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TABLE-TALK;

OR,

ORIGINAL ESSAYS.

BY WILLIAM HAZLITT.



LONDON:

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MDCCCXXI.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

*IT may be proper to observe, that the Essays
“ On the Pleasure of Painting” and “ On the
Ignorance of the Learned,” in this Volume, have
already appeared in periodical publications.*

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solid gold, and lifts the mind quite off its ordinary hinges. The account of the manner in which the founder of Guy's Hospital accumulated his immense wealth has always to me something romantic in it, from the same force of contrast. He was a little shop-keeper, and out of his savings, bought Bibles and purchased seamen's tickets in Queen Anne's wars, by which he left a fortune of two hundred thousand pounds. The story suggests the idea of a magician; nor is there any thing in the Arabian Nights that looks more like a fiction.

ESSAY I.

ON THE PLEASURE OF PAINTING.

B

ESSAY I.

ON THE PLEASURE OF PAINTING.

“**THERE** is a pleasure in painting which none but painters know.” In writing, you have to contend with the world; in painting, you have only to carry on a friendly strife with Nature. You sit down to your task, and are happy. From the moment that you take up the pencil, and look Nature in the face, you are at peace with your own heart. No angry passions rise to disturb the silent progress of the work, to shake the hand, or dim the brow: no irritable humours are set afloat: you have no absurd opinions to combat, no point to strain, no adversary to crush, no fool to annoy—you are actuated by fear or favour to no man. There is “no juggling here,” no sophistry, no intrigue, no tampering with the evidence, no attempt to make black white, or white black: but you resign yourself into the hands of a greater power, that of Nature, with the simplicity of a child, and the devotion of an enthusiast—

“study with joy her manner, and with rapture taste her style.” The mind is calm, and full at the same time. The hand and eye are equally employed. In tracing the commonest object, a plant or the stump of a tree, you learn something every moment. You perceive unexpected differences, and discover likenesses where you looked for no such thing. You try to set down what you see—find out your error, and correct it. You need not play tricks, or purposely mistake: with all your pains, you are still far short of the mark. Patience grows out of the endless pursuit, and turns it into a luxury. A streak in a flower, a wrinkle in a leaf, a tinge in a cloud, a stain in an old wall or ruin grey, are seized with avidity as the *spolia opima* of this sort of mental warfare, and furnish out labour for another half-day. The hours pass away untold, without chagrin, and without weariness; nor would you ever wish to pass them otherwise. Innocence is joined with industry, pleasure with business; and the mind is satisfied, though it is not engaged in thinking or in doing any mischief*.

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

“About a league from the town is a place called Walheim. It is very agreeably situated on the side of a hill: from one

I have not much pleasure in writing these Essays, or in reading them afterwards; though I own I now and then meet with a phrase that I like, or a thought that strikes me as a true one. But after I begin them, I am only anxious to get to the end of them, which I am not

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

sure I shall do, for I seldom see my way a page or even a sentence beforehand; and when I have as by a miracle escaped, I trouble myself little more about them. I sometimes have to write them twice over: then it is necessary to read the *proof*, to prevent mistakes by the printer; so that by the time they appear in a tangible shape, and one can con them over with a conscious, sidelong glance to the public approbation, they have lost their gloss and relish, and become "more tedious than a twice-told tale." For a person to read his own works over with any great delight, he ought first to forget that he ever wrote them. Familiarity naturally breeds contempt. It is, in fact, like poring fondly over a piece of blank paper: from repetition, the words convey no distinct meaning to the mind, are mere idle sounds, except that our vanity claims an interest and property in them. I have more satisfaction in my own thoughts than in dictating them to others: words are necessary to explain the impression of certain things upon me to the reader, but they rather weaken and draw a veil over than strengthen it to myself. However I might say with the poet, "My mind to me a kingdom is," yet I have little ambition "to set a throne or chair of state in the understandings of other

men." The ideas we cherish most, exist best in a kind of shadowy abstraction,

" Pure in the last recesses of the mind ;"

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

paring the imitation with the original, you see what you have done, and how much you have still to do. The test of the senses is severer than that of fancy, and an over-match even for the delusions of our self-love. One part of a picture shames another, and you determine to paint up to yourself, if you cannot come up to nature. Every object becomes lustrous from the light thrown back upon it by the mirror of art: and by the aid of the pencil we may be said to touch and handle the objects of sight. The air-drawn visions that hover on the verge of existence have a bodily presence given them on the canvas: the form of beauty is changed into a substance: the dream and the glory of the universe is made "palpable to feeling as to sight."—And see! a rainbow starts from the canvas, with all its humid train of glory, as if it were drawn from its cloudy arch in heaven. The spangled landscape glitters with drops of dew after the shower. The "fleecy fools" show their coats in the gleams of the setting sun. The shepherds pipe their farewell notes in the fresh evening air. And is this bright vision made from a dead dull blank, like a bubble reflecting the mighty fabric of the universe? Who would think this miracle of Rubens's pencil possible to be performed? Who, having seen it, would not

spend his life to do the like? See how the rich fallows, the bare stubble-field, the scanty harvest-home, drag in Rembrandt's landscapes! How often have I looked at them and nature, and tried to do the same, till the very "light thickened," and there was an earthiness in the feeling of the air! There is no end of the refinements of art and nature in this respect. One may look at the misty glimmering horizon till the eye dazzles and the imagination is lost, in hopes to transfer the whole interminable expanse at one blow upon the canvas. Wilson said, he used to try to paint the effect of the motes dancing in the setting sun. At another time, a friend coming into his painting-room when he was sitting on the ground in a melancholy posture, observed that his picture looked like a landscape after a shower: he started up with the greatest delight, and said, "That is the effect I intended to produce, but thought I had failed." Wilson was neglected; and, by degrees, neglected his art to apply himself to brandy. His hand became unsteady, so that it was only by repeated attempts that he could reach the place, or produce the effect he aimed at; and when he had done a little to a picture, he would say to any acquaintance who chanced to drop in, "I have painted enough for one day: come, let us go

somewhere." It was not so Claude left his pictures, or his studies on the banks of the Tiber, to go in search of other enjoyments, or ceased to gaze upon the glittering sunny vales and distant hills; and while his eye drank in the clear sparkling hues and lovely forms of nature, his hand stamped them on the lucid canvas to last there for ever!—One of the most delightful parts of my life was one fine summer, when I used to walk out of an evening to catch the last light of the sun, gemming the green slopes or russet lawns, and gilding tower or tree, while the blue sky gradually turning to purple and gold, or skirted with dusky grey, hung its broad marble pavement over all, as we see it in the great master of Italian landscape. But to come to a more particular explanation of the subject.

The first head I ever tried to paint was an old woman with the upper part of the face shaded by her bonnet, and I certainly laboured it with great perseverance. It took me numberless sittings to do it. I have it by me still, and sometimes look at it with surprise, to think how much pains were thrown away to little purpose,—yet not altogether in vain if it taught me to see good in every thing, and to know that there is nothing vulgar in nature seen with the eye of science or of true art. ; Refinement creates beauty every-

where: it is the grossness of the spectator that discovers nothing but grossness in the object. Be this as it may, I spared no pains to do my best. If art was long, I thought that life was so too at that moment. I got in the general effect the first day; and pleased and surprised enough I was at my success. The rest was a work of time—of weeks and months (if need were) of patient toil and careful finishing. I had seen an old head by Rembrandt at Burleigh-House, and if I could produce a head at all like Rembrandt in a year, in my life-time, it would be glory and felicity and wealth and fame enough for me! The head I had seen at Burleigh was an exact and wonderful fac-simile of nature, and I resolved to make mine (as nearly as I could) an exact fac-simile of nature. I did not then, nor do I now believe, with Sir Joshua, that the perfection of art consists in giving general appearances without individual details, but in giving general appearances with individual details. Otherwise, I had done my work the first day. But I saw something more in nature than general effect, and I thought it worth my while to give it in the picture. There was a gorgeous effect of light and shade: but there was a delicacy as well as depth in the *chiaro scuro*, which

I was bound to follow into all its dim and scarce perceptible variety of tone and shadow. Then I had to make the transition from a strong light to as dark a shade, preserving the masses, but gradually softening off the intermediate parts. It was so in nature: the difficulty was to make it so in the copy. I tried, and failed again and again; I strove harder, and succeeded as I thought. The wrinkles in Rembrandt were not hard lines; but broken and irregular. I saw the same appearance in nature, and strained every nerve to give it. If I could hit off this edgy appearance, and insert the reflected light in the furrows of old age in half a morning, I did not think I had lost a day. Beneath the shrielled yellow parchment look of the skin, there was here and there a streak of the blood colour tinging the face; this I made a point of conveying, and did not cease to compare what I saw with what I did (with jealous lynx-eyed watchfulness) till I succeeded to the best of my ability and judgment. How many revisions were there! How many attempts to catch an expression which I had seen the day before! How often did we try to get the old position, and wait for the return of the same light! There was a puckering up of the lips, a cautious intro-

version of the eye under the shadow of the bonnet, indicative of the feebleness and suspicion of old age, which at last we managed, after many trials and some quarrels, to a tolerable nicety. The picture was never finished, and I might have gone on with it to the present hour*. I used to set it on the ground when my day's work was done, and saw revealed to me with swimming eyes the birth of new hopes, and of a new world of objects. The painter thus learns to look at nature with different eyes. He before saw her "as in a glass darkly, but now face to face." He understands the texture and meaning of the visible universe, and "sees into the life of things," not by the help of mechanical instruments, but of the improved exercise of his faculties, and an intimate sympathy with nature. The meanest thing is not lost upon him, for he looks at it with an eye to itself, not merely to his own vanity or interest, or the opinion of the world. Even where there is neither beauty nor use—if that ever were—still there is truth, and a sufficient source of gratification in the indulgence of curiosity and activity of mind. The humblest painter is a true scholar; and the best

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

of scholars—the scholar of nature. For myself, and for the real comfort and satisfaction of the thing, I had rather have been Jan Steen, or Gerard Dow, than the greatest casuist or philologist that ever lived. The painter does not view things in clouds or “mist, the common gloss of theologians,” but applies the same standard of truth and disinterested spirit of inquiry, that influence his daily practice, to other subjects. He perceives form, he distinguishes character. He reads men and books with an intuitive eye. He is a critic as well as a connoisseur. The conclusions he draws are clear and convincing, because they are taken from the things themselves. He is not a fanatic, a dupe, or a slave: for the habit of seeing for himself also disposes him to judge for himself. The most sensible men I know (taken as a class) are painters; that is, they are the most lively observers of what passes in the world about them, and the closest observers of what passes in their own minds. From their profession they in general mix more with the world than authors; and if they have not the same fund of acquired knowledge, are obliged to rely more on individual sagacity. I might mention the names of Opie, Fuseli, Northcote, as persons distinguished for striking description and acquaintance with

the subtle traits of character*. Painters in ordinary society, or in obscure situations where their value is not known, and they are treated with neglect and indifference, have sometimes a forward self-sufficiency of manner: but this is not so much their fault as that of others. Perhaps their want of regular education may also be in fault in such cases. Richardson, who is very tenacious of the respect in which the profession ought to be held, tells a story of Michael Angelo, that after a quarrel between him and Pope Julius II. "upon account of a slight the artist conceived the pontiff had put upon him, Michael Angelo was introduced by a bishop, who, thinking to serve the artist by it, made it an argument that the Pope should be reconciled to him, because men of his profession were commonly ignorant, and of no consequence otherwise: his holiness, enraged at the bishop, struck him with his staff, and told him, it was he that was the blockhead, and affronted the man

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

himself would not offend; the prelate was driven out of the chamber, and Michael Angelo had the Pope's benediction accompanied with presents. This bishop had fallen into the vulgar error, and was rebuked accordingly."

Besides the exercise of the mind, painting exercises the body. It is a mechanical as well as a liberal art. To do any thing, to dig a hole in the ground, to plant a cabbage, to hit a mark, to move a shuttle, to work a pattern,—in a word, to attempt to produce any effect, and to *succeed*, has something in it that gratifies the love of power, and carries off the restless activity of the mind of man. Indolence is a delightful but distressing state. we must be doing something to be happy. Action is no less necessary than thought to the instinctive tendencies of the human frame; and painting combines them both incessantly*. The hand furnishes a practical test of the correctness of the eye; and the eye thus admonished, imposes fresh tasks of skill and industry upon the hand. Every stroke tells, as the verifying of a new truth; and every new observation, the instant it is made, passes into an act and emanation of the will. Every

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

step is nearer what we wish, and yet there is always more to do. In spite of the facility, the fluttering grace, the evanescent hues, that play round the pencil of Rubens and Vandyke, however I may admire, I do not envy them this power so much as I do the slow, patient, laborious execution of Correggio, Leonardo da Vinci, and Andrea del Sarto, where every touch appears conscious of its charge, emulous of truth, and where the painful artist has so distinctly wrought,

“ That you might almost say his picture thought !”

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

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

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

Painting is not, like writing, what is properly understood by a sedentary employment. It requires not indeed a strong, but a continued and steady exertion of muscular power. The precision and delicacy of the manual operation makes up for the want of vehemence,—as to balance himself for any time in the same position the rope-dancer must strain every nerve. Painting for a whole morning gives one as excellent an appetite for one's dinner, as old Abraham Tucker acquired for his by riding over Banstead Downs. It is related of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that "he took no other exercise than what he used in his painting-room,"—the writer means, in walking backwards and forwards to look at his picture; but the act of painting itself, of laying on the colours in the proper place, and proper quantity, was a much harder exercise than this alternate receding from and returning to the picture. This last would be rather a relaxation and relief than an effort. It is not to be wondered at, that an artist like Sir Joshua, who delighted so much in the sensual and practical part of his art, should have found himself at a considerable loss when the decay of

his sight precluded him, for the last year or two of his life, from the following up of his profession,—“the source,” according to his own remark, “of thirty years uninterrupted enjoyment and prosperity to him.” It is only those who never think at all, or else who have accustomed themselves to brood incessantly on abstract ideas, that never feel *ennui*.

To give one instance more, and then I will have done with this rambling discourse. One of my first attempts was a picture of my father, who was then in a green old age, with strong-marked features, and scarred with the small-pox. I drew it with a broad light crossing the face, looking down, with spectacles on, reading. The book was Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, in a fine old binding, with Gribelin's etchings. My father would as lieve it had been any other book; but for him to read was to be content, was “riches fineless.” The sketch promised well; and I set to work to finish it, determined to spare no time nor pains. My father was willing to sit as long as I pleased; for there is a natural desire in the mind of man to sit for one's picture, to be the object of continued attention, to have one's likeness multiplied; and besides his satisfaction in the picture, he had some pride in the artist, though he would rather

I should have written a sermon than painted like Rembrandt or like Raphael. Those winter days, with the gleams of sunshine coming through the chapel-windows, and cheered by the notes of the robin-redbreast in our garden (that "ever in the haunch of winter sings")—as my afternoon's work drew to a close,—were among the happiest of my life. When I gave the effect I intended to any part of the picture for which I had prepared my colours, when I imitated the roughness of the skin by a lucky stroke of the pencil, when I hit the clear pearly tone of a vein, when I gave the ruddy complexion of health, the blood circulating under the broad shadows of one side of the face, I thought my fortune made; or rather it was already more than made, in my fancying that I might one day be able to say with Correggio, "*I also am a painter!*" It was an idle thought, a boy's conceit; but it did not make me less happy at the time. I used regularly to set my work in the chair to look at it through the long evenings; and many a time did I return to take leave of it before I could go to bed at night. I remember sending it with a throbbing heart to the Exhibition, and seeing it hung up there by the side of one of the Honourable Mr. Skeffington (now Sir George). There was nothing in

common between them, but that they were the portraits of two very good-natured men. I think, but am not sure, that I finished this portrait (or another afterwards) on the same day that the news of the battle of Austerlitz came; I walked out in the afternoon, and, as I returned, saw the evening star set over a poor man's cottage with other thoughts and feelings than I shall ever have again. Oh for the revolution of the great Platonic year, that those times might come over again! I could sleep out the three hundred and sixty-five thousand intervening years very contentedly!—The picture is left: the table, the chair, the window where I learned to construe Livy, the chapel where my father preached, remain where they were; but he himself is gone to rest, full of years, of faith, of hope, and charity!

ESSAY II.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

ESSAY II.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

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

“Whate'er Lorraine light touch'd with soft'ning hue,
Or savage Rosa dash'd, or learned Poussin drew.”

He turns aside to view a country-gentleman's seat with eager looks, thinking it may contain some of the rich products of art. There is an air round Lord Radnor's park, for there hang the two Claudes, the Morning and Evening of the Roman Empire—round Wilton-house, for there is Vandyke's picture of the Pembroke family—round Blenheim, for there is his picture of the Duke of Buckingham's children, and the most magnificent collection of Rubenses in the world—at Knowsley, for there is Rembrandt's Hand-writing on the Wall—and at Burleigh, for there are some of Guido's angelic heads.

The young artist makes a pilgrimage to each of these places, eyes them wistfully at a distance, "bosomed high in tufted trees," and feels an interest in them of which the owner is scarce conscious: he enters the well-swept walks and echoing arch-ways, passes the threshold, is led through wainscoted rooms, is shown the furniture, the rich hangings, the tapestry, the massy services of plate—and, at last, is ushered into the room where his treasure is, the idol of his vows—some speaking face or bright landscape! It is stamped on his brain, and lives there thenceforward, a tally for nature, and a test of art. He furnishes out the chambers of the mind from the spoils of time, picks and chooses which shall have the best places—nearest his heart. He goes away richer than he came, richer than the possessor; and thinks that he may one day return, when he perhaps shall have done something like them, or even from failure shall have learned to admire truth and genius more.

My first initiation in the mysteries of the art was at the Orleans Gallery: it was there I formed my taste, such as it is; so that I am irreclaimably of the old school in painting. I was staggered when I saw the works there collected, and looked at them with wondering and

with longing eyes. A mist passed away from my sight: the scales fell off. A new sense came upon me, a new heaven and a new earth stood before me. I saw the soul speaking in the face—"hands that the rod of empire had swayed" in mighty ages past—"a forked mountain or blue promontory,"

———"with trees upon 't

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

Old Time had unlocked his treasures, and Fame stood portress at the door. We had all heard of the names of Titian, Raphael, Guido, Domenichino, the Caracci—but to see them face to face, to be in the same room with their deathless productions, was like breaking some mighty spell—was almost an effect of necromancy! From that time I lived in a world of pictures. Battles, sieges, speeches in parliament seemed mere idle noise and fury, "signifying nothing," compared with those mighty works and dreaded names that spoke to me in the eternal silence of thought. This was the more remarkable, as it was but a short time before that I was not only totally ignorant of, but insensible to the beauties of art. As an instance, I remember that one afternoon I was reading the Provoked Husband with the highest relish, with a green

woody landscape of Ruysdael or Hobbima just before me, at which I looked off the book now and then, and wondered what there could be in that sort of work to satisfy or delight the mind—at the same time asking myself, as a speculative question, whether I should ever feel an interest in it like what I took in reading Vanbrugh and Cibber?

I had made some progress in painting when I went to the Louvre to study, and I never did any thing afterwards. I never shall forget conning over the Catalogue which a friend lent me just before I set out. The pictures, the names of the painters, seemed to relish in the mouth. There was one of Titian's Mistress at her toilette. Even the colours with which the painter had adorned her hair were not more golden, more amiable to sight, than those which played round and tantalised my fancy ere I saw the picture. There were two portraits by the same hand—"A young Nobleman with a glove"—Another, "a companion to it"—I read the description over and over with fond expectancy, and filled up the imaginary outline with whatever I could conceive of grace, and dignity, and an antique *gusto*—all but equal to the original. There was the Transfiguration too. With what awe I saw it in my mind's eye, and was over-

shadowed with the spirit of the artist! Not to have been disappointed with these works afterwards, was the highest compliment I can pay to their transcendent merits. Indeed, it was from seeing other works of the same great masters that I had formed a vague, but no disparaging idea of these.—The first day I got there, I was kept for some time in the French Exhibition-room, and thought I should not be able to get a sight of the old masters. I just caught a peep at them through the door (vile hindrance!) like looking out of purgatory into paradise—from Poussin's noble mellow-looking landscapes to where Rubens hung out his gaudy banner, and down the glimmering vista to the rich jewels of Titian and the Italian school. At last, by much importunity, I was admitted, and lost not an instant in making use of my new privilege.—It was *un beau jour* to me. I marched delighted through a quarter of a mile of the proudest efforts of the mind of man, a whole creation of genius, a universe of art! I ran the gauntlet of all the schools from the bottom to the top; and in the end got admitted into the inner room, where they had been repairing some of their greatest works. Here the Transfiguration, the St. Peter Martyr, and the St. Jerome of Domenichino stood on the floor, as if they had

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

It has been made a question, whether the

artist, or the mere man of taste and natural sensibility, receives most pleasure from the contemplation of works of art? and I think this question might be answered by another as a sort of *experimentum crucis*, namely, whether any one out of that "number numberless" of mere gentlemen and amateurs, who visited Paris at the period here spoken of, felt as much interest, as much pride or pleasure in this display of the most striking monuments of art as the humblest student would? The first entrance into the Louvre would be only one of the events of his journey, not an event in his life, remembered ever after with thankfulness and regret. He would explore it with the same unmeaning curiosity and idle wonder as he would the Regalia in the Tower, or the Botanic Garden in the Thuilleries, but not with the fond enthusiasm of an artist. How should he? His is "casual fruition, joyless, unendeared." But the painter is wedded to his art, the mistress, queen, and idol of his soul. He has embarked his all in it, fame, time, fortune, peace of mind, his hopes in youth, his consolation in age: and shall he not feel a more intense interest in whatever relates to it than the mere indolent trifler? Natural sensibility alone, without the entire application of the mind to that one ob-

ject, will not enable the possessor to sympathise with all the degrees of beauty and power in the conceptions of a Titian or a Correggio; but it is he only who does this, who follows them into all their force and matchless grace, that does or can feel their full value. Knowledge is pleasure as well as power. No one but the artist who has studied nature and contended with the difficulties of art, can be aware of the beauties, or intoxicated with a passion for painting. No one who has not devoted his life and soul to the pursuit of art, can feel the same exultation in its brightest ornaments and loftiest triumphs which an artist does. Where the treasure is, there the heart is also. It is now seventeen years since I was studying in the Louvre (and I have long since given up all thoughts of the art as a profession), but long after I returned, and even still, I sometimes dream of being there again—of asking for the old pictures—and not finding them, or finding them changed or faded from what they were, I cry myself awake! What gentleman-amateur ever does this at such a distance of time,—that is, ever received pleasure or took interest enough in them to produce so lasting an impression?

But it is said that if a person had the same natural taste, and the same acquired knowledge

as an artist, without the petty interests and technical notions, he would derive a purer pleasure from seeing a fine portrait, a fine landscape, and so on. This however is not so much begging the question as asking an impossibility: he cannot have the same insight into the end without having studied the means; nor the same love of art without the same habitual and exclusive attachment to it. Painters are, no doubt, often actuated by jealousy, partiality, and a sordid attention to that only which they find useful to themselves in painting. W—— has been seen poring over the texture of a Dutch cabinet-picture, so that he could not see the picture itself. But this is the perversion and pedantry of the profession, not its true or genuine spirit. If W—— had never looked at any thing but megilps and handling, he never would have put the soul of life and manners into his pictures, as he has done. Another objection is, that the instrumental parts of the art, the means, the first rudiments, paints, oils, and brushes, are painful and disgusting; and that the consciousness of the difficulty and anxiety with which perfection has been attained, must take away from the pleasure of the finest performance. This, however, is only an additional proof of the greater pleasure derived by the

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artist from his profession; for these things which are said to interfere with and destroy the common interest in works of art, do not disturb him; he never once thinks of them, he is absorbed in the pursuit of a higher object; he is intent, not on the means but the end; he is taken up, not with the difficulties, but with the triumph over them. As in the case of the anatomist, who overlooks many things in the eagerness of his search after abstract truth; or the alchemist who, while he is raking into his soot and furnaces, lives in a golden dream; a lesser gives way to a greater object. But it is pretended that the painter may be supposed to submit to the unpleasant part of the process only for the sake of the fame or profit in view. So far is this from being a true state of the case, that I will venture to say, in the instance of a friend of mine who has lately succeeded in an important undertaking in his art, that not all the fame he has acquired, not all the money he has received from thousands of admiring spectators, not all the newspaper puffs,—nor even the praise of the Edinburgh Review,—not all these, put together, ever gave him at any time the same genuine, undoubted satisfaction as any one half-hour employed in the ardent and propitious pursuit of his art—in finishing to his

heart's content a foot, a hand, or even a piece of drapery. What is the state of mind of an artist while he is at work? He is then in the act of realising the highest idea he can form of beauty or grandeur: he conceives, he embodies that which he understands and loves best: that is, he is in full and perfect possession of that which is to him the source of the highest happiness and intellectual excitement which he can enjoy.

In short, as a conclusion to this argument, I will mention a circumstance which fell under my knowledge the other day. A friend had bought a print of Titian's *Mistress*, the same to which I have alluded above. He was anxious to shew it me on this account. I told him it was a spirited engraving, but it had not the look of the original. I believe he thought this fastidious, till I offered to shew him a rough sketch of it, which I had by me. Having seen this, he said he perceived exactly what I meant, and could not bear to look at the print afterwards. He had good sense enough to see the difference in the individual instance; but a person better acquainted with Titian's manner and with art in general, that is, of a more cultivated and refined taste, would know that it was a bad print, without having any immediate

model to compare it with. He would perceive with a glance of the eye, with a sort of instinctive feeling, that it was hard, and without that bland, expansive, and nameless expression which always distinguished Titian's most famous works. Any one who is accustomed to a head in a picture can never reconcile himself to a print from it: but to the ignorant they are both the same. To a vulgar eye there is no difference between a Guido and a daub, between a penny-print or the vilest scrawl, and the most finished performance. In other words, all that excellence which lies between these two extremes,—all, at least, that marks the excess above mediocrity,—all that constitutes true beauty, harmony, refinement, grandeur, is lost upon the common observer. But it is from this point that the delight, the glowing raptures of the true adept commence. An uninformed spectator may like an ordinary drawing better than the ablest connoisseur; but for that very reason he cannot like the highest specimens of art so well. The refinements not only of execution but of truth and nature are inaccessible to unpractised eyes. The exquisite gradations in a sky of Claude's are not perceived by such persons, and consequently the harmony cannot be felt. Where there is no conscious appre-

hension, there can be no conscious pleasure. Wonder at the first sight of works of art may be the effect of ignorance and novelty; but real admiration and permanent delight in them are the growth of taste and knowledge. "I would not wish to have your eyes," said a good-natured man to a critic, who was finding fault with a picture, in which the other saw no blemish. Why so? The idea which prevented him from admiring this inferior production was a higher idea of truth and beauty which was ever present with him, and a continual source of pleasing and lofty contemplations. It may be different in a taste for outward luxuries and the privations of mere sense; but the idea of perfection, which acts as an intellectual foil, is always an addition, a support, and a proud consolation!

Richardson, in his Essays which ought to be better known, has left some striking examples of the felicity and infelicity of artists, both as it relates to their external fortune, and to the practice of their art. In speaking of *the knowledge of hands*, he exclaims—"When one is considering a picture or a drawing, one at the same time thinks this was done by him* who had many extraordinary endowments of body and

* Leonardo da Vinci.

mind, but was withal very capricious ; who was honoured in life and death, expiring in the arms of one of the greatest princes of that age, Francis I. King of France, who loved him as a friend. Another is of him* who lived a long and happy life, beloved of Charles V. emperor; and many others of the first princes of Europe. When one has another in hand, we think this was done by one † who so excelled in three arts, as that any of them in that degree had rendered him worthy of immortality; and one moreover that durst contend with his sovereign (one of the haughtiest popes that ever was) upon a slight offered to him, and extricated himself with honour. Another is the work of him ‡ who, without any one exterior advantage but mere strength of genius, had the most sublime imaginations, and executed them accordingly, yet lived and died obscurely. Another we shall consider as the work of him § who restored Painting when it had almost sunk ; of him whom art made honourable, but who neglecting and despising greatness with a sort of cynical pride, was treated suitably to the figure he gave himself, not his intrinsic worth ; which, not having philosophy enough to bear it, broke his heart.

* Titian.

† Michael Angelo.

‡ Correggio.

§ Annibal Caracci.

Another is done by one* who (on the contrary) was a fine gentleman and lived in great magnificence, and was much honoured by his own and foreign princes; who was a courtier, a statesman, and a painter; and so much all these, that when he acted in either character, *that* seemed to be his business, and the others his diversion. I say when one thus reflects, besides the pleasure arising from the beauties and excellences of the work, the fine ideas it gives us of natural things, the noble way of thinking it may suggest to us, an additional pleasure results from the above considerations. But, oh! the pleasure, when a connoisseur and lover of art has before him a picture or drawing, of which he can say this is the hand, these are the thoughts of him† who was one of the politest, best-natured gentlemen that ever was; and beloved and assisted by the greatest wits and the greatest men then in Rome: of him who lived in great fame, honour, and magnificence, and died extremely lamented; and missed a Cardinal's hat only by dying a few months too soon; but was particularly esteemed and favoured by two Popes, the only ones who filled the chair of St. Peter in his time, and as great men as ever sat there

* Rubens.

† Rafacelle.

since that apostle, if at least he ever did : one, in short, who could have been a Leonardo, a Michael Angelo, a Titian, a Correggio, a Parmegiano, an Annibal, a Rubens, or any other whom he pleased, but none of them could ever have been a Rafaele." Page 251.

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

“ Guido Reni from a prince-like affluence of fortune (the just reward of his angelic works) fell to a condition like that of a hired servant to one who supplied him with money for what he did at a fixed rate ; and that by his being bewitched with a passion for gaming, whereby he lost vast sums of money ; and even what he got in this his state of servitude by day, he commonly lost at night : nor could he ever be cured of this cursed madness. Those of his works, therefore, which he did in this unhappy part of his life, may easily be conceived to be in a different style to what he did before, which in some things, that is, in the airs of his heads (in the gracious kind) had a delicacy in them peculiar to himself, and almost more than human. But I must not multiply instances. Parmegiano is one that

alone takes in all the several kinds of variation, and all the degrees of goodness, from the lowest of the indifferent up to the sublime. I can produce evident proofs of this in so easy a gradation, that one cannot deny but that he that did this, might do that, and very probably did so; and thus one may ascend and descend, like the angels on Jacob's ladder, whose foot was upon the earth, but its top reached to Heaven.

“ And this great man had his unlucky circumstance: he became mad after the philosopher's stone, and did but very little in painting or drawing afterwards. Judge what that was, and whether there was not an alteration of style from what he had done, before this devil possessed him. His creditors endeavoured to exorcise him, and did him some good, for he set himself to work again in his own way: but if a drawing I have of a Lucretia be that he made for his last picture, as it probably is (Vasari says that was the subject of it) it is an evident proof of his decay: it is good indeed, but it wants much of the delicacy which is commonly seen in his works; and so I always thought before I knew or imagined it to be done in this his ebb of genius.” Page 153.

We have had two artists of our own country, whose fate has been as singular as it was hard. Gandy was a portrait-painter in the beginning

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

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

ESSAY III.
ON THE PAST AND FUTURE.

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I HAVE naturally but little imagination, and am not of a very sanguine turn of mind. I have some desire to enjoy the present good, and some fondness for the past; but I am not at all given to building castles in the air, nor to look forward with much confidence or hope to the brilliant illusions held out by the future. Hence I have perhaps been led to form a theory, which is very contrary to the common notions and feelings on the subject, and which I will here try to explain as well as I can.—When Sterne in the *Sentimental Journey* told the French Minister that if the French people had a fault, it was that they were too serious, the latter replied that if that was his opinion, he must defend it with all his might, for he would have all the world against him; so I shall have enough to do to get well through the present argument.

I cannot see, then, any rational or logical ground for that mighty difference in the value

which mankind generally set upon the past and future, as if the one was every thing, and the other nothing, of no consequence whatever. On the other hand, I conceive that the past is as real and substantial a part of our being, that it is as much a *bona fide*, undeniable consideration in the estimate of human life, as the future can possibly be. To say that the past is of no importance, unworthy of a moment's regard, because it has gone by, and is no longer any thing, is an argument that cannot be held to any purpose: for if the past has ceased to be, and is therefore to be accounted nothing in the scale of good or evil, the future is yet to come, and has never been any thing. Should any one choose to assert that the present only is of any value in a strict and positive sense, because that alone has a real existence, that we should seize the instant good, and give all else to the winds, I can understand what he means (though perhaps he does not himself*): but I cannot comprehend how this distinction be-

* If we take away from *the present* the moment that is just gone by and the moment that is next to come, how much of it will be left for this plain, practical theory to rest upon? Their solid basis of sense and reality will reduce itself to a pin's point, a hair-line, on which our moral balance-masters will have some difficulty to maintain their footing without falling over on either side.

tween that which has a downright and sensible, and that which has only a remote and airy existence, can be applied to establish the preference of the future over the past; for both are in this point of view equally ideal, absolutely nothing, except as they are conceived of by the mind's eye, and are thus rendered present to the thoughts and feelings. Nay, the one is even more imaginary, a more fantastic creature of the brain than the other, and the interest we take in it more shadowy and gratuitous; for the future, on which we lay so much stress, may never come to pass at all, that is, may never be embodied into actual existence in the whole course of events, whereas the past has certainly existed once, has received the stamp of truth, and left an image of itself behind. It is so far then placed beyond the possibility of doubt, or as the poet has it,

“ Those joys are lodg'd beyond the reach of fate.”

It is not, however, attempted to be denied that though the future is nothing at present, and has no immediate interest while we are speaking, yet it is of the utmost consequence in itself, and of the utmost interest to the individual, because it *will have* a real existence, and we have an idea of it as existing in time to

come. Well then, the past also has no real existence; the actual sensation and the interest belonging to it are both fled; but it *has had* a real existence, and we can still call up a vivid recollection of it as having once been; and therefore, by parity of reasoning, it is not a thing perfectly insignificant in itself, nor wholly indifferent to the mind, whether it ever was or not. Oh no! Far from it! Let us not rashly quit our hold upon the past, when perhaps there may be little else left to bind us to existence. Is it nothing to have been, and to have been happy or miserable? Or is it a matter of no moment to think whether I have been one or the other? Do I delude myself, do I build upon a shadow or a dream, do I dress up in the gaudy garb of idleness and folly a pure fiction, with nothing answering to it in the universe of things and the records of truth, when I look back with fond delight or with tender regret to that which was at one time to me *my all*, when I revive the glowing image of some bright reality,

“The thoughts of which can never from my heart?”

Do I then muse on nothing, do I bend my eyes on nothing, when I turn back in fancy to “those suns and skies so pure” that lighted up

my early path? Is it to think of nothing, to set an idle value upon nothing, to think of all that has happened to me, and of all that can ever interest me? Or, to use the language of a fine poet (who is himself among my earliest and not least painful recollections)—

“What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever vanish'd from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flow'r”—

yet am I mocked with a lie, when I venture to think of it? Or do I not drink in and breathe again the air of heavenly truth, when I but “retrace its footsteps, and its skirts far off adore?” I cannot say with the same poet—

“And see how dark the backward stream,
A little moment past so smiling”—

for it is the past that gives me most delight and most assurance of reality. What to me constitutes the great charm of the Confessions of Rousseau is their turning so much upon this feeling. He seems to gather up the past moments of his being like drops of honey-dew to distil a precious liquor from them; his alternate pleasures and pains are the bead-roll that he tells over, and piously worships; he makes a rosary of the flowers of hope and fancy that

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strewed his earliest years. When he begins the last of the *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, "*Il y a aujourd'hui, jour des Pâques Fleuris, cinquante ans depuis que j'ai premier vu Madame Warens,*" what a yearning of the soul is implied in that short sentence! Was all that had happened to him, all that he had thought and felt in that sad interval of time, to be accounted nothing? Was that long, dim, faded retrospect of years happy or miserable, a blank that was not to make his eyes fail and his heart faint within him in trying to grasp all that had once filled it and that had since vanished, because it was not a prospect into futurity? Was he wrong in finding more to interest him in it than in the next fifty years—which he did not live to see; or if he had, what then? Would they have been worth thinking of, compared with the times of his youth, of his first meeting with Madame Warens, with those times which he has traced with such truth and pure delight "in our heart's tables?" When "all the life of life was flown," was he not to live the first and best part of it over again, and once more be all that he then was?—Ye woods that crown the clear lone brow of Norman Court, why do I revisit ye so oft, and feel a soothing consciousness of your presence, but that your high tops waving

in the wind recal to me the hours and years that are for ever fled, that ye renew in ceaseless murmurs the story of long-cherished hopes and bitter disappointment, that in your solitudes and tangled wilds I can wander and lose myself as I wander on and am lost in the solitude of my own heart; and that as your rustling branches give the loud blast to the waste below—borne on the thoughts of other years, I can look down with patient anguish at the cheerless desolation which I feel within! Without that face pale as the primrose with hyacinthine locks, for ever shunning and for ever haunting me, mocking my waking thoughts as in a dream, without that smile which my heart could never turn to scorn, without those eyes dark with their own lustre, still bent on mine, and drawing the soul into their liquid mazes like a sea of love, without that name trembling in fancy's ear, without that form gliding before me like Oread or Dryad in fabled groves, what should I do, how pass away the listless leaden-footed hours? Then wave, wave on, ye woods of Tuderley, and lift your high tops in the air; my sighs and vows uttered by your mystic voice breathe into me my former being, and enable me to bear the thing I am!—The objects that we have known in better days are the main

props that sustain the weight of our affections, and give us strength to await our future lot. The future is like a dead wall or a thick mist hiding all objects from our view: the past is alive and stirring with objects, bright or solemn, and of unfading interest. What is it in fact that we recur to oftenest? What subjects do we think or talk of? Not the ignorant future, but the well-stored past. Othello, the Moor of Venice, amused himself and his hearers at the house of Signor Brabantio by "running through the story of his life even from his boyish days;" and oft "beguiled them of their tears, when he did speak of some disastrous stroke which his youth suffered." This plan of ingratiating himself would not have answered, if the past had been, like the contents of an old almanac, of no use but to be thrown aside and forgotten. What a blank, for instance, does the history of the world for the next six thousand years present to the mind, compared with that of the last! All that strikes the imagination or excites any interest in the mighty scene is *what has been* *!

* A treatise on the Millennium is dull; but who was ever weary of reading the fables of the Golden Age? On my once observing I should like to have been Claude, a person said, "they should not, for that then by this time it would have been all over with them." As if it could possibly signify when

Neither in itself then, nor as a subject of general contemplation, has the future any advantage over the past. But with respect to our grosser passions and pursuits it has. As far as regards the appeal to the understanding or the imagination, the past is just as good, as real, of as much intrinsic and ostensible value as the future: but there is another principle in the human mind, the principle of action or will; and of this the past has no hold, the future engrosses it entirely to itself. It is this strong lever of the affections that gives so powerful a bias to our sentiments on this subject, and violently transposes the natural order of our associations. We regret the pleasures we have lost, and eagerly anticipate those which are to come: we dwell with satisfaction on the evils from which we have escaped (*Posthæc meminisse iuvabit*)—and dread future pain. The good that is past is in this sense like money that is spent, which is of no further use, and about which we give ourselves little concern. The good we expect is like a store yet untouched,

we live (save and excepting the present minute), or as if the value of human life decreased or increased with successive centuries. At that rate, we had better have our life still to come at some future period, and so postpone our existence century after century *ad infinitum*.

and in the enjoyment of which we promise ourselves infinite gratification. What has happened to us we think of no consequence: what is to happen to us, of the greatest. Why so? Simply because the one is still in our power, and the other not—because the efforts of the will to bring any object to pass or to prevent it strengthen our attachment or aversion to that object—because the pains and attention bestowed upon any thing add to our interest in it, and because the habitual and earnest pursuit of any end redoubles the ardour of our expectations, and converts the speculative and indolent satisfaction we might otherwise feel in it into real passion. Our regrets, anxiety, and wishes are thrown away upon the past: but the insisting on the importance of the future is of the utmost use in aiding our resolutions, and stimulating our exertions. If the future were no more amenable to our wills than the past; if our precautions, our sanguine schemes, our hopes and fears were of as little avail in the one case as the other; if we could neither soften our minds to pleasure, nor steel our fortitude to the resistance of pain beforehand; if all objects drifted along by us like straws or pieces of wood in a river, the will being purely passive, and as little able to avert the future as to arrest the

past, we should in that case be equally indifferent to both; that is, we should consider each as they affected the thoughts and imagination with certain sentiments of approbation or regret, but without the importunity of action, the irritation of the will, throwing the whole weight of passion and prejudice into one scale, and leaving the other quite empty. While the blow is coming, we prepare to meet it, we think to ward off or break its force, we arm ourselves with patience to endure what cannot be avoided, we agitate ourselves with fifty needless alarms about it; but when the blow is struck, the pang is over, the struggle is no longer necessary, and we cease to harass or torment ourselves about it more than we can help. It is not that the one belongs to the future and the other to time past; but that the one is a subject of action, of uneasy apprehension, of strong passion, and that the other has passed wholly out of the sphere of action, into the region of

“Calm contemplation and majestic pains*.”

