

persuade you that the most insignificant objects are interesting in themselves, because he is interested in them. If he had met with Rousseau's favourite periwinkle, he would have *translated* it into the most beautiful of flowers.

This is not imagination, but want of sense. If his jealousy of the sympathy of others makes him avoid what is beautiful and grand in nature, why does he undertake elaborately to describe other objects? *His* nature is a mere Dulcinea del Toboso, and he would make a Vashti of her. Rubens appears to have been as extravagantly attached to his three wives as Raphael was to his Fornarina; but their faces were not so classical. The three greatest egotists that we know of—that is, the three writers who felt their own being most powerfully and exclusively—are Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Benvenuto Cellini. As Swift somewhere says, we defy the world to furnish out a fourth.

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No. XXV.

*On Different Sorts of Fame.*

THERE is a half serious, half ironical argument in Melmoth's 'Fitz-Osborn's Letters,' to show the futility of posthumous fame, which runs thus: "The object of any one who is inspired with this passion is to be remembered by posterity with admiration and delight, as having been possessed of certain powers and excellences which distinguished him above his contemporaries. But posterity, it is said, can know nothing of the individual but from the memory of those qualities which he has left behind him. All that we know of Julius Cæsar, for instance, is that he was the person who performed certain actions, and wrote a book called his 'Commentaries.' When, therefore, we extol Julius

Cæsar for his actions or his writings, what do we say but that the person who performed certain things did perform them; that the author of such a work was the person who wrote it; or, in short, that Julius Cæsar was Julius Cæsar? Now this is a mere truism, and the desire to be the subject of such an identical proposition must therefore be an evident absurdity." The sophism is a tolerably ingenious one, but it is a sophism, nevertheless. It would go equally to prove the nullity, not only of posthumous fame, but of living reputation; for the good or the bad opinion which my next-door neighbour may entertain of me is nothing more than his conviction that such and such a person having certain good or bad qualities is possessed of them; nor is the figure which a lord-mayor elect, a prating demagogue, or a popular preacher, makes in the eyes of the admiring multitude—*himself*, but an image of him reflected in the minds of others, in connection with certain feelings of respect and wonder. In fact, whether the admiration we seek is to last for a day or for eternity, whether we are to have it while living or after we are dead, whether it is to be expressed by our contemporaries or by future generations, the principle of it is the same—*sympathy with the feelings of others*, and the necessary tendency which the idea or consciousness of the approbation of others has to strengthen the suggestions of our self-love.<sup>1</sup> We are all inclined to think well of ourselves, of our sense and capacity in whatever we undertake; but from this very desire to think well of ourselves we are (as *Mrs. Peachum* says) "*bitter* bad judges" of our own pretensions; and when our vanity flatters us most we ought in general to suspect it most. We are, therefore, glad

<sup>1</sup> Burns, when about to sail for America after the first publication of his poems (1786), consoled himself with "the delicious thought of being regarded as a clever fellow, though on the other side of the Atlantic."

to get the good opinion of a friend, but that may be partial; the good word of a stranger is likely to be more sincere, but he may be a blockhead; the multitude will agree with us, if we agree with them; accident, the caprice of fashion, the prejudice of the moment, may give a fleeting reputation. Our only certain appeal, therefore, is to posterity; the voice of fame is alone the voice of truth. In proportion, however, as this award is final and secure, it is remote and uncertain. Voltaire said to some one, who had addressed an Epistle to Posterity, "I am afraid, my friend, this letter will never be delivered according to its direction." It can exist only in imagination; and we can only presume upon our claim to it, as we prefer the hope of lasting fame to everything else. The love of fame is almost 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. Vanity and the love of fame are quite distinct from each other; for the one is voracious of the most obvious and doubtful applause, whereas the other rejects or overlooks every kind of applause but that which is purified from every mixture of flattery, and identified with truth and nature itself. There is, therefore, something disinterested in this passion, inasmuch as it is abstracted and ideal, and only appeals to opinion as a standard of truth; it is this which "makes ambition virtue." Milton had as fine an idea as any one of true fame; and Dr. Johnson has very beautifully described his patient and confident anticipations of the success of his great poem in the account of 'Paradise Lost.' He has, indeed, done the same thing himself in 'Lycidas':—

"Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
(That last infirmity of noble mind)  
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;  
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,

And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
Comes the blind Fury with th' abhorred shears,  
And slits the thin-spun life. But not the praise,  
Phœbus replied, and touch'd my trembling ears."

None but those who have sterling pretensions can afford to refer them to time; as persons who live upon their means cannot well go into Chancery. No feeling can be more at variance with the true love of fame than that impatience which we have sometimes witnessed to "pluck its fruits, unripe and crude," before the time, to make a little echo of popularity mimic the voice of fame, and to convert a prize-medal or a newspaper-puff into a passport to immortality.

When we hear any one complaining that he has not the same fame as some poet or painter who lived two hundred years ago, he seems to us to complain that he has not been dead these two hundred years. When his fame has undergone the same ordeal, that is, has lasted as long, it will be as good, if he really deserves it. We think it equally absurd, when we sometimes find people objecting that such an acquaintance of theirs, who has not an idea in his head, should be so much better off in the world than they are. But it is for this very reason; they have preferred the indulgence of their ideas to the pursuit of realities. It is but fair that he who has no ideas should have something in their stead. If he who has devoted his time to the study of beauty, to the pursuit of truth, whose object has been to govern opinion, to form the taste of others, to instruct or to amuse the public, succeeds in this respect, he has no more right to complain that he has not a title or a fortune, than he who has not purchased a ticket, that is, who has taken no means to the end, has a right to complain that he has not a prize in the lottery.

