea all the sparkling effect of the most perfect landscape.

And again:

> 'As when a vulture on Imaus bred,
> Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,
> Dislodging from a region scarce of prey,
> To gorge the flesh of lambs and yeanling kids
> On hills where flocks are fed, flies towards the springs
> Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams;
> But in his way lights on the barren plains
> Of Sericana, where Chineses drive
> With sails and wind their cany waggons light.'

If Milton had taken a journey for the express purpose, he could not have described this scenery and mode of life better. Such passages are like demonstrations of natural history. Instances might be multiplied without end.

We might be tempted to suppose that the vividness with which he describes visible objects, was owing to their having acquired an unusual degree of strength in his mind, after the privation of his sight: but we find the same palpableness and truth in the descriptions which occur in his early poems. In Lycidas he speaks of 'the great vision of the guarded mount,' with that preternatural weight of impression with which it would present itself suddenly to 'the pilot of some small night-foundered skiff': and the lines in the Penseroso, describing 'the wandering moon,'

> 'Riding near her highest noon,
> Like one that had been led astray
> Through the heaven's wide pathless way,'

are as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her. There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different senses, whether colours, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged his attention at the time. It has been indeed objected to Milton, by a common perversity of criticism, that his ideas were musical rather than picturesque, as if because they were in the highest degree musical, they must be (to

keep the sage critical balance even, and to allow no one man to possess two qualities at the same time) proportionably deficient in other respects. But Milton's poetry is not cast in any such narrow, common-place mould; it is not so barren of resources. His worship of the Muse was not so simple or confined. A sound arises 'like a steam of rich distilled perfumes'; we hear the pealing organ, but the incense on the altars is also there, and the statues of the gods are ranged around! The ear indeed predominates over the eye, because it is more immediately affected, and because the language of music blends more immediately with, and forms a more natural accompaniment to, the variable and indefinite associations of ideas conveyed by words. But where the associations of the imagination are not the principal thing, the individual object is given by Milton with equal force and beauty. The strongest and best proof of this, as a characteristic power of his mind, is, that the persons of Adam and Eve, of Satan, &c. are always accompanied, in our imagination, with the grandeur of the naked figure; they convey to us the ideas of sculpture. As an instance, take the following:

'——— He soon
Saw within ken a glorious Angel stand,
The same whom John saw also in the sun:
His back was turned, but not his brightness hid;
Of beaming sunny rays a golden tiar
Circled his head, nor less his locks behind
Illustrious on his shoulders fledge with wings
Lay waving round; on some great charge employ'd
He seem'd, or fix'd in cogitation deep.
Glad was the spirit impure, as now in hope
To find who might direct his wand'ring flight
To Paradise, the happy seat of man,
His journey's end, and our beginning woe.
But first he casts to change his proper shape,
Which else might work him danger or delay
And now a stripling cherub he appears,
Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb
Suitable grace diffus'd, so well he feign'd:
Under a coronet his flowing hair
In curls on either cheek play'd; wings he wore
Of many a colour'd plume sprinkled with gold,
His habit fit for speed succinct, and held
Before his decent steps a silver wand.'

The figures introduced here have all the elegance and precision of a Greek statue; glossy and impurpled, tinged with golden light, and musical as the strings of Memnon's harp!

Again, nothing can be more magnificent than the portrait of Beelzebub:

> 'With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
> The weight of mightiest monarchies:'

Or the comparison of Satan, as he 'lay floating many a rood,' to 'that sea beast,'

> 'Leviathan, which God of all his works
> Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream!

What a force of imagination is there in this last expression! What an idea it conveys of the size of that hugest of created beings, as if it shrunk up the ocean to a stream, and took up the sea in its nostrils as a very little thing? Force of style is one of Milton's greatest excellences. Hence, perhaps, he stimulates us more in the reading, and less afterwards. The way to defend Milton against all impugners, is to take down the book and read it.

Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakspeare's) that deserves the name of verse. Dr. Johnson, who had modelled his ideas of versification on the regular sing-song of Pope, condemns the Paradise Lost as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together, (with the exception already mentioned). Spenser is the most harmonious of our stanza writers, as Dryden is the most sounding and varied of our rhymists. But in neither is there any thing like the same ear for music, the same power of approximating the varieties of poetical to those of musical rhythm, as there is in our great epic poet. The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image. They rise or fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick or affectation, as the occasion seems to require.

The following are some of the finest instances:

> '——— His hand was known
> In Heaven by many a tower'd structure high;—
> Nor was his name unheard or unador'd
> In ancient Greece: and in the Ausonian land
> Men called him Mulciber: and how he fell
> From Heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove

Sheer o'er the chrystal battlements; from morn
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
A summer's day; and with the setting sun
Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
On Lemnos, the Ægean isle: thus they relate,
Erring.'—

'——— But chief the spacious hall
Thick swarm'd, both on the ground and in the air,
Brush'd with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides,
Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
In clusters; they among fresh dews and flow'rs
Fly to and fro: or on the smoothed plank,
The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
New rubb'd with balm, expatiate and confer
Their state affairs. So thick the airy crowd
Swarm'd and were straiten'd; till the signal giv'n,
Behold a wonder! They but now who seem'd
In bigness to surpass earth's giant sons,
Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
Throng numberless, like that Pygmean race
Beyond the Indian mount, or fairy elves,
Whose midnight revels by a forest side
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,
Or dreams he sees, while over-head the moon
Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
Wheels her pale course: they on their mirth and dance
Intent, with jocund music charm his ear;
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.'

I can only give another instance, though I have some difficulty in leaving off.

'Round he surveys (and well might, where he stood
So high above the circling canopy
Of night's extended shade) from th' eastern point
Of Libra to the fleecy star that bears
Andromeda far off Atlantic seas
Beyond the horizon: then from pole to pole
He views in breadth, and without longer pause
Down right into the world's first region throws
His flight precipitant, and winds with ease
Through the pure marble air his oblique way
Amongst innumerable stars that shone
Stars distant, but nigh hand seem'd other worlds;
Or other worlds they seem'd or happy isles,' &c.

The verse, in this exquisitely modulated passage, floats up and down

as if it had itself wings. Milton has himself given us the theory of his versification—

> 'Such as the meeting soul may pierce
> In notes with many a winding bout
> Of linked sweetness long drawn out.'

Dr. Johnson and Pope would have converted his vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse. Read any other blank verse but Milton's,—Thomson's, Young's, Cowper's, Wordsworth's,—and it will be found, from the want of the same insight into 'the hidden soul of harmony,' to be mere lumbering prose.

To proceed to a consideration of the merits of Paradise Lost, in the most essential point of view, I mean as to the poetry of character and passion. I shall say nothing of the fable, or of other technical objections or excellences; but I shall try to explain at once the foundation of the interest belonging to the poem. I am ready to give up the dialogues in Heaven, where, as Pope justly observes, 'God the Father turns a school-divine'; nor do I consider the battle of the angels as the climax of sublimity, or the most successful effort of Milton's pen. In a word, the interest of the poem arises from the daring ambition and fierce passions of Satan, and from the account of the paradisaical happiness, and the loss of it by our first parents. Three-fourths of the work are taken up with these characters, and nearly all that relates to them is unmixed sublimity and beauty. The two first books alone are like two massy pillars of solid gold.

Satan is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created beings, who, for endeavouring to be equal with the highest, and to divide the empire of heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to hell. His aim was no less than the throne of the universe; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright, the third part of the heavens, whom he lured after him with his countenance, and who durst defy the Omnipotent in arms. His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom, and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He stood like a tower; or

> '——————— As when Heaven's fire
> Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines'

He was still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own him as their sovereign leader, and with whose fate he sympathises as he views them round, far as the eye can reach; though he keeps aloof from them in his own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast. An outcast from Heaven, Hell trembles beneath his feet, Sin and Death are at his heels, and mankind are his easy prey.

> 'All is not lost; th' unconquerable will,
> And study of revenge, immortal hate,
> And courage never to submit or yield,
> And what else is not to be overcome,'

are still his. The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it; the fierceness of tormenting flames is qualified and made innoxious by the greater fierceness of his pride; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought, by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil—but of the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never once flinches. His love of power and contempt for suffering are never once relaxed from the highest pitch of intensity. His thoughts burn like a hell within him; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other consideration. The consciousness of a determined purpose, of 'that intellectual being, those thoughts that wander through eternity,' though accompanied with endless pain, he prefers to nonentity, to 'being swallowed up and lost in the wide womb of uncreated night.' He expresses the sum and substance of all ambition in one line. 'Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable, doing or suffering!' After such a conflict as his, and such a defeat, to retreat in order, to rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something; but he does more than this—he founds a new empire in hell, and from it conquers this new world, whither he bends his undaunted flight, forcing his way through nether and surrounding fires. The poet has not in all this given us a mere shadowy outline; the strength is equal to the magnitude of the conception. The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast; Prometheus chained to his rock was not a more terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, 'rising aloft incumbent on the dusky air,' it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate images: so that we see it always before us, gigantic, irregular, portentous, uneasy, and disturbed—but dazzling in its faded

splendour, the clouded ruins of a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will; he has no bodily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. The horns and tail are not there, poor emblems of the unbending, unconquered spirit, of the writhing agonies within. Milton was too magnanimous and open an antagonist to support his argument by the bye-tricks of a hump and cloven foot; to bring into the fair field of controversy the good old catholic prejudices of which Tasso and Dante have availed themselves, and which the mystic German critics would restore. He relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple to give the devil his due. Some persons may think that he has carried his liberality too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Considering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault, from his faith in religion, and his love of rebellion; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.

Not only the figure of Satan, but his speeches in council, his soliloquies, his address to Eve, his share in the war in heaven, or in the fall of man, shew the same decided superiority of character. To give only one instance, almost the first speech he makes:

> 'Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
> Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
> That we must change for Heaven; this mournful gloom
> For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
> Who now is sov'rain can dispose and bid
> What shall be right: farthest from him is best,
> Whom reason hath equal'd, force hath made supreme
> Above his equals. Farewel happy fields,
> Where joy for ever dwells: Hail horrors, hail
> Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell,
> Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
> A mind not to be chang'd by place or time.
> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
> What matter where, if I be still the same,
> And what I should be, all but less than he
> Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
> We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
> Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
> Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
> To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
> Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.'

The whole of the speeches and debates in Pandemonium are well worthy of the place and the occasion—with Gods for speakers, and

angels and archangels for hearers. There is a decided manly tone in the arguments and sentiments, an eloquent dogmatism, as if each person spoke from thorough conviction; an excellence which Milton probably borrowed from his spirit of partisanship, or else his spirit of partisanship from the natural firmness and vigour of his mind. In this respect Milton resembles Dante, (the only modern writer with whom he has any thing in common) and it is remarkable that Dante, as well as Milton, was a political partisan. That approximation to the severity of impassioned prose which has been made an objection to Milton's poetry, and which is chiefly to be met with in these bitter invectives, is one of its great excellences. The author might here turn his philippics against Salmasius to good account. The rout in Heaven is like the fall of some mighty structure, nodding to its base, 'with hideous ruin and combustion down.' But, perhaps, of all the passages in Paradise Lost, the description of the employments of the angels during the absence of Satan, some of whom 'retreated in a silent valley, sing with notes angelical to many a harp their own heroic deeds and hapless fall by doom of battle,' is the most perfect example of mingled pathos and sublimity.—What proves the truth of this noble picture in every part, and that the frequent complaint of want of interest in it is the fault of the reader, not of the poet, is that when any interest of a practical kind takes a shape that can be at all turned into this, (and there is little doubt that Milton had some such in his eye in writing it,) each party converts it to its own purposes, feels the absolute identity of these abstracted and high speculations; and that, in fact, a noted political writer of the present day has exhausted nearly the whole account of Satan in the Paradise Lost, by applying it to a character whom he considered as after the devil, (though I do not know whether he would make even that exception) the greatest enemy of the human race. This may serve to shew that Milton's Satan is not a very insipid personage.

Of Adam and Eve it has been said, that the ordinary reader can feel little interest in them, because they have none of the passions, pursuits, or even relations of human life, except that of man and wife, the least interesting of all others, if not to the parties concerned, at least to the by-standers. The preference has on this account been given to Homer, who, it is said, has left very vivid and infinitely diversified pictures of all the passions and affections, public and private, incident to human nature—the relations of son, of brother, parent, friend, citizen, and many others. Longinus preferred the Iliad to the Odyssey, on account of the greater number of battles it contains; but I can neither agree to his criticism, nor assent to the present objection. It is true, there is little action in this part of

Milton's poem; but there is much repose, and more enjoyment. There are none of the every-day occurrences, contentions, disputes, wars, fightings, feuds, jealousies, trades, professions, liveries, and common handicrafts of life; 'no kind of traffic; letters are not known; no use of service, of riches, poverty, contract, succession, bourne, bound of land, tilth, vineyard none; no occupation, no treason, felony, sword, pike, knife, gun, nor need of any engine.' So much the better; thank Heaven, all these were yet to come. But still the die was cast, and in them our doom was sealed. In them

> 'The generations were prepared; the pangs,
> The internal pangs, were ready, the dread strife
> Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
> Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.'

In their first false step we trace all our future woe, with loss of Eden. But there was a short and precious interval between, like the first blush of morning before the day is overcast with tempest, the dawn of the world, the birth of nature from 'the unapparent deep,' with its first dews and freshness on its cheek, breathing odours. Theirs was the first delicious taste of life, and on them depended all that was to come of it. In them hung trembling all our hopes and fears. They were as yet alone in the world, in the eye of nature, wondering at their new being, full of enjoyment and enraptured with one another, with the voice of their Maker walking in the garden, and ministering angels attendant on their steps, winged messengers from heaven like rosy clouds descending in their sight. Nature played around them her virgin fancies wild; and spread for them a repast where no crude surfeit reigned. Was there nothing in this scene, which God and nature alone witnessed, to interest a modern critic? What need was there of action, where the heart was full of bliss and innocence without it! They had nothing to do but feel their own happiness, and 'know to know no more.' 'They toiled not, neither did they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' All things seem to acquire fresh sweetness, and to be clothed with fresh beauty in their sight. They tasted as it were for themselves and us, of all that there ever was pure in human bliss. 'In them the burthen of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world, is lightened.' They stood awhile perfect, but they afterwards fell, and were driven out of Paradise, tasting the first fruits of bitterness as they had done of bliss. But their pangs were such as a pure spirit might feel at the sight —their tears 'such as angels weep.' The pathos is of that mild

contemplative kind which arises from regret for the loss of unspeakable happiness, and resignation to inevitable fate. There is none of the fierceness of intemperate passion, none of the agony of mind and turbulence of action, which is the result of the habitual struggles of the will with circumstances, irritated by repeated disappointment, and constantly setting its desires most eagerly on that which there is an impossibility of attaining. This would have destroyed the beauty of the whole picture. They had received their unlooked-for happiness as a free gift from their Creator's hands, and they submitted to its loss, not without sorrow, but without impious and stubborn repining.

'In either hand the hast'ning angel caught
Our ling'ring parents, and to th' eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain; then disappear'd.
They looking back, all th' eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Wav'd over by that flaming brand, the gate
With dreadful faces throng'd, and fiery arms:
Some natural tears they dropt, but wip'd them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.'

LECTURE IV

ON DRYDEN AND POPE

Dryden and Pope are the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language, as the poets of whom I have already treated, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton, were of the natural; and though this artificial style is generally and very justly acknowledged to be inferior to the other, yet those who stand at the head of that class, ought, perhaps, to rank higher than those who occupy an inferior place in a superior class. They have a clear and independent claim upon our gratitude, as having produced a kind and degree of excellence which existed equally nowhere else. What has been done well by some later writers of the highest style of poetry, is included in, and obscured by a greater degree of power and genius in those before them: what has been done best by poets of an entirely distinct turn of mind, stands by itself, and tells for its whole amount. Young, for instance, Gray, or Akenside, only follow in the train of Milton and Shakspeare: Pope and Dryden walk by their side, though of an unequal stature, and are entitled to a first place in the

lists of fame. This seems to be not only the reason of the thing, but the common sense of mankind, who, without any regular process of reflection, judge of the merit of a work, not more by its inherent and absolute worth, than by its originality and capacity of gratifying a different faculty of the mind, or a different class of readers; for it should be recollected, that there may be readers (as well as poets) not of the highest class, though very good sort of people, and not altogether to be despised.

The question, whether Pope was a poet, has hardly yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling; for if he was not a great poet, he must have been a great prose-writer, that is, he was a great writer of some sort. He was a man of exquisite faculties, and of the most refined taste; and as he chose verse (the most obvious distinction of poetry) as the vehicle to express his ideas, he has generally passed for a poet, and a good one. If, indeed, by a great poet, we mean one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart, Pope was not in this sense a great poet; for the bent, the characteristic power of his mind, lay the clean contrary way; namely, in representing things as they appear to the indifferent observer, stripped of prejudice and passion, as in his Critical Essays; or in representing them in the most contemptible and insignificant point of view, as in his Satires; or in clothing the little with mock-dignity, as in his poems of Fancy; or in adorning the trivial incidents and familiar relations of life with the utmost elegance of expression, and all the flattering illusions of friendship or self-love, as in his Epistles. He was not then distinguished as a poet of lofty enthusiasm, of strong imagination, with a passionate sense of the beauties of nature, or a deep insight into the workings of the heart; but he was a wit, and a critic, a man of sense, of observation, and the world, with a keen relish for the elegances of art, or of nature when embellished by art, a quick tact for propriety of thought and manners as established by the forms and customs of society, a refined sympathy with the sentiments and habitudes of human life, as he felt them within the little circle of his family and friends. He was, in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art; and the distinction between the two, as well as I can make it out, is this—The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature; to be identified with and to foreknow and to record the

feelings of all men at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions; and to exert the same power over the minds of his readers, that nature does. He sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they are; he feels them in their universal interest, for he feels them as they affect the first principles of his and our common nature. Such was Homer, such was Shakspeare, whose works will last as long as nature, because they are a copy of the indestructible forms and everlasting impulses of nature, welling out from the bosom as from a perennial spring, or stamped upon the senses by the hand of their maker. The power of the imagination in them, is the representative power of all nature. It has its centre in the human soul, and makes the circuit of the universe.

Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class, or in the first rank of it. He saw nature only dressed by art; he judged of beauty by fashion; he sought for truth in the opinions of the world; he judged of the feelings of others by his own. The capacious soul of Shakspeare had an intuitive and mighty sympathy with whatever could enter into the heart of man in all possible circumstances: Pope had an exact knowledge of all that he himself loved or hated, wished or wanted. Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth, through Chaos and old Night. Pope's Muse never wandered with safety, but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto into his library back again. His mind dwelt with greater pleasure on his own garden, than on the garden of Eden; he could describe the faultless whole-length mirror that reflected his own person, better than the smooth surface of the lake that reflects the face of heaven—a piece of cut glass or a pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect, than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun. He would be more delighted with a patent lamp, than with 'the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow,' that fills the skies with its soft silent lustre, that trembles through the cottage window, and cheers the watchful mariner on the lonely wave. In short, he was the poet of personality and of polished life. That which was nearest to him, was the greatest; the fashion of the day bore sway in his mind over the immutable laws of nature. He preferred the artificial to the natural in external objects, because he had a stronger fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or proprietor of a gewgaw, than admiration of that which was interesting to all mankind. He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he could not grapple; while he could trifle with the conventional and superficial modifications of mere sentiment at will, laugh at or admire, put them on or off like a masquerade-dress, make much or little of them,

indulge them for a longer or a shorter time, as he pleased; and because while they amused his fancy and exercised his ingenuity, they never once disturbed his vanity, his levity, or indifference. His mind was the antithesis of strength and grandeur; its power was the power of indifference. He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry; he was in poetry what the sceptic is in religion.

It cannot be denied, that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing, than in aggrandizing objects; in checking, not in encouraging our enthusiasm; in sneering at the extravagances of fancy or passion, instead of giving a loose to them; in describing a row of pins and needles, rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans; in penning a lampoon or a compliment, and in praising Martha Blount.

Shakspeare says,

> '————In Fortune's ray and brightness
> The herd hath more annoyance by the brize
> Than by the tyger: but when the splitting wind
> Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks,
> And flies fled under shade, why then
> The thing of courage,
> As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise;
> And with an accent tuned in the self-same key,
> Replies to chiding Fortune.'

There is none of this rough work in Pope. His Muse was on a peace-establishment, and grew somewhat effeminate by long ease and indulgence. He lived in the smiles of fortune, and basked in the favour of the great. In his smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries; its forked lightnings pointed sarcasms; for 'the gnarled oak,' he gives us 'the soft myrtle': for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plats, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills; for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower-pot, or the fall of a china jar; for the tug and war of the elements, or the deadly strife of the passions, we have

> 'Calm contemplation and poetic ease.'

Yet within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how exquisite, was contained! What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiment! It is like looking at the world through a microscope, where every thing assumes a new character and a new consequence, where things are seen in their

minutest circumstances and slightest shades of difference; where the little becomes gigantic, the deformed beautiful, and the beautiful deformed. The wrong end of the magnifier is, to be sure, held to every thing, but still the exhibition is highly curious, and we know not whether to be most pleased or surprised. Such, at least, is the best account I am able to give of this extraordinary man, without doing injustice to him or others. It is time to refer to particular instances in his works.—The Rape of the Lock is the best or most ingenious of these. It is the most exquisite specimen of *fillagree* work ever invented. It is admirable in proportion as it is made of nothing.

> 'More subtle web Arachne cannot spin,
> Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
> Of scorched dew, do not in th' air more lightly flee.'

It is made of gauze and silver spangles. The most glittering appearance is given to every thing, to paste, pomatum, billet-doux, and patches. Airs, languid airs, breathe around;—the atmosphere is perfumed with affectation. A toilette is described with the solemnity of an altar raised to the Goddess of vanity, and the history of a silver bodkin is given with all the pomp of heraldry. No pains are spared, no profusion of ornament, no splendour of poetic diction, to set off the meanest things. The balance between the concealed irony and the assumed gravity, is as nicely trimmed as the balance of power in Europe. The little is made great, and the great little. You hardly know whether to laugh or weep. It is the triumph of insignificance, the apotheosis of foppery and folly. It is the perfection of the mock-heroic! I will give only the two following passages in illustration of these remarks. Can any thing be more elegant and graceful than the description of Belinda, in the beginning of the second canto?

> 'Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,
> The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
> Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
> Launch'd on the bosom of the silver Thames.
> Fair nymphs, and well-drest youths around her shone,
> But ev'ry eye was fix'd on her alone.
> On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
> Which Jews might kiss, and infidels adore.
> Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
> Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those:
> Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
> Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
> Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike;
> And like the sun, they shine on all alike.

Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide:
If to her share some female errors fall,
Look on her face, and you 'll forget 'em all.

This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
Nourish'd two locks, which graceful hung behind
In equal curls, and well conspir'd to deck
With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck.'

The following is the introduction to the account of Belinda's assault upon the baron bold, who had dissevered one of these locks 'from her fair head for ever and for ever.'

'Now meet thy fate, incens'd Belinda cry'd,
And drew a deadly bodkin from her side.
(The same his ancient personage to deck,
Her great, great grandsire wore about his neck,
In three seal-rings; which after, melted down,
Form'd a vast buckle for his widow's gown:
Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,
The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew;
Then in a bodkin grac'd her mother's hairs,
Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears).'

I do not know how far Pope was indebted for the original idea, or the delightful execution of this poem, to the Lutrin of Boileau.

The Rape of the Lock is a double-refined essence of wit and fancy, as the Essay on Criticism is of wit and sense. The quantity of thought and observation in this work, for so young a man as Pope was when he wrote it, is wonderful: unless we adopt the supposition, that most men of genius spend the rest of their lives in teaching others what they themselves have learned under twenty. The conciseness and felicity of the expression are equally remarkable. Thus in reasoning on the variety of men's opinion, he says—

'Tis with our judgments, as our watches; none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.'

Nothing can be more original and happy than the general remarks and illustrations in the Essay: the critical rules laid down are too much those of a school, and of a confined one. There is one passage in the Essay on Criticism in which the author speaks with that eloquent enthusiasm of the fame of ancient writers, which those will always feel who have themselves any hope or chance of

immortality. I have quoted the passage elsewhere, but I will repeat it here.

> 'Still green with bays 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!
> Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
> As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow.'

These lines come with double force and beauty on the reader, as they were dictated by the writer's despair of ever attaining that lasting glory which he celebrates with such disinterested enthusiasm in others, from the lateness of the age in which he lived, and from his writing in a tongue, not understood by other nations, and that grows obsolete and unintelligible to ourselves at the end of every second century. But he needed not have thus antedated his own poetical doom—the loss and entire oblivion of that which can never die. If he had known, he might have boasted that 'his little bark' wafted down the stream of time,

> '—— —— With *theirs* should sail,
> Pursue the triumph and partake the gale'—

if those who know how to set a due value on the blessing, were not the last to decide confidently on their own pretensions to it.

There is a cant in the present day about genius, as every thing in poetry: there was a cant in the time of Pope about sense, as performing all sorts of wonders. It was a kind of watchword, the shibboleth of a critical party of the day. As a proof of the exclusive attention which it occupied in their minds, it is remarkable that in the Essay on Criticism (not a very long poem) there are no less than half a score successive couplets rhyming to the word *sense*. This appears almost incredible without giving the instances, and no less so when they are given.

> 'But of the two, less dangerous is the offence,
> To tire our patience than mislead our sense.'—*lines* 3, 4.
>
> 'In search of wit these lose their common sense,
> And then turn critics in their own defence.'—*l.* 28, 29.
>
> 'Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
> And fills up all the mighty void of sense.'—*l.* 209, 10.
>
> 'Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
> Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense.'—*l.* 324, 5.

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.'—*l.* 364, 5.

'At every trifle scorn to take offence;
That always shews great pride, or little sense.'—*l.* 386, 7.

'Be silent always, when you doubt your sense,
And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence.'—*l.* 366, 7

'Be niggards of advice on no pretence,
For the worst avarice is that of sense.'—*l.* 578, 9.

'Strain out the last dull dropping of their sense,
And rhyme with all the rage of impotence.'—*l.* 608, 9.

'Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into sense.'—*l.* 653, 4.

I have mentioned this the more for the sake of those critics who are bigotted idolisers of our author, chiefly on the score of his correctness. These persons seem to be of opinion that 'there is but one perfect writer, even Pope.' This is, however, a mistake: his excellence is by no means faultlessness. If he had no great faults, he is full of little errors. His grammatical construction is often lame and imperfect. In the Abelard and Eloise, he says—

'There died the best of passions, Love and Fame.'

This is not a legitimate ellipsis. Fame is not a passion, though love is: but his ear was evidently confused by the meeting of the sounds 'love and fame,' as if they of themselves immediately implied 'love, and love of fame.' Pope's rhymes are constantly defective, being rhymes to the eye instead of the ear; and this to a greater degree, not only than in later, but than in preceding writers. The praise of his versification must be confined to its uniform smoothness and harmony. In the translation of the Iliad, which has been considered as his masterpiece in style and execution, he continually changes the tenses in the same sentence for the purposes of the rhyme, which shews either a want of technical resources, or great inattention to punctilious exactness. But to have done with this.

The epistle of Eloise to Abelard is the only exception I can think of, to the general spirit of the foregoing remarks; and I should be disingenuous not to acknowledge that it is an exception. The foundation is in the letters themselves of Abelard and Eloise, which are quite as impressive, but still in a different way. It is fine as a poem: it is finer as a piece of high-wrought eloquence. No woman could be supposed to write a better love-letter in verse. Besides the richness of the historical materials, the high *gusto* of the original

sentiments which Pope had to work upon, there were perhaps circumstances in his own situation which made him enter into the subject with even more than a poet's feeling. The tears shed are drops gushing from the heart: the words are burning sighs breathed from the soul of love. Perhaps the poem to which it bears the greatest similarity in our language, is Dryden's Tancred and Sigismunda, taken from Boccaccio. Pope's Eloise will bear this comparison; and after such a test, with Boccaccio for the original author, and Dryden for the translator, it need shrink from no other. There is something exceedingly tender and beautiful in the sound of the concluding lines:

> 'If ever chance two wandering lovers brings
> To Paraclete's white walls and silver springs,' &c.

The Essay on Man is not Pope's best work. It is a theory which Bolingbroke is supposed to have given him, and which he expanded into verse. But 'he spins the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument.' All that he says, 'the very words, and to the self-same tune,' would prove just as well that whatever is, is *wrong*, as that whatever is, is *right*. The Dunciad has splendid passages, but in general it is dull, heavy, and mechanical. The sarcasm already quoted on Settle, the Lord Mayor's poet, (for at that time there was a city as well as a court poet)

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

is the finest inversion of immortality conceivable. It is even better than his serious apostrophe to the great heirs of glory, the triumphant bards of antiquity!

The finest burst of severe moral invective in all Pope, is the prophetical conclusion of the epilogue to the Satires:

> 'Virtue may chuse the high or low degree,
> 'Tis just alike to virtue, and to me;
> Dwell in a monk, or light upon a king,
> She 's still the same belov'd, contented thing.
> Vice is undone if she forgets her birth,
> And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth.
> But 'tis the Fall degrades her to a whore:
> Let Greatness own her, and she 's mean no more.
> Her birth, her beauty, crowds and courts confess,
> Chaste matrons praise her, and grave bishops bless;
> In golden chains the willing world she draws,
> And hers the gospel is, and hers the laws;

Mounts the tribunal, lifts her scarlet head,
And sees pale Virtue carted in her stead.
Lo! at the wheels of her triumphal car,
Old England's Genius, rough with many a scar,
Dragg'd in the dust! his arms hang idly round,
His flag inverted trains along the ground!
Our youth, all livery'd o'er with foreign gold,
Before her dance; behind her, crawl the old!
See thronging millions to the Pagod run,
And offer country, parent, wife, or son!
Hear her black trumpet through the land proclaim,
That *not to be corrupted is the shame.*
In soldier, churchman, patriot, man in pow'r,
'Tis av'rice all, ambition is no more!
See all our nobles begging to be slaves!
See all our fools aspiring to be knaves!
The wit of cheats, the courage of a whore,
Are what ten thousand envy and adore:
All, all look up with reverential awe,
At crimes that 'scape or triumph o'er the law;
While truth, worth, wisdom, daily they decry:
Nothing is sacred now but villainy.
Yet may this verse (if such a verse remain)
Show there was one who held it in disdain.'

His Satires are not in general so good as his Epistles. His enmity is effeminate and petulant from a sense of weakness, as his friendship was tender from a sense of gratitude. I do not like, for instance, his character of Chartres, or his characters of women. His delicacy often borders upon sickliness; his fastidiousness makes others fastidious. But his compliments are divine; they are equal in value to a house or an estate. Take the following. In addressing Lord Mansfield, he speaks of the grave as a scene,

'Where Murray, long enough his country's pride,
Shall be no more than Tully, or than Hyde.'

To Bolingbroke he says—

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

Again, he has bequeathed this praise to Lord Cornbury—

'Despise low thoughts, low gains:
Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains;
Be virtuous and be happy for your pains.'

One would think (though there is no knowing) that a descendant of

this nobleman, if there be such a person living, could hardly be guilty of a mean or paltry action.

The finest piece of personal satire in Pope (perhaps in the world) is his character of Addison; and this, it may be observed, is of a mixed kind, made up of his respect for the man, and a cutting sense of his failings. The other finest one is that of Buckingham, and the best part of that is the pleasurable.

> '—— Alas! how changed from him,
> That life of pleasure and that soul of whim:
> Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,
> The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love!'

Among his happiest and most inimitable effusions are the Epistles to Arbuthnot, and to Jervas the painter; amiable patterns of the delightful unconcerned life, blending ease with dignity, which poets and painters then led. Thus he says to Arbuthnot—

> 'Why did I write? What sin to me unknown
> Dipp'd me in ink, my parents' or my own?
> As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
> I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.
> I left no calling for this idle trade,
> No duty broke, no father disobey'd:
> The muse but serv'd to ease some friend, not wife;
> To help me through this long disease, my life,
> To second, Arbuthnot! thy art and care,
> And teach the being you preserv'd to bear.
>
> But why then publish? Granville the polite,
> And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;
> Well-natur'd Garth inflam'd with early praise,
> And Congreve lov'd, and Swift endur'd my lays;
> The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read;
> E'en mitred Rochester would nod the head;
> And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
> With open arms receiv'd one poet more.
> Happy my studies, when by these approv'd!
> Happier their author, when by these belov'd!
> From these the world will judge of men and books,
> Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks.'

I cannot help giving also the conclusion of the Epistle to Jervas.

> 'Oh, lasting as those colours may they shine,
> Free as thy stroke, yet faultless as thy line;
> New graces yearly like thy works display,
> Soft without weakness, without glaring gay;

Led by some rule, that guides, but not constrains;
And finish'd more through happiness than pains.
The kindred arts shall in their praise conspire,
One dip the pencil, and one string the lyre.
Yet should the Graces all thy figures place,
And breathe an air divine on ev'ry face;
Yet should the Muses bid my numbers roll
Strong as their charms, and gentle as their soul;
With Zeuxis' Helen thy Bridgewater vie,
And these be sung till Granville's Myra die:
Alas! how little from the grave we claim!
Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name.'

And shall we cut ourselves off from beauties like these with a theory? Shall we shut up our books, and seal up our senses, to please the dull spite and inordinate vanity of those 'who have eyes, but they see not—ears, but they hear not—and understandings, but they understand not,'—and go about asking our blind guides, whether Pope was a poet or not? It will never do. Such persons, when you point out to them a fine passage in Pope, turn it off to something of the same sort in some other writer. Thus they say that the line, 'I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came,' is pretty, but taken from that of Ovid—*Et quum conabar scribere, versus erat.* They are safe in this mode of criticism: there is no danger of any one's tracing their writings to the classics.

Pope's letters and prose writings neither take away from, nor add to his poetical reputation. There is, occasionally, a littleness of manner, and an unnecessary degree of caution. He appears anxious to say a good thing in every word, as well as every sentence. They, however, give a very favourable idea of his moral character in all respects; and his letters to Atterbury, in his disgrace and exile, do equal honour to both. If I had to choose, there are one or two persons, and but one or two, that I should like to have been better than Pope!

Dryden was a better prose-writer, and a bolder and more varied versifier than Pope. He was a more vigorous thinker, a more correct and logical declaimer, and had more of what may be called strength of mind than Pope; but he had not the same refinement and delicacy of feeling. Dryden's eloquence and spirit were possessed in a higher degree by others, and in nearly the same degree by Pope himself; but that by which Pope was distinguished, was an essence which he alone possessed, and of incomparable value on that sole account. Dryden's Epistles are excellent, but inferior to Pope's, though they appear (particularly the admirable one to Congreve) to have been the model on which the latter formed his. His Satires

are better than Pope's. His Absalom and Achitophel is superior, both in force of invective and discrimination of character, to any thing of Pope's in the same way. The character of Achitophel is very fine; and breathes, if not a sincere love for virtue, a strong spirit of indignation against vice.

Mac Flecknoe is the origin of the idea of the Dunciad; but it is less elaborately constructed, less feeble, and less heavy. The difference between Pope's satirical portraits and Dryden's, appears to be this in a good measure, that Dryden seems to grapple with his antagonists, and to describe real persons; Pope seems to refine upon them in his own mind, and to make them out just what he pleases, till they are not real characters, but the mere driveling effusions of his spleen and malice. Pope describes the thing, and then goes on describing his own description till he loses himself in verbal repetitions. Dryden recurs to the object often, takes fresh sittings of nature, and gives us new strokes of character as well as of his pencil. The Hind and Panther is an allegory as well as a satire; and so far it tells less home; the battery is not so point-blank. But otherwise it has more genius, vehemence, and strength of description than any other of Dryden's works, not excepting the Absalom and Achitophel. It also contains the finest examples of varied and sounding versification. I will quote the following as an instance of what I mean. He is complaining of the treatment which the Papists, under James II. received from the church of England.

'Besides these jolly birds, whose corpse impure
Repaid their commons with their salt manure,
Another farm he had behind his house,
Not overstocked, but barely for his use;
Wherein his poor domestic poultry fed,
And from his pious hand 'received their bread.'
Our pampered pigeons, with malignant eyes,
Beheld these inmates, and their nurseries;
Though hard their fare, at evening, and at morn,
(A cruise of water, and an ear of corn,)
Yet still they grudged that *modicum*, and thought
A sheaf in every single grain was brought.
Fain would they filch that little food away,
While unrestrained those happy gluttons prey;
And much they grieved to see so nigh their hall,
The bird that warned St. Peter of his fall;
That he should raise his mitred crest on high,
And clap his wings, and call his family
To sacred rites; and vex the ethereal powers
With midnight mattins at uncivil hours;

Nay more, his quiet neighbours should molest,
Just in the sweetness of their morning rest.
Beast of a bird! supinely when he might
Lie snug and sleep, to rise before the light!
What if his dull forefathers us'd that cry,
Could he not let a bad example die?
The world was fallen into an easier way:
This age knew better than to fast and pray.
Good sense in sacred worship would appear,
So to begin as they might end the year.
Such feats in former times had wrought the falls
Of crowing chanticleers in cloister'd walls.
Expell'd for this, and for their lands they fled;
And sister Partlet with her hooded head
Was hooted hence, because she would not pray a-bed.'

There is a magnanimity of abuse in some of these epithets, a fearless choice of topics of invective, which may be considered as the heroical in satire.

The Annus Mirabilis is a tedious performance; it is a tissue of far-fetched, heavy, lumbering conceits, and in the worst style of what has been denominated metaphysical poetry. His Odes in general are of the same stamp; they are the hard-strained offspring of a meagre, meretricious fancy. The famous Ode on St. Cecilia deserves its reputation; for, as a piece of poetical mechanism to be set to music, or recited in alternate strophe and antistrophe, with classical allusions, and flowing verse, nothing can be better. It is equally fit to be said or sung; it is not equally good to read. It is lyrical, without being epic or dramatic. For instance, the description of Bacchus,

The jolly god in triumph comes,
Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;
Flush'd with a purple grace,
He shews his honest face'—

does not answer, as it ought, to our idea of the God, returning from the conquest of India, with satyrs and wild beasts, that he had tamed, following in his train; crowned with vine leaves, and riding in a chariot drawn by leopards—such as we have seen him painted by Titian or Rubens! Lyrical poetry, of all others, bears the nearest resemblance to painting: it deals in hieroglyphics and passing figures, which depend for effect, not on the working out, but on the selection. It is the dance and pantomime of poetry. In variety and rapidity of movement, the Alexander's Feast has all that can be required in this respect; it only wants loftiness and truth of character.

Dryden's plays are better than Pope could have written; for

though he does not go out of himself by the force of imagination, he goes out of himself by the force of common-places and rhetorical dialogue. On the other hand, they are not so good as Shakspeare's; but he has left the best character of Shakspeare that has ever been written.[1]

His alterations from Chaucer and Boccaccio shew a greater knowledge of the taste of his readers and power of pleasing them, than acquaintance with the genius of his authors. He ekes out the lameness of the verse in the former, and breaks the force of the passion in both. The Tancred and Sigismunda is the only general exception, in which, I think, he has fully retained, if not improved upon, the impassioned declamation of the original. The Honoria has none of the bewildered, dreary, preternatural effect of Boccaccio's story. Nor has the Flower and the Leaf any thing of the enchanting simplicity and concentrated feeling of Chaucer's romantic fiction. Dryden, however, sometimes seemed to indulge himself as well as his readers, as in keeping entire that noble line in Palamon's address to Venus:

'Thou gladder of the mount of Cithæron!'

His Tales have been, upon the whole, the most popular of his works; and I should think that a translation of some of the other serious tales in Boccaccio and Chaucer, as that of Isabella, the Falcon, of Constance, the Prioress's Tale, and others, if executed with taste and spirit, could not fail to succeed in the present day.

It should appear, in tracing the history of our literature, that poetry had, at the period of which we are speaking, in general declined, by successive gradations, from the poetry of imagination, in the time of Elizabeth, to the poetry of fancy (to adopt a modern distinction) in the time of Charles I.; and again from the poetry of fancy to that of wit, as in the reign of Charles II. and Queen Anne. It degenerated into the poetry of mere common places, both in style

[1] 'To begin then with Shakspeare: he was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned: he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say, he is every where alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him. No man can say, he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter Viburna Cupressi.'

and thought, in the succeeding reigns: as in the latter part of the last century, it was transformed, by means of the French Revolution, into the poetry of paradox.

Of Donne I know nothing but some beautiful verses to his wife, dissuading her from accompanying him on his travels abroad, and some quaint riddles in verse, which the Sphinx could not unravel.

Waller still lives in the name of Sacharissa; and his lines on the death of Oliver Cromwell shew that he was a man not without genius and strength of thought.

Marvel is a writer of nearly the same period, and worthy of a better age. Some of his verses are harsh, as the words of Mercury; others musical, as is Apollo's lute. Of the latter kind are his boat-song, his description of a fawn, and his lines to Lady Vere. His lines prefixed to Paradise Lost are by no means the most favourable specimen of his powers.

Butler's Hudibras is a poem of more wit than any other in the language. The rhymes have as much genius in them as the thoughts; but there is no story in it, and but little humour. Humour is the making others act or talk absurdly and unconsciously: wit is the pointing out and ridiculing that absurdity consciously, and with more or less ill-nature. The fault of Butler's poem is not that it has too much wit, but that it has not an equal quantity of other things. One would suppose that the starched manners and sanctified grimace of the times in which he lived, would of themselves have been sufficiently rich in ludicrous incidents and characters; but they seem rather to have irritated his spleen, than to have drawn forth his powers of picturesque imitation. Certainly if we compare Hudibras with Don Quixote in this respect, it seems rather a meagre and unsatisfactory performance.

Rochester's poetry is the poetry of wit combined with the love of pleasure, of thought with licentiousness. His extravagant heedless levity has a sort of passionate enthusiasm in it; his contempt for every thing that others respect, almost amounts to sublimity. His poem upon Nothing is itself no trifling work. His epigrams were the bitterest, the least laboured, and the truest, that ever were written.

Sir John Suckling was of the same mercurial stamp, but with a greater fund of animal spirits; as witty, but less malicious. His Ballad on a Wedding is perfect in its kind, and has a spirit of high enjoyment in it, of sportive fancy, a liveliness of description, and a truth of nature, that never were surpassed. It is superior to either Gay or Prior; for with all their *naïveté* and terseness, it has a Shakspearian grace and luxuriance about it, which they could not have reached.

Denham and Cowley belong to the same period, but were quite distinct from each other: the one was grave and prosing, the other melancholy and fantastical. There are a number of good lines and good thoughts in the Cooper's Hill. And in Cowley there is an inexhaustible fund of sense and ingenuity, buried in inextricable conceits, and entangled in the cobwebs of the schools. He was a great man, not a great poet. But I shall say no more on this subject. I never wish to meddle with names that are sacred, unless when they stand in the way of things that are more sacred.

Withers is a name now almost forgotten, and his works seldom read; but his poetry is not unfrequently distinguished by a tender and pastoral turn of thought; and there is one passage of exquisite feeling, describing the consolations of poetry in the following terms:

'She doth tell me where to borrow
Comfort in the midst of sorrow;
Makes the desolatest place[1]
To her presence be a grace;
And the blackest discontents
Be her fairest ornaments.
In my former days of bliss
Her divine skill taught me this,
That from every thing I saw,
I could some invention draw;
And raise pleasure to her height,
Through the meanest object's sight,
By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rusteling,
By a daisy whose leaves spread
Shut when Titan goes to bed;
Or a shady bush or tree,
She could more infuse in me,
Than all Nature's beauties can,
In some other wiser man.
By her help I also now
Make this churlish place allow
Some things that may sweeten gladness
In the very gall of sadness.
The dull loneness, the black shade,
That these hanging vaults have made,
The strange music of the waves,
Beating on these hollow caves,
This black den which rocks emboss,
Overgrown with eldest moss,
The rude portals that give light
More to terror than delight,

[1] Written in the Fleet Prison.

This my chamber of neglect,
Wall'd about with disrespect,
From all these and this dull air,
A fit object for despair,
She hath taught me by her might
To draw comfort and delight.
Therefore, thou best earthly bliss,
I will cherish thee for this.
Poesie; thou sweet'st content
That ere Heav'n to mortals lent:
Though they as a trifle leave thee,
Whose dull thoughts cannot conceive thee,
Though thou be to them a scorn,
That to nought but earth are born:
Let my life no longer be
Than I am in love with thee.
Though our wise ones call thee madness,
Let me never taste of sadness,
If I love not thy maddest fits,
Above all their greatest wits.
And though some too seeming holy,
Do account thy raptures folly,
Thou dost teach me to contemn
What makes knaves and fools of them.'

LECTURE V

ON THOMSON AND COWPER

Thomson, the kind-hearted Thomson, was the most indolent of mortals and of poets. But he was also one of the best both of mortals and of poets. Dr. Johnson makes it his praise that he wrote 'no line which dying he would wish to blot.' Perhaps a better proof of his honest simplicity, and inoffensive goodness of disposition, would be that he wrote no line which any other person living would wish that he should blot. Indeed, he himself wished, on his death-bed, formally to expunge his dedication of one of the Seasons to that finished courtier, and candid biographer of his own life, Bub Doddington. As critics, however, not as moralists, we might say on the other hand—'Would he had blotted a thousand!'—The same suavity of temper and sanguine warmth of feeling which threw such a natural grace and genial spirit of enthusiasm over his poetry, was also the cause of its inherent vices and defects. He is affected through carelessness: pompous from unsuspecting simplicity of

character. He is frequently pedantic and ostentatious in his style, because he had no consciousness of these vices in himself. He mounts upon stilts, not out of vanity, but indolence. He seldom writes a good line, but he makes up for it by a bad one. He takes advantage of all the most trite and mechanical common-places of imagery and diction as a kindly relief to his Muse, and as if he thought them quite as good, and likely to be quite as acceptable to the reader, as his own poetry. He did not think the difference worth putting himself to the trouble of accomplishing. He had too little art to conceal his art: or did not even seem to know that there was any occasion for it. His art is as naked and undisguised as his nature; the one is as pure and genuine as the other is gross, gaudy, and meretricious.—All that is admirable in the Seasons, is the emanation of a fine natural genius, and sincere love of his subject, unforced, unstudied, that comes uncalled for, and departs unbidden. But he takes no pains, uses no self-correction; or if he seems to labour, it is worse than labour lost. His genius 'cannot be constrained by mastery.' The feeling of nature, of the changes of the seasons, was in his mind; and he could not help conveying this feeling to the reader, by the mere force of spontaneous expression; but if the expression did not come of itself, he left the whole business to chance; or, willing to evade instead of encountering the difficulties of his subject, fills up the intervals of true inspiration with the most vapid and worthless materials, pieces out a beautiful half line with a bombastic allusion, or overloads an exquisitely natural sentiment or image with a cloud of painted, pompous, cumbrous phrases, like the shower of roses, in which he represents the Spring, his own lovely, fresh, and innocent Spring, as descending to the earth.

> 'Come, gentle Spring! ethereal Mildness! come,
> And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud,
> While music wakes around, veil'd in a shower
> Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend.'

Who, from such a flimsy, round-about, unmeaning commencement as this, would expect the delightful, unexaggerated, home-felt descriptions of natural scenery, which are scattered in such unconscious profusion through this and the following cantos? For instance, the very next passage is crowded with a set of striking images.

> 'And see where surly Winter passes off
> Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts:
> His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
> The shatter'd forest, and the ravag'd vale;
> While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch

Dissolving snows in livid torrents lost,
The mountains lift their green heads to the sky.
As yet the trembling year is unconfirmed,
And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
Deform the day delightless; so that scarce
The bittern knows his time with bill ingulpht
To shake the sounding marsh, or from the shore
The plovers when to scatter o'er the heath,
And sing their wild notes to the list'ning waste.'

Thomson is the best of our descriptive poets: for he gives most of the poetry of natural description. Others have been quite equal to him, or have surpassed him, as Cowper for instance, in the picturesque part of his art, in marking the peculiar features and curious details of objects;—no one has yet come up to him in giving the sum total of their effects, their varying influences on the mind. He does not go into the *minutiæ* of a landscape, but describes the vivid impression which the whole makes upon his own imagination; and thus transfers the same unbroken, unimpaired impression to the imagination of his readers. The colours with which he paints seem yet wet and breathing, like those of the living statue in the Winter's Tale. Nature in his descriptions is seen growing around us, fresh and lusty as in itself. We feel the effect of the atmosphere, its humidity or clearness, its heat or cold, the glow of summer, the gloom of winter, the tender promise of the spring, the full overshadowing foliage, the declining pomp and deepening tints of autumn. He transports us to the scorching heat of vertical suns, or plunges us into the chilling horrors and desolation of the frozen zone. We hear the snow drifting against the broken casement without, and see the fire blazing on the hearth within. The first scattered drops of a vernal shower patter on the leaves above our heads, or the coming storm resounds through the leafless groves. In a word, he describes not to the eye alone, but to the other senses, and to the whole man. He puts his heart into his subject, writes as he feels, and humanises whatever he touches. He makes all his descriptions teem with life and vivifying soul. His faults were those of his style—of the author and the man; but the original genius of the poet, the pith and marrow of his imagination, the fine natural mould in which his feelings were bedded, were too much for him to counteract by neglect, or affectation, or false ornaments. It is for this reason that he is, perhaps, the most popular of all our poets, treating of a subject that all can understand, and in a way that is interesting to all alike, to the ignorant or the refined, because he gives back the impression which the things

themselves make upon us in nature. 'That,' said a man of genius, seeing a little shabby soiled copy of Thomson's Seasons lying on the window-seat of an obscure country alehouse—'That is true fame!'

It has been supposed by some, that the Castle of Indolence is Thomson's best poem; but that is not the case. He has in it, indeed, poured out the whole soul of indolence, diffuse, relaxed, supine, dissolved into a voluptuous dream; and surrounded himself with a set of objects and companions, in entire unison with the listlessness of his own temper. Nothing can well go beyond the descriptions of these inmates of the place, and their luxurious pampered way of life—of him who came among them like 'a burnished fly in month of June,' but soon left them on his heedless way; and him,

> 'For whom the merry bells had rung, I ween,
> If in this nook of quiet, bells had ever been.'

The in-door quiet and cushioned ease, where 'all was one full-swelling bed'; the out-of-door stillness, broken only by 'the stock-dove's plaint amid the forest deep,'

> 'That drowsy rustled to the sighing gale'—

are in the most perfect and delightful keeping. But still there are no passages in this exquisite little production of sportive ease and fancy, equal to the best of those in the Seasons. Warton, in his Essay on Pope, was the first to point out and do justice to some of these; for instance, to the description of the effects of the contagion among our ships at Carthagena—'of the frequent corse heard nightly plunged amid the sullen waves,' and to the description of the pilgrims lost in the deserts of Arabia. This last passage, profound and striking as it is, is not free from those faults of style which I have already noticed.

> '———Breath'd hot
> From all the boundless furnace of the sky,
> And the wide-glitt'ring waste of burning sand,
> A suffocating wind the pilgrim smites
> With instant death. Patient of thirst and toil,
> Son of the desert, ev'n the camel feels
> Shot through his wither'd heart the fiery blast.
> Or from the black-red ether, bursting broad,
> Sallies the sudden whirlwind. Straight the sands,
> Commov'd around, in gath'ring eddies play;
> Nearer and nearer still they dark'ning come,
> Till with the gen'ral all-involving storm
> Swept up, the whole continuous wilds arise,
> And by their noon-day fount dejected thrown,

Or sunk at night in sad disastrous sleep,
Beneath descending hills the caravan
Is buried deep. In Cairo's crowded streets,
Th' impatient merchant, wond'ring, waits in vain ;
And Mecca saddens at the long delay.'

There are other passages of equal beauty with these ; such as that of the hunted stag, followed by 'the inhuman rout,'

'———That from the shady depth
Expel him, circling through his ev'ry shift.
He sweeps the forest oft, and sobbing sees
The glades mild op'ning to the golden day,
Where in kind contest with his butting friends
He wont to struggle, or his loves enjoy.'

The whole of the description of the frozen zone, in the Winter, is perhaps even finer and more thoroughly felt, as being done from early associations, that that of the torrid zone in his Summer. Any thing more beautiful than the following account of the Siberian exiles is, I think, hardly to be found in the whole range of poetry.

'There through the prison of unbounded wilds,
Barr'd by the hand of nature from escape,
Wide roams the Russian exile. Nought around
Strikes his sad eye but deserts lost in snow,
And heavy-loaded groves, and solid floods,
That stretch athwart the solitary vast
Their icy horrors to the frozen main ;
And cheerless towns far distant, never bless'd,
Save when its annual course the caravan
Bends to the golden coast of rich Cathay,
With news of human kind.'

The feeling of loneliness, of distance, of lingering, slow-revolving years of pining expectation, of desolation within and without the heart, was never more finely expressed than it is here.

The account which follows of the employments of the Polar night —of the journeys of the natives by moonlight, drawn by rein-deer, and of the return of spring in Lapland—

'Where pure Niemi's fairy mountains rise,
And fring'd with roses Tenglio rolls his stream,'

is equally picturesque and striking in a different way. The traveller lost in the snow, is a well-known and admirable dramatic episode. I prefer, however, giving one example of our author's skill in painting common domestic scenery, as it will bear a more immediate comparison with the style of some later writers on such subjects. It is of

little consequence what passage we take. The following description of the first setting in of winter is, perhaps, as pleasing as any.

'Through the hush'd air the whitening shower descends,
At first thin wav'ring, till at last the flakes
Fall broad and wide, and fast, dimming the day
With a continual flow. The cherish'd fields
Put on their winter-robe of purest white:
'Tis brightness all, save where the new snow melts
Along the mazy current. Low the woods
Bow their hoar head; and ere the languid Sun,
Faint, from the West emits his ev'ning ray,
Earth's universal face, deep hid, and chill,
Is one wide dazzling waste, that buries wide
The works of man. Drooping, the lab'rer-ox
Stands cover'd o'er with snow, and then demands
The fruit of all his toil. The fowls of heav'n,
Tam'd by the cruel season, crowd around
The winnowing store, and claim the little boon
Which Providence assigns them. One alone,
The red-breast, sacred to the household Gods,
Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky,
In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves
His shivering mates, and pays to trusted man
His annual visit. Half-afraid, he first
Against the window beats; then, brisk, alights
On the warm hearth; then hopping o'er the floor,
Eyes all the smiling family askance,
And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is:
Till more familiar grown, the table-crumbs
Attract his slender feet. The foodless wilds
Pour forth their brown inhabitants. The hare,
Though timorous of heart, and hard beset
By death in various forms, dark snares and dogs,
And more unpitying men, the garden seeks,
Urg'd on by fearless want. The bleating kind
Eye the bleak heav'n, and next, the glist'ning earth,
With looks of dumb despair; then, sad dispers'd,
Dig for the wither'd herb through heaps of snow.'

It is thus that Thomson always gives a *moral sense* to nature.

Thomson's blank verse is not harsh, or utterly untuneable; but it is heavy and monotonous; it seems always labouring up-hill. The selections which have been made from his works in Enfield's Speaker, and other books of extracts, do not convey the most favourable idea of his genius or taste; such as Palemon and Lavinia, Damon and Musidora, Celadon and Amelia. Those parts of any author which are most liable to be stitched in worsted, and framed and

glazed, are not by any means always the best. The moral descriptions and reflections in the Seasons are in an admirable spirit, and written with great force and fervour.

His poem on Liberty is not equally good: his Muse was too easy and good-natured for the subject, which required as much indignation against unjust and arbitrary power, as complacency in the constitutional monarchy, under which, just after the expulsion of the Stuarts and the establishment of the House of Hanover, in contempt of the claims of hereditary pretenders to the throne, Thomson lived. Thomson was but an indifferent hater; and the most indispensable part of the love of liberty has unfortunately hitherto been the hatred of tyranny. Spleen is the soul of patriotism, and of public good: but you would not expect a man who has been seen eating peaches off a tree with both hands in his waistcoat pockets, to be 'overrun with the spleen,' or to heat himself needlessly about an abstract proposition.

His plays are liable to the same objection. They are never acted, and seldom read. The author could not, or would not, put himself out of his way, to enter into the situations and passions of others, particularly of a tragic kind. The subject of Tancred and Sigismunda, which is taken from a serious episode in Gil Blas, is an admirable one, but poorly handled: the ground may be considered as still unoccupied.

Cowper, whom I shall speak of in this connection, lived at a considerable distance of time after Thomson; and had some advantages over him, particularly in simplicity of style, in a certain precision and minuteness of graphical description, and in a more careful and leisurely choice of such topics only as his genius and peculiar habits of mind prompted him to treat of. The Task has fewer blemishes than the Seasons; but it has not the same capital excellence, the 'unbought grace' of poetry, the power of moving and infusing the warmth of the author's mind into that of the reader. If Cowper had a more polished taste, Thomson had, beyond comparison, a more fertile genius, more impulsive force, a more entire forgetfulness of himself in his subject. If in Thomson you are sometimes offended with the slovenliness of the author by profession, determined to get through his task at all events; in Cowper you are no less dissatisfied with the finicalness of the private gentleman, who does not care whether he completes his work or not; and in whatever he does, is evidently more solicitous to please himself than the public. There is an effeminacy about him, which shrinks from and repels common and hearty sympathy. With all his boasted simplicity and love of the country, he seldom launches out into general descriptions of nature: he looks at her over his clipped hedges, and from his well-swept

garden-walks; or if he makes a bolder experiment now and then, it is with an air of precaution, as if he were afraid of being caught in a shower of rain, or of not being able, in case of any untoward accident, to make good his retreat home. He shakes hands with nature with a pair of fashionable gloves on, and leads 'his Vashti' forth to public view with a look of consciousness and attention to etiquette, as a fine gentleman hands a lady out to dance a minuet. He is delicate to fastidiousness, and glad to get back, after a romantic adventure with crazy Kate, a party of gypsies or a little child on a common, to the drawing room and the ladies again, to the sofa and the tea-kettle—No, I beg his pardon, not to the singing, well-scoured tea-kettle, but to the polished and loud-hissing urn. His walks and arbours are kept clear of worms and snails, with as much an appearance of *petit-maitreship* as of humanity. He has some of the sickly sensibility and pampered refinements of Pope; but then Pope prided himself in them: whereas, Cowper affects to be all simplicity and plainness. He had neither Thomson's love of the unadorned beauties of nature, nor Pope's exquisite sense of the elegances of art. He was, in fact, a nervous man, afraid of trusting himself to the seductions of the one, and ashamed of putting forward his pretensions to an intimacy with the other: but to be a coward, is not the way to succeed either in poetry, in war, or in love! Still he is a genuine poet, and deserves all his reputation. His worst vices are amiable weaknesses, elegant trifling. Though there is a frequent dryness, timidity, and jejuneness in his manner, he has left a number of pictures of domestic comfort and social refinement, as well as of natural imagery and feeling, which can hardly be forgotten but with the language itself. Such, among others, are his memorable description of the post coming in, that of the preparations for tea in a winter's evening in the country, of the unexpected fall of snow, of the frosty morning (with the fine satirical transition to the Empress of Russia's palace of ice), and most of all, the winter's walk at noon. Every one of these may be considered as distinct studies, or highly finished cabinet-pieces, arranged without order or coherence. I shall be excused for giving the last of them, as what has always appeared to me one of the most feeling, elegant, and perfect specimens of this writer's manner.

> 'The night was winter in his roughest mood;
> The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon
> Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
> And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
> The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
> And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue.

Without a cloud, and white without a speck
The dazzling splendour of the scene below.
Again the harmony comes o'er the vale;
And through the trees I view th' embattled tow'r,
Whence all the music. I again perceive
The soothing influence of the wafted strains,
And settle in soft musings as I tread
The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms,
Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.
The roof, though moveable through all its length,
As the wind sways it, has yet well suffic'd,
And, intercepting in their silent fall
The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me.
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.
The redbreast warbles still, but is content
With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd.
Pleas'd with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes
From many a twig the pendent drop of ice,
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below.
Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,
Charms more than silence. Meditation here
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
May give a useful lesson to the head,
And Learning wiser grow without his books.
Knowledge and Wisdom, far from being one,
Have oft-times no connection. Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
Books are not seldom talismans and spells,
By which the magic art of shrewder wits
Holds an unthinking multitude enthrall'd.
Some to the fascination of a name
Surrender judgment hood-wink'd. Some the style
Infatuates, and through labyrinths and wilds
Of error leads them, by a tune entranc'd,
While sloth seduces more, too weak to bear
The insupportable fatigue of thought,
And swallowing therefore without pause or choice
The total grist unsifted, husks and all.
But trees, and rivulets whose rapid course
Defies the check of winter, haunts of deer,
And sheep-walks populous with bleating lambs,
And lanes, in which the primrose ere her time
Peeps through the moss that clothes the hawthorn root,
Deceive no student. Wisdom there, and truth,
Not shy, as in the world, and to be won
By slow solicitation, seize at once
The roving thought, and fix it on themselves.'

His satire is also excellent. It is pointed and forcible, with the polished manners of the gentleman, and the honest indignation of the virtuous man. His religious poetry, except where it takes a tincture of controversial heat, wants elevation and fire. His Muse had not a seraph's wing. I might refer, in illustration of this opinion, to the laboured anticipation of the Millennium at the end of the sixth book. He could describe a piece of shell-work as well as any modern poet: but he could not describe the New Jerusalem so well as John Bunyan;—nor are his verses on Alexander Selkirk so good as Robinson Crusoe. The one is not so much like a vision, nor is the other so much like the reality.

The first volume of Cowper's poems has, however, been less read than it deserved. The comparison in these poems of the proud and humble believer to the peacock and the pheasant, and the parallel between Voltaire and the poor cottager, are exquisite pieces of eloquence and poetry, particularly the last.

> 'Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
> Pillow and bobbins all her little store;
> Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
> Shuffling her threads about the live-long day,
> Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night,
> Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light;
> She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
> Has little understanding, and no wit,
> Receives no praise; but, though her lot be such,
> (Toilsome and indigent) she renders much;
> Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—
> A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;
> And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes
> Her title to a treasure in the skies.
>
> O happy peasant! Oh unhappy bard!
> His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward;
> He prais'd, perhaps, for ages yet to come,
> She never heard of half a mile from home:
> He lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
> She safe in the simplicity of hers.'

His character of Whitfield, in the poem on Hope, is one of his most spirited and striking things. It is written *con amore*.

> 'But if, unblameable in word and thought,
> A man arise, a man whom God has taught,
> With all Elijah's dignity of tone,
> And all the love of the beloved John,
> To storm the citadels they build in air,
> To smite the untemper'd wall ('tis death to spare,)

To sweep away all refuges of lies,
And place, instead of quirks, themselves devise,
Lama Sabachthani before their eyes;
To show that without Christ all gain is loss,
All hope despair that stands not on his cross;
Except a few his God may have impressed,
A tenfold phrensy seizes all the rest.'

These lines were quoted, soon after their appearance, by the Monthly Reviewers, to shew that Cowper was no poet, though they afterwards took credit to themselves for having been the first to introduce his verses to the notice of the public. It is not a little remarkable that these same critics regularly damned, at its first coming out, every work which has since acquired a standard reputation with the public. —Cowper's verses on his mother's picture, and his lines to Mary, are some of the most pathetic that ever were written. His stanzas on the loss of the Royal George have a masculine strength and feeling beyond what was usual with him. The story of John Gilpin has perhaps given as much pleasure to as many people as any thing of the same length that ever was written.

His life was an unhappy one. It was embittered by a morbid affection, and by his religious sentiments. Nor are we to wonder at this, or bring it as a charge against religion; for it is the nature of the poetical temperament to carry every thing to excess, whether it be love, religion, pleasure, or pain, as we may see in the case of Cowper and of Burns, and to find torment or rapture in that in which others merely find a resource from *ennui*, or a relaxation from common occupation.

There are two poets still living who belong to the same class of excellence, and of whom I shall here say a few words; I mean Crabbe, and Robert Bloomfield, the author of the Farmer's Boy. As a painter of simple natural scenery, and of the still life of the country, few writers have more undeniable and unassuming pretensions than the ingenious and self-taught poet, last-mentioned. Among the sketches of this sort I would mention, as equally distinguished for delicacy, faithfulness, and *naïveté*, his description of lambs racing, of the pigs going out an acorning, of the boy sent to feed his sheep before the break of day in winter; and I might add the innocently told story of the poor bird-boy, who in vain through the live-long day expects his promised companions at his hut, to share his feast of roasted sloes with him, as an example of that humble pathos, in which this author excels. The fault indeed of his genius is that it is too humble: his Muse has something not only rustic, but menial in her aspect. He seems afraid of elevating

nature, lest she should be ashamed of him. Bloomfield very beautifully describes the lambs in springtime as racing round the hillocks of green turf: Thomson, in describing the same image, makes the mound of earth the remains of an old Roman encampment. Bloomfield never gets beyond his own experience; and that is somewhat confined. He gives the simple appearance of nature, but he gives it naked, shivering, and unclothed with the drapery of a moral imagination. His poetry has much the effect of the first approach of spring, 'while yet the year is unconfirmed,' where a few tender buds venture forth here and there, but are chilled by the early frosts and nipping breath of poverty.—It should seem from this and other instances that have occurred within the last century, that we cannot expect from original genius alone, without education, in modern and more artificial periods, the same bold and independent results as in former periods. And one reason appears to be, that though such persons, from whom we might at first expect a restoration of the good old times of poetry, are not encumbered and enfeebled by the trammels of custom, and the dull weight of other men's ideas; yet they are oppressed by the consciousness of a want of the common advantages which others have; are looking at the tinsel finery of the age, while they neglect the rich unexplored mine in their own breasts; and instead of setting an example for the world to follow, spend their lives in aping, or in the despair of aping, the hackneyed accomplishments of their inferiors. Another cause may be, that original genius alone is not sufficient to produce the highest excellence, without a corresponding state of manners, passions, and religious belief: that no single mind can move in direct opposition to the vast machine of the world around it; that the poet can do no more than stamp the mind of his age upon his works; and that all that the ambition of the highest genius can hope to arrive at, after the lapse of one or two generations, is the perfection of that more refined and effeminate style of studied elegance and adventitious ornament, which is the result, not of nature, but of art. In fact, no other style of poetry has succeeded, or seems likely to succeed, in the present day. The public taste hangs like a millstone round the neck of all original genius that does not conform to established and exclusive models. The writer is not only without popular sympathy, but without a rich and varied mass of materials for his mind to work upon and assimilate unconsciously to itself; his attempts at originality are looked upon as affectation, and in the end, degenerate into it from the natural spirit of contradiction, and the constant uneasy sense of disappointment and undeserved ridicule. But to return.

Crabbe is, if not the most natural, the most literal of our descriptive

poets. He exhibits the smallest circumstances of the smallest things. He gives the very costume of meanness; the nonessentials of every trifling incident. He is his own landscape-painter, and engraver too. His pastoral scenes seem pricked on paper in little dotted lines. He describes the interior of a cottage like a person sent there to distrain for rent. He has an eye to the number of arms in an old worm-eaten chair, and takes care to inform himself and the reader whether a joint-stool stands upon three legs or upon four. If a settle by the fire-side stands awry, it gives him as much disturbance as a tottering world; and he records the rent in a ragged counterpane as an event in history. He is equally curious in his back-grounds and in his figures. You know the christian and surnames of every one of his heroes,—the dates of their achievements, whether on a Sunday or a Monday,—their place of birth and burial, the colour of their clothes, and of their hair, and whether they squinted or not. He takes an inventory of the human heart exactly in the same manner as of the furniture of a sick room: his sentiments have very much the air of fixtures; he gives you the petrifaction of a sigh, and carves a tear, to the life, in stone. Almost all his characters are tired of their lives, and you heartily wish them dead. They remind one of anatomical preservations; or may be said to bear the same relation to actual life that a stuffed cat in a glass-case does to the real one purring on the hearth: the skin is the same, but the life and the sense of heat is gone. Crabbe's poetry is like a museum, or curiosity-shop: every thing has the same posthumous appearance, the same inanimateness and identity of character. If Bloomfield is too much of the Farmer's Boy, Crabbe is too much of the parish beadle, an overseer of the country poor. He has no delight beyond the walls of a workhouse, and his officious zeal would convert the world into a vast infirmary. He is a kind of Ordinary, not of Newgate, but of nature. His poetical morality is taken from Burn's Justice, or the Statutes against Vagrants. He sets his own imagination in the stocks, and his Muse, like Malvolio, 'wears cruel garters.' He collects all the petty vices of the human heart, and superintends, as in a panopticon, a select circle of rural malefactors. He makes out the poor to be as bad as the rich—a sort of vermin for the others to hunt down and trample upon, and this he thinks a good piece of work. With him there are but two moral categories, riches and poverty, authority and dependence. His parish apprentice, Richard Monday, and his wealthy baronet, Sir Richard Monday, of Monday-place, are the same individual—the extremes of the same character, and of his whole system. 'The latter end of his Commonwealth does not forget the beginning.' But his parish ethics are the very worst model for a state: any thing more degrading and

helpless cannot well be imagined. He exhibits just the contrary view of human life to that which Gay has done in his Beggar's Opera. In a word, Crabbe is the only poet who has attempted and succeeded in the *still life* of tragedy: who gives the stagnation of hope and fear—the deformity of vice without the temptation—the pain of sympathy without the interest—and who seems to rely, for the delight he is to convey to his reader, on the truth and accuracy with which he describes only what is disagreeable.

The best descriptive poetry is not, after all, to be found in our descriptive poets. There are set descriptions of the flowers, for instance, in Thomson, Cowper, and others; but none equal to those in Milton's Lycidas, and in the Winter's Tale.

We have few good pastorals in the language. Our manners are not Arcadian; our climate is not an eternal spring; our age is not the age of gold. We have no pastoral-writers equal to Theocritus, nor any landscapes like those of Claude Lorraine. The best parts of Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar are two fables, Mother Hubberd's Tale, and the Oak and the Briar; which last is as splendid a piece of oratory as any to be found in the records of the eloquence of the British senate! Browne, who came after Spenser, and Withers, have left some pleasing allegorical poems of this kind. Pope's are as full of senseless finery and trite affectation, as if a peer of the realm were to sit for his picture with a crook and cocked hat on, smiling with an insipid air of no-meaning, between nature and fashion. Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia is a lasting monument of perverted power; where an image of extreme beauty, as that of 'the shepherd boy piping as though he should never be old,' peeps out once in a hundred folio pages, amidst heaps of intricate sophistry and scholastic quaintness. It is not at all like Nicholas Poussin's picture, in which he represents some shepherds wandering out in a morning of the spring, and coming to a tomb with this inscription—'I also was an Arcadian!' Perhaps the best pastoral in the language is that prose-poem, Walton's Complete Angler. That well-known work has a beauty and romantic interest equal to its simplicity, and arising out of it. In the description of a fishing-tackle, you perceive the piety and humanity of the author's mind. It is to be doubted whether Sannazarius's Piscatory Eclogues are equal to the scenes described by Walton on the banks of the river Lea. He gives the feeling of the open air: we walk with him along the dusty road-side, or repose on the banks of the river under a shady tree; and in watching for the finny prey, imbibe what he beautifully calls 'the patience and simplicity of poor honest fishermen.' We accompany them to their inn at night, and partake of their simple, but delicious fare; while Maud, the pretty milk-maid,

at her mother's desire, sings the classical ditties of the poet Marlow; 'Come live with me, and be my love.' Good cheer is not neglected in this work, any more than in Homer, or any other history that sets a proper value on the good things of this life. The prints in the Complete Angler give an additional reality and interest to the scenes it describes. While Tottenham Cross shall stand, and longer, thy work, amiable and happy old man, shall last!—It is in the notes to it that we find that character of 'a fair and happy milkmaid,' by Sir Thomas Overbury, which may vie in beauty and feeling with Chaucer's character of Griselda.

'A fair and happy milk-maid is a country wench that is so far from making herself beautiful by art, that one look of her's is able to put all face-physic out of countenance. She knows a fair look is but a dumb orator to commend virtue, therefore minds it not. All her excellences stand in her so silently, as if they had stolen upon her without her knowledge. The lining of her apparel (which is herself) is far better than outsides of tissue; for though she be not arrayed in the spoil of the silk-worm, she is decked in innocency, a far better wearing. She doth not, with lying long in bed, spoil both her complexion and conditions. Nature hath taught her, too immoderate sleep is rust to the soul: she rises therefore with chanticleer, her dame's cock, and at night makes the lamb her curfew. Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new-made haycock. She makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pity; and when winter evenings fall early (sitting at her merry wheel) she sings a defiance to the giddy wheel of Fortune. She doth all things with so sweet a grace, it seems ignorance will not suffer her to do ill, being her mind is to do well. She bestows her year's wages at next fair; and in choosing her garments, counts no bravery in the world like decency. The garden and bee-hive are all her physic and chirurgery, and she lives the longer for't. She dares go alone, and unfold sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none: yet, to say the truth, she is never alone, for she is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers, but short ones; yet they have their efficacy, in that they are not palled with ensuing idle cogitations. Lastly, her dreams are so chaste, that she dare tell them; only a Friday's dream is all her superstition; that she conceals for fear of anger. Thus lives she; and all her care is she may die in the spring-time, to have store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet.'

The love of the country has been sung by poets, and echoed by philosophers; but the first have not attempted, and the last have been greatly puzzled to account for it. I do not know that any one has ever explained, satisfactorily, the true source of this feeling, or of that soothing emotion which the sight of the country, or a lively description of rural objects hardly ever fails to infuse into the mind. Some have ascribed this feeling to the natural beauty of the objects them-

selves; others to the freedom from care, the silence and tranquillity which scenes of retirement afford; others to the healthy and innocent employments of a country life; others to the simplicity of country manners, and others to a variety of different causes; but none to the right one. All these, indeed, have their effect; but there is another principal one which has not been touched upon, or only slightly glanced at. I will not, however, imitate Mr. Horne Tooke, who after enumerating seventeen different definitions of the verb, and laughing at them all as deficient and nugatory, at the end of two quarto volumes does not tell us what the verb really is, and has left posterity to pluck out 'the heart of his mystery.' I will say at once what it is that distinguishes this interest from others, and that is its *abstractedness*. The interest we feel in human nature is exclusive, and confined to the individual; the interest we feel in external nature is common, and transferable from one object to all others of the same class. Thus.

Rousseau in his Confessions relates, that when he took possession of his room at Annecy, he found that he could see 'a little spot of green' from his window, which endeared his situation the more to him, because, he says, it was the first time he had had this object constantly before him since he left Boissy, the place where he was at school when a child.[1] Some such feeling as that here described will be found lurking at the bottom of all our attachments of this sort. Were it not for the recollections habitually associated with them, natural objects could not interest the mind in the manner they do. No doubt, the sky is beautiful, the clouds sail majestically along its bosom; the sun is cheering; there is something exquisitely graceful in the manner in which a plant or tree puts forth its branches; the motion with which they bend and tremble in the evening breeze is soft and lovely; there is music in the babbling of a brook; the view from the top of a mountain is full of grandeur; nor can we behold the ocean with indifference. Or, as the Minstrel sweetly sings,

> 'Oh, how canst thou renounce the boundless store
> Of charms which Nature to her votary yields!
> The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
> The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;
> All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
> And all that echoes to the song of even,
> All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,
> And all the dread magnificence of heaven,
> Oh, how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven!'

[1] Pope also declares that he had a particular regard for an old post which stood in the court-yard before the house where he was brought up.

It is not, however, the beautiful and magnificent alone that we admire in Nature; the most insignificant and rudest objects are often found connected with the strongest emotions; we become attached to the most common and familiar images, as to the face of a friend whom we have long known, and from whom we have received many benefits. It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes its attention; with change of place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends; it is because they have surrounded us in almost all situations, in joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain; because they have been one chief source and nourishment of our feelings, and a part of our being, that we love them as we do ourselves.