It would not give a man more concern to know

* In like manner, though we know that an event must have taken place at a distance, long before we can hear the result, yet as long as we remain in ignorance of it, we irritate ourselves about it, and suffer all the agonies of sus-

that he should be put to the rack a year hence, than to recollect that he had been put to it a year ago, but that he hopes to avoid the one, whereas he must sit down patiently under the consciousness of the other. In this hope he wears himself out in vain struggles with fate, and puts himself to the rack of his imagination every day he has to live in the mean while. When the event is so remote or so independent of the will as to set aside the necessity of immediate action, or to baffle all attempts to defeat it, it gives us little more disturbance or emotion than if it had already taken place, or were something to happen in another state of being, or to an indifferent person. Criminals are observed to grow more anxious as their trial approaches; but after their sentence is passed, they become tolerably resigned, and generally sleep sound the night before its execution.

It in some measure confirms this theory, that men attach more or less importance to past and future events, according as they are more or less engaged in action and the busy scenes of life. Those who have a fortune to make or are in pursuit of rank and power think little of the pence, as if it was still to come; but as soon as our uncertainty is removed, our fretful impatience vanishes, we resign ourselves to fate, and make up our minds to what has happened as well as we can.

past, for it does not contribute greatly to their views: those who have nothing to do but to think, take nearly the same interest in the past as in the future. The contemplation of the one is as delightful and real as that of the other. The season of hope has an end; but the remembrance of it is left. The past still lives in the memory of those who have leisure to look back upon the way that they have trod, and can from it "catch glimpses that may make them less forlorn." The turbulence of action, and uneasiness of desire, must point to the future: it is only in the quiet innocence of shepherds, in the simplicity of pastoral ages, that a tomb was found with this inscription—"I ALSO WAS AN ARCADIAN!"

Though I by no means think that our habitual attachment to life is in exact proportion to the value of the gift, yet I am not one of those splenetic persons who affect to think it of no value at all. *Que peu de chose est la vie humaine*—is an exclamation in the mouths of moralists and philosophers, to which I cannot agree. It is little, it is short, it is not worth having, if we take the last hour, and leave out all that has gone before, which has been one way of looking at the subject. Such calculators seem to say that life is nothing when it is

over, and that may in their sense be true. If the old rule—*Respice finem*—were to be made absolute, and no one could be pronounced fortunate till the day of his death, there are few among us whose existence would, upon those conditions, be much to be envied. But this is not a fair view of the case. A man's life is his whole life, not the last glimmering snuff of the candle; and this, I say, is considerable, and not *a little matter*, whether we regard its pleasures or its pains. To draw a peevish conclusion to the contrary from our own superannuated desires or forgetful indifference is about as reasonable as to say, a man never was young because he is grown old, or never lived because he is now dead. The length or agreeableness of a journey does not depend on the few last steps of it, nor is the size of a building to be judged of from the last stone that is added to it. It is neither the first nor last hour of our existence, but the space that parts these two—not our exit nor our entrance upon the stage, but what we do, feel, and think while there—that we are to attend to in pronouncing sentence upon it. Indeed it would be easy to shew that it is the very extent of human life, the infinite number of things contained in it, its contradictory and fluctuating interests, the tran-

sition from one situation to another, the hours, months, years spent in one fond pursuit after another; that it is, in a word, the length of our common journey and the quantity of events crowded into it, that, baffling the grasp of our actual perception, make it slide from our memory, and dwindle into nothing in its own perspective. It is too mighty for us, and we say it is nothing! It is a speck in our fancy, and yet what canvas would be big enough to hold its striking groups, its endless subjects! It is light as vanity, and yet if all its weary moments, if all its head and heart aches were compressed into one, what fortitude would not be overwhelmed with the blow! What a huge heap, a "huge, dumb heap," of wishes, thoughts, feelings, anxious cares, soothing hopes, loves, joys, friendships, it is composed of! How many ideas and trains of sentiment, long and deep and intense, often pass through the mind in only one day's thinking or reading, for instance! How many such days are there in a year, how many years in a long life, still occupied with something interesting, still recalling some old impression, still recurring to some difficult question and making progress in it, every step accompanied with a sense of power, and every moment conscious of "the high endeavour or

the glad success ;” for the mind seizes only on that which keeps it employed, and is wound up to a certain pitch of pleasurable excitement or lively solicitude, by the necessity of its own nature. The division of the map of life into its component parts is beautifully made by King Henry VI.

“ Oh God! methinks it were a happy life
To be no better than a homely swain,
To sit upon a hill as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run;
How many make the hour full complete,
How many hours bring about the day,
How many days will finish up the year,
How many years a mortal man may live:
When this is known, then to divide the times ;
So many hours must I tend my flock,
So many hours must I take my rest,
So many hours must I contemplate,
So many hours must I sport myself ;
So many days my ewes have been with young,
So many weeks ere the poor fools will yeau,
So many months ere I shall shear the fleece :
So many minutes, hours, weeks, months, and years
Past over to the end they were created,
Would bring grey hairs unto a quiet grave.”

I myself am neither a king nor a shepherd :
books have been my fleecy charge, and my
thoughts have been my subjects. But these

have found me sufficient employment at the time, and enough to think of for the time to come.—

The passions contract and warp the natural progress of life. They paralyse all of it that is not devoted to their tyranny and caprice. This makes the difference between the laughing innocence of childhood, the pleasantness of youth, and the crabbedness of age. A load of cares lies like a weight of guilt upon the mind: so that a man of business often has all the air, the distraction and restlessness and hurry of feeling of a criminal. A knowledge of the world takes away the freedom and simplicity of thought as effectually as the contagion of its example. The artlessness and candour of our early years are open to all impressions alike, because the mind is not clogged and pre-occupied with other objects. Our pleasures and our pains come single, make room for one another, and the spring of the mind is fresh and unbroken, its aspect clear and unsullied. Hence “the tear forgot as soon shed, the sunshine of the breast.” But as we advance farther, the will gets greater head. We form violent antipathies and indulge exclusive preferences. We make up our minds to some one thing, and if we cannot have that, will have nothing. We are wedded to opinion, to fancy,

to prejudice ; which destroys the soundness of our judgments, and the serenity and buoyancy of our feelings. The chain of habit coils itself round the heart, like a serpent, to gnaw and stifle it. It grows rigid and callous ; and for the softness and elasticity of childhood, full of proud flesh and obstinate tumours. The violence and perversity of our passions comes in more and more to overlay our natural sensibility and well-grounded affections ; and we screw ourselves up to aim only at those things which are neither desirable nor practicable. Thus life passes away in the feverish irritation of pursuit and the certainty of disappointment. By degrees, nothing but this morbid state of feeling satisfies us : and all common pleasures and cheap amusements are sacrificed to the demon of ambition, avarice, or dissipation. The machine is overwrought : the parching heat of the veins dries up and withers the flowers of Love, Hope, and Joy ; and any pause, any release from the rack of ecstasy on which we are stretched, seems more insupportable than the pangs which we endure. We are suspended between tormenting desires, and the horrors of *ennui*. The impulse of the will, like the wheels of a carriage going down hill, becomes too strong for the driver, reason, and cannot be stopped nor kept

within bounds. Some idea, some fancy, takes possession of the brain ; and however ridiculous, however distressing, however ruinous, haunts us by a sort of fascination through life.

Not only is this principle of excessive irritability to be seen at work in our more turbulent passions and pursuits, but even in the formal study of arts and sciences, the same thing takes place, and undermines the repose and happiness of life. The eagerness of pursuit overcomes the satisfaction to result from the accomplishment. The mind is overstrained to attain its purpose ; and when it is attained, the ease and alacrity necessary to enjoy it are gone. The irritation of action does not cease and go down with the occasion for it ; but we are first uneasy to get to the end of our work, and then uneasy for want of something to do. The ferment of the brain does not of itself subside into pleasure and soft repose. Hence the disposition to strong *stimuli* observable in persons of much intellectual exertion to allay and carry off the over-excitement. The *improvisatori* poets (it is recorded by Spence in his Anecdotes of Pope) cannot sleep after an evening's continued display of their singular and difficult art. The rhymes keep running in their head in spite of themselves, and will not let them rest. Mechanics and la-

bouring people never know what to do with themselves on a Sunday, though they return to their work with greater spirit for the relief, and look forward to it with pleasure all the week. Sir Joshua Reynolds was never comfortable out of his painting-room, and died of chagrin and regret, because he could not paint on to the last moment of his life. He used to say that he could go on retouching a picture for ever, as long as it stood on his easel; but as soon as it was once fairly out of the house, he never wished to see it again. An ingenious artist of our own time has been heard to declare, that if ever the Devil got him into his clutches, he would set him to copy his own pictures. Thus the secure, self-complacent retrospect to what is done is nothing, while the anxious, uneasy looking forward to what is to come is every thing. We are afraid to dwell upon the past, lest it should retard our future progress; the indulgence of ease is fatal to excellence; and to succeed in life, we lose the ends of being!

ESSAY · IV.

ON GENIUS AND COMMON SENSE.

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WE hear it maintained by people of more gravity than understanding, that genius and taste are strictly reducible to rules, and that there is a rule for every thing. So far is it from being true that the finest breath of fancy is a definable thing, that the plainest common sense is only what Mr. Locke would have called a *mixed mode*, subject to a particular sort of acquired and undefinable tact. It is asked, "If you do not know the rule by which a thing is done, how can you be sure of doing it a second time?" And the answer is, "If you do not know the muscles by the help of which you walk, how is it you do not fall down at every step you take?" In art, in taste, in life, in speech, you decide from feeling, and not from reason; that is, from the impression of a number of things on the mind, which impression is true and well-founded, though you may not be able to analyse or account for it in the several

particulars. In a gesture you use, in a look you see, in a tone you hear, you judge of the expression, propriety, and meaning from habit, not from reason or rules; that is to say, from innumerable instances of like gestures, looks, and tones, in innumerable other circumstances, variously modified, which are too many and too refined to be all distinctly recollected, but which do not therefore operate the less powerfully upon the mind and eye of taste. Shall we say that these impressions (the immediate stamp of nature) do not operate in a given manner till they are classified and reduced to rules, or is not the rule itself grounded upon the truth and certainty of that natural operation? How then can the distinction of the understanding as to the manner in which they operate be necessary to their producing their due and uniform effect upon the mind? If certain effects did not regularly arise out of certain causes in mind as well as matter, there could be no rule given for them: nature does not follow the rule, but suggests it. Reason is the interpreter and critic of nature and genius, not their lawgiver and judge. He must be a poor creature indeed whose practical convictions do not in almost all cases outrun his deliberate understanding, or who does not feel and know much more than he

can give a reason for.—Hence the distinction between eloquence and wisdom, between ingenuity and common sense. A man may be dextrous and able in explaining the grounds of his opinions, and yet may be a mere sophist, because he only sees one half of a subject. Another may feel the whole weight of a question, nothing relating to it may be lost upon him, and yet he may be able to give no account of the manner in which it affects him, or to drag his reasons from their silent lurking-places. This last will be a wise man, though neither a logician nor rhetorician. Goldsmith was a fool to Dr. Johnson in argument; that is, in assigning the specific grounds of his opinions: Dr. Johnson was a fool to Goldsmith in the fine tact, the airy, intuitive faculty with which he skimmed the surfaces of things, and unconsciously formed his opinions. Common sense is the just result of the sum-total of such unconscious impressions in the ordinary occurrences of life, as they are treasured up in the memory, and called out by the occasion. Genius and taste depend much upon the same principle exercised on loftier ground and in more unusual combinations.

I am glad to shelter myself from the charge of affectation or singularity in this view of an often debated but ill-understood point, by

quoting a passage from Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses, which is full, and, I think, conclusive to the purpose. He says,

“ I observe, as a fundamental ground common to all the Arts with which we have any concern in this Discourse, that they address themselves only to two faculties of the mind, its imagination and its sensibility.

“ All theories which attempt to direct or to control the Art, upon any principles falsely called rational, which we form to ourselves upon a supposition of what ought in reason to be the end or means of Art, independent of the known first effect produced by objects on the imagination, must be false and delusive. For though it may appear bold to say it, the imagination is here the residence of truth. If the imagination be affected, the conclusion is fairly drawn ; if it be not affected, the reasoning is erroneous, because the end is not obtained ; the effect itself being the test, and the only test, of the truth and efficacy of the means.

“ There is in the commerce of life, as in Art, a sagacity which is far from being contradictory to right reason, and is superior to any occasional exercise of that faculty ; which supersedes it ; and does not wait for the slow progress of deduction, but goes at once, by what appears a

kind of intuition, to the conclusion. A man endowed with this faculty feels and acknowledges the truth, though it is not always in his power, perhaps, to give a reason for it; because he cannot recollect and bring before him all the materials that gave birth to his opinion; for very many and very intricate considerations may unite to form the principle, even of small and minute parts, involved in, or dependent on, a great system of things:—though these in process of time are forgotten, the right impression still remains fixed in his mind.

“ This impression is the result of the accumulated experience of our whole life, and has been collected, we do not always know how, or when. But this mass of collective observation, however acquired, ought to prevail over that reason, which however powerfully exerted on any particular occasion, will probably comprehend but a partial view of the subject; and our conduct in life, as well as in the arts, is or ought to be generally governed by this habitual reason: it is our happiness that we are enabled to draw on such funds. If we were obliged to enter into a theoretical deliberation on every occasion before we act, life would be at a stand, and Art would be impracticable.

“ It appears to me therefore” (continues Sir

Joshua) “that our first thoughts, that is, the effect which any thing produces on our minds, on its first appearance, is never to be forgotten; and it demands for that reason, because it is the first, to be laid up with care. If this be not done, the artist may happen to impose on himself by partial reasoning; by a cold consideration of those animated thoughts which proceed, not perhaps from caprice or rashness (as he may afterwards conceit), but from the fulness of his mind, enriched with the copious stores of all the various inventions which he had ever seen, or had ever passed in his mind. These ideas are infused into his design, without any conscious effort; but if he be not on his guard, he may reconsider and correct them, till the whole matter is reduced to a common-place invention.

“This is sometimes the effect of what I mean to caution you against; that is to say, an unfounded distrust of the imagination and feeling, in favour of narrow, partial, confined, argumentative theories, and of principles that seem to apply to the design in hand; without considering those general impressions on the fancy in which real principles of *sound reason*, and of much more weight and importance, are involved, and, as it were, lie hid under the ap-

pearance of a sort of vulgar sentiment. Reason, without doubt, must ultimately determine every thing; at this minute it is required to inform us when that very reason is to give way to feeling.”—Discourse XIII. vol. ii. p. 113-17.

Mr. Burke, by whom the foregoing train of thinking was probably suggested, has insisted on the same thing, and made rather a perverse use of it in several parts of his *Reflections on the French Revolution*; and Windham in one of his *Speeches* has clenched it into an aphorism —“There is nothing so true as habit.” Once more I would say, common sense is tacit reason. Conscience is the same tacit sense of right and wrong, or the impression of our moral experience and moral apprehensions on the mind, which, because it works unseen, yet certainly, we suppose to be an instinct, implanted in the mind; as we sometimes attribute the violent operations of our passions, of which we can neither trace the source nor assign the reason, to the instigation of the Devil!

I shall here try to go more at large into this subject, and to give such instances and illustrations of it as occur to me.

One of the persons who had rendered themselves obnoxious to Government and been included in a charge for high treason in the year

1794, had retired soon after into Wales to write an epic poem and enjoy the luxuries of a rural life. In his peregrinations through that beautiful scenery, he had arrived one fine morning at the inn at Llangollen, in the romantic valley of that name. He had ordered his breakfast, and was sitting at the window in all the dalliance of expectation when a face passed of which he took no notice at the instant—but when his breakfast was brought in presently after, he found his appetite for it gone, the day had lost its freshness in his eye, he was uneasy and spiritless; and without any cause that he could discover, a total change had taken place in his feelings. While he was trying to account for this odd circumstance, the same face passed again—it was the face of Taylor the spy; and he was no longer at a loss to explain the difficulty. He had before caught only a transient glimpse, a passing side-view of the face; but though this was not sufficient to awaken a distinct idea in his memory, his feelings, quicker and surer, had taken the alarm; a string had been touched that gave a jar to his whole frame, and would not let him rest, though he could not at all tell what was the matter with him. To the fitting, shadowy, half-distinguished profile that had glided by his window

was linked unconsciously and mysteriously, but inseparably, the impression of the trains that had been laid for him by this person ;—in this brief moment, in this dim, illegible short-hand of the mind he had just escaped the speeches of the Attorney and Solicitor-General over again ; the gaunt figure of Mr. Pitt glared by him ; the walls of a prison enclosed him ; and he felt the hands of the executioner near him, without knowing it till the tremor and disorder of his nerves gave information to his reasoning faculties that all was not well within. That is, the same state of mind was recalled by one circumstance in the series of association that had been produced by the whole set of circumstances at the time, though the manner in which this was done was not immediately perceptible. In other words, the feeling of pleasure or pain, of good or evil, is revived and acts instantaneously upon the mind, before we have time to recollect the precise objects which have originally given birth to it*. The incident here mentioned was merely,

* Sentiment has the same source as that here pointed out. Thus the *Ranz des Vaches*, which has such an effect on the minds of the Swiss peasantry, when its well-known sound is heard, does not merely recal to them the idea of their country, but has associated with it a thousand nameless ideas, numberless touches of private affection, of early hope, ro-

then, one case of what the learned understand by the *association of ideas* : but all that is meant by feeling or common sense is nothing but the different cases of the association of ideas, more or less true to the impression of the original circumstances, as reason begins with the more formal development of those circumstances, or pretends to account for the different cases of the association of ideas. But it does not follow that the dumb and silent pleading of the former (though sometimes, nay often mistaken) is less true than that of its babbling interpreter, or that we are never to trust its dictates without consulting the express authority of reason. Both are imperfect, both are useful in their way, and therefore both are best together, to correct or to confirm one another. It does not appear that in the singular instance above mentioned, the sudden impression on the mind was

mantic adventure, and national pride, all which rush in (with mingled currents) to swell the tide of fond remembrance, and make them languish or die for home. What a fine instrument the human heart is! Who shall touch it? Who shall fathom it? Who shall "sound it from its lowest note to the top of its compass?" Who shall put his hand among the strings, and explain their wayward music? The heart alone, when touched by sympathy, trembles and responds to their hidden meaning!

superstition or fancy, though it might have been thought so, had it not been proved by the event to have a real physical and moral cause. Had not the same face returned again, the doubt would never have been properly cleared up, but would have remained a puzzle ever after, or perhaps have been soon forgot.—By the law of association as laid down by physiologists, any impression in a series can recal any other impression in that series without going through the whole in order: so that the mind drops the intermediate links, and passes on rapidly and by stealth to the more striking effects of pleasure or pain which have naturally taken the strongest hold of it. By doing this habitually and skilfully with respect to the various impressions and circumstances with which our experience makes us acquainted, it forms a series of unpremeditated conclusions on almost all subjects that can be brought before it, as just as they are of ready application to human life; and common sense is the name of this body of unassuming but practical wisdom. Common sense, however, is an impartial, instinctive result of truth and nature, and will therefore bear the test and abide the scrutiny of the most severe and patient reasoning. It is indeed in-

complete without it. By ingrafting reason on feeling, we "make assurance double sure."

"'Tis the last, key-stone that makes up the arch...
Then stands it a triumphal mark! Then men
Observe the strength, the height, the why and when
It was erected; and still walking under,
Meet some new matter to look up, and wonder."

But reason, not employed to interpret nature, and to improve and perfect common sense and experience, is, for the most part, a building without a foundation.—The criticism exercised by reason then on common sense may be as severe as it pleases, but it must be as patient as it is severe. Hasty, dogmatical, self-satisfied reason is worse than idle fancy, or bigotted prejudice. It is systematic, ostentatious in error, closes up the avenues of knowledge, and "shuts the gates of wisdom on mankind." It is not enough to shew that there is no reason for a thing, that we do not see the reason of it: if the common feeling, if the involuntary prejudice sets in strong in favour of it, if in spite of all we can do, there is a lurking suspicion on the side of our first impressions, we must try again, and believe that truth is mightier than we. So, in offering a definition of any subject,

if we feel a misgiving that there is any fact or circumstance omitted, but of which we have only a vague apprehension, like a name we cannot recollect, we must ask for more time, and not cut the matter short by an arrogant assumption of the point in dispute. Common sense thus acts as a check-weight on sophistry, and suspends our rash and superficial judgments. On the other hand, if not only no reason can be given for a thing, but every reason is clear against it, and we can account from ignorance, from authority, from interest, from different causes, for the prevalence of an opinion or sentiment, then we have a right to conclude that we have mistaken a prejudice for an instinct, or have confounded a false and partial impression with the fair and unavoidable inference from general observation. Mr. Burke said that we ought not to reject every prejudice, but should separate the husk of prejudice from the truth it encloses, and so try to get at the kernel within; and thus far he was right. But he was wrong in insisting that we are to cherish our prejudices, "because they are prejudices:" for if they are all well-founded, there is no occasion to inquire into their origin or use; and he who sets out to philosophise upon them, or make the separation Mr. Burke talks

of in this spirit and with this previous determination, will be very likely to mistake a maggot or a rotten canker for the precious kernel of truth, as was indeed the case with our political sophist.

There is nothing more distinct than common sense and vulgar opinion. Common sense is only a judge of things that fall under common observation, or immediately come home to the business and bosoms of men. This is of the very essence of its principle, the basis of its pretensions. It rests upon the simple process of feeling, it anchors in experience. It is not, nor it cannot be, the test of abstract, speculative opinions. But half the opinions and prejudices of mankind, those which they hold in the most unqualified approbation and which have been instilled into them under the strongest sanctions, are of this latter kind, that is, opinions, not which they have ever thought, known, or felt one tittle about, but which they have taken up on trust from others, which have been palmed on their understandings by fraud or force, and which they continue to hold at the peril of life, limb, property, and character, with as little warrant from common sense in the first instance as appeal to reason in the last. The *ultima ratio regum* proceeds upon a very different plea.

Common sense is neither priestcraft nor state-policy. Yet "there's the rub that makes absurdity of so long life;" and, at the same time, gives the sceptical philosophers the advantage over us. Till nature has fair play allowed it, and is not adulterated by political and polemical quacks, (as it so often has been) it is impossible to appeal to it as a defence against the errors and extravagances of mere reason. If we talk of common sense, we are twitted with vulgar prejudice, and asked how we distinguish the one from the other: but common and received opinion is indeed "a compost heap" of crude notions, got together by the pride and passions of individuals, and reason is itself the thrall or manumitted slave of the same lordly and besotted masters, dragging its servile chain, or committing all sorts of Saturnalian licenses, the moment it feels itself freed from it.—If ten millions of Englishmen are furious in thinking themselves right in making war upon thirty millions of Frenchmen, and if the last are equally bent upon thinking the others always in the wrong, though it is a common and national prejudice, both opinions cannot be the dictate of good sense: but it may be the infatuated policy of one or both governments to keep their subjects always at variance. If a few centuries

ago all Europe believed in the infallibility of the Pope, this was not an opinion derived from the proper exercise or erroneous direction of the common sense of the people: common sense had nothing to do with it—they believed whatever their priests told them. England at present is divided into Whigs and Tories, Churchmen and Dissenters: both parties have numbers on their side; but common sense and party-spirit are two different things. Sects and heresies are upheld partly by sympathy, and partly by the love of contradiction: if there was nobody of a different way of thinking, they would fall to pieces of themselves. If a whole court say the same thing, this is no proof that they think it, but that the individual at the head of the court has said it: if a mob agree for a while in shouting the same watch-word, this is not to me an example of the *sensus communis*, they only repeat what they have heard repeated by others. If indeed a large proportion of the people are in want of food, of clothing, of shelter, if they are sick, miserable, scorned, oppressed, and if each feeling it in himself, they all say so with one voice and one heart, and lift up their hands to second their appeal, this I should say was but the dictate of common sense, the cry of nature. But to wave this part of the argument, which it

is needless to push farther.—I believe that the best way to instruct mankind is not by pointing out to them their mutual errors, but by teaching them to think rightly on indifferent matters, where they will listen with patience in order to be amused, and where they do not consider a definition or a syllogism as the greatest injury you can offer them.

There is no rule for expression. It is got at solely by *feeling*, that is, on the principle of the association of ideas, and by transferring what has been found to hold good in one case (with the necessary modifications) to others. A certain look has been remarked strongly indicative of a certain passion or trait of character, and we attach the same meaning to it or are affected in the same pleasurable or painful manner by it, where it exists in a less degree, though we can define neither the look itself nor the modification of it. Having got the general clue, the exact result may be left to the imagination to vary, to extenuate, or aggravate it according to circumstances. In the admirable profile of Oliver Cromwell after ——, the drooping eye-lids, as if drawing a veil over the fixed, penetrating glance, the nostrils somewhat distended, and lips compressed so as hardly to let the breath escape him, denote the character of the man for

high-reaching policy and deep designs as plainly as they can be written. How is it that we decypher this [expression in the face? First, by feeling it: and how is it that we feel it? Not by pre-established rules, but by the instinct of analogy, by the principle of association, which is subtle and sure in proportion as it is variable and indefinite. A circumstance, apparently of no value, shall alter the whole interpretation to be put upon an expression or action; and it shall alter it thus powerfully because in proportion to its very insignificance it shews a strong general principle at work that extends in its ramifications to the smallest things. This in fact will make all the difference between minuteness and subtlety or refinement; for a small or trivial effect may in given circumstances imply the operation of a great power. Stillness may be the result of a blow too powerful to be resisted; silence may be imposed by feelings too agonising for utterance. The minute, the trifling and insipid is that which is little in itself, in its causes and its consequences: the subtle and refined is that which is slight and evanescent at first sight, but which mounts up to a mighty sum in the end, which is an essential part of an important whole, which has consequences greater than itself, and where more is meant

than meets the eye or ear. We complain sometimes of littleness in a Dutch picture, where there are a vast number of distinct parts and objects, each small in itself, and leading to nothing else. A sky of Claude's cannot fall under this censure, where one imperceptible gradation is as it were the scale to another, where the broad arch of heaven is piled up of endlessly intermediate gold and azure tints, and where an infinite number of minute, scarce noticed particulars blend and melt into universal harmony. The subtlety in Shakespear, of which there is an immense deal every where scattered up and down, is always the instrument of passion, the vehicle of character. The action of a man pulling his hat over his forehead is indifferent enough in itself, and generally speaking, may mean any thing or nothing: but in the circumstances in which Macduff is placed, it is neither insignificant nor equivocal.

"What! man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows," &c.

It admits but of one interpretation or inference, that which follows it:—

"Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak,
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break."

The passage in the same play, in which Duncan and his attendants are introduced commenting

on the beauty and situation of Macbeth's castle, though familiar in itself, has been often praised for the striking contrast it presents to the scenes which follow.—The same look in different circumstances may convey a totally different expression. Thus the eye turned round to look at you without turning the head indicates generally slyness or suspicion: but if this is combined with large expanded eye-lids or fixed eye-brows, as we see it in Titian's pictures, it will denote calm contemplation or piercing sagacity, without any thing of meanness or fear of being observed. In other cases, it may imply merely indolent enticing voluptuousness, as in Lely's portraits of women. The languor and weakness of the eye-lids gives the amorous turn to the expression. How should there be a rule for all this beforehand, seeing it depends on circumstances ever varying, and scarce discernible but by their effect on the mind? Rules are applicable to abstractions, but expression is concrete and individual. We know the meaning of certain looks, and we feel how they modify one another in conjunction. But we cannot have a separate rule to judge of all their combinations in different degrees and circumstances, without foreseeing all those combinations, which is impossible: or if we did foresee them, we should only be

where we are, that is, we could only make the rule as we now judge without it, from imagination and the feeling of the moment. The absurdity of reducing expression to a preconcerted system was perhaps never more evidently shewn than in a picture of the Judgment of Solomon by so great a man as N. Poussin, which I once heard admired for the skill and discrimination of the artist in making all the women, who are ranged on one side, in the greatest alarm at the sentence of the judge, while all the men on the opposite side see through the design of it. Nature does not go to work or cast things in a regular mould in this sort of way. I once heard a person remark of another—"He has an eye like a vicious horse." This was a fair analogy. We all, I believe, have noticed the look of a horse's eye, just before he is going to bite or kick. But will any one, therefore, describe to me exactly what that look is? It was the same acute observer that said of a self-sufficient prating music-master—"He talks on all subjects *at sight*"—which expressed the man at once by an allusion to his profession. The coincidence was indeed perfect. Nothing else could compare to the easy assurance with which this gentleman would volunteer an explanation of things of which he was most ignorant, but the *nonchalance*

with which a musician sits down to a harpsichord to play a piece he has never seen before. My physiognomical friend would not have hit on this mode of illustration without knowing the profession of the subject of his criticism; but having this hint given him, it instantly suggested itself to his "sure trailing." The manner of the speaker was evident; and the association of the music-master sitting down to play at sight, lurking in his mind, was immediately called out by the strength of his impression of the character. The feeling of character and the felicity of invention in explaining it were nearly allied to each other. The first was so wrought up and running over that the transition to the last was easy and unavoidable. When Mr. Kean was so much praised for the action of Richard in his last struggle with his triumphant antagonist, where he stands, after his sword is wrested from him, with his hands stretched out, "as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had a withering power," he said that he borrowed it from seeing the last efforts of Painter in his fight with Oliver. This assuredly did not lessen the merit of it. Thus it ever is with the man of real genius. He has the feeling of truth already shrined in his own breast, and his eye is still bent on

nature to see how she expresses herself. When we thoroughly understand the subject, it is easy to translate from one language into another. Raphael, in muffling up the figure of Elymas the Sorcerer in his garments, appears to have extended the idea of blindness even to his clothes. Was this design? Probably not; but merely the feeling of analogy thoughtlessly suggesting this device, which being so suggested was retained and carried on, because it flattered or fell in with the original feeling. The tide of passion, when strong, overflows and gradually insinuates itself into all nooks and corners of the mind. Invention (of the best kind) I therefore do not think so distinct a thing from feeling, as some are apt to imagine. The springs of pure feeling will rise and fill the moulds of fancy that are fit to receive it. There are some striking coincidences of colour in well-composed pictures, as in a straggling weed in the foreground streaked with blue or red to answer to a blue or red drapery, to the tone of the flesh or an opening in the sky:—not that this was intended, or done by rule (for then it would presently become affected and ridiculous) but the eye being imbued with a certain colour, repeats and varies it from a natural sense of harmony, a secret craving and appetite for beauty, which in the same manner

soothes and gratifies the eye of taste, though the cause is not understood. *Tact, finesse*, is nothing but the being completely aware of the feeling belonging to certain situations, passions, &c. and the being consequently sensible to their slightest indications or movements in others. One of the most remarkable instances of this sort of faculty is the following story, told of Lord Shaftesbury, the grandfather of the author of the *Characteristics*. He had been to dine with Lady Clarendon and her daughter, who was at that time privately married to the Duke of York (afterwards James II.) and as he returned home with another nobleman who had accompanied him, he suddenly turned to him, and said, "Depend upon it, the Duke has married Hyde's daughter." His companion could not comprehend what he meant; but on explaining himself, he said, "Her mother behaved to her with an attention and a marked respect that it is impossible to account for in any other way; and I am sure of it." His conjecture shortly afterwards proved to be the truth. This was carrying the prophetic spirit of common sense as far as it could go.—

ESSAY V.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

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GENIUS or originality is, for the most part, *some strong quality in the mind, answering to and bringing out some new and striking quality in nature.*

Imagination is, more properly, the power of carrying on a given feeling into other situations, which must be done best according to the hold which the feeling itself has taken of the mind*. In new and unknown combinations, the impression must act by sympathy, and not by rule; but there can be no sympathy, where there is no passion, no original interest. The personal interest may in some cases oppress and circumscribe the imaginative faculty, as in the instance of Rousseau: but in general the strength and consistency of the imagination will be in proportion to the strength and depth of feeling;

* I do not here speak of the figurative or fanciful exercise of the imagination, which consists in finding out some striking object or image to illustrate another.

and it is rarely that a man even of lofty genius will be able to do more than carry on his own feelings and character, or some prominent and ruling passion, into fictitious and uncommon situations. Milton has by allusion embodied a great part of his political and personal history in the chief characters and incidents of *Paradise Lost*. He has, no doubt, wonderfully adapted and heightened them, but the elements are the same; you trace the bias and opinions of the man in the creations of the poet. Shakespear (almost alone) seems to have been a man of genius, raised above the definition of genius. "Born universal heir to all humanity," he was "as one, in suffering all who suffered nothing;" with a perfect sympathy with all things, yet alike indifferent to all: who did not tamper with nature or warp her to his own purposes; who "knew all qualities with a learned spirit," instead of judging of them by his own predilections; and was rather "a pipe for the Muse's finger to play what stop she pleased," than anxious to set up any character or pretensions of his own. His genius consisted in the faculty of transforming himself at will into whatever he chose: his originality was the power of seeing every object from the exact point of view in which others would see it. He was the Pro-

teus of human intellect. Genius in ordinary is a more obstinate and less versatile thing. It is sufficiently exclusive and self-willed, quaint and peculiar. It does some one thing by virtue of doing nothing else: it excels in some one pursuit by being blind to all excellence but its own. It is just the reverse of the cameleon; for it does not borrow, but lend its colours to all about it: or like the glow-worm, discloses a little circle of gorgeous light in the twilight of obscurity, in the night of intellect, that surrounds it. So did Rembrandt. If ever there was a man of genius, he was one, in the proper sense of the term. He lived in and revealed to others a world of his own, and might be said to have invented a new view of nature. He did not discover things *out of* nature, in fiction or fairy land, or make a voyage to the moon "to descry new lands, rivers, or mountains in her spotty globe," but saw things *in* nature that every one had missed before him, and gave others eyes to see them with. This is the test and triumph of originality, not to shew us what has never been, and what we may therefore very easily never have dreamt of, but to point out to us what is before our eyes and under our feet, though we have had no suspicion of its existence, for want of sufficient strength of intuition,

of determined grasp of mind to seize and retain it. Rembrandt's conquests were not over the *ideal*, but the real. He did not contrive a new story or character, but we nearly owe to him a fifth part of painting, the knowledge of *chiaroscuro*—a distinct power and element in art and nature. He had a steadiness, a firm keeping of mind and eye, that first stood the shock of "fierce extremes" in light and shade, or reconciled the greatest obscurity and the greatest brilliancy into perfect harmony; and he therefore was the first to hazard this appearance upon canvas, and give full effect to what he saw and delighted in. He was led to adopt this style of broad and startling contrast from its congeniality to his own feelings: his mind grappled with that which afforded the best exercise to its master-powers: he was bold in act, because he was urged on by a strong native impulse. Originality is then nothing but nature and feeling working in the mind. A man does not affect to be original: he is so, because he cannot help it, and often without knowing it. This extraordinary artist indeed might be said to have had a particular organ for colour. His eye seemed to come in contact with it as a feeling, to lay hold of it as a substance, rather than to contemplate it as a visual object. The texture of his landscapes is

“of the earth, earthy”—his clouds are humid, heavy, slow; his shadows are “darkness that may be felt,” a “palpable obscure;” his lights are lumps of liquid splendour! There is something more in this than can be accounted for from design or accident: Rembrandt was not a man made up of two or three rules and directions for acquiring genius.

I am afraid I shall hardly write so satisfactory a character of Mr. Wordsworth, though he, too, like Rembrandt, has a faculty of making something out of nothing, that is, out of himself, by the medium through which he sees and with which he clothes the barrenest subject. Mr. Wordsworth is the last man to “look abroad into universality,” if that alone constituted genius: he looks at home into himself, and is “content with riches fineless.” He would in the other case be “poor as winter,” if he had nothing but general capacity to trust to. He is the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day, only because he is the greatest egotist. He is “self-involved, not dark.” He sits in the centre of his own being, and there “enjoys bright day.” He does not waste a thought on others. Whatever does not relate exclusively and wholly to himself, is foreign to his views. He contemplates a whole-length

figure of himself, he looks along the unbroken line of his personal identity. He thrusts aside all other objects, all other interests with scorn and impatience, that he may repose on his own being, that he may dig out the treasures of thought contained in it, that he may unfold the precious stores of a mind, for ever brooding over itself. His genius is the effect of his individual character. He stamps that character, that deep individual interest, on whatever he meets. The object is nothing but as it furnishes food for internal meditation, for old associations. If there had been no other being in the universe, Mr. Wordsworth's poetry would have been just what it is. If there had been neither love nor friendship, neither ambition nor pleasure nor business in the world, the author of the Lyrical Ballads need not have been greatly changed from what he is—might still have "kept the noiseless tenour of his way," retired in the sanctuary of his own heart, hallowing the Sabbath of his own thoughts. With the passions, the pursuits, and imaginations of other men he does not profess to sympathise, but "finds tongues in the trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in every thing." With a mind averse from outward objects, but ever intent upon its own workings, he hangs a weight of thought

and feeling upon every trifling circumstance connected with his past history. The note of the cuckoo sounds in his ear like the voice of other years; the daisy spreads its leaves in the rays of boyish delight, that stream from his thoughtful eyes; the rainbow lifts its proud arch in heaven but to mark his progress from infancy to manhood; an old thorn is buried, bowed down under the mass of associations he has wound about it; and to him, as he himself beautifully says,

—“The meanest flow’r that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

It is this power of habitual sentiment, or of transferring the interest of our conscious existence to whatever gently solicits attention, and is a link in the chain of association, without rousing our passions or hurting our pride, that is the striking feature in Mr. Wordsworth’s mind and poetry. Others have felt and shown this power before, as Withers, Burns, &c. but none have felt it so intensely and absolutely as to lend to it the voice of inspiration, as to make it the foundation of a new style and school in poetry. His strength, as it so often happens, arises from the excess of his weakness. But he has opened a new avenue to the human heart,

has explored another secret haunt and nook of nature, "sacred to verse, and sure of everlasting fame." Compared with his lines, Lord Byron's stanzas are but exaggerated commonplace, and Walter Scott's poetry (not his prose) old wives' fables*. There is no one in whom I have been more disappointed than in the writer here spoken of, nor with whom I am more disposed on certain points to quarrel: but the love of truth and justice which obliges me to do this, will not suffer me to blench his merits. Do what he can, he cannot help being an original-minded man. His poetry is not servile. While the cuckoo returns in the spring, while the daisy looks bright in the sun, while the rainbow lifts its head above the storm—

" Yet I'll remember thee, Glencairn,
And all that thou hast done for me!"

Sir Joshua Reynolds, in endeavouring to show that there is no such thing as proper originality, a spirit emanating from the mind of the artist and shining through his works, has traced Raphael through a number of figures which he has borrowed from Masaccio and others. This is a bad calculation. If Raphael had only borrowed those figures from others, would he, even in Sir

* Mr. Wordsworth himself should not say this, and yet I am not sure he would not.

Joshua's sense, have been entitled to the praise of originality? Plagiarism, I presume, in so far as it is plagiarism, is not originality. Salvator is considered by many as a great genius. He was what they call an irregular genius. My notion of genius is not exactly the same as theirs. It has also been made a question whether there is not more genius in Rembrandt's *Three Trees* than in all Claude Lorraine's landscapes? I do not know how that may be: but it was enough for Claude to have been a perfect landscape-painter.

Capacity is not the same thing as genius. Capacity may be described to relate to the quantity of knowledge, however acquired; genius to its quality and the mode of acquiring it. Capacity is a power over given ideas or combinations of ideas; genius is the power over those which are not given, and for which no obvious or precise rule can be laid down. Or capacity is power of any sort: genius is power of a different sort from what has yet been shown. A retentive memory, a clear understanding is capacity, but it is not genius. The admirable Crichton was a person of prodigious capacity; but there is no proof (that I know) that he had an atom of genius. His verses that remain are dull and sterile. He could learn all that was

known of any subject: he could do any thing if others could show him the way to do it. This was very wonderful: but that is all you can say of it. It requires a good capacity to play well at chess: but, after all, it is a game of skill, and not of genius. Know what you will of it, the understanding still moves in certain tracks in which others have trod before it, quicker or slower, with more or less comprehension and presence of mind. The greatest skill strikes out nothing for itself, from its own peculiar resources; the nature of the game is a thing determinate and fixed: there is no royal or poetical road to check-mate your adversary. There is no place for genius but in the indefinite and unknown. The discovery of the binomial theorem was an effort of genius; but there was none shown in Jedediah Buxton's being able to multiply 9 figures by 9 in his head. If he could have multiplied 90 figures by 90 instead of 9, it would have been equally useless toil and trouble*.