In proportion as men can command the immediate and vulgar applause of others they become indifferent

to that which is remote and difficult of attainment. We take pains only when we are compelled to do it. Little men are remarked to have courage, little women to have wit; and it is seldom that a man of genius is a coxcomb in his dress. Rich men are contented not to be thought wise; and the great often think themselves well off if they can escape being the jest of their acquaintance. Authors were actuated by the desire of the applause of posterity only so long as they were debarred of that of their contemporaries, just as we see the map of the gold-mines of Peru hanging in the room of Hogarth's 'Distressed Poet.' In the midst of the ignorance and prejudices with which they were surrounded, they had a sort of *forlorn hope* in the prospect of immortality. The spirit of universal criticism has superseded the anticipation of posthumous fame, and instead of waiting for the award of distant ages, the poet or prose-writer receives final doom from the next number of the 'Edinburgh' or 'Quarterly Review.' According as the nearness of the applause increases our impatience increases with it. A writer in a weekly journal engages with reluctance in a monthly publication; and again, a contributor to a daily paper sets about his task with greater spirit than either of them. It is like prompt payment; the effort and the applause go together. We, indeed, have known a man of genius and eloquence to whom, from a habit of excessive talking, the certainty of seeing what he wrote in print the next day was too remote a stimulus for his imagination, and who constantly laid aside his pen in the middle of an article, if a friend dropped in, to finish the subject more effectually aloud, so that the approbation of his hearer and the sound of his own voice might be co-instantaneous. Members of Parliament seldom turn authors, except to print their speeches when they have not been distinctly heard or understood; and great orators are generally very

indifferent writers, from want of sufficient inducement to exert themselves, when the immediate effect on others is not perceived, and the irritation of applause or opposition ceases.

There have been in the last century two singular examples of literary reputation: the one of an author without a name, and the other of a name without an author. We mean the author of 'Junius's Letters,' and the translator of the mottoes to the 'Rambler,' whose name was Elphinstone. The 'Rambler' was published in the year 1750, and the name of Elphinstone prefixed to each paper is familiar to every literary reader since that time, though we know nothing more of him. We saw this gentleman, since the commencement of the present century, looking over a clipped hedge in the country, with a broad-flapped hat, a venerable countenance, and his dress cut out with the same formality as his evergreens. His name had not only survived half a century in conjunction with that of Johnson, but he had survived with it, enjoying all the dignity of a classical reputation and the ease of a literary sinecure on the strength of his mottoes. The author of 'Junius's Letters' is, on the contrary, as remarkable an instance of a writer who has arrived at all the public honours of literature without being known by name to a single individual, and who may be said to have realised all the pleasure of posthumous fame while living, without the smallest gratification of personal vanity. An anonymous writer may feel an acute interest in what is said of his productions, and a secret satisfaction in their success, because it is not the effect of personal considerations, as the overhearing any one speak well of us is more agreeable than a direct compliment. But this very satisfaction will tempt him to communicate his secret. This temptation, however, does not extend beyond the circle of his acquaintance. With respect to the public, who know an

author only by his writings, it is of little consequence whether he has a real or a fictitious name or signature, so that they have some clue by which to associate the works with the author. In the case of 'Junius,' therefore, where other personal considerations of interest or connections might immediately counteract and set aside this temptation, the triumph over the mere vanity of authorship might not have cost him so dear as we are at first inclined to imagine. Suppose it to have been the old Marquis of ———. It is quite out of the question that he should keep his places and not keep his secret. If ever the King should die we think it not impossible that the secret may out. Certainly the accouchement of any princess in Europe would not excite an equal interest. "And you then, sir, are the author of 'Junius'!" What a recognition for the public and the author! That between Yorick and the Frenchman was a trifle to it.

We have said that we think the desire to be known by name as an author chiefly has a reference to those to whom we are known personally, and is strongest with regard to those who know most of our persons and least of our capacities. We wish to *subpœna* the public to our characters. Those who, by great services or great meannesses, have attained titles always take them from the place with which they have the earliest associations, and thus strive to throw a veil of importance over the insignificance of their original pretensions or the injustice of fortune. When Lord Nelson was passing over the quay at Yarmouth, to take possession of the ship to which he had been appointed, the people exclaimed, "Why make that little fellow a captain?" He thought of this when he fought the battles of the Nile and Trafalgar. The same sense of personal insignificance which made him great in action made him a fool in love. If Bonaparte had been six inches higher

he never would have gone on that disastrous Russian expedition, nor "with that addition" would he ever have been emperor and king. For our own part, one object which we have in writing these essays is to send them in a volume to a person who took some notice of us when children, and who argued, perhaps, better of us than we deserved. In fact, the opinion of those who know us most, who are a kind of second self in our recollections, is a sort of second conscience; and the approbation of one or two friends is all the immortality *we* pretend to.

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## No. XXVI.

*Character of John Bull.*

In a late number of a respectable publication there is the following description of the French character:—

"Extremes meet. This is the only way of accounting for that enigma, the French character. It has often been remarked that this ingenious nation exhibits more striking contradictions than any other that ever existed. They are the gayest of the gay, and the gravest of the grave. Their very faces pass at once from an expression of the most lively animation, when they are in conversation or in action, to a melancholy blank. They are the lightest and most volatile, and at the same time the most plodding, mechanical, and laborious people in Europe. They are one moment the slaves of the most contemptible prejudices, and the next launch out into all the extravagance of the most abstract speculations. In matters of taste they are as inexorable as they are lax in questions of morality; they judge of the one by rules, of the other by their inclinations. It seems at times as if nothing could shock them, and yet they are offended at the merest trifles. The smallest things make