There is, generally speaking, the same foundation for our love of Nature as for all our habitual attachments, namely, association of ideas. But this is not all. That which distinguishes this attachment from others is the transferable nature of our feelings with respect to physical objects; the associations connected with any one object extending to the whole class. Our having been attached to any particular person does not make us feel the same attachment to the next person we may chance to meet; but, if we have once associated strong feelings of delight with the objects of natural scenery, the tie becomes indissoluble, and we shall ever after feel the same attachment to other objects of the same sort. I remember when I was abroad, the trees, and grass, and wet leaves, rustling in the walks of the Thuilleries, seemed to be as much English, to be as much the same trees and grass, that I had always been used to, as the sun shining over my head was the same sun which I saw in England; the faces only were foreign to me. Whence comes this difference? It arises from our always imperceptibly connecting the idea of the individual with man, and only the idea of the class with natural objects. In the one case, the external appearance or physical structure is the least thing to be attended to; in the other, it is every thing. The springs that move the human form, and make it friendly or adverse to me, lie hid within it. There is an infinity of motives, passions, and ideas, contained in that narrow compass, of which I know nothing, and in which I have no share. Each individual is a world to himself, governed by a thousand contradictory and wayward impulses. I can, therefore, make no inference from one individual to another; nor can my habitual sentiments, with respect to any individual, extend beyond himself to others. A crowd of people presents a disjointed, confused, and unsatisfactory appearance to the eye, because there is nothing to

connect the motley assemblage into one continuous or general impression, unless when there is some common object of interest to fix their attention, as in the case of a full pit at the play-house. The same principle will also account for that feeling of littleness, vacuity, and perplexity, which a stranger feels on entering the streets of a populous city. Every individual he meets is a blow to his personal identity. Every new face is a teazing, unanswered riddle. He feels the same wearisome sensation in walking from Oxford Street to Temple Bar, as a person would do who should be compelled to read through the first leaf of all the volumes in a library. But it is otherwise with respect to nature. A flock of sheep is not a contemptible, but a beautiful sight. The greatest number and variety of physical objects do not puzzle the will, or distract the attention, but are massed together under one uniform and harmonious feeling. The heart reposes in greater security on the immensity of Nature's works, 'expatiates freely there,' and finds elbow room and breathing space. We are always at home with Nature. There is neither hypocrisy, caprice, nor mental reservation in her favours. Our intercourse with her is not liable to accident or change, suspicion or disappointment: she smiles on us still the same. A rose is always sweet, a lily is always beautiful: we do not hate the one, nor envy the other. If we have once enjoyed the cool shade of a tree, and been lulled into a deep repose by the sound of a brook running at its foot, we are sure that wherever we can find a shady stream, we can enjoy the same pleasure again; so that when we imagine these objects, we can easily form a mystic personification of the friendly power that inhabits them, Dryad or Naiad, offering its cool fountain or its tempting shade. Hence the origin of the Grecian mythology. All objects of the same kind being the same, not only in their appearance, but in their practical uses, we habitually confound them together under the same general idea; and whatever fondness we may have conceived for one, is immediately placed to the common account. The most opposite kinds and remote trains of feeling gradually go to enrich the same sentiment; and in our love of nature, there is all the force of individual attachment, combined with the most airy abstraction. It is this circumstance which gives that refinement, expansion, and wild interest, to feelings of this sort, when strongly excited, which every one must have experienced who is a true lover of nature.

It is the same setting sun that we see and remember year after year, through summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. The moon that shines above our heads, or plays through the checquered shade, is the same moon that we used to read of in Mrs. Radcliffe's romances. We see no difference in the trees first covered with leaves

in the spring. The dry reeds rustling on the side of a stream—the woods swept by the loud blast—the dark massy foliage of autumn—the grey trunks and naked branches of the trees in winter—the sequestered copse, and wide-extended heath—the glittering sunny showers, and December snows—are still the same, or accompanied with the same thoughts and feelings: there is no object, however trifling or rude, that does not in some mood or other find its way into the heart, as a link in the chain of our living being; and this it is that makes good that saying of the poet—

> 'To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.'

Thus nature is a kind of universal home, and every object it presents to us an old acquaintance with unaltered looks; for there is that consent and mutual harmony among all her works, one undivided spirit pervading them throughout, that to him who has well acquainted himself with them, they speak always the same well-known language, striking on the heart, amidst unquiet thoughts and the tumult of the world, like the music of one's native tongue heard in some far-off country.

> 'My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began,
> So is it now I am a man,
> So shall it be when I grow old and die.
> The child 's the father of the man,
> And I would have my years to be
> Linked each to each by natural piety.'

The daisy that first strikes the child's eye in trying to leap over his own shadow, is the same flower that with timid upward glance implores the grown man not to tread upon it. Rousseau, in one of his botanical excursions, meeting with the periwinkle, fell upon his knees, crying out—*Ah! voila de la pervenche!* It was because he had thirty years before brought home the same flower with him in one of his rambles with Madame de Warens, near Chambery. It struck him as the same identical little blue flower that he remembered so well; and thirty years of sorrow and bitter regret were effaced from his memory. That, or a thousand other flowers of the same name, were the same to him, to the heart, and to the eye; but there was but one Madame Warens in the world, whose image was never absent from his thoughts; with whom flowers and verdure sprung up beneath his feet, and without whom all was cold and barren in nature and in his own breast. The cuckoo, 'that wandering voice,' that

comes and goes with the spring, mocks our ears with one note from youth to age; and the lapwing, screaming round the traveller's path, repeats for ever the same sad story of Tereus and Philomel!

LECTURE VI

ON SWIFT, YOUNG, GRAY, COLLINS, &c.

I SHALL in the present Lecture go back to the age of Queen Anne, and endeavour to give a cursory account of the most eminent of our poets, of whom I have not already spoken, from that period to the present.

The three principal poets among the wits of Queen Anne's reign, next to Pope, were Prior, Swift, and Gay. Parnell, though a good-natured, easy man, and a friend to poets and the Muses, was himself little more than an occasional versifier; and Arbuthnot, who had as much wit as the best of them, chose to shew it in prose, and not in verse. He had a very notable share in the immortal History of John Bull, and the inimitable and praise-worthy Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus. There has been a great deal said and written about the plagiarisms of Sterne; but the only real plagiarism he has been guilty of (if such theft were a crime), is in taking Tristram Shandy's father from Martin's, the elder Scriblerus. The original idea of the character, that is, of the opinionated, captious old gentleman, who is pedantic, not from profession, but choice, belongs to Arbuthnot.—Arbuthnot's style is distinguished from that of his contemporaries, even by a greater degree of terseness and conciseness. He leaves out every superfluous word; is sparing of connecting particles, and introductory phrases; uses always the simplest forms of construction; and is more a master of the idiomatic peculiarities and internal resources of the language than almost any other writer. There is a research in the choice of a plain, as well as of an ornamented or learned style; and, in fact, a great deal more. Among common English words, there may be ten expressing the same thing with different degrees of force and propriety, and only one of them the very word we want, because it is the only one that answers exactly with the idea we have in our minds. Each word in familiar use has a different set of associations and shades of meaning attached to it, and distinguished from each other by inveterate custom; and it is in having the whole of these at our command, and in knowing which to choose, as they are called for by the occasion, that the perfection of a pure conversational prose-style consists. But in writing a florid and artificial style,

neither the same range of invention, nor the same quick sense of propriety—nothing but learning is required. If you know the words, and their general meaning, it is sufficient: it is impossible you should know the nicer inflections of signification, depending on an endless variety of application, in expressions borrowed from a foreign or dead language. They all impose upon the ear alike, because they are not familiar to it; the only distinction left is between the pompous and the plain; the *sesquipedalia verba* have this advantage, that they are all of one length; and any words are equally fit for a learned style, so that we have never heard them before. Themistocles thought that the same sounding epithets could not suit all subjects, as the same dress does not fit all persons. The style of our modern prose-writers is very fine in itself; but it wants variety of inflection and adaptation; it hinders us from seeing the differences of the things it undertakes to describe.

What I have here insisted on will be found to be the leading distinction between the style of Swift, Arbuthnot, Steele, and the other writers of the age of Queen Anne, and the style of Dr. Johnson, which succeeded to it. The one is English, and the other is not. The writers first mentioned, in order to express their thoughts, looked about them for the properest word to convey any idea, that the language which they spoke, and which their countrymen understood, afforded: Dr. Johnson takes the first English word that offers, and by translating it at a venture into the first Greek or Latin word he can think of, only retaining the English termination, produces an extraordinary effect upon the reader, by much the same sort of mechanical process that Trim converted the old jack-boots into a pair of new mortars.

Dr. Johnson was a lazy learned man, who liked to think and talk, better than to read or write; who, however, wrote much and well, but too often by rote. His long compound Latin phrases required less thought, and took up more room than others. What shews the facilities afforded by this style of imposing generalization, is, that it was instantly adopted with success by all those who were writers by profession, or who were not; and that at present, we cannot see a lottery puff or a quack advertisement pasted against a wall, that is not perfectly Johnsonian in style. Formerly, the learned had the privilege of translating their notions into Latin; and a great privilege it was, as it confined the reputation and emoluments of learning to themselves. Dr. Johnson may be said to have naturalised this privilege, by inventing a sort of jargon translated half-way out of one language into the other, which raised the Doctor's reputation, and confounded all ranks in literature.

In the short period above alluded to, authors professed to write as other men spoke; every body now affects to speak as authors write; and any one who retains the use of his mother tongue, either in writing or conversation, is looked upon as a very illiterate character.

Prior and Gay belong, in the characteristic excellences of their style, to the same class of writers with Suckling, Rochester, and Sedley: the former imbibed most of the licentious levity of the age of Charles II. and carried it on beyond the Revolution under King William. Prior has left no single work equal to Gay's Fables, or the Beggar's Opera. But in his lyrical and fugitive pieces he has shown even more genius, more playfulness, more mischievous gaiety. No one has exceeded him in the laughing grace with which he glances at a subject that will not bear examining, with which he gently hints at what cannot be directly insisted on, with which he half conceals, and half draws aside the veil from some of the Muses' nicest mysteries. His Muse is, in fact, a giddy wanton flirt, who spends her time in playing at snap-dragon and blind-man's buff, who tells what she should not, and knows more than she tells. She laughs at the tricks she shews us, and blushes, or would be thought to do so, at what she keeps concealed. Prior has translated several of Fontaine's Tales from the French; and they have lost nothing in the translation, either of their wit or malice. I need not name them: but the one I like the most, is that of Cupid in search of Venus's doves. No one could insinuate a knavish plot, a tender point, a loose moral, with such unconscious archness, and careless raillery, as if he gained new self-possession and adroitness from the perplexity and confusion into which he throws scrupulous imaginations, and knew how to seize on all the ticklish parts of his subject, from their involuntarily shrinking under his grasp. Some of his imitations of Boileau's servile addresses to Louis XIV. which he has applied with a happy mixture of wit and patriotic enthusiasm to King William, or as he familiarly calls him, to

> 'Little Will, the scourge of France,
> No Godhead, but the first of men,'

are excellent, and shew the same talent for *double-entendre* and the same gallantry of spirit, whether in the softer lyric, or the more lively heroic. Some of Prior's *bon mots* are the best that are recorded.—His serious poetry, as his *Solomon*, is as heavy as his familiar style was light and agreeable. His moral Muse is a Magdalen, and should not have obtruded herself on public view. Henry and Emma is a paraphrase of the old ballad of the Nut-brown Maid, and not so good as the original. In short, as we often see in other cases, where

men thwart their own genius, Prior's sentimental and romantic productions are mere affectation, the result not of powerful impulse or real feeling, but of a consciousness of his deficiencies, and a wish to supply their place by labour and art.

Gay was sometimes grosser than Prior, not systematically, but inadvertently—from not being so well aware of what he was about; nor was there the same necessity for caution, for his grossness is by no means so seductive or inviting.

Gay's Fables are certainly a work of great merit, both as to the quantity of invention implied, and as to the elegance and facility of the execution. They are, however, spun out too long; the descriptions and narrative are too diffuse and desultory; and the moral is sometimes without point. They are more like Tales than Fables. The best are, perhaps, the Hare with Many Friends, the Monkeys, and the Fox at the Point of Death. His Pastorals are pleasing and poetical. But his capital work is his Beggar's Opera. It is indeed a masterpiece of wit and genius, not to say of morality. In composing it, he chose a very unpromising ground to work upon, and he has prided himself in adorning it with all the graces, the precision, and brilliancy of style. It is a vulgar error to call this a vulgar play. So far from it, that I do not scruple to say that it appears to me one of the most refined productions in the language. The elegance of the composition is in exact proportion to the coarseness of the materials: by 'happy alchemy of mind,' the author has extracted an essence of refinement from the dregs of human life, and turns its very dross into gold. The scenes, characters, and incidents are, in themselves, of the lowest and most disgusting kind but, by the sentiments and reflections which are put into the mouths of highwaymen, turnkeys, their mistresses, wives, or daughters, he has converted this motley group into a set of fine gentlemen and ladies, satirists and philosophers. He has also effected this transformation without once violating probability, or 'o'erstepping the modesty of nature.' In fact, Gay has 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. The extreme beauty and feeling of the song, 'Woman is like the fair flower in its lustre,' are only equalled by its characteristic propriety and *naïveté*. *Polly* describes her lover going to the gallows, with the same touching simplicity, and with all the natural fondness of a young girl in her circumstances, who sees in his approaching catastrophe nothing but the misfortunes and the personal accomplishments of the object of her affections. 'I see

him sweeter than the nosegay in his hand; the admiring crowd lament that so lovely a youth should come to an untimely end:—even butchers weep, and Jack Ketch refuses his fee rather than consent to tie the fatal knot.' The preservation of the character and costume is complete. It has been said by a great authority—'There is some soul of goodness in things evil':—and the *Beggar's Opera* is a good-natured but instructive comment on this text. The poet has thrown all the gaiety and sunshine of the imagination, all 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 back-ground, parcelling out their months and weeks between them. The general view exhibited of human life is of the most subtle and abstracted kind. The author has, with great felicity, brought out the good qualities and interesting emotions almost inseparable from the lowest conditions; and with the same penetrating glance, has detected the disguises which rank and circumstances lend to exalted vice. Every line in this sterling comedy sparkles with wit, and is fraught with the keenest sarcasm. The very wit, however, takes off from the offensiveness of the satire; and I have seen great statesmen, very great statesmen, heartily enjoying the joke, laughing most immoderately at the compliments paid to them as not much worse than pickpockets and cut-throats in a different line of life, and pleased, as it were, to see themselves humanised by some sort of fellowship with their kind. Indeed, it may be said that the moral of the piece is *to shew the vulgarity of vice*; or that the same violations of integrity and decorum, the same habitual sophistry in palliating their want of principle, are common to the great and powerful, with the meanest and most contemptible of the species. What can be more convincing than the arguments used by these would-be politicians, to shew that in hypocrisy, selfishness, and treachery, they do not come up to many of their betters? The exclamation of *Mrs. Peachum*, when her daughter marries *Macheath*, 'Hussy, hussy, 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!

I shall conclude this account of Gay with his verses on Sir Richard Blackmore, which may serve at once as a specimen of his own manner, and as a character of a voluminous contemporary poet, who was admired by Mr. Locke, and knighted by King William III.

> 'See who ne'er was nor will be half-read,
> Who first sung Arthur, then sung Alfred;
> Praised great Eliza in God's anger,
> Till all true Englishmen cried, 'Hang her!'—

Maul'd human wit in one thick satire;
Next in three books spoil'd human nature:
Undid Creation at a jerk,
And of Redemption made damn'd work.
Then took his Muse at once, and dipt her
Full in the middle of the Scripture.
What wonders there the man, grown old, did?
Sternhold himself he out Sternholded.
Made David seem so mad and freakish,
All thought him just what thought King Achish.
No mortal read his Solomon
But judg'd Re'boam his own son.
Moses he serv'd as Moses Pharaoh,
And Deborah as she Siserah;
Made Jeremy full sore to cry,
And Job himself curse God and die.
What punishment all this must follow?
Shall Arthur use him like King Tollo?
Shall David as Uriah slay him?
Or dextrous Deborah Siserah him?
No!—none of these! Heaven spare his life!
But send him, honest Job, thy wife!'

Gay's Trivia, or Art of Walking the Streets, is as pleasant as walking the streets must have been at the time when it was written. His ballad of Black Eyed Susan is one of the most delightful that can be imagined; nor do I see that it is a bit the worse for Mr. Jekyll's parody on it.

Swift's reputation as a poet has been in a manner obscured by the greater splendour, by the natural force and inventive genius of his prose writings; but if he had never written either the Tale of a Tub or Gulliver's Travels, his name merely as a poet would have come down to us, and have gone down to posterity with well-earned honours. His Imitations of Horace, and still more his Verses on his own Death, place him in the first rank of agreeable moralists in verse. There is not only a dry humour, an exquisite tone of irony, in these productions of his pen; but there is a touching, unpretending pathos, mixed up with the most whimsical and eccentric strokes of pleasantry and satire. His Description of the Morning in London, and of a City Shower, which were first published in the Tatler, are among the most delightful of the contents of that very delightful work. Swift shone as one of the most sensible of the poets; he is also distinguished as one of the most nonsensical of them. No man has written so many lack-a-daisical, slip-shod, tedious, trifling, foolish, fantastical verses as he, which are so little an imputation on the wisdom of the writer; and which, in fact, only shew his readiness

to oblige others, and to forget himself. He has gone so far as to invent a new stanza of fourteen and sixteen syllable lines for Mary the cookmaid to vent her budget of nothings, and for Mrs. Harris to gossip with the deaf old housekeeper. Oh, when shall we have such another Rector of Laracor!—The Tale of a Tub is one of the most masterly compositions in the language, whether for thought, wit, or style. It is so capital and undeniable a proof of the author's talents, that Dr. Johnson, who did not like Swift, would not allow that he wrote it. It is hard that the same performance should stand in the way of a man's promotion to a bishopric, as wanting gravity, and at the same time be denied to be his, as having too much wit. It is a pity the Doctor did not find out some graver author, for whom he felt a critical kindness, on whom to father this splendid but unacknowledged production. Dr. Johnson could not deny that Gulliver's Travels were his; he therefore disputed their merits, and said that after the first idea of them was conceived, they were easy to execute; all the rest followed mechanically. I do not know how that may be; but the mechanism employed is something very different from any that the author of Rasselas was in the habit of bringing to bear on such occasions. There is nothing more futile, as well as invidious, than this mode of criticising a work of original genius. Its greatest merit is supposed to be in the invention; and you say, very wisely, that it is not *in the execution*. You might as well take away the merit of the invention of the telescope, by saying that, after its uses were explained and understood, any ordinary eyesight could look through it. Whether the excellence of Gulliver's Travels is in the conception or the execution, is of little consequence; the power is somewhere, and it is a power that has moved the world. The power is not that of big words and vaunting commonplaces. Swift left these to those who wanted them; and has done what his acuteness and intensity of mind alone could enable any one to conceive or to perform. His object was to strip empty pride and grandeur of the imposing air which external circumstances throw around them; and for this purpose he has cheated the imagination of the illusions which the prejudices of sense and of the world put upon it, by reducing every thing to the abstract predicament of size. He enlarges or diminishes the scale, as he wishes to shew the insignificance or the grossness of our overweening self-love. That he has done this with mathematical precision, with complete presence of mind and perfect keeping, in a manner that comes equally home to the understanding of the man and of the child, does not take away from the merit of the work or the genius of the author. He has taken a new view of human nature, such as a being of a higher sphere might take of it; he has torn the scales from off

his moral vision; he has tried an experiment upon human life, and sifted its pretensions from the alloy of circumstances; he has measured it with a rule, has weighed it in a balance, and found it, for the most part, wanting and worthless—in substance and in shew. Nothing solid, nothing valuable is left in his system but virtue and wisdom. What a libel is this upon mankind! What a convincing proof of misanthropy! What presumption and what *malice prepense*, to shew men what they are, and to teach them what they ought to be! What a mortifying stroke aimed at national glory, is that unlucky incident of Gulliver's wading across the channel and carrying off the whole fleet of Blefuscu! After that, we have only to consider which of the contending parties was in the right. What a shock to personal vanity is given in the account of Gulliver's nurse Glumdalclitch! Still, notwithstanding the disparagement to her personal charms, her good-nature remains the same amiable quality as before. I cannot see the harm, the misanthropy, the immoral and degrading tendency of this. The moral lesson is as fine as the intellectual exhibition is amusing. It is an attempt to tear off the mask of imposture from the world; and nothing but imposture has a right to complain of it. It is, indeed, the way with our quacks in morality to preach up the dignity of human nature, to pamper pride and hypocrisy with the idle mockeries of the virtues they pretend to, and which they have not: but it was not Swift's way to cant morality, or any thing else; nor did his genius prompt him to write unmeaning panegyrics on mankind!

I do not, therefore, agree with the estimate of Swift's moral or intellectual character, given by an eminent critic, who does not seem to have forgotten the party politics of Swift. I do not carry my political resentments so far back: I can at this time of day forgive Swift for having been a Tory. I feel little disturbance (whatever I might think of them) at his political sentiments, which died with him, considering how much else he has left behind him of a more solid and imperishable nature! If he had, indeed, (like some others) merely left behind him the lasting infamy of a destroyer of his country, or the shining example of an apostate from liberty, I might have thought the case altered.

The determination with which Swift persisted in a preconcerted theory, savoured of the morbid affection of which he died. There is nothing more likely to drive a man mad, than the being unable to get rid of the idea of the distinction between right and wrong, and an obstinate, constitutional preference of the true to the agreeable. Swift was not a Frenchman. In this respect he differed from Rabelais and Voltaire. They have been accounted the three greatest wits in modern times; but their wit was of a peculiar kind in each. They

are little beholden to each other; there is some resemblance between Lord Peter in the Tale of a Tub, and Rabelais' Friar John; but in general they are all three authors of a substantive character in themselves. Swift's wit (particularly in his chief prose works) was serious, saturnine, and practical; Rabelais' was fantastical and joyous; Voltaire's was light, sportive, and verbal. Swift's wit was the wit of sense; Rabelais', the wit of nonsense; Voltaire's, of indifference to both. The ludicrous in Swift arises out of his keen sense of impropriety, his soreness and impatience of the least absurdity. He separates, with a severe and caustic air, truth from falsehood, folly from wisdom, 'shews vice her own image, scorn her own feature'; and it is the force, the precision, and the honest abruptness with which the separation is made, that excites our surprise, our admiration, and laughter. He sets a mark of reprobation on that which offends good sense and good manners, which cannot be mistaken, and which holds it up to our ridicule and contempt ever after. His occasional disposition to trifling (already noticed) was a relaxation from the excessive earnestness of his mind. *Indignatio facit versus.* His better genius was his spleen. It was the biting acrimony of his temper that sharpened his other faculties. The truth of his perceptions produced the pointed coruscations of his wit; his playful irony was the result of inward bitterness of thought; his imagination was the product of the literal, dry, incorrigible tenaciousness of his understanding. He endeavoured to escape from the persecution of realities into the regions of fancy, and invented his Lilliputians and Brobdingnagians, Yahoos, and Houyhnhyms, as a diversion to the more painful knowledge of the world around him: *they* only made him laugh, while men and women made him angry. His feverish impatience made him view the infirmities of that great baby the world, with the same scrutinizing glance and jealous irritability that a parent regards the failings of its offspring; but, as Rousseau has well observed, parents have not on this account been supposed to have more affection for other people's children than their own. In other respects, and except from the sparkling effervescence of his gall, Swift's brain was as 'dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage.' He hated absurdity—Rabelais loved it, exaggerated it with supreme satisfaction, luxuriated in its endless varieties, rioted in nonsense, 'reigned there and revelled.' He dwelt on the absurd and ludicrous for the pleasure they gave him, not for the pain. He lived upon laughter, and died laughing. He indulged his vein, and took his full swing of folly. He did not baulk his fancy or his readers. His wit was to him 'as riches fineless'; he saw no end of his wealth in that way, and set no limits to his extravagance: he was communicative, prodigal, boundless, and

inexhaustible. His were the Saturnalia of wit, the riches and the royalty, the health and long life. He is intoxicated with gaiety, mad with folly. His animal spirits drown him in a flood of mirth: his blood courses up and down his veins like wine. His thirst of enjoyment is as great as his thirst of drink: his appetite for good things of all sorts is unsatisfied, and there is a never-ending supply. *Discourse is dry;* so they moisten their words in their cups, and relish their dry jests with plenty of Botargos and dried neats' tongues. It is like Camacho's wedding in Don Quixote, where Sancho ladled out whole pullets and fat geese from the soup-kettles at a pull. The flagons are set a running, their tongues wag at the same time, and their mirth flows as a river. How Friar John roars and lays about him in the vineyard! How Panurge whines in the storm, and how dexterously he contrives to throw the sheep overboard! How much Pantagruel behaves like a wise king! How Gargantua mewls, and pules, and slabbers his nurse, and demeans himself most like a royal infant! what provinces he devours! what seas he drinks up! How he eats, drinks, and sleeps—sleeps, eats, and drinks! The style of Rabelais is no less prodigious than his matter. His words are of marrow, unctuous, dropping fatness. He was a mad wag, the king of good fellows, and prince of practical philosophers!

Rabelais was a Frenchman of the old school—Voltaire of the new. The wit of the one arose from an exuberance of enjoyment—of the other, from an excess of indifference, real or assumed. Voltaire had no enthusiasm for one thing or another: he made light of every thing. In his hands all things turn to chaff and dross, as the pieces of silver money in the Arabian Nights were changed by the hands of the enchanter into little dry crumbling leaves! He is a Parisian. He never exaggerates, is never violent: he treats things with the most provoking *sang froid*; and expresses his contempt by the most indirect hints, and in the fewest words, as if he hardly thought them worth even his contempt. He retains complete possession of himself and of his subject. He does not effect his purpose by the eagerness of his blows, but by the delicacy of his tact. The poisoned wound he inflicted was so fine, as scarcely to be felt till it rankled and festered in its 'mortal consequences.' His callousness was an excellent foil for the antagonists he had mostly to deal with. He took knaves and fools on his shield well. He stole away its cloak from grave imposture. If he reduced other things below their true value, making them seem worthless and hollow, he did not degrade the pretensions of tyranny and superstition below their true value, by making them seem utterly worthless and hollow, as contemptible as they were odious. This was the service he rendered to truth and mankind!

His *Candide* is a masterpiece of wit. It has been called 'the dull product of a scoffer's pen'; it is indeed the 'product of a scoffer's pen'; but after reading the Excursion, few people will think it *dull*. It is in the most perfect keeping, and without any appearance of effort. Every sentence tells, and the whole reads like one sentence. There is something sublime in Martin's sceptical indifference to moral good and evil. It is the repose of the grave. It is better to suffer this living death, than a living martyrdom. 'Nothing can touch him further.' The moral of Candide (such as it is) is the same as that of Rasselas: the execution is different. Voltaire says, 'A great book is a great evil.' Dr. Johnson would have laboured this short apophthegm into a voluminous common-place. Voltaire's traveller (in another work) being asked 'whether he likes black or white mutton best,' replies that 'he is indifferent, provided it is tender.' Dr. Johnson did not get at a conclusion by so short a way as this. If Voltaire's licentiousness is objected to me, I say, let it be placed to its true account, the manners of the age and court in which he lived. The lords and ladies of the bedchamber in the reign of Louis xv. found no fault with the immoral tendency of his writings. Why then should our modern *purists* quarrel with them?—But to return.

Young is a gloomy epigrammatist. He has abused great powers both of thought and language. His moral reflections are sometimes excellent; but he spoils their beauty by overloading them with a religious horror, and at the same time giving them all the smart turns and quaint expression of an enigma or repartee in verse. The well-known lines on Procrastination are in his best manner:

'Be wise to-day; 'tis madness to defer;
Next day the fatal precedent will plead;
Thus on, till wisdom is push'd out of life.
Procrastination is the thief of time;
Year after year it steals, till all are fled,
And to the mercies of a moment leaves
The vast concerns of an eternal scene.

Of man's miraculous mistakes, this bears
The palm, "That all men are about to live,"
For ever on the brink of being born.
All pay themselves the compliment to think
They, one day, shall not drivel; and their pride
On this reversion takes up ready praise;
At least, their own; their future selves applauds;
How excellent that life they ne'er will lead!
Time lodg'd in their own hands is Folly's vails:
That lodg'd in Fate's, to Wisdom they consign;
The thing they can't but purpose, they postpone.

'Tis not in Folly, not to scorn a fool;
And scarce in human Wisdom to do more.
All Promise is poor dilatory man,
And that through every stage. When young, indeed,
In full content we, sometimes, nobly rest,
Un-anxious for ourselves; and only wish,
As duteous sons, our fathers were more wise.
At thirty man suspects himself a fool;
Knows it at forty, and reforms his plan;
At fifty chides his infamous delay,
Pushes his prudent purpose to Resolve;
In all the magnanimity of thought
Resolves, and re-resolves; then dies the same.

And why? Because he thinks himself immortal.
All men think all men mortal, but themselves;
Themselves, when some alarming shock of fate
Strikes through their wounded hearts the sudden dread;
But their hearts wounded, like the wounded air,
Soon close; where past the shaft, no trace is found.
As from the wing no scar the sky retains;
The parted wave no furrow from the keel;
So dies in human hearts the thought of death.
Ev'n with the tender tear which nature sheds
O'er those we love, we drop it in their grave.'

His Universal Passion is a keen and powerful satire; but the effort takes from the effect, and oppresses attention by perpetual and violent demands upon it. His tragedy of the Revenge is monkish and scholastic. Zanga is a vulgar caricature of Iago. The finest lines in it are the burst of triumph at the end, when his revenge is completed:

'Let Europe and her pallid sons go weep,
Let Afric on her hundred thrones rejoice,' &c.

Collins is a writer of a very different stamp, who had perhaps less general power of mind than Young; but he had that true *vivida vis*, that genuine inspiration, which alone can give birth to the highest efforts of poetry. He leaves stings in the minds of his readers, certain traces of thought and feelings which never wear out, because nature had left them in his own mind. He is the only one of the minor poets of whom, if he had lived, it cannot be said that he might not have done the greatest things. The germ is there. He is sometimes affected, unmeaning, and obscure; but he also catches rich glimpses of the bowers of Paradise, and has lofty aspirations after the highest seats of the Muses. With a great deal of tinsel and splendid patch-work, he has not been able to hide the solid sterling

ore of genius. In his best works there is an attic simplicity, a pathos, and fervour of imagination, which make us the more lament that the efforts of his mind were at first depressed by neglect and pecuniary embarrassment, and at length buried in the gloom of an unconquerable and fatal malady. How many poets have gone through all the horrors of poverty and contempt, and ended their days in moping melancholy or moody madness!

> 'We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
> But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.'

Is this the fault of themselves, of nature in tempering them of too fine a clay, or of the world, that spurner of living, and patron of dead merit? Read the account of Collins—with hopes frustrated, with faculties blighted, at last, when it was too late for himself or others, receiving the deceitful favours of relenting Fortune, which served only to throw their sunshine on his decay, and to light him to an early grave. He was found sitting with every spark of imagination extinguished, and with only the faint traces of memory and reason left—with only one book in his room, the Bible; 'but that,' he said, 'was the best.' A melancholy damp hung like an unwholesome mildew upon his faculties—a canker had consumed the flower of his life. He produced works of genius, and the public regarded them with scorn: he aimed at excellence that should be his own, and his friends treated his efforts as the wanderings of fatuity. The proofs of his capacity are, his Ode on Evening, his Ode on the Passions (particularly the fine personification of Hope), his Ode to Fear, the Dirge in Cymbeline, the Lines on Thomson's Grave, and his Eclogues, parts of which are admirable. But perhaps his Ode on the Poetical Character is the best of all. A rich distilled perfume emanates from it like the breath of genius; a golden cloud envelopes it; a honeyed paste of poetic diction encrusts it, like the candied coat of the auricula. His Ode to Evening shews equal genius in the images and versification. The sounds steal slowly over the ear, like the gradual coming on of evening itself:

> 'If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song
> May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
> Like thy own solemn springs,
> Thy springs and dying gales,
>
> O nymph reserv'd, while now the bright-haired sun
> Sits on yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts
> With brede ethereal wove,
> O'erhang his wavy bed:

Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-ey'd bat,
With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises midst the twilight path,
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum.
Now teach me, maid compos'd,
To breathe some soften'd strain,

Whose numbers stealing through thy darkling vale
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
As musing slow, I hail
Thy genial, lov'd return!

For when thy folding star arising shews
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp
The fragrant Hours and Elves
Who slept in flow'rs the day,

And many a nymph who wreathes her brows with sedge,
And sheds the fresh'ning dew, and lovelier still,
The pensive Pleasures sweet
Prepare thy shadowy car;

Then lead, calm Votress, where some sheety lake
Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallow'd pile,
Or upland fallows grey
Reflect its last cool gleam.

But when chill blust'ring winds, or driving rain,
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut,
That from the mountain's side
Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim discover'd spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.

While Spring shall pour his show'rs, as oft he wont,
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve!
While Summer loves to sport
Beneath thy lingering light;

While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves;
Or Winter yelling through the troublous air,
Affrights thy shrinking train,
And rudely rends thy robes;

So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipp'd Health,
Thy gentlest influence own,
And hymn thy favourite name.'

Hammond, whose poems are bound up with Collins's, in Bell's pocket edition, was a young gentleman, who appears to have fallen in love about the year 1740, and who translated Tibullus into English verse, to let his mistress and the public know of it.

I should conceive that Collins had a much greater poetical genius than Gray: he had more of that fine madness which is inseparable from it, of its turbid effervescence, of all that pushes it to the verge of agony or rapture. Gray's Pindaric Odes are, I believe, generally given up at present: they are stately and pedantic, a kind of methodical borrowed phrenzy. But I cannot so easily give up, nor will the world be in any haste to part with his Elegy in a Country Church-yard: it is one of the most classical productions that ever was penned by a refined and thoughtful mind, moralising on human life. Mr. Coleridge (in his Literary Life) says, that his friend Mr. Wordsworth had undertaken to shew that the language of the Elegy is unintelligible: it has, however, been understood! The Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College is more mechanical and common-place; but it touches on certain strings about the heart, that vibrate in unison with it to our latest breath. No one ever passes by Windsor's 'stately heights,' or sees the distant spires of Eton College below, without thinking of Gray. He deserves that we should think of him; for he thought of others, and turned a trembling, ever-watchful ear to 'the still sad music of humanity.'— His Letters are inimitably fine. If his poems are sometimes finical and pedantic, his prose is quite free from affectation. He pours his thoughts out upon paper as they arise in his mind; and they arise in his mind without pretence, or constraint, from the pure impulse of learned leisure and contemplative indolence. He is not here on stilts or in buckram; but smiles in his easy chair, as he moralises through the loopholes of retreat, on the bustle and raree-show of the world, or on 'those reverend bedlams, colleges and schools!' He had nothing to do but to read and to think, and to tell his friends what he read and thought. His life was a luxurious, thoughtful dream. 'Be mine,' he says in one of his Letters, 'to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon.' And in another, to shew his contempt for action and the turmoils of ambition, he says to some one, 'Don't you remember Lords—— and——, who are now great statesmen, little dirty boys playing at cricket? For my part, I do not feel a bit wiser, or bigger, or older than I did then.' What an equivalent for not being wise or great, to be always young! What a happiness never to lose or gain any thing in the game of human life, by being never any thing more than a looker-on!

How different from Shenstone, who only wanted to be looked at:

who withdrew from the world to be followed by the crowd, and courted popularity by affecting privacy! His Letters shew him to have lived in a continual fever of petty vanity, and to have been a finished literary coquet. He seems always to say, 'You will find nothing in the world so amiable as Nature and me: come, and admire us.' His poems are indifferent and tasteless, except his Pastoral Ballad, his Lines on Jemmy Dawson, and his School-mistress, which last is a perfect piece of writing.

Akenside had in him the materials of poetry, but he was hardly a great poet. He improved his Pleasures of the Imagination in the subsequent editions, by pruning away a great many redundances of style and ornament. Armstrong is better, though he has not chosen a very exhilarating subject — The Art of Preserving Health. Churchill's Satires on the Scotch, and Characters of the Players, are as good as the subjects deserved—they are strong, coarse, and full of an air of hardened assurance. I ought not to pass over without mention Green's Poem on the Spleen, or Dyer's Grongar Hill.

The principal name of the period we are now come to is that of Goldsmith, than which few names stand higher or fairer in the annals of modern literature. One should have his own pen to describe him as he ought to be described—amiable, various, and bland, with careless inimitable grace touching on every kind of excellence—with manners unstudied, but a gentle heart—performing miracles of skill from pure happiness of nature, and whose greatest fault was ignorance of his own worth. As a poet, he is the most flowing and elegant of our versifiers since Pope, with traits of artless nature which Pope had not, and with a peculiar felicity in his turns upon words, which he constantly repeated with delightful effect: such as—

> '—— His lot, though small,
> He sees that little lot, the lot of all.'
>
> * * * * *
>
> 'And turn'd and look'd, and turn'd to look again.

As a novelist, his Vicar of Wakefield has charmed all Europe. What reader is there in the civilised world, who is not the better for the story of the washes which the worthy Dr. Primrose demolished so deliberately with the poker—for the knowledge of the guinea which the Miss Primroses kept unchanged in their pockets—the adventure of the picture of the Vicar's family, which could not be got into the house—and that of the Flamborough family, all painted with oranges in their hands—or for the story of the case of shagreen spectacles and the cosmogony?

As a comic writer, his Tony Lumpkin draws forth new powers from Mr. Liston's face. That alone is praise enough for it. Poor Goldsmith! how happy he has made others! how unhappy he was in himself! He never had the pleasure of reading his own works! He had only the satisfaction of good-naturedly relieving the necessities of others, and the consolation of being harassed to death with his own! He is the most amusing and interesting person, in one of the most amusing and interesting books in the world, Boswell's Life of Johnson. His peach-coloured coat shall always bloom in Boswell's writings, and his fame survive in his own!—His genius was a mixture of originality and imitation: he could do nothing without some model before him, and he could copy nothing that he did not adorn with the graces of his own mind. Almost all the latter part of the Vicar of Wakefield, and a great deal of the former, is taken from Joseph Andrews; but the circumstances I have mentioned above are not.

The finest things he has left behind him in verse are his character of a country school-master, and that prophetic description of Burke in the Retaliation. His moral Essays in the Citizen of the World, are as agreeable chit-chat as can be conveyed in the form of didactic discourses.

Warton was a poet and a scholar, studious with ease, learned without affectation. He had a happiness which some have been prouder of than he, who deserved it less—he was poet-laureat.

> 'And that green wreath which decks the bard when dead,
> That laurel garland crown'd his living head.'

But he bore his honours meekly, and performed his half-yearly task regularly. I should not have mentioned him for this distinction alone (the highest which a poet can receive from the state), but for another circumstance; I mean his being the author of some of the finest sonnets in the language—at least so they appear to me; and as this species of composition has the necessary advantage of being short (though it is also sometimes both 'tedious and brief'), I will here repeat two or three of them, as treating pleasing subjects in a pleasing and philosophical way.

Written in a blank leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon

> 'Deem not, devoid of elegance, the sage,
> By Fancy's genuine feelings unbeguil'd,
> Of painful pedantry the poring child;
> Who turns of these proud domes the historic page,

Now sunk by Time, and Henry's fiercer rage.
Think'st thou the warbling Muses never smil'd
On his lone hours? Ingenuous views engage
His thoughts, on themes unclassic falsely styl'd,
Intent. While cloister'd piety displays
Her mouldering roll, the piercing eye explores
New manners, and the pomp of elder days,
Whence culls the pensive bard his pictur'd stores.
Not rough nor barren are the winding ways
Of hoar Antiquity, but strewn with flowers.'

Sonnet. Written at Stonehenge.

'Thou noblest monument of Albion's isle,
Whether, by Merlin's aid, from Scythia's shore
To Amber's fatal plain Pendragon bore,
Huge frame of giant hands, the mighty pile,
T' entomb his Britons slain by Hengist's guile:
Or Druid priests, sprinkled with human gore,
Taught mid thy massy maze their mystic lore:
Or Danish chiefs, enrich'd with savage spoil,
To victory's idol vast, an unhewn shrine,
Rear'd the rude heap, or in thy hallow'd ground
Repose the kings of Brutus' genuine line;
Or here those kings in solemn state were crown'd;
Studious to trace thy wondrous origin,
We muse on many an ancient tale renown'd.'

Nothing can be more admirable than the learning here displayed, or the inference from it, that it is of no use but as it leads to interesting thought and reflection.

That written after seeing Wilton House is in the same style, but I prefer concluding with that to the river Lodon, which has a personal as well as poetical interest about it.

'Ah! what a weary race my feet have run,
Since first I trod thy bank with alders crown'd,
And thought my way was all through fairy ground,
Beneath the azure sky and golden sun:
When first my Muse to lisp her notes begun!
While pensive memory traces back the round
Which fills the varied interval between;
Much pleasure, more of sorrow, marks the scene.—
Sweet native stream! those skies and suns so pure
No more return, to cheer my evening road!
Yet still one joy remains, that not obscure
Nor useless, all my vacant days have flow'd
From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime mature,
Nor with the Muse's laurel unbestow'd.'

I have thus gone through all the names of this period I could think of, but I find that there are others still waiting behind that I had never thought of. Here is a list of some of them—Pattison, Tickell, Hill, Somerville, Browne, Pitt, Wilkie, Dodsley, Shaw, Smart, Langhorne, Bruce, Greame, Glover, Lovibond, Penrose, Mickle, Jago, Scott, Whitehead, Jenyns, Logan, Cotton, Cunningham, and Blacklock.—I think it will be best to let them pass and say nothing about them. It will be hard to persuade so many respectable persons that they are dull writers, and if we give them any praise, they will send others.

But here comes one whose claims cannot be so easily set aside: they have been sanctioned by learning, hailed by genius, and hallowed by misfortune—I mean Chatterton. Yet I must say what I think of him, and that is not what is generally thought. I pass over the disputes between the learned antiquaries, Dr. Mills, Herbert Croft, and Dr. Knox, whether he was to be placed after Shakspeare and Dryden, or to come after Shakspeare alone. A living poet has borne a better testimony to him—

> 'I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous boy,
> The sleepless soul that perished in his pride;
> And him[1] who walked in glory and in joy
> Beside his plough along the mountain side.'

I am loth to put asunder whom so great an authority has joined together; but I cannot find in Chatterton's works any thing so extraordinary as the age at which they were written. They have a facility, vigour, and knowledge, which were prodigious in a boy of sixteen, but which would not have been so in a man of twenty. He did not shew extraordinary powers of genius, but extraordinary precocity. Nor do I believe he would have written better, had he lived. He knew this himself, or he would have lived. Great geniuses, like great kings, have too much to think of to kill themselves; for their mind to them also 'a kingdom is.' With an unaccountable power coming over him at an unusual age, and with the youthful confidence it inspired, he performed wonders, and was willing to set a seal on his reputation by a tragic catastrophe. He had done his best; and, like another Empedocles, threw himself into Ætna, to ensure immortality. The brazen slippers alone remain!—

[1] Burns.—These lines are taken from the introduction to Mr. Wordsworth's poem of the LEECH-GATHERER.

LECTURE VII

ON BURNS, AND THE OLD ENGLISH BALLADS

I AM sorry that what I said in the conclusion of the last Lecture respecting Chatterton, should have given dissatisfaction to some persons, with whom I would willingly agree on all such matters. What I meant was less to call in question Chatterton's genius, than to object to the common mode of estimating its magnitude by its prematureness. The lists of fame are not filled with the dates of births or deaths; and the side-mark of the age at which they were done, wears out in works destined for immortality. Had Chatterton really done more, we should have thought less of him, for our attention would then have been fixed on the excellence of the works themselves, instead of the singularity of the circumstances in which they were produced. But because he attained to the full powers of manhood at an early age, I do not see that he would have attained to more than those powers, had he lived to be a man. He was a prodigy, because in him the ordinary march of nature was violently precipitated; and it is therefore inferred, that he would have continued to hold on his course, 'unslacked of motion.' On the contrary, who knows but he might have lived to be poet-laureat? It is much better to let him remain as he was. Of his actual productions, any one may think as highly as he pleases; I would only guard against adding to the account of his *quantum meruit*, those possible productions by which the learned rhapsodists of his time raised his gigantic pretensions to an equality with those of Homer and Shakspeare. It is amusing to read some of these exaggerated descriptions, each rising above the other in extravagance. In Anderson's Life, we find that Mr. Warton speaks of him 'as a prodigy of genius,' as 'a singular instance of prematurity of abilities': that may be true enough, and Warton was at any rate a competent judge; but Mr. Malone 'believes him to have been the greatest genius that England has produced since the days of Shakspeare.' Dr. Gregory says, 'he must rank, as a universal genius, above Dryden, and perhaps only second to Shakspeare.' Mr. Herbert Croft is still more unqualified in his praises; he asserts, that 'no such being, at any period of life, has ever been known, or possibly ever will be known.' He runs a parallel between Chatterton and Milton; and asserts, that 'an army of Macedonian and Swedish mad butchers fly before him,'

meaning, I suppose, that Alexander the Great and Charles the Twelfth were nothing to him; 'nor,' he adds, 'does my memory supply me with any human being, who at such an age, with such advantages, has produced such compositions. Under the heathen mythology, superstition and admiration would have explained all, by bringing Apollo on earth; nor would the God ever have descended with more credit to himself.'—Chatterton's physiognomy would at least have enabled him to pass *incognito*. It is quite different from the look of timid wonder and delight with which Annibal Caracci has painted a young Apollo listening to the first sounds he draws from a Pan's pipe, under the tutelage of the old Silenus! If Mr. Croft is sublime on the occasion, Dr. Knox is no less pathetic. 'The testimony of Dr. Knox,' says Dr. Anderson, (Essays, p. 144), 'does equal credit to the classical taste and amiable benevolence of the writer, and the genius and reputation of Chatterton.' 'When I read,' says the Doctor, 'the researches of those learned antiquaries who have endeavoured to prove that the poems attributed to Rowley were really written by him, I observe many ingenious remarks in confirmation of their opinion, which it would be tedious, if not difficult, to controvert.'

Now this is so far from the mark, that the whole controversy might have been settled by any one but the learned antiquaries themselves, who had the smallest share of their learning, from this single circumstance, that the poems read as smooth as any modern poems, if you read them as modern compositions; and that you cannot read them, or make verse of them at all, if you pronounce or accent the words as they were spoken at the time when the poems were pretended to have been written. The whole secret of the imposture, which nothing but a deal of learned dust, raised by collecting and removing a great deal of learned rubbish, could have prevented our laborious critics from seeing through, lies on the face of it (to say nothing of the burlesque air which is scarcely disguised throughout) in the repetition of a few obsolete words, and in the mis-spelling of common ones.

'No sooner,' proceeds the Doctor, 'do I turn to the poems, than the labour of the antiquaries appears only waste of time; and I am involuntarily forced to join in placing that laurel, which he seems so well to have deserved, on the brow of Chatterton. The poems bear so many marks of superior genius, that they have deservedly excited the general attention of polite scholars, and are considered as the most remarkable productions in modern poetry. We have many instances of poetical eminence at an early age; but neither Cowley, Milton, nor Pope, ever produced any thing while they were boys,

which can justly be compared to the poems of Chatterton. The learned antiquaries do not indeed dispute their excellence. They extol it in the highest terms of applause. They raise their favourite Rowley to a rivalry with Homer: but they make the very merits of the works an argument against their real author. Is it possible, say they, that a boy should produce compositions so beautiful and masterly? That a common boy should produce them is not possible,' rejoins the Doctor; 'but that they should be produced by a boy of an extraordinary genius, such as was that of Homer or Shakspeare, though a prodigy, is such a one as by no means exceeds the bounds of rational credibility.'

Now it does not appear that Shakspeare or Homer were such early prodigies; so that by this reasoning he must take precedence of them too, as well as of Milton, Cowley, and Pope. The reverend and classical writer then breaks out into the following melancholy raptures:—

'Unfortunate boy! short and evil were thy days, but thy fame shall be immortal. Hadst thou been known to the munificent patrons of genius. . . .

'Unfortunate boy! poorly wast thou accommodated during thy short sojourning here among us;—rudely wast thou treated—sorely did thy feelings suffer from the scorn of the unworthy; and there are at last those who wish to rob thee of thy only meed, thy posthumous glory. Severe too are the censures of thy morals. In the gloomy moments of despondency, I fear thou hast uttered impious and blasphemous thoughts. But let thy more rigid censors reflect, that thou wast literally and strictly but a boy. Let many of thy bitterest enemies reflect what were their own religious principles, and whether they had any at the age of fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen. Surely it is a severe and unjust surmise that thou wouldst probably have ended thy life as a victim to the laws, if thou hadst not ended it as thou didst.'

Enough, enough, of the learned antiquaries, and of the classical and benevolent testimony of Dr. Knox. Chatterton was, indeed, badly enough off; but he was at least saved from the pain and shame of reading this woful lamentation over fallen genius, which circulates splendidly bound in the fourteenth edition, while he is a prey to worms. As to those who are really capable of admiring Chatterton's genius, or of feeling an interest in his fate, I would only say, that I never heard any one speak of any one of his works as if it were an old well-known favourite, and had become a faith and a religion in his mind. It is his name, his youth, and what he might have lived to have done, that excite our wonder and admiration. He has the same

sort of posthumous fame that an actor of the last age has—an abstracted reputation which is independent of any thing we know of his works. The admirers of Collins never think of him without recalling to their minds his Ode on Evening, or on the Poetical Character. Gray's Elegy, and his poetical popularity, are identified together, and inseparable even in imagination. It is the same with respect to Burns: when you speak of him as a poet, you mean his works, his Tam o' Shanter, or his Cotter's Saturday Night. But the enthusiasts for Chatterton, if you ask for the proofs of his extraordinary genius, are obliged to turn to the volume, and perhaps find there what they seek; but it is not in their minds; and it is of *that* I spoke.

The Minstrel's song in Ælla is I think the best.

'O! synge untoe my roundelaie,
O! droppe the brynie teare wythe mee,
Daunce ne moe atte hallie daie,
Lycke a rennynge ryver bee.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Blacke hys cryne as the wyntere nyght,
Whyte hys rode as the sommer snowe,
Rodde hys face as the mornynge lyghte,
Cale he lyes ynne the grave belowe.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Swote hys tongue as the throstles note,
Quycke ynne daunce as thought cann bee,
Defte his taboure, codgelle stote,
O! hee lys bie the wyllowe-tree.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Harke! the ravenne flappes hys wynge,
In the briered dell belowe;
Harke! the dethe-owle loude dothe synge,
To the nygthe-mares as theie goe.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gone to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

See! the whyte moone sheenes onne hie;
Whyterre ys mie true loves shroude;

Whyterre yanne the mornynge skie,
Whyterre yanne the evenynge cloude.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree,

Heere, upon mie true loves grave,
Schalle the baren fleurs be layde,
Ne one hallie seyncte to save
Al the celness of a mayde.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to his deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Wythe mie hondes I 'll dent the brieres
Rounde hys hallie corse to gre,
Ouphante fairies, lyghte your fyres,
Heere mie boddie stille schalle bee.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Comme, wythe acorne-coppe and thorne,
Drayne my hartys blodde awaie ;
Lyfe and all yttes goode I scorne,
Daunce bie nete, or feaste by daie.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Water wytches, crownede wythe reytes,
Bere mee to yer leathalle tyde.
I die ; I comme ; mie true love waytes.
Thos the damselle spake, and dyed.'

To proceed to the more immediate subject of the present Lecture, the character and writings of Burns.—Shakspeare says of some one, that 'he was like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring.' Burns, the poet, was not such a man. He had a strong mind, and a strong body, the fellow to it. He had a real heart of flesh and blood beating in his bosom—you can almost hear it throb. Some one said, that if you had shaken hands with him, his hand would have burnt yours. The Gods, indeed, 'made him poetical'; but nature had a hand in him first. His heart was in the right place. He did not 'create a soul under the ribs of death,' by tinkling siren sounds, or by piling up centos of poetic diction ; but for the artificial flowers of poetry, he plucked the mountain-daisy under his feet ; and a field-mouse, hurrying from its ruined dwelling, could inspire him

with the sentiments of terror and pity. He held the plough or the pen with the same firm, manly grasp; nor did he cut out poetry as we cut out watch-papers, with finical dexterity, nor from the same flimsy materials. Burns was not like Shakspeare in the range of his genius; but there is something of the same magnanimity, directness, and unaffected character about him. He was not a sickly sentimentalist, a namby-pamby poet, a mincing metre ballad-monger, any more than Shakspeare. He would as soon hear 'a brazen candlestick tuned, or a dry wheel grate on the axletree.' He was as much of a man—not a twentieth part as much of a poet as Shakspeare. With but little of his imagination or inventive power, he had the same life of mind: within the narrow circle of personal feeling or domestic incidents, the pulse of his poetry flows as healthily and vigorously. He had an eye to see; a heart to feel:—no more. His pictures of good fellowship, of social glee, of quaint humour, are equal to any thing; they come up to nature, and they cannot go beyond it. The sly jest collected in his laughing eye at the sight of the grotesque and ludicrous in manners—the large tear rolled down his manly cheek at the sight of another's distress. He has made us as well acquainted with himself as it is possible to be; has let out the honest impulses of his native disposition, the unequal conflict of the passions in his breast, with the same frankness and truth of description. His strength is not greater than his weakness: his virtues were greater than his vices. His virtues belonged to his genius: his vices to his situation, which did not correspond to his genius.

It has been usual to attack Burns's moral character, and the moral tendency of his writings at the same time; and Mr. Wordsworth, in a letter to Mr. Gray, Master of the High School at Edinburgh, in attempting to defend, has only laid him open to a more serious and unheard-of responsibility. Mr. Gray might very well have sent him back, in return for his epistle, the answer of Holofernes in Love's Labour's Lost:—'*Via* goodman Dull, thou hast spoken no word all this while.' The author of this performance, which is as weak in effect as it is pompous in pretension, shews a great dislike of Robespierre, Buonaparte, and of Mr. Jeffrey, whom he, by some unaccountable fatality, classes together as the three most formidable enemies of the human race that have appeared in his (Mr. Wordsworth's) remembrance; but he betrays very little liking to Burns. He is, indeed, anxious to get him out of the unhallowed clutches of the Edinburgh Reviewers (as a mere matter of poetical privilege), only to bring him before a graver and higher tribunal, which is his own; and after repeating and insinuating ponderous charges against him, shakes his head, and declines giving any opinion in so tremendous

a case; so that though the judgment of the former critic is set aside, poor Burns remains just where he was, and nobody gains any thing by the cause but Mr. Wordsworth, in an increasing opinion of his own wisdom and purity. 'Out upon this half-faced fellowship!' The author of the Lyrical Ballads has thus missed a fine opportunity of doing Burns justice and himself honour. He might have shewn himself a philosophical prose-writer, as well as a philosophical poet. He might have offered as amiable and as gallant a defence of the Muses, as my uncle Toby, in the honest simplicity of his heart, did of the army. He might have said at once, instead of making a parcel of wry faces over the matter, that Burns had written Tam o' Shanter, and that that alone was enough; that he could hardly have described the excesses of mad, hairbrained, roaring mirth and convivial indulgence, which are the soul of it, if he himself had not 'drunk full ofter of the ton than of the well'—unless 'the act and practique part of life had been the mistress of his theorique.' Mr. Wordsworth might have quoted such lines as—

> 'The landlady and Tam grew gracious,
> Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious';—

or,

> 'Care, mad to see a man so happy,
> E'en drown'd himself among the nappy';

and fairly confessed that he could not have written such lines from a want of proper habits and previous sympathy; and that till some great puritanical genius should arise to do these things equally well without any knowledge of them, the world might forgive Burns the injuries he had done his health and fortune in his poetical apprenticeship to experience, for the pleasure he had afforded them. Instead of this, Mr. Wordsworth hints, that with different personal habits and greater strength of mind, Burns would have written differently, and almost as well as *he* does. He might have taken that line of Gay's,

> 'The fly that sips treacle is lost in the sweets,'—

and applied it in all its force and pathos to the poetical character. He might have argued that poets are men of genius, and that a man of genius is not a machine; that they live in a state of intellectual intoxication, and that it is too much to expect them to be distinguished by peculiar *sang froid*, circumspection, and sobriety. Poets are by nature men of stronger imagination and keener sensibilities than others; and it is a contradiction to suppose them at the same time governed only by the cool, dry, calculating dictates of reason and foresight. Mr. Wordsworth might have ascertained the boundaries that part the

provinces of reason and imagination:—that it is the business of the understanding to exhibit things in their relative proportions and ultimate consequences—of the imagination to insist on their immediate impressions, and to indulge their strongest impulses; but it is the poet's office to pamper the imagination of his readers and his own with the extremes of present ecstacy or agony, to snatch the swift-winged golden minutes, the torturing hour, and to banish the dull, prosaic, monotonous realities of life, both from his thoughts and from his practice. Mr. Wordsworth might have shewn how it is that all men of genius, or of originality and independence of mind, are liable to practical errors, from the very confidence their superiority inspires, which makes them fly in the face of custom and prejudice, always rashly, sometimes unjustly; for, after all, custom and prejudice are not without foundation in truth and reason, and no one individual is a match for the world in power, very few in knowledge. The world may altogether be set down as older and wiser than any single person in it.

Again, our philosophical letter-writer might have enlarged on the temptations to which Burns was exposed from his struggles with fortune and the uncertainty of his fate. He might have shewn how a poet, not born to wealth or title, was kept in a constant state of feverish anxiety with respect to his fame and the means of a precarious livelihood: that 'from being chilled with poverty, steeped in contempt, he had passed into the sunshine of fortune, and was lifted to the very pinnacle of public favour'; yet even there could not count on the continuance of success, but was, 'like the giddy sailor on the mast, ready with every blast to topple down into the fatal bowels of the deep!' He might have traced his habit of ale-house tippling to the last long precious draught of his favourite usquebaugh, which he took in the prospect of bidding farewel for ever to his native land; and his conjugal infidelities to his first disappointment in love, which would not have happened to him, if he had been born to a small estate in land, or bred up behind a counter!

Lastly, Mr. Wordsworth might have shewn the incompatibility between the Muses and the Excise, which never agreed well together, or met in one seat, till they were unaccountably reconciled on Rydal Mount. He must know (no man better) the distraction created by the opposite calls of business and of fancy, the torment of extents, the plague of receipts laid in order or mislaid, the disagreeableness of exacting penalties or paying the forfeiture; and how all this (together with the broaching of casks and the splashing of beer-barrels) must have preyed upon a mind like Burns, with more than his natural sensibility and none of his acquired firmness.

Mr. Coleridge, alluding to this circumstance of the promotion of the Scottish Bard to be 'a gauger of ale-firkins,' in a poetical epistle to his friend Charles Lamb, calls upon him in a burst of heartfelt indignation, to gather a wreath of henbane, nettles, and nightshade,

'—— ——To twine
The illustrious brow of Scotch nobility.'

If, indeed, Mr. Lamb had undertaken to write a letter in defence of Burns, how different would it have been from this of Mr. Wordsworth's! How much better than I can even imagine it to have been done!

It is hardly reasonable to look for a hearty or genuine defence of Burns from the pen of Mr. Wordsworth; for there is no common link of sympathy between them. Nothing can be more different or hostile than the spirit of their poetry. Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of mere sentiment and pensive contemplation: Burns's is a very highly sublimated essence of animal existence. With Burns, 'self-love and social are the same'—

'And we 'll tak a cup of kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.'

Mr. Wordsworth is 'himself alone,' a recluse philosopher, or a reluctant spectator of the scenes of many-coloured life; moralising on them, not describing, not entering into them. Robert Burns has exerted all the vigour of his mind, all the happiness of his nature, in exalting the pleasures of wine, of love, and good fellowship: but in Mr. Wordsworth there is a total disunion and divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body; the banns are forbid, or a separation is austerely pronounced from bed and board—*a mensâ et thoro*. From the Lyrical Ballads, it does not appear that men eat or drink, marry or are given in marriage. If we lived by every sentiment that proceeded out of mouths, and not by bread or wine, or if the species were continued like trees (to borrow an expression from the great Sir Thomas Browne), Mr. Wordsworth's poetry would be just as good as ever. It is not so with Burns: he is 'famous for the keeping of it up,' and in his verse is ever fresh and gay. For this, it seems, he has fallen under the displeasure of the Edinburgh Reviewers, and the still more formidable patronage of Mr. Wordsworth's pen.

'This, this was the unkindest cut of all.'

I was going to give some extracts out of this composition in

support of what I have said, but I find them too tedious. Indeed (if I may be allowed to speak my whole mind, under correction) Mr. Wordsworth could not be in any way expected to tolerate or give a favourable interpretation to Burns's constitutional foibles—even his best virtues are not good enough for him. He is repelled and driven back into himself, not less by the worth than by the faults of others. His taste is as exclusive and repugnant as his genius. It is because so few things give him pleasure, that he gives pleasure to so few people. It is not every one who can perceive the sublimity of a daisy, or the pathos to be extracted from a withered thorn!

To proceed from Burns's patrons to his poetry, than which no two things can be more different. His 'Twa Dogs' is a very spirited piece of description, both as it respects the animal and human creation, and conveys a very vivid idea of the manners both of high and low life. The burlesque panegyric of the first dog,

> 'His locked, lettered, braw brass collar
> Shew'd him the gentleman and scholar'—

reminds one of Launce's account of his dog Crabbe, where he is said, as an instance of his being in the way of promotion, 'to have got among three or four gentleman-like dogs under the Duke's table.' The 'Halloween' is the most striking and picturesque description of local customs and scenery. The Brigs of Ayr, the Address to a Haggis, Scotch Drink, and innumerable others are, however, full of the same kind of characteristic and comic painting. But his masterpiece in this way is his Tam o' Shanter. I shall give the beginning of it, but I am afraid I shall hardly know when to leave off.

> 'When chapman billies leave the street,
> And drouthy neebors, neebors meet,
> As market-days are wearing late,
> And folk begin to tak the gate;
> While we sit bousing at the nappy,
> And getting fou and unco happy,
> We think na on the lang Scots miles,
> The mosses, waters, slaps, and stiles,
> That lie between us and our hame,
> Whare sits our sulky, sullen dame,
> Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
> Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.
>
> This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
> As he frae Ayr ae night did canter;
> (Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses,
> For honest men and bonny lasses.)

O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise,
As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That frae November till October
Ae market-day thou was na sober;
That ilka melder, wi' the miller,
Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;
That ev'ry naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;
That at the Lord's house, ev'n on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirton Jean till Monday—
She prophesy'd, that late or soon,
Thou wad be found deep drown'd in Doon;
Or catcht wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
To think how mony counsels sweet,
How mony lengthen'd, sage advices,
The husband frae the wife despises!

But to our tale: Ae market night,
Tam had got planted unco right
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow, Souter Johnny,
His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;
Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither;
They had been fou for weeks thegither.
The night drave on wi' sangs an clatter,
And aye the ale was growing better:
The landlady and Tam grew gracious
Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious:
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:
The storm without might rair and rustle,
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd himsel amang the nappy;
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure:
Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
O'er a' the ills of life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r—its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow, falls in the river,
A moment white—then melts for ever;

Or like the Borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm.—
Nae man can tether time or tide,
The hour approaches, Tam maun ride;
That hour o' night's black arch the key-stane,
That dreary hour he mounts his beast in,
And sic a night he taks the road in,
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast,
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd,
Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd:
That night a child might understand,
The Deil had business on his hand.

Weel mounted on his grey mare, Meg,
A better never lifted leg,
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire,
Despising wind, and rain, and fire;
Whiles haulding fast his gude blue bonnet;
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet;
Whiles glowring round wi' prudent cares,
Lest bogles catch him unawares;
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Whare ghaists and houlets nightly cry.—

By this time Tam was cross the ford,
Whare in the snaw, the chapman smoor'd;
And past the birks and meikle stane,
Whare drunken Charlie brak 's neck-bane;
And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,
Where hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
And near the thorn, aboon the well,
Whare Mungo's mither hang'd hersel.—
Before him Doon pours all his floods;
The doubling storm roars thro' the woods;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
Near and more near the thunders roll:
When, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze;
Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing;
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!
What dangers thou canst make us scorn!
Wi' Tippenny, we fear nae evil,
Wi' Usqueba, we 'll face the devil!

The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,
Fair play, he car'd na de'ils a boddle.
But Maggie stood right sair astonish'd,
Till by the heel and hand admonish'd,
She ventur'd forward on the light,
And, vow! Tam saw an unco sight!
Warlocks and witches in a dance,
Nae light cotillion new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.
As winnock-bunker, in the east,
There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;
A touzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
To gie them music was his charge;
He screw'd the pipes, and gart them skirl,
Till roof and rafters a' did dirl—
Coffins stood round like open presses,
That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
And, by some devilish cantrip slight,
Each in its cauld hand held a light—
By which heroic Tam was able
To note upon the haly table,
A murderer's banes in gibbet-airns;
Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen'd bairns;
A thief, new cutted frae a rape,
Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;
Five tomahawks, wi' bluid red rusted;
Five scimitars, wi' murder crusted;
A garter, which a babe had strangled;
A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
Whom his ain son o' life bereft,
The grey hairs yet stack to the heft;
Wi' mair, o' horrible and awfu',
Which e'en to name wad be unlawfu'

As Tammie glowr'd amaz'd, and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:
The Piper loud and louder blew;
The dancers quick and quicker flew;
They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
Till ilka Carlin swat and reekit,
And coost her duddies to the wark,
And linket at it in her sark!

Now Tam, O Tam! had they been queans
A' plump and strapping in their teens;
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
Been snaw-white seventeen hundred linen!

Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush, o' guid blue hair,
I wad hae gi'en them aff my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies!
But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,
Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal,
Louping and flinging on a crummock,
I wonder did na turn thy stomach.

But Tam ken'd what was what fu' brawly,
There was ae winsome wench and waly,
That night enlisted in the core,
(Lang after ken'd on Carrick shore;
For mony a beast to dead she shot,
And perish'd mony a bonnie boat,
And shook baith meikle corn and bear,
And kept the country-side in fear—)
Her cutty sark o' Paisley harn,
That while a lassie she had worn,
In longitude tho' sorely scanty,
It was her best, and she was vaunty.—
Ah! little ken'd thy reverend grannie,
That sark she coft for her wee Nannie,
Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches),
Wad ever grac'd a dance of witches!

But here my Muse her wing maun cour;
Sic flights are far beyond her power:
To sing how Nannie lap and flang,
(A souple jade she was, and strang)
And how Tam stood like ane bewitch'd,
And thought his very een enrich'd;
Ev'n Satan glowr'd and fidg'd fu' fain,
And hotch't, and blew wi' might and main;
Till first ae caper, syne anither,
Tam tint his reason a' thegither,
And roars out, 'Weel done, Cutty Sark!'
And in an instant all was dark;
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied.

As bees biz out wi' angry fyke
When plundering herds assail their byke;
As open pussie's mortal foes,
When, pop! she starts before their nose;
As eager rins the market-crowd,
When 'Catch the thief!' resounds aloud;
So Maggie rins—the witches follow,
Wi' mony an eldritch skreech and hollow,

Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou 'll get thy fairin'!
In hell they 'll roast thee like a herrin'!
In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin'!
Kate soon will be a waefu' woman!
Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
And win the key-stane o' the brig;
There, at them thou thy tail may toss,
A running stream they dare na cross;
But ere the key-stane she could make,
The fient a tail she had to shake!
For Nannie, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle;
But little wist she Maggie's mettle—
Ae spring brought off her master hale,
But left behind, her ain grey tail:
The Carlin claught her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,
Ilk man and mother's son tak heed:
Whane'er to drink you are inclin'd,
Or Cutty Sarks rin in your mind,
Think, ye may buy the joys owre dear;
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.'

Burns has given the extremes of licentious eccentricity and convivial enjoyment, in the story of this scape-grace, and of patriarchal simplicity and gravity in describing the old national character of the Scottish peasantry. The Cotter's Saturday Night is a noble and pathetic picture of human manners, mingled with a fine religious awe. It comes over the mind like a slow and solemn strain of music. The soul of the poet aspires from this scene of low-thoughted care, and reposes, in trembling hope, on 'the bosom of its Father and its God.' Hardly any thing can be more touching than the following stanzas, for instance, whether as they describe human interests, or breathe a lofty devotional spirit.

'The toil-worn Cotter frae his labour goes,
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;
Th' expectant wee-things, toddlin, stacher through
To meet their dad, wi' flichterin noise and glee.

His wee-bit ingle, blinkin bonilie,
His clean hearth-stane, his thriftie wifie's smile.
The lisping infant, prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary carking cares beguile,
And makes him quite forget his labour and his toil.

Belyve, the elder bairns come drapping in,
At service out, amang the farmers roun',
Some ca' the pleugh, some herd, some tentie rin
A cannie errand to a neebor town;
Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman-grown,
In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
Comes hame, perhaps, to shew a braw new gown,
Or deposit her sair-won penny-fee,
To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

Wi' joy unfeign'd, brothers and sisters meet,
An' each for other's welfare kindly spiers;
The social hours, swift-winged, unnotic'd fleet;
Each tells the uncos that he sees or hears:
The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years;
Anticipation forward points the view;
The mither, wi' her needle an' her shears,
Gars auld claes look amaist as weel 's the new;
The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

* * * * * * *

But, hark! a rap comes gently to the door;
Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the same,
Tells how a neebor lad cam o'er the moor,
To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
The wily mother sees the conscious flame
Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek;
With heart-struck, anxious care, inquires his name,
While Jenny hafflins is afraid to speak;
Weel pleas'd the mother hears it 's nae wild, worthless rake.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben;
A strappan youth; he taks the mother's eye;
Blithe Jenny sees the visit 's no ill ta'en;
The father craks of horses, pleughs, and kye.
The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy,
But blate an' laithfu', scarce can weel behave;
The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
What makes the youth sae bashfu' an' sae grave;
Weel-pleas'd to think her bairn 's respected like the lave.

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
The halesome parritch, chief o' Scotia's food:

The soupe their only hawkie does afford,
That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood:
The dame brings forth, in complimental mood,
To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd kebbuck, fell,
An' aft he 's prest, an' aft he ca's it guid;
The frugal wifie, garrulous, will tell,
How 'twas a towmond auld, sin' lint was i' the bell.

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
The big ha'-Bible, ance his father's pride:
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion wi' judicious care;
And 'Let us worship God!' he says, with solemn air

They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim:
Perhaps Dundee's wild-warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive Martyrs, worthy of the name;
Or noble Elgin beets the heav'n-ward flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays:
Compar'd with these, Italian trills are tame;
The tickled ears no heart-felt raptures raise;
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise.'—

Burns's poetical epistles to his friends are admirable, whether for the touches of satire, the painting of character, or the sincerity of friendship they display. Those to Captain Grose, and to Davie, a brother poet, are among the best:—they are 'the true pathos and sublime of human life.' His prose-letters are sometimes tinctured with affectation. They seem written by a man who has been admired for his wit, and is expected on all occasions to shine. Those in which he expresses his ideas of natural beauty in reference to Alison's Essay on Taste, and advocates the keeping up the remembrances of old customs and seasons, are the most powerfully written. His English serious odes and moral stanzas are, in general, failures, such as the The Lament, Man was made to Mourn, &c. nor do I much admire his 'Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled.' In this strain of didactic or sentimental moralising, the lines to Glencairn are the most happy, and impressive. His imitations of the old humorous ballad style of Ferguson's songs are no whit inferior to the admirable originals, such as 'John Anderson, my Joe,' and many more. But of all his productions, the pathetic and serious love-songs which he

has left behind him, in the manner of the old ballads, are perhaps those which take the deepest and most lasting hold of the mind. Such are the lines to Mary Morison, and those entitled Jessy.

'Here 's a health to ane I lo'e dear—
Here 's a health to ane I lo'e dear—
Thou art sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet,
And soft as their parting tear—Jessy!

Altho' thou maun never be mine,
Altho' even hope is denied;
'Tis sweeter for thee despairing,
Than aught in the world beside—Jessy!

The conclusion of the other is as follows.

'Yestreen, when to the trembling string
The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw.
Tho' this was fair, and that was bra',
And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sighed and said among them a',
Ye are na' Mary Morison.'

That beginning, 'Oh gin my love were a bonny red rose,' is a piece of rich and fantastic description. One would think that nothing could surpass these in beauty of expression, and in true pathos: and nothing does or can, but some of the old Scotch ballads themselves. There is in them a still more original cast of thought, a more romantic imagery—the thistle's glittering down, the gilliflower on the old garden-wall, the horseman's silver bells, the hawk on its perch—a closer intimacy with nature, a firmer reliance on it, as the only stock of wealth which the mind has to resort to, a more infantine simplicity of manners, a greater strength of affection, hopes longer cherished and longer deferred, sighs that the heart dare hardly heave, and 'thoughts that often lie too deep for tears.' We seem to feel that those who wrote and sung them (the early minstrels) lived in the open air, wandering on from place to place with restless feet and thoughts, and lending an ever-open ear to the fearful accidents of war or love, floating on the breath of old tradition or common fame, and moving the strings of their harp with sounds that sank into a nation's heart. How fine an illustration of this is that passage in Don Quixote, where the knight and Sancho, going in search of Dulcinea, inquire their way of the countryman, who was driving his mules to plough before break of day, 'singing the ancient ballad of Ronces-

valles.' Sir Thomas Overbury describes his country girl as still accompanied with fragments of old songs. One of the best and most striking descriptions of the effects of this mixture of national poetry and music is to be found in one of the letters of Archbishop Herring, giving an account of a confirmation-tour in the mountains of Wales.

'That pleasure over, our work became very arduous, for we were to mount a rock, and in many places of the road, over natural stairs of stone. I submitted to this, which they told me was but a taste of the country, and to prepare me for worse things to come. However, worse things did not come that morning, for we dined soon after out of our own wallets; and though our inn stood in a place of the most frightful solitude, and the best formed for the habitation of monks (who once possessed it) in the world, yet we made a cheerful meal. The novelty of the thing gave me spirits, and the air gave me appetite much keener than the knife I ate with. We had our music too; for there came in a harper, who soon drew about us a group of figures that Hogarth would have given any price for. The harper was in his true place and attitude; a man and woman stood before him, singing to his instrument wildly, but not disagreeably; a little dirty child was playing with the bottom of the harp; a woman in a sick night-cap hanging over the stairs; a boy with crutches fixed in a staring attention, and a girl carding wool in the chimney, and rocking a cradle with her naked feet, interrupted in her business by the charms of the music; all ragged and dirty, and all silently attentive. These figures gave us a most entertaining picture, and would please you or any man of observation; and one reflection gave me a particular comfort, that the assembly before us demonstrated, that even here, the influential sun warmed poor mortals, and inspired them with love and music.'

I could wish that Mr. Wilkie had been recommended to take this group as the subject of his admirable pencil; he has painted a picture of Bathsheba, instead.

In speaking of the old Scotch ballads, I need do no more than mention the name of Auld Robin Gray. The effect of reading this old ballad is as if all our hopes and fears hung upon the last fibre of the heart, and we felt that giving way. What silence, what loneliness, what leisure for grief and despair!

'My father pressed me sair,
Though my mother did na' speak;
But she looked in my face
Till my heart was like to break.'

The irksomeness of the situations, the sense of painful dependence, is excessive; and yet the sentiment of deep-rooted, patient affection triumphs over all, and is the only impression that remains. Lady

Ann Bothwell's Lament is not, I think, quite equal to the lines beginning—

'O waly, waly, up the bank,
And waly, waly, down the brae,
And waly, waly, yon burn side,
Where I and my love wont to gae.
I leant my back unto an aik,
I thought it was a trusty tree;
But first it bow'd, and syne it brak,
Sae my true-love 's forsaken me.