* The only good thing I ever heard come of this man's singular faculty of memory was the following. A gentleman was mentioning his having been sent up to London from the place where he lived to see Garrick act. When he went back into the country, he was asked what he thought of the player and the play. "Oh!" he said, "he did not know: he had only seen a little man strut about the stage, and

He is a man of capacity who possesses considerable intellectual riches: he is a man of genius who finds out a vein of new ore. Originality is the seeing nature differently from others, and yet as it is in itself. It is not singularity or affectation, but the discovery of new and valuable truth. All the world do not see the whole meaning of any object they have been looking at. Habit blinds them to some things: short-sightedness to others. Every mind is not a gauge and measure of truth. Nature has her surface and her dark recesses. She is deep, obscure, and infinite. It is only minds on whom she makes her fullest impressions that can penetrate her shrine or unveil her *Holy of Holies*. It is only those whom she has filled with her spirit that have the boldness or the power to reveal her mysteries to others. But nature has a thousand aspects, and one man can only draw out one of

repeat 7956 words." We all laughed at this, but a person in one corner of the room, holding one hand to his forehead, and seeming mightily delighted, called out, "Ay, indeed! And pray, was he found to be correct?" This was the supererogation of literal matter-of-fact curiosity. Jedediah Buxton's counting the number of words was idle enough; but here was a fellow who wanted some one to count them over again to see if he was correct.

"The force of *dulness* could no farther go!"

them. Whoever does this, is a man of genius. One displays her force, another her refinement, one her power of harmony, another her suddenness of contrast, one her beauty of form, another her splendour of colour. Each does that for which he is best fitted by his particular genius, that is to say, by some quality of mind into which the quality of the object sinks deepest, where it finds the most cordial welcome, is perceived to its utmost extent, and where again it forces its way out from the fulness with which it has taken possession of the mind of the student. The imagination gives out what it has first absorbed by congeniality of temperament, what it has attracted and moulded into itself by elective affinity, as the loadstone draws and impregnates iron. A little originality is more esteemed and sought for than the greatest acquired talent, because it throws a new light upon things, and is peculiar to the individual. The other is common; and may be had for the asking, to any amount.

The value of any work is to be judged of by the quantity of originality contained in it. A very little of this will go a great way. If Goldsmith had never written any thing but the two or three first chapters of the Vicar of Wakefield, or the character of a Village-School-master, they would have stamped him a man of

genius. The Editors of Encyclopedias are not usually reckoned the first literary characters of the age. The works, of which they have the management, contain a great deal of knowledge, like chests or warehouses, but the goods are not their own. We should as soon think of admiring the shelves of a library; but the shelves of a library are useful and respectable. I was once applied to, in a delicate emergency, to write an article on a difficult subject for an Encyclopedia, and was advised to take time and give it a systematic and scientific form, to avail myself of all the knowledge that was to be obtained on the subject, and arrange it with clearness and method. I made answer that as to the first, I had taken time to do all that I ever pretended to do, as I had thought incessantly on different matters for twenty years of my life*; that I had no particular knowledge of the subject in question, and no head for arrangement; and that the utmost I could do in such a case would be, when a systematic and scientific article was prepared, to write marginal notes upon it, to insert a remark or illustration of my own (not to be found in former Encyclopedias) or to

* Sir Joshua Reynolds being asked how long it had taken him to do a certain picture, made answer, "All his life."

suggest a better definition than had been offered in the text. There are two sorts of writing. The first is compilation; and consists in collecting and stating all that is already known of any question in the best possible manner, for the benefit of the uninformed reader. An author of this class is a very learned amanuensis of other people's thoughts. The second sort proceeds on an entirely different principle. Instead of bringing down the account of knowledge to the point at which it has already arrived, it professes to start from that point on the strength of the writer's individual reflections; and supposing the reader in possession of what is already known, supplies deficiencies, fills up certain blanks, and quits the beaten road in search of new tracts of observation or sources of feeling. It is in vain to object to this last style that it is disjointed, disproportioned, and irregular. It is merely a set of additions and corrections to other men's works, or to the common stock of human knowledge, printed separately. You might as well expect a continued chain of reasoning in the notes to a book. It skips all the trite, intermediate, level common-places of the subject, and only stops at the difficult passages of the human mind, or touches on some striking point that has been overlooked in previous edi-

tions. A view of a subject, to be connected and regular, cannot be all new. A writer will always be liable to be charged either with paradox or common-place, either with dulness or affectation. But we have no right to demand from any one more than he pretends to. There is indeed a medium in all things, but to unite opposite excellencies, is a task ordinarily too hard for mortality. He who succeeds in what he aims at, or who takes the lead in any one mode or path of excellence, may think himself very well off. It would not be fair to complain of the style of an Encyclopedia as dull, as wanting volatile salt; nor of the style of an Essay because it is too light and sparkling, because it is not a *caput mortuum*. So it is rather an odd objection to a work that it is made up entirely of "brilliant passages"—at least it is a fault that can be found with few works, and the book might be pardoned for its singularity. The censure might indeed seem like adroit flattery, if it were not passed on an author whom any objection is sufficient to render unpopular and ridiculous. I grant it is best to unite solidity with show, general information with particular ingenuity. This is the pattern of a perfect style: but I myself do not pretend to be a perfect writer. In fine, we do not banish light

French wines from our tables, or refuse to taste sparkling Champagne when we can get it, because it has not the body of Old Port. Besides, I do not know that dulness is strength, or that an observation is slight, because it is striking. Mediocrity, insipidity, want of character is the great fault. *Mediocribus esse poetis non Dii, non homines, non concessere columnæ.* Neither is this privilege allowed to prose-writers in our time, any more than to poets formerly.

It is not then acuteness of organs or extent of capacity that constitutes rare genius or produces the most exquisite models of art, but an intense sympathy with some one beauty or distinguishing characteristic in nature. Irritability alone, or the interest taken in certain things, may supply the place of genius in weak and otherwise ordinary minds. As there are certain instruments fitted to perform certain kinds of labour, there are certain minds so framed as to produce certain *chef-d'œuvres* in art and literature, which is surely the best use they can be put to. If a man had all sorts of instruments in his shop and wanted one, he would rather have that one than be supplied with a double set of all the others. If he had them all twice over, he could only do what he can do as it is, whereas without that one he perhaps cannot finish any one work he

has in hand. So if a man can do one thing better than any body else, the value of this one thing is what he must stand or fall by, and his being able to do a hundred other things merely *as well* as any body else, would not alter the sentence or add to his respectability; on the contrary, his being able to do so many other things well would probably interfere with and incumber him in the execution of the only thing that others cannot do as well as he, and so far be a draw-back and a disadvantage. More people in fact fail from a multiplicity of talents and pretensions than from an absolute poverty of resources. I have given instances of this elsewhere. Perhaps Shakespear's tragedies would in some respects have been better, if he had never written comedies at all; and in that case, his comedies might well have been spared, though they must have cost us some regret. Racine, it is said, might have rivalled Moliere in comedy; but he gave up the cultivation of his comic talents to devote himself wholly to the tragic Muse. If, as the French tell us, he in consequence attained to the perfection of tragic composition, this was better than writing comedies as well as Moliere and tragedies as well as Crebillon. Yet I count those persons fools who think it a pity Hogarth did not succeed better.

in serious subjects. The division of labour is an excellent principle in taste as well as in mechanics. Without this, I find from Adam Smith, we could not have a pin made to the degree of perfection it is. We do not, on any rational scheme of criticism, inquire into the variety of a man's excellences, or the number of his works, or his facility of production. Venice Preserved is sufficient for Otway's fame. I hate all those nonsensical stories about Lope de Vega and his writing a play in a morning before breakfast. He had time enough to do it after. If a man leaves behind him any work which is a model in its kind, we have no right to ask whether he could do any thing else, or how he did it, or how long he was about it. All that talent which is not necessary to the actual quantity of excellence existing in the world, loses its object, is so much waste talent or *talent to let*. I heard a sensible man say he should like to do some one thing better than all the rest of the world, and in every thing else to be like all the rest of the world. Why should a man do more than his part? The rest is vanity and vexation of spirit. We look with jealous and grudging eyes at all those qualifications which are not essential; first, because they are superfluous, and next, because we suspect they will be prejudicial.

Why does Mr. Kean play all those harlequin tricks of singing, dancing, fencing, &c.? They say, "It is for his benefit." It is not for his reputation. Garrick indeed shone equally in comedy and tragedy. But he was first, not second-rate in both. There is not a greater impertinence than to ask, if a man is clever out of his profession. I have heard of people trying to cross-examine Mrs. Siddons. I would as soon try to entrap one of the Elgin Marbles into an argument. Good nature and common sense are required from all people: but one proud distinction is enough for any one individual to possess or to aspire to!

ESSAY VI.

CHARACTER OF COBBETT.

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PEOPLE have about as substantial an idea of Cobbett as they have of Cribb. His blows are as hard, and he himself is as impenetrable. One has no notion of him as making use of a fine pen, but a great mutton-fist; his style stuns his readers, and he "fillips the ear of the public with a three-man beetle." He is too much for any single newspaper antagonist; "lays waste" a city orator or Member of Parliament, and bears hard upon the government itself. He is a kind of *fourth estate* in the politics of the country. He is not only unquestionably the most powerful political writer of the present day, but one of the best writers in the language. He speaks and thinks plain, broad, downright English. He might be said to have the clearness of Swift, the naturalness of Defoe, and the picturesque satirical description of Mandeville; if all such comparisons were not impertinent. A really great and original writer is like nobody

but himself. In one sense, Sterne was not a wit, nor Shakespear a poet. It is easy to describe second-rate talents, because they fall into a class and enlist under a standard: but first-rate powers defy calculation or comparison, and can be defined only by themselves. They are *sui generis*, and make the class to which they belong. I have tried half a dozen times to describe Burke's style without ever succeeding;—its severe extravagance; its literal boldness; its matter-of-fact hyperboles; its running away with a subject, and from it at the same time—but there is no making it out, for there is no example of the same thing any where else. We have no common measure to refer to; and his qualities contradict even themselves.

Cobbett is not so difficult. He has been compared to Paine; and so far it is true there are no two writers who come more into juxtaposition from the nature of their subjects, from the internal resources on which they draw, and from the popular effect of their writings and their adaptation (though that is a bad word in the present case) to the capacity of every reader. But still if we turn to a volume of Paine's (his *Common Sense or Rights of Man*) we are struck (not to say somewhat refreshed) by the difference. Paine is a much more sententious writer

than Cobbett. You cannot open a page in any of his best and earlier works without meeting with some maxim, some antithetical and memorable saying, which is a sort of starting-place for the argument, and the goal to which it returns. There is not a single *bon-mot*, a single sentence in Cobbett that has ever been quoted again. If any thing is ever quoted from him, it is an epithet of abuse or a nickname. He is an excellent hand at invention in that way, and has "damnable iteration in him." What could be better than his pestering Erskine year after year with his second title of Baron Clackmannan? He is rather too fond of *the Sons and Daughters of Corruption*. Paine affected to reduce things to first principles, to announce self-evident truths. Cobbett troubles himself about little but the details and local circumstances. The first appeared to have made up his mind beforehand to certain opinions, and to try to find the most compendious and pointed expressions for them: his successor appears to have no clue, no fixed or leading principles, nor ever to have thought on a question till he sits down to write about it; but then there seems no end of his matters of fact and raw materials, which are brought out in all their strength and sharpness from not having been squared or frittered down.

or vamped up to suit a theory—he goes on with his descriptions and illustrations as if he would never come to a stop; they have all the force of novelty with all the familiarity of old acquaintance; his knowledge grows out of the subject, and his style is that of a man who has an absolute intuition of what he is talking about, and never thinks of any thing else. He deals in premises and speaks to evidence—the coming to a conclusion and summing up (which was Paine's *forte*) lies in a smaller compass. The one could not compose an elementary treatise on politics to become a manual for the popular reader; nor could the other in all probability have kept up a weekly journal for the same number of years with the same spirit, interest, and untired perseverance. Paine's writings are a sort of introduction to political arithmetic on a new plan: Cobbett keeps a day-book and makes an entry at full of all the occurrences and troublesome questions that start up throughout the year. Cobbett with vast industry, vast information, and the utmost power of making what he says intelligible, never seems to get at the beginning or come to the end of any question: Paine in a few short sentences seems by his peremptory manner “to clear it from all controversy, past, present, and to come.” Paine

takes a bird's-eye view of things. Cobbett sticks close to them, inspects the component parts, and keeps fast hold of the smallest advantages they afford him. Or if I might here be indulged in a pastoral allusion, Paine tries to enclose his ideas in a fold for security and repose; Cobbett lets *his* pour out upon the plain like a flock of sheep to feed and batten. Cobbett is a pleasanter writer for those to read who do not agree with him; for he is less dogmatical, goes more into the common grounds of fact and argument to which all appeal, is more desultory and various, and appears less to be driving at a previous conclusion than urged on by the force of present conviction. He is therefore tolerated by all parties, though he has made himself by turns obnoxious to all; and even those he abuses read him. The Reformers read him when he was a Tory, and the Tories read him now that he is a Reformer. He must, I think, however, be *caviare* to the Whigs*.

If he is less metaphysical and poetical than his celebrated prototype, he is more picturesque and dramatic. His episodes, which are numerous as they are pertinent, are striking, interesting, full of life and *naïveté*, minute, double

* The late Lord Thurlow used to say that Cobbett was the only writer that deserved the name of a political reasoner.

measure running over, but never tedious—*nunquam sufflaminandus erat*. He is one of those writers who can never tire us, not even of himself; and the reason is, he is always “full of matter.” He never runs to lees, never gives us the vapid leavings of himself, is never “weary, stale, and unprofitable,” but always setting out afresh on his journey, clearing away some old nuisance, and turning up new mould. His egotism is delightful, for there is no affectation in it. He does not talk of himself for lack of something to write about, but because some circumstance that has happened to himself is the best possible illustration of the subject, and he is not the man to shrink from giving the best possible illustration of the subject from a squeamish delicacy. He likes both himself and his subject too well. He does not put himself before it, and say—“admire me first”—but places us in the same situation with himself, and makes us see all that he does. There is no blindman’s-buff, no conscious hints, no awkward ventriloquism, no testimonies of applause, no abstract, senseless self-complacency, no smuggled admiration of his own person by proxy: it is all plain and above-board. He writes himself plain William Cobbett, strips himself quite as naked as any body would wish—in a word, his

egotism is full of individuality, and has room for very little vanity in it. We feel delighted, rub our hands, and draw our chair to the fire, when we come to a passage of this sort: we know it will be something new and good, manly and simple, not the same insipid story of self over again. We sit down at table with the writer, but it is to a course of rich viands, flesh, fish, and wild-fowl, and not to a nominal entertainment, like that given by the Barmecide in the Arabian Nights, who put off his visitors with calling for a number of exquisite things that never appeared, and with the honour of his company. Mr. Cobbett is not a *make-believe* writer. His worst enemy cannot say that of him. Still less is he a vulgar one. He must be a puny, common-place critic indeed, who thinks him so. How fine were the graphical descriptions he sent us from America: what a transatlantic flavour, what a native *gusto*, what a fine *sauce piquante* of contempt they were seasoned with! If he had sat down to look at himself in the glass, instead of looking about him like Adam in Paradise, he would not have got up these articles in so capital a style. What a noble account of his first breakfast after his arrival in America! It might serve for a month. There is no scene on the stage more

amusing. How well he paints the gold and scarlet plumage of the American birds, only to lament more pathetically the want of the wild wood-notes of his native land! The groves of the Ohio that had just fallen beneath the axe's stroke "live in his description," and the turnips that he transplanted from Botley "look green" in prose! How well at another time he describes the poor sheep that had got the tick and had tumbled down in the agonies of death! It is a portrait in the manner of Bewick, with the strength, the simplicity, and feeling of that great naturalist. What havoc he makes, when he pleases, of the curls of Dr. Parr's wig and of the Whig consistency of Mr. ——! His Grammar too is as entertaining as a story-book. He is too hard upon the style of others, and not enough (sometimes) on his own.

As a political partisan, no one can stand against him. With his brandished club, like Giant Despair in the Pilgrim's Progress, he knocks out their brains; and not only no individual, but no corrupt system could hold out against his powerful and repeated attacks, but with the same weapon, swung round like a flail, that he levels his antagonists, he lays his friends low, and puts his own party *hors de combat*. This is a bad propensity, and a worse principle

in political tactics, though a common one. If his blows were straight forward and steadily directed to the same object, no unpopular Minister could live before him; instead of which he lays about right and left, impartially and remorselessly, makes a clear stage, has all the ring to himself, and then runs out of it, just when he should stand his ground. He throws his head into his adversary's stomach, and takes away from him all inclination for the fight, hits fair or foul, strikes at every thing, and as you come up to his aid or stand ready to pursue his advantage, trips up your heels or lays you sprawling, and pummels you when down as much to his heart's content as ever the Yanguesian carriers belaboured Rosinante with their pack-staves. "*He has the back-trick simply the best of any man in Illyria.*" He pays off both scores of old friendship and new-acquired enmity in a breath, in one perpetual volley, one raking fire of "arrowy sleet" shot from his pen. However his own reputation or the cause may suffer in consequence, he cares not one pin about that, so that he disables all who oppose, or who pretend to help him. In fact, he cannot bear success of any kind, not even of his own views or party; and if any principle were likely to become popular, would turn round

against it to shew his power in shouldering it on one side. In short, wherever power is, there is he against it: he naturally butts at all obstacles, as unicorns are attracted to oak-trees, and feels his own strength only by resistance to the opinions and wishes of the rest of the world. To sail with the stream, to agree with the company, is not his humour. If he could bring about a Reform in Parliament, the odds are that he would instantly fall foul of and try to mar his own handy-work; and he quarrels with his own creatures as soon as he has written them into a little vogue—and a prison. I do not think this is vanity or fickleness so much as a pugnacious disposition, that must have an antagonist power to contend with, and only finds itself at ease in systematic opposition. If it were not for this, the high towers and rotten places of the world would fall before the battering-ram of his hard-headed reasoning: but if he once found them tottering, he would apply his strength to prop them up, and disappoint the expectations of his followers. He cannot agree to any thing established, nor to set up any thing else in its stead. While it is established, he presses hard against it, because it presses upon him, at least in imagination. Let it crumble under his grasp, and the motive to re-

sistance is gone. He then requires some other grievance to set his face against. His principle is repulsion, his nature contradiction: he is made up of mere antipathies, an Ishmaelite indeed without a fellow. He is always playing at *hunt-the-slipper* in politics. He turns round upon whoever is next him. The way to wean him from any opinion, and make him conceive an intolerable hatred against it, would be to place somebody near him who was perpetually dinning it in his ears. When he is in England, he does nothing but abuse the Boroughmongers, and laugh at the whole system: when he is in America, he grows impatient of freedom and a republic. If he had staid there a little longer, he would have become a loyal and a loving subject of his Majesty King George IV. He lampooned the French Revolution when it was hailed as the dawn of liberty by millions: by the time it was brought into almost universal ill-odour by some means or other (partly no doubt by himself) he had turned, with one or two or three others, staunch Buonapartist. He is always of the militant, not of the triumphant party: so far he bears a gallant shew of magnanimity; but his gallantry is hardly of the right stamp. It wants principle: for though he is not servile or mercenary, he is the victim

of self-will. He must pull down and pull in pieces: it is not in his disposition to do otherwise. It is a pity; for with his great talents he might do great things, if he would go right forward to any useful object, make thorough-stitch work of any question, or join hand and heart with any principle. He changes his opinions as he does his friends, and much on the same account. He has no comfort in fixed principles: as soon as any thing is settled in his own mind, he quarrels with it. He has no satisfaction but in the chase after truth, runs a question down, worries and kills it, then quits it like vermin, and starts some new game, to lead him a new dance, and give him a fresh breathing through bog and brake, with the rabble yelping at his heels and the leaders perpetually at fault. This he calls sport-royal. He thinks it as good as cudgel-playing or single-stick, or any thing else that has life in it. He likes the cut and thrust, the falls, bruises, and dry blows of an argument: as to any good or useful results that may come of the amicable settling of it, any one is welcome to them for him. The amusement is over, when the matter is once fairly decided.

There is another point of view in which this may be put. I might say that Mr. Cobbett is

a very honest man with a total want of principle, and I might explain this paradox thus. I mean that he is, I think, in downright earnest in what he says, in the part he takes at the time; but in taking that part, he is led entirely by headstrong obstinacy, caprice, novelty, pique or personal motive of some sort, and not by a steadfast regard for truth or habitual anxiety for what is right uppermost in his mind. He is not a feed, time-serving, shuffling advocate (no man could write as he does who did not believe himself sincere) —but his understanding is the dupe and slave of his momentary, violent, and irritable humours. He does not adopt an opinion “deliberately or for money;” yet his conscience is at the mercy of the first provocation he receives, of the first whim he takes in his head; he sees things through the medium of heat and passion, not with reference to any general principles, and his whole system of thinking is deranged by the first object that strikes his fancy or sours his temper.—One cause of this phenomenon is perhaps his want of a regular education. He is a self-taught man, and has the faults as well as excellences of that class of persons in their most striking and glaring excess. It must be acknowledged that the Editor of the Political Register (the *two-penny trash*, as it was called,

till a bill passed the House to raise the price to sixpence) is not "the gentleman and scholar:" though he has qualities that, with a little better management, would be worth (to the public) both those titles. For want of knowing what has been discovered before him, he has not certain general landmarks to refer to, or a general standard of thought to apply to individual cases. He relies on his own acuteness and the immediate evidence, without being acquainted with the comparative anatomy or philosophical structure of opinion. He does not view things on a large scale or at the horizon (dim and airy enough perhaps)—but as they affect himself, close, palpable, tangible. Whatever he finds out, is his own, and he only knows what he finds out. He is in the constant hurry and fever of gestation: his brain teems incessantly with some fresh project. Every new light is the birth of a new system, the dawn of a new world to him. He is continually outstripping and overreaching himself. The last opinion is the only true one. He is wiser to-day than he was yesterday. Why should he not be wiser to-morrow than he was to-day?—Men of a learned education are not so sharp-witted as clever men without it: but they know the balance of the human intellect better; if they are more stupid, they are more steady;

and are less liable to be led astray by their own sagacity and the over-weening petulance of hard-earned and late-acquired wisdom. They do not fall in love with every meretricious extravagance at first sight, or mistake an old battered hypothesis for a vestal, because they are new to the ways of this old world. They do not seize upon it as a prize, but are safe from gross imposition by being as wise and no wiser than those who went before them.

Paine said on some occasion—"What I have written, I have written"—as rendering any farther declaration of his principles unnecessary. Not so Mr. Cobbett. What he has written is no rule to him what he is to write. He learns something every day, and every week he takes the field to maintain the opinions of the last six days against friend or foe. I doubt whether this outrageous inconsistency, this headstrong fickleness, this understood want of all rule and method, does not enable him to go on with the spirit, vigour, and variety that he does. He is not pledged to repeat himself. Every new Register is a kind of new Prospectus. He blesses himself from all ties and shackles on his understanding; he has no mortgages on his brain; his notions are free and unincumbered. If he was put in trammels, he might become a

vile hack like so many more. But he gives himself "ample scope and verge enough." He takes both sides of a question, and maintains one as sturdily as the other. If nobody else can argue against him, he is a very good match for himself. He writes better in favour of Reform than any body else; he used to write better against it. Wherever he is, there is the tug of war, the weight of the argument, the strength of abuse. He is not like a man in danger of being *bed-rid* in his faculties—he tosses and tumbles about his unwieldy bulk, and when he is tired of lying on one side, relieves himself by turning on the other. His shifting his point of view from time to time not merely adds variety and greater compass to his topics (so that the Political Register is an armoury and magazine for all the materials and weapons of political warfare) but it gives a greater zest and liveliness to his manner of treating them. Mr. Cobbett takes nothing for granted as what he has proved before; he does not write a book of reference. We see his ideas in their first concoction, fermenting and overflowing with the ebullitions of a lively conception. We look on at the actual process, and are put in immediate possession of the grounds and materials on which he forms his sanguine, unsettled conclusions. He does

not give us samples of reasoning, but the whole solid mass, refuse and all.

—“ He pours out all as plain
As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne.”

This is one cause of the clearness and force of his writings. An argument does not stop to stagnate and muddle in his brain, but passes at once to his paper. His ideas are served up, like pancakes, hot and hot. Fresh theories give him fresh courage. He is like a young and lusty bridegroom that divorces a favourite speculation every morning, and marries a new one every night. He is not wedded to his notions, not he. He has not one Mrs. Cobbett among all his opinions. He makes the most of the last thought that has come in his way, seizes fast hold of it, rumples it about in all directions with rough strong hands, has his wicked will of it, takes a surfeit, and throws it away.—Our author's changing his opinions for new ones is not so wonderful: what is more remarkable is his facility in forgetting his old ones. He does not pretend to consistency (like Mr. Coleridge); he frankly disavows all connexion with himself. He feels no personal responsibility in this way, and cuts a friend or principle with the same decided indifference that Antipholis of Ephesus

cuts Ægeon of Syracuse. It is a hollow thing. The only time he ever grew romantic was in bringing over the relics of Mr. Thomas Paine with him from America to go a progress with them through the disaffected districts. Scarce had he landed in Liverpool when he left the bones of a great man to shift for themselves; and no sooner did he arrive in London than he made a speech to disclaim all participation in the political and theological sentiments of his late idol, and to place the whole stock of his admiration and enthusiasm towards him to the account of his financial speculations, and of his having predicted the fate of paper-money. If he had erected a little gold statue to him, it might have proved the sincerity of this assertion: but to make a martyr and a patron-saint of a man, and to dig up "his canonised bones" in order to expose them as objects of devotion to the rabble's gaze, asks something that has more life and spirit in it, more mind and vivifying soul, than has to do with any calculation of pounds, shillings, and pence! The fact is, he *ratted* from his own project. He found the thing not so ripe as he had expected. His heart failed him: his enthusiasm fled, and he made his retractation. His admiration is short-lived: his contempt only is rooted, and his re-

sentment lasting.—The above was only one instance of his building too much on practical *data*. He has an ill habit of prophesying, and goes on, though still deceived. The art of prophesying does not suit Mr. Cobbett's style. He has a knack of fixing names and times and places. According to him, the Reformed Parliament was to meet in March, 1818—it did not, and we heard no more of the matter. When his predictions fail, he takes no farther notice of them, but applies himself to new ones—like the country-people who turn to see what weather there is in the almanac for the next week, though it has been out in its reckoning every day of the last.

Mr. Cobbett is great in attack, not in defence: he cannot fight an up-hill battle. He will not bear the least punishing. If any one turns upon him (which few people like to do) he immediately turns tail. Like an overgrown school-boy, he is so used to have it all his own way, that he cannot submit to any thing like competition or a struggle for the mastery; he must lay on all the blows, and take none. He is bullying and cowardly; a Big Ben in politics, who will fall upon others and crush them by his weight, but is not prepared for resistance, and is soon staggered by a few smart blows. Whenever he has been set upon, he has slunk out of

the controversy. The Edinburgh Review made (what is called) a dead set at him some years ago, to which he only retorted by an eulogy on the superior neatness of an English kitchen-garden to a Scotch one. I remember going one day into a bookseller's shop in Fleet-street to ask for the Review; and on my expressing my opinion to a young Scotchman, who stood behind the counter, that Mr. Cobbett might hit as hard in his reply, the North Briton said with some alarm—"But you don't think, Sir, Mr. Cobbett will be able to injure the Scottish nation?" I said I could not speak to that point, but I thought he was very well able to defend himself. He however did not, but has borne a grudge to the Edinburgh Review ever since, which he hates worse than the Quarterly. I cannot say I do*.

* Mr. Cobbett speaks almost as well as he writes. The only time I ever saw him he seemed to me a very pleasant man—easy of access, affable, clear-headed, simple and mild in his manner, deliberate and unruffled in his speech, though some of his expressions were not very qualified. His figure is tall and portly. He has a good sensible face—rather full, with little grey eyes, a hard, square forehead, a ruddy complexion, with hair grey or powdered; and had on a scarlet broad-cloth waistcoat with the flaps of the pockets hanging down, as was the custom for gentlemen-farmers in the last century, or as we see it in the pictures of Members of Parliament in the reign of George I. I certainly did not think less favourably of him for seeing him.

ESSAY VII.
ON PEOPLE WITH ONE IDEA.

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THERE are people who have but one idea : at least, if they have more, they keep it a secret, for they never talk but of one subject.

There is Major C—— : he has but one idea or subject of discourse, Parliamentary Reform. Now Parliamentary Reform is (as far as I know) a very good thing, a very good idea, and a very good subject to talk about : but why should it be the only one ? To hear the worthy and gallant Major resume his favourite topic, is like law-business, or a person who has a suit in Chancery going on. Nothing can be attended to, nothing can be talked of but that. Now it is getting on, now again it is standing still ; at one time the Master has promised to pass judgment by a certain day, at another he has put it off again and called for more papers, and both are equally reasons for speaking of it. Like the piece of packthread in the barrister's hands, he turns

and twists it all ways, and cannot proceed a step without it. Some school-boys cannot read but in their own book: and the man of one idea cannot converse out of his own subject. Conversation it is not; but a sort of recital of the preamble of a bill, or a collection of grave arguments for a man's being of opinion with himself. It would be well if there was any thing of character, of eccentricity in all this; but that is not the case. It is a political homily personified, a walking common-place we have to encounter and listen to. It is just as if a man was to insist on your hearing him go through the fifth chapter of the Book of Judges every time you meet, or like the story of the Cosmogony in the Vicar of Wakefield. It is a tune played on a barrel-organ. It is a common vehicle of discourse into which they get and are set down when they please, without any pains or trouble to themselves. Neither is it professional pedantry or trading quackery: it has no excuse. The man has no more to do with the question which he saddles on all his hearers than you have. This is what makes the matter hopeless. If a farmer talks to you about his pigs or his poultry, or a physician about his patients, or a lawyer about his briefs, or a merchant about stock, or an author about himself, you know

how to account for this, it is a common infirmity, you have a laugh at his expense, and there is no more to be said. But here is a man who goes out of his way to be absurd, and is troublesome by a romantic effort of generosity. You cannot say to him, "All this may be interesting to you, but I have no concern in it:" you cannot put him off in that way. He retorts the Latin adage upon you—*Nihil humani a me alienum puto*. He has got possession of a subject which is of universal and paramount interest (not "a fee-grief, due to some single breast")—and on that plea may hold you by the button as long as he chooses. His delight is to harangue on what nowise regards himself: how then can you refuse to listen to what as little amuses you? Time and tide wait for no man. The business of the state admits of no delay. The question of Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments stands first on the order of the day—takes precedence in its own right of every other question. Any other topic, grave or gay, is looked upon in the light of impertinence, and sent to *Coventry*. Business is an interruption; pleasure a digression from it. It is the question before every company where the Major comes, which immediately resolves itself into a committee of the whole world upon it, is carried

on by means of a perpetual virtual adjournment, and it is presumed that no other is entertained while this is pending—a determination which gives its persevering advocate a fair prospect of expatiating on it to his dying day. As Cicero says of study, it follows him into the country, it stays with him at home: it sits with him at breakfast, and goes out with him to dinner. It is like a part of his dress, of the costume of his person, without which he would be at a loss what to do. If he meets you in the street, he accosts you with it as a form of salutation: if you see him at his own house, it is supposed you come upon that. If you happen to remark, “It is a fine day or the town is full,” it is considered as a temporary compromise of the question; you are suspected of not going the whole length of the principle. As Sancho when reprimanded for mentioning his homely favourite in the Duke’s kitchen, defended himself by saying—“There I thought of Dapple, and there I spoke of him”—so the true stickler for Reform neglects no opportunity of introducing the subject wherever he is. Place its veteran champion under the frozen north, and he will celebrate sweet smiling Reform: place him under the mid-day Afric suns, and he will talk of nothing but Reform—Reform so sweetly

smiling and so sweetly promising for the last forty years—

Dulce ridentem Lalagen,
Dulce loquentem!

A topic of this sort of which the person himself may be considered as almost sole proprietor and patentee is an estate for life, free from all incumbrance of wit, thought, or study, you live upon it as a settled income; and others might as well think to eject you out of a capital freehold house and estate as think to drive you out of it into the wide world of common sense and argument. Every man's house is his castle; and every man's common-place is his stronghold, from which he looks out and smiles at the dust and heat of controversy, raised by a number of frivolous and vexatious questions—“Rings the world with the vain stir!” A cure for this and every other evil would be a Parliamentary Reform; and so we return in a perpetual circle to the point from which we set out. Is not this a species of sober madness more provoking than the real? Has not the theoretical enthusiast his mind as much warped, as much enslaved by one idea as the acknowledged lunatic, only that the former has no lucid intervals? If you see a visionary of this class going along the street, you can tell as well

what he is thinking of and will say next as the man that fancies himself a tea-pot or the Czar of Muscovy. The one is as inaccessible to reason as the other: if the one raves, the other dotes!

There are some who fancy the Corn Bill the root of all evil, and others who trace all the miseries of life to the practice of muffling up children in night-clothes when they sleep or travel. They will declaim by the hour together on the first, and argue themselves black in the face on the last. It is in vain that you give up the point. They persist in the debate, and begin again—"But don't you see —?" These sort of partial obliquities, as they are more entertaining and original, are also by their nature intermittent. They hold a man but for a season. He may have one a year or every two years; and though, while he is in the heat of any new discovery, he will let you hear of nothing else, he varies from himself, and is amusing undesignedly. He is not like the chimes at midnight.

People of the character here spoken of, that is, who tease you to death with some one idea, generally differ in their favourite notion from the rest of the world; and indeed it is the love of distinction which is mostly at the bottom of this

peculiarity. Thus one person is remarkable for living on a vegetable diet, and never fails to entertain you all dinner-time with an invective against animal food. One of this self-denying class, who adds to the primitive simplicity of this sort of food the recommendation of having it in a raw state, lamenting the death of a patient whom he had augured to be in a good way as a convert to his system, at last accounted for his disappointment in a whisper—"But she ate meat privately, depend upon it." It is not pleasant, though it is what one submits to willingly from some people, to be asked every time you meet, whether you have quite left off drinking wine, and to be complimented or condoled with on your looks according as you answer in the negative or affirmative. Abernethy thinks his pill an infallible cure for all disorders. A person once complaining to his physician that he thought his mode of treatment had not answered, he assured him it was the best in the world,—“and as a proof of it,” says he, “I have had one gentleman, a patient with your disorder, under the same regimen for the last sixteen years!”—I have known persons whose minds were entirely taken up at all times and on all occasions with such questions as the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, the Restoration

of the Jews, or the progress of Unitarianism. I myself at one period took a pretty strong turn to inveighing against the doctrine of Divine Right, and am not yet cured of my prejudice on that subject. How many projectors have gone mad in good earnest from incessantly harping on one idea, the discovery of the philosopher's stone, the finding out the longitude, or paying off the national debt! The disorder at length comes to a fatal crisis; but long before this, and while they were walking about and talking as usual, the derangement of the fancy, the loss of all voluntary power to control or alienate their ideas from the single subject that occupied them, was gradually taking place, and overturning the fabric of the understanding by wrenching it all on one side. Alderman Wood has, I should suppose, talked of nothing but the Queen in all companies for the last six months. Happy Alderman Wood! Some persons have got a definition of the verb, others a system of short-hand, others a cure for typhus fever, others a method for preventing the counterfeiting of bank notes, which they think the best possible, and indeed the only one. Others insist there have been only three great men in the world, leaving you to add a fourth. A man who has been in Germany will some-

times talk of nothing but what is German: a Scotchman always leads the discourse to his own country. Some descant on the Kantian philosophy. There is a conceited fellow about town who talks always and every where on this subject. He wears the Categories round his neck like a pearl-chain: he plays off the names of the primary and transcendental qualities like rings on his fingers. He talks of the Kantian system while he dances; he talks of it while he dines, he talks of it to his children, to his apprentices, to his customers. He called on me to convince me of it, and said I was only prevented from becoming a complete convert by one or two prejudices. He knows no more about it than a pike-staff. Why then does he make so much ridiculous fuss about it? It is not that he has got this one idea in his head, but that he has got no other. A dunce may talk on the subject of the Kantian philosophy with great impunity: if he opened his lips on any other, he might be found out. A French lady, who had married an Englishman who said little, excused him by saying—"He is always thinking of Locke and Newton." This is one way of passing muster by following in the *suite* of great names!—A friend of mine, whom I met one day in the street, accosted me with more

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than usual vivacity, and said, "Well, we're selling, we're selling!" I thought he meant a house. "No," he said, "haven't you seen the advertisement in the newspapers? I mean five-and-twenty copies of the Essay." This work, a comely, capacious quarto on the most abstruse metaphysics, had occupied his sole thoughts for several years, and he concluded that I must be thinking of what he was. I believe, however, I may say I am nearly the only person that ever read, certainly that ever pretended to understand it. It is an original and most ingenious work, nearly as incomprehensible as it is original, and as quaint as it is ingenious. If the author is taken up with the ideas in his own head and no others, he has a right: for he has ideas there, that are to be met with nowhere else, and which occasionally would not disgrace a Berkeley. A dextrous plagiarist might get himself an immense reputation by putting them in a popular dress. Oh! how little do they know, who have never done any thing but repeat after others by rote, the pangs, the labour, the yearnings and misgivings of mind it costs, to get at the germ of an original idea—to dig it out of the hidden recesses of thought and nature, and bring it half-ashamed, struggling, and deformed into the day

—to give words and intelligible symbols to that which was never imagined or expressed before ! It is as if the dumb should speak for the first time, as if things should stammer out their own meaning, through the imperfect organs of mere sense. I wish that some of our fluent, plausible declaimers, who have such store of words to cover the want of ideas, could lend their art to this writer. If he, “poor, unfledged” in this respect, “who has scarce winged from view o’ th’ nest,” could find a language for his ideas, truth would find a language for some of her secrets. Mr. Fearn was buried in the woods of Indostan. In his leisure from business and from tiger-shooting, he took it into his head to look into his own mind. A whim or two, an odd fancy, like a film before the eye, now and then crossed it: it struck him as something curious, but the impression at first disappeared like breath upon glass. He thought no more of it; yet still the same conscious feelings returned, and what at first was chance or instinct, became a habit. Several notions had taken possession of his brain relating to mental processes which he had never heard alluded to in conversation, but not being well versed in such matters, he did not know whether they were to be found in learned authors or not. He took a

journey to the capital of the Peninsula on purpose, bought Locke, Reid, Stewart, and Berkeley, whom he consulted with eager curiosity when he got home, but did not find what he looked for. He set to work himself; and in a few weeks, sketched out a rough draught of his thoughts and observations on bamboo paper. The eagerness of his new pursuit, together with the diseases of the climate, proved too much for his constitution, and he was forced to return to this country. He put his metaphysics, his bamboo manuscript, into the boat with him, and as he floated down the Ganges, said to himself, "If I live, this will live: if I die, it will not be heard of." What is fame to this feeling? The babbling of an idiot! He brought the work home with him, and twice had it stereotyped. The first sketch he allowed was obscure, but the improved copy he thought could not fail to strike. It did not succeed. The world, as Goldsmith said of himself, made a point of taking no notice of it. Ever since he has had nothing but disappointment and vexation—the greatest and most heart-breaking of all others—that of not being able to make yourself understood. Mr. Fearn tells me there is a sensible writer in the Monthly Review who sees the thing in its proper light, and says so.

But I have heard of no other instance. There are notwithstanding ideas in this work, neglected and ill-treated as it has been, that lead to more curious and subtle speculations on some of the most disputed and difficult points of the philosophy of the human mind (such as *relation, abstraction, &c.*) than have been thrown out in any work for the last sixty years, I mean since Hume; for since his time, there has been no metaphysician in this country, worth the name. Yet his Treatise on Human Nature, he tells us, “fell still-born from the press.” So it is that knowledge works its way, and reputation lingers far behind it. But truth is better than opinion, I maintain it; and as to the two stereotyped and unsold editions of the Essay on Conscience, I say, *Honi soit qui mal y pense**!—My Uncle Toby had one idea in his head, that of his bowling-green, and another, that of the Widow Wadman. Oh, spare them both! I will only add one more anecdote in illustration of this theory of the mind’s being occupied with

* Quarto poetry, as well as quarto metaphysics, does not always sell. Going one day into a shop in Paternoster-row to see for some lines in Mr. Wordsworth’s Excursion to interlard some prose with, I applied to the constituted authorities, and asked if I could look at a copy of the Excursion? The answer was—“Into which county, Sir?”

one idea, which is most frequently of a man's self. A celebrated lyrical writer happened to drop into a small party where they had just got the novel of *Rob Roy*, by the author of *Waverley*: The motto in the title-page was taken from a poem of his. This was a hint sufficient, a word to the wise. He instantly went to the book-shelf in the next room, took down the volume of his own poems, read the whole of that in question aloud with manifest complacency, replaced it on the shelf, and walked away; taking no more notice of *Rob Roy* than if there had been no such person, nor of the new novel than if it had not been written by its renowned author. There was no reciprocity in this. But the writer in question does not admit of any merit, second to his own*.