O waly, waly, love is bonny,
A little time while it is new;
But when its auld, it waxeth cauld,
And fades awa' like the morning dew.
When cockle-shells turn siller bells,
And muscles grow on every tree,
Whan frost and snaw sall warm us aw,
Then sall my love prove true to me.

Now Arthur seat sall be my bed,
The sheets sall ne'er be fyld by me:
Saint Anton's well sall be my drink,
Since my true-love 's forsaken me.
Martinmas wind, when wilt thou blaw,
And shake the green leaves aff the tree?
O gentle death, whan wilt thou cum,
And tak' a life that wearies me!

'Tis not the frost that freezes sae,
Nor blawing snaw's inclemencie,
'Tis not sic cauld, that makes me cry,
But my love's heart grown cauld to me.
Whan we came in by Glasgow town,
We were a comely sight to see,
My love was clad in black velvet,
And I myself in cramasie.

But had I wist before I kist,
That love had been sae hard to win;
I 'd lockt my heart in case of gowd,
And pinn'd it with a siller pin.
And oh! if my poor babe were born,
And set upon the nurse's knee,
And I mysel in the cold grave!
Since my true-love 's forsaken me.'

The finest modern imitation of this style is the Braes of Yarrow; and perhaps the finest subject for a story of the same kind in any

modern book, is that told in Turner's History of England, of a Mahometan woman, who having fallen in love with an English merchant, the father of Thomas à Becket, followed him all the way to England, knowing only the word London, and the name of her lover, Gilbert.

But to have done with this, which is rather too serious a subject.—The old English ballads are of a gayer and more lively turn. They are adventurous and romantic; but they relate chiefly to good living and good fellowship, to drinking and hunting scenes. Robin Hood is the chief of these, and he still, in imagination, haunts Sherwood Forest. The archers green glimmer under the waving branches; the print on the grass remains where they have just finished their noon-tide meal under the green-wood tree; and the echo of their bugle-horn and twanging bows resounds through the tangled mazes of the forest, as the tall slim deer glances startled by.

'The trees in Sherwood Forest are old and good;
The grass beneath them now is dimly green:
Are they deserted all? Is no young mien,
With loose-slung bugle, met within the wood?

No arrow found—foil'd of its antler'd food—
Struck in the oak's rude side?—Is there nought seen
To mark the revelries which there have been,
In the sweet days of merry Robin Hood?

Go there with summer, and with evening—go
In the soft shadows, like some wand'ring man—
And thou shalt far amid the forest know
The archer-men in green, with belt and bow,
Feasting on pheasant, river-fowl and swan,
With Robin at their head, and Marian.'[1]

LECTURE VIII

ON THE LIVING POETS

'No more of talk where God or Angel guest
With man, as with his friend, familiar us'd
To sit indulgent.'———

Genius is the heir of fame; but the hard condition on which the bright reversion must be earned is the loss of life. Fame is the recompense not of the living, but of the dead. The temple of fame

[1] Sonnet on Sherwood Forest, by J. H. Reynolds, Esq.

stands upon the grave: the flame that burns upon its altars is kindled from the ashes of great men. Fame itself is immortal, but it is not begot till the breath of genius is extinguished. For fame is not popularity, the shout of the multitude, the idle buzz of fashion, the venal puff, the soothing flattery of favour or of friendship; but it is the spirit of a man surviving himself in the minds and thoughts of other men, undying and imperishable. It is the power which the intellect exercises over the intellect, and the lasting homage which is paid to it, as such, independently of time and circumstances, purified from partiality and evil-speaking. Fame is the sound which the stream of high thoughts, carried down to future ages, makes as it flows —deep, distant, murmuring evermore like the waters of the mighty ocean. He who has ears truly touched to this music, is in a manner deaf to the voice of popularity.—The love of fame differs from mere vanity in this, that the one is immediate and personal, the other ideal and abstracted. It is not the direct and gross homage paid to himself, that the lover of true fame seeks or is proud of; but the indirect and pure homage paid to the eternal forms of truth and beauty as they are reflected in his mind, that gives him confidence and hope. The love of nature is the first thing in the mind of the true poet: the admiration of himself the last. A man of genius cannot well be a coxcomb; for his mind is too full of other things to be much occupied with his own person. He who is conscious of great powers in himself, has also a high standard of excellence with which to compare his efforts: he appeals also to a test and judge of merit, which is the highest, but which is too remote, grave, and impartial, to flatter his self-love extravagantly, or puff him up with intolerable and vain conceit. This, indeed, is one test of genius and of real greatness of mind, whether a man can wait patiently and calmly for the award of posterity, satisfied with the unwearied exercise of his faculties, retired within the sanctuary of his own thoughts; or whether he is eager to forestall his own immortality, and mortgage it for a newspaper puff. He who thinks much of himself, will be in danger of being forgotten by the rest of the world: he who is always trying to lay violent hands on reputation, will not secure the best and most lasting. If the restless candidate for praise takes no pleasure, no sincere and heartfelt delight in his works, but as they are admired and applauded by others, what should others see in them to admire or applaud? They cannot be expected to admire them because they are *his*; but for the truth and nature contained in them, which must first be inly felt and copied with severe delight, from the love of truth and nature, before it can ever appear there. Was Raphael, think you, when he painted his pictures of the Virgin and Child in all their inconceivable

truth and beauty of expression, thinking most of his subject or of himself? Do you suppose that Titian, when he painted a landscape, was pluming himself on being thought the finest colourist in the world, or making himself so by looking at nature? Do you imagine that Shakspeare, when he wrote Lear or Othello, was thinking of any thing but Lear and Othello? Or that Mr. Kean, when he plays these characters, is thinking of the audience?—No: he who would be great in the eyes of others, must first learn to be nothing in his own. The love of fame, as it enters at times into his mind, is only another name for the love of excellence; or it is the ambition to attain the highest excellence, sanctioned by the highest authority—that of time.

Those minds, then, which are the most entitled to expect it, can best put up with the postponement of their claims to lasting fame. They can afford to wait. They are not afraid that truth and nature will ever wear out; will lose their gloss with novelty, or their effect with fashion. If their works have the seeds of immortality in them, they will live; if they have not they care little about them as theirs. They do not complain of the start which others have got of them in the race of everlasting renown, or of the impossibility of attaining the honours which time alone can give, during the term of their natural lives. They know that no applause, however loud and violent, can anticipate or over-rule the judgment of posterity; that the opinion of no one individual, nor of any one generation, can have the weight, the authority (to say nothing of the force of sympathy and prejudice), which must belong to that of successive generations. The brightest living reputation cannot be equally imposing to the imagination, with that which is covered and rendered venerable with the hoar of innumerable ages. No modern production can have the same atmosphere of sentiment around it, as the remains of classical antiquity. But then our moderns may console themselves with the reflection, that they will be old in their turn, and will either be remembered with still increasing honours, or quite forgotten!

I would speak of the living poets as I have spoken of the dead (for I think highly of many of them); but I cannot speak of them with the same reverence, because I do not feel it; with the same confidence, because I cannot have the same authority to sanction my opinion. I cannot be absolutely certain that any body, twenty years hence, will think any thing about any of them; but we may be pretty sure that Milton and Shakspeare will be remembered twenty years hence. We are, therefore, not without excuse if we husband our enthusiasm a little, and do not prematurely lay out our whole stock in untried ventures, and what may turn out to be false bottoms. I

have myself out-lived one generation of favourite poets, the Darwins, the Hayleys, the Sewards. Who reads them now?—If, however, I have not the verdict of posterity to bear me out in bestowing the most unqualified praises on their immediate successors, it is also to be remembered, that neither does it warrant me in condemning them. Indeed, it was not my wish to go into this ungrateful part of the subject; but something of the sort is expected from me, and I must run the gauntlet as well as I can. Another circumstance that adds to the difficulty of doing justice to all parties is, that I happen to have had a personal acquaintance with some of these jealous votaries of the Muses; and that is not the likeliest way to imbibe a high opinion of the rest. Poets do not praise one another in the language of hyperbole. I am afraid, therefore, that I labour under a degree of prejudice against some of the most popular poets of the day, from an early habit of deference to the critical opinions of some of the least popular. I cannot say that I ever learnt much about Shakspeare or Milton, Spenser or Chaucer, from these professed guides; for I never heard them say much about them. They were always talking of themselves and one another. Nor am I certain that this sort of personal intercourse with living authors, while it takes away all real relish or freedom of opinion with regard to their contemporaries, greatly enhances our respect for themselves. Poets are not ideal beings; but have their prose-sides, like the commonest of the people. We often hear persons say, What they would have given to have seen Shakspeare! For my part, I would give a great deal not to have seen him; at least, if he was at all like any body else that I have ever seen. But why should he; for his works are not! This is, doubtless, one great advantage which the dead have over the living. It is always fortunate for ourselves and others, when we are prevented from exchanging admiration for knowledge. The splendid vision that in youth haunts our idea of the poetical character, fades, upon acquaintance, into the light of common day; as the azure tints that deck the mountain's brow are lost on a nearer approach to them. It is well, according to the moral of one of the Lyrical Ballads,—'To leave Yarrow unvisited.' But to leave this 'face-making,' and begin.—

I am a great admirer of the female writers of the present day; they appear to me like so many modern Muses. I could be in love with Mrs. Inchbald, romantic with Mrs. Radcliffe, and sarcastic with Madame D'Arblay: but they are novel-writers, and, like Audrey, may 'thank the Gods for not having made them poetical.' Did any one here ever read Mrs. Leicester's School? If they have not, I wish they would; there will be just time before the next three

volumes of the Tales of My Landlord come out. That is not a school of affectation, but of humanity. No one can think too highly of the work, or highly enough of the author.

The first poetess I can recollect is Mrs. Barbauld, with whose works I became acquainted before those of any other author, male or female, when I was learning to spell words of one syllable in her story-books for children. I became acquainted with her poetical works long after in Enfield's Speaker; and remember being much divided in my opinion at that time, between her Ode to Spring and Collins's Ode to Evening. I wish I could repay my childish debt of gratitude in terms of appropriate praise. She is a very pretty poetess; and, to my fancy, strews the flowers of poetry most agreeably round the borders of religious controversy. She is a neat and pointed prose-writer. Her 'Thoughts on the Inconsistency of Human Expectations,' is one of the most ingenious and sensible essays in the language. There is the same idea in one of Barrow's Sermons.

Mrs. Hannah More is another celebrated modern poetess, and I believe still living. She has written a great deal which I have never read.

Miss Baillie must make up this trio of female poets. Her tragedies and comedies, one of each to illustrate each of the passions, separately from the rest, are heresies in the dramatic art. She is a Unitarian in poetry. With her the passions are, like the French republic, one and indivisible: they are not so in nature, or in Shakspeare. Mr. Southey has, I believe, somewhere expressed an opinion, that the Basil of Miss Baillie is superior to Romeo and Juliet. I shall not stay to contradict him. On the other hand, I prefer her De Montfort, which was condemned on the stage, to some later tragedies, which have been more fortunate—to the Remorse, Bertram, and lastly, Fazio. There is in the chief character of that play a nerve, a continued unity of interest, a setness of purpose and precision of outline which John Kemble alone was capable of giving; and there is all the grace which women have in writing. In saying that De Montfort was a character which just suited Mr. Kemble, I mean to pay a compliment to both. He was not 'a man of no mark or likelihood': and what he could be supposed to do particularly well, must have a meaning in it. As to the other tragedies just mentioned, there is no reason why any common actor should not 'make mouths in them at the invisible event,'—one as well as another. Having thus expressed my sense of the merits of the authoress, I must add, that her comedy of the Election, performed last summer at the Lyceum with indifferent success, appears to me the perfection of baby-house theatricals. Every thing in it has such a *do-me-good* air, is so insipid

and amiable. Virtue seems such a pretty playing at make-believe, and vice is such a naughty word. It is a theory of some French author, that little girls ought not to be suffered to have dolls to play with, to call them *pretty dears*, to admire their black eyes and cherry cheeks, to lament and bewail over them if they fall down and hurt their faces, to praise them when they are good, and scold them when they are naughty. It is a school of affectation: Miss Baillie has profited of it. She treats her grown men and women as little girls treat their dolls—makes moral puppets of them, pulls the wires, and they talk virtue and act vice, according to their cue and the title prefixed to each comedy or tragedy, not from any real passions of their own, or love either of virtue or vice.

The transition from these to Mr. Rogers's Pleasures of Memory, is not far: he is a very lady-like poet. He is an elegant, but feeble writer. He wraps up obvious thoughts in a glittering cover of fine words; is full of enigmas with no meaning to them; is studiously inverted, and scrupulously far-fetched; and his verses are poetry, chiefly because no particle, line, or syllable of them reads like prose. He differs from Milton in this respect, who is accused of having inserted a number of prosaic lines in Paradise Lost. This kind of poetry, which is a more minute and inoffensive species of the Della Cruscan, is like the game of asking what one's thoughts are like. It is a tortuous, tottering, wriggling, fidgetty translation of every thing from the vulgar tongue, into all the tantalizing, teasing, tripping, lisping *mimminee-pimminee* of the highest brilliancy and fashion of poetical diction. You have nothing like truth of nature or simplicity of expression. The fastidious and languid reader is never shocked by meeting, from the rarest chance in the world, with a single homely phrase or intelligible idea. You cannot see the thought for the ambiguity of the language, the figure for the finery, the picture for the varnish. The whole is refined, and frittered away into an appearance of the most evanescent brilliancy and tremulous imbecility.—There is no other fault to be found with the Pleasures of Memory, than a want of taste and genius. The sentiments are amiable, and the notes at the end highly interesting, particularly the one relating to the Countess Pillar (as it is called) between Appleby and Penrith, erected (as the inscription tells the thoughtful traveller) by Anne Countess of Pembroke, in the year 1648, in memory of her last parting with her good and pious mother in the same place in the year 1616.

> 'To shew that power of love, how great
> Beyond all human estimate.'

This story is also told in the poem, but with so many artful innuendos and tinsel words, that it is hardly intelligible; and still less does it reach the heart.

Campbell's Pleasures of Hope is of the same school, in which a painful attention is paid to the expression in proportion as there is little to express, and the decomposition of prose is substituted for the composition of poetry. How much the sense and keeping in the ideas are sacrificed to a jingle of words and epigrammatic turn of expression, may be seen in such lines as the following:—one of the characters, an old invalid, wishes to end his days under

> 'Some hamlet shade, to yield his sickly form
> Health in the breeze, and shelter in the storm.

Now the antithesis here totally fails: for it is the breeze, and not the tree, or as it is quaintly expressed, *hamlet shade*, that affords health, though it is the tree that affords shelter in or from the storm. Instances of the same sort of *curiosa infelicitas* are not rare in this author. His verses on the Battle of Hohenlinden have considerable spirit and animation. His Gertrude of Wyoming is his principal performance. It is a kind of historical paraphrase of Mr. Wordsworth's poem of Ruth. It shews little power, or power enervated by extreme fastidiousness. It is

> '———— Of outward show
> Elaborate; of inward less exact.'

There are painters who trust more to the setting of their pictures than to the truth of the likeness. Mr. Campbell always seems to me to be thinking how his poetry will look when it comes to be hot-pressed on superfine wove paper, to have a disproportionate eye to points and commas, and dread of errors of the press. He is so afraid of doing wrong, of making the smallest mistake, that he does little or nothing. Lest he should wander irretrievably from the right path, he stands still. He writes according to established etiquette. He offers the Muses no violence. If he lights upon a good thought, he immediately drops it for fear of spoiling a good thing. When he launches a sentiment that you think will float him triumphantly for once to the bottom of the stanza, he stops short at the end of the first or second line, and stands shivering on the brink of beauty, afraid to trust himself to the fathomless abyss. *Tutus nimium, timidusque procellarum.* His very circumspection betrays him. The poet, as well as the woman, that deliberates, is undone. He is much like a man whose heart fails him just as he is going up in a balloon, and who breaks his neck by flinging himself out of it

when it is too late. Mr. Campbell too often maims and mangles his ideas before they are full formed, to fit them to the Procustes' bed of criticism; or strangles his intellectual offspring in the birth, lest they should come to an untimely end in the Edinburgh Review. He plays the hypercritic on himself, and starves his genius to death from a needless apprehension of a plethora. No writer who thinks habitually of the critics, either to tremble at their censures or set them at defiance, can write well. It is the business of reviewers to watch poets, not of poets to watch reviewers.—There is one admirable simile in this poem, of the European child brought by the sooty Indian in his hand, 'like morning brought by night.' The love-scenes in Gertrude of Wyoming breathe a balmy voluptuousness of sentiment; but they are generally broken off in the middle; they are like the scent of a bank of violets, faint and rich, which the gale suddenly conveys in a different direction. Mr. Campbell is careful of his own reputation, and economical of the pleasures of his readers. He treats them as the fox in the fable treated his guest the stork; or, to use his own expression, his fine things are

'Like angels' visits, few, and far between.'[1]

There is another fault in this poem, which is the mechanical structure of the fable. The most striking events occur in the shape of antitheses. The story is cut into the form of a parallelogram. There is the same systematic alternation of good and evil, of violence and repose, that there is of light and shade in a picture. The Indian, who is the chief agent in the interest of the poem, vanishes and returns after long intervals, like the periodical revolutions of the planets. He unexpectedly appears just in the nick of time, after years of absence, and without any known reason but the convenience of the author and the astonishment of the reader; as if nature were a machine constructed on a principle of complete contrast, to produce a theatrical effect. *Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus.* Mr. Campbell's savage never appears but upon great occasions, and then his punctuality is preternatural and alarming. He is the most wonderful instance on record of poetical *reliability*. The most dreadful mischiefs happen at the most mortifying moments; and when your expectations are wound up to the highest pitch, you are sure to have them knocked on the head by a premeditated and

[1] There is the same idea in Blair's Grave.

'——— Its visits,
Like those of angels, short, and far between.

Mr. Campbell in altering the expression has spoiled it. 'Few,' and 'far between,' are the same thing.

remorseless stroke of the poet's pen. This is done so often for the convenience of the author, that in the end it ceases to be for the satisfaction of the reader.

Tom Moore is a poet of a quite different stamp. He is as heedless, gay, and prodigal of his poetical wealth, as the other is careful, reserved, and parsimonious. The genius of both is national. Mr. Moore's Muse is another Ariel, as light, as tricksy, as indefatigable, and as humane a spirit. His fancy is for ever on the wing, flutters in the gale, glitters in the sun. Every thing lives, moves, and sparkles in his poetry, while over all love waves his purple light. His thoughts are as restless, as many, and as bright as the insects that people the sun's beam. 'So work the honey-bees,' extracting liquid sweets from opening buds; so the butterfly expands its wings to the idle air; so the thistle's silver down is wafted over summer seas. An airy voyager on life's stream, his mind inhales the fragrance of a thousand shores, and drinks of endless pleasures under halcyon skies. Wherever his footsteps tend over the enamelled ground of fairy fiction—

> 'Around him the bees in play flutter and cluster,
> And gaudy butterflies frolic around.'

The fault of Mr. Moore is an exuberance of involuntary power. His facility of production lessens the effect of, and hangs as a dead weight upon, what he produces. His levity at last oppresses. The infinite delight he takes in such an infinite number of things, creates indifference in minds less susceptible of pleasure than his own. He exhausts attention by being inexhaustible. His variety cloys; his rapidity dazzles and distracts the sight. The graceful ease with which he lends himself to every subject, the genial spirit with which he indulges in every sentiment, prevents him from giving their full force to the masses of things, from connecting them into a whole. He wants intensity, strength, and grandeur. His mind does not brood over the great and permanent; it glances over the surfaces, the first impressions of things, instead of grappling with the deep-rooted prejudices of the mind, its inveterate habits, and that 'perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart.' His pen, as it is rapid and fanciful, wants momentum and passion. It requires the same principle to make us thoroughly like poetry, that makes us like ourselves so well, the feeling of continued identity. The impressions of Mr. Moore's poetry are detached, desultory, and physical. Its gorgeous colours brighten and fade like the rainbow's. Its sweetness evaporates like the effluvia exhaled from beds of flowers! His gay laughing style, which relates to the immediate pleasures of love or wine, is better

than his sentimental and romantic vein. His Irish melodies are not free from affectation and a certain sickliness of pretension. His serious descriptions are apt to run into flowery tenderness. His pathos sometimes melts into a mawkish sensibility, or crystallizes into all the prettinesses of allegorical language, and glittering hardness of external imagery. But he has wit at will, and of the first quality. His satirical and burlesque poetry is his best: it is first-rate. His Twopenny Post-Bag is a perfect 'nest of spicery'; where the Cayenne is not spared. The politician there sharpens the poet's pen. In this too, our bard resembles the bee—he has its honey and its sting.

Mr. Moore ought not to have written Lalla Rookh, even for three thousand guineas. His fame is worth more than that. He should have minded the advice of Fadladeen. It is not, however, a failure, so much as an evasion and a consequent disappointment of public expectation. He should have left it to others to break conventions with nations, and faith with the world. He should, at any rate, have kept his with the public. Lalla Rookh is not what people wanted to see whether Mr. Moore could do; namely, whether he could write a long epic poem. It is four short tales. The interest, however, is often high-wrought and tragic, but the execution still turns to the effeminate and voluptuous side. Fortitude of mind is the first requisite of a tragic or epic writer. Happiness of nature and felicity of genius are the pre-eminent characteristics of the bard of Erin. If he is not perfectly contented with what he is, all the world beside is. He had no temptation to risk any thing in adding to the love and admiration of his age, and more than one country.

> Therefore to be possessed with double pomp,
> To guard a title that was rich before,
> To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
> To throw a perfume on the violet,
> To smooth the ice, or add another hue
> Unto the rainbow, or with taper light
> To seek the beauteous eye of heav'n to garnish,
> Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.'

The same might be said of Mr. Moore's seeking to bind an epic crown, or the shadow of one, round his other laurels.

If Mr. Moore has not suffered enough personally, Lord Byron (judging from the tone of his writings) might be thought to have suffered too much to be a truly great poet. If Mr. Moore lays himself too open to all the various impulses of things, the outward shews of earth and sky, to every breath that blows, to every stray sentiment that crosses his fancy; Lord Byron shuts himself up too

much in the impenetrable gloom of his own thoughts, and buries the natural light of things in 'nook monastic.' The Giaour, the Corsair, Childe Harold, are all the same person, and they are apparently all himself. The everlasting repetition of one subject, the same dark ground of fiction, with the darker colours of the poet's mind spread over it, the unceasing accumulation of horrors on horror's head, steels the mind against the sense of pain, as inevitably as the unwearied Siren sounds and luxurious monotony of Mr. Moore's poetry make it inaccessible to pleasure. Lord Byron's poetry is as morbid as Mr. Moore's is careless and dissipated. He has more depth of passion, more force and impetuosity, but the passion is always of the same unaccountable character, at once violent and sullen, fierce and gloomy. It is not the passion of a mind struggling with misfortune, or the hopelessness of its desires, but of a mind preying upon itself, and disgusted with, or indifferent to all other things. There is nothing less poetical than this sort of unaccommodating selfishness. There is nothing more repulsive than this sort of ideal absorption of all the interests of others, of the good and ills of life, in the ruling passion and moody abstraction of a single mind, as if it would make itself the centre of the universe, and there was nothing worth cherishing but its intellectual diseases. It is like a cancer, eating into the heart of poetry. But still there is power; and power rivets attention and forces admiration. 'He hath a demon:' and that is the next thing to being full of the God. His brow collects the scattered gloom: his eye flashes livid fire that withers and consumes. But still we watch the progress of the scathing bolt with interest, and mark the ruin it leaves behind with awe. Within the contracted range of his imagination, he has great unity and truth of keeping. He chooses elements and agents congenial to his mind, the dark and glittering ocean, the frail bark hurrying before the storm, pirates and men that 'house on the wild sea with wild usages.' He gives the tumultuous eagerness of action, and the fixed despair of thought. In vigour of style and force of conception, he in one sense surpasses every writer of the present day. His indignant apothegms are like oracles of misanthropy. He who wishes for 'a curse to kill with,' may find it in Lord Byron's writings. Yet he has beauty lurking underneath his strength, tenderness sometimes joined with the phrenzy of despair. A flash of golden light sometimes follows from a stroke of his pencil, like a falling meteor. The flowers that adorn his poetry bloom over charnel-houses and the grave!

There is one subject on which Lord Byron is fond of writing, on which I wish he would not write—Buonaparte. Not that I quarrel with his writing for him, or against him, but with his writing both

for him and against him. What right has he to do this? Buonaparte's character, be it what else it may, does not change every hour according to his Lordship's varying humour. He is not a pipe for Fortune's finger, or for his Lordship's Muse, to play what stop she pleases on. Why should Lord Byron now laud him to the skies in the hour of his success, and then peevishly wreak his disappointment on the God of his idolatry? The man he writes of does not rise or fall with circumstances: but 'looks on tempests and is never shaken.' Besides, he is a subject for history, and not for poetry.

'Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread,
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried;
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior, famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd.'

If Lord Byron will write any thing more on this hazardous theme, let him take these lines of Shakspeare for his guide, and finish them in the spirit of the original—they will then be worthy of the subject.

Walter Scott is the most popular of all the poets of the present day, and deservedly so. He describes that which is most easily and generally understood with more vivacity and effect than any body else. He has no excellences, either of a lofty or recondite kind, which lie beyond the reach of the most ordinary capacity to find out; but he has all the good qualities which all the world agree to understand. His style is clear, flowing, and transparent: his sentiments, of which his style is an easy and natural medium, are common to him with his readers. He has none of Mr. Wordsworth's *idiosyncracy*. He differs from his readers only in a greater range of knowledge and facility of expression. His poetry belongs to the class of *improvisatori* poetry. It has neither depth, height, nor breadth in it; neither uncommon strength, nor uncommon refinement of thought, sentiment, or language. It has no originality. But if this author has no research, no moving power in his own breast, he relies with the greater safety and success on the force of his subject. He selects a story such as is sure to please, full of incidents, characters, peculiar manners, costume, and scenery; and he tells it in a way that can offend no one. He never wearies or disappoints you. He is communicative and garrulous; but he is not his own hero. He never obtrudes himself on your notice to prevent your seeing the subject. What passes in the poem, passes much as it would have done in reality. The author has little or nothing to do with it. Mr. Scott has great

intuitive power of fancy, great vividness of pencil in placing external objects and events before the eye. The force of his mind is picturesque, rather than *moral*. He gives more of the features of nature than the soul of passion. He conveys the distinct outlines and visible changes in outward objects, rather than 'their mortal consequences.' He is very inferior to Lord Byron in intense passion, to Moore in delightful fancy, to Mr. Wordsworth in profound sentiment: but he has more picturesque power than any of them; that is, he places the objects themselves, about which *they* might feel and think, in a much more striking point of view, with greater variety of dress and attitude, and with more local truth of colouring. His imagery is Gothic and grotesque. The manners and actions have the interest and curiosity belonging to a wild country and a distant period of time. Few descriptions have a more complete reality, a more striking appearance of life and motion, than that of the warriors in the Lady of the Lake, who start up at the command of Rhoderic Dhu, from their concealment under the fern, and disappear again in an instant. The Lay of the Last Minstrel and Marmion are the first, and perhaps the best of his works. The Goblin Page, in the first of these, is a very interesting and inscrutable little personage. In reading these poems, I confess I am a little disconcerted, in turning over the page, to find Mr. Westall's pictures, which always seem *fac-similes* of the persons represented, with ancient costume and a theatrical air. This may be a compliment to Mr. Westall, but it is not one to Walter Scott. The truth is, there is a modern air in the midst of the antiquarian research of Mr. Scott's poetry. It is history or tradition in masquerade. Not only the crust of old words and images is worn off with time,—the substance is grown comparatively light and worthless. The forms are old and uncouth; but the spirit is effeminate and frivolous. This is a deduction from the praise I have given to his pencil for extreme fidelity, though it has been no obstacle to its drawing-room success. He has just hit the town between the romantic and the fashionable; and between the two, secured all classes of readers on his side. In a word, I conceive that he is to the great poet, what an excellent mimic is to a great actor. There is no determinate impression left on the mind by reading his poetry. It has no results. The reader rises up from the perusal with new images and associations, but he remains the same man that he was before. A great mind is one that moulds the minds of others. Mr. Scott has put the Border Minstrelsy and scattered traditions of the country into easy, animated verse. But the Notes to his poems are just as entertaining as the poems themselves, and his poems are only entertaining.

Mr. Wordsworth is the most original poet now living. He is the reverse of Walter Scott in his defects and excellences. He has nearly all that the other wants, and wants all that the other possesses. His poetry is not external, but internal; it does not depend upon tradition, or story, or old song; he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject. He is the poet of mere sentiment. Of many of the Lyrical Ballads, it is not possible to speak in terms of too high praise, such as Hart-leap Well, the Banks of the Wye, Poor Susan, parts of the Leech-gatherer, the lines to a Cuckoo, to a Daisy, the Complaint, several of the Sonnets, and a hundred others of inconceivable beauty, of perfect originality and pathos. They open a finer and deeper vein of thought and feeling than any poet in modern times has done, or attempted. He has produced a deeper impression, and on a smaller circle, than any other of his contemporaries. His powers have been mistaken by the age, nor does he exactly understand them himself. He cannot form a whole. He has not the constructive faculty. He can give only the fine tones of thought, drawn from his mind by accident or nature, like the sounds drawn from the Æolian harp by the wandering gale.—He is totally deficient in all the machinery of poetry. His *Excursion*, taken as a whole, notwithstanding the noble materials thrown away in it, is a proof of this. The line labours, the sentiment moves slow, but the poem stands stock-still. The reader makes no way from the first line to the last. It is more than any thing in the world like Robinson Crusoe's boat, which would have been an excellent good boat, and would have carried him to the other side of the globe, but that he could not get it out of the sand where it stuck fast. I did what little I could to help to launch it at the time, but it would not do. I am not, however, one of those who laugh at the attempts or failures of men of genius. It is not my way to cry 'Long life to the conqueror.' Success and desert are not with me synonymous terms; and the less Mr. Wordsworth's general merits have been understood, the more necessary is it to insist upon them. This is not the place to repeat what I have already said on the subject. The reader may turn to it in the Round Table. I do not think, however, there is any thing in the larger poem equal to many of the detached pieces in the Lyrical Ballads. As Mr. Wordsworth's poems have been little known to the public, or chiefly through garbled extracts from them, I will here give an entire poem (one that has always been a favourite with me), that the reader may know what it is that the admirers of this author find to be delighted with in his poetry. Those who do not feel the beauty and the force of it, may save themselves the trouble of inquiring farther.

HART-LEAP WELL

'The knight had ridden down from Wensley moor
With the slow motion of a summer's cloud;
He turned aside towards a vassal's door,
And, "Bring another horse!" he cried aloud.

"Another horse!"—That shout the vassal heard,
And saddled his best steed, a comely gray;
Sir Walter mounted him; he was the third
Which he had mounted on that glorious day.

Joy sparkled in the prancing courser's eyes:
The horse and horseman are a happy pair;
But, though Sir Walter like a falcon flies,
There is a doleful silence in the air.

A rout this morning left Sir Walter's hall,
That as they galloped made the echoes roar;
But horse and man are vanished, one and all;
Such race, I think, was never seen before.

Sir Walter, restless as a veering wind,
Calls to the few tired dogs that yet remain:
Brach, Swift, and Music, noblest of their kind,
Follow, and up the weary mountain strain.

The knight hallooed, he chid and cheered them on
With suppliant gestures and upbraidings stern;
But breath and eye-sight fail; and, one by one,
The dogs are stretched among the mountain fern.

Where is the throng, the tumult of the race?
The bugles that so joyfully were blown?
—This chase it looks not like an earthly chase;
Sir Walter and the hart are left alone.

The poor hart toils along the mountain side;
I will not stop to tell how far he fled,
Nor will I mention by what death he died;
But now the knight beholds him lying dead.

Dismounting then, he leaned against a thorn;
He had no follower, dog, nor man, nor boy:
He neither smacked his whip, nor blew his horn,
But gazed upon the spoil with silent joy.

Close to the thorn on which Sir Walter leaned,
Stood his dumb partner in this glorious act;
Weak as a lamb the hour that it is yeaned;
And foaming like a mountain cataract.

Upon his side the hart was lying stretched:
His nose half-touched a spring beneath a hill,
And with the last deep groan his breath had fetched
The waters of the spring were trembling still.

And now, too happy for repose or rest,
(Was never man in such a joyful case!)
Sir Walter walked all round, north, south, and west,
And gazed, and gazed upon that darling place

And climbing up the hill—(it was at least
Nine roods of sheer ascent) Sir Walter found,
Three several hoof-marks which the hunted beast
Had left imprinted on the verdant ground.

Sir Walter wiped his face and cried, "Till now
Such sight was never seen by living eyes:
Three leaps have borne him from this lofty brow,
Down to the very fountain where he lies.

I'll build a pleasure-house upon this spot,
And a small arbour, made for rural joy;
'Twill be the traveller's shed, the pilgrim's cot,
A place of love for damsels that are coy.

A cunning artist will I have to frame
A bason for that fountain in the dell;
And they, who do make mention of the same
From this day forth, shall call it HART-LEAP WELL.

And, gallant brute! to make thy praises known,
Another monument shall here be raised;
Three several pillars, each a rough-hewn stone,
And planted where thy hoofs the turf have grazed.

And, in the summer-time when days are long,
I will come hither with my paramour;
And with the dancers, and the minstrel's song,
We will make merry in that pleasant bower.

Till the foundations of the mountains fail,
My mansion with its arbour shall endure;—
The joy of them who till the fields of Swale,
And them who dwell among the woods of Ure!"

Then home he went, and left the hart, stone-dead,
With breathless nostrils stretched above the spring.
—Soon did the knight perform what he had said,
And far and wide the fame thereof did ring.

Ere thrice the moon into her port had steered,
A cup of stone received the living well;
Three pillars of rude stone Sir Walter reared,
And built a house of pleasure in the dell.

And near the fountain, flowers of stature tall
With trailing plants and trees were intertwined,—
Which soon composed a little sylvan hall,
A leafy shelter from the sun and wind.

And thither, when the summer-days were long,
Sir Walter journeyed with his paramour;
And with the dancers and the minstrel's song
Made merriment within that pleasant bower.

The knight, Sir Walter, died in course of time,
And his bones lie in his paternal vale.—
But there is matter for a second rhyme,
And I to this would add another tale.'

PART SECOND

'The moving accident is not my trade:
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts:
'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,
To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts.

As I from Hawes to Richmond did repair,
It chanced that I saw standing in a dell
Three aspens at three corners of a square,
And one, not four yards distant, near a well.

What this imported I could ill divine:
And, pulling now the rein my horse to stop,
I saw three pillars standing in a line,
The last stone pillar on a dark hill-top.

The trees were gray, with neither arms nor head;
Half-wasted the square mound of tawny green;
So that you just might say, as then I said,
"Here in old time the hand of man hath been."

I looked upon the hill both far and near,
More doleful place did never eye survey;
It seemed as if the spring-time came not here,
And Nature here were willing to decay.

I stood in various thoughts and fancies lost,
When one, who was in shepherd's garb attired,
Came up the hollow:—Him did I accost,
And what this place might be I then inquired.

The shepherd stopped, and that same story told
Which in my former rhyme I have rehearsed.
"A jolly place," said he, "in times of old!
But something ails it now; the spot is curst.

You see these lifeless stumps of aspen wood—
Some say that they are beeches, others elms—
These were the bower; and here a mansion stood,
The finest palace of a hundred realms!

The arbour does its own condition tell;
You see the stones, the fountain, and the stream;
But as to the great lodge! you might as well
Hunt half a day for a forgotten dream.

There 's neither dog nor heifer, horse nor sheep,
Will wet his lips within that cup of stone;
And oftentimes, when all are fast asleep,
This water doth send forth a dolorous groan.

Some say that here a murder has been done,
And blood cries out for blood: but, for my part,
I 've guessed, when I 've been sitting in the sun,
That it was all for that unhappy hart.

What thoughts must through the creature's brain have passed!
Even from the top-most stone, upon the steep,
Are but three bounds—and look, Sir, at this last—
—O Master! it has been a cruel leap.

For thirteen hours he ran a desperate race;
And in my simple mind we cannot tell
What cause the hart might have to love this place,
And come and make his death-bed near the well.

Here on the grass perhaps asleep he sank,
Lulled by this fountain in the summer-tide;
This water was perhaps the first he drank
When he had wandered from his mother's side.

In April here beneath the scented thorn
He heard the birds their morning carols sing;
And he, perhaps, for aught we know, was born
Not half a furlong from that self-same spring.

But now here 's neither grass nor pleasant shade;
The sun on drearier hollow never shone;
So will it be, as I have often said,
Till trees, and stones, and fountain all are gone."

'Gray-headed Shepherd, thou hast spoken well;
Small difference lies between thy creed and mine:
This beast not unobserved by Nature fell;
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.

The Being, that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep, and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

The pleasure-house is dust:—behind, before,
This is no common waste, no common gloom;
But Nature, in due course of time, once more
Shall here put on her beauty and her bloom.

She leaves these objects to a slow decay,
That what we are, and have been, may be known;
But at the coming of the milder day,
These monuments shall all be overgrown.

One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she shews, and what conceals,
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.'

Mr. Wordsworth is at the head of that which has been denominated the Lake school of poetry; a school which, with all my respect for it, I do not think sacred from criticism or exempt from faults, of some of which faults I shall speak with becoming frankness; for I do not see that the liberty of the press ought to be shackled, or freedom of speech curtailed, to screen either its revolutionary or renegado extravagances. This school of poetry had its origin in the French revolution, or rather in those sentiments and opinions which produced that revolution; and which sentiments and opinions were indirectly imported into this country in translations from the German about that period. Our poetical literature had, towards the close of the last century, degenerated into the most trite, insipid, and mechanical of all things, in the hands of the followers of Pope and the old French school of poetry. It wanted something to stir it up, and it found that something in the principles and events of the French revolution. From the impulse it thus received, it rose at once from the most servile imitation and tamest common-place, to the utmost pitch of singularity and paradox. The change in the belles-lettres was as complete, and to many persons as startling, as the change in politics, with which it went hand in hand. There was a mighty ferment in the heads of statesmen and poets, kings and people. According to the prevailing notions, all was to be natural and new. Nothing that was established

was to be tolerated. All the common-place figures of poetry, tropes, allegories, personifications, with the whole heathen mythology, were instantly discarded; a classical allusion was considered as a piece of antiquated foppery; capital letters were no more allowed in print, than letters-patent of nobility were permitted in real life; kings and queens were dethroned from their rank and station in legitimate tragedy or epic poetry, as they were decapitated elsewhere; rhyme was looked upon as a relic of the feudal system, and regular metre was abolished along with regular government. Authority and fashion, elegance or arrangement, were hooted out of countenance, as pedantry and prejudice. Every one did that which was good in his own eyes. The object was to reduce all things to an absolute level; and a singularly affected and outrageous simplicity prevailed in dress and manners, in style and sentiment. A striking effect produced where it was least expected, something new and original, no matter whether good, bad, or indifferent, whether mean or lofty, extravagant or childish, was all that was aimed at, or considered as compatible with sound philosophy and an age of reason. The licentiousness grew extreme: Coryate's Crudities were nothing to it. The world was to be turned topsy-turvy; and poetry, by the good will of our Adam-wits, was to share its fate and begin *de novo*. It was a time of promise, a renewal of the world and of letters; and the Deucalions, who were to perform this feat of regeneration, were the present poet-laureat and the two authors of the Lyrical Ballads. The Germans, who made heroes of robbers, and honest women of cast-off mistresses, had already exhausted the extravagant and marvellous in sentiment and situation: our native writers adopted a wonderful simplicity of style and matter. The paradox they set out with was, that all things are by nature equally fit subjects for poetry; or that if there is any preference to be given, those that are the meanest and most unpromising are the best, as they leave the greatest scope for the unbounded stores of thought and fancy in the writer's own mind. Poetry had with them 'neither buttress nor coigne of vantage to make its pendant bed and procreant cradle.' It was not 'born so high: its aiery buildeth in the cedar's top, and dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun.' It grew like a mushroom out of the ground; or was hidden in it like a truffle, which it required a particular sagacity and industry to find out and dig up. They founded the new school on a principle of sheer humanity, on pure nature void of art. It could not be said of these sweeping reformers and dictators in the republic of letters, that 'in their train walked crowns and crownets; that realms and islands, like plates, dropt from their pockets': but they were surrounded, in company with the Muses, by a mixed rabble of idle

apprentices and Botany Bay convicts, female vagrants, gipsies, meek daughters in the family of Christ, of ideot boys and mad mothers, and after them 'owls and night-ravens flew.' They scorned 'degrees, priority, and place, insisture, course, proportion, season, form, office, and custom in all line of order':—the distinctions of birth, the vicissitudes of fortune, did not enter into their abstracted, lofty, and levelling calculation of human nature. He who was more than man, with them was none. They claimed kindred only with the commonest of the people: peasants, pedlars, and village-barbers were their oracles and bosom friends. Their poetry, in the extreme to which it professedly tended, and was in effect carried, levels all distinctions of nature and society; has 'no figures nor no fantasies,' which the prejudices of superstition or the customs of the world draw in the brains of men; 'no trivial fond records' of all that has existed in the history of past ages; it has no adventitious pride, pomp, or circumstance, to set it off; 'the marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe'; neither tradition, reverence, nor ceremony, 'that to great ones 'longs': it breaks in pieces the golden images of poetry, and defaces its armorial bearings, to melt them down in the mould of common humanity or of its own upstart self-sufficiency. They took the same method in their new-fangled 'metre ballad-mongering' scheme, which Rousseau did in his prose paradoxes—of exciting attention by reversing the established standards of opinion and estimation in the world. They were for bringing poetry back to its primitive simplicity and state of nature, as he was for bringing society back to the savage state: so that the only thing remarkable left in the world by this change, would be the persons who had produced it. A thorough adept in this school of poetry and philanthropy is jealous of all excellence but his own. He does not even like to share his reputation with his subject; for he would have it all proceed from his own power and originality of mind. Such a one is slow to admire any thing that is admirable; feels no interest in what is most interesting to others, no grandeur in anything grand, no beauty in anything beautiful. He tolerates only what he himself creates; he sympathizes only with what can enter into no competition with him, with 'the bare trees and mountains bare, and grass in the green field.' He sees nothing but himself and the universe. He hates all greatness and all pretensions to it, whether well or ill-founded. His egotism is in some respects a madness; for he scorns even the admiration of himself, thinking it a presumption in any one to suppose that he has taste or sense enough to understand him. He hates all science and all art; he hates chemistry, he hates conchology; he hates Voltaire; he hates Sir Isaac Newton; he

hates wisdom; he hates wit; he hates metaphysics, which he says are unintelligible, and yet he would be thought to understand them; he hates prose; he hates all poetry but his own; he hates the dialogues in Shakespeare; he hates music, dancing, and painting; he hates Rubens, he hates Rembrandt; he hates Raphael, he hates Titian; he hates Vandyke; he hates the antique; he hates the Apollo Belvidere; he hates the Venus of Medicis. This is the reason that so few people take an interest in his writings, because he takes an interest in nothing that others do!—The effect has been perceived as something odd; but the cause or principle has never been distinctly traced to its source before, as far as I know. The proofs are to be found every where—in Mr. Southey's Botany Bay Eclogues, in his book of Songs and Sonnets, his Odes and Inscriptions, so well parodied in the Anti-Jacobin Review, in his Joan of Arc, and last, though not least, in his Wat Tyler:

'When Adam delved, and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman?'

(—or the poet laureat either, we may ask?)—In Mr. Coleridge's Ode to an Ass's Foal, in his Lines to Sarah, his Religious Musings; and in his and Mr. Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, *passim*.

Of Mr. Southey's larger epics, I have but a faint recollection at this distance of time, but all that I remember of them is mechanical and extravagant, heavy and superficial. His affected, disjointed style is well imitated in the Rejected Addresses. The difference between him and Sir Richard Blackmore seems to be, that the one is heavy and the other light, the one solemn and the other pragmatical, the one phlegmatic and the other flippant; and that there is no Gay in the present time to give a Catalogue Raisonné of the performances of the living undertaker of epics. Kehama is a loose sprawling figure, such as we see cut out of wood or paper, and pulled or jerked with wire or thread, to make sudden and surprising motions, without meaning, grace, or nature in them. By far the best of his works are some of his shorter personal compositions, in which there is an ironical mixture of the quaint and serious, such as his lines on a picture of Gaspar Poussin, the fine tale of Gualberto, his Description of a Pig, and the Holly-tree, which is an affecting, beautiful, and modest retrospect on his own character. May the aspiration with which it concludes be fulfilled![1]—But the little he has done of true

[1] 'O reader! hast thou ever stood to see
The Holly Tree?
The eye that contemplates it well perceives
Its glossy leaves,

and sterling excellence, is overloaded by the quantity of indifferent matter which he turns out every year, 'prosing or versing,' with equally mechanical and irresistible facility. His Essays, or political and moral disquisitions, are not so full of original matter as Montaigne's. They are second or third rate compositions in that class.

It remains that I should say a few words of Mr. Coleridge; and there is no one who has a better right to say what he thinks of him

Ordered by an intelligence so wise
As might confound the Atheist's sophistries

Below, a circling fence, its leaves are seen
Wrinkled and keen;
No grazing cattle through their prickly round
Can reach to wound;
But as they grow where nothing is to fear,
Smooth and unarm'd the pointless leaves appear.

I love to view these things with curious eyes,
And moralize;
And in the wisdom of the Holly Tree
Can emblems see
Wherewith perchance to make a pleasant rhyme,
Such as may profit in the after time.

So, though abroad perchance I might appear
Harsh and austere,
To those who on my leisure would intrude
Reserved and rude,
Gentle at home amid my friends I 'd be,
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.

And should my youth, as youth is apt I know,
Some harshness show,
All vain asperities I day by day
Would wear away,
Till the smooth temper of my age should be
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.

And as when all the summer trees are seen
So bright and green,
The Holly leaves their fadeless hues display
Less bright than they,
But when the bare and wintry woods we see,
What then so cheerful as the Holly Tree?

So serious should my youth appear among
The thoughtless throng,
So would I seem amid the young and gay
More grave than they,
That in my age as cheerful I might be
As the green winter of the Holly Tree.'—

than I have. 'Is there here any dear friend of Cæsar? To him I say, that Brutus's love to Cæsar was no less than his.' But no matter.—His Ancient Mariner is his most remarkable performance, and the only one that I could point out to any one as giving an adequate idea of his great natural powers. It is high German, however, and in it he seems to 'conceive of poetry but as a drunken dream, reckless, careless, and heedless, of past, present, and to come.' His tragedies (for he has written two) are not answerable to it; they are, except a few poetical passages, drawling sentiment and metaphysical jargon. He has no genuine dramatic talent. There is one fine passage in his Christabel, that which contains the description of the quarrel between Sir Leoline and Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine, who had been friends in youth.

'Alas! they had been friends in youth,
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
And constancy lives in realms above;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain:
And thus it chanc'd as I divine,
With Roland and Sir Leoline.
Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother,
And parted ne'er to meet again!
But neither ever found another
To free the hollow heart from paining—

They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder:
A dreary sea now flows between,
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away I ween
The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline a moment's space
Stood gazing on the damsel's face;
And the youthful lord of Tryermaine
Came back upon his heart again.'

It might seem insidious if I were to praise his ode entitled Fire, Famine, and Slaughter, as an effusion of high poetical enthusiasm, and strong political feeling. His Sonnet to Schiller conveys a fine compliment to the author of the Robbers, and an equally fine idea of the state of youthful enthusiasm in which he composed it.

'Schiller! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
If through the shudd'ring midnight I had sent
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—

That in no after moment aught less vast
Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
Black Horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout
From the more with'ring scene diminish'd pass'd.

Ah! Bard tremendous in sublimity!
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood,
Wand'ring at eve, with finely frenzied eye,
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!
Awhile, with mute awe gazing, I would brood,
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstacy!'—

His *Conciones ad Populum*, Watchman, &c. are dreary trash. Of his Friend, I have spoken the truth elsewhere. But I may say of him here, that he is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt any thing. There is only one thing he could learn from me in return, but *that* he has not. He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! . . . . That spell is broke; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more: but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound.

'What though the radiance which was once so bright,
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flow'r;
I do not grieve, but rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy,

Which having been, must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In years that bring the philosophic mind!'—

I have thus gone through the task I intended, and have come at last to the level ground. I have felt my subject gradually sinking from under me as I advanced, and have been afraid of ending in nothing. The interest has unavoidably decreased at almost every successive step of the progress, like a play that has its catastrophe in the first or second act. This, however, I could not help. I have done as well as I could.

End of LECTURES ON
THE ENGLISH POETS

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

CONTENTS

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

PAGE

Jeremy Bentham 171
William Godwin 182
Mr. Coleridge 194
Rev. Mr. Irving 204
The Late Mr. Horne Tooke 213
Sir Walter Scott 223
Lord Byron 235
Mr. Southey 244
Mr. Wordsworth 252
Sir James Macintosh 261
Mr. Malthus 269
Mr. Gifford 280
Mr. Jeffrey 292
Mr. Brougham—Sir F. Burdett 300
Lord Eldon—Mr. Wilberforce 307
Mr. Canning 316
Mr. Campbell—Mr. Crabbe 325
Mr. T. Moore—Mr. Leigh Hunt . . . 335
Elia—Geoffrey Crayon 344

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

JEREMY BENTHAM

Mr. Bentham is one of those persons who verify the old adage, that 'A prophet has most honour out of his own country.' His reputation lies at the circumference; and the lights of his understanding are reflected, with increasing lustre, on the other side of the globe. His name is little known in England, better in Europe, best of all in the plains of Chili and the mines of Mexico. He has offered constitutions for the New World, and legislated for future times. The people of Westminster, where he lives, hardly dream of such a person; but the Siberian savage has received cold comfort from his lunar aspect, and may say to him with Caliban—'I know thee, and thy dog and thy bush!' The tawny Indian may hold out the hand of fellowship to him across the Great Pacific. We believe that the Empress Catherine corresponded with him; and we know that the Emperor Alexander called upon him, and presented him with his miniature in a gold snuff-box, which the philosopher, to his eternal honour, returned. Mr. Hobhouse is a greater man at the hustings, Lord Rolle at Plymouth Dock; but Mr. Bentham would carry it hollow, on the score of popularity, at Paris or Pegu. The reason is, that our author's influence is purely intellectual. He has devoted his life to the pursuit of abstract and general truths, and to those studies—

'That waft a *thought* from Indus to the Pole'—

and has never mixed himself up with personal intrigues or party politics. He once, indeed, stuck up a hand-bill to say that he (Jeremy Bentham) being of sound mind, was of opinion that Sir Samuel Romilly was the most proper person to represent Westminster; but this was the whim of the moment. Otherwise, his reasonings, if true at all, are true everywhere alike: his speculations concern humanity at large, and are not confined to the hundred or the bills of mortality. It is in moral as in physical magnitude. The little is seen best near: the great appears in its proper dimensions, only from

a more commanding point of view, and gains strength with time, and elevation from distance!

Mr. Bentham is very much among philosophers what La Fontaine was among poets:—in general habits and in all but his professional pursuits, he is a mere child. He has lived for the last forty years in a house in Westminster, overlooking the Park, like an anchoret in his cell, reducing law to a system, and the mind of man to a machine. He scarcely ever goes out, and sees very little company. The favoured few, who have the privilege of the *entrée*, are always admitted one by one. He does not like to have witnesses to his conversation. He talks a great deal, and listens to nothing but facts. When any one calls upon him, he invites them to take a turn round his garden with him (Mr. Bentham is an economist of his time, and sets apart this portion of it to air and exercise)—and there you may see the lively old man, his mind still buoyant with thought and with the prospect of futurity, in eager conversation with some Opposition Member, some expatriated Patriot, or Transatlantic Adventurer, urging the extinction of Close Boroughs, or planning a code of laws for some 'lone island in the watery waste,' his walk almost amounting to a run, his tongue keeping pace with it in shrill, cluttering accents, negligent of his person, his dress, and his manner, intent only on his grand theme of UTILITY—or pausing, perhaps, for want of breath and with lack-lustre eye to point out to the stranger a stone in the wall at the end of his garden (overarched by two beautiful cotton-trees) *Inscribed to the Prince of Poets*, which marks the house where Milton formerly lived. To show how little the refinements of taste or fancy enter into our author's system, he proposed at one time to cut down these beautiful trees, to convert the garden where he had breathed the air of Truth and Heaven for near half a century into a paltry *Chrestomathic School*, and to make Milton's house (the cradle of Paradise Lost) a thoroughfare, like a three-stalled stable, for the idle rabble of Westminster to pass backwards and forwards to it with their cloven hoofs. Let us not, however, be getting on too fast—Milton himself taught school! There is something not altogether dissimilar between Mr. Bentham's appearance, and the portraits of Milton, the same silvery tone, a few dishevelled hairs, a peevish, yet puritanical expression, an irritable temperament corrected by habit and discipline. Or in modern times, he is something between Franklin and Charles Fox, with the comfortable double-chin and sleek thriving look of the one, and the quivering lip, the restless eye, and animated acuteness of the other. His eye is quick and lively; but it glances not from object to object, but from thought to thought. He is evidently a man occupied with some train of fine

and inward association. He regards the people about him no more than the flies of a summer. He meditates the coming age. He hears and sees only what suits his purpose, or some 'foregone conclusion'; and looks out for facts and passing occurrences in order to put them into his logical machinery and grind them into the dust and powder of some subtle theory, as the miller looks out for grist to his mill! Add to this physiognomical sketch the minor points of costume, the open shirt-collar, the single-breasted coat, the old fashioned half-boots and ribbed stockings; and you will find in Mr. Bentham's general appearance a singular mixture of boyish simplicity and of the venerableness of age. In a word, our celebrated jurist presents a striking illustration of the difference between the *philosophical* and the *regal* look; that is, between the merely abstracted and the merely personal. There is a lack-adaisical *bonhommie* about his whole aspect, none of the fierceness of pride or power; an unconscious neglect of his own person, instead of a stately assumption of superiority; a good-humoured, placid intelligence, instead of a lynx-eyed watchfulness, as if it wished to make others its prey, or was afraid they might turn and rend him; he is a beneficent spirit, prying into the universe, not lording it over it; a thoughtful spectator of the scenes of life, or ruminator on the fate of mankind, not a painted pageant, a stupid idol set up on its pedestal of pride for men to fall down and worship with idiot fear and wonder at the thing themselves have made, and which, without that fear and wonder, would in itself be nothing!

Mr. Bentham, perhaps, over-rates the importance of his own theories. He has been heard to say (without any appearance of pride or affectation) that 'he should like to live the remaining years of his life, a year at a time at the end of the next six or eight centuries, to see the effect which his writings would by that time have had upon the world.' Alas! his name will hardly live so long! Nor do we think, in point of fact, that Mr. Bentham has given any new or decided impulse to the human mind. He cannot be looked upon in the light of a discoverer in legislation or morals. He has not struck out any great leading principle or parent-truth, from which a number of others might be deduced; nor has he enriched the common and established stock of intelligence with original observations, like pearls thrown into wine. One truth discovered is immortal, and entitles its author to be so: for, like a new substance in nature, it cannot be destroyed. But Mr. Bentham's *forte* is arrangement; and the form of truth, though not its essence, varies with time and circumstance. He has methodised, collated, and condensed all the materials prepared to his hand on the subjects

of which he treats, in a masterly and scientific manner; but we should find a difficulty in adducing from his different works (however elaborate or closely reasoned) any new element of thought, or even a new fact or illustration. His writings are, therefore, chiefly valuable as *books of reference*, as bringing down the account of intellectual inquiry to the present period, and disposing the results in a compendious, connected, and tangible shape; but books of reference are chiefly serviceable for facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, and are constantly liable to be superseded and to grow out of fashion with its progress, as the scaffolding is thrown down as soon as the building is completed. Mr. Bentham is not the first writer (by a great many) who has assumed the principle of UTILITY as the foundation of just laws, and of all moral and political reasoning:—his merit is, that he has applied this principle more closely and literally; that he has brought all the objections and arguments, more distinctly labelled and ticketted, under this one head, and made a more constant and explicit reference to it at every step of his progress, than any other writer. Perhaps the weak side of his conclusions also is, that he has carried this single view of his subject too far, and not made sufficient allowance for the varieties of human nature, and the caprices and irregularities of the human will. 'He has not allowed for the *wind*.' It is not that you can be said to see his favourite doctrine of Utility glittering everywhere through his system, like a vein of rich, shining ore (that is not the nature of the material)—but it might be plausibly objected that he had struck the whole mass of fancy, prejudice, passion, sense, whim, with his petrific, leaden mace, that he had 'bound volatile Hermes,' and reduced the theory and practice of human life to a *caput mortuum* of reason, and dull, plodding, technical calculation. The gentleman is himself a capital logician; and he has been led by this circumstance to consider man as a logical animal. We fear this view of the matter will hardly hold water. If we attend to the *moral* man, the constitution of his mind will scarcely be found to be built up of pure reason and a regard to consequences: if we consider the *criminal* man (with whom the legislator has chiefly to do) it will be found to be still less so.

Every pleasure, says Mr. Bentham, is equally a good, and is to be taken into the account as such in a moral estimate, whether it be the pleasure of sense or of conscience, whether it arise from the exercise of virtue or the perpetration of crime. We are afraid the human mind does not readily come into this doctrine, this *ultima ratio philosophorum*, interpreted according to the letter. Our moral sentiments are made up of sympathies and antipathies, of sense and imagination, of understanding and prejudice. The soul, by reason of its weakness,

is an aggregating and an exclusive principle; it clings obstinately to some things, and violently rejects others. And it must do so, in a great measure, or it would act contrary to its own nature. It needs helps and stages in its progress, and 'all appliances and means to boot,' which can raise it to a partial conformity to truth and good (the utmost it is capable of) and bring it into a tolerable harmony with the universe. By aiming at too much, by dismissing collateral aids, by extending itself to the farthest verge of the conceivable and possible, it loses its elasticity and vigour, its impulse and its direction. The moralist can no more do without the intermediate use of rules and principles, without the 'vantage ground of habit, without the levers of the understanding, than the mechanist can discard the use of wheels and pulleys, and perform every thing by simple motion. If the mind of man were competent to comprehend the whole of truth and good, and act upon it at once, and independently of all other considerations, Mr. Bentham's plan would be a feasible one, and *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*, would be the best possible ground to place morality upon. But it is not so. In ascertaining the rules of moral conduct, we must have regard not merely to the nature of the object, but to the capacity of the agent, and to his fitness for apprehending or attaining it. Pleasure is that which is so in itself: good is that which approves itself as such on reflection, or the idea of which is a source of satisfaction. All pleasure is not, therefore (morally speaking) equally a good; for all pleasure does not equally bear reflecting on. There are some tastes that are sweet in the mouth and bitter in the belly; and there is a similar contradiction and anomaly in the mind and heart of man.

Again, what would become of the *Posthæc meminisse juvabit* of the poet, if a principle of fluctuation and reaction is not inherent in the very constitution of our nature, or if all moral truth is a mere literal truism? We are not, then, so much to inquire what certain things are abstractedly or in themselves, as how they affect the mind, and to approve or condemn them accordingly. The same object seen near strikes us more powerfully than at a distance: things thrown into masses give a greater blow to the imagination than when scattered and divided into their component parts. A number of mole-hills do not make a mountain, though a mountain is actually made up of atoms: so moral truth must present itself under a certain aspect and from a certain point of view, in order to produce its full and proper effect upon the mind. The laws of the affections are as necessary as those of optics. A calculation of consequences is no more equivalent to a sentiment, than a *seriatim* enumeration of square yards or feet touches the fancy like the sight of the Alps or Andes.

To give an instance or two of what we mean. Those who on pure cosmopolite principles, or on the ground of abstract humanity, affect an extraordinary regard for the Turks and Tartars, have been accused of neglecting their duties to their friends and next-door neighbours. Well, then, what is the state of the question here? One human being is, no doubt, as much worth in himself, independently of the circumstances of time or place, as another; but he is not of so much value to us and our affections. Could our imagination take wing (with our speculative faculties) to the other side of the globe or to the ends of the universe, could our eyes behold whatever our reason teaches us to be possible, could our hands reach as far as our thoughts and wishes, we might then busy ourselves to advantage with the Hottentots, or hold intimate converse with the inhabitants of the Moon; but being as we are, our feelings evaporate in so large a space—we must draw the circle of our affections and duties somewhat closer—the heart hovers and fixes nearer home. It is true, the bands of private, or of local and natural affection, are often, nay in general, too tightly strained, so as frequently to do harm instead of good: but the present question is whether we can, with safety and effect, be wholly emancipated from them? Whether we should shake them off at pleasure and without mercy, as the only bar to the triumph of truth and justice? Or whether benevolence, constructed upon a logical scale, would not be merely *nominal*, whether duty, raised to too lofty a pitch of refinement, might not sink into callous indifference or hollow selfishness? Again, is it not to exact too high a strain from humanity, to ask us to qualify the degree of abhorrence we feel against a murderer by taking into our cool consideration the pleasure he may have in committing the deed, and in the prospect of gratifying his avarice or his revenge? We are hardly so formed as to sympathise at the same moment with the assassin and his victim. The degree of pleasure the former may feel, instead of extenuating, aggravates his guilt, and shows the depth of his malignity. Now the mind revolts against this by mere natural antipathy, if it is itself well-disposed; or the slow process of reason would afford but a feeble resistance to violence and wrong. The will, which is necessary to give consistency and promptness to our good intentions, cannot extend so much candour and courtesy to the antagonist principle of evil: virtue, to be sincere and practical, cannot be divested entirely of the blindness and impetuosity of passion! It has been made a plea (half jest, half earnest) for the horrors of war, that they promote trade and manufactures. It has been said, as a set-off for the atrocities practised upon the negro slaves in the West Indies, that without their blood and sweat, so many millions of people could not have sugar to sweeten

their tea. Fires and murders have been argued to be beneficial, as they serve to fill the newspapers, and for a subject to talk of—this is a sort of sophistry that it might be difficult to disprove on the bare scheme of contingent utility; but on the ground that we have stated, it must pass for mere irony. What the proportion between the good and the evil will really be found in any of the supposed cases, may be a question to the understanding; but to the imagination and the heart, that is, to the natural feelings of mankind, it admits of none!

Mr. Bentham, in adjusting the provisions of a penal code, lays too little stress on the co-operation of the natural prejudices of mankind, and the habitual feelings of that class of persons for whom they are more particularly designed. Legislators (we mean writers on legislation) are philosophers, and governed by their reason: criminals, for whose controul laws are made, are a set of desperadoes, governed only by their passions. What wonder that so little progress has been made towards a mutual understanding between the two parties! They are quite a different species, and speak a different language, and are sadly at a loss for a common interpreter between them. Perhaps the Ordinary of Newgate bids as fair for this office as any one. What should Mr. Bentham, sitting at ease in his arm-chair, composing his mind before he begins to write by a prelude on the organ, and looking out at a beautiful prospect when he is at a loss for an idea, know of the principles of action of rogues, outlaws, and vagabonds? No more than Montaigne of the motions of his cat! If sanguine and tender-hearted philanthropists have set on foot an inquiry into the barbarity and the defects of penal laws, the practical improvements have been mostly suggested by reformed cut-throats, turnkeys, and thief-takers. What even can the Honourable House, who when the Speaker has pronounced the well-known, wished-for sounds, 'That this house do now adjourn,' retire, after voting a royal crusade or a loan of millions, to lie on down, and feed on plate in spacious palaces, know of what passes in the hearts of wretches in garrets and night-cellars, petty pilferers and marauders, who cut throats and pick pockets with their own hands? The thing is impossible. The laws of the country are, therefore, ineffectual and abortive, because they are made by the rich for the poor, by the wise for the ignorant, by the respectable and exalted in station for the very scum and refuse of the community. If Newgate would resolve itself into a committee of the whole Press-yard, with Jack Ketch at its head, aided by confidential persons from the county prisons or the Hulks, and would make a clear breast, some *data* might be found out to proceed upon; but as it is, the *criminal mind* of the country is a book sealed, no one has been able to penetrate to the inside!

Mr. Bentham, in his attempts to revise and amend our criminal jurisprudence, proceeds entirely on his favourite principle of Utility. Convince highwaymen and housebreakers that it will be for their interest to reform, and they will reform and lead honest lives; according to Mr. Bentham. He says, 'All men act from calculation, even madmen reason.' And, in our opinion, he might as well carry this maxim to Bedlam or St. Luke's, and apply it to the inhabitants, as think to coerce or overawe the inmates of a gaol, or those whose practices make them candidates for that distinction, by the mere dry, detailed convictions of the understanding. Criminals are not to be influenced by reason; for it is of the very essence of crime to disregard consequences both to ourselves and others. You may as well preach philosophy to a drunken man, or to the dead, as to those who are under the instigation of any mischievous passion. A man is a drunkard, and you tell him he ought to be sober; he is debauched, and you ask him to reform; he is idle, and you recommend industry to him as his wisest course; he gambles, and you remind him that he may be ruined by this foible; he has lost his character, and you advise him to get into some reputable service or lucrative situation; vice becomes a habit with him, and you request him to rouse himself and shake it off; he is starving, and you warn him if he breaks the law, he will be hanged. None of this reasoning reaches the mark it aims at. The culprit, who violates and suffers the vengeance of the laws, is not the dupe of ignorance, but the slave of passion, the victim of habit or necessity. To argue with strong passion, with inveterate habit, with desperate circumstances, is to talk to the winds. Clownish ignorance may indeed be dispelled, and taught better; but it is seldom that a criminal is not aware of the consequences of his act, or has not made up his mind to the alternative. They are, in general, *too knowing by half*. You tell a person of this stamp what is his interest; he says he does not care about his interest, or the world and he differ on that particular. But there is one point on which he must agree with them, namely, what *they* think of his conduct, and that is the only hold you have of him. A man may be callous and indifferent to what happens to himself; but he is never indifferent to public opinion, or proof against open scorn and infamy. Shame, then, not fear, is the sheet-anchor of the law. He who is not afraid of being pointed at as a *thief*, will not mind a month's hard labour. He who is prepared to take the life of another, is already reckless of his own. But every one makes a sorry figure in the pillory; and the being launched from the New Drop lowers a man in his own opinion. The lawless and violent spirit, who is hurried by head-strong self-will to break the laws, does not like to have the ground of pride and

obstinacy struck from under his feet. This is what gives the *swells* of the metropolis such a dread of the *tread-mill*—it makes them ridiculous. It must be confessed, that this very circumstance renders the reform of criminals nearly hopeless. It is the apprehension of being stigmatized by public opinion, the fear of what will be thought and said of them, that deters men from the violation of the laws, while their character remains unimpeached; but honour once lost, all is lost. The man can never be himself again! A citizen is like a soldier, a part of a machine, who submits to certain hardships, privations, and dangers, not for his own ease, pleasure, profit, or even conscience, but—*for shame*. What is it that keeps the machine together in either case? Not punishment or discipline, but sympathy. The soldier mounts the breach or stands in the trenches, the peasant hedges and ditches, or the mechanic plies his ceaseless task, because the one will not be called a *coward*, the other a *rogue*: but let the one turn deserter and the other vagabond, and there is an end of him. The grinding law of necessity, which is no other than a name, a breath, loses its force; he is no longer sustained by the good opinion of others, and he drops out of his place in society, a useless clog! Mr. Bentham takes a culprit, and puts him into what he calls a *Panopticon*, that is, a sort of circular prison, with open cells, like a glass bee-hive. He sits in the middle, and sees all the other does. He gives him work to do, and lectures him if he does not do it. He takes liquor from him, and society and liberty; but he feeds and clothes him, and keeps him out of mischief; and when he has convinced him, by force and reason together, that this life is for his good, he turns him out upon the world a reformed man, and as confident of the success of his handy-work, as the shoemaker of that which he has just taken off the last, or the Parisian barber in Sterne, of the buckle of his wig. 'Dip it in the ocean,' said the perruquier, 'and it will stand!' But we doubt the durability of our projector's patchwork. Will our convert to the great principle of Utility work when he is from under Mr. Bentham's eye, because he was forced to work when under it? Will he keep sober, because he has been kept from liquor so long? Will he not return to loose company, because he has had the pleasure of sitting vis-à-vis with a philosopher of late? Will he not steal, now that his hands are untied? Will he not take the road, now that it is free to him? Will he not call his benefactor all the names he can set his tongue to, the moment his back is turned? All this is more than to be feared. The charm of criminal life, like that of savage life, consists in liberty, in hardship, in danger, and in the contempt of death, in one word, in extraordinary excitement; and he who has tasted of it, will no more return to regular

habits of life, than a man will take to water after drinking brandy, or than a wild beast will give over hunting its prey. Miracles never cease, to be sure; but they are not to be had wholesale, or *to order*. Mr. Owen, who is another of those proprietors and patentees of reform, has lately got an American savage with him, whom he carries about in great triumph and complacency, as an antithesis to his *New View of Society*, and as winding up his reasoning to what it mainly wanted, an epigrammatic point. Does the benevolent visionary of the Lanark cotton-mills really think this *natural man* will act as a foil to his *artificial man*? Does he for a moment imagine that his *Address to the higher and middle classes*, with all its advantages of fiction, makes any thing like so interesting a romance as *Hunter's Captivity among the North American Indians*? Has he any thing to show, in all the apparatus of New Lanark and its desolate monotony, to excite the thrill of imagination like the blankets made of wreaths of snow under which the wild wood-rovers bury themselves for weeks in winter? Or the skin of a leopard, which our hardy adventurer slew, and which served him for great-coat and bedding? Or the rattle-snake that he found by his side as a bedfellow? Or his rolling himself into a ball to escape from him? Or his suddenly placing himself against a tree to avoid being trampled to death by the herd of wild buffaloes, that came rushing on like the sound of thunder? Or his account of the huge spiders that prey on blue-bottles and gilded flies in green pathless forests; or of the great Pacific Ocean, that the natives look upon as the gulf that parts time from eternity, and that is to waft them to the spirits of their fathers? After all this, Mr. Hunter must find Mr. Owen and his parallelograms trite and flat, and will, we suspect, take an opportunity to escape from them!

Mr. Bentham's method of reasoning, though comprehensive and exact, labours under the defect of most systems—it is too *topical*. It includes every thing; but it includes every thing alike. It is rather like an inventory, than a valuation of different arguments. Every possible suggestion finds a place, so that the mind is distracted as much as enlightened by this perplexing accuracy. The exceptions seem as important as the rule. By attending to the minute, we overlook the great; and in summing up an account, it will not do merely to insist on the number of items without considering their amount. Our author's page presents a very nicely dove-tailed mosaic pavement of legal common-places. We slip and slide over its even surface without being arrested any where. Or his view of the human mind resembles a map, rather than a picture: the outline, the disposition is correct, but it wants colouring and relief. There is a technicality of manner, which renders his writings of more value

to the professional inquirer than to the general reader. Again, his style is unpopular, not to say unintelligible. He writes a language of his own, that *darkens knowledge*. His works have been translated into French—they ought to be translated into English. People wonder that Mr. Bentham has not been prosecuted for the boldness and severity of some of his invectives. He might wrap up high treason in one of his inextricable periods, and it would never find its way into Westminster-Hall. He is a kind of Manuscript author—he writes a cypher-hand, which the vulgar have no key to. The construction of his sentences is a curious frame-work with pegs and hooks to hang his thoughts upon, for his own use and guidance, but almost out of the reach of every body else. It is a barbarous philosophical jargon, with all the repetitions, parentheses, formalities, uncouth nomenclature and verbiage of law-Latin; and what makes it worse, it is not mere verbiage, but has a great deal of acuteness and meaning in it, which you would be glad to pick out if you could. In short, Mr. Bentham writes as if he was allowed but a single sentence to express his whole view of a subject in, and as if, should he omit a single circumstance or step of the argument, it would be lost to the world for ever, like an estate by a flaw in the title-deeds. This is over-rating the importance of our own discoveries, and mistaking the nature and object of language altogether. Mr. Bentham has *acquired* this disability—it is not natural to him. His admirable little work *On Usury*, published forty years ago, is clear, easy, and vigorous. But Mr. Bentham has shut himself up since then 'in nook monastic,' conversing only with followers of his own, or with 'men of Ind,' and has endeavoured to overlay his natural humour, sense, spirit, and style, with the dust and cobwebs of an obscure solitude. The best of it is, he thinks his present mode of expressing himself perfect, and that whatever may be objected to his law or logic, no one can find the least fault with the purity, simplicity, and perspicuity of his style.

Mr. Bentham, in private life, is an amiable and exemplary character. He is a little romantic, or so; and has dissipated part of a handsome fortune in practical speculations. He lends an ear to plausible projectors, and, if he cannot prove them to be wrong in their premises or their conclusions, thinks himself bound *in reason* to stake his money on the venture. Strict logicians are licenced visionaries. Mr. Bentham is half-brother to the late Mr. Speaker Abbott[1] —*Prob pudor!* He was educated at Eton, and still takes our novices to task about a passage in Homer, or a metre in Virgil. He was

[1] Now Lord Colchester.

afterwards at the University, and he has described the scruples of an ingenuous youthful mind about subscribing the articles, in a passage in his *Church-of-Englandism*, which smacks of truth and honour both, and does one good to read it in an age, when 'to be honest' (or not to laugh at the very idea of honesty) 'is to be one man picked out of ten thousand!' Mr. Bentham relieves his mind sometimes, after the fatigue of study, by playing on a fine old organ, and has a relish for Hogarth's prints. He turns wooden utensils in a lathe for exercise, and fancies he can turn men in the same manner. He has no great fondness for poetry, and can hardly extract a moral out of Shakespeare. His house is warmed and lighted by steam. He is one of those who prefer the artificial to the natural in most things, and think the mind of man omnipotent. He has a great contempt for out-of-door prospects, for green fields and trees, and is for referring every thing to Utility. There is a little narrowness in this; for if all the sources of satisfaction are taken away, what is to become of utility itself? It is, indeed, the great fault of this able and extraordinary man, that he has concentrated his faculties and feelings too entirely on one subject and pursuit, and has not 'looked enough abroad into universality.'[1]

WILLIAM GODWIN

The Spirit of the Age was never more fully shown than in its treatment of this writer—its love of paradox and change, its dastard submission to prejudice and to the fashion of the day. Five-and-twenty years ago he was in the very zenith of a sultry and unwholesome popularity; he blazed as a sun in the firmament of reputation; no one was more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after, and wherever liberty, truth, justice was the theme, his name was not far off:—now he has sunk below the horizon, and enjoys the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality. Mr. Godwin, during his lifetime, has secured to himself the triumphs and the mortifications of an extreme notoriety and of a sort of posthumous fame. His bark, after being tossed in the revolutionary tempest, now raised to heaven by all the fury of popular breath, now almost dashed in pieces, and buried in the quicksands of ignorance, or scorched with the lightning of momentary indignation, at length floats on the calm wave that is to bear it down the stream of time. Mr. Godwin's person is not known, he is not pointed out in the street, his conversation is not courted, his opinions are not asked, he is at the head of no cabal,

[1] Lord Bacon's Advancement of Learning.

he belongs to no party in the State, he has no train of admirers, no one thinks it worth his while even to traduce and vilify him, he has scarcely friend or foe, the world make a point (as Goldsmith used to say) of taking no more notice of him than if such an individual had never existed; he is to all ordinary intents and purposes dead and buried; but the author of *Political Justice* and of *Caleb Williams* can never die, his name is an abstraction in letters, his works are standard in the history of intellect. He is thought of now like any eminent writer a hundred-and-fifty years ago, or just as he will be a hundred-and-fifty years hence. He knows this, and smiles in silent mockery of himself, reposing on the monument of his fame—

'Sedet, in eternumque sedebit infelix Theseus.'

No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*. Tom Paine was considered for the time as a Tom Fool to him; Paley an old woman; Edmund Burke a flashy sophist. Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, had here taken up its abode; and these were the oracles of thought. 'Throw aside your books of chemistry,' said Wordsworth to a young man, a student in the Temple, 'and read Godwin on Necessity.' Sad necessity! Fatal reverse! Is truth then so variable? Is it one thing at twenty, and another at forty? Is it at a burning heat in 1793, and below *zero* in 1814? Not so, in the name of manhood and of common sense! Let us pause here a little.—Mr. Godwin indulged in extreme opinions, and carried with him all the most sanguine and fearless understandings of the time. What then? Because those opinions were overcharged, were they therefore altogether groundless? Is the very God of our idolatry all of a sudden to become an abomination and an anathema? Could so many young men of talent, of education, and of principle have been hurried away by what had neither truth, nor nature, not one particle of honest feeling nor the least show of reason in it? Is the *Modern Philosophy* (as it has been called) at one moment a youthful bride, and the next a withered beldame, like the false Duessa in Spenser? Or is the vaunted edifice of Reason, like his House of Pride, gorgeous in front, and dazzling to approach, while 'its hinder parts are ruinous, decayed, and old?' Has the main prop, which supported the mighty fabric, been shaken and given way under the strong grasp of some Samson; or has it not rather been undermined by rats and vermin? At one time, it almost seemed, that 'if this failed,

The pillar'd firmament was rottenness,
And earth's base built of stubble:'

now scarce a shadow of it remains, it is crumbled to dust, nor is it even talked of! 'What, then, went ye forth for to see, a reed shaken with the wind?' Was it for this that our young gownsmen of the greatest expectation and promise, versed in classic lore, steeped in dialectics, armed at all points for the foe, well read, well nurtured, well provided for, left the University and the prospect of lawn sleeves, tearing asunder the shackles of the free born spirit, and the cobwebs of school-divinity, to throw themselves at the feet of the new Gamaliel, and learn wisdom from him? Was it for this, that students at the bar, acute, inquisitive, sceptical (here only wild enthusiasts) neglected for a while the paths of preferment and the law as too narrow, tortuous, and unseemly to bear the pure and broad light of reason? Was it for this, that students in medicine missed their way to Lecturerships and the top of their profession, deeming lightly of the health of the body, and dreaming only of the renovation of society and the march of mind? Was it to this that Mr. Southey's *Inscriptions* pointed? to this that Mr. Coleridge's *Religious Musings* tended? Was it for this, that Mr. Godwin himself sat with arms folded, and, 'like Cato, gave his little senate laws?' Or rather, like another Prospero, uttered syllables that with their enchanted breath were to change the world, and might almost stop the stars in their courses? Oh! and is all forgot? Is this sun of intellect blotted from the sky? Or has it suffered total eclipse? Or is it we who make the fancied gloom, by looking at it through the paltry, broken, stained fragments of our own interests and prejudices? Were we fools then, or are we dishonest now? Or was the impulse of the mind less likely to be true and sound when it arose from high thought and warm feeling, than afterwards, when it was warped and debased by the example, the vices, and follies of the world?

The fault, then, of Mr. Godwin's philosophy, in one word, was too much ambition—'by that sin fell the angels!' He conceived too nobly of his fellows (the most unpardonable crime against them, for there is nothing that annoys our self-love so much as being complimented on imaginary achievements, to which we are wholly unequal) —he raised the standard of morality above the reach of humanity, and by directing virtue to the most airy and romantic heights, made her path dangerous, solitary, and impracticable. The author of the *Political Justice* took abstract reason for the rule of conduct, and abstract good for its end. He places the human mind on an elevation, from which it commands a view of the whole line of moral consequences; and requires it to conform its acts to the larger and more enlightened conscience which it has thus acquired. He absolves man from the gross and narrow ties of sense, custom, authority, private

and local attachment, in order that he may devote himself to the boundless pursuit of universal benevolence. Mr. Godwin gives no quarter to the amiable weaknesses of our nature, nor does he stoop to avail himself of the supplementary aids of an imperfect virtue. Gratitude, promises, friendship, family affection give way, not that they may be merged in the opposite vices or in want of principle; but that the void may be filled up by the disinterested love of good, and the dictates of inflexible justice, which is 'the law of laws, and sovereign of sovereigns.' All minor considerations yield, in his system, to the stern sense of duty, as they do, in the ordinary and established ones, to the voice of necessity. Mr. Godwin's theory, and that of more approved reasoners, differ only in this, that what are with them the exceptions, the extreme cases, he makes the every-day rule. No one denies that on great occasions, in moments of fearful excitement, or when a mighty object is at stake, the lesser and merely instrumental points of duty are to be sacrificed without remorse at the shrine of patriotism, of honour, and of conscience. But the disciple of the *New School* (no wonder it found so many impugners, even in its own bosom!) is to be always the hero of duty; the law to which he has bound himself never swerves nor relaxes; his feeling of what is right is to be at all times wrought up to a pitch of enthusiastic self-devotion; he must become the unshrinking martyr and confessor of the public good. If it be said that this scheme is chimerical and impracticable on ordinary occasions, and to the generality of mankind, well and good; but those who accuse the author of having trampled on the common feelings and prejudices of mankind in wantonness or insult, or without wishing to substitute something better (and only unattainable, because it is better) in their stead, accuse him wrongfully. We may not be able to launch the bark of our affections on the ocean-tide of humanity, we may be forced to paddle along its shores, or shelter in its creeks and rivulets: but we have no right to reproach the bold and adventurous pilot, who dared us to tempt the uncertain abyss, with our own want of courage or of skill, or with the jealousies and impatience, which deter us from undertaking, or might prevent us from accomplishing the voyage!

The *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (it was urged by its favourers and defenders at the time, and may still be so, without either profaneness or levity) is a metaphysical and logical commentary on some of the most beautiful and striking texts of Scripture. Mr. Godwin is a mixture of the Stoic and of the Christian philosopher. To break the force of the vulgar objections and outcry that have been raised against the Modern Philosophy, as if it were a new and monstrous birth in morals, it may be worth noticing, that volumes of

sermons have been written to excuse the founder of Christianity for not including friendship and private affection among its golden rules, but rather excluding them.[1] Moreover, the answer to the question, 'Who is thy neighbour?' added to the divine precept, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' is the same as in the exploded pages of our author,—'He to whom we can do most good.' In determining this point, we were not to be influenced by any extrinsic or collateral considerations, by our own predilections, or the expectations of others, by our obligations to them or any services they might be able to render us, by the climate they were born in, by the house they lived in, by rank or religion, or party, or personal ties, but by the abstract merits, the pure and unbiassed justice of the case. The artificial helps and checks to moral conduct were set aside as spurious and unnecessary, and we came at once to the grand and simple question—'In what manner we could best contribute to the greatest possible good?' This was the paramount obligation in all cases whatever, from which we had no right to free ourselves upon any idle or formal pretext, and of which each person was to judge for himself, under the infallible authority of his own opinion and the inviolable sanction of his self-approbation. 'There was the rub that made *philosophy* of so short life!' Mr. Godwin's definition of morals was the same as the admired one of law, *reason without passion*; but with the unlimited scope of private opinion, and in a boundless field of speculation (for nothing less would satisfy the pretensions of the New School), there was danger that the unseasoned novice might substitute some pragmatical conceit of his own for the rule of right reason, and mistake a heartless indifference for a superiority to more natural and generous feelings. Our ardent and dauntless reformer followed out the moral of the parable of the Good Samaritan into its most rigid and repulsive consequences with a pen of steel, and let fall his 'trenchant-blade' on every vulnerable point of human infirmity; but there is a want in his system of the mild and persuasive tone of the Gospel, where 'all is conscience and tender heart.' Man was indeed screwed up, by mood and figure, into a logical machine, that was to forward the public good with the utmost punctuality and effect, and it might go very well on smooth ground and under favourable circumstances; but would it work up-hill or *against the grain*? It was to be feared that the proud Temple of Reason, which at a distance and in stately supposition shone like the palaces of the New Jerusalem, might (when placed on actual ground) be broken up into the sordid styes of

[1] Shaftesbury made this an objection to Christianity, which was answered by Foster, Leland, and other eminent divines, on the ground that Christianity had a higher object in view, namely, general philanthropy.

sensuality, and the petty huckster's shops of self-interest! Every man (it was proposed—'so ran the tenour of the bond') was to be a Regulus, a Codrus, a Cato, or a Brutus—every woman a Mother of the Gracchi.

'———— It was well said,
And 'tis a kind of good deed to say well.'

But heroes on paper might degenerate into vagabonds in practice, Corinnas into courtezans. Thus a refined and permanent individual attachment is intended to supply the place and avoid the inconveniences of marriage; but vows of eternal constancy, without church security, are found to be fragile. A member of the *ideal* and perfect commonwealth of letters lends another a hundred pounds for immediate and pressing use; and when he applies for it again, the borrower has still more need of it than he, and retains it for his own especial, which is tantamount to the public good. The Exchequer of pure reason, like that of the State, never refunds. The political as well as the religious fanatic appeals from the overweening opinion and claims of others to the highest and most impartial tribunal, namely, his own breast. Two persons agree to live together in Chambers on principles of pure equality and mutual assistance—but when it comes to the push, one of them finds that the other always insists on his fetching water from the pump in Hare-court, and cleaning his shoes for him. A modest assurance was not the least indispensable virtue in the new perfectibility code; and it was hence discovered to be a scheme, like other schemes where there are all prizes and no blanks, for the accommodation of the enterprizing and cunning, at the expense of the credulous and honest. This broke up the system, and left no good odour behind it! Reason has become a sort of bye-word, and philosophy has, 'fallen first into a fasting, then into a sadness, then into a decline, and last, into the dissolution of which we all complain!' This is a worse error than the former: we may be said to have 'lost the immortal part of ourselves, and what remains is beastly!'

The point of view from which this matter may be fairly considered, is two-fold, and may be stated thus:—In the first place, it by no means follows, because reason is found not to be the only infallible or safe rule of conduct, that it is no rule at all; or that we are to discard it altogether with derision and ignominy. On the contrary, if not the sole, it is the principal ground of action; it is, 'the guide, the stay and anchor of our purest thoughts, and soul of all our moral being.' In proportion as we strengthen and expand this principle, and bring our affections and subordinate, but perhaps more powerful motives of action into harmony with it, it will not admit of a doubt that we

advance to the goal of perfection, and answer the ends of our creation, those ends which not only morality enjoins, but which religion sanctions. If with the utmost stretch of reason, man cannot (as some seemed inclined to suppose) soar up to the God, and quit the ground of human frailty, yet, stripped wholly of it, he sinks at once into the brute. If it cannot stand alone, in its naked simplicity, but requires other props to buttress it up, or ornaments to set it off; yet without it the moral structure would fall flat and dishonoured to the ground. Private reason is that which raises the individual above his mere animal instincts, appetites, and passions: public reason in its gradual progress separates the savage from the civilized state. Without the one, men would resemble wild beasts in their dens; without the other, they would be speedily converted into hordes of barbarians or banditti. Sir Walter Scott, in his zeal to restore the spirit of loyalty, of passive obedience and non-resistance as an acknowledgment for his having been created a Baronet by a Prince of the House of Brunswick, may think it a fine thing to return in imagination to the good old times, 'when in Auvergne alone, there were three hundred nobles whose most ordinary actions were robbery, rape, and murder,' when the castle of each Norman baron was a strong hold from which the lordly proprietor issued to oppress and plunder the neighbouring districts, and when the Saxon peasantry were treated by their gay and gallant tyrants as a herd of loathsome swine—but for our own parts, we beg to be excused; we had rather live in the same age with the author of Waverley and Blackwood's Magazine. Reason is the meter and alnager in civil intercourse, by which each person's upstart and contradictory pretensions are weighed and approved or found wanting, and without which it could not subsist, any more than traffic or the exchange of commodities could be carried on without weights and measures. It is the medium of knowledge, and the polisher of manners, by creating common interests and ideas. Or in the words of a contemporary writer, 'Reason is the queen of the moral world, the soul of the universe, the lamp of human life, the pillar of society, the foundation of law, the beacon of nations, the golden chain let down from heaven, which links all accountable and all intelligent natures in one common system—and in the vain strife between fanatic innovation and fanatic prejudice, we are exhorted to dethrone this queen of the world, to blot out this light of the mind, to deface this fair column, to break in pieces this golden chain! We are to discard and throw from us with loud taunts and bitter execrations that reason, which has been the lofty theme of the philosopher, the poet, the moralist, and the divine, whose name was not first named to be

abused by the enthusiasts of the French Revolution, or to be blasphemed by the madder enthusiasts, the advocates of Divine Right, but which is coeval with, and inseparable from the nature and faculties of man—is the image of his Maker stamped upon him at his birth, the understanding breathed into him with the breath of life, and in the participation and improvement of which alone he is raised above the brute creation and his own physical nature!'—The overstrained and ridiculous pretensions of monks and ascetics were never thought to justify a return to unbridled licence of manners, or the throwing aside of all decency. The hypocrisy, cruelty, and fanaticism, often attendant on peculiar professions of sanctity, have not banished the name of religion from the world. Neither can 'the unreasonableness of the reason' of some modern sciolists so 'unreason our reason,' as to debar us of the benefit of this principle in future, or to disfranchise us of the highest privilege of our nature. In the second place, if it is admitted that Reason alone is not the sole and self-sufficient ground of morals, it is to Mr. Godwin that we are indebted for having settled the point. No one denied or distrusted this principle (before his time) as the absolute judge and interpreter in all questions of difficulty; and if this is no longer the case, it is because he has taken this principle, and followed it into its remotest consequences with more keenness of eye and steadiness of hand than any other expounder of ethics. His grand work is (at least) an *experimentum crucis* to show the weak sides and imperfections of human reason as the sole law of human action. By overshooting the mark, or by 'flying an eagle flight, forth and right on,' he has pointed out the limit or line of separation, between what is practicable and what is barely conceivable—by imposing impossible tasks on the naked strength of the will, he has discovered how far it is or is not in our power to dispense with the illusions of sense, to resist the calls of affection, to emancipate ourselves from the force of habit; and thus, though he has not said it himself, has enabled others to say to the towering aspirations after good, and to the over-bearing pride of human intellect—'Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther!' Captain Parry would be thought to have rendered a service to navigation and his country, no less by proving that there is no North-West Passage, than if he had ascertained that there is one: so Mr. Godwin has rendered an essential service to moral science, by attempting (in vain) to pass the Arctic Circle and Frozen Regions, where the understanding is no longer warmed by the affections, nor fanned by the breeze of fancy! This is the effect of all bold, original, and powerful thinking, that it either discovers the truth, or detects where error lies; and the only crime with which Mr. Godwin can be charged as

a political and moral reasoner is, that he has displayed a more ardent spirit, and a more independent activity of thought than others, in establishing the fallacy (if fallacy it be) of an old popular prejudice that *the Just and True were one*, by 'championing it to the Outrance,' and in the final result placing the Gothic structure of human virtue on an humbler, but a wider and safer foundation than it had hitherto occupied in the volumes and systems of the learned.

Mr. Godwin is an inventor in the regions of romance, as well as a skilful and hardy explorer of those of moral truth. *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon* are two of the most splendid and impressive works of the imagination that have appeared in our times. It is not merely that these novels are very well for a philosopher to have produced—they are admirable and complete in themselves, and would not lead you to suppose that the author, who is so entirely at home in human character and dramatic situation, had ever dabbled in logic or metaphysics. The first of these, particularly, is a master-piece, both as to invention and execution. The romantic and chivalrous principle of the love of personal fame is embodied in the finest possible manner in the character of Falkland[1]; as in Caleb Williams (who is not the first, but the second character in the piece) we see the very demon of curiosity personified. Perhaps the art with which these two characters are contrived to relieve and set off each other, has never been surpassed in any work of fiction, with the exception of the immortal satire of Cervantes. The restless and inquisitive spirit of Caleb Williams, in search and in possession of his patron's fatal secret, haunts the latter like a second conscience, plants stings in his tortured mind, fans the flames of his jealous ambition, struggling with agonized remorse; and the hapless but noble-minded Falkland at length falls a martyr to the persecution of that morbid and overpowering interest, of which his mingled virtues and vices have rendered him the object. We conceive no one ever began Caleb Williams that did not read it through: no one that ever read it could possibly forget it, or speak of it after any length of time but with an impression as if the events and feelings had been personal to himself. This is the case also with the story of St. Leon, which, with less dramatic interest and intensity of purpose, is set off by a more gorgeous and flowing eloquence, and by a crown of preternatural imagery, that waves over it like a palm-tree! It is the beauty and the charm of Mr. Godwin's descriptions

[1] Mr. Fuseli used to object to this striking delineation a want of historical correctness, inasmuch as the animating principle of the true chivalrous character was the sense of honour, not the mere regard to, or saving of, appearances. This, we think, must be an hypercriticism, from all we remember of books of chivalry and heroes of romance.

that the reader identifies himself with the author; and the secret of this is, that the author has identified himself with his personages. Indeed, he has created them. They are the proper issue of his brain, lawfully begot, not foundlings, nor the 'bastards of his art.' He is not an indifferent, callous spectator of the scenes which he himself pourtrays, but without seeming to feel them. There is no look of patch-work and plagiarism, the beggarly copiousness of borrowed wealth; no tracery-work from worm-eaten manuscripts, from forgotten chronicles, nor piecing out of vague traditions with fragments and snatches of old ballads, so that the result resembles a gaudy, staring transparency, in which you cannot distinguish the daubing of the painter from the light that shines through the flimsy colours and gives them brilliancy. Here all is clearly made out with strokes of the pencil, by fair, not by factitious means. Our author takes a given subject from nature or from books, and then fills it up with the ardent workings of his own mind, with the teeming and audible pulses of his own heart. The effect is entire and satisfactory in proportion. The work (so to speak) and the author are one. We are not puzzled to decide upon their respective pretensions. In reading Mr. Godwin's novels, we know what share of merit the author has in them. In reading the *Scotch Novels*, we are perpetually embarrassed in asking ourselves this question; and perhaps it is not altogether a false modesty that prevents the editor from putting his name in the title-page—he is (for any thing we know to the contrary) only a more voluminous sort of Allen-a-Dale. At least, we may claim this advantage for the English author, that the chains with which he rivets our attention are forged out of his own thoughts, link by link, blow for blow, with glowing enthusiasm: we see the genuine ore melted in the furnace of fervid feeling, and moulded into stately and *ideal* forms; and this is so far better than peeping into an old iron shop, or pilfering from a dealer in marine stores! There is one drawback, however, attending this mode of proceeding, which attaches generally, indeed, to all originality of composition; namely, that it has a tendency to a certain degree of monotony. He who draws upon his own resources, easily comes to an end of his wealth. Mr. Godwin, in all his writings, dwells upon one idea or exclusive view of a subject, aggrandises a sentiment, exaggerates a character, or pushes an argument to extremes, and makes up by the force of style and continuity of feeling for what he wants in variety of incident or ease of manner. This necessary defect is observable in his best works, and is still more so in Fleetwood and Mandeville; the one of which, compared with his more admired performances, is mawkish, and the other morbid. Mr. Godwin is also an essayist, an historian

—in short, what is he not, that belongs to the character of an indefatigable and accomplished author? His *Life of Chaucer* would have given celebrity to any man of letters possessed of three thousand a year, with leisure to write quartos: as the legal acuteness displayed in his *Remarks on Judge Eyre's Charge to the Jury* would have raised any briefless barrister to the height of his profession. This temporary effusion did more—it gave a turn to the trials for high treason in the year 1794, and possibly saved the lives of twelve innocent individuals, marked out as political victims to the Moloch of Legitimacy, which then skulked behind a British throne, and had not yet dared to stalk forth (as it has done since) from its lurking-place, in the face of day, to brave the opinion of the world. If it had then glutted its maw with its intended prey (the sharpness of Mr. Godwin's pen cut the legal cords with which it was attempted to bind them), it might have done so sooner, and with more lasting effect. The world do not know (and we are not sure but the intelligence may startle Mr. Godwin himself), that he is the author of a volume of Sermons, and of a life of Chatham.[1]

Mr Fawcett (an old friend and fellow-student of our author, and who always spoke of his writings with admiration, tinctured with wonder) used to mention a circumstance with respect to the last-mentioned work, which may throw some light on the history and progress of Mr. Godwin's mind. He was anxious to make his biographical account as complete as he could, and applied for this purpose to many of his acquaintance to furnish him with anecdotes or to suggest criticisms. Amongst others Mr. Fawcett repeated to him what he thought a striking passage in a speech on *General Warrants* delivered by Lord Chatham, at which he (Mr Fawcett) had been present. 'Every man's house' (said this emphatic thinker and speaker) 'has been called his castle. And why is it called his castle? Is it because it is defended by a wall, because it is surrounded with a moat? No, it may be nothing more than a straw-built shed. It may be open to all the elements: the wind may enter in, the rain may enter in—but the king *cannot* enter in!' His friend thought that the point was here palpable enough: but when he came to read the printed volume, he found it thus *transposed*: 'Every man's house is his castle. And why is it called so? Is it because it is defended by a wall, because it is surrounded with a moat? No, it may be nothing more than a straw-built shed. It may be exposed to all the elements: the rain may enter into it, *all the winds of Heaven may whistle round it*, but the king cannot, &c.' This was what Fawcett called a defect

[1] We had forgotten the tragedies of Antonio and Ferdinand. Peace be with their *manes*!

of *naturat imagination*. He at the same time admitted that Mr Godwin had improved his native sterility in this respect; or atoned for it by incessant activity of mind and by accumulated stores of thought and powers of language. In fact, his *forte* is not the spontaneous, but the voluntary exercise of talent. He fixes his ambition on a high point of excellence, and spares no pains or time in attaining it. He has less of the appearance of a man of genius, than any one who has given such decided and ample proofs of it. He is ready only on reflection: dangerous only at the rebound. He gathers himself up, and strains every nerve and faculty with deliberate aim to some heroic and dazzling achievement of intellect: but he must make a career before he flings himself, armed, upon the enemy, or he is sure to be unhorsed. Or he resembles an eight-day clock that must be wound up long before it can strike. Therefore, his powers of conversation are but limited. He has neither acuteness of remark, nor a flow of language, both which might be expected from his writings, as these are no less distinguished by a sustained and impassioned tone of declamation than by novelty of opinion or brilliant tracks of invention. In company, Horne Tooke used to make a mere child of him—or of any man! Mr Godwin liked this treatment,[1] and indeed it is his foible to fawn on those who use him *cavalierly*, and to be cavalier to those who express an undue or unqualified admiration of him. He looks up with unfeigned respect to acknowledged reputation (but then it must be very well ascertained before he admits it)—and has a favourite hypothesis that Understanding and Virtue are the same thing. Mr. Godwin possesses a high degree of philosophical candour, and studiously paid the homage of his pen and person to Mr. Malthus, Sir James Mackintosh, and Dr. Parr, for their unsparing attacks on him; but woe to any poor devil who had the hardihood to defend him against them! In private, the author of *Political Justice* at one time reminded those who knew him of the metaphysician engrafted on the Dissenting Minister. There was a dictatorial, captious, quibbling pettiness of manner. He lost this with the first blush and awkwardness of popularity, which surprised him in the retirement of his study; and he has since, with the wear and tear of society, from being too pragmatical, become somewhat too careless. He is, at present, as easy as an old glove. Perhaps there

[1] To be sure, it was redeemed by a high respect and by some magnificent compliments. Once in particular, at his own table, after a good deal of *badinage* and cross-questioning about his being the author of the Reply to Judge Eyre's Charge, on Mr. Godwin's acknowledging that he was, Mr. Tooke said, 'Come here then,' —and when his guest went round to his chair, he took his hand, and pressed it to his lips, saying—'I can do no less for the hand that saved my life!'

is a little attention to effect in this, and he wishes to appear a foil to himself. His best moments are with an intimate acquaintance or two, when he gossips in a fine vein about old authors, Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, or Burnet's *History of his own Time*; and you perceive by your host's talk, as by the taste of seasoned wine, that he has a *cellarage* in his understanding! Mr. Godwin also has a correct *acquired* taste in poetry and the drama. He relishes Donne and Ben Jonson, and recites a passage from either with an agreeable mixture of pedantry and *bonhommie*. He is not one of those who do not grow wiser with opportunity and reflection: he changes his opinions, and changes them for the better. The alteration of his taste in poetry, from an exclusive admiration of the age of Queen Anne to an almost equally exclusive one of that of Elizabeth, is, we suspect, owing to Mr. Coleridge, who some twenty years ago, threw a great stone into the standing pool of criticism, which splashed some persons with the mud, but which gave a motion to the surface and a reverberation to the neighbouring echoes, which has not since subsided. In common company, Mr. Godwin either goes to sleep himself, or sets others to sleep. He is at present engaged in a History of the Commonwealth of England.—*Esto perpetua!* In size Mr. Godwin is below the common stature, nor is his deportment graceful or animated. His face is, however, fine, with an expression of placid temper and recondite thought. He is not unlike the common portraits of Locke. There is a very admirable likeness of him by Mr. Northcote, which with a more heroic and dignified air, only does justice to the profound sagacity and benevolent aspirations of our author's mind. Mr. Godwin has kept the best company of his time, but he has survived most of the celebrated persons with whom he lived in habits of intimacy. He speaks of them with enthusiasm and with discrimination; and sometimes dwells with peculiar delight on a day passed at John Kemble's in company with Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Curran, Mrs. Wolstonecraft and Mrs. Inchbald, when the conversation took a most animated turn, and the subject was of Love. Of all these our author is the only one remaining. Frail tenure, on which human life and genius are lent us for a while to improve or to enjoy!

MR. COLERIDGE

The present is an age of talkers, and not of doers; and the reason is, that the world is growing old. We are so far advanced in the Arts and Sciences, that we live in retrospect, and doat on past achievements. The accumulation of knowledge has been so great,

that we are lost in wonder at the height it has reached, instead of attempting to climb or add to it; while the variety of objects distracts and dazzles the looker-on. What *niche* remains unoccupied? What path untried? What is the use of doing anything, unless we could do better than all those who have gone before us? What hope is there of this? We are like those who have been to see some noble monument of art, who are content to admire without thinking of rivalling it; or like guests after a feast, who praise the hospitality of the donor 'and thank the bounteous Pan'—perhaps carrying away some trifling fragments; or like the spectators of a mighty battle, who still hear its sound afar off, and the clashing of armour and the neighing of the war-horse and the shout of victory is in their ears, like the rushing of innumerable waters!

Mr. Coleridge has 'a mind reflecting ages past'; his voice is like the echo of the congregated roar of the 'dark rearward and abyss' of thought. He who has seen a mouldering tower by the side of a chrystal lake, hid by the mist, but glittering in the wave below, may conceive the dim, gleaming, uncertain intelligence of his eye: he who has marked the evening clouds uprolled (a world of vapours), has seen the picture of his mind, unearthly, unsubstantial, with gorgeous tints and ever-varying forms—

> 'That which was now a horse, even with a thought
> The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
> As water is in water.'

Our author's mind is (as he himself might express it) *tangential*. There is no subject on which he has not touched, none on which he has rested. With an understanding fertile, subtle, expansive, 'quick, forgetive, apprehensive,' beyond all living precedent, few traces of it will perhaps remain. He lends himself to all impressions alike; he gives up his mind and liberty of thought to none. He is a general lover of art and science, and wedded to no one in particular. He pursues knowledge as a mistress, with outstretched hands and winged speed; but as he is about to embrace her, his Daphne turns—alas! not to a laurel! Hardly a speculation has been left on record from the earliest time, but it is loosely folded up in Mr. Coleridge's memory, like a rich, but somewhat tattered piece of tapestry: we might add (with more seeming than real extravagance), that scarce a thought can pass through the mind of man, but its sound has at some time or other passed over his head with rustling pinions. On whatever question or author you speak, he is prepared to take up the theme with advantage—from Peter Abelard down to Thomas Moore, from

the subtlest metaphysics to the politics of the *Courier*. There is no man of genius, in whose praise he descants, but the critic seems to stand above the author, and 'what in him is weak, to strengthen, what is low, to raise and support': nor is there any work of genius that does not come out of his hands like an illuminated Missal, sparkling even in its defects. If Mr. Coleridge had not been the most impressive talker of his age, he would probably have been the finest writer; but he lays down his pen to make sure of an auditor, and mortgages the admiration of posterity for the stare of an idler. If he had not been a poet, he would have been a powerful logician; if he had not dipped his wing in the Unitarian controversy, he might have soared to the very summit of fancy. But in writing verse, he is trying to subject the Muse to *transcendental* theories: in his abstract reasoning, he misses his way by strewing it with flowers. All that he has done of moment, he had done twenty years ago: since then, he may be said to have lived on the sound of his own voice. Mr. Coleridge is too rich in intellectual wealth, to need to task himself to any drudgery: he has only to draw the sliders of his imagination, and a thousand subjects expand before him, startling him with their brilliancy, or losing themselves in endless obscurity—

> 'And by the force of blear illusion,
> They draw him on to his confusion.'

What is the little he could add to the stock, compared with the countless stores that lie about him, that he should stoop to pick up a name, or to polish an idle fancy? He walks abroad in the majesty of an universal understanding, eyeing the 'rich strond,' or golden sky above him, and 'goes sounding on his way,' in eloquent accents, uncompelled and free!

Persons of the greatest capacity are often those, who for this reason do the least; for surveying themselves from the highest point of view, amidst the infinite variety of the universe, their own share in it seems trifling, and scarce worth a thought, and they prefer the contemplation of all that is, or has been, or can be, to the making a coil about doing what, when done, is no better than vanity. It is hard to concentrate all our attention and efforts on one pursuit, except from ignorance of others; and without this concentration of our faculties, no great progress can be made in any one thing. It is not merely that the mind is not capable of the effort; it does not think the effort worth making. Action is one; but thought is manifold. He whose restless eye glances through the wide compass of nature and art, will not consent to have 'his own nothings monstered': but he must do

this, before he can give his whole soul to them. The mind, after 'letting contemplation have its fill,' or

> 'Sailing with supreme dominion
> Through the azure deep of air,'

sinks down on the ground, breathless, exhausted, powerlesss, inactive; or if it must have some vent to its feelings, seeks the most easy and obvious; is soothed by friendly flattery, lulled by the murmur of immediate applause, thinks as it were aloud, and babbles in its dreams! A scholar (so to speak) is a more disinterested and abstracted character than a mere author. The first looks at the numberless volumes of a library, and says, 'All these are mine': the other points to a single volume (perhaps it may be an immortal one) and says, 'My name is written on the back of it.' This is a puny and groveling ambition, beneath the lofty amplitude of Mr. Coleridge's mind. No, he revolves in his wayward soul, or utters to the passing wind, or discourses to his own shadow, things mightier and more various!—Let us draw the curtain, and unlock the shrine.

Learning rocked him in his cradle, and while yet a child,

> 'He lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.'

At sixteen he wrote his *Ode on Chatterton*, and he still reverts to that period with delight, not so much as it relates to himself (for that string of his own early promise of fame rather jars than otherwise) but as exemplifying the youth of a poet. Mr. Coleridge talks of himself, without being an egotist, for in him the individual is always merged in the abstract and general. He distinguished himself at school and at the University by his knowledge of the classics, and gained several prizes for Greek epigrams. How many men are there (great scholars, celebrated names in literature) who having done the same thing in their youth, have no other idea all the rest of their lives but of this achievement, of a fellowship and dinner, and who, installed in academic honours, would look down on our author as a mere strolling bard! At Christ's Hospital, where he was brought up, he was the idol of those among his schoolfellows, who mingled with their bookish studies the music of thought and of humanity; and he was usually attended round the cloisters by a group of these (inspiring and inspired) whose hearts, even then, burnt within them as he talked, and where the sounds yet linger to mock ELIA on his way, still turning pensive to the past! One of the finest and rarest parts of Mr. Coleridge's conversation, is when he expatiates on the Greek tragedians (not that he is not well acquainted,

when he pleases, with the epic poets, or the philosophers, or orators, or historians of antiquity)—on the subtle reasonings and melting pathos of Euripides, on the harmonious gracefulness of Sophocles, tuning his love-laboured song, like sweetest warblings from a sacred grove; on the high-wrought trumpet-tongued eloquence of Æschylus, whose Prometheus, above all, is like an Ode to Fate, and a pleading with Providence, his thoughts being let loose as his body is chained on his solitary rock, and his afflicted will (the emblem of mortality)

'Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.'

As the impassioned critic speaks and rises in his theme, you would think you heard the voice of the Man hated by the Gods, contending with the wild winds as they roar, and his eye glitters with the spirit of Antiquity!

Next, he was engaged with Hartley's tribes of mind, 'etherial braid, thought-woven,'—and he busied himself for a year or two with vibrations and vibratiuncles and the great law of association that binds all things in its mystic chain, and the doctrine of Necessity (the mild teacher of Charity) and the Millennium, anticipative of a life to come—and he plunged deep into the controversy on Matter and Spirit, and, as an escape from Dr. Priestley's Materialism, where he felt himself imprisoned by the logician's spell, like Ariel in the cloven pine-tree, he became suddenly enamoured of Bishop Berkeley's fairy-world,[1] and used in all companies to build the universe, like a brave poetical fiction, of fine words—and he was deep-read in Malebranche, and in Cudworth's Intellectual System (a huge pile of learning, unwieldy, enormous) and in Lord Brook's hieroglyphic theories, and in Bishop Butler's Sermons, and in the Duchess of Newcastle's fantastic folios, and in Clarke and South and Tillotson, and all the fine thinkers and masculine reasoners of that age—and Leibnitz's *Pre-Established Harmony* reared its arch above his head, like the rainbow in the cloud, covenanting with the hopes of man—and then he fell plump, ten thousand fathoms down (but his wings saved him harmless) into the *hortus siccus* of Dissent, where he pared religion down to the standard of reason and stripped faith of mystery, and

[1] Mr. Coleridge named his eldest son (the writer of some beautiful Sonnets) after Hartley, and the second after Berkeley. The third was called Derwent, after the river of that name. Nothing can be more characteristic of his mind than this circumstance. All his ideas indeed are like a river, flowing on for ever, and still murmuring as it flows, discharging its waters and still replenished—

'And so by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean!'

preached Christ crucified and the Unity of the Godhead, and so dwelt for a while in the spirit with John Huss and Jerome of Prague and Socinus and old John Zisca, and ran through Neal's History of the Puritans, and Calamy's Non-Conformists' Memorial, having like thoughts and passions with them—but then Spinoza became his God, and he took up the vast chain of being in his hand, and the round world became the centre and the soul of all things in some shadowy sense, forlorn of meaning, and around him he beheld the living traces and the sky-pointing proportions of the mighty Pan —but poetry redeemed him from this spectral philosophy, and he bathed his heart in beauty, and gazed at the golden light of heaven, and drank of the spirit of the universe, and wandered at eve by fairy-stream or fountain,

> '——When he saw nought but beauty,
> When he heard the voice of that Almighty One
> In every breeze that blew, or wave that murmured '—

and wedded with truth in Plato's shade, and in the writings of Proclus and Plotinus saw the ideas of things in the eternal mind, and unfolded all mysteries with the Schoolmen and fathomed the depths of Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas, and entered the third heaven with Jacob Behmen, and walked hand in hand with Swedenborg through the pavilions of the New Jerusalem, and sung his faith in the promise and in the word in his *Religious Musings*—and lowering himself from that dizzy height, poised himself on Milton's wings, and spread out his thoughts in charity with the glad prose of Jeremy Taylor, and wept over Bowles's Sonnets, and studied Cowper's blank verse, and betook himself to Thomson's Castle of Indolence, and sported with the wits of Charles the Second's days and of Queen Anne, and relished Swift's style and that of the John Bull (Arbuthnot's we mean, not Mr. Croker's), and dallied with the British Essayists and Novelists, and knew all qualities of more modern writers with a learned spirit, Johnson, and Goldsmith, and Junius, and Burke, and Godwin, and the Sorrows of Werther, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire, and Marivaux, and Crebillon, and thousands more—now 'laughed with Rabelais in his easy chair' or pointed to Hogarth, or afterwards dwelt on Claude's classic scenes, or spoke with rapture of Raphael, and compared the women at Rome to figures that had walked out of his pictures, or visited the Oratory of Pisa, and described the works of Giotto and Ghirlandaio and Massaccio, and gave the moral of the picture of the Triumph of Death, where the beggars and the wretched invoke his dreadful dart, but the rich and mighty of the earth quail and shrink before it;

and in that land of siren sights and sounds, saw a dance of peasant girls, and was charmed with lutes and gondolas,—or wandered into Germany and lost himself in the labyrinths of the Hartz Forest and of the Kantean philosophy, and amongst the cabalistic names of Fichté and Schelling and Lessing, and God knows who—this was long after, but all the former while, he had nerved his heart and filled his eyes with tears, as he hailed the rising orb of liberty, since quenched in darkness and in blood, and had kindled his affections at the blaze of the French Revolution, and sang for joy when the towers of the Bastile and the proud places of the insolent and the oppressor fell, and would have floated his bark, freighted with fondest fancies, across the Atlantic wave with Southey and others to seek for peace and freedom—

'In Philarmonia's undivided dale!'

Alas! 'Frailty, thy name is *Genius*!'—What is become of all this mighty heap of hope, of thought, of learning, and humanity? It has ended in swallowing doses of oblivion and in writing paragraphs in the *Courier*.—Such and so little is the mind of man!

It was not to be supposed that Mr. Coleridge could keep on at the rate he set off; he could not realize all he knew or thought, and less could not fix his desultory ambition; other stimulants supplied the place, and kept up the intoxicating dream, the fever and the madness of his early impressions. Liberty (the philosopher's and the poet's bride) had fallen a victim, meanwhile, to the murderous practices of the hag, Legitimacy. Proscribed by court-hirelings, too romantic for the herd of vulgar politicians, our enthusiast stood at bay, and at last turned on the pivot of a subtle casuistry to the *unclean side*: but his discursive reason would not let him trammel himself into a poet-laureate or stamp-distributor, and he stopped, ere he had quite passed that well-known 'bourne from whence no traveller returns'—and so has sunk into torpid, uneasy repose, tantalized by useless resources, haunted by vain imaginings, his lips idly moving, but his heart for ever still, or, as the shattered chords vibrate of themselves, making melancholy music to the ear of memory! Such is the fate of genius in an age, when in the unequal contest with sovereign wrong, every man is ground to powder who is not either a born slave, or who does not willingly and at once offer up the yearnings of humanity and the dictates of reason as a welcome sacrifice to besotted prejudice and loathsome power.

Of all Mr. Coleridge's productions, the *Ancient Mariner* is the only one that we could with confidence put into any person's hands, on whom we wished to impress a favourable idea of his extraordinary

powers. Let whatever other objections be made to it, it is unquestionably a work of genius—of wild, irregular, overwhelming imagination, and has that rich, varied movement in the verse, which gives a distant idea of the lofty or changeful tones of Mr. Coleridge's voice. In the *Christabel*, there is one splendid passage on divided friendship. The *Translation of Schiller's Wallenstein* is also a masterly production in its kind, faithful and spirited. Among his smaller pieces there are occasional bursts of pathos and fancy, equal to what we might expect from him; but these form the exception, and not the rule. Such, for instance, is his affecting Sonnet to the author of the Robbers.

'Schiller! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
If through the shudd'ring midnight I had sent
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—
That in no after-moment aught less vast
Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
Black horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout
From the more with'ring scene diminish'd pass'd.
Ah! Bard tremendous in sublimity!
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood,
Wand'ring at eve, with finely frenzied eye,
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!
Awhile, with mute awe gazing, I would brood,
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstasy.'

His Tragedy, entitled *Remorse*, is full of beautiful and striking passages, but it does not place the author in the first rank of dramatic writers. But if Mr. Coleridge's works do not place him in that rank, they injure instead of conveying a just idea of the man, for he himself is certainly in the first class of general intellect.

If our author's poetry is inferior to his conversation, his prose is utterly abortive. Hardly a gleam is to be found in it of the brilliancy and richness of those stores of thought and language that he pours out incessantly, when they are lost like drops of water in the ground. The principal work, in which he has attempted to embody his general views of things, is the FRIEND, of which, though it contains some noble passages and fine trains of thought, prolixity and obscurity are the most frequent characteristics.

No two persons can be conceived more opposite in character or genius than the subject of the present and of the preceding sketch. Mr. Godwin, with less natural capacity, and with fewer acquired advantages, by concentrating his mind on some given object, and doing what he had to do with all his might, has accomplished much, and will leave more than one monument of a powerful intellect behind

him; Mr. Coleridge, by dissipating his, and dallying with every subject by turns, has done little or nothing to justify to the world or to posterity, the high opinion which all who have ever heard him converse, or known him intimately, with one accord entertain of him. Mr. Godwin's faculties have kept at home, and plied their task in the workshop of the brain, diligently and effectually: Mr. Coleridge's have gossiped away their time, and gadded about from house to house, as if life's business were to melt the hours in listless talk. Mr. Godwin is intent on a subject, only as it concerns himself and his reputation; he works it out as a matter of duty, and discards from his mind whatever does not forward his main object as impertinent and vain. Mr. Coleridge, on the other hand, delights in nothing but episodes and digressions, neglects whatever he undertakes to perform, and can act only on spontaneous impulses, without object or method. 'He cannot be constrained by mastery.' While he should be occupied with a given pursuit, he is thinking of a thousand other things; a thousand tastes, a thousand objects tempt him, and distract his mind, which keeps open house, and entertains all comers; and after being fatigued and amused with morning calls from idle visitors, finds the day consumed and its business unconcluded. Mr. Godwin, on the contrary, is somewhat exclusive and unsocial in his habits of mind, entertains no company but what he gives his whole time and attention to, and wisely writes over the doors of his understanding, his fancy, and his senses—'No admittance except on business.' He has none of that fastidious refinement and false delicacy, which might lead him to balance between the endless variety of modern attainments. He does not throw away his life (nor a single half-hour of it) in adjusting the claims of different accomplishments, and in choosing between them or making himself master of them all. He sets about his task, (whatever it may be) and goes through it with spirit and fortitude. He has the happiness to think an author the greatest character in the world, and himself the greatest author in it. Mr. Coleridge, in writing an harmonious stanza, would stop to consider whether there was not more grace and beauty in a *Pas de trois*, and would not proceed till he had resolved this question by a chain of metaphysical reasoning without end Not so Mr. Godwin. That is best to him, which he can do best. He does not waste himself in vain aspirations and effeminate sympathies. He is blind, deaf, insensible to all but the trump of Fame. Plays, operas, painting, music, ball-rooms, wealth, fashion, titles, lords, ladies, touch him not —all these are no more to him than to the magician in his cell, and he writes on to the end of the chapter, through good report and evil report. *Pingo in eternitatem*—is his motto. He neither envies nor

admires what others are, but is contented to be what he is, and strives to do the utmost he can. Mr. Coleridge has flirted with the Muses as with a set of mistresses: Mr. Godwin has been married twice, to Reason and to Fancy, and has to boast no short-lived progeny by each. So to speak, he has *valves* belonging to his mind, to regulate the quantity of gas admitted into it, so that like the bare, unsightly, but well-compacted steam-vessel, it cuts its liquid way, and arrives at its promised end: while Mr. Coleridge's bark, 'taught with the little nautilus to sail,' the sport of every breath, dancing to every wave,

'Youth at its prow, and Pleasure at its helm,'

flutters its gaudy pennons in the air, glitters in the sun, but we wait in vain to hear of its arrival in the destined harbour. Mr. Godwin, with less variety and vividness, with less subtlety and susceptibility both of thought and feeling, has had firmer nerves, a more determined purpose, a more comprehensive grasp of his subject, and the results are as we find them. Each has met with his reward: for justice has, after all, been done to the pretensions of each; and we must, in all cases, use means to ends!

It was a misfortune to any man of talent to be born in the latter end of the last century. Genius stopped the way of Legitimacy, and therefore it was to be abated, crushed, or set aside as a nuisance. The spirit of the monarchy was at variance with the spirit of the age. The flame of liberty, the light of intellect, was to be extinguished with the sword—or with slander, whose edge is sharper than the sword. The war between power and reason was carried on by the first of these abroad—by the last at home. No quarter was given (then or now) by the Government-critics, the authorised censors of the press, to those who followed the dictates of independence, who listened to the voice of the tempter, Fancy. Instead of gathering fruits and flowers, immortal fruits and amaranthine flowers, they soon found themselves beset not only by a host of prejudices, but assailed with all the engines of power, by nicknames, by lies, by all the arts of malice, interest and hypocrisy, without the possibility of their defending themselves 'from the pelting of the pitiless storm,' that poured down upon them from the strong-holds of corruption and authority. The philosophers, the dry abstract reasoners, submitted to this reverse pretty well, and armed themselves with patience 'as with triple steel,' to bear discomfiture, persecution, and disgrace. But the poets, the creatures of sympathy, could not stand the frowns both of king and people. They did not like to be shut out when places and pensions, when the critic's praises, and the laurel-wreath were about to be distributed. They did not stomach being *sent to*

Coventry, and Mr. Coleridge sounded a retreat for them by the help of casuistry, and a musical voice.—'His words were hollow, but they pleased the ear' of his friends of the Lake School, who turned back disgusted and panic-struck from the dry desert of unpopularity, like Hassan the camel-driver,

> 'And curs'd the hour, and curs'd the luckless day,
> When first from Shiraz' walls they bent their way.'

They are safely inclosed there, but Mr. Coleridge did not enter with them; pitching his tent upon the barren waste without, and having no abiding place nor city of refuge!

REV. MR. IRVING

This gentleman has gained an almost unprecedented, and not an altogether unmerited popularity as a preacher. As he is, perhaps, though a burning and a shining light, not 'one of the fixed,' we shall take this opportunity of discussing his merits, while he is at his meridian height; and in doing so, shall 'nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice.'

Few circumstances show the prevailing and preposterous rage for novelty in a more striking point of view, than the success of Mr. Irving's oratory. People go to hear him in crowds, and come away with a mixture of delight and astonishment—they go again to see if the effect will continue, and send others to try to find out the mystery—and in the noisy conflict between extravagant encomiums and splenetic objections, the true secret escapes observation, which is, that the whole thing is, nearly from beginning to end, a *transposition of ideas*. If the subject of these remarks had come out as a player, with all his advantages of figure, voice, and action, we think he would have failed; if, as a preacher, he had kept within the strict bounds of pulpit-oratory, he would scarcely have been much distinguished among his Calvinistic brethren: as a mere author, he would have excited attention rather by his quaintness and affectation of an obsolete style and mode of thinking, than by any thing else. But he has contrived to jumble these several characters together in an unheard-of and unwarranted manner, and the fascination is altogether irresistible. Our Caledonian divine is equally an anomaly in religion, in literature, in personal appearance, and in public speaking. To hear a person spout Shakspeare on the stage is nothing—the charm is nearly worn out—but to hear any one spout Shakspeare (and that

not in a sneaking under-tone, but at the top of his voice, and with the full breadth of his chest) from a Calvinistic pulpit, is new and wonderful. The *Fancy* have lately lost something of their gloss in public estimation, and after the last fight, few would go far to see a Neat or a Spring set-to;—but to see a man who is able to enter the ring with either of them, or brandish a quarter-staff with Friar Tuck, or a broad-sword with Shaw the Life-guard's man, stand up in a strait-laced old-fashioned pulpit, and bandy dialectics with modern philosophers, or give a *cross-buttock* to a cabinet minister, there is something in a sight like this also, that is a cure for sore eyes. It is as if Crib or Molyneux had turned Methodist parson, or as if a Patagonian savage were to come forward as the patron-saint of Evangelical religion. Again, the doctrine of eternal punishment was one of the staple arguments with which, everlastingly drawled out, the old school of Presbyterian divines used to keep their audiences awake, or lull them to sleep; but to which people of taste and fashion paid little attention, as inelegant and barbarous, till Mr. Irving, with his cast-iron features and sledge-hammer blows, puffing like a grim Vulcan, set to work to forge more classic thunderbolts, and kindle the expiring flames anew with the very sweepings of sceptical and infidel libraries, so as to excite a pleasing horror in the female part of his congregation. In short, our popular declaimer has, contrary to the Scripture-caution, put new wine into old bottles, or new cloth on old garments. He has, with an unlimited and daring licence, mixed the sacred and the profane together, the carnal and the spiritual man, the petulance of the bar with the dogmatism of the pulpit, the theatrical and theological, the modern and the obsolete;—what wonder that this splendid piece of patchwork, splendid by contradiction and contrast, has delighted some and confounded others? The more serious part of his congregation indeed complain, though not bitterly, that their pastor has converted their meeting-house into a play-house: but when a lady of quality, introducing herself and her three daughters to the preacher, assures him that they have been to all the most fashionable places of resort, the opera, the theatre, assemblies, Miss Macauley's readings, and Exeter-Change, and have been equally entertained no where else, we apprehend that no remonstrances of a committee of ruling-elders will be able to bring him to his senses again, or make him forego such sweet, but ill-assorted praise. What we mean to insist upon is, that Mr. Irving owes his triumphant success, not to any one quality for which he has been extolled, but to a combination of qualities, the more striking in their immediate effect, in proportion as they are unlooked-for and heterogeneous, like the violent opposition

of light and shade in a picture. We shall endeavour to explain this view of the subject more at large.

Mr. Irving, then, is no common or mean man. He has four or five qualities, possessed in a moderate or in a paramount degree, which, added or multiplied together, fill up the important space he occupies in the public eye. Mr. Irving's intellect itself is of a superior order; he has undoubtedly both talents and acquirements beyond the ordinary run of every-day preachers. These alone, however, we hold, would not account for a twentieth part of the effect he has produced: they would have lifted him perhaps out of the mire and slough of sordid obscurity, but would never have launched him into the ocean-stream of popularity, in which he 'lies floating many a rood';—but to these he adds uncommon height, a graceful figure and action, a clear and powerful voice, a striking, if not a fine face, a bold and fiery spirit, and a most portentous obliquity of vision, which throw him to an immeasurable distance beyond all competition, and effectually relieve whatever there might be of common-place or bombast in his style of composition. Put the case that Mr. Irving had been five feet high—Would he ever have been heard of, or, as he does now, have 'bestrode the world like a Colossus?' No, the thing speaks for itself. He would in vain have lifted his Lilliputian arm to Heaven, people would have laughed at his monkey-tricks. Again, had he been as tall as he is, but had wanted other recommendations, he would have been nothing.

> 'The player's province they but vainly try,
> Who want these powers, deportment, voice, and eye.'

Conceive a rough, ugly, shock-headed Scotchman, standing up in the Caledonian Chapel, and dealing 'damnation round the land' in a broad northern dialect, and with a harsh, screaking voice, what ear polite, what smile serene would have hailed the barbarous prodigy, or not consigned him to utter neglect and derision? But the Rev. Edward Irving, with all his native wildness, 'hath a smooth aspect framed to make women' saints; his very unusual size and height are carried off and moulded into elegance by the most admirable symmetry of form and ease of gesture; his sable locks, his clear iron-grey complexion, and firm-set features, turn the raw, uncouth Scotchman into the likeness of a noble Italian picture; and even his distortion of sight only redeems the otherwise 'faultless monster' within the bounds of humanity, and, when admiration is exhausted and curiosity ceases, excites a new interest by leading to the idle question whether it is an advantage to the preacher or not. Farther, give him all his

actual and remarkable advantages of body and mind, let him be as tall, as strait, as dark and clear of skin, as much at his ease, as silver-tongued, as eloquent and as argumentative as he is, yet with all these, and without a little charlatanry to set them off he had been nothing. He might, keeping within the rigid line of his duty and professed calling, have preached on for ever; he might have divided the old-fashioned doctrines of election, grace, reprobation, predestination, into his sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth heads, and his *lastly* have been looked for as a 'consummation devoutly to be wished'; he might have defied the devil and all his works, and by the help of a loud voice and strong-set person—

'A lusty man to ben an Abbot able;'—

have increased his own congregation, and been quoted among the godly as a powerful preacher of the word; but in addition to this, he went out of his way to attack Jeremy Bentham, and the town was up in arms. The thing was new. He thus wiped the stain of musty ignorance and formal bigotry out of his style. Mr. Irving must have something superior in him, to look over the shining close-packed heads of his congregation to have a hit at the *Great Jurisconsult* in his study. He next, ere the report of the former blow had subsided, made a lunge at Mr. Brougham, and glanced an eye at Mr. Canning; *mystified* Mr. Coleridge, and *stultified* Lord Liverpool in his place—in the Gallery. It was rare sport to see him, 'like an eagle in a dovecote, flutter the Volscians in Corioli.' He has found out the secret of attracting by repelling. Those whom he is likely to attack are curious to hear what he says of them: they go again, to show that they do not mind it. It is no less interesting to the bystanders, who like to witness this sort of *onslaught*—like a charge of cavalry, the shock, and the resistance. Mr. Irving has, in fact, without leave asked or a licence granted, converted the Caledonian Chapel into a Westminster Forum or Debating Society, with the sanctity of religion added to it. Our spirited polemic is not contented to defend the citadel of orthodoxy against all impugners, and shut himself up in texts of Scripture and huge volumes of the Commentators as an impregnable fortress;—he merely makes use of the strong-hold of religion as a resting-place, from which he sallies forth, armed with modern topics and with penal fire, like Achilles of old rushing from the Grecian tents, against the adversaries of God and man. Peter Aretine is said to have laid the Princes of Europe under contribution by penning satires against them: so Mr. Irving keeps the public in awe by insulting all their favourite idols. He does not spare their politicians, their rulers, their moralists, their

poets, their players, their critics, their reviewers, their magazine-writers; he levels their resorts of business, their places of amusement, at a blow—their cities, churches, palaces, ranks and professions, refinements, and elegances—and leaves nothing standing but himself, a mighty landmark in a degenerate age, overlooking the wide havoc he has made! He makes war upon all arts and sciences, upon the faculties and nature of man, on his vices and his virtues, on all existing institutions, and all possible improvements, that nothing may be left but the Kirk of Scotland, and that he may be the head of it. He literally sends a challenge to all London in the name of the KING of HEAVEN, to evacuate its streets, to disperse its population, to lay aside its employments, to burn its wealth, to renounce its vanities and pomp; and for what?—that he may enter in as the *King of Glory;* or after enforcing his threat with the battering-ram of logic, the grape-shot of rhetoric, and the cross-fire of his double vision, reduce the British metropolis to a Scottish heath, with a few miserable hovels upon it, where they may worship God according to *the root of the matter*, and where an old man with a blue bonnet, a fair-haired girl, and a little child would form the flower of his flock! Such is the pretension and the boast of this new Peter the Hermit, who would get rid of all we have done in the way of improvement on a state of barbarous ignorance, or still more barbarous prejudice, in order to begin again on a *tabula rasa* of Calvinism, and have a world of his own making. It is not very surprising that when nearly the whole mass and texture of civil society is indicted as a nuisance, and threatened to be pulled down as a rotten building ready to fall on the heads of the inhabitants, that all classes of people run to hear the crash, and to see the engines and levers at work which are to effect this laudable purpose. What else can be the meaning of our preacher's taking upon himself to denounce the sentiments of the most serious professors in great cities, as vitiated and stark-naught, of relegating religion to his native glens, and pretending that the hymn of praise or the sigh of contrition cannot ascend acceptably to the throne of grace from the crowded street as well as from the barren rock or silent valley? Why put this affront upon his hearers? Why belie his own aspirations?

'God made the country, and man made the town.'

So says the poet; does Mr. Irving say so? If he does, and finds the air of the city death to his piety, why does he not return home again? But if he can breathe it with impunity, and still retain the fervour of his early enthusiasm, and the simplicity and purity of the faith that was once delivered to the saints, why not extend the benefit

of his own experience to others, instead of taunting them with a vapid pastoral theory? Or, if our popular and eloquent divine finds a change in himself, that flattery prevents the growth of grace, that he is becoming the God of his own idolatry by being that of others, that the glittering of coronet-coaches rolling down Holborn-Hill to Hatton Garden, that titled beauty, that the parliamentary complexion of his audience, the compliments of poets, and the stare of peers discompose his wandering thoughts a little; and yet that he cannot give up these strong temptations tugging at his heart; why not extend more charity to others, and show more candour in speaking of himself? There is either a good deal of bigoted intolerance with a deplorable want of self-knowledge in all this; or at least an equal degree of cant and quackery.

To which ever cause we are to attribute this hyperbolical tone, we hold it certain he could not have adopted it, if he had been *a little man*. But his imposing figure and dignified manner enable him to hazard sentiments or assertions that would be fatal to others. His controversial daring is *backed* by his bodily prowess; and by bringing his intellectual pretensions boldly into a line with his physical accomplishments, he, indeed, presents a very formidable front to the sceptic or the scoffer. Take a cubit from his stature, and his whole manner resolves itself into an impertinence. But with that addition, he *overcrows* the town, browbeats their prejudices, and bullies them out of their senses, and is not afraid of being contradicted by any one *less than himself*. It may be said, that individuals with great personal defects have made a considerable figure as public speakers; and Mr. Wilberforce, among others, may be held out as an instance. Nothing can be more insignificant as to mere outward appearance, and yet he is listened to in the House of Commons. But he does not wield it, he does not insult or bully it. He leads by following opinion, he trims, he shifts, he glides on the silvery sounds of his undulating, flexible, cautiously modulated voice, winding his way betwixt heaven and earth, now courting popularity, now calling servility to his aid, and with a large estate, the 'saints,' and the population of Yorkshire to swell his influence, never venturing on the forlorn hope, or doing any thing more than 'hitting the house between wind and water.' Yet he is probably a cleverer man than Mr. Irving.

There is a Mr. Fox, a Dissenting Minister, as fluent a speaker, with a sweeter voice and a more animated and beneficent countenance than Mr. Irving, who expresses himself with manly spirit at a public meeting, takes a hand at whist, and is the darling of his congregation; but he is no more, because he is diminutive in person. His head is

not seen above the crowd the length of a street off. He is the Duke of Sussex in miniature, but the Duke of Sussex does not go to hear him preach, as he attends Mr. Irving, who rises up against him like a martello tower, and is nothing loth to confront the spirit of a man of genius with the blood-royal. We allow there are, or may be, talents sufficient to produce this equality without a single personal advantage; but we deny that this would be the effect of any that our great preacher possesses. We conceive it not improbable that the consciousness of muscular power, that the admiration of his person by strangers might first have inspired Mr. Irving with an ambition to be something, intellectually speaking, and have given him confidence to attempt the greatest things. He has not failed for want of courage. The public, as well as the fair, are won by a show of gallantry. Mr. Irving has shrunk from no opinion, however paradoxical. He has scrupled to avow no sentiment, however obnoxious. He has revived exploded prejudices, he has scouted prevailing fashions. He has opposed the spirit of the age, and not consulted the *esprit de corps*. He has brought back the doctrines of Calvinism in all their inveteracy, and relaxed the inveteracy of his northern accents. He has turned religion and the Caledonian Chapel topsy-turvy. He has held a play-book in one hand, and a Bible in the other, and quoted Shakespeare and Melancthon in the same breath. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is no longer, with his grafting, a dry withered stump; it shoots its branches to the skies, and hangs out its blossoms to the gale—

'Miraturque novos fructus, et non sua poma.'

He has taken the thorns and briars of scholastic divinity, and garlanded them with the flowers of modern literature. He has done all this, relying on the strength of a remarkably fine person and manner, and through that he has succeeded—otherwise he would have perished miserably.

Dr. Chalmers is not by any means so good a looking man, nor so accomplished a speaker as Mr. Irving; yet he at one time almost equalled his oratorical celebrity, and certainly paved the way for him. He has therefore more merit than his admired pupil, as he has done as much with fewer means. He has more scope of intellect and more intensity of purpose. Both his matter and his manner, setting aside his face and figure, are more impressive. Take the volume of 'Sermons on Astronomy,' by Dr. Chalmers, and the 'Four Orations for the Oracles of God' which Mr. Irving lately published, and we apprehend there can be no comparison as to their success. The first ran like wild-fire through the country, were the darlings of

watering-places, were laid in the windows of inns,[1] and were to be met with in all places of public resort; while the 'Orations' get on but slowly, on Milton's stilts, and are pompously announced as in a Third Edition. We believe the fairest and fondest of his admirers would rather see and hear Mr. Irving than read him. The reason is, that the ground work of his compositions is trashy and hackneyed, though set off by extravagant metaphors and an affected phraseology; that without the turn of his head and wave of his hand, his periods have nothing in them; and that he himself is the only *idea* with which he has yet enriched the public mind! He must play off his person, as Orator Henley used to dazzle his hearers with his diamond-ring. The small frontispiece prefixed to the 'Orations' does not serve to convey an adequate idea of the magnitude of the man, nor of the ease and freedom of his motions in the pulpit. How different is Dr. Chalmers! He is like 'a monkey-preacher' to the other. He cannot boast of personal appearance to set him off. But then he is like the very genius or demon of theological controversy personified. He has neither airs nor graces at command; he thinks nothing of himself: he has nothing theatrical about him (which cannot be said of his successor and rival); but you see a man in mortal throes and agony with doubts and difficulties, seizing stubborn knotty points with his teeth, tearing them with his hands, and straining his eyeballs till they almost start out of their sockets, in pursuit of a train of visionary reasoning, like a Highland-seer with his second sight. The description of Balfour of Burley in his cave, with his Bible in one hand and his sword in the other, contending with the imaginary enemy of mankind, gasping for breath, and with the cold moisture running down his face, gives a lively idea of Dr. Chalmers's prophetic fury in the pulpit. If we could have looked in to have seen Burley hard-beset 'by the coinage of his heat-oppressed brain,' who would have asked whether he was a handsome man or not? It would be enough to see a man haunted by a spirit, under the strong and entire dominion of a wilful hallucination. So the integrity and vehemence of Dr. Chalmers's manner, the determined way in which he gives himself up to his subject, or lays about him and buffets sceptics and gain-sayers, arrests attention in spite of every other circumstance, and fixes it on that, and that alone, which excites such interest and such eagerness in his own breast! Besides, he is a logician, has a theory in support of whatever he chooses to

[1] We remember finding the volume in the orchard at Burford-bridge near Boxhill, and passing a whole and very delightful morning in reading it, without quitting the shade of an apple-tree. We have not been able to pay Mr. Irving's book the same compliment of reading it at a sitting.

advance, and weaves the tissue of his sophistry so close and intricate, that it is difficult not to be entangled in it, or to escape from it. 'There 's magic in the web.' Whatever appeals to the pride of the human understanding, has a subtle charm in it. The mind is naturally pugnacious, cannot refuse a challenge of strength or skill, sturdily enters the lists and resolves to conquer, or to yield itself vanquished in the forms. This is the chief hold Dr. Chalmers had upon his hearers, and upon the readers of his 'Astronomical Discourses.' No one was satisfied with his arguments, no one could answer them, but every one wanted to try what he could make of them, as we try to find out a riddle. 'By his so potent art,' the art of laying down problematical premises, and drawing from them still more doubtful, but not impossible, conclusions, 'he could bedim the noonday sun, betwixt the green sea and the azure vault set roaring war,' and almost compel the stars in their courses to testify to his opinions. The mode in which he undertook to make the circuit of the universe, and demand categorical information 'now of the planetary and now of the fixed,' might put one in mind of Hecate's mode of ascending in a machine from the stage, 'midst troops of spirits,' in which you now admire the skill of the artist, and next tremble for the fate of the performer, fearing that the audacity of the attempt will turn his head or break his neck. The style of these 'Discourses' also, though not elegant or poetical, was, like the subject, intricate and endless It was that of a man pushing his way through a labyrinth of difficulties, and determined not to flinch. The impression on the reader was proportionate; for, whatever were the merits of the style or matter, both were new and striking; and the train of thought that was unfolded at such length and with such strenuousness, was bold, well-sustained, and consistent with itself.

Mr. Irving wants the continuity of thought and manner which distinguishes his rival—and shines by patches and in bursts. He does not warm or acquire increasing force or rapidity with his progress. He is never hurried away by a deep or lofty enthusiasm, nor touches the highest point of genius or fanaticism, but 'in the very storm and whirlwind of his passion, he acquires and begets a temperance that may give it smoothness.' He has the self-possession and masterly execution of an experienced player or fencer, and does not seem to express his natural convictions, or to be engaged in a mortal struggle. This greater ease and indifference is the result of vast superiority of personal appearance, which 'to be admired needs but to be seen,' and does not require the possessor to work himself up into a passion, or to use any violent contortions to gain attention

or to keep it. These two celebrated preachers are in almost all respects an antithesis to each other. If Mr. Irving is an example of what can be done by the help of external advantages, Dr. Chalmers is a proof of what can be done without them. The one is most indebted to his mind, the other to his body. If Mr. Irving inclines one to suspect fashionable or popular religion of a little *anthropomorphitism*, Dr. Chalmers effectually redeems it from that scandal.

THE LATE MR. HORNE TOOKE

Mr. Horne Tooke was one of those who may be considered as connecting links between a former period and the existing generation. His education and accomplishments, nay, his political opinions, were of the last age; his mind, and the tone of his feelings were *modern*. There was a hard, dry materialism in the very texture of his understanding, varnished over by the external refinements of the old school. Mr. Tooke had great scope of attainment, and great versatility of pursuit; but the same shrewdness, quickness, cool self-possession, the same *literalness* of perception, and absence of passion and enthusiasm, characterised nearly all he did, said, or wrote. He was without a rival (almost) in private conversation, an expert public speaker, a keen politician, a first-rate grammarian, and the finest gentleman (to say the least) of his own party. He had no imagination (or he would not have scorned it!)—no delicacy of taste, no rooted prejudices or strong attachments: his intellect was like a bow of polished steel, from which he shot sharp-pointed poisoned arrows at his friends in private, at his enemies in public. His mind (so to speak) had no *religion* in it, and very little even of the moral qualities of genius; but he was a man of the world, a scholar bred, and a most acute and powerful logician. He was also a wit, and a formidable one: yet it may be questioned whether his wit was any thing more than an excess of his logical faculty: it did not consist in the play of fancy, but in close and cutting combinations of the understanding. 'The law is open to every one: *so*,' said Mr. Tooke, '*is the London Tavern*!' It is the previous deduction formed in the mind, and the splenetic contempt felt for a practical sophism, that *beats about the bush for*, and at last finds the apt illustration; not the casual, glancing coincidence of two objects, that points out an absurdity to the understanding. So, on another occasion, when Sir Allan Gardiner (who was a candidate for Westminster) had objected to Mr. Fox, that 'he was always against the minister,

whether right or wrong,' and Mr. Fox, in his reply, had overlooked this slip of the tongue, Mr. Tooke immediately seized on it, and said, 'he thought it at least an equal objection to Sir Allan, that he was always *with* the minister, whether right or wrong.' This retort had all the effect, and produced the same surprise as the most brilliant display of wit or fancy: yet it was only the detecting a flaw in an argument, like a flaw in an indictment, by a kind of legal pertinacity, or rather by a rigid and constant habit of attending to the exact import of every word and clause in a sentence. Mr. Tooke had the mind of a lawyer; but it was applied to a vast variety of topics and general trains of speculation.

Mr. Horne Tooke was in private company, and among his friends, the finished gentleman of the last age. His manners were as fascinating as his conversation was spirited and delightful. He put one in mind of the burden of the song of '*The King's Old Courtier, and an Old Courtier of the King's*.' He was, however, of the opposite party. It was curious to hear our modern sciolist advancing opinions of the most radical kind without any mixture of radical heat or violence, in a tone of fashionable *nonchalance*, with elegance of gesture and attitude, and with the most perfect good-humour. In the spirit of opposition, or in the pride of logical superiority, he too often shocked the prejudices or wounded the self-love of those about him, while he himself displayed the same unmoved indifference or equanimity. He said the most provoking things with a laughing gaiety, and a polite attention, that there was no withstanding. He threw others off their guard by thwarting their favourite theories, and then availed himself of the temperance of his own pulse to chafe them into madness. He had not one particle of deference for the opinion of others, nor of sympathy with their feelings; nor had he any obstinate convictions of his own to defend—

'Lord of himself, uncumbered with a *creed*!'

He took up any topic by chance, and played with it at will, like a juggler with his cups and balls. He generally ranged himself on the losing side; and had rather an ill-natured delight in contradiction, and in perplexing the understandings of others, without leaving them any clue to guide them out of the labyrinth into which he had led them. He understood, in its perfection, the great art of throwing the *onus probandi* on his adversary; and so could maintain almost any opinion, however absurd or fantastical, with fearless impunity. I have heard a sensible and well-informed man say, that he never was in company with Mr. Tooke without being delighted and surprised, or without feeling the conversation of every other person to be flat in the

comparison; but that he did not recollect having ever heard him make a remark that struck him as a sound and true one, or that he himself appeared to think so. He used to plague Fuseli by asking him after the origin of the Teutonic dialects, and Dr. Parr, by wishing to know the meaning of the common copulative, *Is*. Once at G——'s, he defended Pitt from a charge of verbiage, and endeavoured to prove him superior to Fox. Some one imitated Pitt's manner, to show that it was monotonous, and he imitated him also, to show that it was not. He maintained (what would he not maintain?) that young Betty's acting was finer than John Kemble's, and recited a passage from Douglas in the manner of each, to justify the preference he gave to the former. The mentioning this will please the living; it cannot hurt the dead. He argued on the same occasion and in the same breath, that Addison's style was without modulation, and that it was physically impossible for any one to write well, who was habitually silent in company. He sat like a king at his own table, and gave law to his guests—and to the world! No man knew better how to manage his immediate circle, to foil or bring them out. A professed orator, beginning to address some observations to Mr. Tooke with a voluminous apology for his youth and inexperience, he said, 'Speak up, young man!'—and by taking him at his word, cut short the flower of orations. Porson was the only person of whom he stood in some degree of awe, on account of his prodigious memory and knowledge of his favourite subject, Languages. Sheridan, it has been remarked, said more good things, but had not an equal flow of pleasantry. As an instance of Mr. Horne Tooke's extreme coolness and command of nerve, it has been mentioned that once at a public dinner when he had got on the table to return thanks for his health being drank with a glass of wine in his hand, and when there was a great clamour and opposition for some time, after it had subsided, he pointed to the glass to show that it was still full. Mr. Holcroft (the author of the *Road to Ruin*) was one of the most violent and fiery-spirited of all that motley crew of persons, who attended the Sunday meetings at Wimbledon. One day he was so enraged by some paradox or raillery of his host, that he indignantly rose from his chair, and said, 'Mr. Tooke, you are a scoundrel!' His opponent without manifesting the least emotion, replied, 'Mr. Holcroft, when is it that I am to dine with you? shall it be next Thursday?'—'If you please, Mr. Tooke!' answered the angry philosopher, and sat down again.—It was delightful to see him sometimes turn from these waspish or ludicrous altercations with over-weening antagonists to some old friend and veteran politician seated at his elbow; to hear him recall the time of Wilkes and Liberty, the conversation mellow-

ing like the wine with the smack of age; assenting to all the old man said, bringing out his pleasant *traits*, and pampering him into childish self-importance, and sending him away thirty years younger than he came!

As a public or at least as a parliamentary speaker, Mr. Tooke did not answer the expectations that had been conceived of him, or probably that he had conceived of himself. It is natural for men who have felt a superiority over all those whom they happen to have encountered, to fancy that this superiority will continue, and that it will extend from individuals to public bodies. There is no rule in the case; or rather, the probability lies the contrary way. That which constitutes the excellence of conversation is of little use in addressing large assemblies of people; while other qualities are required that are hardly to be looked for in one and the same capacity. The way to move great masses of men is to show that you yourself are moved. In a private circle, a ready repartee, a shrewd cross-question, ridicule and banter, a caustic remark or an amusing anecdote, whatever sets off the individual to advantage, or gratifies the curiosity or piques the self-love of the hearers, keeps attention alive, and secures the triumph of the speaker—it is a personal contest, and depends on personal and momentary advantages. But in appealing to the public, no one triumphs but in the triumph of some public cause, or by showing a sympathy with the general and predominant feelings of mankind. In a private room, a satirist, a sophist may provoke admiration by expressing his contempt for each of his adversaries in turn, and by setting their opinion at defiance—but when men are congregated together on a great public question and for a weighty object, they must be treated with more respect; they are touched with what affects themselves or the general weal, not with what flatters the vanity of the speaker; they must be moved altogether, if they are moved at all; they are impressed with gratitude for a luminous exposition of their claims or for zeal in their cause; and the lightning of generous indignation at bad men and bad measures is followed by thunders of applause—even in the House of Commons. But a man may sneer and cavil and puzzle and fly-blow every question that comes before him—be despised and feared by others, and admired by no one but himself. He who thinks first of himself, either in the world or in a popular assembly, will be sure to turn attention away from his claims, instead of fixing it there. He must make common cause with his hearers. To lead, he must follow the general bias. Mr. Tooke did not therefore succeed as a speaker in parliament. He stood aloof, he played antics, he exhibited his peculiar talent--while he was on his legs, the question before the

House stood still; the only point at issue respected Mr. Tooke himself, his personal address and adroitness of intellect. Were there to be no more places and pensions, because Mr. Tooke's style was terse and epigrammatic? Were the Opposition benches to be inflamed to an unusual pitch of 'sacred vehemence,' because he gave them plainly to understand there was not a pin to choose between Ministers and Opposition? Would the House let him remain among them, because, if they turned him out on account of his *black coat*, Lord Camelford had threatened to send his *black servant* in his place? This was a good joke, but not a practical one. Would he gain the affections of the people out of doors, by scouting the question of reform? Would the King ever relish the old associate of Wilkes? What interest, then, what party did he represent? He represented nobody but himself. He was an example of an ingenious man, a clever talker, but he was out of his place in the House of Commons; where people did not come (as in his own house) to admire or break a lance with him, but to get through the business of the day, and so adjourn! He wanted effect and *momentum*. Each of his sentences told very well in itself, but they did not altogether make a speech. He left off where he began. His eloquence was a succession of drops, not a stream. His arguments, though subtle and new, did not affect the main body of the question. The coldness and pettiness of his manner did not warm the hearts or expand the understandings of his hearers. Instead of encouraging, he checked the ardour of his friends; and teazed, instead of overpowering his antagonists. The only palpable hit he ever made, while he remained there, was the comparing his own situation in being rejected by the House, on account of the supposed purity of his clerical character, to the story of the girl at the Magdalen, who was told 'she must turn out and qualify.'[1] This met with laughter and loud applause. It was a *home* thrust, and the House (to do them justice) are obliged to any one who, by a smart blow, relieves them of the load of grave responsibility, which sits heavy on their shoulders.—At the hustings, or as an election-candidate, Mr. Tooke did better. There was no great question to move or carry—it was an affair of political *sparring* between himself and the other candidates. He took it in a very cool and leisurely manner—watched his competitors with a wary, sarcastic eye; picked up the mistakes or absurdities that fell from them, and retorted them on their heads; told a story to the mob; and smiled and took snuff with a gentlemanly and becoming air, as if he was already seated in the House. But a Court of Law was the place

[1] 'They receive him like a virgin at the Magdalen, *Go thou and do likewise*'—JUNIUS.

where Mr. Tooke made the best figure in public. He might assuredly be said to be 'native and endued unto that element.' He had here to stand merely on the defensive—not to advance himself, but to block up the way—not to impress others, but to be himself impenetrable. All he wanted was *negative success*; and to this no one was better qualified to aspire. Cross purposes, *moot-points*, pleas, demurrers, flaws in the indictment, double meanings, cases, inconsequentialities, these were the play-things, the darlings of Mr. Tooke's mind; and with these he baffled the Judge, dumb-founded the Counsel, and outwitted the Jury. The report of his trial before Lord Kenyon is a masterpiece of acuteness, dexterity, modest assurance, and legal effect. It is much like his examination before the Commissioners of the Income-Tax—nothing could be got out of him in either case!