* These fantastic poets are like a foolish ringer at Plymouth that Northcote tells the story of. He was proud of his ringing, and the boys who made a jest of his foible used to get him in the belfry, and ask him, "Well now, John, how many good ringers are there in Plymouth?" "Two," he would say, without any hesitation. "Ay, indeed! and who are they?"—"Why, first, there's myself, that's one; and—and"—"Well, and who's the other?"—"Why, there's, there's—Ecod, I can't think of any other but myself." *Talk we of one Master Launcelot.* The story is of ringers: it will do for any vain, shallow, self-satisfied egotist of them all.

Mr. Owen is a man remarkable for one idea. It is that of himself and the Lanark cotton-mills. He carries this idea backwards and forwards with him from Glasgow to London, without allowing any thing for attrition, and expects to find it in the same state of purity and perfection in the latter place as at the former. He acquires a wonderful velocity and impenetrability in his undaunted transit. Resistance to him is vain, while the whirling motion of the mail-coach remains in his head.

“ Nor Alps nor Apennines can keep him out,
Nor fortified redoubt.”

He even got possession, in the suddenness of his onset, of the steam-engine of the Times Newspaper, and struck off ten thousand wood-cuts of the Projected Villages, which afforded an ocular demonstration to all who saw them of the practicability of Mr. Owen's whole scheme. He comes into a room with one of these documents in his hand, with the air of a schoolmaster and a quack-doctor mixed, asks very kindly how you do, and on hearing you are still in an indifferent state of health owing to bad digestion, instantly turns round, and observes, “ That all that will be remedied in his plan : that indeed he thinks too much attention has been paid to the mind,

and not enough to the body ; that in his system, which he has now perfected and which will shortly be generally adopted, he has provided effectually for both : that he has been long of opinion that the mind depends altogether on the physical organisation, and where the latter is neglected or disordered, the former must languish and want its due vigour : that exercise is therefore a part of his system, with full liberty to develop every faculty of mind and body : that two objections had been made to his *New View of Society*, *viz.* its want of relaxation from labour, and its want of variety ; but the first of these, the too great restraint, he trusted he had already answered, for where the powers of mind and body were freely exercised and brought out, surely liberty must be allowed to exist in the highest degree ; and as to the second, the monotony which would be produced by a regular and general plan of co-operation, he conceived he had proved in his “ *New View*” and “ *Addresses to the higher Classes* ;” that the co-operation he had recommended was necessarily conducive to the most extensive improvement of the ideas and faculties, and where this was the case, there must be the greatest possible variety instead of a want of it.” And having said this, this expert and sweeping orator takes up his

hat and walks down stairs after reading his lecture of truisms like a play-bill or an apothecary's advertisement; and should you stop him at the door to say by way of putting in a word in common, that Mr. Southey seems somewhat favourable to his plan in his late Letter to Mr. William Smith, he looks at you with a smile of pity at the futility of all opposition and the idleness of all encouragement. People who thus swell out some vapid scheme of their own into undue importance, seem to me to labour under water in the head—to exhibit a huge hydrocephalus! They may be very worthy people for all that, but they are bad companions and very indifferent reasoners. Tom Moore says of some one somewhere, "That he puts his hand in his breeches' pocket like a crocodile." The phrase is hieroglyphical: but Mr. Owen and others might be said to put their foot in the question of social improvement and reform much in the same unaccountable manner.

I hate to be surfeited with any thing, however sweet. I do not want to be always tied to the same question, as if there were no other in the world. I like a mind more Catholic.

"I love to talk with mariners,
That come from a far countree."

I am not for "a collusion" but "an exchange" of ideas. It is well to hear what other people have to say on a number of subjects. I do not wish to be always respiring the same confined atmosphere, but to vary the scene, and get a little relief and fresh air out of doors. Do all we can to shake it off, there is always enough pedantry, egotism, and self-conceit left lurking behind: we need not seal ourselves up hermetically in these precious qualities; so as to think of nothing but our own wonderful discoveries, and hear nothing but the sound of our own voice. Scholars, like princes, may learn something by being *incognito*. Yet we see those who cannot go into a bookseller's shop, or bear to be five minutes in a stage-coach, without letting you know who they are. They carry their reputation about with them as the snail does its shell, and sit under its canopy, like the lady in the lobster. I cannot understand this at all. What is the use of a man's always revolving round his own little circle? He must, one should think, be tired of it himself, as well as tire other people. A well-known writer says with much boldness both in the thought and expression, that "a Lord is imprisoned in the Bastille of a name, and cannot enlarge himself into man:" and I have known men of genius in the same predicament.

Why must a man be for ever mouthing out his own poetry, comparing himself with Milton, passage by passage, and weighing every line in a balance of posthumous fame which he holds in his own hands? It argues a want of imagination as well as common sense. Has he no ideas but what he has put into verse; or none in common with his hearers? Why should he think it the only scholar-like thing, the only "virtue extant" to see the merit of his writings, and that "men were brutes without them?" Why should he bear a grudge to all art, to all beauty, to all wisdom that does not spring from his own brain? Or why should he fondly imagine that there is but one fine thing in the world, namely poetry, and that he is the only poet in it? It will never do. Poetry is a very fine thing; but there are other things besides it. Every thing must have its turn. Does a wise man think to enlarge his comprehension by turning his eyes only on himself, or hope to conciliate the admiration of others by scouting, proscribing, and loathing all that they delight in? He must either have a disproportionate idea of himself, or be ignorant of the world in which he lives. It is quite enough to have one class of people born to think the universe made for them!—It seems also to argue a want of repose, of confidence, and firm faith

in a man's real pretensions to be always dragging them forward into the fore-ground, as if the proverb held here—*Out of sight out of mind*. Does he, for instance, conceive that no one would ever think of his poetry, unless he forced it upon them by repeating it himself? Does he believe all competition, all allowance of another's merit fatal to him? Must he, like Moody in the Country Girl, lock up the faculties of his admirers in ignorance of all other fine things, painting, music, the antique, lest they should play truant to him? Methinks such a proceeding implies no good opinion of his own genius or their taste:—it is deficient in dignity and in decorum. Surely if any one is convinced of the reality of an acquisition, he can bear not to have it spoken of every minute. If he knows he has an undoubted superiority in any respect, he will not be uneasy because every one he meets is not in the secret, nor staggered by the report of rival excellence. One of the first mathematicians and classical scholars of the day was mentioning it as a compliment to himself that a cousin of his, a girl from school, had said of him—“ You know M—— is a very plain good sort of a young man, but he is not any thing at all out of the common.” L. H. once said to me—“ I wonder I never heard you speak upon this sub-

ject before, which you seem to have studied a good deal." I answered, "Why, we were not reduced to that, that I know of!"—

There are persons, who without being chargeable with the vice here spoken of, yet "stand accountant for as great a sin:" though not dull and monotonous, they are vivacious mannerists in their conversation, and excessive egotists. Though they run over a thousand subjects in mere gaiety of heart, their delight still flows from one idea, namely, themselves. Open the book in what page you will, there is a frontispiece of themselves staring you in the face. They are a sort of *Jacks o' the Green*, with a sprig of laurel, a little tinsel, and a little smut, but still playing antics and keeping in incessant motion, to attract attention and extort your pittance of approbation. Whether they talk of the town or the country, poetry or politics, it comes to much the same thing. If they talk to you of the town, its diversions, "its palaces, its ladies, and its streets," they are the delight, the grace, and ornament of it. If they are describing the charms of the country, they give no account of any individual spot or object or source of pleasure but the circumstance of their being there. "With them conversing, we forget all place, all seasons, and their change."

They perhaps pluck a leaf or a flower, patronise it, and hand it you to admire, but select no one feature of beauty or grandeur to dispute the palm of perfection with their own persons. Their rural descriptions are mere landscape back-grounds with their own portraits in an engaging attitude in front. They are not observing or enjoying the scene, but doing the honours as masters of the ceremonies to nature, and arbiters of elegance to all humanity. If they tell a love-tale of enamoured princesses, it is plain they fancy themselves the hero of the piece. If they discuss poetry, their encomiums still turn on something genial and unsophisticated, meaning their own style: if they enter into politics, it is understood that a hint from them to the potentates of Europe is sufficient. In short, as a lover (talk of what you will) brings in his mistress at every turn, so these persons contrive to divert your attention to the same darling object—they are, in fact, in love with themselves; and like lovers, should be left to keep their own company.

ESSAY VIII.

ON THE

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“ For the more languages a man can speak,
His talent has but sprung the greater leak:
And, for the industry he has spent upon't,
Must full as much some other way discount.
The Hebrew, Chaldee, and the Syriac,
Do, like their letters, set men's reason back,
And turn their wits that strive to understand it
(Like those that write the characters) left-handed.
Yet he that is but able to express
No sense at all in several languages,
Will pass for learned than he that's known
To speak the strongest reason in his own.”

BUTLER.

THE description of persons who have the fewest ideas of all others are mere authors and readers. It is better to be able neither to read nor write than to be able to do nothing else. A lounger who is ordinarily seen with a book in his hand, is (we may be almost sure) equally without the power or inclination to attend either to what passes around him, or in his own mind. Such

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a one may be said to carry his understanding about with him in his pocket, or to leave it at home on his library shelves. He is afraid of venturing on any train of reasoning, or of striking out any observation that is not mechanically suggested to him by passing his eyes over certain legible characters; shrinks from the fatigue of thought, which, for want of practice, becomes insupportable to him; and sits down contented with an endless wearisome succession of words and half-formed images, which fill the void of the mind, and continually efface one another. Learning is, in too many cases, but a foil to common sense; a substitute for true knowledge. Books are less often made use of as "spectacles" to look at nature with, than as blinds to keep out its strong light and shifting scenery from weak eyes and indolent dispositions. The book-worm wraps himself up in his web of verbal generalities, and sees only the glimmering shadows of things reflected from the minds of others. Nature *puts him out*. The impressions of real objects, stripped of the disguises of words and voluminous round-about descriptions, are blows that stagger him; their variety distracts, their rapidity exhausts him; and he turns from the bustle, the noise, and glare, and whirling motion of the world about him

(which he has not an eye to follow in its fantastic changes, nor an understanding to reduce to fixed principles,) to the quiet monotony of the dead languages, and the less startling and more intelligible combinations of the letters of the alphabet. It is well, it is perfectly well. "Leave me to my repose," is the motto of the sleeping and the dead. You might as well ask the paralytic to leap from his chair and throw away his crutch, or, without a miracle, to "take up his bed and walk," as expect the learned reader to throw down his book and think for himself. He clings to it for his intellectual support; and his dread of being left to himself is like the horror of a vacuum. He can only breathe a learned atmosphere, as other men breathe common air. He is a borrower of sense. He has no ideas of his own, and must live on those of other people. The habit of supplying our ideas from foreign sources "enfeebles all internal strength of thought," as a course of dram-drinking destroys the tone of the stomach. The faculties of the mind, when not exerted, or when cramped by custom and authority, become listless, torpid, and unfit for the purposes of thought or action. Can we wonder at the languor and lassitude which is thus produced by a life of learned sloth and

ignorance ; by poring over lines and syllables that excite little more idea or interest than if they were the characters of an unknown tongue, till the eye closes on vacancy, and the book drops from the feeble hand ! I would rather be a wood-cutter, or the meanest hind, that all day “sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and at night sleeps in Elysium,” than wear out my life so, ’twixt dreaming and awake. The learned author differs from the learned student in this, that the one transcribes what the other reads. The learned are mere literary drudges. If you set them upon original composition, their heads turn, they don’t know where they are. The indefatigable readers of books are like the everlasting copiers of pictures, who, when they attempt to do any thing of their own, find they want an eye quick enough, a hand steady enough, and colours bright enough, to trace the living forms of nature.

Any one who has passed through the regular gradations of a classical education, and is not made a fool by it, may consider himself as having had a very narrow escape. It is an old remark, that boys who shine at school do not make the greatest figure when they grow up and come out into the world. The things, in fact, which a boy is set to learn at school, and on which his

success depends, are things which do not require the exercise either of the highest or the most useful faculties of the mind. Memory (and that of the lowest kind) is the chief faculty called into play, in conning over and repeating lessons by rote in grammar, in languages, in geography, arithmetic, &c. so that he who has the most of this technical memory, with the least turn for other things, which have a stronger and more natural claim upon his childish attention, will make the most forward school-boy. The jargon containing the definitions of the parts of speech, the rules for casting up an account, or the inflections of a Greek verb, can have no attraction to the tyro of ten years old, except as they are imposed as a task upon him by others, or from his feeling the want of sufficient relish or amusement in other things. A lad with a sickly constitution, and no very active mind, who can just retain what is pointed out to him, and has neither sagacity to distinguish nor spirit to enjoy for himself, will generally be at the head of his form. An idler at school, on the other hand, is one who has high health and spirits, who has the free use of his limbs, with all his wits about him, who feels the circulation of his blood and the motion of his heart, who is ready to laugh and cry in a breath, and who had rather chase

a ball or a butterfly, feel the open air in his face, look at the fields or the sky, follow a winding path, or enter with eagerness into all the little conflicts and interests of his acquaintances and friends, than doze over a musty spelling-book, repeat barbarous distichs after his master, sit so many hours pinioned to a writing-desk, and receive his reward for the loss of time and pleasure in paltry prize-medals at Christmas and Midsummer. There is indeed a degree of stupidity which prevents children from learning the usual lessons, or ever arriving at these puny academic honours. But what passes for stupidity is much oftener a want of interest, of a sufficient motive to fix the attention, and force a reluctant application to the dry and unmeaning pursuits of school-learning. The best capacities are as much above this drudgery, as the dullest are beneath it. Our men of the greatest genius have not been most distinguished for their acquirements at school or at the university.

“Th’ enthusiast Fancy was a truant ever.”

Gray and Collins were among the instances of this wayward disposition. Such persons do not think so highly of the advantages, nor can they submit their imaginations so servilely to the trammels of strict scholastic discipline. There

is a certain kind and degree of intellect in which words take root, but into which things have not power to penetrate. A mediocrity of talent, with a certain slenderness of moral constitution, is the soil that produces the most brilliant specimens of successful prize-essayists and Greek epigrammatists. It should not be forgotten, that the least respectable character among modern politicians was the cleverest boy at Eaton.

Learning is the knowledge of that which is not generally known to others, and which we can only derive at second-hand from books or other artificial sources. The knowledge of that which is before us, or about us, which appeals to our experience, passions, and pursuits, to the bosoms and businesses of men, is not learning. Learning is the knowledge of that which none but the learned know. He is the most learned man who knows the most of what is farthest removed from common life and actual observation, that is of the least practical utility, and least liable to be brought to the test of experience, and that, having been handed down through the greatest number of intermediate stages, is the most full of uncertainty, difficulties, and contradictions. It is seeing with the eyes of others, hearing with their ears, and pinning our faith on their understandings. The learned

man prides himself in the knowledge of names, and dates, not of men or things. He thinks and cares nothing about his next-door neighbours, but he is deeply read in the tribes and casts of the Hindoos and Calmuc-Tartars. He can hardly find his way into the next street, though he is acquainted with the exact dimensions of Constantinople and Pekin. He does not know whether his oldest acquaintance is a knave or a fool, but he can pronounce a pompous lecture on all the principal characters in history. He cannot tell whether an object is black or white, round or square, and yet he is a professed master of the laws of optics and the rules of perspective. He knows as much of what he talks about, as a blind man does of colours. He cannot give a satisfactory answer to the plainest question, nor is he ever in the right in any one of his opinions, upon any one matter of fact that really comes before him, and yet he gives himself out for an infallible judge on all those points, of which it is impossible that he or any other person living should know any thing but by conjecture. He is expert in all the dead and in most of the living languages; but he can neither speak his own fluently, nor write it correctly. A person of this class, the second Greek scholar of his day, undertook to point

out several solecisms in Milton's Latin style; and in his own performance there is hardly a sentence of common English. Such was Dr. ———. Such is Dr. ———. Such was not Porson. He was an exception that confirmed the general rule,—a man that, by uniting talents and knowledge with learning, made the distinction between them more striking and palpable.

A mere scholar, who knows nothing but books, must be ignorant even of them. "Books do not teach the use of books." How should he know any thing of a work, who knows nothing of the subject of it? The learned pedant is conversant with books only as they are made of other books, and those again of others, without end. He parrots those who have parroted others. He can translate the same word into ten different languages, but he knows nothing of the *thing* which it means in any one of them. He stuffs his head with authorities built on authorities, with quotations quoted from quotations, while he locks up his senses, his understanding, and his heart. He is unacquainted with the maxims and manners of the world; he is to seek in the characters of individuals. He sees no beauty in the face of nature or of art. To him "the mighty world of eye and ear" is hid; and "knowledge," except at one entrance,

“quite shut out.” His pride takes part with his ignorance; and his self-importance rises with the number of things of which he does not know the value, and which he therefore despises as unworthy of his notice. He knows nothing of pictures;—“of the colouring of Titian, the grace of Raphael, the purity of Domenichino, the *corregiescity* of Correggio, the learning of Poussin, the airs of Guido, the taste of the Caracci, or the grand contour of Michael Angelo,”—of all those glories of the Italian and miracles of the Flemish school, which have filled the eyes of mankind with delight, and to the study and imitation of which thousands have in vain devoted their lives. These are to him as if they had never been, a mere dead letter, a bye-word; and no wonder: for he neither sees nor understands their prototypes in nature. A print of Rubens’s Watering-place, or Claude’s Enchanted Castle, may be hanging on the walls of his room for months without his once perceiving them; and if you point them out to him, he will turn away from them. The language of nature, or of art (which is another nature), is one that he does not understand. He repeats indeed the names of Apelles and Phidias, because they are to be found in classic authors, and boasts of their works as prodigies, because

they no longer exist ; or when he sees the finest remains of Grecian art actually before him in the Elgin marbles, takes no other interest in them than as they lead to a learned dispute, and (which is the same thing) a quarrel about the meaning of a Greek particle. He is equally ignorant of music ; he “ knows no touch of it,” from the strains of the all-accomplished Mozart to the shepherd’s pipe upon the mountain. His ears are nailed to his books ; and deadened with the sound of the Greek and Latin tongues, and the din and smithery of school-learning. Does he know anything more of poetry ? He knows the number of feet in a verse, and of acts in a play ; but of the soul or spirit he knows nothing. He can turn a Greek ode into English, or a Latin epigram into Greek verse, but whether either is worth the trouble, he leaves to the critics. Does he understand “ the act and practique part of life ” better than “ the theorique ? ” No. He knows no liberal or mechanic art ; no trade or occupation ; no game of skill or chance. Learning “ has no skill in surgery,” in agriculture, in building, in working in wood or in iron ; it cannot make any instrument of labour, or use it when made ; it cannot handle the plough or the spade, or the chisel or the hammer ; it knows nothing of hunting or hawking, fishing or shoot-

ing, of horses or dogs, of fencing or dancing, or cudgel-playing, or bowls, or cards, or tennis, or any thing else. The learned professor of all arts and sciences cannot reduce any one of them to practice, though he may contribute an account of them to an Encyclopædia. He has not the use of his hands or of his feet; he can neither run, nor walk, nor swim; and he considers all those who actually understand and can exercise any of these arts of body or mind, as vulgar and mechanical men;—though to know almost any one of them in perfection requires long time and practice, with powers originally fitted, and a turn of mind particularly devoted to them. It does not require more than this to enable the learned candidate to arrive, by painful study, at a doctor's degree and a fellowship, and to eat, drink, and sleep, the rest of his life!

The thing is plain. All that men really understand, is confined to a very small compass; to their daily affairs and experience; to what they have an opportunity to know, and motives to study or practise. The rest is affectation and imposture. The common people have the use of their limbs; for they live by their labour or skill. They understand their own business, and the characters of those they have to deal with; for it is necessary that they should. They

have eloquence to express their passions, and wit at will to express their contempt and provoke laughter. Their natural use of speech is not hung up in monumental mockery, in an obsolete language; nor is their sense of what is ludicrous, or readiness at finding out allusions to express it, buried in collections of *Anas*. You will hear more good things on the outside of a stage-coach from London to Oxford, than if you were to pass a twelvemonth with the undergraduates, or heads of colleges, of that famous university; and more *home* truths are to be learnt from listening to a noisy debate in an ale-house, than from attending to a formal one in the House of Commons. An elderly country gentlewoman will often know more of character, and be able to illustrate it by more amusing anecdotes taken from the history of what has been said, done, and gossiped in a country town for the last fifty years, than the best blue-stocking of the age will be able to glean from that sort of learning which consists in an acquaintance with all the novels and satirical poems published in the same period. People in towns, indeed, are woefully deficient in a knowledge of character, which they see only *in the bust*, not as a whole-length. People in the country not only know all that has happened to a man, but trace his

virtues or vices, as they do his features, in their descent through several generations, and solve some contradiction in his behaviour by a cross in the breed, half a century ago. The learned know nothing of the matter, either in town or country. Above all, the mass of society have common sense, which the learned in all ages want. The vulgar are in the right when they judge for themselves; they are wrong when they trust to their blind guides. The celebrated nonconformist divine, Baxter, was almost stoned to death by the good women of Kidderminster, for asserting from the pulpit that "hell was paved with infants' skulls;" but, by the force of argument, and of learned quotations from the Fathers, the reverend preacher at length prevailed over the scruples of his congregation, and over reason and humanity.

Such is the use which has been made of human learning. The labourers in this vineyard seem as if it was their object to confound all common sense, and the distinctions of good and evil, by means of traditional maxims, and preconceived notions, taken upon trust, and increasing in absurdity, with increase of age. They pile hypothesis on hypothesis, mountain high, till it is impossible to come at the plain truth on any question. They see things, not as

they are, but as they find them in books; and “wink and shut their apprehensions up,” in order that they may discover nothing to interfere with their prejudices, or convince them of their absurdity. It might be supposed, that the height of human wisdom consisted in maintaining contradictions, and rendering nonsense sacred. There is no dogma, however fierce or foolish, to which these persons have not set their seals, and tried to impose on the understandings of their followers, as the will of Heaven, clothed with all the terrors and sanctions of religion. How little has the human understanding been directed to find out the true and useful! How much ingenuity has been thrown away in the defence of creeds and systems! How much time and talents have been wasted in theological controversy, in law, in politics, in verbal criticism, in judicial astrology, and in finding out the art of making gold! What actual benefit do we reap from the writings of a Laud or a Whitgift, or of Bishop Bull or Bishop Waterland, or Prideaux’ Connections, or Beausobre, or Calmet, or St. Augustine, or Puffendorf, or Vattel, or from the more literal but equally learned and unprofitable labours of Scaliger, Cardan, and Scioppius? How many grains of sense are there in their thousand folio or quarto

volumes? What would the world lose if they were committed to the flames to-morrow? Or are they not already "gone to the vault of all the Capulets?" Yet all these were oracles in their time, and would have scoffed at you or me, at common sense and human nature, for differing with them. It is our turn to laugh now.

To conclude this subject. The most sensible people to be met with in society are men of business and of the world, who argue from what they see and know, instead of spinning cobweb distinctions of what things ought to be. Women have often more of what is called *good sense* than men. They have fewer pretensions; are less implicated in theories; and judge of objects more from their immediate and involuntary impression on the mind, and, therefore, more truly and naturally. They cannot reason wrong; for they do not reason at all. They do not think or speak by rule; and they have in general more eloquence and wit, as well as sense, on that account. By their wit, sense, and eloquence together, they generally contrive to govern their husbands. Their style, when they write to their friends (not for the booksellers) is better than that of most authors.—Uneducated people have most exuberance of invention, and

the greatest freedom from prejudice. Shakespear's was evidently an uneducated mind, both in the freshness of his imagination, and in the variety of his views ; as Milton's was scholastic, in the texture both of his thoughts and feelings. Shakespear had not been accustomed to write themes at school in favour of virtue or against vice. To this we owe the unaffected, but healthy tone of his dramatic morality. If we wish to know the force of human genius, we should read Shakespear. If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning, we may study his commentators.

ESSAY IX.

THE INDIAN JUGGLERS.

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THE INDIAN JUGGLERS.

· COMING forward and seating himself on the ground in his white dress and tightened turban, the chief of the Indian Jugglers begins with tossing up two brass balls, which is what any of us could do, and concludes with keeping up four at the same time, which is what none of us could do to save our lives, nor if we were to take our whole lives to do it in. Is it then a trifling power we see at work, or is it not something next to miraculous? It is the utmost stretch of human ingenuity, which nothing but the bending the faculties of body and mind to it from the tenderest infancy with incessant, ever-anxious application up to manhood can accomplish or make even a slight approach to. Man, thou art a wonderful animal, and thy ways past finding out! Thou canst do strange things, but thou turnest them to little account!—To conceive of this effort of extraordinary dexterity distracts the imagination and makes admiration

breathless. Yet it costs nothing to the performer, any more than if it were a mere mechanical deception with which he had nothing to do but to watch and laugh at the astonishment of the spectators. A single error of a hair's-breadth, of the smallest conceivable portion of time, would be fatal: the precision of the movements must be like a mathematical truth, their rapidity is like lightning. To catch four balls in succession in less than a second of time, and deliver them back so as to return with seeming consciousness to the hand again, to make them revolve round him at certain intervals, like the planets in their spheres, to make them chase one another like sparkles of fire, or shoot up like flowers or meteors, to throw them behind his back and twine them round his neck like ribbons or like serpents, to do what appears an impossibility, and to do it with all the ease, the grace, the carelessness imaginable, to laugh at, to play with the glittering mockeries, to follow them with his eye as if he could fascinate them with its lambent fire or as if he had only to see that they kept time with the music on the stage—there is something in all this which he who does not admire may be quite sure he never really admired any thing in the whole course of his life. It is skill surmounting difficulty, and

beauty triumphing over skill. It seems as if the difficulty once mastered naturally resolved itself into ease and grace, and as if to be overcome at all, it must be overcome without an effort. The smallest awkwardness or want of pliancy or self-possession would stop the whole process. It is the work of witchcraft, and yet sport for children. Some of the other feats are quite as curious and wonderful, such as the balancing the artificial tree and shooting a bird from each branch through a quill; though none of them have the elegance or facility of the keeping up of the brass balls. You are in pain for the result and glad when the experiment is over; they are not accompanied with the same unmixed, unchecked delight as the former; and I would not give much to be merely astonished without being pleased at the same time. As to the swallowing of the sword, the police ought to interfere to prevent it. When I saw the Indian Juggler do the same things before, his feet were bare, and he had large rings on the toes, which kept turning round all the time of the performance, as if they moved of themselves.—The hearing a speech in Parliament, drawled or stammered out by the Honourable Member or the Noble Lord, the ringing the changes on their common-places, which any one could re-

peat after them as well as they, stirs me not a jot, shakes not my good opinion of myself: but the seeing the Indian Jugglers does. It makes me ashamed of myself. I ask what there is that I can do as well as this? Nothing. What have I been doing all my life? Have I been idle, or have I nothing to shew for all my labour and pains? Or have I passed my time in pouring words like water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up a hill and then down again, trying to prove an argument in the teeth of facts, and looking for causes in the dark, and not finding them? Is there no one thing in which I can challenge competition, that I can bring as an instance of exact perfection, in which others cannot find a flaw? The utmost I can pretend to is to write a description of what this fellow can do. I can write a book: so can many others who have not even learned to spell. What abortions are these Essays! What errors, what ill-pieced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions! How little is made out, and that little how ill! Yet they are the best I can do. I endeavour to recollect all I have ever observed or thought upon a subject, and to express it as nearly as I can. Instead of writing on four subjects at a time, it is as much as I can manage to keep the thread of one discourse

clear and unentangled. I have also time on my hands to correct my opinions, and polish my periods: but the one I cannot, and the other I will not do. I am fond of arguing: yet with a good deal of pains and practice it is often as much as I can do to beat my man; though he may be a very indifferent hand. A common fencer would disarm his adversary in the twinkling of an eye, unless he were a professor like himself. A stroke of wit will sometimes produce this effect, but there is no such power or superiority in sense or reasoning. There is no complete mastery of execution to be shewn there: and you hardly know the professor from the impudent pretender or the mere clown*.

I have always had this feeling of the inefficacy

* The celebrated Peter Pindar (Dr. Wolcot) first discovered and brought out the talents of the late Mr. Opie, the painter. He was a poor Cornish boy, and was out at work in the fields, when the poet went in search of him. "Well, my lad, can you go and bring me your very best picture?" The other flew like lightning, and soon came back with what he considered as his master-piece. The stranger looked at it, and the young artist, after waiting for some time without his giving any opinion, at length exclaimed eagerly, "Well, what do you think of it?"—"Think of it?" said Wolcot, "why, I think you ought to be ashamed of it—that you who might do so well, do no better!" The same answer would have applied to this artist's latest performances, that had been suggested by one of his earliest efforts.

and slow progress of intellectual compared to mechanical excellence, and it has always made me somewhat dissatisfied. It is a great many years since I saw Richer, the famous rope-dancer, perform at Sadler's Wells. He was matchless in his art, and added to his extraordinary skill exquisite ease, and unaffected, natural grace. I was at that time employed in copying a half-length picture of Sir Joshua Reynolds's; and it put me out of conceit with it. How ill this part was made out in the drawing! How heavy, how slovenly this other was painted! I could not help saying to myself, "If the rope-dancer had performed his task in this manner, leaving so many gaps and botches in his work, he would have broke his neck long ago; I should never have seen that vigorous elasticity of nerve and precision of movement!" —Is it then so easy an undertaking (comparatively) to dance on a tight-rope? Let any one, who thinks so, get up and try. There is the thing. It is that which at first we cannot do at all, which in the end is done to such perfection. To account for this in some degree, I might observe that mechanical dexterity is confined to doing some one particular thing, which you can repeat as often as you please, in which you know whether you succeed or fail, and where the

point of perfection consists in succeeding in a given undertaking.—In mechanical efforts, you improve by perpetual practice, and you do so infallibly, because the object to be attained is not a matter of taste or fancy or opinion, but of actual experiment, in which you must either do the thing or not do it. If a man is put to aim at a mark with a bow and arrow, he must hit it or miss it, that's certain. He cannot deceive himself, and go on shooting wide or falling short, and still fancy that he is making progress. The distinction between right and wrong, between true and false, is here palpable; and he must either correct his aim or persevere in his error with his eyes open, for which there is neither excuse nor temptation. If a man is learning to dance on a rope, if he does not mind what he is about, he will break his neck. After that, it will be in vain for him to argue that he did not make a false step. His situation is not like that of Goldsmith's pedagogue.—

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

Danger is a good teacher, and makes apt scholars. So are disgrace, defeat, exposure to immediate scorn and laughter. There is no opportunity in such cases for self-delusion, no

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

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

Farther, what is meant by perfection in mechanical exercises is the performing certain feats to a uniform nicety, that is, in fact, undertaking no more than you can perform. You task yourself, the limit you fix is optional, and no more than human industry and skill can attain to: but you have no abstract, independent standard of difficulty or excellence (other than the extent of your own powers). Thus he who can keep up four brass balls does this *to perfection*; but he cannot keep up five at the same instant, and would fail every time he attempted it. That is, the mechanical performer undertakes

to emulate himself, not to equal another*. But the artist undertakes to imitate another, or to do what nature has done, and this it appears is more difficult, *viz.* to copy what she has set before us in the face of nature or "human face divine," entire and without a blemish, than to keep up four brass balls at the same instant, for the one is done by the power of human skill and industry, and the other never was nor will be. Upon the whole, therefore, I have more respect for Reynolds, than I have for Richer; for, happen how it will, there have been more people in the world who could dance on a rope like the one than who could paint like Sir Joshua. The latter was but a bungler in his profession to the other, it is true; but then he had a harder task-master to obey; whose will was more wayward and obscure, and whose instructions it was more difficult to practise. You can put a child apprentice to a tumbler or rope-dancer with a comfortable prospect of success, if they are but sound of wind and limb: but you cannot do the same thing in painting. The odds are a million to one.

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

You may make indeed as many H——s and H——s, as you put into that sort of machine, but not one Reynolds amongst them all, with his grace, his grandeur, his blandness of *gusto*, “in tones and gestures hit,” unless you could make the man over again. To snatch this grace beyond the reach of art is then the height of art—where fine art begins, and where mechanical skill ends. The soft suffusion of the soul, the speechless breathing eloquence, the looks “commercing with the skies,” the ever-shifting forms of an eternal principle, that which is seen but for a moment, but dwells in the heart always, and is only seized as it passes by strong and secret sympathy, must be taught by nature and genius, not by rules or study. It is suggested by feeling, not by laborious microscopic inspection: in seeking for it without, we lose the harmonious clue to it within: and in aiming to grasp the substance, we let the very spirit of art evaporate. In a word, the objects of fine art are not the objects of sight but as these last are the objects of taste and imagination, that is, as they appeal to the sense of beauty, of pleasure, and of power in the human breast, and are explained by that finer sense, and revealed in their inner structure to the eye in return. Nature is also a language.

Objects, like words, have a meaning; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language; which he can only do by knowing its application to a thousand other objects in a thousand other situations. Thus the eye is too blind a guide of itself to distinguish between the warm or cold tone of a deep blue sky, but another sense acts as a monitor to it, and does not err. The colour of the leaves in autumn would be nothing without the feeling that accompanies it; but it is that feeling that stamps them on the canvas, faded, seared, blighted, shrinking from the winter's flaw, and makes the sight as true as touch—

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

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

“ Thrills in each nerve, and lives along the line.”

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

Cleverness is a certain *knack* or aptitude at doing certain things, which depend more on a particular adroitness and off-hand readiness than

on force or perseverance, such as making puns, making epigrams, making extempore verses, mimicking the company, mimicking a style, &c. Cleverness is either liveliness and smartness, or something answering to *sleight of hand*, like letting a glass fall sideways off a table, or else a trick, like knowing the secret spring of a watch. Accomplishments are certain external graces, which are to be learnt from others, and which are easily displayed to the admiration of the beholder, *viz.* dancing, riding, fencing, music, and so on. These ornamental acquirements are only proper to those who are at ease in mind and fortune. I know an individual who if he had been born to an estate of five thousand a year, would have been the most accomplished gentleman of the age. He would have been the delight and envy of the circle in which he moved—would have graced by his manners the liberality flowing from the openness of his heart, would have laughed with the women, have argued with the men, have said good things and written agreeable ones, have taken a hand at piquet or the lead at the harpsichord, and have set and sung his own verses—*nugæ canoræ*—with tenderness and spirit; a Rochester without the vice, a modern Surrey! As it is, all these capabilities of excellence

stand in his way. He is too versatile for a professional man, not dull enough for a political drudge, too gay to be happy, too thoughtless to be rich. He wants the enthusiasm of the poet, the severity of the prose-writer, and the application of the man of business.—Talent is the capacity of doing any thing that depends on application and industry, such as writing a criticism, making a speech, studying the law. Talent differs from genius, as voluntary differs from involuntary power. Ingenuity is genius in trifles, greatness is genius in undertakings of much pith and moment. A clever or ingenious man is one who can do any thing well, whether it is worth doing or not : a great man is one who can do that which when done is of the highest importance. Themistocles said he could not play on the flute, but that he could make of a small city a great one. This gives one a pretty good idea of the distinction in question.

Greatness is great power, producing great effects. It is not enough that a man has great power in himself, he must shew it to all the world in a way that cannot be hid or gainsaid. He must fill up a certain idea in the public mind. I have no other notion of greatness than this two-fold definition, great results springing from great inherent energy. The great in

visible objects has relation to that which extends over space : the great in mental ones has to do with space and time. No man is truly great, who is great only in his life-time. The test of greatness is the page of history. Nothing can be said to be great that has a distinct limit, or that borders on something evidently greater than itself. Besides, what is short-lived and pampered into mere notoriety, is of a gross and vulgar quality in itself. A Lord Mayor is hardly a great man. A city orator or patriot of the day only shew, by reaching the height of their wishes, the distance they are at from any true ambition. Popularity is neither fame nor greatness. A king (as such) is not a great man. He has great power, but it is not his own. He merely wields the lever of the state, which a child, an idiot, or a madman can do. It is the office, not the man we gaze at. Any one else in the same situation would be just as much an object of abject curiosity. We laugh at the country girl who having seen a king expressed her disappointment by saying, "Why, he is only a man!" Yet, knowing this, we run to see a king as if he was something more than a man.—To display the greatest powers, unless they are applied to great purposes, makes nothing for the character of greatness. To throw

a barley-corn through the eye of a needle, to multiply nine figures by nine in the memory, argues infinite dexterity of body and capacity of mind, but nothing comes of either. There is a surprising power at work, but the effects are not proportionate, or such as take hold of the imagination. To impress the idea of power on others, they must be made in some way to feel it. It must be communicated to their understandings in the shape of an increase of knowledge, or it must subdue and overawe them by subjecting their wills. Admiration to be solid and lasting must be founded on proofs from which we have no means of escaping; it is neither a slight nor a voluntary gift. A mathematician who solves a profound problem, a poet who creates an image of beauty in the mind that was not there before, imparts knowledge and power to others, in which his greatness and his fame consists, and on which it reposes. Jedediah Buxton will be forgotten; but Napier's bones will live. Lawgivers, philosophers, founders of religion, conquerors and heroes, inventors and great geniuses in arts and sciences, are great men, for they are great public benefactors, or formidable scourges to mankind. Among ourselves, Shakespear, Newton, Bacon, Milton, Cromwell, were great men,

for they shewed great power by acts and thoughts, which have not yet been consigned to oblivion. They must needs be men of lofty stature, whose shadows lengthen out to remote posterity. A great farce-writer may be a great man; for Moliere was but a great farce-writer. In my mind, the author of Don Quixote was a great man. So have there been many others. A great chess-player is not a great man, for he leaves the world as he found it. No act terminating in itself constitutes greatness. This will apply to all displays of power or trials of skill, which are confined to the momentary, individual effort, and construct no permanent image or trophy of themselves without them. Is not an actor then a great man, because "he dies and leaves the world no copy?" I must make an exception for Mrs. Siddons, or else give up my definition of greatness for her sake. A man at the top of his profession is not therefore a great man. He is great in his way, but that is all, unless he shews the marks of a great moving intellect, so that we trace the master-mind, and can sympathise with the springs that urge him on. The rest is but a craft or *mystery*. John Hunter was a great man—*that* any one might see without the smallest skill in surgery. His style and manner shewed the man. He would set about

cutting up the carcase of a whale with the same greatness of *gusto* that Michael Angelo would have hewn a block of marble. Lord Nelson was a great naval commander ; but for myself, I have not much opinion of a sea-faring life. Sir Humphry Davy is a great chemist, but I am not sure that he is a great man. I am not a bit the wiser for any of his discoveries, nor I never met with any one that was. But it is in the nature of greatness to propagate an idea of itself, as wave impels wave, circle without circle. It is a contradiction in terms for a coxcomb to be a great man. A really great man has always an idea of something greater than himself. I have observed that certain sectaries and polemical writers have no higher compliment to pay their most shining lights than to say that "Such a one was a considerable man in his day." Some new elucidation of a text sets aside the authority of the old interpretation, and a "great scholar's memory outlives him half a century," at the utmost. A rich man is not a great man, except to his dependants and his steward. A lord is a great man in the idea we have of his ancestry, and probably of himself, if we know nothing of him but his title. I have heard a story of two bishops, one of whom said (speaking of St.

Peter's at Rome) that when he first entered it, he was rather awe-struck, but that as he walked up it, his mind seemed to swell and dilate with it, and at last to fill the whole building—the other said that as he saw more of it, he appeared to himself to grow less and less every step he took, and in the end to dwindle into nothing. This was in some respects a striking picture of a great and little mind—for greatness sympathises with greatness, and littleness shrinks into itself. The one might have become a Wolsey; the other was only fit to become a Mendicant Friar—or there might have been court-reasons for making him a bishop. The French have to me a character of littleness in all about them; but they have produced three great men that belong to every country, Moliere, Rabelais, and Montaigne.