Mr. Tooke, as a political leader, belonged to the class of *trimmers*; or at most, it was his delight to make mischief and spoil sport. He would rather be *against* himself than *for* any body else. He was neither a bold nor a safe leader. He enticed others into scrapes, and kept out of them himself. Provided he could say a clever or a spiteful thing, he did not care whether it served or injured the cause. Spleen or the exercise of intellectual power was the motive of his patriotism, rather than principle. He would talk treason with a saving clause; and instil sedition into the public mind, through the medium of a third (who was to be the responsible) party. He made Sir Francis Burdett his spokesman in the House and to the country, often venting his chagrin or singularity of sentiment at the expense of his friend; but what in the first was trick or reckless vanity, was in the last plain downright English honesty and singleness of heart. In the case of the State Trials, in 1794, Mr. Tooke rather compromised his friends to screen himself. He kept repeating that 'others might have gone on to Windsor, but he had stopped at Hounslow,' as if to go farther might have been dangerous and unwarrantable. It was not the question how far he or others had actually gone, but how far they had a right to go, according to the law. His conduct was not the limit of the law, nor did treasonable excess begin where prudence or principle taught him to stop short, though this was the oblique inference liable to be drawn from his line of defence. Mr. Tooke was uneasy and apprehensive for the issue of the Government-prosecution while in confinement, and said, in speaking of it to a friend, with a morbid feeling and an emphasis quite unusual with him—'They want our blood—blood—blood!' It was somewhat ridiculous to implicate Mr. Tooke in a charge of High Treason (and indeed the whole charge was built on the mistaken purport of an intercepted letter

relating to an engagement for a private dinner-party)—his politics were not at all revolutionary. In this respect he was a mere petti-fogger, full of chicane, and captious objections, and unmeaning discontent; but he had none of the grand whirling movements of the French Revolution, nor of the tumultuous glow of rebellion in his head or in his heart. His politics were cast in a different mould, or confined to the party distinctions and court intrigues and pittances of popular right, that made a noise in the time of Junius and Wilkes—and even if his understanding had gone along with more modern and unqualified principles, his cautious temper would have prevented his risking them in practice. Horne Tooke (though not of the same side in politics) had much of the tone of mind and more of the spirit of moral feeling of the celebrated philosopher of Malmesbury. The narrow scale and fine-drawn distinctions of his political creed made his conversation on such subjects infinitely amusing, particularly when contrasted with that of persons who dealt in the sounding *common-places* and sweeping clauses of abstract politics. He knew all the cabals and jealousies and heart-burnings in the beginning of the late reign, the changes of administration and the springs of secret influence, the characters of the leading men, Wilkes, Barrè, Dunning, Chatham, Burke, the Marquis of Rockingham, North, Shelburne, Fox, Pitt, and all the vacillating events of the American war:—these formed a curious back-ground to the more prominent figures that occupied the present time, and Mr. Tooke worked out the minute details and touched in the evanescent *traits* with the pencil of a master. His conversation resembled a political *camera obscura*—as quaint as it was magical. To some pompous pretenders he might seem to narrate *fabellas aniles* (old wives' fables)—but not to those who study human nature, and wish to know the materials of which it is composed. Mr. Tooke's faculties might appear to have ripened and acquired a finer flavour with age. In a former period of his life he was hardly the man he was latterly; or else he had greater abilities to contend against. He no where makes so poor a figure as in his controversy with Junius. He has evidently the best of the argument, yet he makes nothing out of it. He tells a long story about himself, without wit or point in it; and whines and whimpers like a school-boy under the rod of his master. Junius, after bringing a hasty charge against him, has not a single fact to adduce in support of it; but keeps his ground and fairly beats his adversary out of the field by the mere force of style. One would think that 'Parson Horne' knew who Junius was, and was afraid of him. 'Under him his genius is' quite 'rebuked.' With the best cause to defend, he comes off more shabbily from the contest than any other person in

the LETTERS, except Sir William Draper, who is the very hero of defeat.

The great thing which Mr. Horne Tooke has done, and which he has left behind him to posterity, is his work on Grammar, oddly enough entitled THE DIVERSIONS OF PURLEY. Many people have taken it up as a description of a game—others supposing it to be a novel. It is, in truth, one of the few philosophical works on Grammar that were ever written. The essence of it (and, indeed, almost all that is really valuable in it) is contained in his *Letter to Dunning*, published about the year 1775. Mr. Tooke's work is truly elementary. Dr. Lowth described Mr. Harris's *Hermes* as 'the finest specimen of analysis since the days of Aristotle'—a work in which there is no analysis at all, for analysis consists in reducing things to their principles, and not in endless details and subdivisions. Mr. Harris multiplies distinctions, and confounds his readers. Mr. Tooke clears away the rubbish of school-boy technicalities, and strikes at the root of his subject. In accomplishing his arduous task, he was, perhaps, aided not more by the strength and resources of his mind than by its limits and defects. There is a web of old associations wound round language, that is a kind of veil over its natural features; and custom puts on the mask of ignorance. But this veil, this mask the author of *The Diversions of Purley* threw aside and penetrated to the naked truth of things, by the literal, matter-of-fact, unimaginative nature of his understanding, and because he was not subject to prejudices or illusions of any kind. Words may be said to 'bear a charmed life, that must not yield to one of woman born'—with womanish weaknesses and confused apprehensions. But this charm was broken in the case of Mr. Tooke, whose mind was the reverse of effeminate—hard, unbending, concrete, physical, half-savage—and who saw language stripped of the clothing of habit or sentiment, or the disguises of doting pedantry, naked in its cradle, and in its primitive state. Our author tells us that he found his discovery on Grammar among a number of papers on other subjects, which he had thrown aside and forgotten. Is this an idle boast? Or had he made other discoveries of equal importance, which he did not think it worth his while to communicate to the world, but chose to die the churl of knowledge? The whole of his reasoning turns upon showing that the Conjunction *That* is the pronoun *That*, which is itself the participle of a verb, and in like manner that all the other mystical and hitherto unintelligible parts of speech are derived from the only two intelligible ones, the Verb and Noun. 'I affirm *that* gold is yellow,' that is, 'I affirm *that* fact, or that proposition, viz. gold is yellow.' The secret of the Conjunction on which so many

fine heads had split, on which so many learned definitions were thrown away, as if it was its peculiar province and inborn virtue to announce oracles and formal propositions, and nothing else, like a Doctor of Laws, is here at once accounted for, inasmuch as it is clearly nothing but another part of speech, the pronoun, *that*, with a third part of speech, the noun, *thing*, understood. This is getting at a solution of words into their component parts, not glossing over one difficulty by bringing another to parallel it, nor like saying with Mr. Harris, when it is asked, 'what a Conjunction is?' that there are conjunctions copulative, conjunctions disjunctive, and as many other frivolous varieties of the species as any one chooses to hunt out 'with laborious foolery.' Our author hit upon his parent-discovery in the course of a law-suit, while he was examining, with jealous watchfulness, the meaning of words to prevent being entrapped by them; or rather, this circumstance might itself be traced to the habit of satisfying his own mind as to the precise sense in which he himself made use of words. Mr. Tooke, though he had no objection to puzzle others, was mightily averse to being puzzled or *mystified* himself. All was, to his determined mind, either complete light or complete darkness. There was no hazy, doubtful *chiaro-scuro* in his understanding. He wanted something 'palpable to feeling as to sight.' 'What,' he would say to himself, 'do I mean when I use the conjunction *that*? Is it an anomaly, a class by itself, a word sealed against all inquisitive attempts? Is it enough to call it a *copula*, a bridge, a link, a word connecting sentences? That is undoubtedly its use, but what is its origin?' Mr. Tooke thought he had answered this question satisfactorily, and loosened the Gordian knot of grammarians, 'familiar as his garter,' when he said, 'It is the common pronoun, adjective, or participle, *that*, with the noun, *thing or proposition*, implied, and the particular example following it.' So he thought, and so every reader has thought since, with the exception of teachers and writers upon Grammar. Mr. Windham, indeed, who was a sophist, but not a logician, charged him with having found 'a mare's-nest'; but it is not to be doubted that Mr. Tooke's etymologies will stand the test, and last longer than Mr. Windham's ingenious derivation of the practice of bull-baiting from the principles of humanity!

Having thus laid the corner-stone, he proceeded to apply the same method of reasoning to other undecyphered and impracticable terms. Thus the word, *And*, he explained clearly enough to be the verb *add*, or a corruption of the old Saxon, *anandad*. 'Two *and* two make four,' that is, 'two *add* two make four.' Mr. Tooke, in fact, treated words as the chemists do substances; he separated those which are compounded of others from those which are not decompoundable.

He did not explain the obscure by the more obscure, but the difficult by the plain, the complex by the simple. This alone is proceeding upon the true principles of science: the rest is pedantry and *petit-maîtreship*. Our philosophical writer distinguished all words into *names of things*, and directions added for joining them together, or originally into *nouns* and *verbs*. It is a pity that he has left this matter short, by omitting to define the Verb. After enumerating sixteen different definitions (all of which he dismisses with scorn and contumely) at the end of two quarto volumes, he refers the reader for the true solution to a third volume, which he did not live to finish. This extraordinary man was in the habit of tantalizing his guests on a Sunday afternoon with sundry abstruse speculations, and putting them off to the following week for a satisfaction of their doubts; but why should he treat posterity in the same scurvy manner, or leave the world without quitting scores with it? I question whether Mr. Tooke was himself in possession of his pretended *nostrum*, and whether, after trying hard at a definition of the verb as a distinct part of speech, as a terrier-dog mumbles a hedge-hog, he did not find it too much for him, and leave it to its fate. It is also a pity that Mr. Tooke spun out his great work with prolix and dogmatical dissertations on irrelevant matters; and after denying the old metaphysical theories of language, should attempt to found a metaphysical theory of his own on the nature and mechanism of language. The nature of words, he contended (it was the basis of his whole system) had no connection with the nature of things or the objects of thought; yet he afterwards strove to limit the nature of things and of the human mind by the technical structure of language. Thus he endeavours to show that there are no abstract ideas, by enumerating two thousand instances of words, expressing abstract ideas, that are the past participles of certain verbs. It is difficult to know what he means by this. On the other hand, he maintains that 'a complex idea is as great an absurdity as a complex star,' and that words only are complex. He also makes out a triumphant list of metaphysical and moral non-entities, proved to be so on the pure principle that the names of these non-entities are participles, not nouns, or names of things. That is strange in so close a reasoner, and in one who maintained that all language was a masquerade of words, and that the class to which they grammatically belonged had nothing to do with the class of ideas they represented.

It is now above twenty years since the two quarto volumes of the *Diversions of Purley* were published, and fifty since the same theory was promulgated in the celebrated *Letter to Dunning*. Yet it is a curious example of the *Spirit of the Age* that Mr. Lindley Murray's

Grammar (a work out of which Mr. C*** helps himself to English, and Mr. M*** to style[1]) has proceeded to the thirtieth edition in complete defiance of all the facts and arguments there laid down. He defines a noun to be the name of a thing. Is quackery a thing, *i.e.* a substance? He defines a verb to be a word signifying *to be, to do, or to suffer.* Are being, action, suffering, verbs? He defines an adjective to be the name of a quality. Are not *wooden, golden, substantial* adjectives? He maintains that there are six cases in English nouns, that is, six various terminations without any change of termination at all,[2] and that English verbs have all the moods, tenses, and persons that the Latin ones have. This is an extraordinary stretch of blindness and obstinacy. He very formally translates the Latin Grammar into English, (as so many had done before him) and fancies he has written an English Grammar; and divines applaud, and schoolmasters usher him into the polite world, and English scholars carry on the jest, while Horne Tooke's genuine anatomy of our native tongue is laid on the shelf. Can it be that our politicians smell a rat in the Member for Old Sarum? That our clergy do not relish Parson Horne? That the world at large are alarmed at acuteness and originality greater than their own? What has all this to do with the formation of the English language or with the first conditions and necessary foundation of speech itself? Is there nothing beyond the reach of prejudice and party-spirit? It seems in this, as in so many other instances, as if there was a patent for absurdity in the natural bias of the human mind, and that folly should be *stereotyped*!

SIR WALTER SCOTT

Sir Walter Scott is undoubtedly the most popular writer of the age—the 'lord of the ascendant' for the time being. He is just half what the human intellect is capable of being: if you take the universe, and divide it into two parts, he knows all that it *has been*; all that it *is to be* is nothing to him. His is a mind brooding over antiquity—scorning 'the present ignorant time.' He is 'laudator temporis acti'—a '*prophesier* of things past.' The old world is to

[1] This work is not without merit in the details and examples of English construction. But its fault even in that part is that he confounds the genius of the English language, making it periphrastic and literal, instead of elliptical and idiomatic. According to Mr. Murray, hardly any of our best writers ever wrote a word of English.

[2] At least, with only one change in the genitive case.

him a crowded map; the new one a dull, hateful blank. He dotes on all well-authenticated superstitions; he shudders at the shadow of innovation. His retentiveness of memory, his accumulated weight of interested prejudice or romantic association have overlaid his other faculties. The cells of his memory are vast, various, full even to bursting with life and motion; his speculative understanding is empty, flaccid, poor, and dead. His mind receives and treasures up every thing brought to it by tradition or custom—it does not project itself beyond this into the world unknown, but mechanically shrinks back as from the edge of a precipice. The land of pure reason is to his apprehension like *Van Dieman's Land*;—barren, miserable, distant, a place of exile, the dreary abode of savages, convicts, and adventurers. Sir Walter would make a bad hand of a description of the *Millennium*, unless he could lay the scene in Scotland five hundred years ago, and then he would want facts and worm-eaten parchments to support his drooping style. Our historical novelist firmly thinks that nothing *is* but what *has been*—that the moral world stands still, as the material one was supposed to do of old—and that we can never get beyond the point where we actually are without utter destruction, though every thing changes and will change from what it was three hundred years ago to what it is now,—from what it is now to all that the bigoted admirer of the good old times most dreads and hates!

It is long since we read, and long since we thought of our author's poetry. It would probably have gone out of date with the immediate occasion, even if he himself had not contrived to banish it from our recollection. It is not to be denied that it had great merit, both of an obvious and intrinsic kind. It abounded in vivid descriptions, in spirited action, in smooth and flowing versification. But it wanted *character*. It was 'poetry of no mark or likelihood.' It slid out of the mind as soon as read, like a river; and would have been forgotten, but that the public curiosity was fed with ever new supplies from the same teeming liquid source. It is not every man that can write six quarto volumes in verse, that are caught up with avidity, even by fastidious judges. But what a difference between *their* popularity and that of the Scotch Novels! It is true, the public read and admired the *Lay of the last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, and so on, and each individual was contented to read and admire because the public did so: but with regard to the prose-works of the same (supposed) author, it is quite *another-guess* sort of thing. Here every one stands forward to applaud on his own ground, would be thought to go before the public opinion, is eager to extol his favourite characters louder, to understand them better than every body else, and has his own scale of comparative excellence for each work, supported by nothing but his own

enthusiastic and fearless convictions. It must be amusing to the *Author of Waverley* to hear his readers and admirers (and are not these the same thing?[1]) quarrelling which of his novels is the best, opposing character to character, quoting passage against passage, striving to surpass each other in the extravagance of their encomiums, and yet unable to settle the precedence, or to do the author's writings justice—so various, so equal, so transcendant are their merits! His volumes of poetry were received as fashionable and well-dressed acquaintances: we are ready to tear the others in pieces as old friends. There was something meretricious in Sir Walter's ballad-rhymes; and like those who keep opera *figurantes*, we were willing to have our admiration shared, and our taste confirmed by the town: but the Novels are like the betrothed of our hearts, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and we are jealous that any one should be as much delighted or as thoroughly acquainted with their beauties as ourselves. For which of his poetical heroines would the reader break a lance so soon as for Jeanie Deans? What *Lady of the Lake* can compare with the beautiful Rebecca? We believe the late Mr. John Scott went to his death-bed (though a painful and premature one) with some degree of satisfaction, inasmuch as he had penned the most elaborate panegyric on the *Scotch Novels* that had as yet appeared!—The *Epics* are not poems, so much as metrical romances. There is a glittering veil of verse thrown over the features of nature and of old romance. The deep incisions into character are 'skinned and filmed over'—the details are lost or shaped into flimsy and insipid decorum; and the truth of feeling and of circumstance is translated into a tinkling sound, a tinsel *common-place*. It must be owned, there is a power in true poetry that lifts the mind from the ground of reality to a higher sphere, that penetrates the inert, scattered, incoherent materials presented to it, and by a force and inspiration of its own, melts and moulds them into sublimity and beauty. But Sir Walter (we contend, under correction) has not this creative impulse, this plastic power, this capacity of reacting on his first impressions. He is a learned, a literal, a *matter-of-fact* expounder of truth or fable:[2] he does not soar above and look down upon his subject, imparting his own lofty views and feelings to his descriptions

[1] No! For we met with a young lady who kept a circulating library and a milliner's shop, in a watering-place in the country, who, when we inquired for the *Scotch Novels*, spoke indifferently about them, said they were 'so dry she could hardly get through them,' and recommended us to read *Agnes*. We never thought of it before; but we would venture to lay a wager that there are many other young ladies in the same situation, and who think 'Old Mortality' 'dry.'

[2] Just as Cobbett is a matter-of-fact reasoner.

of nature—he relies upon it, is raised by it, is one with it, or he is nothing. A poet is essentially a *maker*; that is, he must atone for what he loses in individuality and local resemblance by the energies and resources of his own mind. The writer of whom we speak is deficient in these last. He has either not the faculty or not the will to impregnate his subject by an effort of pure invention. The execution also is much upon a par with the more ephemeral effusions of the press. It is light, agreeable, effeminate, diffuse. Sir Walter's Muse is a *Modern Antique*. The smooth, glossy texture of his verse contrasts happily with the quaint, uncouth, rugged materials of which it is composed; and takes away any appearance of heaviness or harshness from the body of local traditions and obsolete costume. We see grim knights and iron armour; but then they are woven in silk with a careless, delicate hand, and have the softness of flowers. The poet's figures might be compared to old tapestries copied on the finest velvet:—they are not like Raphael's *Cartoons*, but they are very like Mr. Westall's drawings, which accompany, and are intended to illustrate them. This facility and grace of execution is the more remarkable, as a story goes that not long before the appearance of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* Sir Walter (then Mr.) Scott, having, in the company of a friend, to cross the Firth of Forth in a ferry-boat, they proposed to beguile the time by writing a number of verses on a given subject, and that at the end of an hour's hard study, they found they had produced only six lines between them. 'It is plain,' said the unconscious author to his fellow-labourer, 'that you and I need never think of getting our living by writing poetry!' In a year or so after this, he set to work, and poured out quarto upon quarto, as if they had been drops of water. As to the rest, and compared with true and great poets, our Scottish Minstrel is but 'a metre ballad-monger.' We would rather have written one song of Burns, or a single passage in Lord Byron's *Heaven and Earth*, or one of Wordsworth's 'fancies and good-nights,' than all his epics. What is he to Spenser, over whose immortal, ever-amiable verse beauty hovers and trembles, and who has shed the purple light of Fancy, from his ambrosial wings, over all nature? What is there of the might of Milton, whose head is canopied in the blue serene, and who takes us to sit with him there? What is there (in his ambling rhymes) of the deep pathos of Chaucer? Or of the o'er-informing power of Shakespear, whose eye, watching alike the minutest traces of characters and the strongest movements of passion, 'glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,' and with the lambent flame of genius, playing round each object, lights up the universe in a robe of its own radiance? Sir Walter has no voluntary power of

combination: all his associations (as we said before) are those of habit or of tradition. He is a mere narrative and descriptive poet, garrulous of the old time. The definition of his poetry is a pleasing superficiality.

Not so of his Novels and Romances. There we turn over a new leaf—another and the same—the same in matter, but in form, in power how different! The author of Waverley has got rid of the tagging of rhymes, the eking out of syllables, the supplying of epithets, the colours of style, the grouping of his characters, and the regular march of events, and comes to the point at once, and strikes at the heart of his subject, without dismay and without disguise. His poetry was a lady's waiting-maid, dressed out in cast-off finery: his prose is a beautiful, rustic nymph, that, like Dorothea in Don Quixote, when she is surprised with dishevelled tresses bathing her naked feet in the brook, looks round her, abashed at the admiration her charms have excited! The grand secret of the author's success in these latter productions is that he has completely got rid of the trammels of authorship; and torn off at one rent (as Lord Peter got rid of so many yards of lace in the *Tale of a Tub*) all the ornaments of fine writing and worn-out sentimentality. All is fresh, as from the hand of nature: by going a century or two back and laying the scene in a remote and uncultivated district, all becomes new and startling in the present advanced period.—Highland manners, characters, scenery, superstitions, Northern dialect and costume, the wars, the religion, and politics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, give a charming and wholesome relief to the fastidious refinement and 'over-laboured lassitude' of modern readers, like the effect of plunging a nervous valetudinarian into a cold-bath. The *Scotch Novels*, for this reason, are not so much admired in Scotland as in England. The contrast, the transition is less striking. From the top of the Calton Hill, the inhabitants of 'Auld Reekie' can descry, or fancy they descry the peaks of Ben Lomond and the waving outline of Rob Roy's country: we who live at the southern extremity of the island can only catch a glimpse of the billowy scene in the descriptions of the Author of Waverley. The mountain air is most bracing to our languid nerves, and it is brought us in ship-loads from the neighbourhood of Abbot's-Ford. There is another circumstance to be taken into the account. In Edinburgh there is a little opposition and something of the spirit of cabal between the partisans of works proceeding from Mr. Constable's and Mr. Blackwood's shops. Mr. Constable gives the highest prices; but being the Whig bookseller, it is grudged that he should do so. An attempt is therefore made to transfer a certain share of popularity to the second-rate Scotch novels,

'the embryo fry, the little airy of *ricketty* children,' issuing through Mr. Blackwood's shop-door. This operates a diversion, which does not affect us here. The Author of Waverley wears the palm of legendary lore alone. Sir Walter may, indeed, surfeit us: his imitators make us sick! It may be asked, it has been asked, 'Have we no materials for romance in England? Must we look to Scotland for a supply of whatever is original and striking in this kind?' And we answer—'Yes!' Every foot of soil is with us worked up: nearly every movement of the social machine is calculable. We have no room left for violent catastrophes; for grotesque quaintnesses; for wizard spells. The last skirts of ignorance and barbarism are seen hovering (in Sir Walter's pages) over the Border. We have, it is true, gipsies in this country as well as at the Cairn of Derncleugh: but they live under clipped hedges, and repose in camp-beds, and do not perch on crags, like eagles, or take shelter, like sea-mews, in basaltic subterranean caverns. We have heaths with rude heaps of stones upon them: but no existing superstition converts them into the Geese of Micklestane-Moor, or sees a Black Dwarf groping among them. We have sects in religion: but the only thing sublime or ridiculous in that way is Mr. Irving, the Caledonian preacher, who 'comes like a satyr staring from the woods, and yet speaks like an orator!' We had a Parson Adams not quite a hundred years ago—a Sir Roger de Coverley rather more than a hundred! Even Sir Walter is ordinarily obliged to pitch his angle (strong as the hook is) a hundred miles to the North of the 'Modern Athens' or a century back. His last work,[1] indeed, is mystical, is romantic in nothing but the title-page. Instead of 'a holy-water sprinkle dipped in dew,' he has given us a fashionable watering-place—and we see what he has made of it. He must not come down from his fastnesses in traditional barbarism and native rusticity; the level, the littleness, the frippery of modern civilization will undo him as it has undone us!

Sir Walter has found out (oh, rare discovery) that facts are better than fiction; that there is no romance like the romance of real life; and that if we can but arrive at what men feel, do, and say in striking and singular situations, the result will be 'more lively, audible, and full of vent,' than the fine-spun cobwebs of the brain. With reverence be it spoken, he is like the man who having to imitate the squeaking of a pig upon the stage, brought the animal under his coat with him. Our author has conjured up the actual people he has to deal with, or as much as he could get of them, in 'their habits as they lived.' He has ransacked old chronicles, and poured the contents upon his page;

[1] St. Ronan's Well.

he has squeezed out musty records; he has consulted wayfaring pilgrims, bed-rid sibyls; he has invoked the spirits of the air; he has conversed with the living and the dead, and let them tell their story their own way; and by borrowing of others, has enriched his own genius with everlasting variety, truth, and freedom. He has taken his materials from the original, authentic sources, in large concrete masses, and not tampered with or too much frittered them away. He is only the amanuensis of truth and history. It is impossible to say how fine his writings in consequence are, unless we could describe how fine nature is. All that portion of the history of his country that he has touched upon (wide as the scope is) the manners, the personages, the events, the scenery, lives over again in his volumes. Nothing is wanting—the illusion is complete. There is a hurtling in the air, a trampling of feet upon the ground, as these perfect representations of human character or fanciful belief come thronging back upon our imaginations. We will merely recall a few of the subjects of his pencil to the reader's recollection; for nothing we could add, by way of note or commendation, could make the impression more vivid.

There is (first and foremost, because the earliest of our acquaintance) the Baron of Bradwardine, stately, kind-hearted, whimsical, pedantic; and Flora MacIvor (whom even *we* forgive for her Jacobitism), the fierce Vich Ian Vohr, and Evan Dhu, constant in death, and Davie Gellatly roasting his eggs or turning his rhymes with restless volubility, and the two stag-hounds that met Waverley, as fine as ever Titian painted, or Paul Veronese:—then there is old Balfour of Burley, brandishing his sword and his Bible with fire-eyed fury, trying a fall with the insolent, gigantic Bothwell at the 'Change-house, and vanquishing him at the noble battle of Loudon-hill; there is Bothwell himself, drawn to the life, proud, cruel, selfish, profligate, but with the love-letters of the gentle Alice (written thirty years before), and his verses to her memory, found in his pocket after his death: in the same volume of *Old Mortality* is that lone figure, like a figure in Scripture, of the woman sitting on the stone at the turning to the mountain, to warn Burley that there is a lion in his path; and the fawning Claverhouse, beautiful as a panther, smooth-looking, blood-spotted; and the fanatics, Macbriar and Mucklewrath, crazed with zeal and sufferings; and the inflexible Morton, and the faithful Edith, who refused to 'give her hand to another while her heart was with her lover in the deep and dead sea.' And in *The Heart of Mid Lothian* we have Effie Deans (that sweet, faded flower) and Jeanie, her more than sister, and old David Deans, the patriarch of St. Leonard's Crags, and Butler, and Dumbiedikes, eloquent in his

silence, and Mr. Bartoline Saddle-tree and his prudent helpmate, and Porteous swinging in the wind, and Madge Wildfire, full of finery and madness, and her ghastly mother. — Again, there is Meg Merrilies, standing on her rock, stretched on her bier with 'her head to the east,' and Dirk Hatterick (equal to Shakespear's Master Barnardine), and Glossin, the soul of an attorney, and Dandy Dinmont, with his terrier-pack and his pony Dumple, and the fiery Colonel Mannering, and the modish old counsellor Pleydell, and Dominie Sampson,[1] and Rob Roy (like the eagle in his eyry), and Baillie Nicol Jarvie, and the inimitable Major Galbraith, and Rashleigh Osbaldistone, and Die Vernon, the best of secret-keepers; and in the *Antiquary*, the ingenious and abstruse Mr. Jonathan Oldbuck, and the old beadsman Edie Ochiltree, and that preternatural figure of old Edith Elspeith, a living shadow, in whom the lamp of life had been long extinguished, had it not been fed by remorse and 'thick-coming' recollections; and that striking picture of the effects of feudal tyranny and fiendish pride, the unhappy Earl of Glenallan; and the Black Dwarf, and his friend Habby of the Heughfoot (the cheerful hunter), and his cousin Grace Armstrong, fresh and laughing like the morning; and the *Children of the Mist*, and the baying of the blood-hound that tracks their steps at a distance (the hollow echoes are in our ears now), and Amy and her hapless love, and the villain Varney, and the deep voice of George of Douglas—and the immoveable Balafre, and Master Oliver the Barber in Quentin Durward—and the quaint humour of the Fortunes of Nigel, and the comic spirit of Peveril of the Peak—and the fine old English romance of Ivanhoe. What a list of names! What a host of associations! What a thing is human life! What a power is that of genius! What a world of thought and feeling is thus rescued from oblivion! How many hours of heartfelt satisfaction has our author given to the gay and thoughtless! How many sad hearts has he soothed in pain and solitude! It is no wonder that the public repay with lengthened applause and gratitude the pleasure they receive. He writes as fast as they can read, and he does not write himself down. He is always in the public eye, and we do not tire of him. His worst is better than any other person's best. His *back-grounds* (and his later works are little else but back-grounds capitally made out) are more attractive than the principal figures and most complicated actions of other writers. His works (taken together) are almost like a new edition of human nature. This is indeed to be an author!

The political bearing of the *Scotch Novels* has been a considerable

[1] Perhaps the finest scene in all these novels, is that where the Dominie meets his pupil, Miss Lucy, the morning after her brother's arrival.

recommendation to them. They are a relief to the mind, rarefied as it has been with modern philosophy, and heated with ultra-radicalism. At a time also, when we bid fair to revive the principles of the Stuarts, it is interesting to bring us acquainted with their persons and misfortunes. The candour of Sir Walter's historic pen levels our bristling prejudices on this score, and sees fair play between Roundheads and Cavaliers, between Protestant and Papist. He is a writer reconciling all the diversities of human nature to the reader. He does not enter into the distinctions of hostile sects or parties, but treats of the strength or the infirmity of the human mind, of the virtues or vices of the human breast, as they are to be found blended in the whole race of mankind. Nothing can show more handsomely or be more gallantly executed. There was a talk at one time that our author was about to take Guy Faux for the subject of one of his novels, in order to put a more liberal and humane construction on the Gunpowder Plot than our 'No Popery' prejudices have hitherto permitted. Sir Walter is a professed *clarifier* of the age from the vulgar and still lurking old-English antipathy to Popery and Slavery. Through some odd process of *servile* logic, it should seem, that in restoring the claims of the Stuarts by the courtesy of romance, the House of Brunswick are more firmly seated in point of fact, and the Bourbons, by collateral reasoning, become legitimate! In any other point of view, we cannot possibly conceive how Sir Walter imagines 'he has done something to revive the declining spirit of loyalty' by these novels. His loyalty is founded on *would-be* treason: he props the actual throne by the shadow of rebellion. Does he really think of making us enamoured of the 'good old times' by the faithful and harrowing portraits he has drawn of them? Would he carry us back to the early stages of barbarism, of clanship, of the feudal system as 'a consummation devoutly to be wished?' Is he infatuated enough, or does he so dote and drivel over his own slothful and self-willed prejudices, as to believe that he will make a single convert to the beauty of Legitimacy, that is, of lawless power and savage bigotry, when he himself is obliged to apologise for the horrors he describes, and even render his descriptions credible to the modern reader by referring to the authentic history of these delectable times?[1] He is indeed so besotted as to the moral of his own story,

[1] 'And here we cannot but think it necessary to offer some better proof than the incidents of an idle tale, to vindicate the melancholy representation of manners which has been just laid before the reader. It is grievous to think that those valiant Barons, to whose stand against the crown the liberties of England were indebted for their existence, should themselves have been such dreadful oppressors, and capable of excesses, contrary not only to the laws of England, but

that he has even the blindness to go out of his way to have a fling at *flints* and *dungs* (the contemptible ingredients, as he would have us believe, of a modern rabble) at the very time when he is describing a mob of the twelfth century—a mob (one should think) after the writer's own heart, without one particle of modern philosophy or revolutionary politics in their composition, who were to a man, to a hair, just what priests, and kings, and nobles *let* them be, and who were collected to witness (a spectacle proper to the times) the burning of the lovely Rebecca at a stake for a sorceress, because she was a Jewess, beautiful and innocent, and the consequent victim of insane bigotry and unbridled profligacy. And it is at this moment (when the heart is kindled and bursting with indignation at the revolting abuses of self-constituted power) that Sir Walter *stops the press* to have a sneer at the people, and to put a spoke (as he thinks) in the wheel of upstart innovation! This is what he calls, backing his friends'—it is thus he administers charms and philtres to our love of Legitimacy, makes us conceive a horror of all reform, civil, political, or religious, and would fain put down the *Spirit of the Age*. The author of Waverley might just as well get up and make a speech at a dinner at Edinburgh, abusing Mr. Mac-Adam for his improvements in the roads, on the ground that they were nearly *impassable* in many places 'sixty years since'; or object to Mr. Peel's *Police-Bill*, by insisting that Hounslow-Heath was formerly a scene of greater interest and terror to highwaymen and travellers, and cut a greater figure in the Newgate Calendar than it does at present.—Oh! Wickliff, Luther, Hampden, Sidney, Somers, mistaken Whigs, and thoughtless Reformers in religion and politics, and all ye, whether poets or philosophers, heroes or sages, inventors of arts or sciences,

to those of nature and humanity. But alas! we have only to extract from the industrious Henry one of those numerous passages which he has collected from contemporary historians, to prove that fiction itself can hardly reach the dark reality of the horrors of the period.

'The description given by the author of the Saxon Chronicle of the cruelties exercised in the reign of King Stephen by the great barons and lords of castles, who were all Normans, affords a strong proof of the excesses of which they were capable when their passions were inflamed. "They grievously oppressed the poor people by building castles; and when they were built, they filled them with wicked men or rather devils, who seized both men and women who they imagined had any money, threw them into prison, and put them to more cruel tortures than the martyrs ever endured. They suffocated some in mud, and suspended others by the feet, or the head, or the thumbs, kindling fires below them. They squeezed the heads of some with knotted cords till they pierced their brains, while they threw others into dungeons swarming with serpents, snakes, and toads." But it would be cruel to put the reader to the pain of perusing the remainder of the description.'—*Henry's Hist.* edit. 1805, vol. vii. p. 346.

patriots, benefactors of the human race, enlighteners and civilisers of the world, who have (so far) reduced opinion to reason, and power to law, who are the cause that we no longer burn witches and heretics at slow fires, that the thumb-screws are no longer applied by ghastly, smiling judges, to extort confession of imputed crimes from sufferers for conscience sake; that men are no longer strung up like acorns on trees without judge or jury, or hunted like wild beasts through thickets and glens, who have abated the cruelty of priests, the pride of nobles, the divinity of kings in former times; to whom we owe it, that we no longer wear round our necks the collar of Gurth the swineherd, and of Wamba the jester; that the castles of great lords are no longer the dens of banditti, from whence they issue with fire and sword, to lay waste the land; that we no longer expire in loathsome dungeons without knowing the cause, or have our right hands struck off for raising them in self-defence against wanton insult; that we can sleep without fear of being burnt in our beds, or travel without making our wills; that no Amy Robsarts are thrown down trap-doors by Richard Varneys with impunity; that no Red Reiver of Westburn-Flat sets fire to peaceful cottages; that no Claverhouse signs cold-blooded death-warrants in sport; that we have no Tristan the Hermit, or Petit-André, crawling near us, like spiders, and making our flesh creep, and our hearts sicken within us at every moment of our lives—ye who have produced this change in the face of nature and society, return to earth once more, and beg pardon of Sir Walter and his patrons, who sigh at not being able to undo all that you have done! Leaving this question, there are two other remarks which we wished to make on the Novels. The one was, to express our admiration of the good-nature of the mottos, in which the author has taken occasion to remember and quote almost every living author (whether illustrious or obscure) but himself—an indirect argument in favour of the general opinion as to the source from which they spring—and the other was, to hint our astonishment at the innumerable and incessant instances of bad and slovenly English in them, more, we believe, than in any other works now printed. We should think the writer could not possibly read the manuscript after he has once written it, or overlook the press.

If there were a writer, who 'born for the universe'—

> '—— Narrow'd his mind,
> And to party gave up what was meant for mankind—'

who, from the height of his genius looking abroad into nature, and scanning the recesses of the human heart, 'winked and shut his apprehension up' to every thought or purpose that tended to the

future good of mankind—who, raised by affluence, the reward of successful industry, and by the voice of fame above the want of any but the most honourable patronage, stooped to the unworthy arts of adulation, and abetted the views of the great with the pettifogging feelings of the meanest dependant on office—who, having secured the admiration of the public (with the probable reversion of immortality), showed no respect for himself, for that genius that had raised him to distinction, for that nature which he trampled under foot—who, amiable, frank, friendly, manly in private life, was seized with the dotage of age and the fury of a woman, the instant politics were concerned—who reserved all his candour and comprehensiveness of view for history, and vented his littleness, pique, resentment, bigotry, and intolerance on his contemporaries—who took the wrong side, and defended it by unfair means—who, the moment his own interest or the prejudices of others interfered, seemed to forget all that was due to the pride of intellect, to the sense of manhood—who, praised, admired by men of all parties alike, repaid the public liberality by striking a secret and envenomed blow at the reputation of every one who was not the ready tool of power—who strewed the slime of rankling malice and mercenary scorn over the bud and promise of genius, because it was not fostered in the hot-bed of corruption, or warped by the trammels of servility—who supported the worst abuses of authority in the worst spirit—who joined a gang of desperadoes to spread calumny, contempt, infamy, wherever they were merited by honesty or talent on a different side—who officiously undertook to decide public questions by private insinuations, to prop the throne by nicknames, and the altar by lies—who being (by common consent), the finest, the most humane and accomplished writer of his age, associated himself with and encouraged the lowest panders of a venal press; deluging, nauseating the public mind with the offal and garbage of Billingsgate abuse and vulgar *slang*; showing no remorse, no relenting or compassion towards the victims of this nefarious and organized system of party-proscription, carried on under the mask of literary criticism and fair discussion, insulting the misfortunes of some, and trampling on the early grave of others—

> 'Who would not grieve if such a man there be?
> Who would not weep if Atticus were he?'

But we believe there is no other age or country of the world (but ours), in which such genius could have been so degraded!

LORD BYRON

Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott are among writers now living[1] the two, who would carry away a majority of suffrages as the greatest geniuses of the age. The former would, perhaps, obtain the preference with the fine gentlemen and ladies (squeamishness apart)—the latter with the critics and the vulgar. We shall treat of them in the same connection, partly on account of their distinguished pre-eminence, and partly because they afford a complete contrast to each other. In their poetry, in their prose, in their politics, and in their tempers, no two men can be more unlike.

If Sir Walter Scott may be thought by some to have been

> 'Born universal heir to all humanity,'

it is plain Lord Byron can set up no such pretension. He is, in a striking degree, the creature of his own will. He holds no communion with his kind; but stands alone, without mate or fellow—

> 'As if a man were author of himself,
> And owned no other kin.'

He is like a solitary peak, all access to which is cut off not more by elevation than distance. He is seated on a lofty eminence, 'cloud-capt,' or reflecting the last rays of setting suns; and in his poetical moods, reminds us of the fabled Titans, retired to a ridgy steep, playing on their Pan's-pipes, and taking up ordinary men and things in their hands with haughty indifference. He raises his subject to himself, or tramples on it; he neither stoops to, nor loses himself in it. He exists not by sympathy, but by antipathy. He scorns all things, even himself. Nature must come to him to sit for her picture—he does not go to her. She must consult his time, his convenience, and his humour; and wear a *sombre* or a fantastic garb, or his Lordship turns his back upon her. There is no ease, no unaffected simplicity of manner, no 'golden mean.' All is strained, or petulant in the extreme. His thoughts are sphered and crystalline; his style 'prouder than when blue Iris bends'; his spirit fiery, impatient, wayward, indefatigable. Instead of taking his impressions from without, in entire and almost unimpaired masses, he moulds them according to his own temperament, and heats the materials of his imagination in the furnace of his passions.—Lord Byron's verse glows like a flame, consuming every thing in its way; Sir Walter Scott's glides

[1] This Essay was written just before Lord Byron's death.

like a river, clear, gentle, harmless. The poetry of the first scorches, that of the last scarcely warms. The light of the one proceeds from an internal source, ensanguined, sullen, fixed; the other reflects the hues of Heaven, or the face of nature, glancing vivid and various. The productions of the Northern Bard have the rust and the freshness of antiquity about them; those of the Noble Poet cease to startle from their extreme ambition of novelty, both in style and matter. Sir Walter's rhymes are 'silly sooth'—

> 'And dally with the innocence of thought,
> Like the old age'—

his Lordship's Muse spurns *the olden time*, and affects all the supercilious airs of a modern fine lady and an upstart. The object of the one writer is to restore us to truth and nature: the other chiefly thinks how he shall display his own power, or vent his spleen, or astonish the reader either by starting new subjects and trains of speculation, or by expressing old ones in a more striking and emphatic manner than they have been expressed before. He cares little what it is he says, so that he can say it differently from others. This may account for the charges of plagiarism which have been repeatedly brought against the Noble Poet—if he can borrow an image or sentiment from another, and heighten it by an epithet or an allusion of greater force and beauty than is to be found in the original passage, he thinks he shows his superiority of execution in this in a more marked manner than if the first suggestion had been his own. It is not the value of the observation itself he is solicitous about; but he wishes to shine by contrast—even nature only serves as a foil to set off his style. He therefore takes the thoughts of others (whether contemporaries or not) out of their mouths, and is content to make them his own, to set his stamp upon them, by imparting to them a more meretricious gloss, a higher relief, a greater loftiness of tone, and a characteristic inveteracy of purpose. Even in those collateral ornaments of modern style, slovenliness, abruptness, and eccentricity (as well as in terseness and significance), Lord Byron, when he pleases, defies competition and surpasses all his contemporaries. Whatever he does, he must do in a more decided and daring manner than any one else—he lounges with extravagance, and yawns so as to alarm the reader! Self-will, passion, the love of singularity, a disdain of himself and of others (with a conscious sense that this is among the ways and means of procuring admiration) are the proper categories of his mind: he is a lordly writer, is above his own reputation, and condescends to the Muses with a scornful grace!

Lord Byron, who in his politics is a *liberal*, in his genius is haughty

and aristocratic: Walter Scott, who is an aristocrat in principle, is popular in his writings, and is (as it were) equally *servile* to nature and to opinion. The genius of Sir Walter is essentially imitative, or 'denotes a foregone conclusion': that of Lord Byron is self-dependent; or at least requires no aid, is governed by no law, but the impulses of its own will. We confess, however much we may admire independence of feeling and erectness of spirit in general or practical questions, yet in works of genius we prefer him who bows to the authority of nature, who appeals to actual objects, to moulder-ing superstitions, to history, observation, and tradition, before him who only consults the pragmatical and restless workings of his own breast, and gives them out as oracles to the world. We like a writer (whether poet or prose-writer) who takes in (or is willing to take in) the range of half the universe in feeling, character, description, much better than we do one who obstinately and invariably shuts himself up in the Bastile of his own ruling passions. In short, we had rather be Sir Walter Scott (meaning thereby the Author of Waverley) than Lord Byron, a hundred times over. And for the reason just given, namely, that he casts his descriptions in the mould of nature, ever-varying, never tiresome, always interesting and always instructive, instead of casting them constantly in the mould of his own individual impressions. He gives us man as he is, or as he was, in almost every variety of situation, action, and feeling. Lord Byron makes man after his own image, woman after his own heart; the one is a capricious tyrant, the other a yielding slave; he gives us the misan-thrope and the voluptuary by turns; and with these two characters, burning or melting in their own fires, he makes out everlasting centos of himself. He hangs the cloud, the film of his existence over all outward things—sits in the centre of his thoughts, and enjoys dark night, bright day, the glitter and the gloom 'in cell monastic'—we see the mournful pall, the crucifix, the death's heads, the faded chaplet of flowers, the gleaming tapers, the agonized brow of genius, the wasted form of beauty—but we are still imprisoned in a dungeon, a curtain intercepts our view, we do not breathe freely the air of nature or of our own thoughts—the other admired author draws aside the curtain, and the veil of egotism is rent, and he shows us the crowd of living men and women, the endless groups, the landscape back-ground, the cloud and the rainbow, and enriches our imagina-tions and relieves one passion by another, and expands and lightens reflection, and takes away that tightness at the breast which arises from thinking or wishing to think that there is nothing in the world out of a man's self!—In this point of view, the Author of Waverley is one of the greatest teachers of morality that ever lived, by

emancipating the mind from petty, narrow, and bigotted prejudices: Lord Byron is the greatest pamperer of those prejudices, by seeming to think there is nothing else worth encouraging but the seeds or the full luxuriant growth of dogmatism and self-conceit. In reading the *Scotch Novels*, we never think about the author, except from a feeling of curiosity respecting our unknown benefactor: in reading Lord Byron's works, he himself is never absent from our minds. The colouring of Lord Byron's style, however rich and dipped in Tyrian dyes, is nevertheless opaque, is in itself an object of delight and wonder: Sir Walter Scott's is perfectly transparent. In studying the one, you seem to gaze at the figures cut in stained glass, which exclude the view beyond, and where the pure light of Heaven is only a means of setting off the gorgeousness of art: in reading the other, you look through a noble window at the clear and varied landscape without. Or to sum up the distinction in one word, Sir Walter Scott is the most *dramatic* writer now living; and Lord Byron is the least so. It would be difficult to imagine that the Author of Waverley is in the smallest degree a pedant; as it would be hard to persuade ourselves that the author of Childe Harold and Don Juan is not a coxcomb, though a provoking and sublime one. In this decided preference given to Sir Walter Scott over Lord Byron, we distinctly include the prose-works of the former; for we do not think his poetry alone by any means entitles him to that precedence. Sir Walter in his poetry, though pleasing and natural, is a comparative trifler: it is in his anonymous productions that he has shown himself for what he is!—

Intensity is the great and prominent distinction of Lord Byron's writings. He seldom gets beyond force of style, nor has he produced any regular work or masterly whole. He does not prepare any plan beforehand, nor revise and retouch what he has written with polished accuracy. His only object seems to be to stimulate himself and his readers for the moment—to keep both alive, to drive away *ennui*, to substitute a feverish and irritable state of excitement for listless indolence or even calm enjoyment. For this purpose he pitches on any subject at random without much thought or delicacy—he is only impatient to begin—and takes care to adorn and enrich it as he proceeds with 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn.' He composes (as he himself has said) whether he is in the bath, in his study, or on horseback—he writes as habitually as others talk or think—and whether we have the inspiration of the Muse or not, we always find the spirit of the man of genius breathing from his verse. He grapples with his subject, and moves, penetrates, and animates it by the electric force of his own feelings. He is often monotonous,

extravagant, offensive; but he is never dull, or tedious, but when he writes prose. Lord Byron does not exhibit a new view of nature, or raise insignificant objects into importance by the romantic associations with which he surrounds them; but generally (at least) takes commonplace thoughts and events, and endeavours to express them in stronger and statelier language than others. His poetry stands like a Martello tower by the side of his subject. He does not, like Mr. Wordsworth, lift poetry from the ground, or create a sentiment out of nothing. He does not describe a daisy or a periwinkle, but the cedar or the cypress: not 'poor men's cottages, but princes' palaces.' His *Childe Harold* contains a lofty and impassioned review of the great events of history, of the mighty objects left as wrecks of time, but he dwells chiefly on what is familiar to the mind of every schoolboy; has brought out few new traits of feeling or thought; and has done no more than justice to the reader's preconceptions by the sustained force and brilliancy of his style and imagery.

Lord Byron's earlier productions, *Lara*, the *Corsair*, &c. were wild and gloomy romances, put into rapid and shining verse. They discover the madness of poetry, together with the inspiration: sullen, moody, capricious, fierce, inexorable, gloating on beauty, thirsting for revenge, hurrying from the extremes of pleasure to pain, but with nothing permanent, nothing healthy or natural. The gaudy decorations and the morbid sentiments remind one of flowers strewed over the face of death! In his *Childe Harold* (as has been just observed) he assumes a lofty and philosophic tone, and 'reasons high of providence, fore-knowledge, will, and fate.' He takes the highest points in the history of the world, and comments on them from a more commanding eminence: he shows us the crumbling monuments of time, he invokes the great names, the mighty spirit of antiquity. The universe is changed into a stately mausoleum:—in solemn measures he chaunts a hymn to fame. Lord Byron has strength and elevation enough to fill up the moulds of our classical and time-hallowed recollections, and to rekindle the earliest aspirations of the mind after greatness and true glory with a pen of fire. The names of Tasso, of Ariosto, of Dante, of Cincinnatus, of Cæsar, of Scipio, lose nothing of their pomp or their lustre in his hands, and when he begins and continues a strain of panegyric on such subjects, we indeed sit down with him to a banquet of rich praise, brooding over imperishable glories,

'Till Contemplation has her fill.

Lord Byron seems to cast himself indignantly from 'this bank and shoal of time,' or the frail tottering bark that bears up modern reputa-

tion, into the huge sea of ancient renown, and to revel there with untired, outspread plume. Even this in him is spleen—his contempt of his contemporaries makes him turn back to the lustrous past, or project himself forward to the dim future!—Lord Byron's tragedies, Faliero,[1] Sardanapalus, &c. are not equal to his other works. They want the essence of the drama. They abound in speeches and descriptions, such as he himself might make either to himself or others, lolling on his couch of a morning, but do not carry the reader out of the poet's mind to the scenes and events recorded. They have neither action, character, nor interest, but are a sort of *gossamer* tragedies, spun out, and glittering, and spreading a flimsy veil over the face of nature. Yet he spins them on. Of all that he has done in this way the *Heaven and Earth* (the same subject as Mr. Moore's *Loves of the Angels*) is the best. We prefer it even to *Manfred*. *Manfred* is merely himself, with a fancy-drapery on: but in the dramatic fragment published in the *Liberal*, the space between Heaven and Earth, the stage on which his characters have to pass to and fro, seems to fill his Lordship's imagination; and the Deluge, which he has so finely described, may be said to have drowned all his own idle humours.

We must say we think little of our author's turn for satire. His 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers' is dogmatical and insolent, but without refinement or point. He calls people names, and tries to transfix a character with an epithet, which does not stick, because it has no other foundation than his own petulance and spite; or he endeavours to degrade by alluding to some circumstance of external situation. He says of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, that 'it is his aversion.' That may be: but whose fault is it? This is the satire of a lord, who is accustomed to have all his whims or dislikes taken for gospel, and who cannot be at the pains to do more than signify his contempt or displeasure. If a great man meets with a rebuff which he does not like, he turns on his heel, and this passes for a repartee. The Noble Author says of a celebrated barrister and critic, that he was 'born in a garret sixteen stories high' The insinuation is not true; or if it were, it is low. The allusion degrades the person who makes, not him to whom it is applied. This is also the satire of a person of birth and quality, who measures all merit by external rank, that is, by his own standard. So his Lordship, in a 'Letter to the Editor of My Grandmother's Review,' addresses him fifty times as '*my dear Robarts*'; nor is there any other wit in the

[1] 'Don Juan was my Moscow, and Faliero
My Leipsic, and my Mont St. Jean seems Cain.'
Don Juan, Canto XI.

article. This is surely a mere assumption of superiority from his Lordship's rank, and is the sort of *quizzing* he might use to a person who came to hire himself as a valet to him at *Long's*—the waiters might laugh, the public will not. In like manner, in the controversy about Pope, he claps Mr. Bowles on the back with a coarse facetious familiarity, as if he were his chaplain whom he had invited to dine with him, or was about to present to a benefice. The reverend divine might submit to the obligation, but he has no occasion to subscribe to the jest. If it is a jest that Mr. Bowles should be a parson, and Lord Byron a peer, the world knew this before; there was no need to write a pamphlet to prove it.

The *Don Juan* indeed has great power; but its power is owing to the force of the serious writing, and to the oddity of the contrast between that and the flashy passages with which it is interlarded. From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step. You laugh and are surprised that any one should turn round and *travestie* himself: the drollery is in the utter discontinuity of ideas and feelings. He makes virtue serve as a foil to vice; *dandyism* is (for want of any other) a variety of genius. A classical intoxication is followed by the splashing of soda-water, by frothy effusions of ordinary bile. After the lightning and the hurricane, we are introduced to the interior of the cabin and the contents of wash-hand basins. The solemn hero of tragedy plays *Scrub* in the farce. This is 'very tolerable and not to be endured.' The Noble Lord is almost the only writer who has prostituted his talents in this way. He hallows in order to desecrate; takes a pleasure in defacing the images of beauty his hands have wrought; and raises our hopes and our belief in goodness to Heaven only to dash them to the earth again, and break them in pieces the more effectually from the very height they have fallen. Our enthusiasm for genius or virtue is thus turned into a jest by the very person who has kindled it, and who thus fatally quenches the sparks of both. It is not that Lord Byron is sometimes serious and sometimes trifling, sometimes profligate, and sometimes moral—but when he is most serious and most moral, he is only preparing to mortify the unsuspecting reader by putting a pitiful *hoax* upon him. This is a most unaccountable anomaly. It is as if the eagle were to build its eyry in a common sewer, or the owl were seen soaring to the mid-day sun. Such a sight might make one laugh, but one would not wish or expect it to occur more than once.[1]

In fact, Lord Byron is the spoiled child of fame as well as fortune.

[1] This censure applies to the first Cantos of Don Juan much more than to the last. It has been called a Tristram Shandy in rhyme: it is rather a poem written about itself.

He has taken a surfeit of popularity, and is not contented to delight, unless he can shock the public. He would force them to admire in spite of decency and common sense—he would have them read what they would read in no one but himself, or he would not give a rush for their applause. He is to be 'a chartered libertine,' from whom insults are favours, whose contempt is to be a new incentive to admiration. His Lordship is hard to please: he is equally averse to notice or neglect, enraged at censure and scorning praise. He tries the patience of the town to the very utmost, and when they show signs of weariness or disgust, threatens to *discard* them. He says he will write on, whether he is read or not. He would never write another page, if it were not to court popular applause, or to affect a superiority over it. In this respect also, Lord Byron presents a striking contrast to Sir Walter Scott. The latter takes what part of the public favour falls to his share, without grumbling (to be sure he has no reason to complain); the former is always quarrelling with the world about his *modicum* of applause, the *spolia opima* of vanity, and ungraciously throwing the offerings of incense heaped on his shrine back in the faces of his admirers. Again, there is no taint in the writings of the Author of Waverley, all is fair and natural and *above-board*: he never outrages the public mind. He introduces no anomalous character: broaches no staggering opinion. If he goes back to old prejudices and superstitions as a relief to the modern reader, while Lord Byron floats on swelling paradoxes—

'Like proud seas under him';

if the one defers too much to the spirit of antiquity, the other panders to the spirit of the age, goes to the very edge of extreme and licentious speculation, and breaks his neck over it. Grossness and levity are the playthings of his pen. It is a ludicrous circumstance that he should have dedicated his *Cain* to the worthy Baronet! Did the latter ever acknowledge the obligation? We are not nice, not very nice; but we do not particularly approve those subjects that shine chiefly from their rottenness: nor do we wish to see the Muses drest out in the flounces of a false or questionable philosophy, like *Portia* and *Nerissa* in the garb of Doctors of Law. We like metaphysics as well as Lord Byron; but not to see them making flowery speeches, nor dancing a measure in the fetters of verse. We have as good as hinted, that his Lordship's poetry consists mostly of a tissue of superb common-places; even his paradoxes are *common-place*. They are familiar in the schools: they are only new and striking in his dramas and stanzas, by being out of place. In a word, we think that poetry moves best within the circle of nature and received opinion: specula-

tive theory and subtle casuistry are forbidden ground to it. But Lord Byron often wanders into this ground wantonly, wilfully, and unwarrantably. The only apology we can conceive for the spirit of some of Lord Byron's writings, is the spirit of some of those opposed to him. They would provoke a man to write anything. 'Farthest from them is best.' The extravagance and license of the one seems a proper antidote to the bigotry and narrowness of the other. The first *Vision of Judgment* was a set-off to the second, though

'None but itself could be its parallel.'

Perhaps the chief cause of most of Lord Byron's errors is, that he is that anomaly in letters and in society, a Noble Poet. It is a double privilege, almost too much for humanity. He has all the pride of birth and genius. The strength of his imagination leads him to indulge in fantastic opinions; the elevation of his rank sets censure at defiance. He becomes a pampered egotist. He has a seat in the House of Lords, a niche in the Temple of Fame. Every-day mortals, opinions, things are not good enough for him to touch or think of. A mere nobleman is, in his estimation, but 'the tenth transmitter of a foolish face': a mere man of genius is no better than a worm. His Muse is also a lady of quality. The people are not polite enough for him: the Court not sufficiently intellectual. He hates the one and despises the other. By hating and despising others, he does not learn to be satisfied with himself. A fastidious man soon grows querulous and splenetic. If there is nobody but ourselves to come up to our idea of fancied perfection, we easily get tired of our idol. When a man is tired of what he is, by a natural perversity he sets up for what he is not. If he is a poet, he pretends to be a metaphysician: if he is a patrician in rank and feeling, he would fain be one of the people. His ruling motive is not the love of the people, but of distinction; not of truth, but of singularity. He patronizes men of letters out of vanity, and deserts them from caprice, or from the advice of friends. He embarks in an obnoxious publication to provoke censure, and leaves it to shift for itself for fear of scandal. We do not like Sir Walter's gratuitous servility: we like Lord Byron's preposterous *liberalism* little better. He may affect the principles of equality, but he resumes his privilege of peerage, upon occasion. His Lordship has made great offers of service to the Greeks—money and horses. He is at present in Cephalonia, waiting the event!

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We had written thus far when news came of the death of Lord Byron, and put an end at once to a strain of somewhat peevish

invective, which was intended to meet his eye, not to insult his memory. Had we known that we were writing his epitaph, we must have done it with a different feeling. As it is, we think it better and more like himself, to let what we had written stand, than to take up our leaden shafts, and try to melt them into 'tears of sensibility,' or mould them into dull praise, and an affected show of candour. We were not silent during the author's life-time, either for his reproof or encouragement (such as we could give, and *he* did not disdain to accept) nor can we now turn undertakers' men to fix the glittering plate upon his coffin, or fall into the procession of popular woe.—Death cancels every thing but truth; and strips a man of every thing but genius and virtue. It is a sort of natural canonization. It makes the meanest of us sacred—it installs the poet in his immortality, and lifts him to the skies. Death is the great assayer of the sterling ore of talent. At his touch the drossy particles fall off, the irritable, the personal, the gross, and mingle with the dust—the finer and more ethereal part mounts with the winged spirit to watch over our latest memory, and protect our bones from insult. We consign the least worthy qualities to oblivion, and cherish the nobler and imperishable nature with double pride and fondness. Nothing could show the real superiority of genius in a more striking point of view than the idle contests and the public indifference about the place of Lord Byron's interment, whether in Westminster Abbey or his own family-vault. A king must have a coronation—a nobleman a funeral-procession.—The man is nothing without the pageant. The poet's cemetery is the human mind, in which he sows the seeds of never-ending thought—his monument is to be found in his works:

> 'Nothing can cover his high fame but Heaven;
> No pyramids set off his memory,
> But the eternal substance of his greatness.'

Lord Byron is dead: he also died a martyr to his zeal in the cause of freedom, for the last, best hopes of man. Let that be his excuse and his epitaph!

MR. SOUTHEY

Mr. Southey, as we formerly remember to have seen him, had a hectic flush upon his cheek, a roving fire in his eye, a falcon glance, a look at once aspiring and dejected—it was the look that had been impressed upon his face by the events that marked the outset of his life, it was the dawn of Liberty that still tinged his cheek, a smile betwixt hope and sadness that still played upon his quivering lip.

Mr. Southey's mind is essentially sanguine, even to over-weeningness. It is prophetic of good; it cordially embraces it; it casts a longing, lingering look after it, even when it is gone for ever. He cannot bear to give up the thought of happiness, his confidence in his fellow-man, when all else despair. It is the very element, 'where he must live or have no life at all.' While he supposed it possible that a better form of society could be introduced than any that had hitherto existed, while the light of the French Revolution beamed into his soul (and long after, it was seen reflected on his brow, like the light of setting suns on the peak of some high mountain, or lonely range of clouds, floating in purer ether!) while he had this hope, this faith in man left, he cherished it with child-like simplicity, he clung to it with the fondness of a lover, he was an enthusiast, a fanatic, a leveller; he stuck at nothing that he thought would banish all pain and misery from the world—in his impatience of the smallest error or injustice, he would have sacrificed himself and the existing generation (a holocaust) to his devotion to the right cause. But when he once believed after many staggering doubts and painful struggles, that this was no longer possible, when his chimeras and golden dreams of human perfectibility vanished from him, he turned suddenly round, and maintained that 'whatever *is*, is right.' Mr. Southey has not fortitude of mind, has not patience to think that evil is inseparable from the nature of things. His irritable sense rejects the alternative altogether, as a weak stomach rejects the food that is distasteful to it. He hopes on against hope, he believes in all unbelief. He must either repose on actual or on imaginary good. He missed his way in *Utopia*, he has found it at Old Sarum—

'His generous *ardour* no cold medium knows:'

his eagerness admits of no doubt or delay. He is ever in extremes, and ever in the wrong!

The reason is, that not truth, but self-opinion is the ruling principle of Mr. Southey's mind. The charm of novelty, the applause of the multitude, the sanction of power, the venerableness of antiquity, pique, resentment, the spirit of contradiction have a good deal to do with his preferences. His inquiries are partial and hasty: his conclusions raw and unconcocted, and with a considerable infusion of whim and humour and a monkish spleen. His opinions are like certain wines, warm and generous when new; but they will not keep, and soon turn flat or sour, for want of a stronger spirit of the understanding to give a body to them. He wooed Liberty as a youthful lover, but it was perhaps more as a mistress than a bride; and he has since wedded with an elderly and not very reputable lady, called Legitimacy. *A*

wilful man, according to the Scotch proverb, *must have his way*. If it were the cause to which he was sincerely attached, he would adhere to it through good report and evil report; but it is himself to whom he does homage, and would have others do so; and he therefore changes sides, rather than submit to apparent defeat or temporary mortification. Abstract principle has no rule but the understood distinction between right and wrong; the indulgence of vanity, of caprice, or prejudice is regulated by the convenience or bias of the moment. The temperament of our politician's mind is poetical, not philosophical. He is more the creature of impulse, than he is of reflection. He invents the unreal, he embellishes the false with the glosses of fancy, but pays little attention to 'the words of truth and soberness.' His impressions are accidental, immediate, personal, instead of being permanent and universal. Of all mortals he is surely the most impatient of contradiction, even when he has completely turned the tables on himself. Is not this very inconsistency the reason? Is he not tenacious of his opinions, in proportion as they are brittle and hastily formed? Is he not jealous of the grounds of his belief, because he fears they will not bear inspection, or is conscious he has shifted them? Does he not confine others to the strict line of orthodoxy, because he has himself taken every liberty? Is he not afraid to look to the right or the left, lest he should see the ghosts of his former extravagances staring him in the face? Does he not refuse to tolerate the smallest shade of difference in others, because he feels that he wants the utmost latitude of construction for differing so widely from himself? Is he not captious, dogmatical, petulant in delivering his sentiments, according as he has been inconsistent, rash, and fanciful in adopting them? He maintains that there can be no possible ground for differing from him, because he looks only at his own side of the question! He sets up his own favourite notions as the standard of reason and honesty, because he has changed from one extreme to another! He treats his opponents with contempt, because he is himself afraid of meeting with disrespect! He says that 'a Reformer is a worse character than a house-breaker,' in order to stifle the recollection that he himself once was one!

We must say that 'we relish Mr. Southey more in the Reformer' than in his lately acquired, but by no means natural or becoming character of poet-laureat and courtier. He may rest assured that a garland of wild flowers suits him better than the laureat-wreath: that his pastoral odes and popular inscriptions were far more adapted to his genius than his presentation-poems. He is nothing akin to birth-day suits and drawing-room fopperies. 'He is nothing, if not fantastical.' In his figure, in his movements, in his sentiments, he

is sharp and angular, quaint and eccentric. Mr. Southey is not of the court, courtly. Every thing of him and about him is from the people. He is not classical, he is not legitimate. He is not a man cast in the mould of other men's opinions: he is not shaped on any model: he bows to no authority: he yields only to his own wayward peculiarities. He is wild, irregular, singular, extreme. He is no formalist, not he! All is crude and chaotic, self-opinionated, vain. He wants proportion, keeping, system, standard rules. He is not *teres et rotundus*. Mr. Southey walks with his chin erect through the streets of London, and with an umbrella sticking out under his arm, in the finest weather. He has not sacrificed to the Graces, nor studied decorum. With him every thing is projecting, starting from its place, an episode, a digression, a poetic license. He does not move in any given orbit, but like a falling star, shoots from his sphere. He is pragmatical, restless, unfixed, full of experiments, beginning every thing a-new, wiser than his betters, judging for himself, dictating to others. He is decidedly *revolutionary*. He may have given up the reform of the State: but depend upon it, he has some other *hobby* of the same kind. Does he not dedicate to his present Majesty that extraordinary poem on the death of his father, called *The Vision of Judgment*, as a specimen of what might be done in English hexameters? In a court-poem all should be trite and on an approved model. He might as well have presented himself at the levee in a fancy or masquerade dress. Mr. Southey was not *to try conclusions* with Majesty—still less on such an occasion. The extreme freedoms with departed greatness, the party-petulance carried to the Throne of Grace, the unchecked indulgence of private humour, the assumption of infallibility and even of the voice of Heaven in this poem, are pointed instances of what we have said. They show the singular state of over-excitement of Mr. Southey's mind, and the force of old habits of independent and unbridled thinking, which cannot be kept down even in addressing his Sovereign! Look at Mr. Southey's larger poems, his *Kehama*, his *Thalaba*, his *Madoc*, his *Roderic*. Who will deny the spirit, the scope, the splendid imagery, the hurried and startling interest that pervades them? Who will say that they are not sustained on fictions wilder than his own Glendoveer, that they are not the daring creations of a mind curbed by no law, tamed by no fear, that they are not rather like the trances than the waking dreams of genius, that they are not the very paradoxes of poetry? All this is very well, very intelligible, and very harmless, if we regard the rank excrescences of Mr. Southey's poetry, like the red and blue flowers in corn, as the unweeded growth of a luxuriant and wandering fancy; or if we allow the yeasty

workings of an ardent spirit to ferment and boil over—the variety, the boldness, the lively stimulus given to the mind may then atone for the violation of rules and the offences to bed-rid authority; but not if our poetic libertine sets up for a law-giver and judge, or an apprehender of vagrants in the regions either of taste or opinion. Our motley gentleman deserves the strait-waistcoat, if he is for setting others in the stocks of servility, or condemning them to the pillory for a new mode of rhyme or reason. Or if a composer of sacred Dramas on classic models, or a translator of an old Latin author (that will hardly bear translation) or a vamper-up of vapid cantos and Odes set to music, were to turn pander to prescription and palliater of every dull, incorrigible abuse, it would not be much to be wondered at or even regretted. But in Mr. Southey it was a lamentable falling-off. It is indeed to be deplored, it is a stain on genius, a blow to humanity, that the author of *Joan of Arc*—that work in which the love of Liberty is exhaled like the breath of spring, mild, balmy, heaven-born, that is full of tears and virgin-sighs, and yearnings of affection after truth and good, gushing warm and crimsoned from the heart—should ever after turn to folly, or become the advocate of a rotten cause. After giving up his heart to that subject, he ought not (whatever others might do) ever to have set his foot within the threshold of a court. He might be sure that he would not gain forgiveness or favour by it, nor obtain a single cordial smile from greatness. All that Mr. Southey is or that he does best, is independent, spontaneous, free as the vital air he draws—when he affects the courtier or the sophist, he is obliged to put a constraint upon himself, to hold in his breath, he loses his genius, and offers a violence to his nature. His characteristic faults are the excess of a lively, unguarded temperament:—oh! let them not degenerate into cold-blooded, heartless vices! If we speak or have ever spoken of Mr. Southey with severity, it is with 'the malice of old friends,' for we count ourselves among his sincerest and heartiest well-wishers. But while he himself is anomalous, incalculable, eccentric, from youth to age (the *Wat Tyler* and the *Vision of Judgment* are the Alpha and Omega of his disjointed career) full of sallies of humour, of ebullitions of spleen, making *jets-a'eaux*, cascades, fountains, and water-works of his idle opinions, he would shut up the wits of others in leaden cisterns, to stagnate and corrupt, or bury them under ground—

'Far from the sun and summer gale!'

He would suppress the freedom of wit and humour, of which he has set the example, and claim a privilege for playing antics. He would

introduce an uniformity of intellectual weights and measures, of irregular metres and settled opinions, and enforce it with a high hand. This has been judged hard by some, and has brought down a severity of recrimination, perhaps disproportioned to the injury done. 'Because he is virtuous,' (it has been asked,) 'are there to be no more cakes and ale?' Because he is loyal, are we to take all our notions from the *Quarterly Review*? Because he is orthodox, are we to do nothing but read the *Book of the Church*? We declare we think his former poetical scepticism was not only more amiable, but had more of the spirit of religion in it, implied a more heartfelt trust in nature and providence than his present bigotry. We are at the same time free to declare that we think his articles in the *Quarterly Review*, notwithstanding their virulence and the talent they display, have a tendency to qualify its most pernicious effects. They have redeeming traits in them. 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump'; and the spirit of humanity (thanks to Mr. Southey) is not quite expelled from the *Quarterly Review*. At the corner of his pen, 'there hangs a vapourous drop profound' of independence and liberality, which falls upon its pages, and oozes out through the pores of the public mind. There is a fortunate difference between writers whose hearts are naturally callous to truth, and whose understandings are hermetically sealed against all impressions but those of self-interest, and a man like Mr. Southey. *Once a philanthropist and always a philanthropist.* No man can entirely baulk his nature: it breaks out in spite of him. In all those questions, where the spirit of contradiction does not interfere, on which he is not sore from old bruises, or sick from the extravagance of youthful intoxication, as from a last night's debauch, our 'laureate' is still bold, free, candid, open to conviction, a reformist without knowing it. He does not advocate the slave-trade, he does not arm Mr. Malthus's revolting ratios with his authority, he does not strain hard to deluge Ireland with blood. On such points, where humanity has not become obnoxious, where liberty has not passed into a by-word, Mr. Southey is still liberal and humane. The elasticity of his spirit is unbroken: the bow recoils to its old position. He still stands convicted of his early passion for inquiry and improvement. He was not regularly articled as a Government-tool!—Perhaps the most pleasing and striking of all Mr. Southey's poems are not his triumphant taunts hurled against oppression, are not his glowing effusions to Liberty, but those in which, with a mild melancholy, he seems conscious of his own infirmities of temper, and to feel a wish to correct by thought and time the precocity and sharpness of his disposition. May the quaint but affecting aspiration expressed in

one of these be fulfilled, that as he mellows into maturer age, all such asperities may wear off, and he himself become

'Like the high leaves upon the holly-tree!'

Mr. Southey's prose-style can scarcely be too much praised. It is plain, clear, pointed, familiar, perfectly modern in its texture, but with a grave and sparkling admixture of *archaisms* in its ornaments and occasional phraseology. He is the best and most natural prose-writer of any poet of the day; we mean that he is far better than Lord Byron, Mr. Wordsworth, or Mr. Coleridge, for instance. The manner is perhaps superior to the matter, that is, in his Essays and Reviews. There is rather a want of originality and even of *impetus*: but there is no want of playful or biting satire, of ingenuity, of casuistry, of learning and of information. He is 'full of wise saws and modern' (as well as ancient) 'instances.' Mr. Southey may not always convince his opponents; but he seldom fails to stagger, never to gall them. In a word, we may describe his style by saying that it has not the body or thickness of port wine, but is like clear sherry with kernels of old authors thrown into it!—He also excels as an historian and prose-translator. His histories abound in information, and exhibit proofs of the most indefatigable patience and industry. By no uncommon process of the mind, Mr. Southey seems willing to steady the extreme levity of his opinions and feelings by an appeal to facts. His translations of the Spanish and French romances are also executed *con amore*, and with the literal fidelity and care of a mere linguist. That of the *Cid*, in particular, is a masterpiece. Not a word could be altered for the better, in the old scriptural style which it adopts in conformity to the original. It is no less interesting in itself, or as a record of high and chivalrous feelings and manners, than it is worthy of perusal as a literary curiosity.

Mr. Southey's conversation has a little resemblance to a common-place book; his habitual deportment to a piece of clock-work. He is not remarkable either as a reasoner or an observer: but he is quick, unaffected, replete with anecdote, various and retentive in his reading, and exceedingly happy in his play upon words, as most scholars are who give their minds this sportive turn. We have chiefly seen Mr. Southey in company where few people appear to advantage, we mean in that of Mr. Coleridge. He has not certainly the same range of speculation, nor the same flow of sounding words, but he makes up by the details of knowledge, and by a scrupulous correctness of statement for what he wants in originality of thought, or impetuous declamation. The tones of Mr. Coleridge's voice are eloquence: those of Mr. Southey are meagre, shrill, and dry.

Mr. Coleridge's *forte* is conversation, and he is conscious of this: Mr. Southey evidently considers writing as his stronghold, and if gravelled in an argument, or at a loss for an explanation, refers to something he has written on the subject, or brings out his port-folio, doubled down in dog-ears, in confirmation of some fact. He is scholastic and professional in his ideas. He sets more value on what he writes than on what he says: he is perhaps prouder of his library than of his own productions—themselves a library! He is more simple in his manners than his friend Mr. Coleridge; but at the same time less cordial or conciliating. He is less vain, or has less hope of pleasing, and therefore lays himself less out to please. There is an air of condescension in his civility. With a tall, loose figure, a peaked austerity of countenance, and no inclination to *embonpoint*, you would say he has something puritanical, something ascetic in his appearance. He answers to Mandeville's description of Addison, 'a parson in a tye-wig.' He is not a boon companion, nor does he indulge in the pleasures of the table, nor in any other vice; nor are we aware that Mr. Southey is chargeable with any human frailty but—*want of charity!* Having fewer errors to plead guilty to, he is less lenient to those of others. He was born an age too late. Had he lived a century or two ago, he would have been a happy as well as blameless character. But the distraction of the time has unsettled him, and the multiplicity of his pretensions have jostled with each other. No man in our day (at least no man of genius) has led so uniformly and entirely the life of a scholar from boyhood to the present hour, devoting himself to learning with the enthusiasm of an early love, with the severity and constancy of a religious vow—and well would it have been for him if he had confined himself to this, and not undertaken to pull down or to patch up the State! However irregular in his opinions, Mr. Southey is constant, unremitting, mechanical in his studies, and the performance of his duties. There is nothing Pindaric or Shandean here. In all the relations and charities of private life, he is correct, exemplary, generous, just. We never heard a single impropriety laid to his charge; and if he has many enemies, few men can boast more numerous or stauncher friends.—The variety and piquancy of his writings form a striking contrast to the mode in which they are produced. He rises early, and writes or reads till breakfast-time. He writes or reads after breakfast till dinner, after dinner till tea, and from tea till bed-time—

> 'And follows so the ever-running year
> With profitable labour to his grave—'

on Derwent's banks, beneath the foot of Skiddaw. Study serves him for business, exercise, recreation. He passes from verse to prose, from history to poetry, from reading to writing, by a stop-watch. He writes a fair hand, without blots, sitting upright in his chair, leaves off when he comes to the bottom of the page, and changes the subject for another, as opposite as the Antipodes. His mind is after all rather the recipient and transmitter of knowledge, than the originator of it. He has hardly grasp of thought enough to arrive at any great leading truth. His passions do not amount to more than irritability. With some gall in his pen, and coldness in his manner, he has a great deal of kindness in his heart. Rash in his opinions, he is steady in his attachments—and is a man, in many particulars admirable, in all respectable—his political inconsistency alone excepted!

MR. WORDSWORTH

Mr. Wordsworth's genius is a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age. Had he lived in any other period of the world, he would never have been heard of. As it is, he has some difficulty to contend with the hebetude of his intellect, and the meanness of his subject. With him 'lowliness is young ambition's ladder': but he finds it a toil to climb in this way the steep of Fame. His homely Muse can hardly raise her wing from the ground, nor spread her hidden glories to the sun. He has 'no figures nor no fantasies, which busy *passion* draws in the brains of men:' neither the gorgeous machinery of mythologic lore, nor the splendid colours of poetic diction. His style is vernacular: he delivers household truths. He sees nothing loftier than human hopes; nothing deeper than the human heart. This he probes, this he tampers with, this he poises, with all its incalculable weight of thought and feeling, in his hands; and at the same time calms the throbbing pulses of his own heart, by keeping his eye ever fixed on the face of nature. If he can make the life-blood flow from the wounded breast, this is the living colouring with which he paints his verse: if he can assuage the pain or close up the wound with the balm of solitary musing, or the healing power of plants and herbs and 'skyey influences,' this is the sole triumph of his art. He takes the simplest elements of nature and of the human mind, the mere abstract conditions inseparable from our being, and tries to compound a new system of poetry from them; and has perhaps succeeded as well as any one could. *'Nihil humani a me alienum puto'*—is the motto of his works. He thinks nothing

low or indifferent of which this can be affirmed: every thing that professes to be more than this, that is not an absolute essence of truth and feeling, he holds to be vitiated, false, and spurious. In a word, his poetry is founded on setting up an opposition (and pushing it to the utmost length) between the natural and the artificial; between the spirit of humanity, and the spirit of fashion and of the world!

It is one of the innovations of the time. It partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age: the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments. His Muse (it cannot be denied, and without this we cannot explain its character at all) is a levelling one. It proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard. It is distinguished by a proud humility. It relies upon its own resources, and disdains external show and relief. It takes the commonest events and objects, as a test to prove that nature is always interesting from its inherent truth and beauty, without any of the ornaments of dress or pomp of circumstances to set it off. Hence the unaccountable mixture of seeming simplicity and real abstruseness in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Fools have laughed at, wise men scarcely understand them. He takes a subject or a story merely as pegs or loops to hang thought and feeling on; the incidents are trifling, in proportion to his contempt for imposing appearances; the reflections are profound, according to the gravity and the aspiring pretensions of his mind.

His popular, inartificial style gets rid (at a blow) of all the trappings of verse, of all the high places of poetry: 'the cloud-capt towers, the solemn temples, the gorgeous palaces,' are swept to the ground, and 'like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wrack behind.' All the traditions of learning, all the superstitions of age, are obliterated and effaced. We begin *de novo*, on a *tabula rasa* of poetry. The purple pall, the nodding plume of tragedy are exploded as mere pantomime and trick, to return to the simplicity of truth and nature. Kings, queens, priests, nobles, the altar and the throne, the distinctions of rank, birth, wealth, power, 'the judge's robe, the marshal's truncheon, the ceremony that to great ones 'longs,' are not to be found here. The author tramples on the pride of art with greater pride. The Ode and Epode, the Strophe and the Antistrophe, he laughs to scorn. The harp of Homer, the trump of Pindar and of Alcæus are still. The decencies of costume, the decorations of vanity are stripped off without mercy as barbarous, idle, and Gothic. The jewels in the crisped hair, the diadem on the polished brow are thought meretricious, theatrical, vulgar; and nothing contents

his fastidious taste beyond a simple garland of flowers. Neither does he avail himself of the advantages which nature or accident holds out to him. He chooses to have his subject a foil to his invention, to owe nothing but to himself. He gathers manna in the wilderness, he strikes the barren rock for the gushing moisture. He elevates the mean by the strength of his own aspirations; he clothes the naked with beauty and grandeur from the stores of his own recollections. No cypress grove loads his verse with funeral pomp: but his imagination lends 'a sense of joy

> 'To the bare trees and mountains bare,
> And grass in the green field.'

No storm, no shipwreck startles us by its horrors: but the rainbow lifts its head in the cloud, and the breeze sighs through the withered fern. No sad vicissitude of fate, no overwhelming catastrophe in nature deforms his page: but the dew-drop glitters on the bending flower, the tear collects in the glistening eye.

> 'Beneath the hills, along the flowery vales,
> The generations are prepared; the pangs,
> The internal pangs are ready; the dread strife
> Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
> Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.'

As the lark ascends from its low bed on fluttering wing, and salutes the morning skies; so Mr. Wordsworth's unpretending Muse, in russet guise, scales the summits of reflection, while it makes the round earth its footstool, and its home!

Possibly a good deal of this may be regarded as the effect of disappointed views and an inverted ambition. Prevented by native pride and indolence from climbing the ascent of learning or greatness, taught by political opinions to say to the vain pomp and glory of the world, 'I hate ye,' seeing the path of classical and artificial poetry blocked up by the cumbrous ornaments of style and turgid *commonplaces*, so that nothing more could be achieved in that direction but by the most ridiculous bombast or the tamest servility; he has turned back partly from the bias of his mind, partly perhaps from a judicious policy—has struck into the sequestered vale of humble life, sought out the Muse among sheep-cotes and hamlets and the peasant's mountain-haunts, has discarded all the tinsel pageantry of verse, and endeavoured (not in vain) to aggrandise the trivial and add the charm of novelty to the familiar. No one has shown the same imagination in raising trifles into importance: no one has displayed the same pathos in treating of the simplest feelings of the heart. Reserved,

yet haughty, having no unruly or violent passions, (or those passions having been early suppressed,) Mr. Wordsworth has passed his life in solitary musing, or in daily converse with the face of nature. He exemplifies in an eminent degree the power of *association*; for his poetry has no other source or character. He has dwelt among pastoral scenes, till each object has become connected with a thousand feelings, a link in the chain of thought, a fibre of his own heart. Every one is by habit and familiarity strongly attached to the place of his birth, or to objects that recall the most pleasing and eventful circumstances of his life. But to the author of the *Lyrical Ballads*, nature is a kind of home; and he may be said to take a personal interest in the universe. There is no image so insignificant that it has not in some mood or other found the way into his heart: no sound that does not awaken the memory of other years.—

> 'To him the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.'

The daisy looks up to him with sparkling eye as an old acquaintance: the cuckoo haunts him with sounds of early youth not to be expressed: a linnet's nest startles him with boyish delight: an old withered thorn is weighed down with a heap of recollections: a grey cloak, seen on some wild moor, torn by the wind, or drenched in the rain, afterwards becomes an object of imagination to him: even the lichens on the rock have a life and being in his thoughts. He has described all these objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature. He is in this sense the most original poet now living, and the one whose writings could the least be spared: for they have no substitute elsewhere. The vulgar do not read them, the learned, who see all things through books, do not understand them, the great despise, the fashionable may ridicule them: but the author has created himself an interest in the heart of the retired and lonely student of nature, which can never die. Persons of this class will still continue to feel what he has felt: he has expressed what they might in vain wish to express, except with glistening eye and faltering tongue! There is a lofty philosophic tone, a thoughtful humanity, infused into his pastoral vein. Remote from the passions and events of the great world, he has communicated interest and dignity to the primal movements of the heart of man, and ingrafted his own conscious reflections on the casual thoughts of hinds and shepherds. Nursed amidst the grandeur of mountain scenery, he has stooped to have a nearer view of the daisy under his feet, or plucked a branch of white-thorn from the spray: but in describing it, his mind seems

imbued with the majesty and solemnity of the objects around him—the tall rock lifts its head in the erectness of his spirit; the cataract roars in the sound of his verse; and in its dim and mysterious meaning, the mists seem to gather in the hollows of Helvellyn, and the forked Skiddaw hovers in the distance. There is little mention of mountainous scenery in Mr. Wordsworth's poetry; but by internal evidence one might be almost sure that it was written in a mountainous country, from its bareness, its simplicity, its loftiness and its depth!

His later philosophic productions have a somewhat different character. They are a departure from, a dereliction of his first principles. They are classical and courtly. They are polished in style, without being gaudy; dignified in subject, without affectation. They seem to have been composed not in a cottage at Grasmere, but among the half-inspired groves and stately recollections of Cole-Orton. We might allude in particular, for examples of what we mean, to the lines on a Picture by Claude Lorraine, and to the exquisite poem, entitled *Laodamia*. The last of these breathes the pure spirit of the finest fragments of antiquity—the sweetness, the gravity, the strength, the beauty and the languor of death—

'Calm contemplation and majestic pains.'

Its glossy brilliancy arises from the perfection of the finishing, like that of careful sculpture, not from gaudy colouring—the texture of the thoughts has the smoothness and solidity of marble. It is a poem that might be read aloud in Elysium, and the spirits of departed heroes and sages would gather round to listen to it! Mr. Wordsworth's philosophic poetry, with a less glowing aspect and less tumult in the veins than Lord Byron's on similar occasions, bends a calmer and keener eye on mortality; the impression, if less vivid, is more pleasing and permanent; and we confess it (perhaps it is a want of taste and proper feeling) that there are lines and poems of our author's, that we think of ten times for once that we recur to any of Lord Byron's. Or if there are any of the latter's writings, that we can dwell upon in the same way, that is, as lasting and heart-felt sentiments, it is when laying aside his usual pomp and pretension, he descends with Mr. Wordsworth to the common ground of a disinterested humanity. It may be considered as characteristic of our poet's writings, that they either make no impression on the mind at all, seem mere *nonsense-verses*, or that they leave a mark behind them that never wears out. They either

'Fall blunted from the indurated breast'—

without any perceptible result, or they absorb it like a passion. To one class of readers he appears sublime, to another (and we fear the largest) ridiculous. He has probably realised Milton's wish, —'and fit audience found, though few'; but we suspect he is not reconciled to the alternative. There are delightful passages in the EXCURSION, both of natural description and of inspired reflection (passages of the latter kind that in the sound of the thoughts and of the swelling language resemble heavenly symphonies, mournful *requiems* over the grave of human hopes); but we must add, in justice and in sincerity, that we think it impossible that this work should ever become popular, even in the same degree as the *Lyrical Ballads*. It affects a system without having any intelligible clue to one; and instead of unfolding a principle in various and striking lights, repeats the same conclusions till they become flat and insipid. Mr. Wordsworth's mind is obtuse, except as it is the organ and the receptacle of accumulated feelings: it is not analytic, but synthetic; it is reflecting, rather than theoretical. The EXCURSION, we believe, fell still-born from the press. There was something abortive, and clumsy, and ill-judged in the attempt. It was long and laboured. The personages, for the most part, were low, the fare rustic: the plan raised expectations which were not fulfilled, and the effect was like being ushered into a stately hall and invited to sit down to a splendid banquet in the company of clowns, and with nothing but successive courses of apple-dumplings served up. It was not even *toujours perdrix*!

Mr. Wordsworth, in his person, is above the middle size, with marked features, and an air somewhat stately and Quixotic. He reminds one of some of Holbein's heads, grave, saturnine, with a slight indication of sly humour, kept under by the manners of the age or by the pretensions of the person. He has a peculiar sweetness in his smile, and great depth and manliness and a rugged harmony, in the tones of his voice. His manner of reading his own poetry is particularly imposing; and in his favourite passages his eye beams with preternatural lustre, and the meaning labours slowly up from his swelling breast. No one who has seen him at these moments could go away with an impression that he was a 'man of no mark or likelihood.' Perhaps the comment of his face and voice is necessary to convey a full idea of his poetry. His language may not be intelligible, but his manner is not to be mistaken. It is clear that he is either mad or inspired. In company, even in a *tête-à-tête*, Mr. Wordsworth is often silent, indolent, and reserved. If he is become verbose and oracular of late years, he was not so in his better days. He threw out a bold or an indifferent remark without either effort or pretension,

and relapsed into musing again. He shone most (because he seemed most roused and animated) in reciting his own poetry, or in talking about it. He sometimes gave striking views of his feelings and trains of association in composing certain passages; or if one did not always understand his distinctions, still there was no want of interest—there was a latent meaning worth inquiring into, like a vein of ore that one cannot exactly hit upon at the moment, but of which there are sure indications. His standard of poetry is high and severe, almost to exclusiveness. He admits of nothing below, scarcely of any thing above himself. It is fine to hear him talk of the way in which certain subjects should have been treated by eminent poets, according to his notions of the art. Thus he finds fault with Dryden's description of Bacchus in the *Alexander's Feast*, as if he were a mere good-looking youth, or boon companion—

> 'Flushed with a purple grace,
> He shows his honest face'—

instead of representing the God returning from the conquest of India, crowned with vine-leaves, and drawn by panthers, and followed by troops of satyrs, of wild men and animals that he had tamed. You would think, in hearing him speak on this subject, that you saw Titian's picture of the meeting of *Bacchus and Ariadne*—so classic were his conceptions, so glowing his style. Milton is his great idol, and he sometimes dares to compare himself with him. His Sonnets, indeed, have something of the same high-raised tone and prophetic spirit. Chaucer is another prime favourite of his, and he has been at the pains to modernize some of the Canterbury Tales. Those persons who look upon Mr. Wordsworth as a merely puerile writer, must be rather at a loss to account for his strong predilection for such geniuses as Dante and Michael Angelo. We do not think our author has any very cordial sympathy with Shakespear. How should he? Shakespear was the least of an egotist of any body in the world. He does not much relish the variety and scope of dramatic composition. 'He hates those interlocutions between Lucius and Caius.' Yet Mr. Wordsworth himself wrote a tragedy when he was young; and we have heard the following energetic lines quoted from it, as put into the mouth of a person smit with remorse for some rash crime:

> ———'Action is momentary,
> The motion of a muscle this way or that;
> Suffering is long, obscure, and infinite!'

Perhaps for want of light and shade, and the unshackled spirit of the drama, this performance was never brought forward. Our critic has

a great dislike to Gray, and a fondness for Thomson and Collins. It is mortifying to hear him speak of Pope and Dryden, whom, because they have been supposed to have all the possible excellences of poetry, he will allow to have none. Nothing, however, can be fairer, or more amusing, than the way in which he sometimes exposes the unmeaning verbiage of modern poetry. Thus, in the beginning of Dr. Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*—

> 'Let observation with extensive view
> Survey mankind from China to Peru'—

he says there is a total want of imagination accompanying the words, the same idea is repeated three times under the disguise of a different phraseology: it comes to this—'let *observation*, with extensive *observation*, *observe* mankind'; or take away the first line, and the second,

> 'Survey mankind from China to Peru,'

literally conveys the whole. Mr. Wordsworth is, we must say, a perfect Drawcansir as to prose writers. He complains of the dry reasoners and matter-of-fact people for their want of *passion*; and he is jealous of the rhetorical declaimers and rhapsodists as trenching on the province of poetry. He condemns all French writers (as well of poetry as prose) in the lump. His list in this way is indeed small. He approves of Walton's Angler, Paley, and some other writers of an inoffensive modesty of pretension. He also likes books of voyages and travels, and Robinson Crusoe. In art, he greatly esteems Bewick's woodcuts, and Waterloo's sylvan etchings. But he sometimes takes a higher tone, and gives his mind fair play. We have known him enlarge with a noble intelligence and enthusiasm on Nicolas Poussin's fine landscape-compositions, pointing out the unity of design that pervades them, the superintending mind, the imaginative principle that brings all to bear on the same end; and declaring he would not give a rush for any landscape that did not express the time of day, the climate, the period of the world it was meant to illustrate, or had not this character of *wholeness* in it. His eye also does justice to Rembrandt's fine and masterly effects. In the way in which that artist works something out of nothing, and transforms the stump of a tree, a common figure into an *ideal* object, by the gorgeous light and shade thrown upon it, he perceives an analogy to his own mode of investing the minute details of nature with an atmosphere of sentiment; and in pronouncing Rembrandt to be a man of genius, feels that he strengthens his own claim to the title. It has been said of Mr. Wordsworth, that 'he hates conchology, that he hates the Venus of

Medicis.' But these, we hope, are mere epigrams and *jeux-d'esprit*, as far from truth as they are free from malice; a sort of running satire or critical clenches—

> 'Where one for sense and one for rhyme
> Is quite sufficient at one time.'

We think, however, that if Mr. Wordsworth had been a more liberal and candid critic, he would have been a more sterling writer. If a greater number of sources of pleasure had been open to him, he would have communicated pleasure to the world more frequently. Had he been less fastidious in pronouncing sentence on the works of others, his own would have been received more favourably, and treated more leniently. The current of his feelings is deep, but narrow; the range of his understanding is lofty and aspiring rather than discursive. The force, the originality, the absolute truth and identity with which he feels some things, makes him indifferent to so many others. The simplicity and enthusiasm of his feelings, with respect to nature, renders him bigotted and intolerant in his judgments of men and things. But it happens to him, as to others, that his strength lies in his weakness; and perhaps we have no right to complain. We might get rid of the cynic and the egotist, and find in his stead a commonplace man. We should 'take the good the Gods provide us': a fine and original vein of poetry is not one of their most contemptible gifts, and the rest is scarcely worth thinking of, except as it may be a mortification to those who expect perfection from human nature; or who have been idle enough at some period of their lives, to deify men of genius as possessing claims above it. But this is a chord that jars, and we shall not dwell upon it.

Lord Byron we have called, according to the old proverb, 'the spoiled child of fortune': Mr. Wordsworth might plead, in mitigation of some peculiarities, that he is 'the spoiled child of disappointment.' We are convinced, if he had been early a popular poet, he would have borne his honours meekly, and would have been a person of great *bonhommie* and frankness of disposition. But the sense of injustice and of undeserved ridicule sours the temper and narrows the views. To have produced works of genius, and to find them neglected or treated with scorn, is one of the heaviest trials of human patience. We exaggerate our own merits when they are denied by others, and are apt to grudge and cavil at every particle of praise bestowed on those to whom we feel a conscious superiority. In mere self-defence we turn against the world, when it turns against us; brood over the undeserved slights we receive; and thus the genial current of the soul is stopped, or vents itself in effusions of petulance

and self-conceit. Mr. Wordsworth has thought too much of contemporary critics and criticism; and less than he ought of the award of posterity, and of the opinion, we do not say of private friends, but of those who were made so by their admiration of his genius. He did not court popularity by a conformity to established models, and he ought not to have been surprised that his originality was not understood as a matter of course. He has *gnawed too much on the bridle*; and has often thrown out crusts to the critics, in mere defiance or as a point of honour when he was challenged, which otherwise his own good sense would have withheld. We suspect that Mr. Wordsworth's feelings are a little morbid in this respect, or that he resents censure more than he is gratified by praise. Otherwise, the tide has turned much in his favour of late years—he has a large body of determined partisans—and is at present sufficiently in request with the public to save or relieve him from the last necessity to which a man of genius can be reduced—that of becoming the God of his own idolatry!

SIR JAMES MACKINTOSH

The subject of the present article is one of the ablest and most accomplished men of the age, both as a writer, a speaker, and a converser. He is, in fact, master of almost every known topic, whether of a passing or of a more recondite nature. He has lived much in society, and is deeply conversant with books. He is a man of the world and a scholar; but the scholar gives the tone to all his other acquirements and pursuits. Sir James is by education and habit, and we were going to add, by the original turn of his mind, a college-man; and perhaps he would have passed his time most happily and respectably, had he devoted himself entirely to that kind of life. The strength of his faculties would have been best developed, his ambition would have met its proudest reward, in the accumulation and elaborate display of grave and useful knowledge. As it is, it may be said, that in company he talks well, but too much; that in writing he overlays the original subject and spirit of the composition, by an appeal to authorities and by too formal a method; that in public speaking the logician takes place of the orator, and that he fails to give effect to a particular point or to urge an immediate advantage home upon his adversary from the enlarged scope of his mind, and the wide career he takes in the field of argument.

To consider him in the last point of view, first. As a political

partisan, he is rather the lecturer than the advocate. He is able to instruct and delight an impartial and disinterested audience by the extent of his information, by his acquaintance with general principles, by the clearness and aptitude of his illustrations, by vigour and copiousness of style; but where he has a prejudiced or unfair antagonist to contend with, he is just as likely to put weapons into his enemy's hands, as to wrest them from him, and his object seems to be rather to deserve than to obtain success. The characteristics of his mind are retentiveness and comprehension, with facility of production: but he is not equally remarkable for originality of view, or warmth of feeling, or liveliness of fancy. His eloquence is a little rhetorical; his reasoning chiefly logical: he can bring down the account of knowledge on a vast variety of subjects to the present moment, he can embellish any cause he undertakes by the most approved and graceful ornaments, he can support it by a host of facts and examples, but he cannot advance it a step forward by placing it on a new and triumphant 'vantage-ground, nor can he overwhelm and break down the artificial fences and bulwarks of sophistry by the irresistible tide of manly enthusiasm. Sir James Mackintosh is an accomplished debater, rather than a powerful orator: he is distinguished more as a man of wonderful and variable talent than as a man of commanding intellect. His mode of treating a question is critical, and not parliamentary. It has been formed in the closet and the schools, and is hardly fitted for scenes of active life, or the collisions of party-spirit. Sir James reasons on the square; while the arguments of his opponents are loaded with iron or gold. He makes, indeed, a respectable ally, but not a very formidable opponent. He is as likely, however, to prevail on a neutral, as he is almost certain to be baffled on a hotly contested ground. On any question of general policy or legislative improvement, the Member for Nairn is heard with advantage, and his speeches are attended with effect: and he would have equal weight and influence at other times, if it were the object of the House to hear reason, as it is his aim to speak it. But on subjects of peace or war, of political rights or foreign interference, where the waves of party run high, and the liberty of nations or the fate of mankind hangs trembling in the scales, though he probably displays equal talent, and does full and heaped justice to the question (abstractedly speaking, or if it were to be tried before an impartial assembly), yet we confess we have seldom heard him, on such occasions, without pain for the event. He did not slur his own character and pretensions, but he compromised the argument. He spoke *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*; but the House of Commons (we dare aver it) is not the place where the

truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth can be spoken with safety or with advantage. The judgment of the House is not a balance to weigh scruples and reasons to the turn of a fraction: another element, besides the love of truth enters into the composition of their decisions, the reaction of which must be calculated upon and guarded against. If our philosophical statesman had to open the case before a class of tyros, or a circle of grey-beards, who wished to form or to strengthen their judgments upon fair and rational grounds, nothing could be more satisfactory, more luminous, more able or more decisive than the view taken of it by Sir James Mackintosh. But the House of Commons, as a collective body, have not the docility of youth, the calm wisdom of age; and often only want an excuse to do wrong, or to adhere to what they have already determined upon; and Sir James, in detailing the inexhaustible stores of his memory and reading, in unfolding the wide range of his theory and practice, in laying down the rules and the exceptions, in insisting upon the advantages and the objections with equal explicitness, would be sure to let something drop that a dexterous and watchful adversary would easily pick up and turn against him, if this were found necessary; or if with so many *pros* and *cons*, doubts and difficulties, dilemmas and alternatives thrown into it, the scale, with its natural bias to interest and power, did not already fly up and kick the beam. There wanted unity of purpose, impetuosity of feeling to break through the phalanx of hostile and inveterate prejudice arrayed against him. He gave a handle to his enemies; threw stumbling-blocks in the way of his friends. He raised so many objections for the sake of answering them, proposed so many doubts for the sake of solving them, and made so many concessions where none were demanded, that his reasoning had the effect of neutralizing itself; it became a mere exercise of the understanding without zest or spirit left in it; and the provident engineer who was to shatter in pieces the strong-holds of corruption and oppression, by a well-directed and unsparing discharge of artillery, seemed to have brought not only his own cannon-balls, but his own wool-packs along with him to ward off the threatened mischief. This was a good deal the effect of his maiden speech on the transfer of Genoa, to which Lord Castlereagh did not deign an answer, and which another Honourable Member called 'a *finical* speech.' It was a most able, candid, closely argued, and philosophical exposure of that unprincipled transaction; but for this very reason it was a solecism in the place where it was delivered. Sir James has, since this period, and with the help of practice, lowered himself to the tone of the House; and has also applied himself to questions more

congenial to his habits of mind, and where the success would be more likely to be proportioned to his zeal and his exertions.

There was a greater degree of power, or of dashing and splendid effect (we wish we could add, an equally humane and liberal spirit) in the *Lectures on the Law of Nature and Nations*, formerly delivered by Sir James (then Mr.) Mackintosh, in Lincoln's-Inn Hall. He showed greater confidence; was more at home there. The effect was more electrical and instantaneous, and this elicited a prouder display of intellectual riches, and a more animated and imposing mode of delivery. He grew wanton with success. Dazzling others by the brilliancy of his acquirements, dazzled himself by the admiration they excited, he lost fear as well as prudence; dared every thing, carried every thing before him. The Modern Philosophy, counter-scarp, outworks, citadel, and all, fell without a blow, by 'the whiff and wind of his fell *doctrine*,' as if it had been a pack of cards. The volcano of the French Revolution was seen expiring in its own flames, like a bonfire made of straw: the principles of Reform were scattered in all directions, like chaff before the keen northern blast. He laid about him like one inspired; nothing could withstand his envenomed tooth. Like some savage beast got into the garden of the fabled Hesperides, he made clear work of it, root and branch, with white, foaming tusks—

'Laid waste the borders, and o'erthrew the bowers.'

The havoc was amazing, the desolation was complete. As to our visionary sceptics and Utopian philosophers, they stood no chance with our lecturer—he did not 'carve them as a dish fit for the Gods, but hewed them as a carcase fit for hounds.' Poor Godwin, who had come, in the *bonhommie* and candour of his nature, to hear what new light had broken in upon his old friend, was obliged to quit the field, and slunk away after an exulting taunt thrown out at 'such fanciful chimeras as a golden mountain or a perfect man.' Mr. Mackintosh had something of the air, much of the dexterity and self-possession, of a political and philosophical juggler; and an eager and admiring audience gaped and greedily swallowed the gilded bait of sophistry, prepared for their credulity and wonder. Those of us who attended day after day, and were accustomed to have all our previous notions confounded and struck out of our hands by some metaphysical legerdemain, were at last at some loss to know *whether two and two made four*, till we had heard the lecturer's opinion on that head. He might have some mental reservation on the subject, some pointed ridicule to pour upon the common sup-

position, some learned authority to quote against it. To anticipate the line of argument he might pursue, was evidently presumptuous and premature. One thing only appeared certain, that whatever opinion he chose to take up, he was able to make good either by the foils or the cudgels, by gross banter or nice distinctions, by a well-timed mixture of paradox and common-place, by an appeal to vulgar prejudices or startling scepticism. It seemed to be equally his object, or the tendency of his Discourses, to unsettle every principle of reason or of common sense, and to leave his audience at the mercy of the *dictum* of a lawyer, the nod of a minister, or the shout of a mob. To effect this purpose, he drew largely on the learning of antiquity, on modern literature, on history, poetry, and the belles-lettres, on the Schoolmen and on writers of novels, French, English, and Italian. In mixing up the sparkling julep, that by its potent operation was to scour away the dregs and feculence and peccant humours of the body politic, he seemed to stand with his back to the drawers in a metaphysical dispensary, and to take out of them whatever ingredients suited his purpose. In this way he had an antidote for every error, an answer to every folly. The writings of Burke, Hume, Berkeley, Paley, Lord Bacon, Jeremy Taylor, Grotius, Puffendorf, Cicero, Aristotle, Tacitus, Livy, Sully, Machiavel, Guicciardini, Thuanus, lay open beside him, and he could instantly lay his hand upon the passage, and quote them chapter and verse to the clearing up of all difficulties, and the silencing of all oppugners. Mr. Mackintosh's Lectures were after all but a kind of philosophical centos. They were profound, brilliant, new to his hearers; but the profundity, the brilliancy, the novelty were not his own. He was like Dr. Pangloss (not Voltaire's, but Coleman's) who speaks only in quotations; and the pith, the marrow of Sir James's reasoning and rhetoric at that memorable period might be put within inverted commas. It, however, served its purpose and the loud echo died away. We remember an excellent man and a sound critic[1] going to hear one of these elaborate effusions; and on his want of enthusiasm being accounted for from its not being one of the orator's brilliant days, he replied, 'he did not think a man of genius could speak for two hours without saying something by which he would have been electrified.' We are only sorry, at this distance of time, for one thing in these Lectures—the tone and spirit in which they seemed to have been composed and to be delivered. If all that body of opinions and principles of which the orator read his recantation was unfounded, and there was an end of all those views and hopes that

[1] The late Rev. Joseph Fawcett, of Walthamstow.

pointed to future improvement, it was not a matter of triumph or exultation to the lecturer or any body else, to the young or the old, the wise or the foolish; on the contrary, it was a subject of regret, of slow, reluctant, painful admission—

'Of lamentation loud heard through the rueful air.'

The immediate occasion of this sudden and violent change in Sir James's views and opinions was attributed to a personal interview which he had had a little before his death with Mr. Burke, at his house at Beaconsfield. In the latter end of the year 1796, appeared the *Regicide Peace*, from the pen of the great apostate from liberty and betrayer of his species into the hands of those who claimed it as their property by divine right—a work imposing, solid in many respects, abounding in facts and admirable reasoning, and in which all flashy ornaments were laid aside for a testamentary gravity, (the eloquence of despair resembling the throes and heaving and muttered threats of an earthquake, rather than the loud thunderbolt)—and soon after came out a criticism on it in *The Monthly Review*, doing justice to the author and the style, and combating the inferences with force and at much length; but with candour and with respect, amounting to deference. It was new to Mr. Burke not to be called names by persons of the opposite party; it was an additional triumph to him to be spoken well of, to be loaded with well-earned praise by the author of the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*. It was a testimony from an old, a powerful, and an admired antagonist.[1] He sent an invitation to the writer to come and see him; and in the course of three days' animated discussion of such subjects, Mr. Mackintosh became a convert not merely to the graces and gravity of Mr. Burke's style, but to the liberality of his views, and the solidity of his opinions.—The Lincoln's-Inn Lectures were the fruit of this interview: such is the influence exercised by men of genius and imaginative power over those who have nothing to oppose to their unforeseen flashes of thought and invention, but the dry, cold, formal, deductions of the understanding. Our politician had time, during a few years of absence from his native country, and while the din of war and the cries of party-spirit 'were lost over a wide and unhearing ocean,' to recover from his surprise and from a temporary alienation of mind; and to return in spirit, and in the mild and mellowed maturity of age, to the principles and attachments of his early life.

[1] At the time when the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* first made its appearance, as a reply to the *Reflections on the French Revolution*, it was cried up by the partisans of the new school, as a work superior in the charms of composition to its redoubted rival: in acuteness, depth, and soundness of reasoning, of course there was supposed to be no comparison.

The appointment of Sir James Mackintosh to a Judgeship in India was one, which, however flattering to his vanity or favourable to his interests, was entirely foreign to his feelings and habits. It was an honourable exile. He was out of his element among black slaves and sepoys, and Nabobs and cadets, and writers to India. He had no one to exchange ideas with. The 'unbought grace of life,' the charm of literary conversation was gone. It was the habit of his mind, his ruling passion to enter into the shock and conflict of opinions on philosophical, political, and critical questions—not to dictate to raw tyros or domineer over persons in subordinate situations—but to obtain the guerdon and the laurels of superior sense and information by meeting with men of equal standing, to have a fair field pitched, to argue, to distinguish, to reply, to hunt down the game of intellect with eagerness and skill, to push an advantage, to cover a retreat, to give and take a fall—

'And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.'

It is no wonder that this sort of friendly intellectual gladiatorship is Sir James's greatest pleasure, for it is his peculiar *forte*. He has not many equals, and scarcely any superior in it. He is too indolent for an author; too unimpassioned for an orator: but in society he is just vain enough to be pleased with immediate attention, good-humoured enough to listen with patience to others, with great coolness and self-possession, fluent, communicative, and with a manner equally free from violence and insipidity. Few subjects can be started, on which he is not qualified to appear to advantage as the gentleman and scholar. If there is some tinge of pedantry, it is carried off by great affability of address and variety of amusing and interesting topics. There is scarce an author that he has not read; a period of history that he is not conversant with; a celebrated name of which he has not a number of anecdotes to relate; an intricate question that he is not prepared to enter upon in a popular or scientific manner. If an opinion in an abstruse metaphysical author is referred to, he is probably able to repeat the passage by heart, can tell the side of the page on which it is to be met with, can trace it back through various descents to Locke, Hobbes, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, to a place in some obscure folio of the School-men or a note in one of the commentators on Aristotle or Plato, and thus give you in a few moments' space, and without any effort or previous notice, a chronological table of the progress of the human mind in that particular branch of inquiry. There is something, we think, perfectly admirable and delightful in an exhibition of this kind, and which is equally creditable to the speaker and gratifying to the hearer. But this kind of talent was of

no use in India: the intellectual wares, of which the Chief Judge delighted to make a display, were in no request there. He languished after the friends and the society he had left behind; and wrote over incessantly for books from England. One that was sent him at this time was an *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*; and the way in which he spoke of that dry, tough, metaphysical *choke-pear*, showed the dearth of intellectual intercourse in which he lived, and the craving in his mind after those studies which had once been his pride, and to which he still turned for consolation in his remote solitude.—Perhaps to another, the novelty of the scene, the differences of mind and manners might have atoned for a want of social and literary *agrémens*: but Sir James is one of those who see nature through the spectacles of books. He might like to read an account of India; but India itself with its burning, shining face would be a mere blank, an endless waste to him. To persons of this class of mind things must be translated into words, visible images into abstract propositions to meet their refined apprehensions, and they have no more to say to a matter-of-fact staring them in the face without a label in its mouth, than they would to a hippopotamus!—We may add, before we quit this point, that we cannot conceive of any two persons more different in colloquial talents, in which they both excel, than Sir James Mackintosh and Mr. Coleridge. They have nearly an equal range of reading and of topics of conversation: but in the mind of the one we see nothing but *fixtures*, in the other every thing is fluid. The ideas of the one are as formal and tangible, as those of the other are shadowy and evanescent. Sir James Mackintosh walks over the ground, Mr. Coleridge is always flying off from it. The first knows all that has been said upon a subject; the last has something to say that was never said before. If the one deals too much in learned *common-places*, the other teems with idle fancies. The one has a good deal of the *caput mortuum* of genius, the other is all volatile salt. The conversation of Sir James Mackintosh has the effect of reading a well-written book, that of his friend is like hearing a bewildered dream. The one is an Encyclopedia of knowledge, the other is a succession of *Sybilline Leaves!*

As an author, Sir James Mackintosh may claim the foremost rank among those who pride themselves on artificial ornaments and acquired learning, or who write what may be termed a *composite* style. His *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* is a work of great labour, great ingenuity, great brilliancy, and great vigour. It is a little too antithetical in the structure of its periods, too dogmatical in the announcement of its opinions. Sir James has, we believe, rejected something of the *false brilliant* of the one, as he has retracted some of the abrupt extravagance

of the other. We apprehend, however, that our author is not one of those who draw from their own resources and accumulated feelings, or who improve with age. He belongs to a class (common in Scotland and elsewhere) who get up school-exercises on any given subject in a masterly manner at twenty, and who at forty are either where they were—or retrograde, if they are men of sense and modesty. The reason is, their vanity is weaned, after the first hey-day and animal spirits of youth are flown, from making an affected display of knowledge, which, however useful, is not their own, and may be much more simply stated; they are tired of repeating the same arguments over and over again, after having exhausted and rung the changes on their whole stock for a number of times. Sir James Mackintosh is understood to be a writer in the Edinburgh Review; and the articles attributed to him there are full of matter of great pith and moment. But they want the trim, pointed expression, the ambitious ornaments, the ostentatious display and rapid volubility of his early productions. We have heard it objected to his later compositions, that his style is good as far as single words and phrases are concerned, but that his sentences are clumsy and disjointed, and that these make up still more awkward and sprawling paragraphs. This is a nice criticism, and we cannot speak to its truth; but if the fact be so, we think we can account for it from the texture and obvious process of the author's mind. All his ideas may be said to be given preconceptions. They do not arise, as it were, out of the subject, or out of one another at the moment, and therefore do not flow naturally and gracefully from one another. They have been laid down beforehand in a sort of formal division or frame-work of the understanding; and the connection between the premises and the conclusion, between one branch of a subject and another, is made out in a bungling and unsatisfactory manner. There is no principle of fusion in the work; he strikes after the iron is cold, and there is a want of malleability in the style. Sir James is at present said to be engaged in writing a *History of England* after the downfall of the house of Stuart. May it be worthy of the talents of the author, and of the principles of the period it is intended to illustrate!

MR. MALTHUS

Mr. Malthus may be considered as one of those rare and fortunate writers who have attained a *scientific* reputation in questions of moral and political philosophy. His name undoubtedly stands very high in the present age, and will in all probability go down to posterity

with more or less of renown or obloquy. It was said by a person well qualified to judge both from strength and candour of mind, that 'it would take a thousand years at least to answer his work on Population.' He has certainly thrown a new light on that question, and changed the aspect of political economy in a decided and material point of view—whether he has not also endeavoured to spread a gloom over the hopes and more sanguine speculations of man, and to cast a slur upon the face of nature, is another question. There is this to be said for Mr. Malthus, that in speaking of him, one knows what one is talking about. He is something beyond a mere name—one has not to *beat the bush* about his talents, his attainments, his vast reputation, and leave off without knowing what it all amounts to —he is not one of those great men, who set themselves off and strut and fret an hour upon the stage, during a day-dream of popularity, with the ornaments and jewels borrowed from the common stock, to which nothing but their vanity and presumption gives them the least individual claim—he has dug into the mine of truth, and brought up ore mixed with dross! In weighing his merits we come at once to the question of what he has done or failed to do. It is a specific claim that he sets up. When we speak of Mr. Malthus, we mean the *Essay on Population*; and when we mention the Essay on Population, we mean a distinct leading proposition, that stands out intelligibly from all trashy pretence, and is a ground on which to fix the levers that may move the world, backwards or forwards. He has not left opinion where he found it; he has advanced or given it a wrong bias, or thrown a stumbling-block in its way. In a word, his name is not stuck, like so many others, in the firmament of reputation, nobody knows why, inscribed in great letters, and with a transparency of Talents, Genius, Learning blazing round it—it is tantamount to an idea, it is identified with a principle, it means that *the population cannot go on perpetually increasing without pressing on the limits of the means of subsistence, and that a check of some kind or other must, sooner or later, be opposed to it.* This is the essence of the doctrine which Mr. Malthus has been the first to bring into general notice, and as we think, to establish beyond the fear of contradiction. Admitting then as we do the prominence and the value of his claims to public attention, it yet remains a question, how far those claims are (as to the talent displayed in them) strictly original; how far (as to the logical accuracy with which he has treated the subject) he has introduced foreign and doubtful matter into it; and how far (as to the spirit in which he has conducted his inquiries, and applied a general principle to particular objects) he has only drawn fair and inevitable conclusions from it, or endeavoured to tamper with and wrest it to sinister and

servile purposes. A writer who shrinks from following up a well-founded principle into its untoward consequences from timidity or false delicacy, is not worthy of the name of a philosopher: a writer who assumes the garb of candour and an inflexible love of truth to garble and pervert it, to crouch to power and pander to prejudice, deserves a worse title than that of a sophist!

Mr. Malthus's first octavo volume on this subject (published in the year 1798) was intended as an answer to Mr. Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*. It was well got up for the purpose, and had an immediate effect. It was what in the language of the ring is called *a facer*. It made Mr. Godwin and the other advocates of Modern Philosophy look about them. It may be almost doubted whether Mr. Malthus was in the first instance serious in many things that he threw out, or whether he did not hazard the whole as an amusing and extreme paradox, which might puzzle the reader as it had done himself in an idle moment, but to which no practical consequence whatever could attach. This state of mind would probably continue till the irritation of enemies and the encouragement of friends convinced him that what he had at first exhibited as an idle fancy was in fact a very valuable discovery, or 'like the toad ugly and venomous, had yet a precious jewel in its head.' Such a supposition would at least account for some things in the original Essay, which scarcely any writer would venture upon, except as professed exercises of ingenuity, and which have been since in part retracted. But a wrong bias was thus given, and the author's theory was thus rendered warped, disjointed, and sophistical from the very outset.

Nothing could in fact be more illogical (not to say absurd) than the whole of Mr. Malthus's reasoning applied as an answer (*par excellence*) to Mr. Godwin's book, or to the theories of other Utopian philosophers. Mr. Godwin was not singular, but was kept in countenance by many authorities, both ancient and modern, in supposing a state of society possible in which the passions and wills of individuals would be conformed to the general good, in which the knowledge of the best means of promoting human welfare and the desire of contributing to it would banish vice and misery from the world, and in which, the stumbling-blocks of ignorance, of selfishness, and the indulgence of gross appetite being removed, all things would move on by the mere impulse of wisdom and virtue, to still higher and higher degrees of perfection and happiness. Compared with the lamentable and gross deficiencies of existing institutions, such a view of futurity as barely possible could not fail to allure the gaze and tempt the aspiring thoughts of the philan-

thropist and the philosopher: the hopes and the imaginations of speculative men could not but rush forward into this ideal world as into a *vacuum* of good; and from 'the mighty stream of tendency' (as Mr. Wordsworth in the cant of the day calls it,) there was danger that the proud monuments of time-hallowed institutions, that the strong-holds of power and corruption, that 'the Corinthian capitals of polished society,' with the base and pediments, might be overthrown and swept away as by a hurricane. There were not wanting persons whose ignorance, whose fears, whose pride, or whose prejudices contemplated such an alternative with horror; and who would naturally feel no small obligation to the man who should relieve their apprehensions from the stunning roar of this mighty change of opinion that thundered at a distance, and should be able, by some logical apparatus or unexpected turn of the argument, to prevent the vessel of the state from being hurried forward with the progress of improvement, and dashed in pieces down the tremendous precipice of human perfectibility. Then comes Mr. Malthus forward with the geometrical and arithmetical ratios in his hands, and holds them out to his affrighted contemporaries as the only means of salvation. 'For' (so argued the author of the Essay) 'let the principles of Mr. Godwin's Enquiry and of other similar works be carried literally and completely into effect; let every corruption and abuse of power be entirely got rid of; let virtue, knowledge, and civilization be advanced to the greatest height that these visionary reformers would suppose; let the passions and appetites be subjected to the utmost control of reason and influence of public opinion: grant them, in a word, all that they ask, and the more completely their views are realized, the sooner will they be overthrown again, and the more inevitable and fatal will be the catastrophe. For the principle of population will still prevail, and from the comfort, ease, and plenty that will abound, will receive an increasing force and *impetus*; the number of mouths to be fed will have no limit, but the food that is to supply them cannot keep pace with the demand for it; we must come to a stop somewhere, even though each square yard, by extreme improvements in cultivation, could maintain its man: in this state of things there will be no remedy, the wholesome checks of vice and misery (which have hitherto kept this principle within bounds) will have been done away; the voice of reason will be unheard; the passions only will bear sway; famine, distress, havoc, and dismay will spread around; hatred, violence, war, and bloodshed will be the infallible consequence, and from the pinnacle of happiness, peace, refinement, and social advantage, we shall be hurled once more into a profounder abyss of misery, want, and

barbarism than ever, by the sole operation of the principle of population!'—Such is a brief abstract of the argument of the Essay. Can any thing be less conclusive, a more complete fallacy and *petitio principii*? Mr. Malthus concedes, he assumes a state of perfectibility, such as his opponents imagined, in which the general good is to obtain the entire mastery of individual interests, and reason of gross appetites and passions: and then he argues that such a perfect structure of society will fall by its own weight, or rather be undermined by the principle of population, because in the highest possible state of the subjugation of the passions to reason, they will be absolutely lawless and unchecked, and because as men become enlightened, quick sighted and public-spirited, they will show themselves utterly blind to the consequences of their actions, utterly indifferent to their own well-being and that of all succeeding generations, whose fate is placed in their hands. This we conceive to be the boldest paralogism that ever was offered to the world, or palmed upon willing credulity. Against whatever other scheme of reform this objection might be valid, the one it was brought expressly to overturn was impregnable against it, invulnerable to its slightest graze. Say that the Utopian reasoners are visionaries, unfounded; that the state of virtue and knowledge they suppose, in which reason shall have become all-in-all, can never take place, that it is inconsistent with the nature of man and with all experience, well and good—but to say that society will have attained this high and 'palmy state,' that reason will have become the master-key to all our motives, and that when arrived at its greatest power it will cease to act at all, but will fall down dead, inert, and senseless before the principle of population, is an opinion which one would think few people would choose to advance or assent to, without strong inducements for maintaining or believing it.

The fact, however, is, that Mr. Malthus found this argument entire (the principle and the application of it) in an obscure and almost forgotten work published about the middle of the last century, entitled *Various Prospects of Mankind, Nature, and Providence*, by a Scotch gentleman of the name of Wallace. The chapter in this work on the Principle of Population, considered as a bar to all ultimate views of human improvement, was probably written to amuse an idle hour, or read as a paper to exercise the wits of some literary society in the Northern capital, and no farther responsibilty or importance annexed to it. Mr. Malthus, by adopting and setting his name to it, has given it sufficient currency and effect. It sometimes happens that one writer is the first to discover a certain principle or lay down a given observation, and that another makes an application of, or draws

a remote or an immediate inference from it, totally unforeseen by the first, and from which, in all probability, he might have widely dissented. But this is not so in the present instance. Mr. Malthus has borrowed (perhaps without consciousness, at any rate without acknowledgment) both the preliminary statement, that the increase in the supply of food 'from a limited earth and a limited fertility' must have an end, while the tendency to increase in the principle of population has none, without some external and forcible restraint on it, and the subsequent use made of this statement as an insuperable bar to all schemes of Utopian or progressive improvement—both these he has borrowed (whole) from Wallace, with all their imperfections on their heads, and has added more and greater ones to them out of his own store. In order to produce something of a startling and dramatic effect, he has strained a point or two. In order to quell and frighten away the bugbear of Modern Philosophy, he was obliged to make a sort of monster of the principle of population, which was brought into the field against it, and which was to swallow it up quick. No half-measures, no middle course of reasoning would do. With a view to meet the highest possible power of reason in the new order of things, Mr. Malthus saw the necessity of giving the greatest possible physical weight to the antagonist principle, and he accordingly lays it down that its operation is mechanical and irresistible. He premises these two propositions as the basis of all his reasoning, 1. *That food is necessary to man*; 2. *That the desire to propagate the species is an equally indispensable law of our existence*:—thus making it appear that these two wants or impulses are equal and coordinate principles of action. If this double statement had been true, the whole scope and structure of his reasoning (as hostile to human hopes and sanguine speculations) would have been irrefragable; but as it is not true, the whole (in that view) falls to the ground. According to Mr. Malthus's octavo edition, the sexual passion is as necessary to be gratified as the appetite of hunger, and a man can no more exist without propagating his species than he can live without eating. Were it so, neither of these passions would admit of any excuses, any delay, any restraint from reason or foresight; and the only checks to the principle of population must be vice and misery. The argument would be triumphant and complete. But there is no analogy, no parity in the two cases, such as our author here assumes. No man can live for any length of time without food; many persons live all their lives without gratifying the other sense. The longer the craving after food is unsatisfied, the more violent, imperious, and uncontroulable the desire becomes; whereas the longer the gratification of the sexual passion is resisted, the greater force does habit and

resolution acquire over it; and, generally speaking, it is a well-known fact, attested by all observation and history, that this latter passion is subject more or less to controul from personal feelings and character, from public opinions and the institutions of society, so as to lead either to a lawful and regulated indulgence, or to partial or total abstinence, according to the dictates of *moral restraint*, which latter check to the inordinate excesses and unheard-of consequences of the principle of population, our author, having no longer an extreme case to make out, admits and is willing to patronize in addition to the two former and exclusive ones of *vice* and *misery*, in the second and remaining editions of his work. Mr. Malthus has shown some awkwardness or even reluctance in softening down the harshness of his first peremptory decision. He sometimes grants his grand exception cordially, proceeds to argue stoutly, and to try conclusions upon it; at other times he seems disposed to cavil about or retract it:—'the influence of moral restraint is very inconsiderable, or none at all.' It is indeed difficult (more particularly for so formal and nice a reasoner as Mr. Malthus) to piece such contradictions plausibly or gracefully together. We wonder how *he* manages it—how *any one* should attempt it! The whole question, the *gist* of the argument of his early volume turned upon this, 'Whether vice and misery were the *only* actual or possible checks to the principle of population?' He then said they were, and farewell to building castles in the air: he now says that *moral restraint* is to be coupled with these, and that its influence depends greatly on the state of laws and manners—and Utopia stands where it did, a great way off indeed, but not turned *topsy-turvy* by our magician's wand! Should we ever arrive there, that is, attain to a state of *perfect moral restraint*, we shall not be driven headlong back into Epicurus's stye for want of the only possible checks to population, *vice* and *misery*; and in proportion as we advance that way, that is, as the influence of moral restraint is extended, the necessity for vice and misery will be diminished, instead of being increased according to the first alarm given by the Essay. Again, the advance of civilization and of population in consequence with the same degree of moral restraint (as there exists in England at this present time, for instance) is a good, and not an evil—but this does not appear from the Essay. The Essay shows that population is not (as had been sometimes taken for granted) an abstract and unqualified good; but it led many persons to suppose that it was an abstract and unqualified evil, to be checked only by vice and misery; and producing, according to its encouragement a greater quantity of vice and misery; and this error the author has not been at sufficient pains to do away. Another thing, in which Mr. Malthus attempted to *clench* Wallace's argument,

was in giving to the disproportionate power of increase in the principle of population and the supply of food a mathematical form, or reducing it to the arithmetical and geometrical ratios, in which we believe Mr. Malthus is now generally admitted, even by his friends and admirers, to have been wrong. There is evidently no inherent difference in the principle of increase in food or population; since a grain of corn, for example, will propagate and multiply itself much faster even than the human species. A bushel of wheat will sow a field; that field will furnish seed for twenty others. So that the limit to the means of subsistence is only the want of room to raise it in, or, as Wallace expresses it, 'a limited fertility and a limited earth.' Up to the point where the earth or any given country is fully occupied or cultivated, the means of subsistence naturally increase in a geometrical ratio, and will more than keep pace with the natural and unrestrained progress of population; and beyond that point, they do not go on increasing even in Mr. Malthus's arithmetical ratio, but are stationary or nearly so. So far, then, is this proportion from being universally and mathematically true, that in no part of the world or state of society does it hold good. But our theorist, by laying down this double ratio as a law of nature, gains this advantage, that at all times it seems as if, whether in new or old-peopled countries, in fertile or barren soils, the population was pressing hard on the means of subsistence; and again, it seems as if the evil increased with the progress of improvement and civilization; for if you cast your eye at the scale which is supposed to be calculated upon true and infallible *data*, you find that when the population is at 8, the means of subsistence are at 4; so that here there is only a *deficit* of one-half; but when it is at 32, they have only got to 6, so that here there is a difference of 26 in 32, and so on in proportion; the farther we proceed, the more enormous is the mass of vice and misery we must undergo, as a consequence of the natural excess of the population over the means of subsistence and as a salutary check to its farther desolating progress. The mathematical Table, placed at the front of the Essay, therefore leads to a secret suspicion or a barefaced assumption, that we ought in mere kindness and compassion to give every sort of indirect and under-hand encouragement (to say the least) to the providential checks of vice and misery; as the sooner we arrest this formidable and paramount evil in its course, the less opportunity we leave it of doing incalculable mischief. Accordingly, whenever there is the least talk of colonizing new countries, of extending the population, or adding to social comforts and improvements, Mr. Malthus conjures up his double ratios, and insists on the alarming results of advancing them a single step forward in the series. By the same rule, it would

be better to return at once to a state of barbarism; and to take the benefit of acorns and scuttle-fish, as a security against the luxuries and wants of civilized life. But it is not our ingenious author's wish to hint at or recommend any alterations in existing institutions; and he is therefore silent on that unpalatable part of the subject and natural inference from his principles.

Mr. Malthus's 'gospel is preached to the poor.' He lectures them on economy, on morality, the regulation of their passions (which, he says, at other times, are amenable to no restraint) and on the ungracious topic, that 'the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, have doomed them and their families to starve for want of a right to the smallest portion of food beyond what their labour will supply, or some charitable hand may hold out in compassion.' This is illiberal, and it is not philosophical. The laws of nature or of God, to which the author appeals, are no other than a limited fertility and a limited earth. Within those bounds, the rest is regulated by the laws of man. The division of the produce of the soil, the price of labour, the relief afforded to the poor, are matters of human arrangement: while any charitable hand can extend relief, it is a proof that the means of subsistence are not exhausted in themselves, that the 'tables are not full!' Mr. Malthus says that the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, have rendered that relief physically impossible; and yet he would abrogate the poor-laws by an act of the legislature, in order to take away that *impossible* relief, which the laws of God deny, and which the laws of man *actually* afford. We cannot think that this view of his subject, which is prominent and dwelt on at great length and with much pertinacity, is dictated either by rigid logic or melting charity! A labouring man is not allowed to knock down a hare or a partridge that spoils his garden: a country-squire keeps a pack of hounds: a lady of quality rides out with a footman behind her, on two sleek, well-fed horses. We have not a word to say against all this as exemplifying the spirit of the English Constitution, as a part of the law of the land, or as an artful distribution of light and shade in the social picture; but if any one insists at the same time that 'the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, have doomed the poor and their families to starve,' because the principle of population has encroached upon and swallowed up the means of subsistence, so that not a mouthful of food is left *by the grinding law of necessity* for the poor, we beg leave to deny both fact and inference—and we put it to Mr. Malthus whether we are not, in strictness, justified in doing so?

We have, perhaps, said enough to explain our feeling on the subject of Mr. Malthus's merits and defects. We think he had the

opportunity and the means in his hands of producing a great work on the principle of population; but we believe he has let it slip from his having an eye to other things besides that broad and unexplored question. He wished not merely to advance to the discovery of certain great and valuable truths, but at the same time to overthrow certain unfashionable paradoxes by exaggerated statements—to curry favour with existing prejudices and interests by garbled representations. He has, in a word, as it appears to us on a candid retrospect and without any feelings of controversial asperity rankling in our minds, sunk the philosopher and the friend of his species (a character to which he might have aspired) in the sophist and party-writer. The period at which Mr. Malthus came forward teemed with answers to Modern Philosophy, with antidotes to liberty and humanity, with abusive Histories of the Greek and Roman republics, with fulsome panegyrics on the Roman Emperors (at the very time when we were reviling Buonaparte for his strides to universal empire) with the slime and offal of desperate servility—and we cannot but consider the Essay as one of the poisonous ingredients thrown into the cauldron of Legitimacy 'to make it thick and slab.' Our author has, indeed, so far done service to the cause of truth, that he has counteracted many capital errors formerly prevailing as to the universal and indiscriminate encouragement of population under all circumstances; but he has countenanced opposite errors, which if adopted in theory and practice would be even more mischievous, and has left it to future philosophers to follow up the principle, that some check must be provided for the unrestrained progress of population, into a set of wiser and more humane consequences. Mr. Godwin has lately attempted an answer to the Essay (thus giving Mr. Malthus a *Roland for his Oliver*) but we think he has judged ill in endeavouring to invalidate the principle, instead of confining himself to point out the misapplication of it. There is one argument introduced in this Reply, which will, perhaps, amuse the reader as a sort of metaphysical puzzle.

'It has sometimes occurred to me whether Mr. Malthus did not catch the first hint of his geometrical ratio from a curious passage of Judge Blackstone, on consanguinity, which is as follows:—

'The doctrine of lineal consanguinity is sufficiently plain and obvious; but it is at the first view astonishing to consider the number of lineal ancestors which every man has within no very great number of degrees; and so many different bloods is a man said to contain in his veins, as he hath lineal ancestors. Of these he hath two in the first ascending degree, his own parents; he hath four in the second, the parents of his father and the parents of his mother; he hath eight in the third, the parents of his two grandfathers and two grand-

mothers; and by the same rule of progression, he hath an hundred and twenty-eight in the seventh; a thousand and twenty-four in the tenth; and at the twentieth degree, or the distance of twenty generations, every man hath above a million of ancestors, as common arithmetic will demonstrate.

'This will seem surprising to those who are unacquainted with the increasing power of progressive numbers; but is palpably evident from the following table of a geometrical progression, in which the first term is 2, and the denominator also 2; or, to speak more intelligibly, it is evident, for that each of us has two ancestors in the first degree; the number of which is doubled at every remove, because each of our ancestors had also two ancestors of his own.

Lineal Degrees.	*Number of Ancestors.*
1	2
2	4
3	8
4	16
5	32
6	64
7	128
8	256
9	512
10	1024
11	2048
12	4096
13	8192
14	16,384
15	32,768
16	65,536
17	131,072
18	262,144
19	524,288
20	1,048,576

'This argument, however,' (proceeds Mr. Godwin) 'from Judge Blackstone of a geometrical progression would much more naturally apply to Montesquieu's hypothesis of the depopulation of the world, and prove that the human species is hastening fast to extinction, than to the purpose for which Mr. Malthus has employed it. An ingenious sophism might be raised upon it, to show that the race of mankind will ultimately terminate in unity. Mr. Malthus, indeed, should have reflected, that it is much more certain that every man has had ancestors than that he will have posterity, and that it is still more doubtful, whether he will have posterity to twenty or to an indefinite number of generations.'—ENQUIRY CONCERNING POPULATION, p. 100.

Mr. Malthus's style is correct and elegant; his tone of controversy mild and gentlemanly; and the care with which he has brought his facts and documents together, deserves the highest praise. He has lately quitted his favourite subject of population, and broke a lance with Mr. Ricardo on the question of rent and value. The partisans of Mr. Ricardo, who are also the admirers of Mr. Malthus, say that the usual sagacity of the latter has here failed him, and that he has shown himself to be a very illogical writer. To have said this of him formerly on another ground, was accounted a heresy and a piece of presumption not easily to be forgiven. Indeed Mr. Malthus has always been a sort of 'darling in the public eye,' whom it was unsafe to meddle with. He has contrived to make himself as many friends by his attacks on the schemes of *Human Perfectibility* and on the *Poor-Laws*, as Mandeville formerly procured enemies by his attacks on *Human Perfections* and on *Charity-Schools*; and among other instances that we might mention, *Plug* Pulteney, the celebrated miser, of whom Mr. Burke said on his having a large estate left him, 'that now it was to be hoped he would *set up a pocket-handkerchief*,' was so enamoured with the saving schemes and humane economy of the Essay, that he desired a friend to find out the author and offer him a church living! This liberal intention was (by design or accident) unhappily frustrated.

MR. GIFFORD

Mr. Gifford was originally bred to some handicraft: he afterwards contrived to learn Latin, and was for some time an usher in a school, till he became a tutor in a nobleman's family. The low-bred, self-taught man, the pedant, and the dependant on the great contribute to form the Editor of the *Quarterly Review*. He is admirably qualified for this situation, which he has held for some years, by a happy combination of defects, natural and acquired; and in the event of his death, it will be difficult to provide him a suitable successor.

Mr. Gifford has no pretensions to be thought a man of genius, of taste, or even of general knowledge. He merely understands the mechanical and instrumental part of learning. He is a critic of the last age, when the different editions of an author, or the dates of his several performances were all that occupied the inquiries of a profound scholar, and the spirit of the writer or the beauties of his style were left to shift for themselves, or exercise the fancy of the light and superficial reader. In studying an old author, he

has no notion of any thing beyond adjusting a point, proposing a different reading, or correcting, by the collation of various copies, an error of the press. In appreciating a modern one, if it is an enemy, the first thing he thinks of is to charge him with bad grammar—he scans his sentences instead of weighing his sense; or if it is a friend, the highest compliment he conceives it possible to pay him is, that his thoughts and expressions are moulded on some hackneyed model. His standard of *ideal* perfection is what he himself now is, a person of *mediocre* literary attainments: his utmost contempt is shown by reducing any one to what he himself once was, a person without the ordinary advantages of education and learning. It is accordingly assumed, with much complacency in his critical pages, that Tory writers are classical and courtly as a matter of course; as it is a standing jest and evident truism, that Whigs and Reformers must be persons of low birth and breeding—imputations from one of which he himself has narrowly escaped, and both of which he holds in suitable abhorrence. He stands over a contemporary performance with all the self-conceit and self-importance of a country schoolmaster, tries it by technical rules, affects not to understand the meaning, examines the hand-writing, the spelling, shrugs up his shoulders and chuckles over a slip of the pen, and keeps a sharp look-out for a false concord and—a flogging. There is nothing liberal, nothing humane in his style of judging: it is altogether petty, captious, and literal. The Editor's political subserviency adds the last finishing to his ridiculous pedantry and vanity. He has all his life been a follower in the train of wealth and power—strives to back his pretensions on Parnassus by a place at court, and to gild his reputation as a man of letters by the smile of greatness. He thinks his works are stamped with additional value by having his name in the *Red-Book*. He looks up to the distinctions of rank and station as he does to those of learning, with the gross and overweening adulation of his early origin. All his notions are low, upstart, servile. He thinks it the highest honour to a poet to be patronised by a peer or by some dowager of quality. He is prouder of a court-livery than of a laurel-wreath; and is only sure of having established his claims to respectability by having sacrificed those of independence. He is a retainer to the Muses; a door-keeper to learning; a lacquey in the state. He believes that modern literature should wear the fetters of classical antiquity; that truth is to be weighed in the scales of opinion and prejudice; that power is equivalent to right; that genius is dependent on rules; that taste and refinement of language consist in *word-catching*. Many persons suppose that Mr. Gifford knows better than he pretends; and that

he is shrewd, artful, and designing. But perhaps it may be nearer the mark to suppose that his dulness is guarantee for his sincerity; or that before he is the tool of the profligacy of others, he is the dupe of his own jaundiced feelings, and narrow, hood-winked perceptions.

> 'Destroy his fib or sophistry: in vain—
> The creature 's at his dirty work again!'

But this is less from choice or perversity, than because he cannot help it and can do nothing else. He damns a beautiful expression less out of spite than because he really does not understand it: any novelty of thought or sentiment gives him a shock from which he cannot recover for some time, and he naturally takes his revenge for the alarm and uneasiness occasioned him, without referring to venal or party motives. He garbles an author's meaning, not so much wilfully, as because it is a pain to him to enlarge his microscopic view to take in the context, when a particular sentence or passage has struck him as quaint and out of the way: he fly-blows an author's style, and picks out detached words and phrases for cynical reprobation, simply because he feels himself at home, or takes a pride and pleasure in this sort of petty warfare. He is tetchy and impatient of contradiction; sore with wounded pride; angry at obvious faults, more angry at unforeseen beauties. He has the *chalk-stones* in his understanding, and from being used to long confinement, cannot bear the slightest jostling or irregularity of motion. He may call out with the fellow in the *Tempest*—'I am not Stephano, but a cramp!' He would go back to the standard of opinions, style, the faded ornaments, and insipid formalities that came into fashion about forty years ago. Flashes of thought, flights of fancy, idiomatic expressions, he sets down among the signs of the times—the extraordinary occurrences of the age we live in. They are marks of a restless and revolutionary spirit: they disturb his composure of mind, and threaten (by implication) the safety of the state. His slow, snail-paced, bed-rid habits of reasoning, cannot keep up with the whirling, eccentric motion, the rapid, perhaps extravagant combinations of modern literature. He has long been stationary himself, and is determined that others shall remain so. The hazarding a paradox is like letting off a pistol close to his ear: he is alarmed and offended. The using an elliptical mode of expression (such as he did not use to find in Guides to the English Tongue) jars him like coming suddenly to a step in a flight of stairs that you were not aware of. He *pishes* and *pshaws* at all this, exercises a sort of interjectional criticism on what excites his spleen, his envy, or his

wonder, and hurls his meagre anathemas *ex cathedrâ* at all those writers who are indifferent alike to his precepts and his example!

Mr. Gifford, in short, is possessed of that sort of learning which is likely to result from an over-anxious desire to supply the want of the first rudiments of education; that sort of wit, which is the offspring of ill-humour or bodily pain; that sort of sense, which arises from a spirit of contradiction and a disposition to cavil at and dispute the opinions of others; and that sort of reputation, which is the consequence of bowing to established authority and ministerial influence. He dedicates to some great man, and receives his compliments in return. He appeals to some great name, and the Under-graduates of the two Universities look up to him as an oracle of wisdom. He throws the weight of his verbal criticism and puny discoveries in *black-letter* reading into the gap, that is supposed to be making in the Constitution by Whigs and Radicals, whom he qualifies without mercy as dunces and miscreants; and so entitles himself to the protection of Church and State. The character of his mind is an utter want of independence and magnanimity in all that he attempts. He cannot go alone, he must have crutches, a go-cart and trammels, or he is timid, fretful, and helpless as a child. He cannot conceive of any thing different from what he finds it, and hates those who pretend to a greater reach of intellect or boldness of spirit than himself. He inclines, by a natural and deliberate bias, to the traditional in laws and government; to the orthodox in religion; to the safe in opinion; to the trite in imagination; to the technical in style; to whatever implies a surrender of individual judgment into the hands of authority, and a subjection of individual feeling to mechanic rules. If he finds any one flying in the face of these, or straggling from the beaten path, he thinks he has them at a notable disadvantage, and falls foul of them without loss of time, partly to soothe his own sense of mortified self-consequence, and as an edifying spectacle to his legitimate friends. He takes none but unfair advantages. He *twits* his adversaries (that is, those who are not in the leading-strings of his school or party) with some personal or accidental defect. If a writer has been punished for a political libel, he is sure to hear of it in a literary criticism. If a lady goes on crutches and is out of favour at court, she is reminded of it in Mr. Gifford's manly satire. He sneers at people of low birth or who have not had a college education, partly to hide his own want of certain advantages, partly as well-timed flattery to those who possess them. He has a right to laugh at poor, unfriended, untitled genius from wearing the livery of rank and letters, as footmen behind a coronet-coach laugh at the rabble. He keeps good

company, and forgets himself. He stands at the door of Mr. Murray's shop, and will not let any body pass but the well-dressed mob, or some followers of the court. To edge into the *Quarterly* Temple of Fame the candidate must have a diploma from the Universities, a passport from the Treasury. Otherwise, it is a breach of etiquette to let him pass, an insult to the better sort who aspire to the love of letters—and may chance to drop in to the *Feast of the Poets*. Or, if he cannot manage it thus, or get rid of the claim on the bare ground of poverty or want of school-learning, he *trumps* up an excuse for the occasion, such as that 'a man was confined in Newgate a short time before'—it is not a *lie* on the part of the critic, it is only an amiable subserviency to the will of his betters, like that of a menial who is ordered to deny his master, a sense of propriety, a knowledge of the world, a poetical and moral license. Such fellows (such is his cue from his employers) should at any rate be kept out of privileged places: persons who have been convicted of prose-libels ought not to be suffered to write poetry—if the fact was not exactly as it was stated, it was something of the kind, or it *ought* to have been so, the assertion was a pious fraud,—the public, the court, the prince himself might read the work, but for this mark of opprobrium set upon it—it was not to be endured that an insolent plebeian should aspire to elegance, taste, fancy—it was throwing down the barriers which ought to separate the higher and the lower classes, the loyal and the disloyal—the paraphrase of the story of Dante was therefore to perform quarantine, it was to seem not yet recovered from the gaol infection, there was to be a taint upon it, as there was none in it—and all this was performed by a single slip of Mr. Gifford's pen! We would willingly believe (if we could) that in this case there was as much weakness and prejudice as there was malace and cunning.—Again, we do not think it possible that under any circumstances the writer of the *Verses to Anna* could enter into the spirit or delicacy of Mr. Keats's poetry. The fate of the latter somewhat resembled that of

> 'a bud bit by an envious worm,
> Ere it could spread its sweet leaves to the air,
> Or dedicate its beauty to the sun.'

Mr. Keats's ostensible crime was that he had been praised in the *Examiner Newspaper*: a greater and more unpardonable offence probably was, that he was a true poet, with all the errors and beauties of youthful genius to answer for. Mr. Gifford was as insensible to the one as he was inexorable to the other. Let the reader judge

from the two subjoined specimens how far the one writer could ever, without a presumption equalled only by a want of self-knowledge, set himself in judgment on the other.

'Out went the taper as she hurried in;
Its little smoke in pallid moonshine died:
She closed the door, she panted, all akin
To spirits of the air and visions wide:
No utter'd syllable, or woe betide!
But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side;
As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
Her heart in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

'A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

'Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for Heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

'Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

'Soon trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppress'd
Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away

Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;
Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.'

EVE OF ST. AGNES.

With the rich beauties and the dim obscurities of lines like these, let us contrast the Verses addressed *To a Tuft of early Violets* by the fastidious author of the Baviad and Mæviad.—

'Sweet flowers! that from your humble beds
Thus prematurely dare to rise,
And trust your unprotected heads
To cold Aquarius' watery skies.

'Retire, retire! *These* tepid airs
Are not the genial brood of May;
That sun with light malignant glares,
And flatters only to betray.

'Stern Winter's reign is not yet past—
Lo! while your buds prepare to blow,
On icy pinions comes the blast,
And nips your root, and lays you low.

'Alas, for such ungentle doom!
But I will shield you; and supply
A kindlier soil on which to bloom,
A nobler bed on which to die.

'Come then—'ere yet the morning ray
Has drunk the dew that gems your crest,
And drawn your balmiest sweets away;
O come and grace my Anna's breast.

'Ye droop, fond flowers! But did ye know
What worth, what goodness there reside,
Your cups with liveliest tints would glow;
And spread their leaves with conscious pride.

'For there has liberal Nature joined
Her riches to the stores of Art,
And added to the vigorous mind
The soft, the sympathising heart.

'Come then—'ere yet the morning ray
Has drunk the dew that gems your crest,
And drawn your balmiest sweets away;
O come and grace my Anna's breast.

'O! I should think—*that fragrant bed*
Might I but hope with you to share—[1]
Years of anxiety repaid
By one short hour of transport there.

'More blest than me, thus shall ye live
Your little day; and when ye die,
Sweet flowers! the grateful Muse shall give
A verse; the sorrowing maid, a sigh.

'While I alas! no distant date,
Mix with the dust from whence I came,
Without a friend to weep my fate,
Without a stone to tell my name.'

We subjoin one more specimen of these 'wild strains'[2] said to be '*Written two years after the preceding.*' Ecce iterum Crispinus.

'I wish I was where Anna lies;
For I am sick of lingering here,
And every hour Affection cries,
Go, and partake her humble bier.

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[1] What an awkward bedfellow for a tuft of violets!

[2] 'How oft, O Dart! what time the faithful pair
Walk'd forth, the fragrant hour of eve to share,
On thy romantic banks, have my *wild strains*
(Not yet forgot amidst my native plains)
While thou hast sweetly gurgled down the vale,
Filled up the pause of love's delightful tale!
While, ever as she read, the conscious maid,
By faultering voice and downcast looks betray'd,
Would blushing on her lover's neck recline,
And with her finger—point the tenderest line!'

Mæviad, pp. 194, 202.

Yet the author assures us just before, that in these 'wild strains' 'all was plain.'

'Even then (admire, John Bell! my simple ways)
No heaven and hell danced madly through my lays,
No oaths, no execrations; *all was plain*;
Yet trust me, while thy ever jingling train
Chime their sonorous woes with frigid art,
And shock the reason and revolt the heart;
My hopes and fears, in nature's language drest,
Awakened love in many a gentle breast.'

Ibid., v. 185-92.

If any one else had composed these 'wild strains,' in which 'all is plain,' Mr. Gifford would have accused them of three things. '1. Downright nonsense. 2. Downright frigidity. 3. Downright doggrel;' and proceeded to anatomise them very cordially in his way. As it is, he is thrilled with a very pleasing horror at his former scenes of tenderness, and 'gasps at the recollection' 'of *watery Aquarius!*' *he! jam satis est!* 'Why rack a grub—a butterfly upon a wheel?'

'I wish I could! for when she died
I lost my all; and life has prov'd
Since that sad hour a dreary void,
A waste unlovely and unlov'd.

'But who, when I am turned to clay,
Shall duly to her grave repair,
And pluck the ragged moss away,
And weeds that have "no business there?"

'And who, with pious hand, shall bring
The flowers she cherish'd, snow-drops cold,
And violets that unheeded spring,
To scatter o'er her hallowed mould?

'And who, while Memory loves to dwell
Upon her name for ever dear,
Shall feel his heart with passions swell,
And pour the bitter, bitter tear?

'I DID IT; and would fate allow,
Should visit still, should still deplore—
But health and strength have left me now,
But I, alas! can weep no more.

'Take then, sweet maid! this simple strain,
The last I offer at thy shrine;
Thy grave must then undeck'd remain,
And all thy memory fade with mine.

'And can thy soft persuasive look,
That voice that might with music vie,
Thy air that every gazer took,
Thy matchless eloquence of eye,

'Thy spirits, frolicsome as good,
Thy courage, by no ills dismay'd,
Thy patience, by no wrongs subdued,
Thy gay good-humour—can they "fade?"

'Perhaps—but sorrow dims my eye:
Cold turf, which I no more must view,
Dear name, which I no more must sigh,
A long, a last, a sad adieu!'

It may be said in extenuation of the low, mechanic vein of these impoverished lines, that they were written at an early age—they were the inspired production of a youthful lover! Mr. Gifford was thirty when he wrote them, Mr. Keats died when he was scarce twenty! Farther it may be said, that Mr. Gifford hazarded his

first poetical attempts under all the disadvantages of a neglected education: but the same circumstance, together with a few unpruned redundancies of fancy and quaintnesses of expression, was made the plea on which Mr. Keats was hooted out of the world, and his fine talents and wounded sensibilities consigned to an early grave. In short, the treatment of this heedless candidate for poetical fame might serve as a warning, and was intended to serve as a warning to all unfledged tyros, how they venture upon any such doubtful experiments, except under the auspices of some lord of the bed-chamber or Government Aristarchus, and how they imprudently associate themselves with men of mere popular talent or independence of feeling!—It is the same in prose works. The Editor scorns to enter the lists of argument with any proscribed writer of the opposite party. He does not refute, but denounces him. He makes no concessions to an adversary, lest they should in some way be turned against him. He only feels himself safe in the fancied insignificance of others: he only feels himself superior to those whom he stigmatizes as the lowest of mankind. All persons are without common-sense and honesty who do not believe implicitly (with him) in the immaculateness of Ministers and the divine origin of Kings. Thus he informed the world that the author of TABLE-TALK was a person who could not write a sentence of common English and could hardly spell his own name, because he was not a friend to the restoration of the Bourbons, and had the assurance to write *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* in a style of criticism somewhat different from Mr. Gifford's. He charged this writer with imposing on the public by a flowery style; and when the latter ventured to refer to a work of his, called *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, which has not a single ornament in it, as a specimen of his original studies and the proper bias of his mind, the learned critic, with a shrug of great self-satisfaction, said, 'It was amusing to see this person, sitting like one of Brouwer's Dutch boors over his gin and tobacco-pipes, and fancying himself a Leibnitz!' The question was, whether the subject of Mr. Gifford's censure had ever written such a work or not; for if he had, he had amused himself with something besides gin and tobacco-pipes. But our Editor, by virtue of the situation he holds, is superior to facts or arguments: he is accountable neither to the public nor to authors for what he says of them, but owes it to his employers to prejudice the work and vilify the writer, if the latter is not avowedly ready to range himself on the stronger side.—The *Quarterly Review*, besides the political *tirades* and denunciations of suspected writers, intended for the guidance of the heads of families, is filled up with accounts of books of Voyages and Travels for the

amusement of the younger branches. The poetical department is almost a sinecure, consisting of mere summary decisions and a list of quotations. Mr. Croker is understood to contribute the St. Helena articles and the liberality, Mr. Canning the practical good sense, Mr. D'Israeli the good-nature, Mr. Jacob the modesty, Mr. Southey the consistency, and the Editor himself the chivalrous spirit and the attacks on Lady Morgan. It is a double crime, and excites a double portion of spleen in the Editor, when female writers are not advocates of passive obedience and non-resistance. This Journal, then, is a depository for every species of political sophistry and personal calumny. There is no abuse or corruption that does not there find a jesuitical palliation or a barefaced vindication. There we meet the slime of hypocrisy, the varnish of courts, the cant of pedantry, the cobwebs of the law, the iron hand of power. Its object is as mischievous as the means by which it is pursued are odious. The intention is to poison the sources of public opinion and of individual fame—to pervert literature, from being the natural ally of freedom and humanity, into an engine of priestcraft and despotism, and to undermine the spirit of the English constitution and the independence of the English character. The Editor and his friends systematically explode every principle of liberty, laugh patriotism and public spirit to scorn, resent every pretence to integrity as a piece of singularity or insolence, and strike at the root of all free inquiry or discussion, by running down every writer as a vile scribbler and a bad member of society, who is not a hireling and a slave. No means are stuck at in accomplishing this laudable end. Strong in patronage, they trample on truth, justice, and decency. They claim the privilege of court-favourites. They keep as little faith with the public, as with their opponents. No statement in the *Quarterly Review* is to be trusted: there is no fact that is not misrepresented in it, no quotation that is not garbled, no character that is not slandered, if it can answer the purposes of a party to do so. The weight of power, of wealth, of rank is thrown into the scale, gives its impulse to the machine; and the whole is under the guidance of Mr. Gifford's instinctive genius—of the in-born hatred of servility for independence, of dulness for talent, of cunning and impudence for truth and honesty. It costs him no effort to execute his disreputable task—in being the tool of a crooked policy, he but labours in his natural vocation. He patches up a rotten system as he would supply the chasms in a worm-eaten manuscript, from a grovelling incapacity to do any thing better; thinks that if a single iota in the claims of prerogative and power were lost, the whole fabric of society would fall upon his head and crush him; and calculates that his best chance for literary reputation is by

black-balling one half of the competitors as Jacobins and levellers, and securing the suffrages of the other half in his favour as a loyal subject and trusty partisan!