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

“Died at his house in Burbage-street, St. Giles’s, John Cavanagh, the famous hand fives-player. When a person dies, who does any one thing better than any one else in the world, which so many others are trying to do well, it leaves a gap in society. It is not likely that any one will now see the game of fives played in its perfection for many years to come—for Cavanagh is dead, and has not left his peer behind him. It may be said that there are things of more importance than striking a ball against a wall—there are things indeed that make more noise and do as little good, such as making war and peace, making speeches and answering them, making verses and blotting them; making money and throwing it away. But the game of fives is what no one despises who has ever played at it. It is the finest exercise for the body, and the best relaxation for the mind. The Roman poet said that ‘Care mounted behind the horseman and stuck to his skirts.’ But this remark would not have applied to the fives-player. He who takes to playing at fives is twice young. He feels neither the past nor future ‘in the instant.’ Debts, taxes, ‘domestic treason, foreign levy, nothing can touch him further.’ He has no other wish, no other thought, from the moment the game begins,

but that of striking the ball, of placing it, of *making* it! This Cavanagh was sure to do. Whenever he touched the ball, there was an end of the chase. His eye was certain, his hand fatal, his presence of mind complete. He could do what he pleased, and he always knew exactly what to do. He saw the whole game, and played it; took instant advantage of his adversary's weakness, and recovered balls, as if by a miracle and from sudden thought, that every one gave for lost. He had equal power and skill, quickness, and judgment. He could either outwit his antagonist by finesse, or beat him by main strength. Sometimes, when he seemed preparing to send the ball with the full swing of his arm, he would by a slight turn of his wrist drop it within an inch of the line. In general, the ball came from his hand, as if from a racket, in a straight horizontal line; so that it was in vain to attempt to overtake or stop it. As it was said of a great orator that he never was at a loss for a word, and for the properest word, so Cavanagh always could tell the degree of force necessary to be given to a ball, and the precise direction in which it should be sent. He did his work with the greatest ease; never took more pains than was necessary; and while others were fagging themselves to death, was as cool

and collected as if he had just entered the court. His style of play was as remarkable as his power of execution. He had no affectation, no trifling. He did not throw away the game to show off an attitude, or try an experiment. He was a fine, sensible, manly player, who did what he could, but that was more than any one else could even affect to do. His blows were not undecided and ineffectual—lumbering like Mr. Wordsworth's epic poetry, nor wavering like Mr. Coleridge's lyric prose, nor short of the mark like Mr. Brougham's speeches, nor wide of it like Mr. Canning's wit, nor foul like the *Quarterly*, not *let* balls like the *Edinburgh Review*. Cobbett and Junius together would have made a Cavanagh. He was the best *up-hill* player in the world; even when his adversary was fourteen, he would play on the same or better, and as he never flung away the game through carelessness and conceit, he never gave it up through laziness or want of heart. The only peculiarity of his play was that he never *volleyed*, but let the balls hop; but if they rose an inch from the ground, he never missed having them. There was not only nobody equal, but nobody second to him. It is supposed that he could give any other player half the game, or beat them with his left hand. His service was tremendous. He

once played Woodward and Meredith together (two of the best players in England) in the Fives-court, St. Martin's-street, and made seven and twenty aces following by services alone—a thing unheard of. He another time played Peru, who was considered a first-rate fives-player, a match of the best out of five games, and in the three first games, which of course decided the match, Peru got only one ace. Cavanagh was an Irishman by birth, and a house-painter by profession. He had once laid aside his working-dress, and walked up, in his smartest clothes, to the Rosemary Branch to have an afternoon's pleasure. A person accosted him, and asked him if he would have a game. So they agreed to play for half a crown a game, and a bottle of cider. The first game began—it was seven, eight, ten, thirteen, fourteen, all. Cavanagh won it. The next was the same. They played on, and each game was hardly contested. 'There,' said the unconscious fives-player, 'there was a stroke that Cavanagh could not take: I never played better in my life, and yet I can't win a game. I don't know how it is.' However, they played on, Cavanagh winning every game, and the by-standers drinking the cider and laughing all the time. In the twelfth game, when Cavanagh was only four,

and the stranger thirteen, a person came in, and said, 'What! are you here, Cavanagh?' The words were no sooner pronounced than the astonished player let the ball drop from his hand, and saying, 'What! have I been breaking my heart all this time to beat Cavanagh?' refused to make another effort. 'And yet, I give you my word,' said Cavanagh, telling the story with some triumph, 'I played all the while with my clenched fist.'—He used frequently to play matches at Copenhagen-house for wagers and dinners. The wall against which they play is the same that supports the kitchen-chimney, and when the wall resounded louder than usual, the cooks exclaimed, 'Those are the Irishman's balls,' and the joints trembled on the spit!—Goldsmith consoled himself that there were places where he too was admired: and Cavanagh was the admiration of all the fives-courts, where he ever played. Mr. Powell, when he played matches in the Court in St. Martin's-street, used to fill his gallery at half-a-crown a head, with amateurs and admirers of talent in whatever department it is shown. He could not have shown himself in any ground in England, but he would have been immediately surrounded with inquisitive gazers, trying to find

out in what part of his frame his unrivalled skill lay, as politicians wonder to see the balance of Europe suspended in Lord Castlereagh's face, and admire the trophies of the British Navy lurking under Mr. Croker's hanging brow. Now Cavanagh was as good-looking a man as the Noble Lord, and much better looking than the Right Hon. Secretary. He had a clear, open countenance, and did not look sideways or down, like Mr. Murray the bookseller. He was a young fellow of sense, humour, and courage. He once had a quarrel with a waterman at Hungerford-stairs, and they say, served him out in great style. In a word, there are hundreds at this day, who cannot mention his name without admiration, as the best fives-player that perhaps ever lived (the greatest excellence of which they have any notion)—and the noisy shout of the ring happily stood him in stead of the unheard voice of posterity!—The only person who seems to have excelled as much in another way as Cavanagh did in his, was the late John Davies, the racket-player. It was remarked of him that he did not seem to follow the ball, but the ball seemed to follow him. Give him a foot of wall, and he was sure to make the ball. The four best racket-players of that day were Jack Spines,

Jem. Harding, Armitage, and Church. Davies could give any one of these two hands a time, that is, half the game, and each of these, at their best, could give the best player now in London the same odds. Such are the gradations in all exertions of human skill and art. He once played four capital players together, and beat them. He was also a first-rate tennis-player, and an excellent fives-player. In the Fleet or King's Bench, he would have stood against Powell, who was reckoned the best open-ground player of his time. This last-mentioned player is at present the keeper of the Fives-court, and we might recommend to him for a motto over his door—'Who enters here, forgets himself, his country, and his friends.' And the best of it is, that by the calculation of the odds, none of the three are worth remembering!—Cavanagh died from the bursting of a blood-vessel, which prevented him from playing for the last two or three years. This, he was often heard to say, he thought hard upon him. He was fast recovering, however, when he was suddenly carried off, to the regret of all who knew him. As Mr. Peel made it a qualification of the present Speaker, Mr. Manners Sutton, that he was an excellent moral character, so Jack Cavanagh was a zealous Catholic, and could not be per-

suaded to eat meat on a Friday, the day on which he died. We have paid this willing tribute to his memory.

“ Let no rude hand deface it,
And his forlorn ‘ *Hic Jacet.* ’ ”

ESSAY X.

ON LIVING TO ONE'S-SELF.

P

ESSAY X.

ON LIVING TO ONE'S-SELF*.

“ Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,
Or by the lazy Scheldt or wandering Po.”

I NEVER was in a better place or humour than I am at present for writing on this subject. I have a partridge getting ready for my supper, my fire is blazing on the hearth, the air is mild for the season of the year, I have had but a slight fit of indigestion to-day (the only thing that makes me abhor myself), I have three hours good before me, and therefore I will attempt it. It is as well to do it at once as to have it to do for a week to come.

If the writing on this subject is no easy task, the thing itself is a harder one. It asks a troublesome effort to ensure the admiration of others: it is a still greater one to be satisfied with one's own thoughts. As I look from the window at the wide bare heath before me, and through the

* Written at Winterslow Hut, January 18th—19th, 1821.

misty moon-light air see the woods that wave
over the top of Winterslow,

“ While Heav'n's chancel-vault is blind with sleet,”

my mind takes its flight through too long a series of years, supported only by the patience of thought and secret yearnings after truth and good, for me to be at a loss to understand the feeling I intend to write about; but I do not know that this will enable me to convey it more agreeably to the reader.

Lady G. in a letter to Miss Harriet Byron, assures her that “ her brother Sir Charles lived to himself:” and Lady L. soon after (for Richardson was never tired of a good thing) repeats the same observation; to which Miss Byron frequently returns in her answers to both sisters — “ For you know Sir Charles lives to himself” till at length it passes into a proverb among the fair correspondents. This is not, however, an example of what I understand by *living to one's-self*, for Sir Charles Grandison was indeed always thinking of himself; but by this phrase I mean never thinking at all about one's-self, any more than if there was no such person in existence. The character I speak of is as little of an egotist as possible: Richardson's great favourite was as much of one as possible. Some satirical critic

has represented him in Elysium “ bowing over the *faded* hand of Lady Grandison” (Miss Byron that was)—he ought to have been represented bowing over his own hand, for he never admired any one but himself, and was the God of his own idolatry.—Neither do I call it living to one's-self to retire into a desert (like the saints and martyrs of old) to be devoured by wild beasts, nor to descend into a cave to be considered as a hermit, nor to get to the top of a pillar or rock to do fanatic penance and be seen of all men. What I mean by living to one's-self is living in the world, as in it, not of it: it is as if no one knew there was such a person, and you wished no one to know it: it is to be a silent spectator of the mighty scene of things, not an object of attention or curiosity in it; to take a thoughtful, anxious interest in what is passing in the world, but not to feel the slightest inclination to make or meddle with it. It is such a life as a pure spirit might be supposed to lead, and such an interest as it might take in the affairs of men, calm, contemplative, passive, distant, touched with pity for their sorrows, smiling at their follies without bitterness, sharing their affections, but not troubled by their passions, not seeking their notice, nor once dreamt of by them. He who lives wisely to himself and to

his own heart, looks at the busy world through the loop-holes of retreat, and does not want to mingle in the fray. "He hears the tumult, and is still." He is not able to mend it, nor willing to mar it. He sees enough in the universe to interest him without putting himself forward to try what he can do to fix the eyes of the universe upon him. Vain the attempt! He reads the clouds, he looks at the stars, he watches the return of the seasons, the falling leaves of autumn, the perfumed breath of spring, starts with delight at the note of a thrush in a copse near him, sits by the fire, listens to the moaning of the wind, pores upon a book, or discourses the freezing hours away, or melts down hours to minutes in pleasing thought. All this while he is taken up with other things, forgetting himself. He relishes an author's style, without thinking of turning author. He is fond of looking at a print from an old picture in the room, without teasing himself to copy it. He does not fret himself to death with trying to be what he is not, or to do what he cannot. He hardly knows what he is capable of, and is not in the least concerned whether he shall ever make a figure in the world. He feels the truth of the lines—

“ The man whose eye is ever on himself,
Doth look on one, the least of nature's works ;
One who might move the wise man to that scorn
Which wisdom holds unlawful ever”—

he looks out of himself at the wide extended prospect of nature, and takes an interest beyond his narrow pretensions in general humanity. He is free as air, and independent as the wind. Woe be to him when he first begins to think what others say of him. While a man is contented with himself and his own resources, all is well. When he undertakes to play a part on the stage, and to persuade the world to think more about him than they do about themselves, he is got into a track where he will find nothing but briars and thorns, vexation and disappointment. I can speak a little to this point. For many years of my life I did nothing but think. I had nothing else to do but solve some knotty point, or dip in some abstruse author, or look at the sky, or wander by the pebbled sea-side—

“ To see the children sporting on the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.”

I cared for nothing, I wanted nothing. I took my time to consider whatever occurred to me, and was in no hurry to give a sophistical answer to a question—there was no printer's devil

waiting for me. I used to write a page or two perhaps in half a year; and remember laughing heartily at the celebrated experimentalist Nicholson, who told me that in twenty years he had written as much as would make three hundred octavo volumes. If I was not a great author, I could read with ever fresh delight, "never ending, still beginning," and had no occasion to write a criticism when I had done. If I could not paint like Claude, I could admire "the witchery of the soft blue sky" as I walked out, and was satisfied with the pleasure it gave me. If I was dull, it gave me little concern: if I was lively, I indulged my spirits. I wished well to the world, and believed as favourably of it as I could. I was like a stranger in a foreign land, at which I looked with wonder, curiosity, and delight, without expecting to be an object of attention in return. I had no relations to the state, no duty to perform, no ties to bind me to others: I had neither friend nor mistress, wife or child. I lived in a world of contemplation, and not of action.

This sort of dreaming existence is the best. He who quits it to go in search of realities, generally barter repose for repeated disappointments and vain regrets. His time, thoughts, and feelings are no longer at his own disposal.

From that instant he does not survey the objects of nature as they are in themselves, but looks askant at them to see whether he cannot make them the instruments of his ambition, interest, or pleasure; for a candid, undesigning, undisguised simplicity of character, his views become jaundiced, sinister, and double: he takes no farther interest in the great changes of the world but as he has a paltry share in producing them: instead of opening his senses, his understanding, and his heart to the resplendent fabric of the universe, he holds a crooked mirror before his face, in which he may admire his own person and pretensions, and just glance his eye aside to see whether others are not admiring him too. He no more exists in the impression which "the fair variety of things" makes upon him, softened and subdued by habitual contemplation, but in the feverish sense of his own upstart self-importance. By aiming to fix, he is become the slave of opinion. He is a tool, a part of a machine that never stands still, and is sick and giddy with the ceaseless motion. He has no satisfaction but in the reflection of his own image in the public gaze, but in the repetition of his own name in the public ear. He himself is mixed up with, and spoils every thing. I wonder Buonaparte was not tired of the N. N.'s

stuck all over the Louvre and throughout France. Goldsmith (as we all know) when in Holland went out into a balcony with some handsome Englishwomen, and on their being applauded by the spectators, turned round and said peevishly—"There are places where I also am admired." He could not give the craving appetite of an author's vanity one day's respite. I have seen a celebrated talker of our own time turn pale and go out of the room when a showy-looking girl has come into it, who for a moment divided the attention of his hearers.—Infinite are the mortifications of the bare attempt to emerge from obscurity; numberless the failures; and greater and more galling still the vicissitudes and tormenting accompaniments of success—

—"Whose top to climb
Is certain falling, or so slippery, that
The fear's as bad as falling."

"Would to God," exclaimed Oliver Cromwell, when he was at any time thwarted by the Parliament, "that I had remained by my wood-side to tend a flock of sheep, rather than have been thrust on such a government as this!" When Buonaparte got into his carriage to proceed on his Russian expedition, carelessly twirling his glove, and singing the air—"Malbrook

to the wars is going"—he did not think of the tumble he has got since, the shock of which no one could have stood but himself. We see and hear chiefly of the favourites of Fortune and the Muse, of great generals, of first-rate actors, of celebrated poets. These are at the head; we are struck with the glittering eminence on which they stand, and long to set out on the same tempting career:—not thinking how many discontented half-pay lieutenants are in vain seeking promotion all their lives, and obliged to put up with “the insolence of office, and the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes;” how many half-starved strolling-players are doomed to penury and tattered robes in country-places, dreaming to the last of a London engagement; how many wretched daubers shiver and shake in the ague-fit of alternate hopes and fears, waste and pine away in the atrophy of genius, or else turn drawing-masters, picture-cleaners, or newspaper critics; how many hapless poets have sighed out their souls to the Muse in vain, without ever getting their effusions farther known than the Poet's-Corner of a country newspaper, and looked and looked with grudging, wistful eyes at the envious horizon that bounded their provincial fame!—Suppose an actor, for instance, “after the heart-aches and

the thousand natural pangs that flesh is heir to," *does* get at the top of his profession, he can no longer bear a rival near the throne; to be second or only equal to another, is to be nothing: he starts at the prospect of a successor, and retains the mimic sceptre with a convulsive grasp; perhaps as he is about to seize the first place which he has long had in his eye, an unsuspected competitor steps in before him, and carries off the prize, leaving him to commence his irksome toil again: he is in a state of alarm at every appearance or rumour of the appearance of a new actor: "a mouse that takes up its lodging in a cat's ear*" has a mansion of peace to him: he dreads every hint of an objection, and least of all, can forgive praise mingled with censure: to doubt is to insult, to discriminate is to degrade: he dare hardly look into a criticism unless some one has *tasted* it for him, to see that there is no offence in it: if he does not draw crowded houses every night, he can neither eat nor sleep; or if all these terrible inflictions are removed, and he can "eat his meal in peace," he then becomes surfeited with applause and dissatisfied with his profession: he wants to be something else, to be distinguished as an author, a collector, a

* Webster's Duchess of Malfy.

classical scholar, a man of sense and information, and weighs every word he utters, and half retracts it before he utters it, lest if he were to make the smallest slip of the tongue, it should get buzzed abroad that *Mr. — was only clever as an actor!* If ever there was a man who did not derive more pain than pleasure from his vanity, that man, says Rousseau, was no other than a fool. A country-gentleman near Taunton spent his whole life in making some hundreds of wretched copies of second-rate pictures, which were bought up at his death by a neighbouring Baronet, to whom

“Some demon whisper’d, L——, have a taste!”

A little Wilson in an obscure corner escaped the man of *virtù*, and was carried off by a Bristol picture-dealer for three guineas, while the muddled copies of the owner of the mansion (with the frames) fetched thirty, forty, sixty, a hundred ducats a piece. A friend of mine found a very fine Canaletti in a state of strange disfigurement, with the upper part of the sky smeared over and fantastically variegated with English clouds; and on inquiring of the person to whom it belonged whether something had not been done to it, received for answer “that a gentleman, a great artist in the neighbourhood,

had retouched some parts of it." What in-
tuation! Yet this candidate for the honours
the pencil might probably have made a jovial
fox-hunter or respectable justice of the peace;
if he could only have stuck to what nature and
fortune intended him for. Miss —— can by
no means be persuaded to quit the boards of the
theatre at ——, a little country town in the
West of England. Her salary has been abridged,
her person ridiculed, her acting laughed at;
nothing will serve—she is determined to be an
actress, and scorns to return to her former busi-
ness as a milliner. Shall I go on? An actor in the
same company was visited by the apothecary of
the place in an ague-fit, who on asking his land-
lady as to his way of life, was told that the poor
gentleman was very quiet and gave little trouble,
that he generally had a plate of mashed potatoes
for his dinner, and lay in bed most of his time,
repeating his part. A young couple, every way
amiable and deserving, were to have been mar-
ried, and a benefit-play was bespoke by the
officers of the regiment quartered there, to de-
fray the expense of a license and of the wed-
ding-ring, but the profits of the night did not
amount to the necessary sum, and they have, I
fear, "virgined it e'er since!" Oh for the pencil
of Hogarth or Wilkie to give a view of the

comic strength of the company at —, drawn up in battle-array in the Clandestine Marriage, with a *coup-d'œil* of the pit, boxes, and gallery, to cure for ever the love of the *ideal*, and the desire to shine and make holiday in the eyes of others, instead of retiring within ourselves and keeping our wishes and our thoughts at home! —Even in the common affairs of life, in love, friendship, and marriage, how little security have we when we trust our happiness in the hands of others! Most of the friends I have seen have turned out the bitterest enemies or cold, uncomfortable acquaintance. Old companions are like meats served up too often that lose their relish and their wholesomeness. He who looks at beauty to admire, to adore it, who reads of its wondrous power in novels, in poems, or in plays, is not unwise: but let no man fall in love, for from that moment he is “the baby of a girl.” I like very well to repeat such lines as these in the play of *Mirandola*—

—“ With what a waving air she goes
 Along the corridor. How like a fawn!
 Yet statelier. Hark! No sound, however soft,
 Nor gentlest echo telleth when she treads,
 But every motion of her shape doth seem
 Hallowed by silence”—

but however beautiful the description, defend me from meeting with the original!

“ The fly that sips treacle
 Is lost in the sweets ;
 So he that tastes woman
 Ruin meets.”

The song is Gay's, not mine, and a bitter-sweet it is.—How few out of the infinite number of those that marry and are given in marriage, wed with those they would prefer to all the world ; nay, how far the greater proportion are joined together by mere motives of convenience, accident, recommendation of friends, or indeed not unfrequently by the very fear of the event, by repugnance and a sort of fatal fascination : yet the tie is for life, not to be shaken off but with disgrace or death : a man no longer lives to himself, but is a body (as well as mind) chained to another, in spite of himself—

“ Like life and death in disproportion met.”

So Milton (perhaps from his own experience) makes Adam exclaim in the vehemence of his despair,

“ For either
 He never shall find out fit mate, but such
 As some misfortune brings him or mistake ;
 Or whom he wishes most shall seldom gain
 Through her perverseness, but shall see her gain'd
 By a far worse ; or if she love, withheld

By parents ; or his happiest choice too late
Shall meet, already link'd and wedlock-bound
To a fell adversary, his hate and shame ;
Which infinite calamity shall cause
To human life, and household peace confound."

If love at first sight were mutual, or to be conciliated by kind offices ; if the fondest affection were not so often repaid and chilled by indifference and scorn ; if so many lovers both before and since the madman in Don Quixote had not "worshipped a statue, hunted the wind, cried aloud to the desert;" if friendship were lasting ; if merit were renown, and renown were health, riches, and long life ; or if the homage of the world were paid to conscious worth and the true aspirations after excellence, instead of its gaudy signs and outward trappings ; then indeed I might be of opinion that it is better to live to others than one's-self : but as the case stands, I incline to the negative side of the question*.—

* Shenstone and Gray were two men, one of whom pretended to live to himself, and the other really did so. Gray shrunk from the public gaze (he did not even like his portrait to be prefixed to his works) into his own thoughts and indolent musings ; Shenstone affected privacy that he might be sought out by the world ; the one courted retirement in order to enjoy leisure and repose, as the other coquetted with it merely to be interrupted with the importunity of visitors and the flatteries of absent friends.

Q

" I have not loved the world, nor the world me ;
 I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bow'd
 To its idolatries a patient knee—
 Nor coin'd my cheek to smiles—nor cried aloud
 In worship of an echo ; in the crowd
 They could not deem me one of such ; I stood
 Among them, but not of them ; in a shroud
 Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,
 Had I not filed my mind which thus itself subdued.

I have not loved the world, nor the world me—
 But let us part fair foes ; I do believe,
 Though I have found them not, that there may be
 Words which are things—hopes which will not deceive,
 And virtues which are merciful nor weave
 Snares for the failing : I would also deem
 O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve ;
 That two, or one, are almost what they seem—
 That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream."

Sweet verse embalms the spirit of sour misanthropy : but woe betide the ignoble prose-writer who should thus dare to compare notes with the world, or tax it roundly with imposture.

If I had sufficient provocation to rail at the public, as Ben Jonson did at the audience in the Prologues to his plays, I think I should do it in good set terms, nearly as follows. There is not a more mean, stupid, dastardly, pitiful, selfish, spiteful, envious, ungrateful animal than the Public. It is the greatest of cowards, for it is afraid of itself. From its unwieldy, over-

grown dimensions, it dreads the least opposition to it, and shakes like isinglass at the touch of a finger. It starts at its own shadow, like the man in the Hartz mountains, and trembles at the mention of its own name. It has a lion's mouth, the heart of a hare, with ears erect and sleepless eyes. It stands "listening its fears." It is so in awe of its own opinion, that it never dares to form any, but catches up the first idle rumour, lest it should be behind-hand in its judgment, and echoes it till it is deafened with the sound of its own voice. The idea of what the public will think prevents the public from ever thinking at all, and acts as a spell on the exercise of private judgment, so that in short the public ear is at the mercy of the first impudent pretender who chooses to fill it with noisy assertions, or false surmises, or secret whispers. What is said by one is heard by all; the supposition that a thing is known to all the world makes all the world believe it, and the hollow repetition of a vague report drowns the "still, small voice" of reason. We may believe or know that what is said is not true: but we know or fancy that others believe it—we dare not contradict or are too indolent to dispute with them, and therefore give up our internal, and as we think, our solitary conviction to a sound without substance, without proof,

and often without meaning. Nay more, we may believe and know not only that a thing is false but that others believe and know it to be so, that they are quite as much in the secret of the imposture as we are, that they see the puppets at work, the nature of the machinery, and yet if any one has the art or power to get the management of it, he shall keep possession of the public ear by virtue of a cant-phrase or nickname; and by dint of effrontery and perseverance make all the world believe and repeat what all the world know to be false. The ear is quicker than the judgment. We know that certain things are said; by that circumstance alone, we know that they produce a certain effect on the imagination of others, and we conform to their prejudices by mechanical sympathy, and for want of sufficient spirit to differ with them. So far then is public opinion from resting on a broad and solid basis, as the aggregate of thought and feeling in a community, that it is slight and shallow and variable to the last degree—the bubble of the moment—so that we may safely say the public is the dupe of public opinion, not its parent.—The public is pusillanimous and cowardly, because it is weak. It knows itself to be a great dunce, and that it has no opinions but upon suggestion. Yet it is un-

willing to appear in leading-strings, and would have it thought that its decisions are as wise as they are weighty. It is hasty in taking up its favourites, more hasty in laying them aside, lest it should be supposed deficient in sagacity in either case. It is generally divided into two strong parties, each of which will allow neither common sense nor common honesty to the other side. It reads the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews, and believes them both—or if there is a doubt, malice turns the scale. Taylor and Hessey told me that they had sold nearly two editions of the *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* in about three months, but that after the Quarterly Review of them came out, they never sold another copy. The public, enlightened as they are, must have known the meaning of that attack as well as those who made it. It was not ignorance then but cowardice that led them to give up their own opinion. A crew of mischievous critics at Edinburgh having affixed the epithet of the *Cockney School* to one or two writers born in the metropolis, all the people in London became afraid of looking into their works, lest they too should be convicted of cockneyism. Oh brave public!—This epithet proved too much for one of the writers in question, and stuck like a barbed arrow in his heart.

Poor Keats! What was sport to the town, was death to him. Young, sensitive, delicate, he was like

“ A bud bit by an envious worm,
Ere he could spread his sweet leaves to the air,
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun”—

and unable to endure the miscreant cry and idiot laugh, withdrew to sigh his last breath in foreign climes.—The public is as envious and ungrateful as it is ignorant, stupid, and pigeon-livered—

“ A huge-sized monster of ingritudes.”

It reads, it admires, it extols only because it is the fashion, not from any love of the subject or the man. It cries you up or runs you down out of mere caprice and levity. If you have pleased it, it is jealous of its own involuntary acknowledgment of merit, and seizes the first opportunity, the first shabby pretext, to pick a quarrel with you, and be quits once more. Every petty caviller is erected into a judge, every tale-bearer is implicitly believed. Every little low paltry creature that gaped and wondered only because others did so, is glad to find you (as he thinks) on a level with himself. An author is not then, after all, a being of another order. Public

admiration is forced, and goes against the grain. Public obloquy is cordial and sincere: every individual feels his own importance in it. They give you up bound hand and foot into the power of your accusers. To attempt to defend yourself is a high crime and misdemeanour, a contempt of court, an extreme piece of impertinence. Or if you prove every charge unfounded, they never think of retracting their error, or making you amends. It would be a compromise of their dignity; they consider themselves as the party injured, and resent your innocence as an imputation on their judgment. The celebrated Bub Doddington, when out of favour at court, said "he would not *justify* before his sovereign: it was for Majesty to be displeased, and for him to believe himself in the wrong!" The public are not quite so modest.—People already begin to talk of the Scotch Novels as over-rated. How then can common authors be supposed to keep their heads long above water? As a general rule, all those who live by the public starve, and are made a bye-word and a standing jest into the bargain.—Posterity is no better (not a bit more enlightened or more liberal) except that you are no longer in their power, and that the voice of common fame saves them the trouble of deciding on your claims.

The public now are the posterity of Milton and Shakespear. Our posterity will be the living public of a future generation. When a man is dead, they put money in his coffin, erect monuments to his memory, and celebrate the anniversary of his birth-day in set speeches. Would they take any notice of him if he were living? No!—I was complaining of this to a Scotchman who had been attending a dinner and a subscription to raise a monument to Burns. He replied he would sooner subscribe twenty pounds to his monument than have given it him while living; so that if the poet were to come to life again, he would treat him just as he was treated in fact. This was an honest Scotchman. What *he* said, the rest would do.

Enough: my soul, turn from them, and let me try to regain the obscurity and quiet that I love, "far from the madding strife," in some sequestered corner of my own, or in some far-distant land! In the latter case, I might carry with me as a consolation the passage in Bolingbroke's Reflections on Exile, in which he describes in glowing colours the resources which a man may always find within himself, and of which the world cannot deprive him.

"Believe me, the providence of God has established such an order in the world, that of

all which belongs to us, the least valuable parts can alone fall under the will of others. Whatever is best is safest; lies out of the reach of human power; can neither be given nor taken away. Such is this great and beautiful work of nature, the world. Such is the mind of man, which contemplates and admires the world whereof it makes the noblest part. These are inseparably ours, and as long as we remain in one we shall enjoy the other. Let us march therefore intrepidly wherever we are led by the course of human accidents. Wherever they lead us, on what coast soever we are thrown by them, we shall not find ourselves absolutely strangers. We shall feel the same revolution of seasons, and the same sun and moon* will guide the course of our year. The same azure vault, bespangled with stars, will be every where spread over our heads. There is no part of the world from whence we may not admire those planets which roll, like ours, in different orbits round the same central sun; from whence we

* "Plut. of Banishment. He compares those who cannot live out of their own country, to the simple people who fancied the moon of Athens was a finer moon than that of Corinth.

—*Labentem cœlo qua ducitis unum.*

VIRG. Georg."

may not discover an object still more stupendous, that army of fixed stars hung up in the immense space of the universe, innumerable suns whose beams enlighten and cherish the unknown worlds which roll around them: and whilst I am ravished by such contemplations as these, whilst my soul is thus raised up to heaven, it imports me little what ground I tread upon."

ESSAY XI.
ON THOUGHT AND ACTION.

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THOSE persons who are much accustomed to abstract contemplation are generally unfitted for active pursuits, and *vice versâ*. I myself am sufficiently decided and dogmatical in my opinions, and yet in action I am as imbecil as a woman or a child. I cannot set about the most indifferent thing without twenty efforts, and had rather write one of these Essays than have to seal a letter. In trying to throw a hat or a book upon a table, I miss it; it just reaches the edge and falls back again, and instead of doing what I mean to perform, I do what I intend to avoid. Thought depends on the habitual exercise of the speculative faculties; action on the determination of the will. The one assigns reasons for things, the other puts causes into act. Abraham Tucker relates of a friend of his, an old special pleader, that once coming out of his chambers in the Temple with him to take a walk, he hesitated at the bottom of the stairs

which way to go—proposed different directions, to Charing-Cross, to St. Paul's,—found some objection to them all, and at last turned back for want of a casting motive to incline the scale. Tucker gives this as an instance of professional indecision, or of that temper of mind which having been long used to weigh the reasons for things with scrupulous exactness, could not come to any conclusion at all on the spur of the occasion, or without some grave distinction to justify its choice. Louvet in his Narrative tells us, that when several of the Brissotin party were collected at the house of Barbaroux (I think it was) ready to effect their escape from the power of Robespierre, one of them going to the window and finding a shower of rain coming on, seriously advised their stopping till the next morning, for that the emissaries of government would not think of coming in search of them in such bad weather. Some of them deliberated on this wise proposal, and were nearly taken. Such is the effeminacy of the speculative and philosophical temperament, compared with the promptness and vigour of the practical! It is on such unequal terms that the refined and romantic speculators on possible good and evil contend with their strong-nerved, remorseless adversaries, and we see the

result. Reasoners in general are undecided, wavering, and sceptical, or yield at last to the weakest motive, as most congenial to their feeble habit of soul*.

Some men are mere machines. They are put in a go-cart of business, and are harnessed to a profession—yoked to fortune's wheels. They plod on, and succeed. Their affairs conduct them, not they their affairs. All they have to do is to let things take their course, and not go out of the beaten road. A man may carry on the business of farming on the same spot and principle that his ancestors have done for many generations before him without any extraordinary share of capacity; the proof is, it is done every day in every county and parish in the kingdom. All that is necessary is that he should not pretend to be wiser than his neighbours. If he has a grain more wit or penetration than they, if his vanity gets the start of his avarice only half a neck, if he has

* When Buonaparte left the Chamber of Deputies to go and fight his last fatal battle, he advised them not to be debating the forms of Constitutions when the enemy was at their gates. Benjamin Constant thought otherwise. He wanted to play a game at *cat's-cradle* between the Republicans and Royalists, and lost his match. He did not care, so that he hampered a more efficient man than himself.

ever thought or read any thing upon the subject, it will most probably be the ruin of him. He will turn theoretical or experimental farmer, and no more need be said. Mr. Cobbett, who is a sufficiently shrewd and practical man, with an eye also to the main chance, had got some notions in his head (from Tull's Husbandry) about the method of sowing turnips, to which he would have sacrificed not only his estate at Botley, but his native county of Hampshire itself; sooner than give up an inch of his argument. "Tut! will you baulk a man in the career of his humour?" Therefore, that a man may not be ruined by his humours, he should be too dull and phlegmatic to have any: he must have "no figures nor no fantasies which busy thought draws in the brains of men." The fact is, that the ingenuity or judgment of no one man is equal to that of the world at large, which is the fruit of the experience and ability of all mankind. Even where a man is right in a particular notion, he will be apt to over-rate the importance of his discovery, to the detriment of his affairs. Action requires co-operation, but in general if you set your face against custom, people will set their faces against you. They cannot tell whether you are right or wrong, but they know that you are guilty

of a pragmatistical assumption of superiority over them, which they do not like. There is no doubt that if a person two hundred years ago had foreseen and attempted to put in practice the most approved and successful methods of cultivation now in use, it would have been a death-blow to his credit and fortune. So that though the experiments and improvements of private individuals from time to time gradually go to enrich the public stock of information and reform the general practice, they are mostly the ruin of the person who makes them, because he takes a part for the whole, and lays more stress upon the single point in which he has found others in the wrong than on all the rest in which they are substantially and prescriptively in the right. The great requisite, it should appear then, for the prosperous management of ordinary business, is the want of imagination, or of any ideas but those of custom and interest on the narrowest scale:—and as the affairs of the world are necessarily carried on by the common run of its inhabitants, it seems a wise dispensation of Providence that it should be so. If no one could rent a piece of glebe-land without a genius for mechanical inventions, or stand behind a counter without a large benevolence of soul, what would become of the

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commercial and agricultural interests of this great (and once flourishing) country?—I would not be understood as saying that there is not what may be called a *genius for business*, an extraordinary capacity for affairs, quickness and comprehension united, an insight into character, an acquaintance with a number of particular circumstances, a variety of expedients, a tact for finding out what will do: I grant all this (in Liverpool and Manchester they would persuade you that your merchant and manufacturer is your only gentleman and scholar)—but still, making every allowance for the difference between the liberal trader and the sneaking shop-keeper, I doubt whether the most surprising success is to be accounted for from any such unusual attainments, or whether a man's making half a million of money is a proof of his capacity for thought in general. It is much oftener owing to views and wishes bounded but constantly directed to one particular object. To succeed, a man should aim only at success. The child of Fortune should resign himself into the hands of Fortune. A plotting head frequently overreaches itself: a mind confident of its resources and calculating powers enters on critical speculations, which, in a game depending so much on chance and unforeseen events,

and not entirely on intellectual skill, turn the odds greatly against any one in the long run. The rule of business is to take what you can get, and keep what you have got: or an eagerness in seizing every opportunity that offers for promoting your own interest, and a plodding persevering industry in making the most of the advantages you have already obtained, are the most effectual as well as safest ingredients in the composition of the mercantile character. The world is a book in which the *Chapter of Accidents* is none of the least considerable; or it is a machine that must be left, in a great measure, to turn itself. The most that a worldly-minded man can do is to stand at the receipt of custom, and be constantly on the look-out for windfalls. The true devotee in this way waits for the revelations of Fortune as the poet waits for the inspiration of the Muse, and does not rashly anticipate her favours. He must be neither capricious nor wilful. I have known people untrammelled in the ways of business, but with so intense an apprehension of their own interest, that they would grasp at the slightest possibility of gain as a certainty, and were led into as many mistakes by an over-gripping usurious disposition as they could have been by the most thoughtless extravagance.—

We hear a great outcry about the want of judgment in men of genius. It is not a want of judgment, but an excess of other things. They err knowingly, and are wilfully blind. The understanding is out of the question. The profound judgment which soberer people pique themselves upon is in truth a want of passion and imagination. Give them an interest in any thing, a sudden fancy, a bait for their favourite foible, and who so besotted as they? Stir their feelings, and farewell to their prudence! The understanding operates as a motive to action only in the silence of the passions. I have heard people of a sanguine temperament reproached with betting according to their wishes, instead of their opinion who should win: and I have seen those who reproached them do the very same thing the instant their own vanity or prejudices were concerned. The most mechanical people, once thrown off their balance, are the most extravagant and fantastical. What passion is there so unmeaning and irrational as avarice itself? The Dutch went mad for tulips, and ——— for love!—To return to what was said a little way back, a question might be started, whether as thought relates to the whole circumference of things and interests, and business is confined to a very small part of them, *viz*

to a knowledge of a man's own affairs and the making of his own fortune, whether a talent for the latter will not generally exist in proportion to the narrowness and grossness of his ideas, nothing drawing his attention out of his own sphere, or giving him an interest except in those things which he can realise and bring home to himself in the most undoubted shape? To the man of business all the world is a fable but the Stock-Exchange: to the money-getter nothing has a real existence that he cannot convert into a tangible feeling, that he does not recognise as property, that he cannot "measure with a two-foot rule or count upon ten fingers." The want of thought, of imagination, drives the practical man upon immediate realities: to the poet or philosopher all is real and interesting that is true or possible, that can reach in its consequences to others, or be made a subject of curious speculation to himself!

But is it right, then, to judge of action by the quantity of thought implied in it, any more than it would be to condemn a life of contemplation for being inactive? Or has not every thing a source and principle of its own, to which we should refer it, and not to the principles of other things? He who succeeds in any pursuit in which others fail, may be presumed to have

qualities of some sort or other which they are without. If he has not brilliant wit, he may have solid sense : if he has not subtlety of understanding, he may have energy and firmness of purpose : if he has only a few advantages, he may have modesty and prudence to make the most of what he possesses. Propriety is one great matter in the conduct of life ; which, though like a graceful carriage of the body it is neither definable nor striking at first sight, is the result of finely balanced feelings, and lends a secret strength and charm to the whole character.

— *Quicquid agit, quoquo vestigia vertit,
Componit furtim, subsequiturque decor.*

There are more ways than one in which the various faculties of the mind may unfold themselves. Neither words nor ideas reducible to words constitute the utmost limit of human capacity. Man is not a merely talking nor a merely reasoning animal. Let us then take him as he is, instead of “ curtailng him of nature’s fair proportions” to suit our previous notions. Doubtless, there are great characters both in active and contemplative life. There have been heroes as well as sages, legislators and founders of religion, historians and able statesmen and

generals, inventors of useful arts and instruments and explorers of undiscovered countries, as well as writers and readers of books. It will not do to set all these aside under any fastidious or pedantic distinction. Comparisons are odious, because they are impertinent, and lead only to the discovery of defects by making one thing the standard of another which has no relation to it. If, as some one proposed, we were to institute an inquiry, "Which was the greatest man, Milton or Cromwell, Buonaparte or Rubens?"—we should have all the authors and artists on one side, and all the military men and the whole diplomatic body on the other, who would set to work with all their might to pull in pieces the idol of the other party, and the longer the dispute continued, the more would each grow dissatisfied with his favourite, though determined to allow no merit to any one else. The mind is not well competent to take in the full impression of more than one style of excellence or one extraordinary character at once; contradictory claims puzzle and stupefy it; and however admirable any individual may be in himself and unrivalled in his particular way, yet if we try him by others in a totally opposite class, that is, if we consider not what he was but what he was not, he will be found to be

nothing. We do not reckon up the excellences on either side, for then these would satisfy the mind and put an end to the comparison: we have no way of exclusively setting up our favourite but by running down his supposed rival; and for the gorgeous hues of Rubens, the lofty conceptions of Milton, the deep policy and cautious daring of Cromwell, or the dazzling exploits and fatal ambition of the modern chieftain, the poet is transformed into a pedant, the artist sinks into a mechanic, the politician turns out no better than a knave, and the hero is exalted into a madman. It is as easy to get the start of our antagonist in argument by frivolous and vexatious objections to one side of the question as it is difficult to do full and heaped justice to the other. If I am asked which is the greatest of those who have been the greatest in different ways, I answer the one that we happen to be thinking of at the time, for while that is the case, we can conceive of nothing higher.—If there is a propensity in the vulgar to admire the achievements of personal prowess or instances of fortunate enterprise too much, it cannot be denied that those who have to weigh out and dispense the meed of fame in books, have been too much disposed, by a natural bias, to confine all merit and talent to the pro-

ductions of the pen, or at least to those works, which, being artificial or abstract representations of things, are transmitted to posterity, and cried up as models in their kind. This, though unavoidable, is hardly just. Actions pass away and are forgotten, or are only discernible in their effects: conquerors, statesmen, and kings live but by their names stamped on the page of history. Hume says rightly that more people think about Virgil and Homer (and that continually) than ever trouble their heads about Cæsar or Alexander. In fact, poets are a longer-lived race than heroes: they breathe more of the air of immortality. They survive more entire in their thoughts and acts. We have all that Virgil or Homer did, as much as if we had lived at the same time with them: we can hold their works in our hands, or lay them on our pillows, or put them to our lips. Scarcely a trace of what the others did is left upon the earth, so as to be visible to common eyes. The one, the dead authors, are living men, still breathing and moving in their writings. The others, the conquerors of the world, are but the ashes in an urn. The sympathy (so to speak) between thought and thought is more intimate and vital than that between thought and action. Thought is linked to thought as flame kindles into flame:

the tribute of admiration to the *manes* of departed heroism is like burning incense in a marble monument. Words, ideas, feelings, with the progress of time harden into substances: things, bodies, actions, moulder away, or melt into a sound, into thin air!—Yet though the Schoolmen in the middle ages disputed more about the texts of Aristotle than the battle of Arbela, perhaps Alexander's Generals in his life-time admired his pupil as much and liked him better. For not only a man's actions are effaced and vanish with him; his virtues and generous qualities die with him also:—his intellect only is immortal and bequeathed unimpaired to posterity. Words are the only things that last for ever.

If however the empire of words and general knowledge is more durable in proportion as it is abstracted and attenuated, it is less immediate and dazzling: if authors are as good after they are dead as when they were living, while living they might as well be dead: and moreover with respect to actual ability, to write a book is not the only proof of taste, sense, or spirit, as pedants would have us suppose. To do any thing well, to paint a picture, to fight a battle, to make a plough or a threshing-machine, requires, one would think, as much skill and judgment as to

talk about or write a description of it when done. Words are universal, intelligible signs, but they are not the only real, existing things. Did not Julius Cæsar shew himself as much of a man in conducting his campaigns as in composing his Commentaries? Or was the Retreat of the Ten Thousand under Xenophon, or his work of that name, the most consummate performance? Or would not Lovelace, supposing him to have existed and to have conceived and executed all his fine stratagems on the spur of the occasion, have been as clever a fellow as Richardson who invented them in cold blood? If to conceive and describe an heroic character is the height of a literary ambition, we can hardly make it out that to be and to do all that the wit of man can feign, is nothing. To use means to ends, to set causes in motion, to wield the machine of society, to subject the wills of others to your own, to manage abler men than yourself by means of that which is stronger in them than their wisdom, *viz.* their weakness and their folly, to calculate the resistance of ignorance and prejudice to your designs, and by obviating to turn them to account, to foresee a long, obscure, and complicated train of events, of chances and openings of success, to unwind the web of others' policy and weave your own out of it, to judge

of the effects of things not in the abstract but with reference to all their bearings, ramifications and impediments, to understand character thoroughly, to see latent talent or lurking treachery, to know mankind for what they are, and use them as they deserve, to have a purpose steadily in view and to effect it after removing every obstacle, to master others and be true to yourself, asks power and knowledge, both nerves and brain.

Such is the sort of talent that may be shewn and that has been possessed by the great leaders on the stage of the world. To accomplish great things argues, I imagine, great resolution: to design great things implies no common mind. Ambition is in some sort genius. Though I would rather wear out my life in arguing a broad speculative question than in caballing for the election to a wardmote, or canvassing for votes in a rotten borough, yet I should think that the loftiest Epicurean philosopher might descend from his punctilio to identify himself with the support of a great principle, or to prop a falling state. This is what the legislators and founders of empire did of old; and the permanence of their institutions shewed the depth of the principles from which they emanated. A tragic poem is not the worse for

acting well: if it will not bear this test, it savours of effeminacy. Well-digested schemes will stand the touchstone of experience. Great thoughts reduced to practice become great acts. Again, great acts grow out of great occasions, and great occasions spring from great principles, working changes in society and tearing it up by the roots. But still I conceive that a genius for action depends essentially on the strength of the will rather than on that of the understanding; that the long-headed calculation of causes and consequences arises from the energy of the first cause, which is the will, setting others in motion and prepared to anticipate the results; that its sagacity is activity delighting in meeting difficulties and adventures more than half way, and its wisdom courage not to shrink from danger, but to redouble its efforts with opposition. Its humanity, if it has much, is magnanimity to spare the vanquished, exulting in power but not prone to mischief, with good sense enough to be aware of the instability of fortune, and with some regard to reputation.—What may serve as a criterion to try this question by is the following consideration, that we sometimes find as remarkable a deficiency of the speculative faculty coupled with great strength of will and consequent

success in active life, as we do a want of voluntary power and total incapacity for business frequently joined to the highest mental qualifications. In some cases it will happen that "to be wise, is to be obstinate." If you are deaf to reason but stick to your own purposes, you will tire others out and bring them over to your way of thinking. Self-will and blind prejudice are the best defence of actual power and exclusive advantages. The forehead of the late king was not remarkable for the character of intellect, but the lower part of his face was expressive of strong passions and fixed resolution. Charles Fox had an animated, intelligent eye, and brilliant, elastic forehead (with a nose indicating fine taste), but the lower features were weak, unsettled, fluctuating, and without *purchase*—it was in them the Whigs were defeated. What a fine iron binding Buonaparte had round his face, as if it had been cased in steel! What sensibility about the mouth! What watchful penetration in the eye! What a smooth, unruffled forehead! Mr. Pitt, with little sunken eyes, had a high, retreating forehead, and a nose expressing pride and aspiring self-opinion: it was on that (with submission) that he suspended the decisions of the House of Commons and dangled the Opposition as

he pleased. Lord Castlereagh is a man rather deficient than redundant in words and topics. He is not (any more than St. Augustine was, in the opinion of La Fontaine) so great a wit as Rabelais, nor is he so great a philosopher as Aristotle: but he has that in him which is not to be trifled with. He has a noble mask of a face (not well filled up in the expression, which is relaxed and dormant) with a fine person and manner. On the strength of these he hazards his speeches in the House. He has also a knowledge of mankind, and of the composition of the House. He takes a thrust which he cannot parry on his shield—is “all tranquillity and smiles” under a volley of abuse, sees when to pay a compliment to a wavering antagonist, soothes the melting mood of his hearers, or gets up a speech full of indignation, and knows how to bestow his attentions on that great public body, whether he wheedles or bullies, so as to bring it to compliance. With a long reach of undefined purposes (the result of a temper too indolent for thought, too violent for repose) he has equal perseverance and pliancy in bringing his objects to pass. I would rather be Lord Castlereagh, as far as a sense of power is concerned (principle is out of the question) than such a man as Mr. Canning, who is a mere fluent

sophist, and never knows the limits of discretion or the effect which will be produced by what he says, except as far as florid commonplaces may be depended on. Buonaparte is referred by Mr. Coleridge to the class of active rather than of intellectual characters: and Cowley has left an invidious but splendid eulogy on Oliver Cromwell, which sets out on much the same principle. "What," he says, "can be more extraordinary, than that a person of mean birth, no fortune, no eminent qualities of body, which have sometimes, or of mind, which have often raised men to the highest dignities, should have the courage to attempt, and the happiness to succeed in, so improbable a design, as the destruction of one of the most ancient and most solidly-founded monarchies upon the earth? That he should have the power or boldness to put his prince and master to an open and infamous death; to banish that numerous and strongly-allied family; to do all this under the name and wages of a Parliament; to trample upon them too as he pleased, and spurn them out of doors when he grew weary of them; to raise up a new and unheard-of monster out of their ashes; to stifle that in the very infancy, and set up himself above all things that ever were called sovereign in England; to oppress all his enemies

by arms, and all his friends afterwards by artifice; to serve all parties patiently for a while, and to command them victoriously at last; to over-run each corner of the three nations, and overcome with equal facility both the riches of the south and the poverty of the north; to be feared and courted by all foreign princes, and adopted a brother to the Gods of the earth; to call together Parliaments with a word of his pen, and scatter them again with the breath of his mouth; to be humbly and daily petitioned that he would please to be hired, at the rate of two millions a year, to be the master of those who had hired him before to be their servant; to have the estates and lives of three kingdoms as much at his disposal, as was the little inheritance of his father, and to be as noble and liberal in the spending of them; and lastly, (for there is no end of all the particulars of his glory) to bequeath all this with one word to his posterity; to die with peace at home, and triumph abroad; to be buried among kings, and with more than regal solemnity; and to leave a name behind him, not to be extinguished but with the whole world; which as it is now too little for his praises, so might have been too [narrow] for his conquests, if the short line of his human life could have been stretched out to the extent of his immortal designs!"

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Cromwell was a bad speaker and a worse writer. Milton wrote his dispatches for him in elegant and erudite Latin: and the pen of the one, like the sword of the other, was "sharp and sweet." We have not that union in modern times of the heroic and literary character which was common among the ancients. Julius Cæsar and Xenophon recorded their own acts with equal clearness of style and modesty of temper. The Duke of Wellington (worse off than Cromwell) is obliged to get Mr. Mudford to write the History of his Life. Sophocles, Æschylus, and Socrates were distinguished for their military prowess among their contemporaries, though now only remembered for what they did in poetry and philosophy. Cicero and Demosthenes, the two greatest orators of antiquity, appear to have been cowards: Nor does Horace seem to give a very favourable picture of his martial achievements. But in general there was not that division in the labours of the mind and body among the Greeks and Romans that has been introduced among us either by the progress of civilisation or by a greater slowness and inaptitude of parts. The French, for instance, appear to unite a number of accomplishments, the literary character and the man of the world, better than we do.

Among us, a scholar is almost another name for a pedant or a clown: it is not so with them. Their philosophers and wits went into the world, and mingled in the society of the fair. Of this there needs no other proof than the spirited print of most of the great names in French literature, to whom Moliere is reading a comedy in the presence of the celebrated Ninon de l'Enclos. D'Alembert, one of the first mathematicians of his age, was a wit, a man of gallantry and letters. With us a learned man is absorbed in himself and some particular study, and minds nothing else. There is something ascetic and impracticable in his very constitution, and he answers to the description of the Monk in Spenser—

“ From every work he challenged essoin
For contemplation's sake” —

Perhaps the superior importance attached to the institutions of religion, as well as the more abstracted and visionary nature of its objects, has led (as a general result) to a wider separation between thought and action in modern times.—

Ambition is of a higher and more heroic strain than avarice. Its objects are nobler, and the means by which it attains its ends less mechanical.

“ Better be lord of them that riches have,
Than riches have myself, and be their servile slave.”

The incentive to ambition is the love of power; the spur to avarice is either the fear of poverty, or a strong desire of self-indulgence. The amassers of fortunes seem divided into two opposite classes, lean, penurious-looking mortals, or jolly fellows who are determined to get possession of, because they want to enjoy the good things of the world. The one have famine and a work-house always before their eyes, the others in the fulness of their persons and the robustness of their constitutions seem to bespeak the reversion of a landed estate, rich acres, fat beeves, a substantial mansion, costly clothing, a chine and turkey, choice wines, and all other good things consonant to the wants and full-fed desires of their bodies. Such men charm fortune by the sleekness of their aspects and the goodly rotundity of their honest faces, as the others scare away poverty by their wan, meagre looks. The last starve themselves into riches by care and carking; the first eat, drink, and sleep their way into the good things of this life. The greatest number of *warm* men in the city are good, jolly fellows. Look at Sir William — Callipash and callipee are written in his face: he rolls about his unwieldy bulk in a sea

of turtle-soup. How many haunches of venison does he carry on his back! He is larded with jobs and contracts; he is stuffed and swelled out with layers of bank-notes, and invitations to dinner! His face hangs out a flag of defiance to mischance: the roguish twinkle in his eye with which he lures half the city and beats Alderman —— hollow, is a smile reflected from heaps of unsunned gold! Nature and Fortune are not so much at variance as to differ about this fellow. To enjoy the good the Gods provide us, is to deserve it. Nature meant him for a Knight, Alderman, and City-Member; and Fortune laughed to see the goodly person and prospects of the man!*—I am not, from certain early pre-

* A thorough fitness for any end implies the means. Where there is a will, there is a way. A real passion, an entire devotion to any object, always succeeds. The strong sympathy with what we wish and imagine, realizes it, dissipates all obstacles, and removes all scruples. The disappointed lover may complain as much as he pleases. He was himself to blame. He was a half witted, *wishy-washy* fellow. His love might be as great as he makes it out: but it was not his ruling-passion. His fear, his pride, his vanity was greater. Let any one's whole soul be steeped in this passion, let him think and care for nothing else, let nothing divert, cool or intimidate him, let the *ideal* feeling become an actual one and take possession of his whole faculties, looks and manner, let the same voluptuous hopes and wishes govern his actions

judices, much given to admire the ostentatious marks of wealth (there are persons enough to admire them without me)—but I confess, there is something in the look of the old banking-houses in Lombard-street, the posterns covered with mud, the doors opening sullenly and silently, the absence of all pretence, the darkness and the gloom within, the gleaming of lamps in the day-time,

“ Like a faint shadow of uncertain light,”

that almost realises the poetical conception of the cave of Mammon in Spenser, where dust and cobwebs concealed the roofs and pillars of

in the presence of his mistress that haunt his fancy in her absence, and I will answer for his success. But I will not answer for the success of “ a dish of skimmed milk ” in such a case.—I could always get to see a fine collection of pictures myself. The fact is, I was set upon it. Neither the surliness of porters, nor the impertinence of footmen could keep me back. I had a portrait of Titian in my eye, and nothing could put me out in my determination. If that had not (as it were) been looking on me all the time I was battling my way, I should have been irritated or disconcerted, and gone away. But my liking to the end conquered my scruples or aversion to the means. I never understood the Scotch character but on these occasions. I would not take “ No ” for an answer. If I had wanted a place under government or a writership to India, I could have got it from the same importunity, and on the same terms.

solid gold, and lifts the mind quite off its ordinary hinges. The account of the manner in which the founder of Guy's Hospital accumulated his immense wealth has always to me something romantic in it, from the same force of contrast. He was a little shop-keeper, and out of his savings, bought Bibles and sold them to sailors, wandering mariners, by which he left a fortune of two hundred thousand pounds. The story suggests the idea of a magician; nor is there any thing in the Arabian Nights that looks more like a fiction.

ESSAY XII.
ON WILL-MAKING.

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ON WILL-MAKING.

Few things show the human character in a more ridiculous light than the circumstance of will-making. It is the latest opportunity we have of exercising the natural perversity of the disposition, and we take care to make a good use of it. We husband it with jealousy, put it off as long as we can, and then use every precaution that the world shall be no gainer by our deaths. This last act of our lives seldom belies the former tenor of them, for stupidity, caprice, and unmeaning spite. All that we seem to think of is to manage matters so (in settling accounts with those who are so unmannerly as to survive us) as to do as little good, and to plague and disappoint as many people as possible.

Many persons have a superstition on the subject of making their last will and testament, and think that when every thing is ready signed and sealed, there is nothing farther left to delay their departure. I have heard of an instance of

one person who having a feeling of this kind on his mind, and being teased into making his will by those about him, actually fell ill with pure apprehension, and thought he was going to die in good earnest, but having executed the deed over-night, awoke, to his great surprise, the next morning, and found himself as well as ever he was*. An elderly gentleman possessed of a good estate and the same idle notion, and who found himself in a dangerous way, was anxious to do this piece of justice to those who remained behind him, but when it came to the point, his heart failed him, and his nervous fancies returned in full force:—even on his death-bed, he still held back and was averse to sign what he looked upon as his own death-warrant, and

* A poor woman at Plymouth who did not like the formality, or could not afford the expence of a will, thought to leave what little property she had in wearing-apparel and household moveables to her friends and relations, *vivâ voce*, and before Death stopped her breath. She gave and willed away (of her proper authority) her chair and table to one, her bed to another, an old cloak to a third, a night-cap and petticoat to a fourth, and so on. The old crones sat weeping round, and soon after carried off all they could lay their hands upon, and left their benefactress to her fate. They were no sooner gone than she unexpectedly recovered, and sent to have her things back again; but not one of them could she get, and she was left without a rag to her back, or a friend to condole with her.

just at the last gasp, amidst the anxious looks and silent upbraidings of friends and relatives that surrounded him, he summoned resolution to hold out his feeble hand which was guided by others to trace his name, and he fell back—a corpse! If there is any pressing reason for it, that is, if any particular person would be relieved from a state of harassing uncertainty, or materially benefited by their making a will, the old and infirm (who do not like to be put out of their way) generally make this an excuse to themselves for putting it off to the very last moment, probably till it is too late: or where this is sure to make the greatest number of blank faces, contrive to give their friends the slip, without signifying their final determination in their favour. Where some unfortunate individual has been kept long in suspense, who has been perhaps sought out for that very purpose, and who may be in a great measure dependent on this as a last resource, it is nearly a certainty that there will be no will to be found; no trace, no sign to discover whether the person dying thus intestate ever had any intention of the sort, or why they relinquished it. This it is to bespeak the thoughts and imaginations of others for victims after we are dead, as well as their persons and expectations for hangers-on while

we are living. A celebrated beauty of the middle of the last century, towards its close sought out a female relative, the friend and companion of her youth, who had lived during the forty years of their separation in rather straitened circumstances, and in a situation which admitted of some alleviations. Twice they met after that long lapse of time—once her relation visited her in the splendour of a rich old family-mansion, and once she crossed the country to become an inmate of the humble dwelling of her early and only remaining friend. What was this for? Was it to revive the image of her youth in the pale and care-worn face of her friend? Or was it to display the decay of her charms and recal her long-forgotten triumphs to the memory of the only person who could bear witness to them? Was it to show the proud remains of herself to those who remembered or had often heard what she was—her skin like shrivelled alabaster, her emaciated features chiseled by nature's finest hand, her eyes that when a smile lighted them up, still shone like diamonds, the vermilion hues that still bloomed among wrinkles? Was it to talk of bone-lace, of the flounces and brocades of the last century, of race-balls in the year 62, and of the scores of lovers that had died at her feet, and to set

whole counties in a flame again, only with a dream of faded beauty? Whether it was for this, or whether she meant to leave her friend any thing (as was indeed expected, all things considered, not without reason) nobody knows—for she never breathed a syllable on the subject herself, and died without a will. The accomplished coquet of twenty, who had pampered hopes only to kill them, who had kindled rapture with a look and extinguished it with a breath, could find no better employment at seventy than to revive the fond recollections and raise up the drooping hopes of her kinswoman only to let them fall—to rise no more. Such is the delight we have in trifling with and tantalising the feelings of others by the exquisite refinements, the studied sleights of love or friendship!

Where a property is actually bequeathed, supposing the circumstances of the case and the usages of society to leave a practical discretion to the testator, it is most frequently in such portions as can be of the least service. Where there is much already, much is given; where much is wanted, little or nothing. Poverty invites a sort of pity, a miserable dole of assistance; necessity neglect and scorn; wealth attracts and allures to itself more wealth, by natural association of ideas, or by that innate love of

inequality and injustice, which is the favourite principle of the imagination. Men like to collect money into large heaps in their life-time: they like to leave it in large heaps after they are dead. They grasp it into their own hands, not to use it for their own good, but to hoard, to lock it up, to make an object, an idol, and a wonder of it. Do you expect them to distribute it so as to do others good; that they will like those who come after them better than themselves; that if they were willing to pinch and starve themselves, they will not deliberately defraud their sworn friends and nearest kindred of what would be of the utmost use to them? No, they will thrust their heaps of gold and silver into the hands of others (as their proxies) to keep for them untouched, still increasing, still of no use to any one, but to pamper pride and avarice, to glitter in the huge, watchful, insatiable eye of fancy, to be deposited as a new offering at the shrine of Mammon, their God—this is with them to put it to its intelligible and proper use, this is fulfilling a sacred, indispensable duty, this cheers them in the solitude of the grave, and throws a gleam of satisfaction across the stony eye of death. But to think of frittering it down, of sinking it in charity, of throwing it away on the idle claims of

humanity, where it would no longer peer in monumental pomp over their heads; and that too when on the point of death themselves, *in articulo mortis*, oh! it would be madness, waste, extravagance, impiety!—Thus worldlings feel and argue without knowing it; and while they fancy they are studying their own interest or that of some booby successor, their *alter idem*, are but the dupes and puppets of a favourite idea, a phantom, a prejudice, that must be kept up somewhere (no matter where) if it still plays before and haunts their imagination while they have sense or understanding left—to cling to their darling follies.

There was a remarkable instance of this tendency *to the heap*, this desire to cultivate an abstract passion for wealth, in a will of one of the Thellusons some time back. This will went to keep the greater part of a large property from the use of the natural heirs and next-of-kin for a length of time, and to let it accumulate at compound interest in such a way and so long, that it would at last mount up in value to the purchase-money of a whole county. The interest accruing from the funded property or the rent of the lands at certain periods was to be employed to purchase other estates, other

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parks and manors in the neighbourhood or farther off, so that the prospect of the future desmesne that was to devolve at some distant time to the unborn lord of acres, swelled and enlarged itself, like a sea, circle without circle, vista beyond vista, till the imagination was staggered, and the mind exhausted. Now here was a scheme for the accumulation of wealth and for laying the foundation of family-aggrandisement purely imaginary, romantic—one might almost say, disinterested. The vagueness, the magnitude, the remoteness of the object, the resolute sacrifice of all immediate and gross advantages, clothe it with the privileges of an abstract idea, so that the project has the air of a fiction or of a story in a novel. It was an instance of what might be called posthumous avarice, like the love of posthumous fame. It had little more to do with selfishness than if the testator had appropriated the same sums in the same way to build a pyramid, to construct an aqueduct, to endow an hospital, or effect any other patriotic or merely fantastic purpose. He wished to heap up a pile of wealth (millions of acres) in the dim horizon of future years, that could be of no use to him or to those with whom he was connected by positive and personal ties,

but as a crotchet of the brain, a gew-gaw of the fancy*. Yet to enable himself to put this scheme in execution, he had perhaps toiled and watched all his life, denied himself rest, food, pleasure, liberty, society, and persevered with the patience and self-denial of a martyr. I have insisted on this point the more, to shew how much of the imaginary and speculative there is interfused even in those passions and purposes which have not the good of others for their object, and how little reason this honest citizen and builder of castles in the air would have had to treat those who devoted themselves to the pursuit of fame, to obloquy and persecution for the sake of truth and liberty, or who sacrificed their lives for their country in a just cause, as visionaries and enthusiasts, who did not understand what was properly due to their own interest and the securing of the main-chance. Man is not the creature of sense and selfishness, even in those pursuits which grow up out of that origin, so much as of imagination, custom, passion, whim, and humour.

I have heard of a singular instance of a will made by a person who was addicted to a habit

* The law of primogeniture has its origin in the principle here stated, the desire of perpetuating some one palpable and prominent proof of wealth and power.

of lying. He was so notorious for this propensity (not out of spite or cunning, but as a gratuitous exercise of invention) that from a child no one could ever believe a syllable he uttered. From the want of any dependence to be placed on him, he became the jest and bye-word of the school where he was brought up. The last act of his life did not disgrace him. For having gone abroad, and falling into a dangerous decline, he was advised to return home. He paid all that he was worth for his passage, went on ship-board, and employed the few remaining days he had to live in making and executing his will; in which he bequeathed large estates in different parts of England, money in the funds, rich jewels, rings, and all kinds of valuables to his old friends and acquaintance, who not knowing how far the force of nature could go, were not for some time convinced that all this fairy wealth had never had an existence any where but in the idle coinage of his brain, whose whims and projects were no more!—The extreme keeping in this character is only to be accounted for by supposing such an original constitutional levity as made truth entirely indifferent to him, and the serious importance attached to it by others an object of perpetual sport and ridicule!

The art of will-making chiefly consists in baffling the importunity of expectation. I do not so much find fault with this when it is done as a punishment and oblique satire on servility and selfishness. It is in that case *Diamond cut Diamond*—a trial of skill between the legacy-hunter and the legacy-maker which shall fool the other. The cringing toad-eater, the officious tale-bearer, is perhaps well paid for years of obsequious attendance with a bare mention and a mourning-ring; nor can I think that Gil Blas' library was not quite as much as the coxcombry of his pretensions deserved. There are some admirable scenes in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, shewing the humours of a legacy-hunter, and the different ways of fobbing him off with excuses and assurances of not being forgotten. Yet it is hardly right, after all, to encourage this kind of pitiful, bare-faced intercourse, without meaning to pay for it, as the coquet has no right to jilt the lovers she has trifled with. Flattery and submission are marketable commodities like any other, have their price, and ought scarcely to be obtained under false pretences. If we see through and despise the wretched creature that attempts to impose on our credulity, we can at any time dispense with his services: if we are soothed by this mockery

of respect and friendship, why not pay him like any other drudge, or as we satisfy the actor who performs a part in a play by our particular desire? But often these premeditated disappointments are as unjust as they are cruel, and are marked with circumstances of indignity, in proportion to the worth of the object. The suspecting, the taking it for granted that your name is down in the will, is sufficient provocation to have it struck out: the hinting at an obligation, the consciousness of it on the part of the testator, will make him determined to avoid the formal acknowledgment of it, at any expence. The disinheriting of relations is mostly for venial offences, not for base actions: we punish out of pique, to revenge some case in which we have been disappointed of our wills, some act of disobedience to what had no reasonable ground to go upon; and we are obstinate in adhering to our resolution, as it was sudden and rash, and doubly bent on asserting our authority in what we have least right to interfere in. It is the wound inflicted upon our self-love, not the stain upon the character of the thoughtless offender, that calls for condign punishment. Crimes, vices may go unchecked, or unnoticed: but it is the laughing at our weaknesses, or thwarting our humours, that is

never to be forgotten. It is not the errors of others, but our own miscalculations, on which we wreak our lasting vengeance. It is ourselves that we cannot forgive. In the will of Nicholas Gimcrack, the virtuoso recorded in the Tatler, we learn, among other items, that his eldest son is cut off with a single cockle-shell for his undutiful behaviour in laughing at his little sister whom his father kept preserved in spirits of wine. Another of his relations has a collection of grasshoppers bequeathed him, as in the testator's opinion an adequate reward and acknowledgment due to his merit. The whole will of the said Nicholas Gimcrack, Esq. is a curious document and exact picture of the mind of the worthy virtuoso defunct, where his various follies, littlenesses, and quaint humours are set forth, as orderly and distinct as his butterflies' wings and cockle-shells and skeletons of fleas in glass-cases*. We often

* It is as follows :

“ The Will of a Virtuoso.

“ I Nicholas Gimcrack, being in sound Health of Mind, but in great Weakness of Body, do by this my Last Will and Testament bequeath my worldly Goods and Chattels in Manner following :

Imprimis, To my dear Wife,
 One Box of Butterflies,
 One Drawer of Shells,

successfully try in this way to give the finishing stroke to our pictures, hang up our weaknesses

A Female Skeleton,
A dried Cockatrice.

Item, To my Daughter Elizabeth,

My Receipt for preserving dead Caterpillars.

As also my Preparations of Winter May-Dew, and Embrio Pickle.

Item, To my little Daughter Fanny,

Three Crocodile's Eggs.

And upon the Birth of her first Child, if she marries with her Mother's Consent,

The Nest of a Humming-Bird.

Item, To my eldest Brother, as an Acknowledgment for the

Lands he has vested in my Son Charles, I bequeath

My last Year's Collection of Grasshoppers.

Item, To his Daughter Susanna, being his only Child, I bequeath my

English Weeds pasted on Royal Paper,

With my large Folio of *Indian Cabbage*.

Having fully provided for my Nephew Isaac, by making over to him some Years since

A Horned *Scarabæus*,

The Skin of a Rattle-Snake, and

The Mummy of an *Egyptian King*,

I make no further Provision for him in this my Will.

My eldest Son *John* having spoken disrespectfully of his little Sister, whom I keep by me in Spirits of Wine, and in many other Instances behaved himself undutifully towards me, I do disinherit, and wholly cut off from any Part of this my Personal Estate, by giving him a single Cockle-Shell.

in perpetuity, and embalm our mistakes in the memories of others.

“ Even from the tomb the voice of nature cries,
Even in our ashes live their wonted fires.”

I shall not speak here of unwarrantable commands imposed upon survivors, by which they were to carry into effect the sullen and revengeful purposes of unprincipled men, after they had breathed their last: but we meet with continual examples of the desire to keep up the farce (if not the tragedy) of life, after we, the performers in it, have quitted the stage, and to have our parts rehearsed by proxy. We thus make a caprice immortal, a peculiarity proverbial. Hence we see the number of legacies and fortunes left, on condition that the legatee shall take the name and style of the testator, by which device we provide for the continu-

To my Second Son *Charles*, I give and bequeath all my Flowers, Plants, Minerals, Mosses, Shells, Pebbles, Fossils, Beetles, Butterflies, Caterpillars, Grasshoppers, and Vermin, not above specified: As also all my Monsters, both wet and dry, making the said *Charles* whole and sole Executor of this my Last Will and Testament, he paying or causing to be paid the aforesaid Legacies within the Space of Six Months after my Decease. And I do hereby revoke all other Wills whatsoever by me formerly made.”—TATLER, Vol. IV. No. 216.

ance of the sounds that formed our names, and endow them with an estate, that they may be repeated with proper respect. In the *Memoirs of an Heiress*, all the difficulties of the plot turn on the necessity imposed by a clause in her uncle's will that her future husband should take the family-name of Beverley. Poor Cecilia! What delicate perplexities she was thrown into by this improvident provision; and with what minute, endless, intricate distresses has the fair authoress been enabled to harrow up the reader on this account! There was a Sir Thomas Dyot in the reign of Charles II. who left the whole range of property which forms Dyot-street, in St. Giles's, and the neighbourhood, on the sole and express condition that it should be appropriated entirely to that sort of buildings, and to the reception of that sort of population, which still keeps undisputed, undivided possession of it. The name was changed the other day to George-street as a more genteel appellation, which, I should think, is an indirect forfeiture of the estate. This Sir Thomas Dyot I should be disposed to put upon the list of old English worthies—as humane, liberal, and no fincher from what he took in his head. He was no common-place man in his line. He was the best commentator on that old-fashioned

text.—“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”—We find some that are curious in the mode in which they shall be buried, and others in the place. Lord Camelford had his remains buried under an ash-tree that grew on one of the mountains in Switzerland; and Sir Francis Bourgeois had a little mausoleum built for him in the college at Dulwich, where he once spent a pleasant, jovial day with the masters and wardens*. It is, no doubt, proper to attend, except for strong reasons to the contrary, to these sort of requests; for by breaking faith with the dead, we loosen the confidence of the living. Besides, there is a stronger argument: we sympathise with the dead as well as with the living, and are bound to them by the most sacred of all ties, our own involuntary fellow-feeling with others!

Thieves, as a last donation, leave advice to their friends, physicians a nostrum, authors a

* Kellerman lately left his heart to be buried in the field of Valmy where the first great battle was fought in the year 1792, in which the Allies were repulsed. Oh! might that heart prove the root from which the tree of Liberty may spring up and flourish once more, as the basil-tree grew and grew from the cherished head of Isabella's lover!

manuscript work, rakes a confession of their faith in the virtue of the sex—all, the last drivellings of their egotism and impertinence. One might suppose that if any thing could, the approach and contemplation of death might bring men to a sense of reason and self-knowledge. On the contrary, it seems only to deprive them of the little wit they had, and to make them even more the sport of their wilfulness and short-sightedness. Some men think that because they are going to be hanged, they are fully authorised to declare a future state of rewards and punishments. All either indulge their caprices or cling to their prejudices. They make a desperate attempt to escape from reflection by taking hold of any whim or fancy that crosses their minds, or by throwing themselves implicitly on old habits and attachments.

An old man is twice a child: the dying man becomes the property of his family. He has no choice left, and his voluntary power is merged in old saws and prescriptive usages. The property we have derived from our kindred reverts tacitly to them: and not to let it take its course, is a sort of violence done to nature as well as custom. The idea of property, of something in common, does not mix cordially with friend-

ship, but is inseparable from near relationship. We owe a return in kind, where we feel no obligation for a favour; and consign our possessions to our next of kin as mechanically as we lean our heads on the pillow, and go out of the world in the same state of stupid amazement that we came into it! *Cætera desunt.*

ESSAY XIII.

**ON CERTAIN INCONSISTENCIES IN SIR
JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S DISCOURSES.**

ESSAY XIII.

ON CERTAIN INCONSISTENCIES IN SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S DISCOURSES.

THE two chief points which Sir Joshua aims at in his Discourses are to shew that excellence in the Fine Arts is the result of pains and study, rather than of genius, and that all beauty, grace and grandeur are to be found, not in actual nature, but in an idea existing in the mind. On both these points he appears to have fallen into considerable inconsistencies or very great latitude of expression, so as to make it difficult to know what conclusion to draw from his various reasonings. I shall attempt little more in this Essay than to bring together several passages, that from their contradictory import seem to imply some radical defect in Sir Joshua's theory, and a doubt as to the possibility of placing an implicit reliance on his authority.

To begin with the first of these subjects, the question of original genius. In the Second

Discourse, On the Method of Study, Sir Joshua observes towards the end,

“ There is one precept, however, in which I shall only be opposed by the vain, the ignorant, and the idle. I am not afraid that I shall repeat it too often. *You must have no dependence on your own genius.* If you have great talents, industry will improve them: if you have but moderate abilities, industry will supply their deficiency. Nothing is denied to well-directed labour; nothing is to be obtained without it. Not to enter into metaphysical discussions on the nature or essence of genius, I will venture to assert, that assiduity unabated by difficulty and a disposition eagerly directed to the object of its pursuit, will produce effects similar to those which some call the result of *natural powers.*”—Vol. I. p. 44.

The only tendency of the maxim here laid down seems to be to lure those students on with the hopes of excellence who have no chance of succeeding, and to deter those who have, from relying on the only prop and source of real excellence—the strong bent and impulse of their natural powers. Industry alone can only produce mediocrity; but mediocrity in art is not worth the trouble of industry. Genius, great natural powers will give industry and ardour in

the pursuit of their proper object, but not if you divert them from that object into the trammels of common-place mechanical labour. By this method you neutralise all distinction of character—make a pedant of the blockhead and a drudge of the man of genius. What, for instance, would have been the effect of persuading Hogarth or Rembrañdt to place no dependence on their own genius, and to apply themselves to the general study of the different branches of the art and of every sort of excellence, with a confidence of success proportioned to their misguided efforts, but to destroy both those great artists? “ You take my house when you do take the prop that doth sustain my house !” You undermine the superstructure of art when you strike at its main pillar and support, confidence and faith in nature. We might as well advise a person who had discovered a silver or lead mine on his estate to close it up, or the common farmer to plough up every acre he rents in the hope of discovering hidden treasure, as advise the man of original genius to neglect his particular vein for the study of rules and the imitation of others, or try to persuade the man of no strong natural powers that he can supply their deficiency by laborious application.—Sir Joshua soon after, in the Third Discourse,

alluding to the terms, *inspiration*, *genius*, *gusto*, applied by critics and orators to painting, proceeds,

“ Such is the warmth with which both the Ancients and Moderns speak of this divine principle of the art; but, as I have formerly observed, enthusiastick admiration seldom promotes knowledge. Though a student by such praise may have his attention roused and a desire excited of running in this great career; yet it is possible that what has been said to excite, may only serve to deter him. He examines his own mind, and perceives there nothing of that divine inspiration, with which, he is told, so many others have been favoured. He never travelled to heaven to gather new ideas; and he finds himself possessed of no other qualifications than what mere common observation and a plain understanding can confer. Thus he becomes gloomy amidst the splendour of figurative declamation, and thinks it hopeless to pursue an object which he supposes out of the reach of human industry.”—
Vol. I. p. 56.

Yet presently after he adds,

“ It is not easy to define in what this great style consists; nor to describe by words the proper means of acquiring it, *if the mind of the*

student should be at all capable of such an acquisition. Could we teach taste or genius by rules, they would be no longer taste and genius."—*Ibid.* p. 57.

Here then Sir Joshua admits that it is a question whether the student is likely to be at all capable of such an acquisition as the higher excellences of art, though he had said in the passage just quoted above, that it is within the reach of constant assiduity and of a disposition eagerly directed to the object of its pursuit to effect all that is usually considered as the result of natural powers. Is the theory which our author means to inculcate a mere delusion, a mere arbitrary assumption? At one moment, Sir Joshua attributes the hopelessness of the student to attain perfection to the discouraging influence of certain figurative and overstrained expressions, and in the next doubts his capacity for such an acquisition under any circumstances. Would he have him hope against hope, then? If he "examines his own mind and finds nothing there of that divine inspiration, with which he is told so many others have been favoured," but which he has never felt himself; if "he finds himself possessed of no other qualifications" for the highest efforts of genius and imagination "than what mere com-

mon observation and a plain understanding can confer," he may as well desist at once from "ascending the brightest heaven of invention:"—if the very idea of the divinity of art deters instead of animating him, if the enthusiasm with which others speak of it damps the flame in his own breast, he had better not enter into a competition where he wants the first principle of success, the daring to aspire and the hope to excel. He may be assured he is not the man. Sir Joshua himself was not struck at first by the sight of the masterpieces of the great style of art, and he seems unconsciously to have adopted this theory to shew that he might still have succeeded in it but for want of due application. His hypothesis goes to this—to make the common run of his readers fancy they can do all that can be done by genius, and to make the man of genius believe he can only do what is to be done by mechanical rules and systematic industry. This is not a very feasible scheme; nor is Sir Joshua sufficiently clear and explicit in his reasoning in support of it.

In speaking of Carlo Maratti, he confesses the inefficiency of this doctrine in a very remarkable manner:—

"Carlo Maratti succeeded better than those I have first named, and I think owes his su-

periority to the extension of his views: besides his master Andrea Sacchi, he imitated Raffaelle, Guido, and the Caraccis. It is true, there is nothing very captivating in Carlo Maratti; but this proceeded from a want which cannot be completely supplied; that is, want of strength of parts. *In this certainly men are not equal*; and a man can bring home wares only in proportion to the capital with which he goes to market. Carlo, by diligence, made the most of what he had: but there was undoubtedly a heaviness about him, which extended itself uniformly to his invention, expression, his drawing, colouring, and the general effect of his pictures. The truth is, he never equalled any of his patterns in any one thing, and he added little of his own.”
—*Ibid.* p. 172.

Here then Reynolds, we see, fairly gives up the argument. Carlo, after all, was a heavy hand; nor could all his diligence and his making the most of what he had, make up for the want of “natural powers.” Sir Joshua’s good sense pointed out to him the truth in the individual instance, though he might be led astray by a vague general theory. Such however is the effect of a false principle that there is an evident bias in the artist’s mind to make genius lean upon others for support, instead of trusting to

itself and developing its own incommunicable resources. So in treating in the Twelfth Discourse of the way in which great artists are formed, Sir Joshua reverts very nearly to his first position.

“ The daily food and nourishment of the mind of an Artist is found in the great works of his predecessors. There is no other way for him to become great himself. *Serpens, nisi serpentem comederit, non fit draco.* Raffaele, as appears from what has been said, had carefully studied the works of Masaccio, and indeed there was no other, if we except Michael Angelo (whom he likewise imitated)* so worthy of his attention: and though his manner was dry and hard, his compositions formal, and not enough diversified, according to the custom of Painters in that early period, yet his works possess that grandeur and simplicity which accompany, and even sometimes proceed from, regularity and hardness of manner. We must consider the barbarous state of the arts before his time, when skill in drawing was so little understood, that the best of the painters could not even shorten the foot, but every figure appeared to

* How careful is Sir Joshua, even in a parenthesis, to insinuate the obligations of this great genius to others, as if he would have been nothing without them!

stand upon his toes; and what served for drapery had, from the hardness and smallness of the folds, too much the appearance of cords clinging round the body. He first introduced large drapery, flowing in an easy and natural manner: indeed he appears to be the first who discovered the path that leads to every excellence to which the art afterwards arrived, and may therefore be justly considered as one of the Great Fathers of Modern Art.