Mr. Gifford, as a satirist, is violent and abrupt. He takes obvious or physical defects, and dwells upon them with much labour and harshness of invective, but with very little wit or spirit. He expresses a great deal of anger and contempt, but you cannot tell very well why —except that he seems to be sore and out of humour. His satire is mere peevishness and spleen, or something worse—personal antipathy and rancour. We are in quite as much pain for the writer, as for the object of his resentment. His address to Peter Pindar is laughable from its outrageousness. He denounces him as a wretch hateful to God and man, for some of the most harmless and amusing trifles that ever were written—and the very good-humour and pleasantry of which, we suspect, constituted their offence in the eyes of this Drawcansir.—His attacks on Mrs. Robinson were unmanly, and even those on Mr. Merry and the Della-Cruscan School were much more ferocious than the occasion warranted. A little affectation and quaintness of style did not merit such severity of castigation.[1] As a translator, Mr. Gifford's version of the Roman satirist is the baldest, and, in parts, the most offensive of all others. We do not know why he attempted it, unless he had got it in his head that he should thus follow in the steps of Dryden, as he had already done in those of Pope in the Baviad and Mæviad. As an editor of old authors, Mr. Gifford is entitled to considerable praise for the pains he has taken in revising the text, and for some improvements he has introduced into it. He had better have spared the notes, in which, though he has detected the blunders of previous commentators, he has exposed his own ill-temper and narrowness of feeling more. As a critic, he has thrown no light on the character and spirit of his authors. He has shown no striking power of analysis nor of original illustration, though he has chosen to exercise his pen on writers most congenial to his own turn of mind, from their dry and caustic vein; Massinger, and Ben Jonson. What he will make of Marlowe, it is difficult to guess. He has none of 'the fiery quality' of the poet. Mr. Gifford does not take for his motto on these occasions—*Spiritus precipitandus est!*—His most successful efforts in this way are barely respectable. In general, his observations are petty, ill-concocted, and discover as little *tact*, as they do a habit of connected reasoning. Thus, for instance, in attempting to add the name of Massinger to the list of Catholic poets, our minute critic insists on the profusion of crucifixes,

[1] Mr. Merry was even with our author in personality of abuse. See his Lines on the Story of the Ape that was given in charge to the ex-tutor.

glories, angelic visions, garlands of roses, and clouds of incense scattered through the *Virgin-Martyr*, as evidence of the theological sentiments meant to be inculcated by the play, when the least reflection might have taught him, that they proved nothing but the author's poetical conception of the character and *costume* of his subject. A writer might, with the same sinister, short-sighted shrewdness, be accused of Heathenism for talking of Flora and Ceres in a poem on the Seasons! What are produced as the exclusive badges and occult proofs of Catholic bigotry, are nothing but the adventitious ornaments and external symbols, the gross and sensible language, in a word, the *poetry* of Christianity in general. What indeed shows the frivolousness of the whole inference is that Deckar, who is asserted by our critic to have contributed some of the most passionate and fantastic of these devotional scenes, is not even suspected of a leaning to Popery. In like manner, he excuses Massinger for the grossness of one of his plots (that of the *Unnatural Combat*) by saying that it was supposed to take place before the Christian era; by this shallow common-place persuading himself, or fancying he could persuade others, that the crime in question (which yet on the very face of the story is made the ground of a tragic catastrophe) was first made *statutory* by the Christian religion.

The foregoing is a harsh criticism, and may be thought illiberal. But as Mr. Gifford assumes a right to say what he pleases of others —they may be allowed to speak the truth of him!

MR. JEFFREY

The *Quarterly Review* arose out of the *Edinburgh*, not as a corollary, but in contradiction to it. An article had appeared in the latter on Don Pedro Cevallos, which stung the Tories to the quick by the free way in which it spoke of men and things, and something must be done to check these *escapades* of the *Edinburgh*. It was not to be endured that the truth should *out* in this manner, even occasionally and half in jest. A startling shock was thus given to established prejudices, the mask was taken off from grave hypocrisy, and the most serious consequences were to be apprehended. The persons who wrote in this Review seemed 'to have their hands full of truths,' and now and then, in a fit of spleen or gaiety, let some of them fly; and while this practice continued, it was impossible to say that the Monarchy or the Hierarchy was safe. Some of the arrows glanced, others might stick, and in the end prove fatal. It was not the principles of the *Edinburgh Review*, but the spirit that was looked at

with jealousy and alarm. The principles were by no means decidedly hostile to existing institutions: but the spirit was that of fair and free discussion; a field was open to argument and wit; every question was tried upon its own ostensible merits, and there was no foul play. The tone was that of a studied impartiality (which many called *trimming*) or of a sceptical indifference. This tone of impartiality and indifference, however, did not at all suit those who profited or existed by abuses, who breathed the very air of corruption. They know well enough that 'those who are not *for* them are *against* them.' They wanted a publication impervious alike to truth and candour; that, hood-winked itself, should lead public opinion blindfold; that should stick at nothing to serve the turn of a party; that should be the exclusive organ of prejudice, the sordid tool of power; that should go the whole length of want of principle in palliating every dishonest measure, of want of decency in defaming every honest man; that should prejudge every question, traduce every opponent; that should give no quarter to fair inquiry or liberal sentiment; that should be 'ugly all over with hypocrisy,' and present one foul blotch of servility, intolerance, falsehood, spite, and ill manners. The *Quarterly Review* was accordingly set up.

> 'Sithence no fairy lights, no quickning ray,
> Nor stir of pulse, nor object to entice
> Abroad the spirits; but the cloister'd heart
> Sits squat at home, like Pagod in a niche
> Obscure!'

This event was accordingly hailed (and the omen has been fulfilled!) as a great relief to all those of his Majesty's subjects who are firmly convinced that the only way to have things remain exactly as they are is to put a stop to all inquiries whether they are right or wrong, and that if you cannot answer a man's arguments, you may at least try to take away his character.

We do not implicitly bow to the political opinions, nor to the critical decisions of the *Edinburgh Review*; but we must do justice to the talent with which they are supported, and to the tone of manly explicitness in which they are delivered.[1] They are eminently characteristic of the Spirit of the Age; as it is the express object of the *Quarterly Review* to discountenance and extinguish that spirit, both in theory and practice. The *Edinburgh Review* stands upon the ground of opinion; it asserts the supremacy of intellect: the

[1] The style of philosophical criticism, which has been the boast of the Edinburgh Review, was first introduced into the Monthly Review about the year 1796, in a series of articles by Mr. William Taylor, of Norwich.

pre-eminence it claims is from an acknowledged superiority of talent and information and literary attainment, and it does not build one tittle of its influence on ignorance, or prejudice, or authority, or personal malevolence. It takes up a question, and argues it *pro* and *con* with great knowledge and boldness and skill; it points out an absurdity, and runs it down, fairly, and according to the evidence adduced. In the former case, its conclusions may be wrong, there may be a bias in the mind of the writer, but he states the arguments and circumstances on both sides, from which a judgment is to be formed—it is not his cue, he has neither the effrontery nor the meanness to falsify facts or to suppress objections. In the latter case, or where a vein of sarcasm or irony is resorted to, the ridicule is not barbed by some allusion (false or true) to private history; the object of it has brought the infliction on himself by some literary folly or political delinquency which is referred to as the understood and justifiable provocation, instead of being held up to scorn as a knave for not being a tool, or as a blockhead for thinking for himself. In the *Edinburgh Review* the talents of those on the opposite side are always extolled *pleno ore*—in the *Quarterly Review* they are denied altogether, and the justice that is in this way withheld from them is compensated by a proportionable supply of personal abuse. A man of genius who is a lord, and who publishes with Mr. Murray, may now and then stand as good a chance as a lord who is not a man of genius and who publishes with Messrs. Longman: but that it the utmost extent of the impartiality of the *Quarterly*. From its account you would take Lord Byron and Mr. Stuart Rose for two very pretty poets; but Mr. Moore's Magdalen Muse is sent to Bridewell without mercy, to beat hemp in silk-stockings. In the *Quarterly* nothing is regarded but the political creed or external circumstances of a writer; in the *Edinburgh* nothing is ever adverted to but his literary merits. Or if there is a bias of any kind, it arises from an affectation of magnanimity and candour in giving heaped measure to those on the aristocratic side in politics, and in being critically severe on others. Thus Sir Walter Scott is lauded to the skies for his romantic powers, without any allusion to his political demerits (as if this would be compromising the dignity of genius and of criticism by the introduction of party-spirit)—while Lord Byron is called to a grave moral reckoning. There is, however, little of the cant of morality in the *Edinburgh Review*—and it is quite free from that of religion. It keeps to its province, which is that of criticism—or to the discussion of debateable topics, and acquits itself in both with force and spirit. This is the natural consequence of the composition of the two Reviews. The one

appeals with confidence to its own intellectual resources, to the variety of its topics, to its very character and existence as a literary journal, which depend on its setting up no pretensions but those which it can make good by the talent and ingenuity it can bring to bear upon them—it therefore meets every question, whether of a lighter or a graver cast, on its own grounds; the other *blinks* every question, for it has no confidence but in the *powers that be*—shuts itself up in the impregnable fastnesses of authority, or makes some paltry cowardly attack (under cover of anonymous criticism) on individuals, or dispenses its award of merit entirely according to the rank or party of the writer. The faults of the *Edinburgh Review* arise out of the very consciousness of critical and logical power. In political questions it relies too little on the broad basis of liberty and humanity, enters too much into mere dry formalities, deals too often in *moot-points*, and descends too readily to a sort of special-pleading in defence of *home* truths and natural feelings: in matters of taste and criticism, its tone is sometimes apt to be supercilious and *cavalier* from its habitual faculty of analysing defects and beauties according to given principles, from its quickness in deciding, from its facility in illustrating its views. In this latter department it has been guilty of some capital oversights. The chief was in its treatment of the *Lyrical Ballads* at their first appearance—not in its ridicule of their puerilities, but in its denial of their beauties, because they were included in no school, because they were reducible to no previous standard or theory of poetical excellence. For this, however, considerable reparation has been made by the prompt and liberal spirit that has been shown in bringing forward other examples of poetical genius. Its capital sin, in a doctrinal point of view, has been (we shrewdly suspect) in the uniform and unqualified encouragement it has bestowed on Mr. Malthus's system. We do not mean that the *Edinburgh Review* was to join in the general *hue and cry* that was raised against this writer; but while it asserted the soundness of many of his arguments, and yielded its assent to the truths he has divulged, it need not have screened his errors. On this subject alone we think the *Quarterly* has the advantage of it. But as the *Quarterly Review* is a mere mass and tissue of prejudices on all subjects, it is the foible of the *Edinburgh Review* to affect a somewhat fastidious air of superiority over prejudices of all kinds, and a determination not to indulge in any of the amiable weaknesses of our nature, except as it can give a reason for the faith that is in it. Luckily, it is seldom reduced to this alternative: 'reasons' are with it 'as plenty as blackberries!'

Mr. Jeffrey is the Editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, and is under-

stood to have contributed nearly a fourth part of the articles from its commencement. No man is better qualified for this situation; nor indeed so much so. He is certainly a person in advance of the age, and yet perfectly fitted both from knowledge and habits of mind to put a curb upon its rash and headlong spirit. He is thoroughly acquainted with the progress and pretensions of modern literature and philosophy; and to this he adds the natural acuteness and discrimination of the logician with the habitual caution and coolness of his profession. If the *Edinburgh Review* may be considered as the organ of or at all pledged to a party, that party is at least a respectable one, and is placed in the middle between two extremes. The Editor is bound to lend a patient hearing to the most paradoxical opinions and extravagant theories which have resulted in our times from the 'infinite agitation of wit,' but he is disposed to qualify them by a number of practical objections, of speculative doubts, of checks and drawbacks, arising out of actual circumstances and prevailing opinions, or the frailties of human nature. He has a great range of knowledge, an incessant activity of mind; but the suspension of his judgment, the well-balanced moderation of his sentiments, is the consequence of the very discursiveness of his reason. What may be considered as a *common-place* conclusion is often the result of a comprehensive view of all the circumstances of a case. Paradox, violence, nay even originality of conception is not seldom owing to our dwelling long and pertinaciously on some one part of a subject, instead of attending to the whole. Mr. Jeffrey is neither a bigot nor an enthusiast. He is not the dupe of the prejudices of others, nor of his own. He is not wedded to any dogma, he is not long the sport of any whim; before he can settle in any fond or fantastic opinion, another starts up to match it, like beads on sparkling wine. A too restless display of talent, a too undisguised statement of all that can be said for and against a question, is perhaps the great fault that is to be attributed to him. Where there is so much power and prejudice to contend with in the opposite scale, it may be thought that the balance of truth can hardly be held with a slack or an even hand; and that the infusion of a little more visionary speculation, of a little more popular indignation into the great Whig Review would be an advantage both to itself and to the cause of freedom. Much of this effect is chargeable less on an Epicurean levity of feeling or on party-trammels, than on real sanguineness of disposition, and a certain fineness of professional tact. Our sprightly Scotchman is not of a desponding and gloomy turn of mind. He argues well for the future hopes of mankind from the smallest beginnings, watches the slow,

gradual, reluctant growth of liberal views, and smiling sees the aloe of Reform blossom at the end of a hundred years; while the habitual subtlety of his mind makes him perceive decided advantages where vulgar ignorance or passion sees only doubts and difficulty; and a flaw in an adversary's argument stands him instead of the shout of a mob, the votes of a majority, or the fate of a pitched battle. The Editor is satisfied with his own conclusions, and does not make himself uneasy about the fate of mankind. The issue, he thinks, will verify his moderate and well-founded expectations.—We believe also that late events have given a more decided turn to Mr. Jeffrey's mind, and that he feels that as in the struggle between liberty and slavery, the views of the one party have been laid bare with their success, so the exertions on the other side should become more strenuous, and a more positive stand be made against the avowed and appalling encroachments of priestcraft and arbitrary power.

The characteristics of Mr. Jeffrey's general style as a writer correspond, we think, with what we have here stated as the characteristics of his mind. He is a master of the foils; he makes an exulting display of the dazzling fence of wit and argument. His strength consists in great range of knowledge, an equal familiarity with the principles and the details of a subject, and in a glancing brilliancy and rapidity of style. Indeed, we doubt whether the brilliancy of his manner does not resolve itself into the rapidity, the variety and aptness of his illustrations. His pen is never at a loss, never stands still; and would dazzle for this reason alone, like an eye that is ever in motion. Mr. Jeffrey is far from a flowery or affected writer; he has few tropes or figures, still less any odd startling thoughts or quaint innovations in expression:—but he has a constant supply of ingenious solutions and pertinent examples; he never proses, never grows dull, never wears an argument to tatters; and by the number, the liveliness and facility of his transitions, keeps up that appearance of vivacity, of novel and sparkling effect, for which others are too often indebted to singularity of combination or tinsel ornaments.

It may be discovered, by a nice observer, that Mr. Jeffrey's style of composition is that of a person accustomed to public speaking. There is no pause, no meagreness, no inanimateness, but a flow, a redundance and volubility like that of a stream or of a rolling-stone. The language is more copious than select, and sometimes two or three words perform the office of one. This copiousness and facility is perhaps an advantage in *extempore* speaking, where no stop or break is allowed in the discourse, and where any word or any number of words almost is better than coming to a dead stand; but in written

compositions it gives an air of either too much carelessness or too much labour. Mr. Jeffrey's excellence, as a public speaker, has betrayed him into this peculiarity. He makes fewer *blots* in addressing an audience than any one we remember to have heard. There is not a hair's-breadth space between any two of his words, nor is there a single expression either ill-chosen or out of its place. He speaks without stopping to take breath, with ease, with point, with elegance, and without 'spinning the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument.' He may be said to weave words into any shapes he pleases for use or ornament, as the glass-blower moulds the vitreous fluid with his breath; and his sentences shine like glass from their polished smoothness, and are equally transparent. His style of eloquence, indeed, is remarkable for neatness, for correctness, and epigrammatic point; and he has applied this as a standard to his written compositions, where the very same degree of correctness and precision produces, from the contrast between writing and speaking, an agreeable diffuseness, freedom and animation. Whenever the Scotch advocate has appeared at the bar of the English House of Lords, he has been admired by those who were in the habit of attending to speeches there, as having the greatest fluency of language and the greatest subtlety of distinction of any one of the profession. The law-reporters were as little able to follow him from the extreme rapidity of his utterance as from the tenuity and evanescent nature of his reasoning.

Mr. Jeffrey's conversation is equally lively, various, and instructive. There is no subject on which he is not *au fait*: no company in which he is not ready to scatter his pearls for sport. Whether it be politics, or poetry, or science, or anecdote, or wit, or raillery, he takes up his cue without effort, without preparation, and appears equally incapable of tiring himself or his hearers. His only difficulty seems to be, not to speak, but to be silent. There is a constitutional buoyancy and elasticity of mind about him that cannot subside into repose, much less sink into dulness. There may be more original talkers, persons who occasionally surprise or interest you more; few, if any, with a more uninterrupted flow of cheerfulness and animal spirits, with a greater fund of information, and with fewer specimens of the *bathos* in their conversation. He is never absurd, nor has he any favourite points which he is always bringing forward. It cannot be denied that there is something bordering on petulance of manner, but it is of that least offensive kind which may be accounted for from merit and from success, and implies no exclusive pretensions nor the least particle of ill-will to others. On the contrary, Mr. Jeffrey is profuse of his encomiums and admiration of others, but still with a

certain reservation of a right to differ or to blame. He cannot rest on one side of a question: he is obliged by a mercurial habit and disposition to vary his point of view. If he is ever tedious, it is from an excess of liveliness: he oppresses from a sense of airy lightness. He is always setting out on a fresh scent: there are always *relays* of topics; the harness is put to, and he rattles away as delightfully and as briskly as ever. New causes are called; he holds a brief in his hand for every possible question. This is a fault. Mr. Jeffrey is not obtrusive, is not impatient of opposition, is not unwilling to be interrupted; but what is said by another, seems to make no impression on him; he is bound to dispute, to answer it, as if he was in Court, or as if it were in a paltry Debating Society, where young beginners were trying their hands. This is not to maintain a character, or for want of good-nature—it is a thoughtless habit. He cannot help cross-examining a witness, or stating the adverse view of the question. He listens not to judge, but to reply. In consequence of this, you can as little tell the impression your observations make on him as what weight to assign to his. Mr. Jeffrey shines in mixed company; he is not good in a *tête-à-tête*. You can only show your wisdom or your wit in general society: but in private your follies or your weaknesses are not the least interesting topics; and our critic has neither any of his own to confess, nor does he take delight in hearing those of others. Indeed in Scotland generally, the display of personal character, the indulging your whims and humours in the presence of a friend, is not much encouraged—every one there is looked upon in the light of a machine or a collection of topics. They turn you round like a cylinder to see what use they can make of you, and drag you into a dispute with as little ceremony as they would drag out an article from an Encyclopedia. They criticise every thing, analyse every thing, argue upon every thing, dogmatise upon every thing; and the bundle of your habits, feelings, humours, follies and pursuits is regarded by them no more than a bundle of old clothes. They stop you in a sentiment by a question or a stare, and cut you short in a narrative by the time of night. The accomplished and ingenious person of whom we speak, has been a little infected by the tone of his countrymen—he is too didactic, too pugnacious, too full of electrical shocks, too much like a voltaic battery, and reposes too little on his own excellent good sense, his own love of ease, his cordial frankness of temper and unaffected candour. He ought to have belonged to us!

The severest of critics (as he has been sometimes termed) is the best-natured of men. Whatever there may be of wavering or indecision in Mr. Jeffrey's reasoning, or of harshness in his critical

decisions, in his disposition there is nothing but simplicity and kindness. He is a person that no one knows without esteeming, and who both in his public connections and private friendships, shows the same manly uprightness and unbiassed independence of spirit. At a distance, in his writings, or even in his manner, there may be something to excite a little uneasiness and apprehension: in his conduct there is nothing to except against. He is a person of strict integrity himself, without pretence or affectation; and knows how to respect this quality in others, without prudery or intolerance. He can censure a friend or a stranger, and serve him effectually at the same time. He expresses his disapprobation, but not as an excuse for closing up the avenues of his liberality. He is a Scotchman without one particle of hypocrisy, of cant, of servility, or selfishness in his composition. He has not been spoiled by fortune—has not been tempted by power—is firm without violence, friendly without weakness—a critic and even-tempered, a casuist and an honest man—and amidst the toils of his profession and the distractions of the world, retains the gaiety, the unpretending carelessness and simplicity of youth. Mr. Jeffrey in his person is slight, with a countenance of much expression, and a voice of great flexibility and acuteness of tone.

MR. BROUGHAM—SIR F. BURDETT

There is a class of eloquence which has been described and particularly insisted on, under the style and title of *Irish Eloquence*: there is another class which it is not absolutely unfair to oppose to this, and that is the Scotch. The first of these is entirely the offspring of *impulse*: the last of *mechanism*. The one is as full of fancy as it is bare of facts: the other excludes all fancy, and is weighed down with facts. The one is all fire, the other all ice: the one nothing but enthusiasm, extravagance, eccentricity; the other nothing but logical deductions, and the most approved postulates. The one without scruple, nay, with reckless zeal, throws the reins loose on the neck of the imagination: the other pulls up with a curb-bridle, and starts at every casual object it meets in the way as a bug-bear. The genius of Irish oratory stands forth in the naked majesty of untutored nature, its eye glancing wildly round on all objects, its tongue darting forked fire: the genius of Scottish eloquence is armed in all the panoply of the schools; its drawling, ambiguous dialect seconds its circumspect dialectics; from behind the vizor that guards its mouth and shadows its pent-up brows, it sees no visions but its own set purpose, its own

data, and its own dogmas. It 'has no figures, nor no fantasies,' but 'those which busy care draws in the brains of men,' or which set off its own superior acquirements and wisdom. It scorns to 'tread the primrose path of dalliance'—it shrinks back from it as from a precipice, and keeps in the iron rail-way of the understanding. Irish oratory, on the contrary, is a sort of aëronaut: it is always going up in a balloon, and breaking its neck, or coming down in the parachute. It is filled full with gaseous matter, with whim and fancy, with alliteration and antithesis, with heated passion and bloated metaphors, that burst the slender silken covering of sense; and the airy pageant, that glittered in empty space and rose in all the bliss of ignorance, flutters and sinks down to its native bogs! If the Irish orator riots in a studied neglect of his subject and a natural confusion of ideas, playing with words, ranging them into all sorts of fantastic combinations, because in the unlettered void or chaos of his mind there is no obstacle to their coalescing into any shapes they please, it must be confessed that the eloquence of the Scotch is encumbered with an excess of knowledge, that it cannot get on for a crowd of difficulties, that it staggers under a load of topics, that it is so environed in the forms of logic and rhetoric as to be equally precluded from originality or absurdity, from beauty or deformity:—the plea of humanity is lost by going through the process of law, the firm and manly tone of principle is exchanged for the wavering and pitiful cant of policy, the living bursts of passion are reduced to a defunct *common-place*, and all true imagination is buried under the dust and rubbish of learned models and imposing authorities. If the one is a bodiless phantom, the other is a lifeless skeleton: if the one in its feverish and hectic extravagance resembles a sick man's dream, the other is akin to the sleep of death—cold, stiff, unfeeling, monumental! Upon the whole, we despair less of the first than of the last, for the principle of life and motion is, after all, the primary condition of all genius. The luxuriant wildness of the one may be disciplined, and its excesses sobered down into reason; but the dry and rigid formality of the other can never burst the shell or husk of oratory. It is true that the one is disfigured by the puerilities and affectation of a Phillips; but then it is redeemed by the manly sense and fervour of a Plunket, the impassioned appeals and flashes of wit of a Curran, and by the golden tide of wisdom, eloquence, and fancy, that flowed from the lips of a Burke. In the other, we do not sink so low in the negative series; but we get no higher in the ascending scale than a Mackintosh or a Brougham.[1] It may be suggested that the late Lord Erskine

[1] Mr. Brougham is not a Scotchman literally, but by adoption.

enjoyed a higher reputation as an orator than either of these: but he owed it to a dashing and graceful manner, to presence of mind, and to great animation in delivering his sentiments. Stripped of these outward and personal advantages, the matter of his speeches, like that of his writings, is nothing, or perfectly inert and dead.

Mr. Brougham is from the North of England, but he was educated in Edinburgh, and represents that school of politics and political economy in the House. He differs from Sir James Mackintosh in this, that he deals less in abstract principles, and more in individual details. He makes less use of general topics, and more of immediate facts. Sir James is better acquainted with the balance of an argument in old authors; Mr. Brougham with the balance of power in Europe. If the first is better versed in the progress of history, no man excels the last in a knowledge of the course of exchange. He is apprised of the exact state of our exports and imports, and scarce a ship clears out its cargo at Liverpool or Hull, but he has notice of the bill of lading. Our colonial policy, prison-discipline, the state of the Hulks, agricultural distress, commerce and manufactures, the Bullion question, the Catholic question, the Bourbons or the Inquisition, 'domestic treason, foreign levy,' nothing can come amiss to him—he is at home in the crooked mazes of rotten boroughs, is not baffled by Scotch law, and can follow the meaning of one of Mr. Canning's speeches. With so many resources, with such variety and solidity of information, Mr. Brougham is rather a powerful and alarming, than an effectual debater. In so many details (which he himself goes through with unwearied and unshrinking resolution) the spirit of the question is lost to others who have not the same voluntary power of attention or the same interest in hearing that he has in speaking; the original impulse that urged him forward is forgotten in so wide a field, in so interminable a career. If he can, others *cannot* carry all he knows in their heads at the same time; a rope of circumstantial evidence does not hold well together, nor drag the unwilling mind along with it (the willing mind hurries on before it, and grows impatient and absent)—he moves in an unmanageable procession of facts and proofs, instead of coming to the point at once—and his premises (so anxious is he to proceed on sure and ample grounds) overlay and block up his conclusion, so that you cannot arrive at it, or not till the first fury and shock of the onset is over. The ball, from the too great width of the *calibre* from which it is sent, and from striking against such a number of hard, projecting points, is almost spent before it reaches its destination. He keeps a ledger or a debtor-and-creditor account between the Government and the Country, posts so much actual crime, corruption, and injustice

against so much contingent advantage or sluggish prejudice, and at the bottom of the page brings in the balance of indignation and contempt, where it is due. But people are not to be *calculated into* contempt or indignation on abstract grounds; for however they may submit to this process where their own interests are concerned, in what regards the public good we believe they must see and feel instinctively, or not at all. There is (it is to be lamented) a good deal of froth as well as strength in the popular spirit, which will not admit of being *decanted* or served out in formal driblets; nor will spleen (the soul of Opposition) bear to be corked up in square patent bottles, and kept for future use! In a word, Mr. Brougham's is ticketed and labelled eloquence, registered and in numeros (like the successive parts of a Scotch Encyclopedia)—it is clever, knowing, imposing, masterly, an extraordinary display of clearness of head, of quickness and energy of thought, of application and industry; but it is not the eloquence of the imagination or the heart, and will never save a nation or an individual from perdition.

Mr. Brougham has one considerable advantage in debate: he is overcome by no false modesty, no deference to others. But then, by a natural consequence or parity of reasoning, he has little sympathy with other people, and is liable to be mistaken in the effect his arguments will have upon them. He relies too much, among other things, on the patience of his hearers, and on his ability to turn every thing to his own advantage. He accordingly goes to the full length of *his tether* (in vulgar phrase) and often overshoots the mark. *C'est dommage*. He has no reserve of discretion, no retentiveness of mind or check upon himself. He needs, with so much wit,

'As much again to govern it.'

He cannot keep a good thing or a shrewd piece of information in his possession, though the letting it out should mar a cause. It is not that he thinks too much of himself, too little of his cause: but he is absorbed in the pursuit of truth as an abstract inquiry, he is led away by the headstrong and overmastering activity of his own mind. He is borne along, almost involuntarily, and not impossibly against his better judgment, by the throng and restlessness of his ideas as by a crowd of people in motion. His perceptions are literal, tenacious, *epileptic*—his understanding voracious of facts, and equally communicative of them—and he proceeds to

'——— Pour out all as plain
As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne'—

without either the virulence of the one or the *bonhommie* of the other.

The repeated, smart, unforeseen discharges of the truth jar those that are next him. He does not dislike this state of irritation and collision, indulges his curiosity or his triumph, till by calling for more facts or hazarding some extreme inference, he urges a question to the verge of a precipice, his adversaries urge it *over*, and he himself shrinks back from the consequence—

'Scared at the sound himself has made!'

Mr. Brougham has great fearlessness, but not equal firmness; and after going too far on the *forlorn hope*, turns short round without due warning to others or respect for himself. He is adventurous, but easily panic-struck; and sacrifices the vanity of self-opinion to the necessity of self-preservation. He is too improvident for a leader, too petulant for a partisan; and does not sufficiently consult those with whom he is supposed to act in concert. He sometimes leaves them in the lurch, and is sometimes left in the lurch by them. He wants the principle of co-operation. He frequently, in a fit of thoughtless levity, gives an unexpected turn to the political machine, which alarms older and more experienced heads: if he was not himself the first to get out of harm's way and escape from the danger, it would be well!—We hold, indeed, as a general rule, that no man born or bred in Scotland can be a great orator, unless he is a mere quack; or a great statesman, unless he turns plain knave. The national gravity is against the first: the national caution is against the last. To a Scotchman if a thing *is, it is;* there is an end of the question with his opinion about it. He is positive and abrupt, and is not in the habit of conciliating the feelings or soothing the follies of others. His only way therefore to produce a popular effect is to sail with the stream of prejudice, and to vent common dogmas, 'the total grist, unsifted, husks and all,' from some evangelical pulpit. This may answer, and it has answered. On the other hand, if a Scotchman, born or bred, comes to think at all of the feelings of others, it is not as they regard them, but as their opinion reacts on his own interest and safety. He is therefore either pragmatical and offensive, or if he tries to please, he becomes cowardly and fawning. His public spirit wants pliancy; his selfish compliances go all lengths. He is as impracticable as a popular partisan, as he is mischievous as a tool of Government. We do not wish to press this argument farther, and must leave it involved in some degree of obscurity, rather than bring the armed intellect of a whole nation on our heads.

Mr. Brougham speaks in a loud and unmitigated tone of voice, sometimes almost approaching to a scream. He is fluent, rapid, vehement, full of his subject, with evidently a great deal to say, and

very regardless of the manner of saying it. As a lawyer, he has not hitherto been remarkably successful. He is not profound in cases and reports, nor does he take much interest in the peculiar features of a particular cause, or show much adroitness in the management of it. He carries too much weight of metal for ordinary and petty occasions: he must have a pretty large question to discuss, and must make *thorough-stitch* work of it. He, however, had an encounter with Mr. Phillips the other day, and shook all his tender blossoms, so that they fell to the ground, and withered in an hour; but they soon bloomed again! Mr. Brougham writes almost, if not quite, as well as he speaks. In the midst of an Election contest he comes out to address the populace, and goes back to his study to finish an article for the Edinburgh Review; sometimes indeed wedging three or four articles (in the shape of *refaccimentos* of his own pamphlets or speeches in parliament) into a single number. Such indeed is the activity of his mind that it appears to require neither repose, nor any other stimulus than a delight in its own exercise. He can turn his hand to any thing, but he cannot be idle. There are few intellectual accomplishments which he does not possess, and possess in a very high degree. He speaks French (and, we believe, several other modern languages) fluently: is a capital mathematician, and obtained an introduction to the celebrated Carnot in this latter character, when the conversation turned on squaring the circle, and not on the propriety of confining France within the natural boundary of the Rhine. Mr. Brougham is, in fact, a striking instance of the versatility and strength of the human mind, and also in one sense of the length of human life, if we make a good use of our time. There is room enough to crowd almost every art and science into it. If we pass 'no day without a line,' visit no place without the company of a book, we may with ease fill libraries or empty them of their contents. Those who complain of the shortness of life, let it slide by them without wishing to seize and make the most of its golden minutes. The more we do, the more we can do; the more busy we are, the more leisure we have. If any one possesses any advantage in a considerable degree, he may make himself master of nearly as many more as he pleases, by employing his spare time and cultivating the waste faculties of his mind. While one person is determining on the choice of a profession or study, another shall have made a fortune or gained a merited reputation. While one person is dreaming over the meaning of a word, another will have learnt several languages. It is not incapacity, but indolence, indecision, want of imagination, and a proneness to a sort of mental tautology, to repeat the same images and tread the same circle, that

leaves us so poor, so dull, and inert as we are, so naked of acquirement, so barren of resources! While we are walking backwards and forwards between Charing-Cross and Temple-Bar, and sitting in the same coffee-house every day, we might make the grand tour of Europe, and visit the Vatican and the Louvre. Mr. Brougham, among other means of strengthening and enlarging his views, has visited, we believe, most of the courts, and turned his attention to most of the Constitutions of the continent. He is, no doubt, a very accomplished, active-minded, and admirable person.

Sir Francis Burdett, in many respects, affords a contrast to the foregoing character. He is a plain, unaffected, unsophisticated English gentleman. He is a person of great reading too and considerable information, but he makes very little display of these, unless it be to quote Shakespear, which he does often with extreme aptness and felicity. Sir Francis is one of the most pleasing speakers in the House, and is a prodigious favourite of the English people. So he ought to be: for he is one of the few remaining examples of the old English understanding and old English character. All that he pretends to is common sense and common honesty; and a greater compliment cannot be paid to these than the attention with which he is listened to in the House of Commons. We cannot conceive a higher proof of courage than the saying things which he has been known to say there; and we have seen him blush and appear ashamed of the truths he has been obliged to utter, like a bashful novice. He could not have uttered what he often did there, if, besides his general respectability, he had not been a very honest, a very good-tempered, and a very good-looking man. But there was evidently no wish to shine, nor any desire to offend: it was painful to him to hurt the feelings of those who heard him, but it was a higher duty in him not to suppress his sincere and earnest convictions. It is wonderful how much virtue and plain-dealing a man may be guilty of with impunity, if he has no vanity, or ill-nature, or duplicity to provoke the contempt or resentment of others, and to make them impatient of the superiority he sets up over them. We do not recollect that Sir Francis ever endeavoured to atone for any occasional indiscretions or intemperance by giving the Duke of York credit for the battle of Waterloo, or congratulating Ministers on the confinement of Buonaparte at St. Helena. There is no honest cause which he dares not avow: no oppressed individual that he is not forward to succour. He has the firmness of manhood with the unimpaired enthusiasm of youthful feeling about him. His principles are mellowed and improved, without having become less sound with time: for at one period he sometimes appeared to come charged to

the House with the petulance and caustic sententiousness he had imbibed at Wimbledon Common. He is never violent or in extremes, except when the people or the parliament happen to be out of their senses; and then he seems to regret the necessity of plainly telling them he thinks so, instead of pluming himself upon it or exulting over impending calamities. There is only one error he seems to labour under (which, we believe, he also borrowed from Mr. Horne Tooke or Major Cartwright), the wanting to go back to the early times of our Constitution and history in search of the principles of law and liberty. He might as well

'Hunt half a day for a forgotten dream.'

Liberty, in our opinion, is but a modern invention (the growth of books and printing)—and whether new or old, is not the less desirable. A man may be a patriot, without being an antiquary. This is the only point on which Sir Francis is at all inclined to a tincture of pedantry. In general, his love of liberty is pure, as it is warm and steady: his humanity is unconstrained and free. His heart does not ask leave of his head to feel; nor does prudence always keep a guard upon his tongue or his pen. No man writes a better letter to his Constituents than the Member for Westminster; and his compositions of that kind ought to be good, for they have occasionally cost him dear. He is the idol of the people of Westminster: few persons have a greater number of friends and well-wishers; and he has still greater reason to be proud of his enemies, for his integrity and independence have made them so. Sir Francis Burdett has often been left in a Minority in the House of Commons, with only one or two on his side. We suspect, unfortunately for his country, that History will be found to enter its protest on the same side of the question!

LORD ELDON AND MR. WILBERFORCE

Lord Eldon is an exceedingly good-natured man; but this does not prevent him, like other good-natured people, from consulting his own ease or interest. The character of *good-nature*, as it is called, has been a good deal mistaken; and the present Chancellor is not a bad illustration of the grounds of the prevailing error. When we happen to see an individual whose countenance is 'all tranquillity and smiles;' who is full of good-humour and pleasantry; whose manners are gentle and conciliating; who is uniformly temperate in his

expressions, and punctual and just in his every-day dealings; we are apt to conclude from so fair an outside, that

'All is conscience and tender heart

within also, and that such a one would not hurt a fly. And neither would he without a motive. But mere good-nature (or what passes in the world for such) is often no better than indolent selfishness. A person distinguished and praised for this quality will not needlessly offend others, because they may retaliate; and besides, it ruffles his own temper. He likes to enjoy a perfect calm, and to live in an interchange of kind offices. He suffers few things to irritate or annoy him. He has a fine oiliness in his disposition, which smooths the waves of passion as they rise. He does not enter into the quarrels or enmities of others; bears their calamities with patience; he listens to the din and clang of war, the earthquake and the hurricane of the political and moral world with the temper and spirit of a philosopher; no act of injustice puts him beside himself, the follies and absurdities of mankind never give him a moment's uneasiness, he has none of the ordinary causes of fretfulness or chagrin that torment others from the undue interest they take in the conduct of their neighbours or in the public good. None of these idle or frivolous sources of discontent, that make such havoc with the peace of human life, ever discompose his features or alter the serenity of his pulse. If a nation is robbed of its rights,

'If wretches hang that Ministers may dine,'—

the laughing jest still collects in his eye, the cordial squeeze of the hand is still the same. But tread on the toe of one of these amiable and imperturbable mortals, or let a lump of soot fall down the chimney and spoil their dinners, and see how they will bear it. All their patience is confined to the accidents that befal others: all their good-humour is to be resolved into giving themselves no concern about any thing but their own ease and self-indulgence. Their charity begins and ends at home. Their being free from the common infirmities of temper is owing to their indifference to the common feelings of humanity; and if you touch the sore place, they betray more resentment, and break out (like spoiled children) into greater fractiousness than others, partly from a greater degree of selfishness, and partly because they are taken by surprise, and mad to think they have not guarded every point against annoyance or attack, by a habit of callous insensibility and pampered indolence.

An instance of what we mean occurred but the other day. An allusion was made in the House of Commons to something in the proceedings in the Court of Chancery, and the Lord Chancellor

comes to his place in the Court, with the statement in his hand, fire in his eyes, and a direct charge of falsehood in his mouth, without knowing any thing certain of the matter, without making any inquiry into it, without using any precaution or putting the least restraint upon himself, and all on no better authority than a common newspaper report. The thing was (not that we are imputing any strong blame in this case, we merely bring it as an illustration) it touched himself, his office, the inviolability of his jurisdiction, the unexceptionableness of his proceedings, and the wet blanket of the Chancellor's temper instantly took fire like tinder! All the fine balancing was at an end; all the doubts, all the delicacy, all the candour real or affected, all the chances that there might be a mistake in the report, all the decencies to be observed towards a Member of the House, are overlooked by the blindness of passion, and the wary Judge pounces upon the paragraph without mercy, without a moment's delay, or the smallest attention to forms! This was indeed serious business, there was to be no trifling here; every instant was an age till the Chancellor had discharged his sense of indignation on the head of the indiscreet interloper on his authority. Had it been another person's case, another person's dignity that had been compromised, another person's conduct that had been called in question, who doubts but that the matter might have stood over till the next term, that the Noble Lord would have taken the Newspaper home in his pocket, that he would have compared it carefully with other newspapers, that he would have written in the most mild and gentlemanly terms to the Honourable Member to inquire into the truth of the statement, that he would have watched a convenient opportunity good-humouredly to ask other Honourable Members what all this was about, that the greatest caution and fairness would have been observed, and that to this hour the lawyers' clerks and the junior counsel would have been in the greatest admiration of the Chancellor's nicety of discrimination, and the utter inefficacy of the heats, importunities, haste, and passions of others to influence his judgment? This would have been true; yet his readiness to decide and to condemn where he himself is concerned, shows that passion is not dead in him, nor subject to the control of reason; but that self-love is the mainspring that moves it, though on all beyond that limit he looks with the most perfect calmness and philosophic indifference.

> 'Resistless passion sways us to the mood
> Of what it likes or loaths.'

All people are passionate in what concerns themselves, or in what they take an interest in. The range of this last is different in different

persons; but the want of passion is but another name for the want of sympathy and imagination.

The Lord Chancellor's impartiality and conscientious exactness are proverbial; and is, we believe, as inflexible as it is delicate in all cases that occur in the stated routine of legal practice. The impatience, the irritation, the hopes, the fears, the confident tone of the applicants move him not a jot from his intended course, he looks at their claims with the 'lack lustre eye' of professional indifference. Power and influence apart, his next strongest passion is to indulge in the exercise of professional learning and skill, to amuse himself with the dry details and intricate windings of the law of equity. He delights to balance a straw, to see a feather turn the scale, or make it even again; and divides and subdivides a scruple to the smallest fraction. He unravels the web of argument and pieces it together again; folds it up and lays it aside, that he may examine it more at his leisure. He hugs indecision to his breast, and takes home a modest doubt or a nice point to solace himself with it in protracted, luxurious dalliance. Delay seems, in his mind, to be of the very essence of justice. He no more hurries through a question than if no one was waiting for the result, and he was merely a *dilettanti*, fanciful judge, who played at my Lord Chancellor, and busied himself with quibbles and punctilios as an idle hobby and harmless illusion. The phlegm of the Chancellor's disposition gives one almost a surfeit of impartiality and candour: we are sick of the eternal poise of childish dilatoriness; and would wish law and justice to be decided at once by a cast of the dice (as they were in Rabelais) rather than be kept in frivolous and tormenting suspense. But there is a limit even to this extreme refinement and scrupulousness of the Chancellor. The understanding acts only in the absence of the passions. At the approach of the loadstone, the needle trembles, and points to it. The air of a political question has a wonderful tendency to brace and quicken the learned Lord's faculties. The breath of a court speedily oversets a thousand objections, and scatters the cobwebs of his brain. The secret wish of power is a thumping *make-weight*, where all is so nicely balanced beforehand. In the case of a celebrated beauty and heiress, and the brother of a Noble Lord, the Chancellor hesitated long, and went through the forms, as usual: but who ever doubted, where all this indecision would end? No man in his senses, for a single instant! We shall not press this point, which is rather a ticklish one. Some persons thought that from entertaining a fellow-feeling on the subject, the Chancellor would have been ready to favour the Poet-Laureat's application to the Court of Chancery for an injunction against Wat

Tyler. His Lordship's sentiments on such points are not so variable, he has too much at stake. He recollected the year 1794, though Mr. Southey had forgotten it!—

The personal always prevails over the intellectual, where the latter is not backed by strong feeling and principle. Where remote and speculative objects do not excite a predominant interest and passion, gross and immediate ones are sure to carry the day, even in ingenuous and well-disposed minds. The will yields necessarily to some motive or other; and where the public good or distant consequences excite no sympathy in the breast, either from short-sightedness or an easiness of temperament that shrinks from any violent effort or painful emotion, self-interest, indolence, the opinion of others, a desire to please, the sense of personal obligation, come in and fill up the void of public spirit, patriotism, and humanity. The best men in the world in their own natural dispositions or in private life (for this reason) often become the most dangerous public characters, from their pliancy to the unruly passions of others, and from their having no set-off in strong moral *stamina* to the temptations that are held out to them, if, as is frequently the case, they are men of versatile talent or patient industry.—Lord Eldon has one of the best-natured faces in the world; it is pleasant to meet him in the street, plodding along with an umbrella under his arm, without one trace of pride, of spleen, or discontent in his whole demeanour, void of offence, with almost rustic simplicity and honesty of appearance—a man that makes friends at first sight, and could hardly make enemies, if he would; and whose only fault is that he cannot say *Nay* to power, or subject himself to an unkind word or look from a King or a Minister. He is a thorough-bred Tory. Others boggle or are at fault in their career, or give back at a pinch, they split into different factions, have various objects to distract them, their private friendships or antipathies stand in their way; but he has never flinched, never gone back, never missed his way, he is an *out-and-outer* in this respect, his allegiance has been without flaw, like 'one entire and perfect chrysolite,' his implicit understanding is a kind of taffeta-lining to the Crown, his servility has assumed an air of the most determined independence, and he has

'Read his history in a Prince's eyes!'—

There has been no stretch of power attempted in his time that he has not seconded: no existing abuse, so odious or so absurd, that he has not sanctioned it. He has gone the whole length of the most unpopular designs of Ministers. When the heavy artillery of interest, power, and prejudice is brought into the field, the paper pellets of the

brain go for nothing: his labyrinth of nice, lady-like doubts explodes like a mine of gunpowder. The Chancellor may weigh and palter—the courtier is decided, the politician is firm, and rivetted to his place in the Cabinet! On all the great questions that have divided party opinion or agitated the public mind, the Chancellor has been found uniformly and without a single exception on the side of prerogative and power, and against every proposal for the advancement of freedom. He was a strenuous supporter of the wars and coalitions against the principles of liberty abroad; he has been equally zealous in urging or defending every act and infringement of the Constitution, for abridging it at home: he at the same time opposes every amelioration of the penal laws, on the alleged ground of his abhorrence of even the shadow of innovation: he has studiously set his face against Catholic emancipation; he laboured hard in his vocation to prevent the abolition of the Slave Trade; he was Attorney-General in the trials for High Treason in 1794; and the other day in giving his opinion on the Queen's Trial, shed tears and protested his innocence before God! This was natural and to be expected; but on all occasions he is to be found at his post, true to the call of prejudice, of power, to the will of others and to his own interest. In the whole of his public career, and with all the goodness of his disposition, he has not shown 'so small a drop of pity as a wren's eye.' He seems to be on his guard against every thing liberal and humane as his weak side. Others relax in their obsequiousness either from satiety or disgust, or a hankering after popularity, or a wish to be thought above narrow prejudices. The Lord Chancellor alone is fixed and immovable. Is it want of understanding or of principle? No—it is want of imagination, a phlegmatic habit, an excess of false complaisance and good-nature. He signs a warrant in Council, devoting ten thousand men to an untimely death, with steady nerves—Is it that he is cruel and unfeeling? No!—but he thinks neither of their sufferings nor their cries; he sees only the gracious smile, the ready hand stretched out to thank him for his compliance with the dictates of rooted hate. He dooms a Continent to slavery. Is it that he is a tyrant, or an enemy to the human race? No!—but he cannot find in his heart to resist the commands or to give pain to a kind and generous benefactor. Common sense and justice are little better than vague terms to him: he acts upon his immediate feelings and least irksome impulses. The King's hand is velvet to the touch—the Woolsack is a seat of honour and profit! That is all he knows about the matter. As to abstract metaphysical calculations, the ox that stands staring at the corner of the street troubles his head as much about them as he does: yet this last is a very good sort of animal

with no harm or malice in him, unless he is goaded on to mischief, and then it is necessary to keep out of his way, or warn others against him!

Mr. Wilberforce is a less perfect character in his way. He acts from mixed motives. He would willingly serve two masters, God and Mammon. He is a person of many excellent and admirable qualifications, but he has made a mistake in wishing to reconcile those that are incompatible. He has a most winning eloquence, specious, persuasive, familiar, silver-tongued, is amiable, charitable, conscientious, pious, loyal, humane, tractable to power, accessible to popularity, honouring the king, and no less charmed with the homage of his fellow-citizens. 'What lacks he then?' Nothing but an economy of good parts. By aiming at too much, he has spoiled all, and neutralised what might have been an estimable character, distinguished by signal services to mankind. A man must take his choice not only between virtue and vice, but between different virtues. Otherwise, he will not gain his own approbation, or secure the respect of others. The graces and accomplishments of private life mar the man of business and the statesman. There is a severity, a sternness, a self-denial, and a painful sense of duty required in the one, which ill-befits the softness and sweetness which should characterise the other. Loyalty, patriotism, friendship, humanity, are all virtues; but may they not sometimes clash? By being unwilling to forego the praise due to any, we may forfeit the reputation of all; and, instead of uniting the suffrages of the whole world in our favour, we may end in becoming a sort of by-word for affectation, cant, hollow professions, trimming, fickleness, and effeminate imbecility. It is best to choose and act up to some one leading character, as it is best to have some settled profession or regular pursuit in life.

We can readily believe that Mr. Wilberforce's first object and principle of action is to do what he thinks right: his next (and that we fear is of almost equal weight with the first) is to do what will be thought so by other people. He is always at a game of *hawk and buzzard* between these two: his 'conscience will not budge,' unless the world goes with it. He does not seem greatly to dread the denunciation in Scripture, but rather to court it—'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!' We suspect he is not quite easy in his mind, because West-India planters and Guinea traders do not join in his praise. His ears are not strongly enough tuned to drink in the execrations of the spoiler and the oppressor as the sweetest music. It is not enough that one-half of the human species (the images of God carved in ebony, as old Fuller calls them) shout his name as a champion and a saviour through vast burning zones, and moisten their parched lips with the gush of gratitude for deliverance

from chains—he must have a Prime-Minister drink his health at a Cabinet-dinner for aiding to rivet on those of his country and of Europe! He goes hand and heart along with Government in all their notions of legitimacy and political aggrandizement, in the hope that they will leave him a sort of *no-man's ground* of humanity in the Great Desert, where his reputation for benevolence and public spirit may spring up and flourish, till its head touches the clouds, and it stretches out its branches to the farthest part of the earth. He has no mercy on those who claim a property in negro-slaves as so much live-stock on their estates; the country rings with the applause of his wit, his eloquence, and his indignant appeals to common sense and humanity on this subject—but not a word has he to say, not a whisper does he breathe against the claim set up by the Despots of the Earth over their Continental subjects, but does every thing in his power to confirm and sanction it! He must give no offence. Mr. Wilberforce's humanity will go all lengths that it can with safety and discretion: but it is not to be supposed that it should lose him his seat for Yorkshire, the smile of Majesty, or the countenance of the loyal and pious. He is anxious to do all the good he can without hurting himself or his fair fame. His conscience and his character compound matters very amicably. He rather patronises honesty than is a martyr to it. His patriotism, his philanthropy are not so ill-bred, as to quarrel with his loyalty or to banish him from the first circles. He preaches vital Christianity to untutored savages; and tolerates its worst abuses in civilized states. He thus shows his respect for religion without offending the clergy, or circumscribing the sphere of his usefulness. There is in all this an appearance of a good deal of cant and tricking. His patriotism may be accused of being servile; his humanity ostentatious; his loyalty conditional; his religion a mixture of fashion and fanaticism. 'Out upon such half-faced fellowship!' Mr. Wilberforce has the pride of being familiar with the great; the vanity of being popular; the conceit of an approving conscience. He is coy in his approaches to power: his public spirit is, in a manner, *under the rose*. He thus reaps the credit of independence, without the obloquy; and secures the advantages of servility, without incurring any obligations. He has two strings to his bow:—he by no means neglects his worldly interests, while he expects a bright reversion in the skies. Mr. Wilberforce is far from being a hypocrite; but he is, we think, as fine a specimen of *moral equivocation* as can well be conceived. A hypocrite is one who is the very reverse of, or who despises the character he pretends to be: Mr. Wilberforce would be all that he pretends to be, and he is it in fact, as far as words, plausible theories, good inclinations, and easy

services go, but not in heart and soul, or so as to give up the appearance of any one of his pretensions to preserve the reality of any other. He carefully chooses his ground to fight the battles of loyalty, religion, and humanity, and it is such as is always safe and advantageous to himself! This is perhaps hardly fair, and it is of dangerous or doubtful tendency. Lord Eldon, for instance, is known to be a thorough-paced ministerialist: his opinion is only that of his party. But Mr. Wilberforce is not a party-man. He is the more looked up to on this account, but not with sufficient reason. By tampering with different temptations and personal projects, he has all the air of the most perfect independence, and gains a character for impartiality and candour, when he is only striking a balance in his mind between the *éclat* of differing from a Minister on some 'vantage ground, and the risk or odium that may attend it. He carries all the weight of his artificial popularity over to the Government on vital points and hard-run questions; while they, in return, lend him a little of the gilding of court-favour to set off his disinterested philanthropy and tramontane enthusiasm. As a leader or a follower, he makes an odd jumble of interests. By virtue of religious sympathy, he has brought the Saints over to the side of the abolition of Negro slavery. This his adversaries think hard and stealing a march upon them. What have the Saints to do with freedom or reform of any kind?—Mr. Wilberforce's style of speaking is not quite *parliamentary*, it is halfway between that and *evangelical*. He is altogether a *double-entendre*: the very tone of his voice is a *double-entendre*. It winds, and undulates, and glides up and down on texts of Scriptures, and scraps from Paley, and trite sophistry, and pathetic appeals to his hearers in a faltering, improgressive, side-long way, like those birds of weak wing, that are borne from their strait-forward course

'By every little breath that under heaven is blown.'

Something of this fluctuating, time-serving principle was visible even in the great question of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. He was, at one time, half inclined to surrender it into Mr. Pitt's dilatory hands, and seemed to think the gloss of novelty was gone from it, and the gaudy colouring of popularity sunk into the *sable* ground from which it rose! It was, however, persisted in and carried to a triumphant conclusion. Mr. Wilberforce said too little on this occasion of one, compared with whom he was but the frontispiece to that great chapter in the history of the world—the mask, the varnishing, and painting—the man that effected it by Herculean labours of body, and equally gigantic labours of mind, was Clarkson, the true Apostle of human Redemption on that occasion, and who, it

is remarkable, resembles in his person and lineaments more than one of the Apostles in the *Cartoons* of Raphael. He deserves to be added to the Twelve![1]

MR. CANNING

Mr. Canning was the cleverest boy at Eton: he is, perhaps, the cleverest man in the House of Commons. It is, however, in the sense in which, according to Mr. Wordsworth, 'the child is father to the man.' He has grown up entirely out of what he then was. He has merely ingrafted a set of Parliamentary phrases and the technicalities of debate on the themes and school-exercises he was set to compose when a boy. Nor has he ever escaped from the trammels imposed on youthful genius: he has never assumed a manly independence of mind. He has been all his life in the habit of getting up a speech at the nod of a Minister, as he used to get up a thesis under the direction of his school-master. The *matter* is nothing; the only question is, how he shall express himself. The consequence has been as might be expected. Not being at liberty to chuse his own side of the question, nor to look abroad into the world for original (but perhaps unwelcome) observations, nor to follow up a strict chain of reasoning into its unavoidable consequences, the whole force of his mind has been exhausted in an attention to the ornaments of style and to an agreeable and imposing selection of topics. It is his business and his inclination to embellish what is trite, to gloss over what is true, to vamp up some feeble sophism, to spread the colours of a meretricious fancy over the unexpected exposure of some dark intrigue, some glaring iniquity—

> 'Like as the sun-burnt Indians do array
> Their tawny bodies in their proudest plight
> With painted plumes in goodly order dight:
> . . . . . .
> As those same plumes, so seemed he vain and light,
> That by his gait might easily appear;
> For still he fared as dancing in delight,
> And in his hands a windy fan did bear,
> That in the idle air he moved still here and there.'
>
> Spenser.

[1] After all, the best as well as most amusing comment on the character just described was that made by Sheridan, who being picked up in no very creditable plight by the watch, and asked rather roughly who he was, made answer—'I am Mr. Wilberforce!' The guardians of the night conducted him home with all the honours due to Grace and Nature.

His reasoning is a tissue of glittering sophistry; his language is a *cento* of florid common-places. The smooth monotony of his style is indeed as much borrowed, is as little his own, as the courtly and often fulsome strain of his sentiments. He has no steady principles, no strong passions, nothing original, masculine, or striking in thought or expression. There is a feeble, diffuse, showy, Asiatic redundancy in all his speeches—something vapid, something second-hand in the whole cast of his mind. The light that proceeds from it gleams from the mouldering materials of corruption: the flowers that are seen there, gay and flaunting, bloom over the grave of humanity!—Mr. Canning never, by any chance, reminds one of the poet or the philosopher, of the admirer of nature, or even the man of the world—he is a mere House-of-Commons man, or, since he was transferred there from College, appears never to have seen or thought of any other place. He may be said to have passed his life in making and learning to make speeches. All other objects and pursuits seem to have been quite lost upon him. He has overlooked the ordinary objects of nature, the familiar interests of human life, as beneath his notice.[1] There is no allusion in any of his speeches to anything passing out of the House, or not to be found in the classics. Their tone is quite Parliamentary—his is the Delphin edition of Nature. Not an image has struck his eye, not an incident has touched his heart, any farther than it could be got up for rhetorical and stage effect. This has an ill effect upon his speeches:—it gives them that shining and bloated appearance which is the result of the confined and heated atmosphere of the House. They have the look of exotics, of artificial, hot-house plants. Their glossiness, their luxuriance, and gorgeousness of colour are greater than their strength or *stamina*: they are forced, not lasting, nor will they bear transplanting from the rank and noxious soil in which they grow. Or rather, perhaps, they bear the same relation to eloquence that artificial flowers do to real ones—alike, yet not the same, without vital heat or the power of reproduction, printed, passionless, specious mockeries. They are, in fact, not the growth of truth, of nature, and feeling, but of state policy, of art, and practice. To deny that Mr. Canning has arrived to a great perfection (perhaps the greatest) in the manufacture of these sort of *common-places*, elegant, but somewhat tarnished, imposing, but not solid, would, we think, show a want of candour: to affirm that he has ever done anything

[1] Mr. Canning, when on a tour to the Lakes, did Mr. Wordsworth the honour of paying him a visit. The favour was duly appreciated, but quite unexpected. Really, we do not know any one so little capable of appreciating the *Lyrical Ballads*.

more (in his serious attempts) would, we think, show an equal want of taste and understanding.[1]

The way in which Mr. Canning gets up the staple-commodity of his speeches appears to be this. He hears an observation on the excellence of the English Constitution, or on the dangers of Reform and the fickleness and headstrong humours of the people, dropped by some Member of the House, or he meets with it in an old Debate in the time of Sir Robert Walpole, or in Paley's Moral and Political Philosophy, which our accomplished scholar read, of course, as the established text-book at the University. He turns it in his mind: by dint of memory and ingenuity he illustrates it by the application of some well-known and well-authenticated simile at hand, such as 'the vessel of the state,' 'the torrent of popular fury,' 'the precipice of reform,' 'the thunderbolt of war,' 'the smile of peace,' &c. He improves the hint by the help of a little play upon words and upon an idle fancy into an allegory, he hooks this on to a verbal inference, which takes you by surprise, equally from the novelty of the premises and the flatness of the conclusion, refers to a passage in Cicero in support of his argument, quotes his authority, relieves exhausted attention by a sounding passage from Virgil, 'like the morn risen on mid-noon,' and launches the whole freight of wisdom, wit, learning, and fancy, on the floor of St. Stephen's Chapel, where it floats and glitters amidst the mingled curiosity and admiration of both sides of the House—

'Scylla heard,
And fell Charybdis murmur'd soft applause.'

Beneath the broad and gilded chandelier that throws its light upon 'the nation's Great Divan,' Mr. Canning piles the lofty harangue, high over-arched with metaphor, dazzling with epithets, sparkling with jests—take it out of doors, or examine it by the light of common sense, and it is no more than a paltry string of sophisms, of trite truisms, and sorry buffooneries. There is also a House-of-Commons jargon as well as a scholastic pedantry in this gentleman's style of oratory, which is very displeasing to all but professional ears. 'The Honourable and Learned Gentleman,' and 'his Honourable and Gallant Friend,' are trolled over the tongue of the Honourable Speaker, 'loud as a trumpet with a silver sound,' and fill up the pauses of the sense or the gaps in the logic with a degree of burlesque

[1] We once heard it said, that 'Mr. Canning had the most elegant mind since Virgil.' But we could not assent to this remark, as we just then happened to think of Claude Lorraine.

self-complacency and pompous inanity. Mr. Canning speaks by rote; and if the words he utters become the mouth and round a period well, he cares little how cheaply he comes by them, or how dear they cost the country! Such mechanic helps to style and technical flourishes and trappings of upstart self-importance are, however, unworthy of the meanest underling of office.

There is, notwithstanding, a facility, a brilliancy, and an elegance in Mr. Canning's general style, always graceful, never abrupt, never meagre, never dry, copious without confusion, dignified without stiffness, perspicuous yet remote from common life, that must excite surprise in an *extempore* speaker. Mr. Canning, we apprehend, is *not* an *extempore* speaker. He only makes set speeches on set occasions. He indeed hooks them in as answers to some one that has gone before him in the debate, by taking up and commenting on a single sentence or so, but he immediately recurs to some old and favourite topic, launches into the middle of the stream, or mounts upon the *high horse*, and rides it to the end of the chapter. He never (that we are aware of) grappled with a powerful antagonist, overthrew him on the spot, or contested the point with him foot to foot. Mr. Canning's replies are *evasions*. He indeed made a capital and very deservedly-admired reply to Sir John Coxe Hippesley; but Sir John had given notice of all his motions a month beforehand, and Mr. Canning had only to lie in ambush for him with a whole magazine of facts, arguments, alliterations, quotations, jests, and squibs, prepared ready to explode and blow him up into the air in an instant. In this manner he contrives to slip into the debate and speak to the question, as if he had lately entered the House and heard the arguments on the other side stated for the first time in his life. He has conned his speeches over for a week or a month previously, but he gives these premeditated effusions the effect of witty impromptus—the spontaneous ebullitions of the laughter or indignation or lofty enthusiasm of the moment. His manner tells this. It is that of a person trying to recollect a speech, and reciting it from beginning to end with studied gesture, and in an emphatic but monotonous and somewhat affected tone of voice, rather than of a person uttering words and thoughts that have occurred to him for the first time, and hurried away by an involuntary impulse, speaking with more or less hesitation, faster or slower, and with more or less passion, according as the occasion requires.

Mr. Canning is a *conventional* speaker; he is an *optional* politician. He has a ready and splendid assortment of arguments upon all ordinary questions: he takes that side or view of a question that is dictated by his vanity, his interest, or his habits, and endeavours to make the best

he can of it. Truth, liberty, justice, humanity, war or peace, civilization or barbarism, are things of little consequence, except for him to make speeches upon them. He thinks 'the worse the better reason,' if he can only make it appear so to others; and in the attempt to confound and mislead, he is greatly assisted by really perceiving no difference himself. It is not what a thing is, but what he can say about it, that is ever uppermost in his mind; and why should he be squeamish or have any particular choice, since his words are all equally fine, and delivered with equal volubility of tongue! His balanced periods are the scale 'that makes these odds all even.' Our Orator does not confine himself to any one view of a subject. He does not blind himself by any dull prejudice: he does not tie himself down to any pedantic rules or abstract principle. He does not listen implicitly to common sense, nor does he follow the independent dictates of his own judgment. No, he picks and chuses among all these, as best suits his purpose. He plucks out the grey hairs of a question, and then again the black. He shifts his position; it is a *ride-and-tie* system with him. He mounts sometimes behind prejudice, and sometimes behind reason. He is now with the wise, and then again with the vulgar. He drivels, or he raves. He is now wedded to antiquity, anon there is no innovation too startling for him. At one time he is literal, at another visionary and romantic. At one time the honour of the country sways him, at another its interest. One moment he is all for liberty, and the next for slavery. First we are to hold the balance of Europe, and to dictate and domineer over the whole world; and then we are to creep into our shells and draw in our horns; one moment resembling Don Quixote, and the next playing the part of Sancho Panza! And why not? All these are topics, are *cues* used in the game of politics, are colours in the changeable coat of party, are dilemmas in casuistry, are pretexts in diplomacy; and Mr. Canning has them all at his fingers' ends. What is there then to prevent his using any of them as he pleases? Nothing in the world but feeling or principle; and as Mr. Canning is not withheld by these from running his heedless career, the application of his ingenuity and eloquence in all such cases is perfectly arbitary, 'quite *optional*,' as Mr. Liston expresses it. A wise man would have some settled opinion, a good man would wish well to some cause, a modest man would be afraid to act without feeling sure of his ground, or to show an utter disregard of right or wrong. Mr. Canning has the luckless ambition to play off the tricks of a political rope-dancer, and he chuses to do it on the nerves of humanity! He has called out for war during thirty years without ceasing, 'like importunate Guinea

fowls, one note day and night;' he has made the House and the country ring with his vain clamour, and now for the first time he is silent, 'quite chopfallen.' Like *Bottom* in the play, 'he aggravates his voice like a sucking-dove;' 'he roars you an 'twere any nightingale!' After the failure of Buonaparte's Russian expedition, Mr. Canning exclaimed exultingly, and with a daring enthusiasm that seemed to come from the heart, that 'he rejoiced that barbarism had been the first to resist invasion, since it showed that the love of national independence was an instinctive principle in every country, superior even to the love of liberty.' This plea served its turn at the time, and we heard no more of it last year when the French invaded Spain. In the war to restore Ferdinand, Mr. Canning echoed with lungs of brass the roar of 'the universal Spanish nation,' and the words Liberty and Humanity hung like music on his tongue; but when the feeble Monarch was restored, and trod upon the necks of those who had restored him, and threw down the mock-scaffold of the Constitution that had raised him once more to the throne, we heard no more of 'the universal Spanish nation,' of Liberty and Humanity. When the speeches of Mr. Canning and the Manifestos of his friends had raised the power of France to a gigantic height that hung like a precipice over our heads, we were to go on, and fight out the battle of liberty and independence, though 'we buried ourselves under the ruins of the civilized world.' When a monstrous claim that threatens the liberty and existence of the civilized world is openly set up and acted upon, and a word from Mr. Canning would arrest its progress in the direction in which it is moving with obscene, ghastly, blood-stained strides, he courteously and with great condescension reminds his hearers of 'the inimitable satire of Cervantes,' that there is a proverbial expression borrowed from it, and that the epithet *Quixotic* would be eminently applicable to the conduct of Great Britain if she interfered in the affairs of the continent at the present juncture. And yet there are persons who persist in believing that Mr. Canning is any thing more than a pivot on whose oily hinges state policy turns easily at this moment, unheard, unseen, and that he has views and feelings of his own that are a pledge for his integrity. If all this were fickleness, caprice, forgetfulness, accident, folly, it would be well or would not much signify; we should stand a chance of sometimes being right, sometimes wrong; or if the ostensible motives were the real ones, they would balance one another. At one time we should be giving a *lift* to liberty, at another we should be advancing our own interests: now we should be generous to others, then we should be just to ourselves, but always we should be doing something or other

fit to be done and to be named, and acting up to one or other of Mr. Canning's fine pleas of religion, morality, or social order. Is that the case? Nothing was said for twenty years about the restoration of the Bourbons as the object of the war. Who doubts it now? This cause skulked behind the throne, and was not let out in any of Mr. Canning's speeches. The cloven foot was concealed by so much flaunting oratory, by so many different facings and piebald patch-work liveries of ruinous policy or perfidious principle, as not to be suspected. This is what makes such persons as Mr. Canning dangerous. Clever men are the tools with which bad men work. The march of sophistry is devious: the march of power is one. Its means, its tools, its pretexts are various, and borrowed like the hues of the camelion from any object that happens to be at hand: its object is ever the same, and deadly as the serpent's fang. It moves on to its end with crested majesty, erect, silent, with eyes sunk and fixed, undiverted by fear, unabashed by shame, and puny orators and patriot mountebanks play tricks before it to amuse the crowd, till it crushes the world in its monstrous folds. There is one word about which nothing has been said all this while in accounting for Mr. Canning's versatility of mind and vast resources in reasoning—it is the word, *Legitimacy*. It is the key with which you 'pluck out the heart of his mystery.' It is the touchstone by which all his other eloquence is to be tried, and made good or found wanting. It is the casting-weight in the scale of sound policy, or that makes humanity and liberty kick the beam. It is the secret of the Ayes and Noes: it accounts for the Majorities and Minorities. It weighs down all other considerations, hides all flaws, makes up for all deficiencies, removes all obstacles, is the crown of success, and makes defeat glorious. It has all the power of the Crown on its side, and all the madness of the people. All Mr. Canning's speeches are but so many different *periphrases* for this one word—*Legitimacy*. It is the foundation of his magnanimity and the source of his pusillanimity. It is the watch-word equally of his oratory or his silence. It is the principle of his interference and of his forbearance. It makes him move forward, or retreat, or stand still. With this word rounded closely in his ear, and with fifty evasions for it in his mouth, he advances boldly to 'the deliverance of mankind'—into the hands of legitimate kings, but can do nothing to deliver them out of their power. When the liberty and independence of mankind can be construed to mean the cause of kings and the doctrine of divine right, Mr. Canning is a virago on the side of humanity—when they mean the cause of the people and the reducing

of arbitrary power within the limits of constitutional law, his patriotism and humanity flag, and he is

'Of his port as meek as is a maid!

This word makes his tropes and figures expand and blaze out like phosphorus, or 'freezes his spirits up like fish in a pond.' It smites with its petrific mace, it deadens with its torpedo touch, the Minister, the Parliament, the people, and makes this vast, free, enlightened, and enterprising country a body without a soul, an inert mass, like the hulks of our men of war, which Mr. Canning saw and described so well at Plymouth. It is the same word, that announcing the profanation of 'the golden round that binds the hollow temples of a king' by unhallowed hands, would fill their sails, and hurl their thunders on rebel shores. It denounces war, it whispers peace. It is echoed by the groans of the nations, is sanctified by their blood, bought with their treasure. It is this that fills the time-rent towers of the Inquisition with tears and piercing cries; and owing to this, Manzotti shrieks in Italian dungeons, while Mr. Canning soothes the House of Commons with the soft accents of liberty and peace! In fine, Mr. Canning's success as an orator, and the space he occupies in the public mind, are strong indications of the Genius of the Age, in which words have obtained a mastery over things, 'and to call evil good and good evil,' is thought the mark of a superior and happy spirit. An accomplished statesman in our day is one who extols the Constitution and violates it—who talks about religion and social order, and means slavery and superstition. The Whigs are always reminding the reigning family of *the principles that raised them to the throne*—the Tories labour as hard to substitute those *that will keep them there*. There is a dilemma here, which is not easily got over; and to solve the difficulty and reconcile the contradiction, was the great problem of the late King's reign. The doubtful lubricity of Mr. Canning's style was one of the rollers by which the transition was effected, and Legitimacy shown to be a middle term between *divine right* and *the choice of the people*, compatible with both, and convertible into either, at the discretion of the Crown, or pleasure of the speaker. Mr. Canning does not disgrace his pretensions on other questions. He is a sophist by profession, a palliator of every powerful and profitable abuse. His shuffling, trifling speeches on Reform are well-known. He sometimes adds the petulance of the schoolboy to his stock of worn-out invention; though his unfeeling taunt on the 'revered and ruptured Ogden,' met with a reception which will make

him cautious how he tampers again with human infirmity and individual suffering, as the subject of ribald jests and profligate alliteration.

The thing in which Mr. Canning excels most is wit; and his wit is confined to parody. The *Rejected Addresses* have been much and deservedly admired; but we do not think the parodies in them, however ingenious or ludicrous, are to be compared with those in the '*Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*,' and some of the very best of these are by Mr. Canning. Among others are, we believe, the *German Play*, and the imitation of Mr. Southey's *Sapphics*. Much as we admire, we do not wonder at Mr. Canning's excellence in this department. Real, original wit, he has none; for that implies sense and feeling, and an insight into the real differences of things; but from a want of sympathy with anything but forms and *common-places*, he can easily let down the sense of others so as to make *nonsense* of it. He has no enthusiasm or sensibility to make him overlook the meanness of a subject, or a little irregularity in the treatment of it, from the interest it excites: to a mind like his, the serious and affecting is a kind of natural burlesque. It is a matter of course for him to be struck with the absurdity of the romantic or singular in any way, to whom every thing out of the beaten track is absurd; and 'to turn what is serious into farce' by transferring the same expressions to perfectly indifferent and therefore contemptible subjects. To make any description or sentiment ludicrous, it is only necessary to take away all feeling from it: the ludicrous is ready-made to Mr. Canning's hands. The poetry, the heart-felt interest of every thing escapes through his apprehension, like a snake out of its skin, and leaves the slough of parody behind it. Any thing more light or worthless cannot well be imagined.[1]

[1] We have said nothing here of the impiety of Mr. Canning's parodies, though a great deal has been said of the impiety of Mr. Hone's, which unfortunately happen to be on the other side of the question. It is true that *one man may steal a horse sooner than another can look over a hedge*. Mr. Hone is not a Cabinet Minister, and therefore is not allowed to take liberties with the Liturgy. It is to no purpose to urge that Mr. Hone is a very good-natured man, that he is mild and inoffensive in his manners, that he is utterly void of guile, with a great deal of sincere piety, and that his greatest vice is that he is fond of a joke, and given to black-letter reading. The answer is—'But he has written parodies'—and it is to no purpose to reply—So has Mr. Canning! He is a Cabinet Minister, and therefore incapable of any thing vulgar or profane. One would think that the triumphant question put by Mr. Hone to his Jury, 'Whether Mr. Jekyll's Parody on Black-eyed Susan was meant to ridicule Sir William Curtis or the Ballad of Black-eyed Susan?' would have put an end for ever to the cant on this subject, if reason could put an end to cant on any subject. The fate of different men is curious. Mr. Canning, who has all his life been defending the most odious and mischievous men and measures,

MR. CAMPBELL AND MR. CRABBE.