“ Though I have been led on to a longer digression respecting this great painter than I intended, yet I cannot avoid mentioning another excellence which he possessed in a very eminent degree; he was as much distinguished among his contemporaries for his diligence and industry, *as he was for the natural faculties of his mind.* We are told that his whole attention was absorbed in the pursuit of his art, and that he acquired the name of Masaccio from his total disregard to his dress, his person, and all the common concerns of life. He is indeed *a signal instance of what well-directed diligence will do in a short time: he lived but twenty-seven years; yet in that short space carried the art so far beyond what it had before reached, that he appears to stand alone as a model for his successors.* Vasari gives a long catalogue of painters

and sculptors who formed their taste and learned their art, by studying his works ; among those, he names Michael Angelo, Lionardo da Vinci, Pietro Perugino, Raffaele, Bartolomeo, Andrea del Sarto, Il Rosso, and Pierino del Vaga." Vol. II. p. 95.

Sir Joshua here again halts between two opinions. He tells us the names of the painters who formed themselves upon Masaccio's style : he does not tell us on whom he formed himself. At one time the natural faculties of his mind were as remarkable as his industry ; at another he was only a signal instance of what well-directed diligence will do in a short time. Then again " he appears to have been the first who discovered the path that leads to every excellence to which the Art afterwards arrived," though he is introduced in an argument to shew that " the daily food and nourishment of the mind of the Artist must be found in the works of his predecessors." There is something surely very wavering and unsatisfactory in all this.

Sir Joshua, in another part of his work, endeavours to reconcile and prop up these contradictions by a paradoxical sophism which I think turns upon himself. He says, " I am on the contrary persuaded, that by imitation only" (by which he has just explained himself to mean

the study of other masters) “ variety and even originality of invention is produced. I will go further ; even genius, at least, what is so called, is the child of imitation. But as this appears to be contrary to the general opinion, I must explain my position before I enforce it.

“ Genius is supposed to be a power of producing excellencies, which are out of the reach of the rules of art ; a power which no precepts can teach, and which no industry can acquire.

“ This opinion of the impossibility of acquiring those beauties, which stamp the work with the character of genius, supposes that it is something more fixed than in reality it is ; and that we always do and ever did agree in opinion, with respect to what should be considered as the characteristick of genius. But the truth is, that the *degree* of excellence which proclaims *Genius* is different in different times and different places ; and what shows it to be so is, that mankind have often changed their opinion upon this matter.

“ When the Arts were in their infancy, the power of merely drawing the likeness of any object, was considered as one of its greatest efforts. The common people, ignorant of the principles of art, talk the same language even to this day. But when it was found that every

man could be taught to do this, and a great deal more, merely by the observance of certain precepts; the name of Genius then shifted its application, and was given only to him who added the peculiar character of the object he represented; to him who had invention, expression, grace, or dignity, in short, those qualities or excellencies, the power of producing which could not *then* be taught by any known and promulgated rules.

“ We are very sure that the beauty of form, the expression of the passions, the art of composition, even the power of giving a general air of grandeur to a work, is at present very much under the dominion of rules. These excellencies were heretofore considered merely as the effects of genius; and justly, if genius is not taken for inspiration, but as the effect of close observation and experience.”—THE SIXTH DISCOURSE, Vol. I. p. 153.

Sir Joshua began with undertaking to shew that “ genius was the child of the imitation of others, and now it turns out not to be inspiration indeed, but the effect of close observation and experience.” The whole drift of this argument appears to be contrary to what the writer intended, for the obvious inference is that the essence of genius consists entirely, both in kind and degree,

in the single circumstance of originality. The very same things are or are not genius, according as they proceed from invention or from mere imitation. In so far as a thing is original, as it has never been done before, it acquires and it deserves the appellation of genius : in so far as it is not original, and is borrowed from others or taught by rule, it is not, neither is it called, genius. This does not make much for the supposition that genius is a traditional and second-hand quality. Because, for example, a man without much genius can copy a picture of Michael Angelo's, does it follow that there was no genius in the original design, or that the inventor and the copyist are equal? If indeed, as Sir Joshua labours to prove, mere imitation of existing models and attention to established rules could produce results exactly similar to those of natural powers, if the progress of art as a learned profession were a gradual but continual accumulation of individual excellence, instead of being a sudden and almost miraculous start to the highest beauty and grandeur nearly at first, and a regular declension to mediocrity ever after, then indeed the distinction between genius and imitation would be little worth contending for ; the causes might be different, the effects would be the same, or rather skill to avail

ourselves of external advantages would be of more importance and efficacy than the most powerful internal resources. But as the case stands, all the great works of art have been the offspring of individual genius, either projecting itself before the general advances of society or striking out a separate path for itself; all the rest is but labour in vain. For every purpose of emulation or instruction, we go back to the original inventors, not to those who imitated, and as it is falsely pretended, improved upon their models: or if those who followed have at any time attained as high a rank or surpassed their predecessors, it was not from borrowing their excellences, but by unfolding new and exquisite powers of their own, of which the moving principle lay in the individual mind, and not in the stimulus afforded by previous example and general knowledge. Great faults, it is true, may be avoided, but great excellences can never be attained in this way. If Sir Joshua's hypothesis of progressive refinement in art was any thing more than a verbal fallacy, why does he go back to Michael Angelo as the God of his idolatry? Why does he find fault with Carlo Maratti for being heavy? Or why does he declare as explicitly as truly, that "the judgment, after it has been long passive, by

degrees loses its power of becoming active when exertion is necessary?"—Once more to point out the fluctuation in Sir Joshua's notions on this subject of the advantages of natural genius and artificial study, he says, when recommending the proper objects of ambition to the young artist—

“ My advice in a word is this: keep your principal attention fixed upon the higher excellencies. If you compass them, and compass nothing more, you are still in the first class. We may regret the innumerable beauties which you may want; you may be very imperfect; but still you are an imperfect artist of the highest order.” Vol. I. p. 116.

This is in the Fifth Discourse. In the Seventh our artist seems to waver, and fling a doubt on his former decision, whereby “ it loses some colour.”

“ Indeed perfection in an inferior style may be reasonably preferred to mediocrity in the highest walks of art. A landscape of Claude Lorraine *may** be preferred to a history by Luca Giordano: but hence appears the neces-

* If Sir Joshua had had an offer to exchange a Luca Giordano in his collection for a Claude Lorraine, he would not have hesitated long about the preference.

sity of the connoisseur's knowing in what consists the excellency of each class, in order to judge how near it approaches to perfection."—*Ibid.* p. 217.

As he advances, however, he grows bolder, and altogether discards his theory of judging of the artist by the class to which he belongs—"But we have the sanction of all mankind," he says, "in preferring genius in a lower rank of art, to feebleness and insipidity in the highest." This is in speaking of Gainsborough. The whole passage is excellent, and, I should think, conclusive against the general and factitious style of art on which he insists so much at other times.

"On this ground, however unsafe, I will venture to prophesy, that two of the last distinguished Painters of that country, I mean Pompeo Battoni, and Raffaello Mengs, however great their names may at present sound in our ears*, will very soon fall into the rank of Imperiale, Sebastian Concha, Placido Constanza, Massuccio, and the rest of their immediate predecessors; whose names, though equally renowned in their life-time, are now fallen into what is little short of total oblivion. I do not

* Written in 1788.

say that those painters were not superior to the artist I allude to*, and whose loss we lament, in a certain routine of practice, which, to the eyes of common observers, has the air of a learned composition, and bears a sort of superficial resemblance to the manner of the great men who went before them. I know this perfectly well; but I know likewise, that a man looking for real and lasting reputation must unlearn much of the common-place method so observable in the works of the artists whom I have named. For my own part, I confess, I take more interest in and am more captivated with the powerful impression of nature, which Gainsborough exhibited in his portraits and in his landscapes, and the interesting simplicity and elegance of his little ordinary beggar-children, than with any of the works of that School, since the time of Andrea Sacchi, or perhaps we may say, Carlo Maratti; two painters who may truly be said to be *ULTIMI ROMANORUM*.

“ I am well aware how much I lay myself open to the censure and ridicule of the *Academical* professors of other nations, in preferring the humble attempts of Gainsborough to the works of those regular graduates in the great historical style. *But we have the sanction of all*

* Gainsborough.

mankind in preferring genius in a lower rank of art to feebleness and insipidity in the highest."
Vol. II. p. 152.

Yet this excellent artist and critic had said but a few pages before when working upon his theory—"For this reason I shall beg leave to lay before you a few thoughts on the subject; to throw out some hints that may lead your minds to an opinion (which I take to be the true one) that Painting is not only not to be considered as an imitation operating by deception, but that it is, and ought to be, in many points of view and strictly speaking, no imitation at all of external nature. Perhaps it ought to be as far removed from the vulgar idea of imitation as the refined civilised state in which we live is removed from a gross state of nature; and those who have not cultivated their imaginations, which the majority of mankind certainly have not, may be said, in regard to arts, to continue in this state of nature. Such men will always prefer imitation" (the imitation of nature) "to that excellence which is addressed to another faculty that they do not possess; but these are not the persons to whom a painter is to look, any more than a judge of morals and manners ought to refer controverted points upon those subjects to the opinions of people taken

from the banks of the Ohio, or from New Holland."—Vol. II. p. 119.

In opposition to the sentiment here expressed that "Painting is and ought to be, in many points of view and strictly speaking, no imitation at all of external nature," it is emphatically said in another place—"Nature is and must be the fountain which alone is inexhaustible; and from which all excellencies must originally flow."—Discourse VI. Vol. I. p. 162.

I cannot undertake to reconcile so many contradictions, nor do I think it an easy task for the student to derive any simple or intelligible clue from these conflicting authorities and broken hints in the prosecution of his art. Sir Joshua appears to have imbibed from others (Burke or Johnson) a spurious metaphysical notion that art was to be preferred to nature, and learning to genius, with which his own good sense and practical observation were continually at war, but from which he only emancipates himself for a moment to relapse into the same error again shortly after*. The con-

* Sir Joshua himself wanted academic skill and patience in the details of his profession. From these defects he seems to have been alternately repelled by each theory and style of art, the simply natural and elaborately scientific, as it came

clusion of the Twelfth Discourse is, I think, however, a triumphant and unanswerable denunciation of his own favourite paradox on the objects and study of art.

“Those artists,” (he says with a strain of eloquent truth) “who have quitted the service of nature (whose service, when well understood, is *perfect freedom*) and have put themselves under the direction of I know not what capricious fantastical mistress, who fascinates and overpowers their whole mind, and from whose dominion there are no hopes of their being ever reclaimed (since they appear perfectly satisfied, and not at all conscious of their forlorn situation) like the transformed followers of Comus,

‘ Not once perceive their foul disfigurement ;
But boast themselves more comely than before.’

“Methinks, such men, who have found out so short a path, have no reason to complain of the shortness of life and the extent of art ; since life is so much longer than is wanted for their improvement, or is indeed necessary for

before him ; and in his impatience of each, to have been betrayed into a tissue of inconsistencies somewhat difficult to unravel.

the accomplishment of their idea of perfection*. On the contrary, he who recurs to nature, at every recurrence renews his strength. The rules of art he is never likely to forget; they are few and simple: but Nature is refined, subtle, and infinitely various, beyond the power and retention of memory; it is necessary therefore to have continual recourse to her. In this intercourse, there is no end of his improvement: the longer he lives, the nearer he approaches to the true and perfect idea of Art.”
—Vol. II. p. 108.

* He had been before speaking of Boucher, Director of the French Academy, who told him that “when he was young, studying his art, he found it necessary to use models, but that he had left them off for many years.”

ESSAY XIV.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

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THE first inquiry which runs through Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses is whether the student ought to look at nature with his own eyes or with the eyes of others, and on the whole, he apparently inclines to the latter. The second question is what is to be understood by nature; whether it is a general and abstract idea, or an aggregate of particulars; and he strenuously maintains the former of these positions. Yet it is not easy always to determine how far or with what precise limitations he does so.

The first germ of his speculations on this subject is to be found in two papers in the *Idler*. In the last paragraph of the second of these, he says,

“ If it has been proved that the Painter, by attending to the invariable and general ideas of nature, produces beauty, he must, by regarding minute particularities and accidental

discriminations, deviate from the universal rule, and pollute his canvas with deformity.”—See Works, Vol. II. p. 242.

In answer to this, I would say that deformity is not the being varied in the particulars, in which all things differ (for on this principle all nature, which is made up of individuals, would be a heap of deformity) but in violating general rules, in which they all or almost all agree. Thus there are no two noses in the world exactly alike, or without a great variety of subordinate parts, which may still be handsome, but a face without any nose at all, or a nose (like that of a mask) without any particularity in the details, would be a great deformity in art or nature. Sir Joshua seems to have been led into his notions on this subject either by an ambiguity of terms, or by taking only one view of nature. He supposes grandeur, or the general effect of the whole, to consist in leaving out the particular details, because these details are sometimes found without any grandeur of effect, and he therefore conceives the two things to be irreconcilable and the alternatives of each other. This is very imperfect reasoning. If the mere leaving out the details constituted grandeur, any one could do this: the greatest dauber would at

that rate be the greatest artist. A house or sign-painter might instantly enter the lists with Michael Angelo, and might look down on the little, dry, hard manner of Raphael. But grandeur depends on a distinct principle of its own, not on a negation of the parts; and as it does not arise from their omission, so neither is it incompatible with their insertion or the highest finishing. In fact, an artist may give the minute particulars of any object one by one and with the utmost care, and totally neglect the proportions, arrangement and general masses, on which the effect of the whole more immediately depends; or he may give the latter, *viz.* the proportions and arrangement of the larger parts and the general masses of light and shade, and leave all the minuter parts of which those parts are composed a mere blotch, one general smear, like the first crude and hasty getting in of the ground-work of a picture: he may do either of these, or he may combine both, that is, finish the parts, but put them in their right places, and keep them in due subordination to the general effect and massing of the whole. If the exclusion of the parts were necessary to the grandeur of the whole composition, if the more entire this exclusion, if the more like a *tabula rasa*, a vague,

undefined, shadowy and abstracted representation the picture was, the greater the grandeur; there could be no danger of pushing this principle too far, and going the full length of Sir Joshua's theory without any restrictions or mental reservations. But neither of these suppositions is true. The greatest grandeur may co-exist with the most perfect, nay with a microscopic accuracy of detail, as we see it does often in nature: the greatest looseness and slovenliness of execution may be displayed without any grandeur at all either in the outline or distribution of the masses of colour. To explain more particularly what I mean. I have seen and copied portraits by Titian, in which the eyebrows were marked with a number of small strokes, like hair-lines (indeed, the hairs of which they were composed were in a great measure given)—but did this destroy the grandeur of expression, the truth of outline, arising from the arrangement of these hair-lines in a given form? The grandeur, the character, the expression remained, for the general form or arched and expanded outline remained, just as much as if it had been daubed in with a blacking-brush: the introduction of the internal parts and texture only added delicacy and truth to the general and striking

effect of the whole. Surely a number of small dots or lines may be arranged into the form of a square or a circle indiscriminately; the square or circle, that is, the larger figure, remains the same, whether the line of which it consists is broken or continuous; as we may see in prints where the outlines, features, and masses remain the same in all the varieties of mezzotinto, dotted and line engraving. If Titian in marking the appearance of the hairs had deranged the general shape and contour of the eyebrows, he would have destroyed the look of nature; but as he did not, but kept both in view, he proportionably improved his copy of it. So, in what regards the masses of light and shade, the variety, the delicate transparency and broken transitions of the tints is not inconsistent with the greatest breadth or boldest contrasts. If the light, for instance, is thrown strongly on one side of a face, and the other is cast into deep shade, let the individual and various parts of the surface be finished with the most scrupulous exactness both in the drawing and in the colours, provided nature is not exceeded, this will not nor cannot destroy the force and harmony of the composition. One side of the face will still have that great and leading distinction of being seen in shadow, and

the other of being seen in the light, let the subordinate differences be as many and as precise as they will. Suppose a panther is painted in the sun: will it be necessary to leave out the spots to produce breadth and the great style, or will not this be done more effectually by painting the spots of one side of his shaggy coat as they are seen in the light, and those of the other as they really appear in natural shadow? The two masses are thus preserved completely, and no offence is done to truth and nature. Otherwise we resolve the distribution of light and shade into *local colouring*. The masses, the grandeur exist equally in external nature with the local differences of different colours. Yet Sir Joshua seems to argue that the grandeur, the effect of the whole object is confined to the general idea in the mind, and that all the littleness and individuality is in nature. This is an essentially false view of the subject. This grandeur, this general effect is indeed always combined with the details, or what our theoretical reasoner would designate as *littleness* in nature: and so it ought to be in art, as far as art can follow nature with prudence and profit. What is the fault of Denner's style?—It is, that he does *not* give this combination of properties: that he gives only one view of nature, that he abstracts

the details, the finishing, the curiosities of natural appearances from the general result, truth and character of the whole, and in finishing every part with elaborate care, totally loses sight of the more important and striking appearance of the object as it presents itself to us in nature. He gives every part of a face; but the shape, the expression, the light and shade of the whole is wrong, and as far as can be from what is natural. He gives an infinite variety of tints, but they are not the tints of the human face, nor are they subjected to any principle of light and shade. He is different from Rembrandt or Titian. The English school, formed on Sir Joshua's theory, give neither the finishing of the parts nor the effect of the whole, but an inexplicable dumb mass without distinction or meaning. They do not do as Denner did, and think that not to do as he did, is to do as Titian and Rembrandt did; I do not know whether they would take it as a compliment to be supposed to imitate nature. Some few artists, it must be said, have "of late reformed this indifferently among us! Oh! let them reform it altogether!" I have no doubt they would if they could; but I have some doubts whether they can or not.— Before I proceed to consider the question of beauty and grandeur as it relates to the selection

of form, I will quote a few passages from Sir Joshua with reference to what has been said on the imitation of particular objects. In the Third Discourse he observes, "I will now add that nature herself is not to be too closely copied. . . . A mere copier of nature *can never produce any thing great; can never raise and enlarge the conceptions, or warm the heart of the spectator.* The wish of the genuine painter must be more extensive: instead of endeavouring to amuse mankind with the minute neatness of his imitations, he must endeavour to improve them by the grandeur of his ideas; instead of seeking praise by deceiving the superficial sense of the spectator, he must strive for fame by captivating the imagination." Vol. I. p. 53.

From this passage it would surely seem that there was nothing in nature but minute neatness and superficial effect: nothing great in *her* style, for an imitator of it can produce nothing great; nothing "to enlarge the conceptions or warm the heart of the spectator."

"What word hath passed thy lips, Adam severe!"

All that is truly grand or excellent is a figment of the imagination, a vapid creation out of nothing, a pure effect of overlooking and scorning the minute neatness of natural objects.

This will not do. Again, Sir Joshua lays it down without any qualification that

“The whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, peculiarities, and *details* of every kind.” Page 58.

Yet at p. 82 we find him acknowledging a different opinion.

“I am very ready to allow” (he says, in speaking of history-painting) “that *some* circumstances of minuteness and particularity *frequently* tend to give an air of truth to a piece, and to *interest the spectator in an extraordinary manner*. Such circumstances therefore cannot wholly be rejected: but if there be any thing in the Art which requires peculiar nicety of discernment, it is the disposition of these minute circumstantial parts; which according to the judgment employed in the choice, become so useful to truth or so injurious to grandeur.” Page 82.

That's true; but the sweeping clause against “all particularities and details of every kind” is clearly got rid of. The undecided state of Sir Joshua's feelings on this subject of the incompatibility between the whole and the details is strikingly manifested in two short passages which follow each other in the space of two

pages. Speaking of some pictures of Paul Veronese and Rubens as distinguished by the dexterity and the unity of style displayed in them, he adds—

“ It is by this and this alone, that the mechanical power is ennobled, and raised much above its natural rank. And it appears to me, that with propriety it acquires this character, as an instance of that superiority with which mind predominates over matter, by contracting into one whole what nature has made multifarious.”
Vol. II. p. 63.

This would imply that the principle of unity and integrity is only in the mind, and that nature is a heap of disjointed, disconnected particulars, a chaos of points and atoms. In the very next page, the following sentence occurs—

“ As painting is an art, they” (the ignorant) “ think they ought to be pleased in proportion as they see that art ostentatiously displayed; they will from this supposition prefer neatness, high finishing, and gaudy colouring, to the truth, simplicity and *unity* of nature.”

Before, neatness and high finishing were supposed to belong exclusively to the littleness of nature, but here truth, simplicity and unity are her characteristics. Soon after, Sir Joshua says,

“ I should be sorry if what has been said should be understood to have any tendency to encourage that carelessness which leaves work in an unfinished state. I commend nothing for the want of exactness ; I mean to point out that kind of exactness which is the best, and which is alone truly to be so esteemed.”—Vol. II. p. 65. This Sir Joshua has already told us consists in getting above “ all particularities and details of every kind.” Once more we find it stated that

“ It is in vain to attend to the variation of tints, if in that attention the general hue of flesh is lost ; or to finish ever so minutely the parts, if the masses are not observed, or the whole not well put together.”

Nothing can be truer : but why always suppose the two things at variance with each other ?

“ Titian’s manner was then new to the world, but that unshaken truth on which it is founded, has fixed it as a model to all succeeding painters ; and those who will examine into the artifice, will find it to consist in the power of generalising, and in the shortness and simplicity of the means employed.” Page 51.

Titian’s real excellence consisted in the power of generalising and of *individualising* at the same time : if it were merely the former, it would be

difficult to account for the error immediately after pointed out by Sir Joshua. He says in the very next paragraph:

“ Many artists, as Vasari likewise observes, have ignorantly imagined they are imitating the manner of Titian, when they leave their colours rough, and neglect the detail : but not possessing the principles on which he wrought, they have produced what he calls *goffe pitture*, absurd, foolish pictures.”—*Ibid.* p. 54.

Many artists have also imagined they were following the directions of Sir Joshua when they did the same thing, that is, neglected the detail, and produced the same results, vapid generalities, absurd, foolish pictures.

I will only give two short passages more, and have done with this part of the subject. I am anxious to confront Sir Joshua with his own authority.

“ The advantage of this method of considering objects (*as a whole*) is what I wish now more particularly to enforce. At the same time I do not forget, that a painter must have the power of contracting as well as dilating his sight ; because he that does not at all express particulars, expresses nothing ; yet it is certain that a nice discrimination of minute circumstances and a punctilious delineation of them,

whatever excellence it may have (and I do not mean to detract from it), never did confer on the artist the character of Genius." Vol. II. p. 44.

At page 53, we find the following words.

"Whether it is the human figure, an animal, or even inanimate objects, there is nothing, however unpromising in appearance, but may be raised into dignity, convey sentiment, and produce emotion, in the hands of a Painter of genius. What was said of Virgil, that he threw even the dung about the ground with an air of dignity, may be applied to Titian; whatever he touched, however naturally mean, and habitually familiar, by a kind of magic he invested with grandeur and importance."—No, not by magic, but by seeking and finding in individual nature, and combined with details of every kind, that grace and grandeur and unity of effect which Sir Joshua supposes to be a mere creation of the artist's brain! Titian's practice was, I conceive, to give general appearances with individual forms and circumstances: Sir Joshua's theory goes too often, and in its prevailing bias, to separate the two things as inconsistent with each other, and thereby to destroy or bring into question that union of striking effect with accuracy of resemblance in which the essence

of sound art (as far as relates to imitation) consists.

Farther, as Sir Joshua is inclined to merge the details of individual objects in general effect, so he is resolved to reduce all beauty or grandeur in natural objects to a central form or abstract idea of a certain class, so as to exclude all peculiarities or deviations from this ideal standard as unfit subjects for the artist's pencil, and as polluting his canvas with deformity. As the former principle went to destroy all exactness and solidity in particular things, this goes to confound all variety, distinctness, and characteristic force in the broader scale of nature. There is a principle of conformity in nature or of something in common between a number of individuals of the same class, but there is also a principle of contrast, of discrimination and identity, which is equally essential in the system of the universe and in the structure of our ideas both of art and nature. Sir Joshua would hardly neutralise the tints of the rainbow to produce a dingy grey, as a medium or central colour: why then should he neutralise all features, forms, &c. to produce an insipid monotony? He does not indeed consider his theory of beauty as applicable to colour, which he well understood, but insists upon and literally enforces it

as to form and ideal conceptions, of which he knew comparatively little, and where his authority is more questionable. I will not in this place undertake to shew that his theory of a middle form (as the standard of taste and beauty) is not true of the outline of the human face and figure or other organic bodies, though I think that even there it is only one principle or condition of beauty; but I do say that it has little or nothing to do with those other capital parts of painting, colour, character, expression, and grandeur of conception. Sir Joshua himself contends that "beauty in creatures of the same species is the medium or centre of all its various forms;" and he maintains that grandeur is the same abstraction of the species in the individual. Therefore beauty and grandeur must be the same thing, which they are not; so that this definition must be faulty. Grandeur I should suppose to imply something that elevates and expands the mind, which is chiefly power or magnitude. Beauty is that which soothes and melts it, and its source I apprehend is a certain harmony, softness, and gradation of form, within the limits of our customary associations, no doubt, or of what we expect of certain species, but not independent of every other consideration. Our critic himself confesses of Michael

Angelo, whom he regards as the pattern of the great or sublime style, that "his people are a superior order of beings; there is nothing about them, nothing in the air of their actions or their attitudes, or the style or cast of their limbs or features, that reminds us of their belonging to our own species. Rafaele's imagination is not so elevated: his figures are not so much disjoined from our own diminutive race of beings, though his ideas are chaste, noble, and of great conformity to their subjects. Michael Angelo's works have a strong, peculiar, and marked character: they seem to proceed from his own mind entirely, and that mind so rich and abundant, that he never needed or seemed to disdain to look abroad for foreign help. Rafaele's materials are generally borrowed, though the noble structure is his own." FIFTH DISCOURSE. How does all this accord with the same writer's favourite theory that all beauty, all grandeur, and all excellence consist in an approximation to that central form or habitual idea of mediocrity, from which every deviation is so much deformity and littleness? Michael Angelo's figures are raised above our diminutive race of beings; yet they are confessedly the standard of sublimity in what regards the human form. Grandeur then admits of an exaggeration of

our habitual impressions; and “the strong, marked, and peculiar character which Michael Angelo has at the same time given to his works” does not take away from it. This is fact against argument. I would take Sir Joshua’s word for the goodness of a picture, and for its distinguishing properties, sooner than I would for an abstract metaphysical theory. Our artist also speaks continually of high and low subjects. There can be no distinction of this kind upon his principle, that the standard of taste is the adhering to the central form of each species, and that every species is in itself equally beautiful. The painter of flowers, of shells, or of any thing else, is equally elevated with Raphael or Michael, if he adheres to the generic or established form of what he paints: the rest, according to this definition, is a matter of indifference. There must therefore be something besides the central or customary form to account for the difference of dignity, for the high and low style in nature or in art. Michael Angelo’s figures, we are told, are more than ordinarily grand: why, by the same rule, may not Raphael’s be more than ordinarily beautiful, have more than ordinary softness, symmetry, and grace?—Character and expression are still less included in the present theory. All character

is a departure from the common-place form ; and Sir Joshua makes no scruple to declare that expression destroys beauty. Thus he says,

“ If you mean to preserve the most perfect beauty *in its most perfect state*, you cannot express the passions, all of which produce distortion and deformity, more or less, in the most beautiful faces.”—Vol. I. p. 118.

He goes on—“ Guido, from want of choice in adapting his subject to his ideas and his powers, or from attempting to preserve beauty where it could not be preserved, has in this respect succeeded very ill. His figures are often engaged in subjects that required great expression : yet his Judith and Holofernes, the daughter of Herodias with the Baptist’s head, the Andromeda, and some even of the Mothers of the Innocents, have little more expression than his Venus attired by the Graces.”—*Ibid.*

What a censure is this passed upon Guido, and what a condemnation of his own theory which would reduce and level all that is truly great and praiseworthy in art to this insipid, tasteless standard, by setting aside as illegitimate all that does not come within the middle, central form ! Yet Sir Joshua judges of Hogarth as he deviates from this standard, not as he excels in individual character, which he says

is only good or tolerable as it partakes of general nature; and he might accuse Michael Angelo and Raphael, the one for his grandeur of style, the other for his expression; for neither are what he sets up as the goal of perfection.—I will just stop to remark here, that Sir Joshua has committed himself very strangely in speaking of the character and expression to be found in the Greek statues. He says in one place—

“I cannot quit the Apollo, without making one observation on the character of this figure. He is supposed to have just discharged his arrow at the Python; and by the head retreating a little towards the right shoulder, he appears attentive to its effect. What I would remark, is the difference of this attention from that of the Discobolus, who is engaged in the same purpose, watching the effect of his Discus. The graceful, negligent, though animated air of the one, and the vulgar eagerness of the other, furnish an instance of the judgment of the ancient Sculptors *in their nice discrimination of character*. They are both equally true to nature, and equally admirable.”—Vol. II. p. 21.

After a few observations on the limited means of the art of Sculpture, and the inatten-

tion of the ancients to almost every thing but form, we meet with the following passage:—

“Those who think Sculpture can express more than we have allowed may ask, by what means we discover, at the first glance, the character that is represented in a Bust, a Cameo, or Intaglio? I suspect it will be found, on close examination, by him who is resolved not to see more than he really does see, that the figures are distinguished by their *insignia* more than by any variety of form or beauty. Take from Apollo his Lyre, from Bacchus his Thyrsus and Vine-leaves, and Meleager the Boar’s Head, and there will remain little or no difference in their characters. In a Juno, Minerva, or Flora, the idea of the artist seems to have gone no further than representing perfect beauty, and afterwards adding the proper attributes, with a total indifference to which they gave them.”

[What then becomes of that “nice discrimination of character” for which our author has just before celebrated them?]

“Thus John De Bologna, after he had finished a group of a young man holding up a young woman in his arms, with an old man at his feet, called his friends together, to tell him what name he should give it, and it was agreed

to call it *The Rape of the Sabines*; and this is the celebrated group which now stands before the old Palace at Florence. The figures have the same general expression which is to be found in most of the antique Sculpture; and yet it would be no wonder, if future critics should find out delicacy of expression which was never intended; and go so far as to see, in the old man's countenance, the exact relation which he bore to the woman who appears to be taken from him."—*Ibid.* p. 25.

So it is that Sir Joshua's theory seems to rest on an inclined plane, and is always glad of an excuse to slide, from the severity of truth and nature, into the milder and more equable regions of insipidity and inanity! I am sorry to say so, but so it appears to me.

I confess, it strikes me as a self-evident truth that variety or contrast is as essential a principle in art and nature as uniformity, and as necessary to make up the harmony of the universe and the contentment of the mind. Who would destroy the shifting effects of light and shade, the sharp, lively opposition of colours in the same or in different objects, the streaks in a flower, the stains in a piece of marble, to reduce all to the same neutral, dead colouring, the same middle tint? Yet it is on this prin-

ciple that Sir Joshua would get rid of all variety, character, expression, and picturesque effect in forms, or at least measure the worth or the spuriousness of all these according to their reference to or departure from a given or average standard. Surely, nature is more liberal, art is wider than Sir Joshua's theory. Allow (for the sake of argument) that all forms are in themselves indifferent, and that beauty or the sense of pleasure in forms can therefore only arise from customary association, or from that middle impression to which they all tend: yet this cannot by the same rule apply to other things. Suppose there is no capacity in form to affect the mind except from its corresponding to previous expectation, the same thing cannot be said of the idea of power or grandeur. No one can say that the idea of power does not affect the mind with the sense of awe and sublimity. That is, power and weakness, grandeur and littleness, are not indifferent things, the perfection of which consists in a medium between both. Again, expression is not a thing indifferent in itself, which derives its value or its interest solely from its conformity to a neutral standard. Who would neutralise the expression of pleasure and pain? Or say that the passions of the human mind, pity,

love, joy, sorrow, &c. are only interesting to the imagination and worth the attention of the artist, as he can reduce them to an equivocal state which is neither pleasant nor painful, neither one thing nor the other? Or who would stop short of the utmost refinement, precision, and force in the delineation of each? Ideal expression is not neutral expression, but extreme expression. Again, character is a thing of peculiarity, of striking contrast, of distinction, and not of uniformity. It is necessarily opposed to Sir Joshua's exclusive theory, and yet it is surely a curious and interesting field of speculation for the human mind. Lively, spirited discrimination of character is one source of gratification to the lover of nature and art, which it could not be, if all truth and excellence consisted in rejecting individual traits. Ideal character is not common-place, but consistent character marked throughout, which may take place in history or portrait. Historical truth in a picture is the putting the different features of the face or muscles of the body into consistent action. The *picturesque* altogether depends on particular points or qualities of an object, projecting as it were beyond the middle line of beauty, and catching the eye of the spectator. It was less, however, my intention to

hazard any speculations of my own, than to confirm the common-sense feelings on the subject by Sir Joshua's own admissions in different places. In the Tenth Discourse, speaking of some objections to the Apollo, he has these remarkable words—

“ In regard to the last objection (*viz.* that the lower half of the figure is longer than just proportion allows) it must be remembered, that Apollo is here in the exertion of *one of his peculiar powers*, which is swiftness; he has therefore that proportion which is best adapted to that character. This is no more incorrectness, than when there is given to an Hercules an extraordinary swelling and strength of muscles.”—Vol. II. p. 20.

Strength and activity then do not depend on the middle form; and the middle form is to be sacrificed to the representation of these positive qualities. Character is thus allowed not only to be an integrant part of the antique and classical style of art, but even to take precedence of and set aside the abstract idea of beauty. Little more would be required to justify Hogarth in his Gothic resolution, that if he were to make a figure of Charon, he would give him bandy legs, because watermen are generally bandy-legged. It is very well to talk

of the abstract idea of a man or of a God, but if you come to any thing like an intelligible proposition, you must either individualise and define, or destroy the very idea you contemplate. Sir Joshua goes into this question at considerable length in the Third Discourse.

“ To the principle I have laid down, that the idea of beauty in each species of beings is an invariable one, it may be objected,” he says, “ that in every particular species there are various central forms, which are separate and distinct from each other, and yet are undeniably beautiful; that in the human figure, for instance, the beauty of Hercules is one, of the Gladiator another, of the Apollo another, which makes so many different ideas of beauty. It is true, indeed, that these figures are each perfect in their kind, though of different characters and proportions; but still none of them is the representation of an individual, but of a class. And as there is one general form, which, as I have said, belongs to the human kind at large, so in each of these classes there is one common idea which is the abstract of the various individual forms belonging to that class. Thus, though the forms of childhood and age differ exceedingly, there is a common form in childhood, and a common form in age, which is the

more perfect as it is remote from all peculiarities. But I must add further, that though the most perfect forms of each of the general divisions of the human figure are ideal, and superior to any individual form of that class; yet the highest perfection of the human figure is not to be found in any of them. It is not in the Hercules, nor in the Gladiator, nor in the Apollo; but in that form which is taken from all, and which partakes equally of the activity of the Gladiator, of the delicacy of the Apollo, and of the muscular strength of the Hercules. For perfect beauty in any species must combine all the characters which are beautiful in that species. It cannot consist in any one to the exclusion of the rest: no one, therefore, must be predominant, that no one may be deficient.”
—Vol. II. p. 64.

Sir Joshua here supposes the distinctions of classes and character to be necessarily combined with the general leading idea of a middle form. This middle form is not to confound age, sex, circumstance, under one sweeping abstraction: but we must limit the general idea by certain specific differences and characteristic marks, belonging to the several subordinate divisions and ramifications of each class. This is enough to shew that there is a

principle of individuality as well as of abstraction inseparable from works of art as well as nature. We are to keep the human form distinct from that of other living beings, that of men from that of women; we are to distinguish between age and infancy, between thoughtfulness and gaiety, between strength and softness. Where is this to stop? But Sir Joshua turns round upon himself in this very passage, and says, "No: we are to unite the strength of the Hercules with the delicacy of the Apollo; for perfect beauty in any species must combine all the characters which are beautiful in that species." Now if these different characters are beautiful in themselves, why not give them for their own sakes and in their most striking appearances, instead of qualifying and softening them down in a neutral form; which must produce a compromise, not a union of different excellences. If all excess of beauty, if all character is deformity, then we must try to lose it as fast as possible in other qualities. But if strength is an excellence, if activity is an excellence, if delicacy is an excellence, then the perfection, *i. e.* the highest degree of each of these qualities cannot be attained but by remaining satisfied with a less degree of the rest. But let us hear

what Sir Joshua himself advances on this subject in another part of the Discourses.

“Some excellencies bear to be united, and are improved by union: others are of a discordant nature: and the attempt to unite them only produces a harsh jarring of incongruent principles. The attempt to unite contrary excellencies (of form, for instance*) in a single figure, *can never escape degenerating into the monstrous but by sinking into the insipid; by taking away its marked character, and weakening its expression.*

“Obvious as these remarks appear, there are many writers on our art, who not being of the profession, and consequently not knowing what can or cannot be done, have been very liberal of absurd praises in their description of favourite works. They always find in them what they are resolved to find. They praise excellencies that can hardly exist together; and above all things are fond of describing with great exactness the expression of a mixed passion, which more particularly appears to me out of the reach of our art†.”

* These are Sir Joshua's words.

† I do not know that: but I do not think the two passions could be expressed by expressing neither or something between both.

“Such are many disquisitions which I have read on some of the Cartoons and other pictures of Raffaele, where the critics have described their own imaginations; or indeed where the excellent master himself may have attempted this expression of passions above the powers of the art; and has, therefore, by an indistinct and imperfect marking, left room for every imagination with equal probability to find a passion of his own. What has been, and what can be done in the art, is sufficiently difficult: we need not be mortified or discouraged at not being able to execute the conceptions of a romantic imagination. Art has its boundaries, though imagination has none. We can easily, like the ancients, suppose a Jupiter to be possessed of all those powers and perfections which the subordinate Deities were endowed with separately. Yet when they employed their art to represent him, they confined his character to majesty alone. Pliny, therefore, though we are under great obligations to him for the information he has given us in relation to the works of the ancient artists, is very frequently wrong when he speaks of them, which he does very often, in the style of many of our modern connoisseurs. He observes that in a statue of Paris, by Euphranor, you might discover at the same time

three different characters; the dignity of a Judge of the Goddesses, the Lover of Helen, and the Conqueror of Achilles. A statue in which you endeavour to unite stately dignity, youthful elegance, and stern valour, must surely possess none of these to any eminent degree.

“ From hence it appears, that there is much difficulty as well as danger in an endeavour to concentrate in a single subject those various powers, which, rising from various points, naturally move in different directions.”—Vol. I. p. 120.

What real clue to the art or sound principles of judging the student can derive from these contradictory statements, or in what manner it is possible to reconcile them one to the other, I confess I am at a loss to discover. As it appears to me, all the varieties of nature in the infinite number of its qualities, combinations, characters, expressions, incidents, &c. rise from distinct points or centres and must move in distinct directions, as the forms of different species are to be referred to a separate standard. It is the object of art to bring them out in all their force, clearness, and precision, and not to blend them into a vague, vapid, nondescript *ideal* conception, which pretends to unite, but in reality destroys. Sir Joshua's theory limits na-

ture and paralyses art. According to him, the middle form or the average of our various impressions is the source from which all beauty, pleasure, interest, imagination springs. I contend on the contrary that this very variety is good in itself, nor do I agree with him that the whole of nature as it exists in fact is stark naught, and that there is nothing worthy of the contemplation of a wise man but that *ideal perfection* which never existed in the world nor even on canvas. There is something fastidious and sickly in Sir Joshua's system. His code of taste consists too much of negations, and not enough of positive, prominent qualities. It accounts for nothing but the beauty of the common Antique, and hardly for that. The merit of Hogarth, I grant, is different from that of the Greek statues; but I deny that Hogarth is to be measured by this standard or by Sir Joshua's middle forms: he has powers of instruction and amusement that "rising from a different point, naturally move in a different direction," and completely attain their end. It would be just as reasonable to condemn a comedy for not having the pathos of a tragedy or the stateliness of an epic poem. If Sir Joshua Reynolds's theory were true, Dr. Johnson's *Irene* would be a better tragedy than any of Shakespear's.

The reasoning of the Discourses is, I think then, deficient in the following particulars.

1. It seems to imply that general effect in a picture is produced by leaving out the details, whereas the largest masses and the grandest outline are consistent with the utmost delicacy of finishing in the parts.

2. It makes no distinction between beauty and grandeur, but refers both to an *ideal* or middle form, as the centre of the various forms of the species, and yet inconsistently attributes the grandeur of Michael Angelo's style to the superhuman appearance of his prophets and apostles.

3. It does not at any time make mention of power or magnitude in an object as a distinct source of the sublime (though this is acknowledged unintentionally in the case of Michael Angelo, &c.) nor of softness or symmetry of form as a distinct source of beauty, independently of, though still in connection with another source arising from what we are accustomed to expect from each individual species.

4. Sir Joshua's theory does not leave room for character, but rejects it as an anomaly.

5. It does not point out the source of expression, but considers it as hostile to beauty; and yet, lastly, he allows that the middle form,

carried to the utmost theoretical extent, neither defined by character, nor impregnated by passion, would produce nothing but vague, insipid, unmeaning generality.