Mr. Campbell may be said to hold a place (among modern poets) between Lord Byron and Mr. Rogers. With much of the glossy splendour, the pointed vigour, and romantic interest of the one, he possesses the fastidious refinement, the classic elegance of the other. Mr. Rogers, as a writer, is too effeminate, Lord Byron too extravagant: Mr. Campbell is neither. The author of the *Pleasures of Memory* polishes his lines till they sparkle with the most exquisite finish; he attenuates them into the utmost degree of trembling softness: but we may complain, in spite of the delicacy and brilliancy of the execution, of a want of strength and solidity. The author of the *Pleasures of Hope*, with a richer and deeper vein of thought and imagination, works it out into figures of equal grace and dazzling beauty, avoiding on the one hand the tinsel of flimsy affectation, and on the other the vices of a rude and barbarous negligence. His Pegasus is not a rough, skittish colt, running wild among the mountains, covered with bur-docks and thistles, nor a tame, sleek pad, unable to get out of the same ambling pace; but a beautiful *manège* horse, full of life and spirit in itself, and subject to the complete controul of the rider. Mr. Campbell gives scope to his feelings and his fancy, and embodies them in a noble and naturally interesting subject; and he at the same time conceives himself called upon (in these days of critical nicety) to pay the exact attention to the expression of each thought, and to modulate each line into the most faultless harmony. The character of his mind is a lofty and self-scrutinising ambition, that strives to reconcile the integrity of general design with the perfect elaboration of each component part, that aims at striking effect, but is jealous of the means by which this is to be

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passes, on that very account, for a most amiable character and an accomplished statesman. Mr. Hone, who defended himself against a charge of blasphemy for a parody on the *Church Service* of which Mr. Canning had furnished him with a precedent, rose from the attack by the force of good-nature, and by that noble spirit of freedom and honesty in which to be unjustly accused is to be superior to all fear, and to speak truth is to be eloquent—but that he did not suffer himself to be crushed to atoms, and made a willing sacrifice to the prejudice, talent, and authority arrayed against him, is a resistance to the opinions of the world and the insolence of power, that can never be overlooked or forgiven.

> 'A wit 's a feather, and a chief 's a rod:
> An honest man 's the noblest work of God!'

produced. Our poet is not averse to popularity (nay, he is tremblingly alive to it)—but self-respect is the primary law, the indispensable condition on which it must be obtained. We should dread to point out (even if we could) a false concord, a mixed metaphor, an imperfect rhyme, in any of Mr. Campbell's productions; for we think that all his fame would hardly compensate to him for the discovery. He seeks for perfection, and nothing evidently short of it can satisfy his mind. He is a *high finisher* in poetry, whose every work must bear inspection, whose slightest touch is precious—not a coarse dauber, who is contented to impose on public wonder and credulity by some huge, ill-executed design, or who endeavours to wear out patience and opposition together by a load of lumbering, feeble, awkward, improgressive lines—on the contrary, Mr. Campbell labours to lend every grace of execution to his subject, while he borrows his ardour and inspiration from it, and to deserve the laurels he has earned, by true genius and by true pains. There is an apparent consciousness of this in most of his writings. He has attained to great excellence by aiming at the greatest, by a cautious and yet daring selection of topics, and by studiously (and with a religious horror) avoiding all those faults which arise from grossness, vulgarity, haste, and disregard of public opinion. He seizes on the highest point of eminence, and strives to keep it to himself—he 'snatches a grace beyond the reach of art,' and will not let it go —he steeps a single thought or image so deep in the Tyrian dyes of a gorgeous imagination, that it throws its lustre over a whole page —every where vivid *ideal* forms hover (in intense conception) over the poet's verse, which ascends, like the aloe, to the clouds, with pure flowers at its top. Or, to take an humbler comparison (the pride of genius must sometimes stoop to the lowliness of criticism), Mr. Campbell's poetry often reminds us of the purple gilliflower, both for its colour and its scent, its glowing warmth, its rich, languid, sullen hue,

> 'Yet sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath!'

There are those who complain of the little that Mr. Campbell has done in poetry, and who seem to insinuate that he is deterred by his own reputation from making any farther or higher attempts. But after having produced two poems that have gone to the heart of a nation, and are gifts to a world, he may surely linger out the rest of his life in a dream of immortality. There are moments in our lives so exquisite that all that remains of them afterwards seems useless and barren; and there are lines and stanzas in our author's early writings in which he may be thought to have exhausted all the sweetness and

all the essence of poetry, so that nothing farther was left to his efforts or his ambition. Happy is it for those few and fortunate worshippers of the Muse (not a subject of grudging or envy to others) who already enjoy in their life-time a foretaste of their future fame, who see their names accompanying them, like a cloud of glory, from youth to age,

> 'And by the vision splendid,
> Are on their way attended'—

and who know that they have built a shrine for the thoughts and feelings that were most dear to them, in the minds and memories of other men, till the language which they lisped in childhood is forgotten, or the human heart shall beat no more!

The *Pleasures of Hope* alone would not have called forth these remarks from us; but there are passages in the *Gertrude of Wyoming* of so rare and ripe a beauty, that they challenge, as they exceed all praise. Such, for instance, is the following peerless description of Gertrude's childhood:—

> 'A loved bequest,—and I may half impart
> To those that feel the strong paternal tie,
> How like a new existence to his heart
> That living flow'r uprose beneath his eye,
> Dear as she was from cherub infancy,
> From hours when she would round his garden play,
> To time when as the rip'ning years went by,
> Her lovely mind could culture well repay,
> And more engaging grew, from pleasing day to day.
>
> 'I may not paint those thousand infant charms;
> (Unconscious fascination, undesign'd!)
> The orison repeated in his arms,
> For God to bless her sire and all mankind;
> The book, the bosom on his knee reclined,
> Or how sweet fairy-lore he heard her con,
> (The playmate ere the teacher of her mind):
> All uncompanion'd else her heart had gone
> Till now, in Gertrude's eyes, their ninth blue summer shone.
>
> 'And summer was the tide, and sweet the hour,
> When sire and daughter saw, with fleet descent,
> An Indian from his bark approach their bow'r,
> Of buskin'd limb and swarthy lineament;
> The red wild feathers on his brow were blent,
> And bracelets bound the arm that help'd to light
> A boy, who seem'd, as he beside him went,
> Of Christian vesture and complexion bright,
> Led by his dusky guide, like morning brought by night.'

In the foregoing stanzas we particularly admire the line—

'Till now, in Gertrude's eyes, their ninth blue summer shone.'

It appears to us like the ecstatic union of natural beauty and poetic fancy, and in its playful sublimity resembles the azure canopy mirrored in the smiling waters, bright, liquid, serene, heavenly! A great outcry, we know, has prevailed for some time past against poetic diction and affected conceits, and, to a certain degree, we go along with it; but this must not prevent us from feeling the thrill of pleasure when we see beauty linked to beauty, like kindred flame to flame, or from applauding the voluptuous fancy that raises and adorns the fairy fabric of thought, that nature has begun! Pleasure is 'scattered in stray-gifts o'er the earth'—beauty streaks the 'famous poet's page' in occasional lines of inconceivable brightness; and wherever this is the case, no splenetic censures or 'jealous leer malign,' no idle theories or cold indifference should hinder us from greeting it with rapture. There are other parts of this poem equally delightful, in which there is a light startling as the red-bird's wing; a perfume like that of the magnolia; a music like the murmuring of pathless woods or of the everlasting ocean. We conceive, however, that Mr. Campbell excels chiefly in sentiment and imagery. The story moves slow, and is mechanically conducted, and rather resembles a Scotch canal carried over lengthened aqueducts and with a number of *locks* in it, than one of those rivers that sweep in their majestic course, broad and full, over Transatlantic plains and lose themselves in rolling gulfs, or thunder down lofty precipices. But in the centre, the inmost recesses of our poet's heart, the pearly dew of sensibility is distilled and collects, like the diamond in the mine, and the structure of his fame rests on the crystal columns of a polished imagination. We prefer the *Gertrude* to the *Pleasures of Hope*, because with perhaps less brilliancy, there is more of tenderness and natural imagery in the former. In the *Pleasures of Hope* Mr. Campbell had not completely emancipated himself from the trammels of the more artificial style of poetry—from epigram, and antithesis, and hyperbole. The best line in it, in which earthly joys are said to be—

'Like angels' visits, few and far between'—

is a borrowed one.[1] But in the Gertrude of Wyoming 'we perceive a softness coming over the heart of the author, and the scales and crust of formality, that fence in his couplets and give them a some-

[1] Like angels' visits, short and far between'—
Blair's Grave.

what glittering and rigid appearance, fall off,' and he has succeeded in engrafting the wild and more expansive interest of the romantic school of poetry on classic elegance and precision. After the poem we have just named, Mr. Campbell's Songs are the happiest efforts of his Muse:—breathing freshness, blushing like the morn, they seem, like clustering roses, to weave a chaplet for love and liberty; or their bleeding words gush out in mournful and hurried succession, like 'ruddy drops that visit the sad heart' of thoughtful Humanity. The *Battle of Hohenlinden* is of all modern compositions the most lyrical in spirit and in sound. To justify this encomium, we need only recall the lines to the reader's memory.

'On Linden, when the sun was low,
All bloodless lay th' untrodden snow,
And dark as winter was the flow
Of Iser, rolling rapidly.

'But Linden saw another sight,
When the drum beat at dead of night,
Commanding fires of death to light
The darkness of her scenery.

'By torch and trumpet fast array'd,
Each horseman drew his battle blade,
And furious every charger neigh'd,
To join the dreadful revelry.

'Then shook the hills with thunder riv'n,
Then rush'd the steed to battle driv'n,
And louder than the bolts of heav'n
Far flash'd the red artillery.

'But redder yet that light shall glow
On Linden's hills of stained snow,
And bloodier yet the torrent flow
Of Iser, rolling rapidly.

''Tis morn, but scarce yon level sun
Can pierce the war-clouds, rolling[1] dun,
Where furious Frank and fiery Hun
Shout in their sulph'rous canopy.

'The combat deepens. On, ye brave,
Who rush to glory, or the grave!
Wave, Munich! all thy banners wave!
And charge with all thy chivalry!

[1] Is not this word, which occurs in the last line but one, (as well as before) an instance of that repetition, which we so often meet with in the most correct and elegant writers?

'Few, few shall part where many meet!
The snow shall be their winding-sheet,
And every turf beneath their feet
Shall be a soldier's sepulchre.'

Mr. Campbell's prose-criticisms on contemporary and other poets (which have appeared in the New Monthly Magazine) are in a style at once chaste, temperate, guarded, and just.

Mr. Crabbe presents an entire contrast to Mr. Campbell:—The one is the most ambitious and aspiring of living poets, the other the most humble and prosaic. If the poetry of the one is like the arch of the rainbow, spanning and adorning the earth, that of the other is like a dull, leaden cloud hanging over it. Mr. Crabbe's style might be cited as an answer to Audrey's question—'Is poetry a true thing?' There are here no ornaments, no flights of fancy, no illusions of sentiment, no tinsel of words. His song is one sad reality, one unraised, unvaried note of unavailing woe. Literal fidelity serves him in the place of invention; he assumes importance by a number of petty details; he rivets attention by being tedious. He not only deals in incessant matters of fact, but in matters of fact of the most familiar, the least animating, and the most unpleasant kind; but he relies for the effect of novelty on the microscopic minuteness with which he dissects the most trivial objects—and for the interest he excites, on the unshrinking determination with which he handles the most painful. His poetry has an official and professional air. He is called in to cases of difficult births, of fractured limbs, or breaches of the peace; and makes out a parochial list of accidents and offences. He takes the most trite, the most gross and obvious and revolting part of nature, for the subject of his elaborate descriptions; but it is Nature still, and Nature is a great and mighty Goddess! It is well for the Reverend Author that it is so. Individuality is, in his theory, the only definition of poetry. Whatever *is*, he hitches into rhyme. Whoever makes an exact image of any thing on the earth, however deformed or insignificant, according to him, must succeed—and he himself has succeeded. Mr. Crabbe is one of the most popular and admired of our living authors. That he is so, can be accounted for on no other principle than the strong ties that bind us to the world about us, and our involuntary yearnings after whatever in any manner powerfully and directly reminds us of it. His Muse is not one of *the Daughters of Memory*, but the old toothless, mumbling, dame herself, doling out the gossip and scandal of the neighbourhood, recounting *totidem verbis et literis*, what happens in every place of the kingdom every hour in the year, and fastening always on the worst as the most

palatable morsels. But she is a circumstantial old lady, communicative, scrupulous, leaving nothing to the imagination, harping on the smallest grievances, a village oracle and critic, most veritable, most identical, bringing us acquainted with persons and things just as they chanced to exist, and giving us a local interest in all she knows and tells. Mr. Crabbe's Helicon is choked up with weeds and corruption; it reflects no light from heaven, it emits no cheerful sound: no flowers of love, of hope, or joy spring up near it, or they bloom only to wither in a moment. Our poet's verse does not put a spirit of youth in every thing, but a spirit of fear, despondency, and decay: it is not an electric spark to kindle or expand, but acts like the torpedo's touch to deaden or contract. It lends no dazzling tints to fancy, it aids no soothing feelings in the heart, it gladdens no prospect, it stirs no wish; in its view the current of life runs slow, dull, cold, dispirited, half under ground, muddy, and clogged with all creeping things. The world is one vast infirmary; the hill of Parnassus is a penitentiary, of which our author is the overseer: to read him is a penance, yet we read on! Mr. Crabbe, it must be confessed, is a repulsive writer. He contrives to 'turn diseases to commodities,' and makes a virtue of necessity. He puts us out of conceit with this world, which perhaps a severe divine should do; yet does not, as a charitable divine ought, point to another. His morbid feelings droop and cling to the earth, grovel where they should soar; and throw a dead weight on every aspiration of the soul after the good or beautiful. By degrees we submit, and are reconciled to our fate, like patients to the physician, or prisoners in the condemned cell. We can only explain this by saying, as we said before, that Mr. Crabbe gives us one part of nature, the mean, the little, the disgusting, the distressing; that he does this thoroughly and like a master, and we forgive all the rest.

Mr. Crabbe's first poems were published so long ago as the year 1782, and received the approbation of Dr. Johnson only a little before he died. This was a testimony from an enemy; for Dr. Johnson was not an admirer of the simple in style or minute in description. Still he was an acute, strong-minded man, and could see truth when it was presented to him, even through the mist of his prejudices and his foibles. There was something in Mr. Crabbe's intricate points that did not, after all, so ill accord with the Doctor's purblind vision; and he knew quite enough of the petty ills of life to judge of the merit of our poet's descriptions, though he himself chose to slur them over in high-sounding dogmas or general invectives. Mr. Crabbe's earliest poem of the *Village* was recommended to the notice of Dr. Johnson by Sir Joshua Reynolds; and we cannot help thinking that a taste for that sort of poetry, which leans for support on the truth and fidelity

of its imitations of nature, began to display itself much about that time, and, in a good measure, in consequence of the direction of the public taste to the subject of painting. Book-learning, the accumulation of wordy common-places, the gaudy pretensions of poetical fiction, had enfeebled and perverted our eye for nature. The study of the fine arts, which came into fashion about forty years ago, and was then first considered as a polite accomplishment, would tend imperceptibly to restore it. Painting is essentially an imitative art; it cannot subsist for a moment on empty generalities: the critic, therefore, who had been used to this sort of substantial entertainment, would be disposed to read poetry with the eye of a connoisseur, would be little captivated with smooth, polished, unmeaning periods, and would turn with double eagerness and relish to the force and precision of individual details, transferred, as it were, to the page from the canvas. Thus an admirer of Teniers or Hobbema might think little of the pastoral sketches of Pope or Goldsmith; even Thomson describes not so much the naked object as what he sees in his mind's eye, surrounded and glowing with the mild, bland, genial vapours of his brain:—but the adept in Dutch interiors, hovels, and pig-styes must find in Mr. Crabbe a man after his own heart. He is the very thing itself; he paints in words, instead of colours: there is no other difference. As Mr. Crabbe is not a painter, only because he does not use a brush and colours, so he is for the most part a poet, only because he writes in lines of ten syllables. All the rest might be found in a newspaper, an old magazine, or a county-register. Our author is himself a little jealous of the prudish fidelity of his homely Muse, and tries to justify himself by precedents. He brings as a parallel instance of merely literal description, Pope's lines on the gay Duke of Buckingham, beginning 'In the worst inn's worst room see Villiers lies!' But surely nothing can be more dissimilar. Pope describes what is striking, Crabbe would have described merely what was there. The objects in Pope stand out to the fancy from the mixture of the mean with the gaudy, from the contrast of the scene and the character. There is an appeal to the imagination; you see what is passing in a poetical point of view. In Crabbe there is no foil, no contrast, no impulse given to the mind. It is all on a level and of a piece. In fact, there is so little connection between the subject-matter of Mr. Crabbe's lines and the ornament of rhyme which is tacked to them, that many of his verses read like serious burlesque, and the parodies which have been made upon them are hardly so quaint as the originals.

Mr. Crabbe's great fault is certainly that he is a sickly, a querulous, a uniformly dissatisfied poet. He sings the country; and he sings

it in a pitiful tone. He chooses this subject only to take the charm out of it, and to dispel the illusion, the glory, and the dream, which had hovered over it in golden verse from Theocritus to Cowper. He sets out with professing to overturn the theory which had hallowed a shepherd's life, and made the names of grove and valley music to our ears, in order to give us truth in its stead; but why not lay aside the fool's cap and bells at once? Why not insist on the unwelcome reality in plain prose? If our author is a poet, why trouble himself with statistics? If he is a statistic writer, why set his ill news to harsh and grating verse? The philosopher in painting the dark side of human nature may have reason on his side, and a moral lesson or remedy in view. The tragic poet, who shows the sad vicissitudes of things and the disappointments of the passions, at least strengthens our yearnings after imaginary good, and lends wings to our desires, by which we, 'at one bound, high overleap all bound' of actual suffering. But Mr. Crabbe does neither. He gives us discoloured paintings of life; helpless, repining, unprofitable, unedifying distress. He is not a philosopher, but a sophist, a misanthrope in verse; a *namby-pamby* Mandeville, a Malthus turned metrical romancer. He professes historical fidelity; but his vein is not dramatic; nor does he give us the *pros* and *cons* of that versatile gipsey, Nature. He does not indulge his fancy or sympathise with us, or tell us how the poor feel; but how he should feel in their situation, which we do not want to know. He does not weave the web of their lives of a mingled yarn, good and ill together, but clothes them all in the same dingy linsey-woolsey, or tinges them with a green and yellow melancholy. He blocks out all possibility of good, cancels the hope, or even the wish for it as a weakness; checkmates Tityrus and Virgil at the game of pastoral cross-purposes, disables all his adversary's white pieces, and leaves none but black ones on the board. The situation of a country clergyman is not necessarily favourable to the cultivation of the Muse. He is set down, perhaps, as he thinks, in a small curacy for life, and he takes his revenge by imprisoning the reader's imagination in luckless verse. Shut out from social converse, from learned colleges and halls, where he passed his youth, he has no cordial fellow-feeling with the unlettered manners of the *Village* or the *Borough*; and he describes his neighbours as more uncomfortable and discontented than himself. All this while he dedicates successive volumes to rising generations of noble patrons; and while he desolates a line of coast with sterile, blighting lines, the only leaf of his books where honour, beauty, worth, or pleasure bloom, is that inscribed to the Rutland family! We might adduce

instances of what we have said from every page of his works: let one suffice—

> 'Thus by himself compelled to live each day,
> To wait for certain hours the tide's delay;
> At the same times the same dull views to see,
> The bounding marsh-bank and the blighted tree;
> The water only when the tides were high,
> When low, the mud half-covered and half-dry;
> The sun-burnt tar that blisters on the planks,
> And bank-side stakes in their uneven ranks;
> Heaps of entangled weeds that slowly float,
> As the tide rolls by the impeded boat.
> When tides were neap, and in the sultry day,
> Through the tall bounding mud-banks made their way,
> Which on each side rose swelling, and below
> The dark warm flood ran silently and slow;
> There anchoring, Peter chose from man to hide,
> There hang his head, and view the lazy tide
> In its hot slimy channel slowly glide;
> Where the small eels, that left the deeper way
> For the warm shore, within the shallows play;
> Where gaping muscles, left upon the mud,
> Slope their slow passage to the fall'n flood:
> Here dull and hopeless he 'd lie down and trace
> How side-long crabs had crawled their crooked race;
> Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry
> Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye;
> What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,
> And the loud bittern, from the bull-rush home,
> Gave from the salt-ditch-side the bellowing boom:
> He nursed the feelings these dull scenes produce
> And loved to stop beside the opening sluice;
> Where the small stream, confined in narrow bound,
> Ran with a dull, unvaried, saddening sound;
> Where all, presented to the eye or ear,
> Oppressed the soul with misery, grief, and fear.'

This is an exact *fac-simile* of some of the most unlovely parts of the creation. Indeed the whole of Mr. Crabbe's *Borough*, from which the above passage is taken, is done so to the life, that it seems almost like some sea-monster, crawled out of the neighbouring slime, and harbouring a breed of strange vermin, with a strong local scent of tar and bilge-water. Mr. Crabbe's *Tales* are more readable than his *Poems*; but in proportion as the interest increases, they become more oppressive. They turn, one and all, upon the same sort of teazing, helpless, mechanical, unimaginative distress;—and though

it is not easy to lay them down, you never wish to take them up again. Still in this way, they are highly finished, striking, and original portraits, worked out with an eye to nature, and an intimate knowledge of the small and intricate folds of the human heart. Some of the best are the *Confidant*, the story of *Silly Shore*, the *Young Poet*, the *Painter*. The episode of *Phœbe Dawson* in the *Village*, is one of the most tender and pensive; and the character of the methodist parson who persecutes the sailor's widow with his godly, selfish love is one of the most profound. In a word, if Mr. Crabbe's writings do not add greatly to the store of entertaining and delightful fiction, yet they will remain, 'as a thorn in the side of poetry,' perhaps for a century to come!

MR. T. MOORE—MR. LEIGH HUNT

'Or winglet of the fairy humming-bird,
Like atoms of the rainbow fluttering round.'

CAMPBELL.

THE lines placed at the head of this sketch, from a contemporary writer, appear to us very descriptive of Mr. Moore's poetry. His verse is like a shower of beauty; a dance of images; a stream of music; or like the spray of the water-fall, tinged by the morning-beam with rosy light. The characteristic distinction of our author's style is this continuous and incessant flow of voluptuous thoughts and shining allusions. He ought to write with a crystal pen on silver paper. His subject is set off by a dazzling veil of poetic diction, like a wreath of flowers gemmed with innumerous dew-drops, that weep, tremble, and glitter in liquid softness and pearly light, while the song of birds ravishes the ear, and languid odours breathe around, and Aurora opens Heaven's smiling portals, Peris and nymphs peep through the golden glades, and an Angel's wing glances over the glossy scene.

'No dainty flower or herb that grows on ground,
No arboret with painted blossoms drest,
And smelling sweet, but there it might be found
To bud out fair, and its sweet smells throw all around.

'No tree, whose branches did not bravely spring;
No branch, whereon a fine bird did not sit;
No bird, but did her shrill notes sweetly sing;
No song, but did contain a lovely dit:
Trees, branches, birds, and songs were framed fit
For to allure frail minds to careless ease.' . . .

Mr. Campbell's imagination is fastidious and select; and hence, though we meet with more exquisite beauties in his writings, we meet with them more rarely: there is comparatively a dearth of ornament. But Mr. Moore's strictest economy is 'wasteful and superfluous excess': he is always liberal, and never at a loss; for sooner than not stimulate and delight the reader, he is willing to be tawdry, or superficial, or common-place. His Muse must be fine at any rate, though she should paint, and wear cast-off decorations. Rather than have any lack of excitement, he repeats himself; and 'Eden, and Eblis, and cherub-smiles' fill up the pauses of the sentiment with a sickly monotony.—It has been too much our author's object to pander to the artificial taste of the age; and his productions, however brilliant and agreeable, are in consequence somewhat meretricious and effeminate. It was thought formerly enough to have an occasionally fine passage in the progress of a story or a poem, and an occasionally striking image or expression in a fine passage or description. But this style, it seems, was to be exploded as rude, Gothic, meagre, and dry. Now all must be raised to the same tantalising and preposterous level. There must be no pause, no interval, no repose, no gradation. Simplicity and truth yield up the palm to affectation and grimace. The craving of the public mind after novelty and effect is a false and uneasy appetite that must be pampered with fine words at every step—we must be tickled with sound, startled with show, and relieved by the importunate, uninterrupted display of fancy and verbal tinsel as much as possible from the fatigue of thought or shock of feeling. A poem is to resemble an exhibition of fire-works, with a continual explosion of quaint figures and devices, flash after flash, that surprise for the moment, and leave no trace of light or warmth behind them. Or modern poetry in its retrograde progress comes at last to be constructed on the principles of the modern Opera, where an attempt is made to gratify every sense at every instant, and where the understanding alone is insulted and the heart mocked. It is in this view only that we can discover that Mr. Moore's poetry is vitiated or immoral,—it seduces the taste and enervates the imagination. It creates a false standard of reference, and inverts or decompounds the natural order of association, in which objects strike the thoughts and feelings. His is the poetry of the bath, of the toilette, of the saloon, of the fashionable world; not the poetry of nature, of the heart, or of human life. He stunts and enfeebles equally the growth of the imagination and the affections, by not taking the seed of poetry and sowing it in the ground of truth, and letting it expand in the dew and rain, and shoot up to heaven,

'And spread its sweet leaves to the air,
Or dedicate its beauty to the sun,'—

instead of which he anticipates and defeats his own object, by plucking flowers and blossoms from the stem, and setting them in the ground of idleness and folly—or in the cap of his own vanity, where they soon wither and disappear, 'dying or ere they sicken!' This is but a sort of child's play, a short-sighted ambition. In Milton we meet with many prosaic lines, either because the subject does not require raising or because they are necessary to connect the story, or serve as a relief to other passages—there is not such a thing to be found in all Mr. Moore's writings. His volumes present us with 'a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets'—but we cannot add—'where no crude surfeit reigns.' He indeed cloys with sweetness; he obscures with splendour; he fatigues with gaiety. We are stifled on beds of roses—we literally lie 'on the rack of restless ecstacy.' His flowery fancy 'looks so fair and smells so sweet, that the sense aches at it.' His verse droops and languishes under a load of beauty, like a bough laden with fruit. His gorgeous style is like 'another morn risen on mid-noon.' There is no passage that is not made up of blushing lines, no line that is not enriched with a sparkling metaphor, no image that is left unadorned with a double epithet—all his verbs, nouns, adjectives, are equally glossy, smooth, and beautiful. Every stanza is transparent with light, perfumed with odours, floating in liquid harmony, melting in luxurious, evanescent delights. His Muse is never contented with an offering from one sense alone, but brings another rifled charm to match it, and revels in a fairy round of pleasure. The interest is not dramatic, but melo-dramatic—it is a mixture of painting, poetry, and music, of the natural and preternatural, of obvious sentiment and romantic costume. A rose is a *Gul*, a nightingale a *Bulbul*. We might fancy ourselves in an eastern harem, amidst Ottomans, and otto of roses, and veils and spangles, and marble pillars, and cool fountains, and Arab maids and Genii, and magicians, and Peris, and cherubs, and what not? Mr. Moore has a little mistaken the art of poetry for the *cosmetic art*. He does not compose an historic group, or work out a single figure; but throws a variety of elementary sensations, of vivid impressions together, and calls it a description. He makes out an inventory of beauty—the smile on the lips, the dimple on the cheeks, *item*, golden locks, *item*, a pair of blue wings, *item*, a silver sound, with breathing fragrance and radiant light, and thinks it a character or a story. He gets together a number of fine things and fine names, and thinks that, flung on heaps, they make up a fine poem. This dissipated, fulsome,

painted, patch-work style may succeed in the levity and languor of the *boudoir*, or might have been adapted to the Pavilions of royalty, but it is not the style of Parnassus, nor a passport to Immortality. It is not the taste of the ancients, 'tis not classical lore'——nor the fashion of Tibullus, or Theocritus, or Anacreon, or Virgil, or Ariosto, or Pope, or Byron, or any great writer among the living or the dead, but it is the style of our English Anacreon, and it is (or was) the fashion of the day! Let one example (and that an admired one), taken from *Lalla Rookh*, suffice to explain the mystery and soften the harshness of the foregoing criticism.

'Now, upon Syria's land of roses
Softly the light of eve reposes,
And, like a glory, the broad sun
Hangs over sainted Lebanon;
Whose head in wintry grandeur towers,
And whitens with eternal sleet,
While summer, in a vale of flowers,
Is sleeping rosy at his feet.

'To one who look'd from upper air
O'er all the enchanted regions there,
How beauteous must have been the glow,
The life, the sparkling from below!
Fair gardens, shining streams, with ranks
Of golden melons on their banks,
More golden where the sun-light falls;—
Gay lizards, glittering on the walls
Of ruin'd shrines, busy and bright
As they were all alive with light;—
And, yet more splendid, numerous flocks
Of pigeons, settling on the rocks,
With their rich restless wings, that gleam
Variously in the crimson beam
Of the warm west,—as if inlaid
With brilliants from the mine, or made
Of tearless rainbows, such as span
The' unclouded skies of Peristan!
And then, the mingling sounds that come,
Of shepherd's ancient reed, with hum
Of the wild bees of Palestine,
Banquetting through the flowery vales;—
And, Jordan, those sweet banks of thine,
And woods, so full of nightingales!'

The following lines are the very perfection of Della Cruscan sentiment, and affected orientalism of style. The Peri exclaims on

finding that old talisman and hackneyed poetical machine, 'a penitent tear'—

> 'Joy, joy for ever! my task is done—
> The gates are pass'd, and Heaven is won!
> Oh! am I not happy? I am, I am—
> To thee, sweet Eden! how dark and sad
> Are the diamond turrets of Shadukiam,
> And the fragrant bowers of Amberabad.'

There is in all this a play of fancy, a glitter of words, a shallowness of thought, and a want of truth and solidity that is wonderful, and that nothing but the heedless, rapid glide of the verse could render tolerable:——it seems that the poet, as well as the lover,

> 'May bestride the Gossamer,
> That wantons in the idle, summer air,
> And yet not fall, so light is vanity!'

Mr. Moore ought not to contend with serious difficulties or with entire subjects. He can write verses, not a poem. There is no principle of massing or of continuity in his productions—neither height nor breadth nor depth of capacity. There is no truth of representation, no strong internal feeling—but a continual flutter and display of affected airs and graces, like a finished coquette, who hides the want of symmetry by extravagance of dress, and the want of passion by flippant forwardness and unmeaning sentimentality. All is flimsy, all is florid to excess. His imagination may dally with insect beauties, with Rosicrucian spells; may describe a butterfly's wing, a flower-pot, a fan: but it should not attempt to span the great outlines of nature, or keep pace with the sounding march of events, or grapple with the strong fibres of the human heart. The great becomes turgid in his hands, the pathetic insipid. If Mr. Moore were to describe the heights of Chimboraco, instead of the loneliness, the vastness and the shadowy might, he would only think of adorning it with roseate tints, like a strawberry-ice, and would transform a magician's fortress in the Himmalaya (stripped of its mysterious gloom and frowning horrors) into a jeweller's toy, to be set upon a lady's toilette. In proof of this, see above 'the diamond turrets of Shadukiam,' &c. The description of Mokanna in the fight, though it has spirit and grandeur of effect, has still a great alloy of the mock-heroic in it. The route of blood and death, which is otherwise well marked, is infested with a swarm of 'fire-fly' fancies.

> 'In vain Mokanna, 'midst the general flight,
> Stands, like the red moon, in some stormy night,
> Among the fugitive clouds, that hurrying by,
> Leave only her unshaken in the sky.'

This simile is fine, and would have been perfect, but that the moon is not red, and that she seems to hurry by the clouds, not they by her.

The description of the warrior's youthful adversary,

> ——'Whose coming seems
> A light, a glory, such as breaks in dreams——'

is fantastic and enervated—a field of battle has nothing to do with dreams:—and again, the two lines immediately after,

> 'And every sword, true as o'er billows dim
> The needle tracks the load-star, following him'—

are a mere piece of enigmatical ingenuity and scientific *mimminee-pimminee*.

We cannot except the *Irish Melodies* from the same censure. If these national airs do indeed express the soul of impassioned feeling in his countrymen, the case of Ireland is hopeless. If these prettinesses pass for patriotism, if a country can heave from its heart's core only these vapid, varnished sentiments, lip-deep, and let its tears of blood evaporate in an empty conceit, let it be governed as it has been. There are here no tones to waken Liberty, to console Humanity. Mr. Moore converts the wild harp of Erin into a musical snuff-box![1] —We *do* except from this censure the author's political squibs, and the 'Twopenny Post-bag.' These are essences, are 'nests of spicery,' bitter and sweet, honey and gall together. No one can so well describe the set speech of a dull formalist,[2] or the flowing locks of a Dowager,

> 'In the manner of Ackermann's dresses for May.'

His light, agreeable, polished style pierces through the body of the court—hits off the faded graces of 'an Adonis of fifty,' weighs the vanity of fashion in tremulous scales, mimics the grimace of affectation and folly, shows up the littleness of the great, and spears

[1] Compare his songs with Burns's.

[2] 'There was a little man, and he had a little soul,
And he said, Little soul, let us try,' &c.

Parody on

'There was a little man, and he had a little gun.'—

One should think this exquisite ridicule of a pedantic effusion might have silenced for ever the automaton that delivered it: but the official personage in question at the close of the Session addressed an extra-official congratulation to the Prince Regent on a bill that had *not* passed—as if to repeat and insist upon our errors were to justify them.

a phalanx of statesmen with its glittering point as with a diamond broach.

> 'In choosing songs the Regent named,
> "Had I a heart for falsehood fram'd:"
> While gentle Hertford begg'd and pray'd
> For "Young I am, and sore afraid."'

Nothing in Pope or Prior ever surpassed the delicate insinuation and adroit satire of these lines, and hundreds more of our author's composition. We wish he would not take pains to make us think of them with less pleasure than formerly.—The 'Fudge Family' is in the same spirit, but with a little falling-off. There is too great a mixture of undisguised Jacobinism and fashionable *slang*. The 'divine Fanny Bias' and 'the mountains *à la Russe*' figure in somewhat quaintly with Buonaparte and the Bourbons. The poet also launches the lightning of political indignation; but it rather plays round and illumines his own pen than reaches the devoted heads at which it is aimed!

Mr. Moore is in private life an amiable and estimable man. The embellished and voluptuous style of his poetry, his unpretending origin, and his *mignon* figure, soon introduced him to the notice of the great, and his gaiety, his wit, his good-humour, and many agreeable accomplishments fixed him there, the darling of his friends and the idol of fashion. If he is no longer familiar with Royalty as with his garter, the fault is not his—his adherence to his principles caused the separation—his love of his country was the cloud that intercepted the sunshine of court-favour. This is so far well. Mr. Moore vindicates his own dignity; but the sense of intrinsic worth, of wide-spread fame, and of the intimacy of the great makes him perhaps a little too fastidious and *exigeant* as to the pretensions of others. He has been so long accustomed to the society of Whig Lords, and so enchanted with the smile of beauty and fashion, that he really fancies himself one of the *set*, to which he is admitted on sufferance, and tries very unnecessarily to keep others out of it. He talks familiarly of works that are or are not read 'in *our* circle'; and seated smiling and at his ease in a coronet-coach, enlivening the owner by his brisk sallies and Attic conceits, is shocked, as he passes, to see a Peer of the realm shake hands with a poet. There is a little indulgence of spleen and envy, a little servility and pandering to aristocratic pride in this proceeding. Is Mr. Moore bound to advise a Noble Poet to get as fast as possible out of a certain publication, lest he should not be able to give an account at Holland or at Lansdown House, how his friend Lord B—— had associated himself with his friend L. H——? Is he afraid that the 'Spirit of Monarchy' will eclipse the 'Fables for

the Holy Alliance' in virulence and plain speaking? Or are the members of the 'Fudge Family' to secure a monopoly for the abuse of the Bourbons and the doctrine of Divine Right? Because he is genteel and sarcastic, may not others be paradoxical and argumentative? Or must no one bark at a Minister or General, unless they have been first dandled, like a little French pug-dog, in the lap of a lady of quality? Does Mr. Moore insist on the double claim of birth and genius as a title to respectability in all advocates of the popular side—but himself? Or is he anxious to keep the pretensions of his patrician and plebeian friends quite separate, so as to be himself the only point of union, a sort of *double meaning*, between the two? It is idle to think of setting bounds to the weakness and illusions of self-love as long as it is confined to a man's own breast; but it ought not to be made a plea for holding back the powerful hand that is stretched out to save another struggling with the tide of popular prejudice, who has suffered shipwreck of health, fame, and fortune in a common cause, and who has deserved the aid and the good wishes of all who are (on principle) embarked in the same cause by equal zeal and honesty, if not by equal talents to support and to adorn it!

We shall conclude the present article with a short notice of an individual who, in the cast of his mind and in political principle, bears no very remote resemblance to the patriot and wit just spoken of, and on whose merits we should descant at greater length, but that personal intimacy might be supposed to render us partial. It is well when personal intimacy produces this effect; and when the light, that dazzled us at a distance, does not on a closer inspection turn out an opaque substance. This is a charge that none of his friends will bring against Mr. Leigh Hunt. He improves upon acquaintance. The author translates admirably into the man. Indeed the very faults of his style are virtues in the individual. His natural gaiety and sprightliness of manner, his high animal spirits, and the *vinous* quality of his mind, produce an immediate fascination and intoxication in those who come in contact with him, and carry off in society whatever in his writings may to some seem flat and impertinent. From great sanguineness of temper, from great quickness and unsuspecting simplicity, he runs on to the public as he does at his own fireside, and talks about himself, forgetting that he is not always among friends. His look, his tone are required to point many things that he says: his frank, cordial manner reconciles you instantly to a little over-bearing, over-weening self-complacency. 'To be admired, he needs but to be seen': but perhaps he ought to be seen to be fully appreciated. No one ever sought his society who did not come away

with a more favourable opinion of him: no one was ever disappointed, except those who had entertained idle prejudices against him. He sometimes trifles with his readers, or tires of a subject (from not being urged on by the stimulus of immediate sympathy)—but in conversation he is all life and animation, combining the vivacity of the schoolboy with the resources of the wit and the taste of the scholar. The personal character, the spontaneous impulses, do not appear to excuse the author, unless you are acquainted with his situation and habits—like some proud beauty who gives herself what we think strange airs and graces under a mask, but who is instantly forgiven when she shews her face. We have said that Lord Byron is a sublime coxcomb: why should we not say that Mr. Hunt is a delightful one? There is certainly an exuberance of satisfaction in his manner which is more than the strict logical premises warrant, and which dull and phlegmatic constitutions know nothing of, and cannot understand till they see it. He is the only poet or literary man we ever knew who puts us in mind of Sir John Suckling or Killigrew or Carew; or who united rare intellectual acquirements with outward grace and natural gentility. Mr. Hunt ought to have been a gentleman born, and to have patronised men of letters. He might then have played, and sung, and laughed, and talked his life away; have written manly prose, elegant verse; and his *Story of Rimini* would have been praised by Mr. Blackwood. As it is, there is no man now living who at the same time writes prose and verse so well, with the exception of Mr. Southey (an exception, we fear, that will be little palatable to either of these gentlemen). His prose writings, however, display more consistency of principle than the laureate's; his verses more taste. We will venture to oppose his Third Canto of the *Story of Rimini* for classic elegance and natural feeling to any equal number of lines from Mr. Southey's Epics or from Mr. Moore's Lalla Rookh. In a more gay and conversational style of writing, we think his *Epistle to Lord Byron* on his going abroad, is a masterpiece;—and the *Feast of the Poets* has run through several editions. A light, familiar grace, and mild unpretending pathos are the characteristics of his more sportive or serious writings, whether in poetry or prose. A smile plays round the sparkling features of the one; a tear is ready to start from the thoughtful gaze of the other. He perhaps takes too little pains, and indulges in too much wayward caprice in both. A wit and a poet, Mr. Hunt is also distinguished by fineness of tact and sterling sense: he has only been a visionary in humanity, the fool of virtue. What then is the drawback to so many shining qualities, that has made them useless, or even hurtful to their owner? His crime is, to have been Editor of

the *Examiner* ten years ago, when some allusion was made in it to the age of the present King, and though his Majesty has grown older, our luckless politician is no wiser than he was then!

ELIA, AND GEOFFREY CRAYON

So Mr. Charles Lamb and Mr. Washington Irvine choose to designate themselves; and as their lucubrations under one or other of these *noms de guerre* have gained considerable notice from the public, we shall here attempt to discriminate their several styles and manner, and to point out the beauties and defects of each in treating of somewhat similar subjects.

Mr. Irvine is, we take it, the more popular writer of the two, or a more general favourite: Mr. Lamb has more devoted, and perhaps more judicious partisans. Mr. Irvine is by birth an American, and has, as it were, *skimmed the cream*, and taken off patterns with great skill and cleverness, from our best known and happiest writers, so that their thoughts and almost their reputation are indirectly transferred to his page, and smile upon us from another hemisphere, like 'the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow': he succeeds to our admiration and our sympathy by a sort of prescriptive title and traditional privilege. Mr. Lamb, on the contrary, being 'native to the manner here,' though he too has borrowed from previous sources, instead of availing himself of the most popular and admired, has groped out his way, and made his most successful researches among the more obscure and intricate, though certainly not the least pithy or pleasant of our writers. Mr. Washington Irvine has culled and transplanted the flowers of modern literature, for the amusement of the general reader: Mr. Lamb has raked among the dust and cobwebs of a more remote period, has exhibited specimens of curious relics, and pored over moth-eaten, decayed manuscripts, for the benefit of the more inquisitive and discerning part of the public. Antiquity after a time has the grace of novelty, as old fashions revived are mistaken for new ones; and a certain quaintness and singularity of style is an agreeable relief to the smooth and insipid monotony of modern composition. Mr. Lamb has succeeded not by conforming to the *Spirit of the Age*, but in opposition to it. He does not march boldly along with the crowd, but steals off the pavement to pick his way in the contrary direction. He prefers *bye-ways* to *highways*. When the full tide of human life pours along to some festive show, to some pageant of a day, Elia would stand on one side to look over an old book-stall, or stroll down some deserted pathway in search of a pensive inscription over a

tottering doorway, or some quaint device in architecture, illustrative of embryo art and ancient manners. Mr. Lamb has the very soul of an antiquarian, as this implies a reflecting humanity; the film of the past hovers forever before him. He is shy, sensitive, the reverse of every thing coarse, vulgar, obtrusive, and *commonplace*. He would fain 'shuffle off this mortal coil,' and his spirit clothes itself in the garb of elder time, homelier, but more durable. He is borne along with no pompous paradoxes, shines in no glittering tinsel of a fashionable phraseology; is neither fop nor sophist. He has none of the turbulence or froth of new-fangled opinions. His style runs pure and clear, though it may often take an underground course, or be conveyed through old-fashioned conduit-pipes. Mr. Lamb does not court popularity, nor strut in gaudy plumes, but shrinks from every kind of ostentatious and obvious pretension into the retirement of his own mind.

> 'The self-applauding bird, the peacock see:—
> Mark what a sumptuous pharisee is he!
> Meridian sun-beams tempt him to unfold
> His radiant glories, azure, green, and gold:
> He treads as if, some solemn music near,
> His measured step were governed by his ear:
> And seems to say—'Ye meaner fowl, give place,
> I am all splendour, dignity, and grace!'
> Not so the pheasant on his charms presumes,
> Though he too has a glory in his plumes.
> He, Christian-like, retreats with modest mien
> To the close copse or far sequestered green,
> And shines without desiring to be seen.'

These lines well describe the modest and delicate beauties of Mr. Lamb's writings, contrasted with the lofty and vain-glorious pretensions of some of his contemporaries. This gentleman is not one of those who pay all their homage to the prevailing idol: he thinks that

> 'New-born gauds are made and moulded of things past,'

nor does he

> 'Give to dust that is a little gilt
> More laud than gilt o'er-dusted.'

His convictions 'do not in broad rumour lie,' nor are they 'set off to the world in the glistering foil' of fashion; but 'live and breathe aloft in those pure eyes, and perfect judgment of all-seeing *time*.' Mr. Lamb rather affects and is tenacious of the obscure and remote. of that which rests on its own intrinsic and silent merit; which scorns all alliance, or even the suspicion of owing any thing to noisy

clamour, to the glare of circumstances. There is a fine tone of *chiaro-scuro*, a moral perspective in his writings. He delights to dwell on that which is fresh to the eye of memory; he yearns after and covets what soothes the frailty of human nature. That touches him most nearly which is withdrawn to a certain distance, which verges on the borders of oblivion:—that piques and provokes his fancy most, which is hid from a superficial glance. That which, though gone by, is still remembered, is in his view more genuine, and has given more 'vital signs that it will live,' than a thing of yesterday, that may be forgotten to-morrow. Death has in this sense the spirit of life in it; and the shadowy has to our author something substantial in it. Ideas savour most of reality in his mind; or rather his imagination loiters on the edge of each, and a page of his writings recalls to our fancy the *stranger* on the grate, fluttering in its dusky tenuity, with its idle superstition and hospitable welcome!

Mr. Lamb has a distaste to new faces, to new books, to new buildings, to new customs. He is shy of all imposing appearances, of all assumptions of self-importance, of all adventitious ornaments, of all mechanical advantages, even to a nervous excess. It is not merely that he does not rely upon, or ordinarily avail himself of them; he holds them in abhorrence, he utterly abjures and discards them, and places a great gulph between him and them. He disdains all the vulgar artifices of authorship, all the cant of criticism, and helps to notoriety. He has no grand swelling theories to attract the visionary and the enthusiast, no passing topics to allure the thoughtless and the vain. He evades the present, he mocks the future. His affections revert to, and settle on the past, but then, even this must have something personal and local in it to interest him deeply and thoroughly; he pitches his tent in the suburbs of existing manners; brings down the account of character to the few straggling remains of the last generation; seldom ventures beyond the bills of mortality, and occupies that nice point between egotism and disinterested humanity. No one makes the tour of our southern metropolis, or describes the manners of the last age, so well as Mr. Lamb—with so fine, and yet so formal an air—with such vivid obscurity, with such arch piquancy, such picturesque quaintness, such smiling pathos. How admirably he has sketched the former inmates of the South-Sea House; what 'fine fretwork he makes of their double and single entries!' With what a firm, yet subtle pencil he has embodied *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist!* How notably he embalms a battered *beau*; how delightfully an amour, that was cold forty years ago, revives in his pages! With what well-disguised humour, he introduces us to his relations, and how freely he serves up his friends!

Certainly, some of his portraits are *fixtures*, and will do to hang up as lasting and lively emblems of human infirmity. Then there is no one who has so sure an ear for 'the chimes at midnight,' not even excepting Mr. Justice Shallow; nor could Master Silence himself take his 'cheese and pippins' with a more significant and satisfactory air. With what a gusto Mr. Lamb describes the inns and courts of law, the Temple and Gray's-Inn, as if he had been a student there for the last two hundred years, and had been as well acquainted with the person of Sir Francis Bacon as he is with his portrait or writings! It is hard to say whether St. John's Gate is connected with more intense and authentic associations in his mind, as a part of old London Wall, or as the frontispiece (time out of mind) of the Gentleman's Magazine. He haunts Watling-street like a gentle spirit; the avenues to the play-houses are thick with panting recollections, and Christ's-Hospital still breathes the balmy breath of infancy in his description of it! Whittington and his Cat are a fine hallucination for Mr. Lamb's historic Muse, and we believe he never heartily forgave a certain writer who took the subject of Guy Faux out of his hands. The streets of London are his fairy-land, teeming with wonder, with life and interest to his retrospective glance, as it did to the eager eye of childhood; he has contrived to weave its tritest traditions into a bright and endless romance!

Mr. Lamb's taste in books is also fine, and it is peculiar. It is not the worse for a little *idiosyncrasy*. He does not go deep into the Scotch novels, but he is at home in Smollet or Fielding. He is little read in Junius or Gibbon, but no man can give a better account of Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, or Sir Thomas Browne's Urn-Burial, or Fuller's Worthies, or John Bunyan's Holy War. No one is more unimpressible to a specious declamation; no one relishes a recondite beauty more. His admiration of Shakespear and Milton does not make him despise Pope; and he can read Parnell with patience, and Gay with delight. His taste in French and German literature is somewhat defective; nor has he made much progress in the science of Political Economy or other abstruse studies, though he has read vast folios of controversial divinity, merely for the sake of the intricacy of style, and to save himself the pain of thinking. Mr. Lamb is a good judge of prints and pictures. His admiration of Hogarth does credit to both, particularly when it is considered that Leonardo da Vinci is his next greatest favourite, and that his love of the *actual* does not proceed from a want of taste for the *ideal*. His worst fault is an over-eagerness of enthusiasm, which occasionally makes him take a surfeit of his highest favourites.—Mr. Lamb excels in familiar conversation almost as much as in writing, when his

modesty does not overpower his self-possession. He is as little of a proser as possible; but he *blurts* out the finest wit and sense in the world. He keeps a good deal in the back-ground at first, till some excellent conceit pushes him forward, and then he abounds in whim and pleasantry. There is a primitive simplicity and self-denial about his manners; and a Quakerism in his personal appearance, which is, however, relieved by a fine Titian head, full of dumb eloquence! Mr. Lamb is a general favourite with those who know him. His character is equally singular and amiable. He is endeared to his friends not less by his foibles than his virtues; he insures their esteem by the one, and does not wound their self-love by the other. He gains ground in the opinion of others, by making no advances in his own. We easily admire genius where the diffidence of the possessor makes our acknowledgment of merit seem like a sort of patronage, or act of condescension, as we willingly extend our good offices where they are not exacted as obligations, or repaid with sullen indifference. —The style of the Essays of Elia is liable to the charge of a certain *mannerism*. His sentences are cast in the mould of old authors; his expressions are borrowed from them; but his feelings and observations are genuine and original, taken from actual life, or from his own breast; and he may be said (if any one can) 'to have coined his heart for *jests*,' and to have split his brain for fine distinctions! Mr. Lamb, from the peculiarity of his exterior and address as an author, would probably never have made his way by detached and independent efforts; but, fortunately for himself and others, he has taken advantage of the Periodical Press, where he has been stuck into notice, and the texture of his compositions is assuredly fine enough to bear the broadest glare of popularity that has hitherto shone upon them. Mr. Lamb's literary efforts have procured him civic honours (a thing unheard of in our times), and he has been invited, in his character of Elia, to dine at a select party with the Lord Mayor. We should prefer this distinction to that of being poet-laureat. We would recommend to Mr. Waithman's perusal (if Mr. Lamb has not anticipated us) the *Rosamond Gray* and the *John Woodvil* of the same author, as an agreeable relief to the noise of a City feast, and the heat of City elections. A friend, a short time ago, quoted some lines[1] from the last-mentioned of these works, which meeting Mr. Godwin's eye, he was so struck with the beauty of the passage, and with a consciousness of having seen it before, that he was uneasy till he could recollect where, and after hunting in vain for

[1] The description of sports in the forest:

'To see the sun to bed and to arise,
Like some hot amourist with glowing eyes,' &c.

it in Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and other not unlikely places, sent to Mr. Lamb to know if he could help him to the author!

Mr. Washington Irvine's acquaintance with English literature begins almost where Mr. Lamb's ends,—with the Spectator, Tom Brown's works and the wits of Queen Anne. He is not bottomed in our elder writers, nor do we think that he has tasked his own faculties much, at least on English ground. Of the merit of his *Knicker-bocker*, and New York stories, we cannot pretend to judge. But in his *Sketch-book* and *Bracebridge-Hall* he gives us very good American copies of our British Essayists and Novelists, which may be very well on the other side of the water, or as proofs of the capabilities of the national genius, but which might be dispensed with here, where we have to boast of the originals. Not only Mr. Irvine's language is with great taste and felicity modelled on that of Addison, Goldsmith, Sterne, or Mackenzie; but the thoughts and sentiments are taken at the rebound, and as they are brought forward at the present period, want both freshness and probability. Mr. Irvine's writings are literary *anachronisms*. He comes to England for the first time; and being on the spot, fancies himself in the midst of those characters and manners which he had read of in the Spectator and other approved authors, and which were the only idea he had hitherto formed of the parent country. Instead of looking round to see what *we are*, he sets to work to describe us as *we were*—at second hand. He has Parson Adams, or Sir Roger de Coverley in his '*mind's eye*'; and he makes a village curate or a country 'squire in Yorkshire or Hampshire sit to these admired models for their portraits in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Whatever the ingenious author has been most delighted with in the representations of books, he transfers to his port-folio, and swears that he has found it actually existing in the course of his observation and travels through Great Britain. Instead of tracing the changes that have taken place in society since Addison or Fielding wrote, he transcribes their account in a different hand-writing, and thus keeps us stationary, at least in our most attractive and praise-worthy qualities of simplicity, honesty, modesty, hospitality, and good-nature. This is a very flattering mode of turning fiction into history, or history into fiction; and we should scarcely know ourselves again in the softened and altered likeness, but that it bears the date of 1820, and issues from the press in Albemarle-street. This is one way of complimenting our national and Tory prejudices; and coupled with literal or exaggerated portraits of *Yankee* peculiarities, could hardly fail to please. The first Essay in the *Sketch-book*, that on national Antipathies, is the best; but after that, the sterling ore of wit or feeling

is gradually spun thinner and thinner, till it fades to the shadow of a shade. Mr. Irvine is himself, we believe, a most agreeable and deserving man, and has been led into the natural and pardonable error we speak of, by the tempting bait of European popularity, in which he thought there was no more likely method of succeeding than by imitating the style of our standard authors, and giving us credit for the virtues of our forefathers.

We should not feel that we had discharged our obligations to truth or friendship, if we were to let this volume go without introducing into it the name of the author of *Virginius*. This is the more proper, inasmuch as he is a character by himself, and the only poet now living that is a mere poet. If we were asked what sort of man Mr. Knowles is, we could only say, 'he is the writer of Virginius.' His most intimate friends see nothing in him, by which they could trace the work to the author. The seeds of dramatic genius are contained and fostered in the warmth of the blood that flows in his veins; his heart dictates to his head. The most unconscious, the most unpretending, the most artless of mortals, he instinctively obeys the impulses of natural feeling, and produces a perfect work of art. He has hardly read a poem or a play or seen any thing of the world, but he hears the anxious beatings of his own heart, and makes others feel them by the force of sympathy. Ignorant alike of rules, regardless of models, he follows the steps of truth and simplicity ; and strength, proportion, and delicacy are the infallible results. By thinking of nothing but his subject, he rivets the attention of the audience to it. All his dialogue tends to action, all his situations form classic groups. There is no doubt that Virginius is the best acting tragedy that has been produced on the modern stage. Mr. Knowles himself was a player at one time, and this circumstance has probably enabled him to judge of the picturesque and dramatic effect of his lines, as we think it might have assisted Shakespear. There is no impertinent display, no flaunting poetry; the writer immediately conceives how a thought would tell if he had to speak it himself. Mr. Knowles is the first tragic writer of the age ; in other respects he is a common man ; and divides his time and his affections between his plots and his fishing-tackle, between the Muses' spring, and those mountain-streams which sparkle like his own eye, that gush out like his own voice at the sight of an old friend. We have known him almost from a child, and we must say he appears to us the same boy-poet that he ever was. He has been cradled in song, and rocked in it as in a dream, forgetful of himself and of the world !

The End of The Spirit of the Age.

INDEX

INDEX

No distinction is made between real and fictional names in this index. Inverted commas denote the title of a periodical, or a pseudonym. Italics denote the title of a literary work. Bold type figures denote principal references.

Abelard to Heloise, 75
Absalom and Achitophel, 80
Achilles, 3, 54
Actium, 50
Adam, 60, 66, 68
Addison, 13, 78, 215
Address to a Haggis, 132
Address to the Higher and Middle Classes, 180
Ælla, 126, 127
Æneas, 54
Æschylus, 56, 198
Agamemnon, 54
Agnes, 225 n.
Akenside, 68, 119
Alexander I, Czar, 171
Alexander's Feast, 81, 258
Alison, 139
Angelica, 3
Ann Bothwell's Lament, 142
Annecy, 100
Annus Mirabilis, 81
'Anti-Jacobin Review,' 164
Antiquary, The, 230
Antonio, 192
Antony, 50
Apollo Belvedere, 164
Aquinas, Thomas, 199
Arbuthnot, 104
Arbuthnot, Epistle to, 78
Archimago, 36
Arcite, 29, 30
Aretino, Pietro, 207
Ariosto, 3, 34, 45
Aristophanes, 56
Armstrong, 119
Art of Preserving Health, The, 119
Atterbury, 79
Audrey (*As You Like It*), 146
Auld Robin Gray, 141

Bacchus, 81
Bacon, Francis, 3, 182
Baillie, Joanna, 147, 148
Balfour of Burley, 211, 229
Ballad on a Wedding, 83
Banks of the Wye, The, 156
Barbauld, Mrs., 147
Barrow (preacher), 147
Basil, 147
Battle of Hohenlinden, The, 149
Becket, Gilbert à, 143
Beelzebub, 61
Beggar's Opera, The, 10, 107, 108
Behmen (Boehme), Jacob, 199

Belphœbe, 38
Bentham, Jeremy, 171
Berkeley, Bishop, 198
Bertram, 147
Bible, the, 15, 16
Black Eyed Susan, 109
Blacklock, 122
Blackmore, Sir Richard, 108, 109, 164
Blackstone, Judge, 278, 279
Blackwood (publisher), 227, 228
Bloomfield, Robert, 95, 96
Boccaccio, 13, 19, 29, 76, 82
Boileau, 73, 106
Boissy, 100
Bolingbroke, 76
Book of the Church, The, 249
Boswell, 120
Botany Bay Eclogues, 164
Bothwell, 229
Bottom, Weaver, 321
Bourbons, 322
Bowles, 199, 241
Bradwardine, 229
Braes of Yarrow, The, 142
Brigs of Ayr, 132
Britomart, 38
Brook, Lord, 198, 300–7
Brougham, Lord, 207
Browne, Sir T., 98, 122, 131
Bruce, 122
Brutus, 52
Buckingham, 78
Bunyan, 14
Buonaparte, 128, 153, 154
Burdett, Sir F., 306–7
Burford Bridge, 211 n.
Burke, Edmund, 7, 15, 120, 183, 266, 280, 310, 316
Burleigh, 34
Burnet, Bishop, 194
Burney (Fanny), *see* D'Arblay
Burns, 95, 122 n., **123 ff.**
Butler, Bishop, 198
Butler, Samuel, 83
Byron, Lord, 153, 155, 294, 235–244

Cain, 242
Calamy, 198
Caleb Williams, 182, 183
Caledonian Chapel, 204–12 *passim*
Camelford, Lord, 217
Campaign, The, 13
Campbell, 148–50, 325–30
Candide, 114
Canning, 207, 290, 316–25
Captivity among the North American Indians (Hunter), 180
Caracci, Annibale, 124
Cartwright, Major, 307
Cassius, 52
Castle of Indolence, The, 88
Castlereagh, Lord, 263
Catherine, Empress, 171
Cervantes, 45
Chalmers, Dr., 9, 210–13
——, his sermons, 211
Chambery, 103
Characters of Shakespear's Plays, 289
Characters of the Players, 119
Chartres, 77
Chatterton, 122, 123–7
Chatterton, Life of (Anderson), 123
Chatterton, Ode on (Coleridge), 197
Chaucer, 13, **19 ff.**, 45, 46, 50, 51, 82
Chaucer, Life of (Godwin), 192
Childe Harold, 153, 239
Christabel, 165, 201

Christ's Hospital, 197
Churchill's Satires on the Scotch, 119
Cid (Southey's translation), 250
Citizen of the World, The, 120
Clarendon, Edward Hyde, first Earl of, 194
Clarissa, 14
Clarke, 198
Clarkson, 315
Claverhouse (Dundee), 229
Cleopatra, 50
Clerk's Tale, The, 30, 31
Cobbett, 225 n.
Colchester, Lord, 181
Coleridge, Derwent, 198 n.
Coleridge, Hartley, 198 n.
Coleridge, S. T., 118, 131, 164, 165–8, 184, 194–204, 207, 250, 251
Colin Clout, 38
Collins, 8, 115 ff., 118, 126, 259
Complaint, The (Wordsworth), 186
Compleat Angler, The, 98, 99
Conciones ad Populum, 167
Constable (publisher), 227
Constance, 28
Cooper's Hill, 84
Cordelia, 5
Cornbury, Lord, 77
Correggio, 45
Corsair, The, 153, 239
Coryate, 162
Cotter's Saturday Night, 137
Cotton, 122
Countess Pillar, 148
'Courier, The,' 200
Cowley, 84
Cowper, 63, 87 ff.
Crabbe, 95–8, 330–5
Crebillon, 118
Cressid, 20
Crib (boxer), 205
Critical Essays, 69
Croft, Herbert, 122, 123
Croker, 290
Crudities, 162
Cuckoo, To a, 156
Cudworth, 196
Cunningham, 122
Curran, 194, 301

Daisy, To a, 156
Dante, 15, 17, 18, 19, 34, 45, 50
D'Arblay, Frances (Burney), 146
Darwin, Erasmus, 146
Deans, David, 229
Deans, Edie, 229
Deans, Jeanie, 225
Deckar (Dekker), 292
Defoe, 14
De Montfort, 147
Denham, 83
Description of a Pig, 164
Desdemona, 6
Dinmont, Dandie, 230
D'Israeli, Isaac, 290
Distant Prospect of Eton College, Ode on a, 118
Diversions of Purley, The, 220
Doctor of Physic, the 24
Doddington, 85
Dodsley, 122
Don Juan, 241
Donne, 83, 194
Don Quixote, 83, 113, 140
Draper, Sir William, 220
Dryden, 13, 61, 68 ff., 259
Dunciad, The, 76
Duns Scotus, 199
Dyer, 119

Eclogues (Young), 116
Edgar, 5
Edinburgh, 227
'Edinburgh Review,' 292, 293, 305
Edinburgh Reviewers, 128, 150
Eldon, Lord, 307–16
Election, The, 147
Elegy in a Country Churchyard, 118
Elizabeth, Queen, 56
Elspeith, Edith, 230
Emetrius, King of Inde, 26
Empedocles, 122
Enfield, 147
English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, 240
Epistles (Burns), 139
Epistles (Dryden), 69, 79
Erskine, Lord, 301
Essay on Criticism, The, 73, 74, 75
Essay on Man, The, 76
Essay on Taste, 139
Essay on the Principles of Human Action, 268, 289
Euripides, 198
Evan Dhu, 229
Eve, 60, 66–8
Evening, Ode on, 116, 117
Eve of St. Agnes, The, 285, 286
'*Examiner, The*,' 284
Excursion, The, 114, 156, 257

Fables (Gay), 107
Fadladeen (Fadl-ud-din?), 152
Faery Queen, 11, 12
Faliero, 240
Farmer's Boy, The, 95, 96
Fawcett, 192
Fazio, 147
Fear, Ode to, 116
Ferdinand, 192
Ferdinand VII, King of Spain, 321
Ferguson, 139
Fire, Famine, and Slaughter, 166
Fleetwood, 191
Florimel, 38
Flower and the Leaf, The, 82, 127
Fortunes of Nigel, The, 230
Four Orations for the Oracles of God, 210, 211
Fox, C. J., 172, 213, 214, 215
Fox (preacher), 209
Franklin, Benjamin, 24, 172
Friend, The, 167, 201
Fuller, 313
Fuseli, Henry, 190, 215

Gardiner, Sir Allan, 213
Gay, John, 83, 106, 107, 164
Gellatly, Davie, 229
Gertrude of Wyoming, 149, 150
Giaour, The, 153
Gifford, 280–92
Gil Blas, 91
Glenallan, Earl of, 230
Glencairn, Lines to, 139
Glover, 122
Goblin Page, the, 155
Godwin, William, 182–4, 201–3, 271, 272
Goldsmith, 119 ff.
Gower, 34
Grandison, Sir Charles, 14
Gray, 118, 126, 129, 259
Greame, 122
Gregory, Dr., 123
Green, 119
Griselda, 28, 30, 31
Gronger Hill, 119
Gualberto, 164
Guido, 45

Guildenstern, 48
Gulliver, 14
Gulliver's Travels, 109

Hamlet, 48, 49
Hammond, 118
Harris (grammarian), 220
Hart-Leap Well, 156, 157–61
Hartley, 198
Hayley, 146
Heart of Midlothian, The, 229
Heaven and Earth, 240
Henley, Orator, 211
Henry and Emma, 106
Hermes, 220
Herring, Archbishop, 141
Hill, 122
Hind and the Panther, The, 80
Hippesley, Sir J. Coxe, 319
History of his Own Times, 194
History of John Bull, 104
History of the Puritans, 199
History of the Rebellion, 194
Hobhouse, J. C., 171
Holcroft, 215
Holly-Tree, The, 164
Homer, 3, 15, 16, 45, 58, 70
Hone, 324 n.
Hudibras, 83
Hunt, Leigh, 342–4
Huss, John. 199

Iachimo, 4
Iago, 51, 115
Iliad, 13
Il Penseroso, 59
Imitations of Horace, 109
Imogen, 4
Inchbald, Mrs. Elizabeth, 146, 194
Irvine (*sic: recte* Irving), Washington, 349, 350
Irving, Edward (preacher), 204–213, 228
Ivanhoe, 230

Jacob, 290
Jacobitism, 231
Jago, 122
James II, 80
Jeffrey, 129, 292–300
Jekyll, 109
Jemmy Dawson, Lines on, 119
Jenyns, 122
Jerome of Prague, 199
Jervas, Epistle to, 78, 79
Jessy, 140
Joan of Arc, 164, 248
John Anderson, my Joe, 139
John Gilpin, Ballad of, 95
John of Gaunt, 19
Johnson, Samuel, 46, 61, 63, 85, 105, 110, 114, 259
Jonson, Ben, 194, 291
Joseph Andrews, 120
Junius, 217, 219

Kean, Edmund, 148
Keats, John, 284, 288, 289
Kehama, 164, 247
Kemble, John, 147, 194, 215
King's Old Courtier, The, 214
Knight's Tale, The, 20, 21, 29
Knowles, 350
Knox, Dr., 122, 124

Lady of the Lake, 155, 225
La Fontaine, 106, 172
Lake Poets, 161–4

Lalla Rookh, 152
Lamb, Charles, 131, 197, 344–9
Lament, The, 139
Langhorne, 122
Laodamia, 256
Lara, 239
Launce, 132
Lay of the Last Minstrel, The, 155, 224, 226
Lear, 4, 5, 8, 52, 56
Lectures on the Law of Nature, etc., 264
Leech-Gatherer, The, 156
Leibnitz, 198
Lemnos, 14
Liberty, On (Thomson), 91
Licurge, King of Thrace, 25
Life of Samuel Johnson, 120
Lillo, 6
Liston, the actor, 120
Liverpool, Lord, 207
Lives of the Poets, 46
Locke, 108, 194
Logan, 122
Longinus, 66
Longman (publisher), 294
Lorraine, Claude, 11, 98, 256
Loss of the 'Royal George,' 95
Lovibond, 122
Lowth, Dr., 220
Lyceum Theatre, 147
Lycidas, 59
Lydgate, 34
Lyrical Ballads, 129, 146, 156, 162, 164, 253, 295, 317 f.

Mabecce, 42
Macbeth, 10, 52, 56
Macbriar, 229
Macduff, 48
Mac Flecknoe, 80
MacIvor, Flora, 229
Mackintosh, Sir James, 193, 261–269, 301, 302
Madoc, 247
Mæviad, 286, 287
Malcolm, 48
Malebranche, 198
Malone, Edmund, 123
Malthus, 193, 269–80
Mandeville, 191
Manfred, 240
Mansfield, Lord, 77
Man was made to Mourn, 139
Manzotti, 323
Marivaux, 118
Marmion, 155, 224
Marvel, 83
Mary Morison, To, 140
Mask of Cupid, The, 35
Massinger, 291
Medoro, 3
Memnon, 60
Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus, 104
Merrilies, Meg, 230
Merry, 291
Michael Angelo, 18, 45
Mickle, 122
Midsummer Night's Dream, 2
Miller, the, 24
Mills, Dr., 122
Milton, 11, 33, 44 ff., 145, 148, 172
Milton's house, 172
Molière, 2
Molyneux (boxer), 205
Monk, The, 23
Montaigne, 165, 177
'Monthly Review, The,' 266
Moore, Tom, 151, 152, 153, 335–342
Moore (tragedian), 6

Moral and Political Philosophy, 318
More, Hannah, 147
Morgan, Lady, 290
Morton, 229
Mrs. Leicester's School, 146
Mucklewrath, 229
Murray, Lindley, 222, 223
Murray (publisher), 248, 294

Neal, 198
Newcastle, Duchess of, 198
Newton, Sir Isaac, 163
Non-Conformist's Memorial, 199
Northcote (painter), 194

Occleve, 33
Ode to an Ass's Foal, 164
Ode to Evening, 147
Ode to Spring, 147
Odes and Inscriptions, 164
Ogden, 323
Old Mortality, 225, 229
On Usury, 181
Ophelia, 49
Ossian, 15, 18
Othello, 5, 54
Overbury, Sir Thomas, 99, 141
Ovid. 79
Owen, Robert, 180

Paine, Tom, 183, 316
Paley, 183, 318
Pandemonium, 65
Paradise Lost, 60
Parnell, 104
Parr, Dr., 193, 215
Parry (explorer), 189
Passions, Ode on the, 116
Pastoral Ballad (Shenstone), 119
Pastorella, 43
Pattison, 122
Pembroke, Anne Countess of, 148
Penrose, 122
'Peter Pindar,' 291
Petrarch, 19
Peveril of the Peak, 230
Phillips, 301, 305
Philoctetes, 13
Pilgrim's Progress, The, 13
Pindaric Odes (Gray), 118
Pitt, 122, 215, 315
Plato, 3, 199
Pleasures of Hope, The, 148, 149
Pleasures of Memory, The, 148
Plotinus, 199
Plunket, 301
Plutus, 42
Poetical Character, Ode on the, 116
Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin, 324
Political Justice, 183
Poor Person, the, 24
Poor Susan, 156
Pope, 8, 13, 43, 45, 61, 63, 68 ff., 92, 100 n., 161, 259
Poussin, Gaspar, 164
Poussin, Nicholas, 38, 98, 259
Pre-Established Harmony, 198
Priestley, Dr., 198
Primrose, Dr., 119
Prior, 83, 104, 106
Prioress, 23, 32
Proclus, 199
Prometheus, 198
Proteus, 38
Puck, 53
Pulteney, 'Plug,' 280

'Quarterly Review,' 249, 280, 290, 292, 293
Quentin Durward, 230

Rabelais, 56, 111, 112, 113
Radclyffe, Mrs., 102, 146
Rape of the Lock, The, 72–3
Raphael, 11, 45, 144, 164, 226, 316
Rebecca, 225
Reeve, the, 24
Regicide Peace, The, 266
Rejected Addresses, 164, 324
Religious Musings, 164, 199
Remarks on Judge Eyre's Charge to the Jury, 192
Rembrandt, 9, 164, 259
Remorse, 147, 201
Retaliation, The, 120
Revenge, The, 115
Reynolds, J. H., 143
Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 18
Rhoderic Dhu, 155
Ricardo, 280
Richard II, 53
Richardson, 14
Rime of the Ancient Mariner, 166, 200, 201
Road to Ruin, The, 215
Robespierre, 128
Robin Hood, 143
Robinson Crusoe, 13, 94
Robinson, Mrs., 291
Rochester, 83
Roderic, 247
Rogers, 148
Rolle, Lord, 171
Romilly, Sir S., 171
Rose, Stuart, 294
Rosencrans, 48
Rousseau, 100, 103, 112, 163
'Rowley,' *see* Chatterton
Rubens, 42, 81, 164
Ruth, 149
Rydal Mount, 130
Sacharissa, 83
Sackville, 34
St. Cecilia's Day, Ode on, 81
St. Leon, 190
St. Ronan's Well, 228
Salmasius, 66
Sannazarius, 98
Sarah, Lines to, 164
Sardanapalus, 240
Satan, 52, 63–6
Satires (Pope), 76, 77
Satyrane, 42
Schiller, Sonnet to, 166, 201
Schoolmistress, The, 119
Scotch Drink, 132
Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled, 139
Scott, John, 225
Scott, Sir Walter, 122, 154, 155, 188, 223-34, 294
Seasons, The, 86
Serjeant at Law (*sic:* Chaucer's Man of Lawe), 24
Settle, Elkanah, 76
Seward, Anna, 146
Shaftesbury, 186
Shakspeare, 4, 5, 6, 13, 44 ff., 70, 71, 128
Shakspeare, Dryden on, 82 n.
Shaw, 122
Shenstone, 118, 119
Sheridan, 194, 215, 316 n.
Sherwood Forest, Sonnet on, 143
Shipman, the 24
Sidney, Sir Philip, 98
Smart, C., 122
Socinus, 199
Solomon, 106
Somerville, 122
Songs and Sonnets, 164
Sophocles, 198
South, 198

Southey, 40, 147, 164, 184, 244–252, 290, 311
Spenser, 11, 20 ff., 45, 46, 61, 85, 98
Spinoza, 199
Steele, 105
Sterne, 104, 179
Suckling, 83
Sumnour, the, 24, 25
Surrey, 34
Sussex, Duke of, 210
Swedenborg, 199
Swift, 104 ff., 109 ff.
Sylvanus, 11

Tale of a Tub, 109, 227
Tales of My Landlord, 147
Talus, 43
Tam O'Shanter, 129, 132–7
Tancred and Sigismunda, 76, 91
Task, The, 91
Tasso, 45
Tatler, The, 109
Taylor, Jeremy, 199
Thalaba, 247
Themistocles, 185
Theocritus, 98
Thomson, 63, 85 ff., 259
Thomson's Grave, Lines on, 116
Thoughts on the Inconsistency of Human Expectations, 147
Tibullus, 118
Tickell, 122
Tillotson, 198
Timon of Athens, 56
Titian, 11, 45, 81, 145, 164, 258
To a Tuft of Early Violets, 286
Tom Jones, 24
Tooke, Horne, 100, 193, 213–23, 307
Trim, Corporal, 105
Tristram Shandy, 104
Trivia, 109
Troilus and Cressida, 54
Turner, 143
Twa Dogs, 132
Twopenny Postbag, The, 152

Ugolino, 18
Ulysses, 54
Una, 11, 35
Universal Passion, The, 115
Unnatural Combat, The, 292
Utility, 178

Van Diemen's Land, 224
Vandyke, 45
Vanity of Human Wishes, 259
Various Prospects of Mankind, etc., 273
Venus dei Medici, 164
Vere, Lady, 83
Vicar of Wakefield, The, 119
Vich Ian Vohr, 229
Vindicæ Gallicæ. 266
Virgin-Martyr, The, 292
Vision of Judgment, A, 243, 247, 248
Voltaire, 56, 94, 111, 112, 113, 114, 163

Wallace, 273
Wallenstein (Coleridge's translation), 201
Waller, 83
Walpole, Sir Robert, 318
Walton, Isaak, 98
Warens, Mme de, 103
Warton, 88, 120 ff.

Watchman, The, 167
Wat Tyler, 164, 248
Waverley, 229
West (painter), 33
Westall (artist), 155, 225
Whitehead, 122
Whitfield, 94
Wife of Bath, the, 24
Wife of Bath's Prologue, 32, 33
Wilberforce, William, 209, 313–316
Wilkes, John, 215
Wilkie, 122, 141
William III, 106, 108
Windham, 221
Winter's Tale, The, 87
Withers, 84, 85, 98
Wittenberg, 48
Wolstonecraft, Mary, 194
Wordsworth, 63, 118, 128–32, 149, 156–61, 183, 253–61, 316, 317 f.
Wyatt, 34

Young, 63, 68, 114 ff.

Zanga, 115
Ziska, John, 199

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