In a word, I cannot think that the theory here laid down is clear and satisfactory, that it is consistent with itself, that it accounts for the various excellences of art from a few simple principles, or that the method which Sir Joshua has pursued in treating the subject is, as he himself expresses it, "*a plain and honest method.*" It is, I fear, more calculated to baffle and perplex the student in his progress, than to give him clear lights as to the object he should have in view, or to furnish him with strong motives of emulation to attain it.

ESSAY XV.

ON PARADOX AND COMMON-PLACE.

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I HAVE been sometimes accused of a fondness for paradoxes, but I cannot in my own mind plead guilty to the charge. I do not indeed swear by an opinion, because it is old: but neither do I fall in love with every extravagance at first sight, because it is new. I conceive that a thing may have been repeated a thousand times, without being a bit more reasonable than it was the first time: and I also conceive that an argument or an observation may be very just, though it may so happen that it was never stated before. But I do not take it for granted that every prejudice is ill-founded; nor that every paradox is self-evident, merely because it contradicts the vulgar opinion. Sheridan once said of some speech in his acute, sarcastic way, that "it contained a great deal both of what was new and what was true: but that unfortunately what was new was not true, and what was true was not new." This appears to me

to express the whole sense of the question. I do not see much use in dwelling on a common-place, however fashionable or well-established: nor am I very ambitious of starting the most specious novelty, unless I imagine I have reason on my side. Originality implies independence of opinion; but differs as widely from mere singularity as from the tritest truism. It consists in seeing and thinking for one's-self: whereas singularity is only the affectation of saying something to contradict other people, without having any real opinion of one's own upon the matter. Mr. Burke was an original, though an extravagant writer: Mr. Windham was a regular manufacturer of paradoxes.

The greatest number of minds seem utterly incapable of fixing on any conclusion, except from the pressure of custom and authority: opposed to these, there is another class less numerous but pretty formidable, who in all their opinions are equally under the influence of novelty and restless vanity. The prejudices of the one are counter-balanced by the paradoxes of the other; and folly, "putting in one scale a weight of ignorance, in that of pride," might be said to "smile delighted with the eternal poise." A sincere and manly spirit of inquiry is neither blinded by example nor dazzled by

sudden flashes of light. Nature is always the same, the store-house of lasting truth, and teeming with inexhaustible variety; and he who looks at her with steady and well-practised eyes, will find enough to employ all his sagacity, whether it has or has not been seen by others before him. Strange as it may seem, to learn what any object is, the true philosopher looks at the object itself, instead of turning to others to know what they think or say or have heard of it, or instead of consulting the dictates of his vanity, petulance, and ingenuity to see what can be said against their opinion, and to prove himself wiser than all the rest of the world. For want of this, the real powers and resources of the mind are lost and dissipated in a conflict of opinions and passions, of obstinacy against levity, of bigotry against self-conceit, of notorious abuses against rash innovations, of dull, plodding, old-fashioned stupidity against new-fangled folly, of worldly interest against head-strong egotism, of the incorrigible prejudices of the old and the unmanageable humours of the young; while truth lies in the middle, and is overlooked by both parties. Or as Luther complained long ago, "human reason is like a drunken man on horse-back: set it up on one side, and it tumbles over on the other."—

With one sort, example, authority, fashion, ease, interest, rule all: with the other, singularity, the love of distinction, mere whim, the throwing off all restraint and shewing an heroic disregard of consequences, an impatient and unsettled turn of mind, the want of sudden and strong excitement, of some new play-thing for the imagination, are equally "lords of the ascendant," and are at every step getting the start of reason, truth, nature, common sense and feeling. With one party, whatever is, is right: with their antagonists, whatever is, is wrong. These swallow every antiquated absurdity: those catch at every new, unfledged project—and are alike enchanted with the velocipedes or the French Revolution. One set, wrapped up in impenetrable forms and technical traditions, are deaf to every thing that has not been dinned in their ears, and in those of their forefathers, from time immemorial: their hearing is *thick* with the same old saws, the same unmeaning form of words, everlastingly repeated: the others pique themselves on a jargon of their own, a Babylonish dialect, crude, unconcocted, harsh, discordant, to which it is impossible for any one else to attach either meaning or respect. These last turn away at the mention of all usages, creeds, institutions of more than a day's

standing as a mass of bigotry, superstition, and barbarous ignorance, whose leaden touch would petrify and benumb their quick, mercurial, "apprehensive, forgetive" faculties. The opinion of to-day supersedes that of yesterday: that of to-morrow supersedes, by anticipation, that of to-day. The wisdom of the ancients, the doctrines of the learned, the laws of nations, the common sentiments of morality, are to them like a bundle of old almanacs. As the modern politician always asks for this day's paper, the modern sciolist always inquires after the latest paradox. With him instinct is a dotard, nature a changeling, and common sense a discarded bye-word. As with the man of the world, what every body says must be true, the citizen of the world has a quite different notion of the matter. With the one the majority, "the powers that be," have always been in the right in all ages and places, though they have been cutting one another's throats and turning the world upside down with their quarrels and disputes from the beginning of time: with the other, what any two people have ever agreed in, is an error on the face of it. The credulous bigot shudders at the idea of altering any thing in "time-hallowed" institutions; and under this cant-phrase can bring himself to tolerate any knavery,

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or any folly, the Inquisition, Holy Oil, the Right Divine, &c. the more refined sceptic will laugh in your face at the idea of retaining any thing which has the damning stamp of custom upon it, and is for abating all former precedents, "all trivial, fond records," the whole frame and fabric of society as a nuisance in the lump. Is not this a pair of wiseacres well-matched? The one stickles through thick and thin for his own religion and government: the other scouts all religions and all governments with a smile of ineffable disdain. The one will not move for any consideration out of the broad and beaten path: the other is continually turning off at right angles, and losing himself in the labyrinths of his own ignorance and presumption. The one will not go along with any party; the other always joins the strongest side. The one will not conform to any common practice; the other will subscribe to any thriving system. The one is the slave of habit, the other is the sport of caprice. The first is like a man obstinately bed-rid: the last is troubled with St. Vitus's dance. He cannot stand still, he cannot rest upon any conclusion. "He never is—but always to be *right*."

The author of the Prometheus Unbound (to take an individual instance of the last character)

has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. He is sanguine-complexioned, and shrill-voiced. As is often observable in the case of religious enthusiasts, there is a slenderness of constitutional *stamina*, which renders the flesh no match for the spirit. His bending, flexible form appears to take no strong hold of things, does not grapple with the world about him, but slides from it like a river—

“ And in its liquid texture mortal wound
Receives no more than can the fluid air.”

The shock of accident, the weight of authority make no impression on his opinions, which retire like a feather, or rise from the encounter unhurt, through their own buoyancy. He is clogged by no dull system of realities, no earth-bound feelings, no rooted prejudices, by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit, but is drawn up by irresistible levity to the regions of mere speculation and fancy, to the sphere of air and fire, where his delighted spirit floats in “ seas of pearl and clouds of amber.” There is no *caput mortuum* of worn-out, thread-bare experience to serve as ballast to his mind ; it is all volatile intellectual

salt of tartar, that refuses to combine its evanescent, inflammable essence with any thing solid or any thing lasting. Bubbles are to him the only realities:—touch them, and they vanish. Curiosity is the only proper category of his mind, and though a man in knowledge, he is a child in feeling. Hence he puts every thing into a metaphysical crucible to judge of it himself and exhibit it to others as a subject of interesting experiment, without first making it over to the ordeal of his common sense or trying it on his heart. This faculty of speculating at random on all questions may in its overgrown and uninformed state do much mischief without intending it, like an overgrown child with the power of a man. Mr. Shelley has been accused of vanity—I think he is chargeable with extreme levity; but this levity is so great, that I do not believe he is sensible of its consequences. He strives to overturn all established creeds and systems: but this is in him an effect of constitution. He runs before the most extravagant opinions, but this is because he is held back by none of the merely mechanical checks of sympathy and habit. He tampers with all sorts of obnoxious subjects, but it is less because he is gratified with the rankness of the taint, than

captivated with the intellectual phosphoric light they emit. It would seem that he wished not so much to convince or inform as to shock the public by the tenor of his productions, but I suspect he is more intent upon startling himself with his electrical experiments in morals and philosophy; and though they may scorch other people, they are to him harmless amusements, the coruscations of an Aurora Borealis, that "play round the head, but do not reach the heart." Still I could wish that he would put a stop to the incessant, alarming whirl of his Voltaic battery. With his zeal, his talent, and his fancy, he would do more good and less harm, if he were to give up his wilder theories, and if he took less pleasure in feeling his heart flutter in unison with the panic-struck apprehensions of his readers. Persons of this class, instead of consolidating useful and acknowledged truths, and thus advancing the cause of science and virtue, are never easy but in raising doubtful and disagreeable questions, which bring the former into disgrace and discredit. They are not contented to lead the minds of men to an eminence overlooking the prospect of social amelioration, unless, by forcing them up slippery paths and to the utmost verge of possibility, they can dash them down the pre-

cipice the instant they reach the promised Pisgah. They think it nothing to hang up a beacon to guide or warn, if they do not at the same time frighten the community like a comet. They do not mind making their principles odious, provided they can make themselves notorious. To win over the public opinion by fair means is to them an insipid, common-place mode of popularity: they would either force it by harsh methods, or seduce it by intoxicating potions. Egotism, petulance, licentiousness, levity of principle (whatever be the source) is a bad thing in any one, and most of all, in a philosophical reformer. Their humanity, their wisdom is always "at the horizon." Any thing new, any thing remote, any thing questionable, comes to them in a shape that is sure of a cordial welcome—a welcome cordial in proportion as the object is new, as it is apparently impracticable, as it is a doubt whether it is at all desirable. Just after the final failure, the completion of the last act of the French Revolution, when the legitimate wits were crying out, "The farce is over, now let us go to supper," these provoking reasoners got up a lively hypothesis about introducing the domestic government of the Nays into this country as a feasible set-off against the success of the Boroughmongers.

The practical is with them always the antipodes of the ideal; and like other visionaries of a different stamp, they date the Millennium or New Order of Things from the Restoration of the Bourbons. Fine words butter no parsnips, says the proverb. "While you are talking of marrying, I am thinking of hanging," says Captain Macheath. Of all people the most tormenting are those who bid you hope in the midst of despair, who, by never caring about any thing but their own sanguine, hair-brained Utopian schemes, have at no time any particular cause for embarrassment and despondency because they have never the least chance of success, and who by including whatever does not hit their idle fancy, kings, priests, religion, government, public abuses or private morals, in the same sweeping clause of ban and anathema, do all they can to combine all parties in a common cause against them, and to prevent every one else from advancing one step farther in the career of practical improvement than they do in that of imaginary and unattainable perfection.

Besides, all this untoward heat and precocity often argues rottenness and a falling-off. I myself remember several instances of this sort of unrestrained license of opinion and violent

effervescence of sentiment in the first period of the French Revolution. Extremes meet: and the most furious anarchists have since become the most barefaced apostates. Among the foremost of these I might mention the present poet-laureate and some of his friends. The prose-writers on that side of the question, Mr. Godwin, Mr. Bentham, &c. have not turned round in this extraordinary manner; they seem to have felt their ground (however mistaken in some points) and have in general adhered to their first principles. But "poets (as it has been said) have *such seething brains*, that they are disposed to meddle with every thing, and mar all. They make bad philosophers and worse politicians*. They live, for the most part, in an ideal world of their own; and it would perhaps be as well

* "As for politics, I think poets are *tories* by nature, supposing them to be by nature poets. The love of an individual person or family, that has worn a crown for many successions, is an inclination greatly adapted to the fanciful tribe. On the other hand, mathematicians, abstract reasoners, of no manner of attachment to persons, at least to the visible part of them, but prodigiously devoted to the ideas of virtue, liberty, and so forth, are generally *whigs*. It happens agreeably enough to this maxim, that the whigs are friends to that wise, plodding, unpoetical people, the Dutch."—Shenstone's Letters, 1746, p. 105.

if they were confined to it. Their flights and fancies are delightful to themselves and to every body else: but they make strange work with matter of fact; and if they were allowed to act in public affairs, would soon turn the world the wrong side out. They indulge only their own flattering dreams or superstitious prejudices, and make idols or bug-bears of whatever they please, caring as little for history or particular facts as for general reasoning. They are dangerous leaders and treacherous followers. Their inordinate vanity runs them into all sorts of extravagances; and their habitual effeminacy gets them out of them at any price. Always pampering their own appetite for excitement, and wishing to astonish others, their whole aim is to produce a dramatic effect, one way or other—to shock or delight the observers; and they are apparently as indifferent to the consequences of what they write, as if the world were merely a stage for them to play their fantastic tricks on, and to make their admirers weep.—Not less romantic in their servility than their independence, and equally importunate candidates for fame or infamy, they require only to be distinguished, and are not scrupulous as to the means of distinction. Jacobins or Anti-Jacobins—outrage-

ous advocates for anarchy and licentiousness, or flaming apostles of political persecution—always violent and vulgar in their opinions; they oscillate, with a giddy and sickening motion, from one absurdity to another, and expiate the follies of youth by the heartless vices of advancing age. None so ready as they to carry every paradox to its most revolting and ridiculous excess—none so sure to caricature, in their own persons, every feature of the prevailing philosophy! In their days of blissful innovation, indeed, the philosophers crept at their heels like hounds, while they darted on their distant quarry like hawks; stooping always to the lowest game; eagerly snuffing up the most tainted and rankest scents; feeding their vanity with a notion of the strength of their digestion of poisons, and most ostentatiously avowing whatever would most effectually startle the prejudices of others*. Preposterously seeking for

* To give the modern reader *un petit aperçu* of the tone of literary conversation about five or six and twenty years ago, I remember being present in a large party composed of men, women, and children, in which two persons of remarkable candour and ingenuity were labouring (as hard as if they had been paid for it) to prove that all prayer was a mode of dictating to the Almighty, and an arrogant assump-

the stimulus of novelty in abstract truth, and the eclat of theatrical exhibition in pure reason, it is no wonder that these persons at last became disgusted with their own pursuits, and that, in consequence of the violence of the change, the most inveterate prejudices and uncharitable

tion of superiority. A gentleman present said, with great simplicity and *naïveté*, that there was one prayer which did not strike him as coming exactly under this description, and being asked what that was, made answer, "The Samaritan's—'Lord, Be merciful to me a sinner!'" This appeal by no means settled the sceptical dogmatism of the two disputants, and soon after the proposer of the objection went away; on which one of them observed with great marks of satisfaction and triumph—"I am afraid we have shocked that gentleman's prejudices." This did not appear to me at that time quite the thing, and this happened in the year 1794.—Twice has the iron entered my soul. Twice have the dastard, vaunting, venal crew gone over it; once as they went forth, conquering and to conquer, with reason by their side, glittering like a faulchion, trampling on prejudices and marching fearlessly on in the work of regeneration; once again, when they returned with retrograde steps, like Cacus's oxen dragged backward by the heels, to the den of Legitimacy, "rout on rout, confusion worse confounded," with places and pensions and the Quarterly Review dangling from their pockets, and shouting "Deliverance for mankind," for "the worst, the second fall of man." Yet I have endured all this marching and countermarching of poets, philosophers, and politicians over my head as well as I could, like "the camomil that thrives, the more 'tis trod upon." By Heavens, I think, I'll endure it no longer!

sentiments have rushed in to fill up the void produced by the previous annihilation of common sense, wisdom, and humanity!"

I have so far been a little hard on poets and reformers. Lest I should be thought to have taken a particular spite to them, I will try to make them the *amende honorable* by turning to a passage in the writings of one who neither is nor ever pretended to be a poet or a reformer, but the antithesis of both, an accomplished man of the world, a courtier, and a wit, and who has endeavoured to move the previous question on all schemes of fanciful improvement, and all plans of practical reform, by the following declaration. It is in itself a finished *common-place*; and may serve as a test whether that sort of smooth, verbal reasoning which passes current because it excites no one idea in the mind, is much freer from inherent absurdity than the wildest paradox.

"My lot," says Mr. Canning in the conclusion of his Liverpool speech, "is cast under the British Monarchy. Under that I have lived; under that I have seen my country flourish*; under that I have seen it enjoy as great a share of prosperity, of happiness, and

* Troja fuit.

of glory, as I believe any modification of human society to be capable of bestowing; and I am not prepared to sacrifice or to hazard the fruit of centuries of experience, of centuries of struggles, and of more than one century of liberty, as perfect as ever blessed any country upon the earth, for visionary schemes of ideal perfectibility, for doubtful experiments even of possible improvement.”—*Mr. Canning’s Speech at the Liverpool Dinner, given in celebration of his Re-election, March 18, 1820. Fourth Edition, revised and corrected.*

Such is Mr. Canning’s common-place; and in giving the following answer to it, I do not think I can be accused of falling into that extravagant and unmitigated strain of paradoxical reasoning, with which I have already found so much fault.

The passage then which the gentleman here throws down as an effectual bar to all change, to all innovation, to all improvement, contains at every step a refutation of his favourite creed. He is not “prepared to sacrifice or to hazard the fruit of centuries of experience, of centuries of struggles, and of one century of liberty, for visionary schemes of ideal perfectibility.” So here are centuries of experience and centuries of struggles to arrive at *one century of liberty*;

and yet according to Mr. Canning's general advice, we are never to make any experiments or to engage in any struggles either with a view to future improvement, or to recover benefits which we have lost. Man (they repeat it in our ears, line upon line, precept upon precept) is always to turn his back upon the future, and his face to the past. He is to believe that nothing is possible or desirable but what he finds already established to his hands in time-worn institutions or inveterate abuses. His understanding is to be buried in implicit creeds, and he himself is to be made into a political automaton, a go-cart of superstition and prejudice, never stirring hand or foot but as he is pulled by the wires and strings of the state-conjurors, the legitimate managers and proprietors of the shew. His powers of will, of thought, and action are to be paralysed in him, and he is to be told and to believe that whatever is, must be. Perhaps Mr. Canning will say that men were to make experiments, and to resolve upon struggles formerly, but that now they are to surrender their understandings and their rights into his keeping. But at what period of the world was the system of political wisdom *stereotyped*, like Mr. Cobbett's "Gold against Paper," so as to admit of

no farther alterations or improvements, or correction of errors of the press? When did the experience of mankind become stationary or retrograde, so that we must act from the obsolete inferences of past periods, not from the living impulse of existing circumstances, and the consolidated force of the knowledge and reflection of ages up to the present instant, naturally projecting us forward into the future, and not driving us back upon the past? Did Mr. Canning never hear, did he never think, of Lord Bacon's axiom, "That those times are the ancient times in which we live, and not those which counting backwards from ourselves, *ordine retrogrado*, we call ancient?" The latest periods must necessarily have the advantage of the sum-total of the experience that has gone before them, and of the sum-total of human reason exerted upon that experience, or upon the solid foundation of nature and history, moving on in its majestic course, not fluttering in the empty air of fanciful speculation, nor leaving a gap of centuries between us and the long-mouldered grounds on which we are to think and act. Mr. Canning cannot plead with Mr. Burke that no discoveries, no improvements have been made in political science and institutions; for he says we have arrived through

centuries of experience and of struggles at one century of liberty. Is the world then at a stand? Mr. Canning knows well enough that it is in ceaseless progress and everlasting change, but he would have it to be the change from liberty to slavery, the progress of corruption, not of regeneration and reform. Why, no longer ago than the present year, the two epochs of November and January last presented (he tells us in this very speech) as great a contrast in the state of the country as any two periods of its history the most opposite or most remote. Well then, are our experience and our struggles at an end? No, he says, "the crisis is at hand for every man to take part for, or against the institutions of the British Monarchy." His part is taken: "but of this be sure, to do aught good will never be his task!" He will guard carefully against all possible improvements, and maintain all possible abuses sacred, impassive, immortal. He will not give up the fruit of centuries of experience, of struggles, and of one century at least of liberty, since the Revolution of 1688, for any doubtful experiments whatever. We are arrived at the end of our experience, our struggles, and our liberty—and are to anchor through time and eternity in the harbour of passive obedience

and non-resistance. We (the people of England) will tell Mr. Canning frankly what we think of his magnanimous and ulterior resolution. It is our own; and it has been the resolution of mankind in all ages of the world. No people, no age, ever threw away the fruits of past wisdom, or the enjoyment of present blessings, for visionary schemes of ideal perfection. It is the knowledge of the past, the actual infliction of the present, that has produced all changes, all innovations, and all improvements—not (as is pretended) the chimerical anticipation of possible advantages, but the intolerable pressure of long-established, notorious, aggravated, and growing abuses. It was the experience of the enormous and disgusting abuses and corruptions of the Papal power that produced the Reformation. It was the experience of the vexations and oppressions of the feudal system that produced its abolition after centuries of sufferings and of struggles. It was the experience of the caprice and tyranny of the Monarch that extorted *Magna Charta* at Runnymede. It was the experience of the arbitrary and insolent abuse of the prerogative in the reigns of the Tudors and the first Stuarts that produced the resistance to it in the reign of Charles I. and the Grand Rebellion. It was

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the experience of the incorrigible attachment of the same Stuarts to Popery and Slavery, with their many acts of cruelty, treachery, and bigotry, that produced the Revolution, and set the House of Brunswick on the Throne. It was the conviction of the incurable nature of the abuse, increasing with time and patience, and overcoming the obstinate attachment to old habits and prejudices, an attachment not to be rooted out by fancy or theory, but only by repeated, lasting, and incontrovertible proofs, that has abated every nuisance that ever was abated, and introduced every innovation and every example of revolution and reform. It was the experience of the abuses, licentiousness, and innumerable oppressions of the old Government in France that produced the French Revolution. It was the experience of the determination of the British Ministry to harass, insult, and plunder them, that produced the Revolution of the United States. Away then with this miserable cant against fanciful theories, and appeal to acknowledged experience! Men never act against their prejudices but from the spur of their feelings, the necessity of their situations—their theories are adapted to their practical convictions and their varying circumstances. Nature has ordered it

so, and Mr. Canning, by shewing off his rhetorical paces, by his "ambling and lispings and nicknaming God's creatures," cannot invert that order, efface the history of the past, or arrest the progress of the future.—Public opinion is the result of public events and public feelings; and government must be moulded by that opinion, or maintain itself in opposition to it by the sword. Mr. Canning indeed will not consent that the social machine should in any case receive a different direction from what it has had, "lest it should be hurried over the precipice and dashed to pieces." These warnings of national ruin and terrific accounts of political precipices put one in mind of Edgar's exaggerations to Gloster: they make one's hair stand on end in the perusal; but the poor old man, like poor Old England, could fall no lower than he was. Mr. Montgomery, the ingenious and amiable poet, after he had been shut up in solitary confinement for a year and a half for printing the Duke of Richmond's Letter on Reform, when he first walked out into the narrow path of the adjoining field, was seized with an apprehension that he should fall over it, as if he had trod on the brink of an abrupt declivity. The author of the loyal Speech at the Liverpool Dinner has been so long kept in

the solitary confinement of his prejudices, and the dark cells of his interest and vanity, that he is afraid of being dashed to pieces if he makes a single false step, to the right or the left, from his dangerous and crooked policy. As to himself, his ears are no doubt closed to any advice that might here be offered him; and as to his country, he seems bent on its destruction. If, however, an example of the futility of all his projects and all his reasonings on a broader scale, "to warn and scare, be wanting," let him look at Spain, and take leisure to recover from his incredulity and his surprise. Spain, as Ferdinand, as the Monarchy, has fallen from its pernicious height, never to rise again: Spain, as Spain, as the Spanish people, has risen from the tomb of liberty, never (it is to be hoped) to sink again under the yoke of the bigot and the oppressor!

ESSAY XVI.
ON VULGARITY AND AFFECTATION.

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Few subjects are more nearly allied than these two—vulgarity and affectation. It may be said of them truly that “thin partitions do their bounds divide.” There cannot be a surer proof of a low origin or of an innate meanness of disposition, than to be always talking and thinking of being genteel. One must feel a strong tendency to that which one is always trying to avoid: whenever we pretend, on all occasions, a mighty contempt for any thing, it is a pretty clear sign that we feel ourselves very nearly on a level with it. Of the two classes of people, I hardly know which is to be regarded with most distaste, the vulgar aping the genteel, or the genteel constantly sneering at and endeavouring to distinguish themselves from the vulgar. These two sets of persons are always thinking of one another; the lower of the higher with envy, the more fortunate of their less happy neighbours with contempt. They are habitually

placed in opposition to each other; jostle in their pretensions at every turn; and the same objects and train of thought (only reversed by the relative situation of either party) occupy their whole time and attention. The one are straining every nerve, and outraging common sense, to be thought genteel; the others have no other object or idea in their heads than not to be thought vulgar. This is but poor spite; a very pitiful style of ambition. To be merely not that which one heartily despises, is a very humble claim to superiority: to despise what one really is, is still worse. Most of the characters in Miss Burney's novels, the Branghtons, the Smiths, the Dubsters, the Cecilians, the Delvilles, &c. are well met in this respect, and much of a piece: the one half are trying not to be taken for themselves, and the other half not to be taken for the first. They neither of them have any pretensions of their own, or real standard of worth. "A feather will turn the scale of their avoirdupois:" though the fair authoress was not aware of the metaphysical identity of her principal and subordinate characters. Affectation is the master-key to both.

Gentility is only a more select and artificial kind of vulgarity. It cannot exist but by a sort of borrowed distinction. It plumes itself

up and revels in the homely pretensions of the mass of mankind. It judges of the worth of every thing by name, fashion, opinion; and hence, from the conscious absence of real qualities or sincere satisfaction in itself, it builds its supercilious and fantastic conceit on the wretchedness and wants of others. Violent antipathies are always suspicious, and betray a secret affinity. The difference between the "Great Vulgar and the Small" is mostly in outward circumstances. The coxcomb criticises the dress of the clown, as the pedant cavils at the bad grammar of the illiterate, or the prude is shocked at the backslidings of her frail acquaintance. Those who have the fewest resources in themselves, naturally seek the food of their self-love elsewhere. The most ignorant people find most to laugh at in strangers: scandal and satire prevail most in country-places; and a propensity to ridicule every the slightest or most palpable deviation from what we happen to approve, ceases with the progress of common sense and decency*. True worth

* "If an European, when he has cut off his beard and put false hair on his head, or bound up his own natural hair in regular hard knots, as unlike nature as he can possibly make it; and after having rendered them immoveable by the help of the fat of hogs, has covered the whole with

does not exult in the faults and deficiencies of others; as true refinement turns away from grossness and deformity, instead of being tempted to indulge in an unmanly triumph over it. Raphael would not faint away at the daubing of a sign-post, nor Homer hold his head the higher for being in the company of a Grub-street bard. Real power, real excellence, does not seek for a foil in inferiority; nor fear contamination from coming in contact with that which is coarse and homely. It reposes on itself, and is equally free from spleen and affectation. But the spirit of gentility is the mere essence of spleen and affectation;—of affected delight in its own *would-be* qualifications, and of ineffable disdain poured out upon the involuntary blunders or accidental disadvantages of those whom it chooses to treat as its inferiors.—Thus a fashionable Miss titters

flour, laid on by a machine with the utmost regularity; if when thus attired he issues forth, and meets a Cherokee Indian, who has bestowed as much time at his toilet, and laid on with equal care and attention his yellow and red oker on particular parts of his forehead or cheeks, as he judges most becoming; whoever of these two despises the other for this attention to the fashion of his country, whichever first feels himself provoked to laugh, is the barbarian.”
—Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Discourses, Vol. I. p. 231—2.

till she is ready to burst her sides at the uncouth shape of a bonnet, or the abrupt drop of a courtesy (such as Jeanie Deans would make) in a country-girl who comes to be hired by her Mamma as a servant:—yet to shew how little foundation there is for this hysterical expression of her extreme good opinion of herself and contempt for the untutored rustic, she would herself the next day be delighted with the very same shaped bonnet if brought her by a French milliner and told it was all the fashion, and in a week's time will become quite familiar with the maid, and chatter with her (upon equal terms) about caps and ribbons and lace by the hour together. There is no difference between them but that of situation in the kitchen or in the parlour: let circumstances bring them together, and they fit like hand and glove. It is like mistress, like maid. Their talk, their thoughts, their dreams, their likings and dislikes are the same. The mistress's head runs continually on dress and finery, so does the maid's: the young lady longs to ride in a coach and six, so does the maid, if she could: Miss forms a *beau ideal* of a lover with black eyes and rosy cheeks, which does not differ from that of her attendant: both like a smart man, the one the footman and the other his master, for the same

reason : both like handsome furniture and fine houses : both apply the terms, *shocking* and *disagreeable*, to the same things and persons : both have a great notion of balls, plays, treats, song-books and love-tales : both like a wedding or a christening, and both would give their little fingers to see a coronation, with this difference, that the one has a chance of getting a seat at it, and the other is dying with envy that she has not.—Indeed, this last is a ceremony that delights equally the greatest monarch and the meanest of his subjects—the vilest of the rabble. Yet this which is the height of gentility and the consummation of external distinction and splendour, is, I should say, a vulgar ceremony. For what degree of refinement, of capacity, of virtue is required in the individual who is so distinguished, or is necessary to his enjoying this idle and imposing parade of his person? Is he delighted with the state-coach and gilded pannels? So is the poorest wretch that gazes at it. Is he struck with the spirit, the beauty and symmetry of the eight cream-coloured horses? There is not one of the immense multitude, who flock to see the sight from town or country, St. Giles's or Whitechapel, young or old, rich or poor, gentle or simple, who does not agree to admire the same object. Is he delighted with

the yeomen of the guard, the military escort, the groups of ladies, the badges of sovereign power, the kingly crown, the marshal's truncheon and the judge's robe, the array that precedes and follows him, the crowded streets, the windows hung with eager looks? So are the mob, for they "have eyes and see them!" There is no one faculty of mind or body, natural or acquired, essential to the principal figure in this procession, more than is common to the meanest and most despised attendant on it. A wax-work figure would answer the same purpose: a Lord Mayor of London has as much tinsel to be proud of. I would rather have a king do something that no one else has the power or magnanimity to do, or say something that no one else has the wisdom to say, or look more handsome, more thoughtful, or benign than any one else in his dominions. But I see nothing to raise one's idea of him in his being made a shew of: if the pageant would do as well without the man, the man would do as well without the pageant! Kings have been declared to be "lovers of low company:" and this maxim, besides the reason sometimes assigned for it, *viz.* that they meet with less opposition to their wills from such persons, will I suspect be found to turn at last on the consideration I am here stating, that they also meet

with more sympathy in their tastes. The most ignorant and thoughtless have the greatest admiration of the baubles, the outward symbols of pomp and power, the sound and shew, which are the habitual delight and mighty prerogative of kings. The stupidest slave worships the gaudiest tyrant. The same gross motives appeal to the same gross capacities, flatter the pride of the superior and excite the servility of the dependant: whereas a higher reach of moral and intellectual refinement might seek in vain for higher proofs of internal worth and inherent majesty in the object of its idolatry, and not finding the divinity lodged within, the unreasonable expectation raised would probably end in mortification on both sides!—There is little to distinguish a king from his subjects but the rabble's shout—if he loses that and is reduced to the forlorn hope of gaining the suffrages of the wise and good, he is of all men the most miserable.—But enough of this.

“I like it,” says Miss Branghton* in *Evelina* (meaning the Opera) “because it is not vulgar.”

* This name was originally spelt Braughton in the Manuscript, and was altered to Branghton by a mistake of the printer. Braughton, however, was thought a good name for the occasion and was suffered to stand. “Dip it in the ocean,” as Sterne's barber says of the buckle, “and it will stand!”

That is, she likes it, not because there is any thing to like in it, but because other people are prevented from liking or knowing any thing about it. Janus Weathercock, Esq. laugheth to scorn and spitefully entreateth and hugely condemneth my dramatic criticisms in the London, for a like exquisite reason. I must therefore make an example of him *in terrorem* to all such hypercritics. He finds fault with me and calls my taste vulgar, because I go to Sadler's Wells ("a place he has heard of"—O Lord, Sir!)—because I notice the Miss Dennetts, "great favourites with the Whitechapel orders"—praise Miss Valancy, "a bouncing Columbine at Ashley's and them there places, as his barber informs him" (has he no way of establishing himself in his own good opinion but by triumphing over his barber's bad English?)—and finally, because I recognise the existence of the Cobourg and the Surrey theatres, at the names of which he cries "Faugh" with great significance, as if he had some personal disgust at them, and yet he would be supposed never to have entered them. It is not his cue as a well-bred critic. *C'est beau ça*. Now this appears to me a very crude, unmeaning, indiscriminate, wholesale and vulgar way of thinking. It is prejudging things in the lump, by names and places and classes,

instead of judging of them by what they are in themselves, by their real qualities and shades of distinction. There is no selection, truth, or delicacy in such a mode of proceeding. It is affecting ignorance, and making it a title to wisdom. It is a vapid assumption of superiority. It is exceeding impertinence. It is rank coxcombry. It is nothing in the world else. To condemn because the multitude admire is as essentially vulgar as to admire because they admire. There is no exercise of taste or judgment in either case: both are equally repugnant to good sense, and of the two I should prefer the good-natured side. I would as soon agree with my barber as differ from him: and why should I make a point of reversing the sentence of the Whitechapel orders? Or how can it affect my opinion of the merits of an actor at the Cobourg or the Surrey theatres, that these theatres are in or out of the Bills of Mortality? This is an easy, short-hand way of judging, as gross as it is mechanical. It is not a difficult matter to settle questions of taste by consulting the map of London, or to prove your liberality by geographical distinctions. Janus jumbles things together strangely. If he had seen Mr. Kean in a provincial theatre, at Exeter or Taunton, he would have thought it

vulgar to admire him : but when he had been stamped in London, Janus would no doubt shew his discernment and the subtlety of his tact for the display of character and passion, by not being behind the fashion. The Miss Dennetts are "little unformed girls," for no other reason than because they danced at one of the Minor Theatres : let them but come out on the Opera boards, and let the beauty and fashion of the season greet them with a fairy shower of delighted applause, and they would outshine Milanie "with the foot of fire." His gorge rises at the mention of a certain quarter of the town : whatever passes current in another, he "swallows total grist unsifted, husks and all." This is not taste, but folly. At this rate, the hackney-coachman who drives him, or his horse Contributor whom he has introduced as a select personage to the vulgar reader, knows as much of the matter as he does.—In a word, the answer to all this in the first instance is to say what vulgarity is. Now its essence, I imagine, consists in taking manners, actions, words, opinions on trust from others, without examining one's own feelings or weighing the merits of the case. It is coarseness or shallowness of taste arising from want of individual refinement, together with the confidence and presumption inspired

by example and numbers. It may be defined to be a prostitution of the mind or body to ape the more or less obvious defects of others, because by so doing we shall secure the suffrages of those we associate with. To affect a gesture, an opinion, a phrase, because it is the rage with a large number of persons, or to hold it in abhorrence because another set of persons very little, if at all, better informed, cry it down to distinguish themselves from the former, is in either case equal vulgarity and absurdity.—A thing is not vulgar merely because it is common. 'Tis common to breathe, to see, to feel, to live. Nothing is vulgar that is natural, spontaneous, unavoidable. Grossness is not vulgarity, ignorance is not vulgarity, awkwardness is not vulgarity: but all these become vulgar when they are affected and shewn off on the authority of others, or to fall in with *the fashion* or the company we keep. Caliban is coarse enough, but surely he is not vulgar. We might as well spurn the clod under our feet, and call it vulgar. Cobbett is coarse enough, but he is not vulgar. He does not belong to the herd. Nothing real, nothing original can be vulgar: but I should think an imitator of Cobbett a vulgar man. Emery's Yorkshireman is vulgar, because he is a Yorkshireman. It is the cant and gibberish,

the cunning and low life of a particular district; it has "a stamp exclusive and provincial." He might "gabble most brutishly" and yet not fall under the letter of the definition: but "his speech bewrayeth him," his dialect (like the jargon of a Bond-street loungee) is the damning circumstance. If he were a mere block-head, it would not signify: but he thinks himself a *knowing hand*, according to the notions and practices of those with whom he was brought up, and which he thinks *the go* every where. In a word, this character is not the offspring of untutored nature but of bad habits; it is made up of ignorance and conceit. It has a mixture of *slang* in it. All slang phrases are for the same reason vulgar; but there is nothing vulgar in the common English idiom. Simplicity is not vulgarity; but the looking to affectation of any sort for distinction is. A cockney is a vulgar character, whose imagination cannot wander beyond the suburbs of the metropolis: so is a fellow who is always thinking of the High-street, Edinburgh. We want a name for this last character. An opinion is vulgar that is stewed in the rank breath of the rabble: nor is it a bit purer or more refined for having passed through the well cleansed teeth of a whole court. The inherent vulgarity is in having no other feeling on any subject than the crude, blind,

headlong, gregarious notion acquired by sympathy with the mixed multitude or with a fastidious minority, who are just as insensible to the real truth, and as indifferent to every thing but their own frivolous and vexatious pretensions. The upper are not wiser than the lower orders, because they resolve to differ from them. The fashionable have the advantage of the unfashionable in nothing but the fashion. The true vulgar are the *servum pecus imitatorum*—the herd of pretenders to what they do not feel and to what is not natural to them, whether in high or low life. To belong to any class, to move in any rank or sphere of life, is not a very exclusive distinction or test of refinement. Refinement will in all classes be the exception, not the rule; and the exception may fall out in one class as well as another. A king is but an hereditary title. A nobleman is only one of the House of Peers. To be a knight or alderman is confessedly a vulgar thing. The king the other day made Sir Walter Scott a baronet, but not all the power of the Three Estates could make another Author of Waverley. Princes, heroes are often common-place people: Hamlet was not a vulgar character, neither was Don Quixote. To be an author, to be a painter, is nothing. It is a trick, it is a trade.

“ An author! ’tis a venerable name:
How few deserve it, yet what numbers claim!”

Nay, to be a Member of the Royal Academy, or a Fellow of the Royal Society, is but a vulgar distinction. But to be a Virgil, a Milton, a Raphael, a Claude, is what fell to the lot of humanity but once! I do not think *they* were vulgar people, though for any thing I know to the contrary the first Lord of the Bed-chamber may be a very vulgar man: for any thing I know to the contrary, he may not be so.—Such are pretty much my notions of gentility and vulgarity.

There is a well-dressed and an ill-dressed mob, both which I hate. *Odi profanum vulgus, et arceo.* The vapid affectation of the one is to me even more intolerable than the gross insolence and brutality of the other. If a set of low-lived fellows are noisy, rude, and boisterous to shew their disregard of the company, a set of fashionable coxcombs are, to a nauseous degree, finical and effeminate to shew their thorough breeding. The one are governed by their feelings, however coarse and misguided, which is something: the others consult only appearances, which are nothing, either as a test of happiness or virtue. Hogarth in his prints has trimmed the balance of pretension between

the downright blackguard and the *soi-disant* fine gentleman unanswerably. It does not appear in his moral demonstrations (whatever it may do in the genteel letter-writing of Lord Chesterfield, or the chivalrous rhapsodies of Burke) that vice by losing all its grossness loses half its evil. It becomes more contemptible, not less disgusting. What is there in common, for instance, between his beaux and belles, his rakes and his coquets, and the men and women, the true heroic and ideal characters in Raphael? But his people of fashion and quality are just upon a par with the low, the selfish, the *unideal* characters in the contrasted view of human life, and are often the very same characters, only changing places. If the lower ranks are actuated by envy and uncharitableness towards the upper, the latter have scarcely any feelings but of pride, contempt, and aversion to the lower. If the poor would pull down the rich to get at their good things, the rich would tread down the poor as in a vine-press, and squeeze the last shilling out of their pockets and the last drop of blood out of their veins. If the headstrong self-will and unruly turbulence of a common ale-house are shocking, what shall we say to the studied insincerity, the insipid want of common sense, the callous insensibility of the drawing-room and

boudoir? I would rather see the feelings of our common nature (for they are the same at bottom) expressed in the most naked and unqualified way, than see every feeling of our nature suppressed, stifled, hermetically sealed under the smooth, cold, glittering varnish of pretended refinement and conventional politeness. The one may be corrected by being better informed; the other is incorrigible, wilful, heartless depravity. I cannot describe the contempt and disgust I have felt at the tone of what would be thought good company, when I have witnessed the sleek, smiling, glossy, gratuitous assumption of superiority to every feeling of humanity, honesty or principle, as a part of the etiquette, the mental and moral *costume* of the table, and every profession of toleration or favour for the lower orders, that is, for the great mass of our fellow-creatures, treated as an indecorum and breach of the harmony of well-regulated society. In short, I prefer a bear-garden to the adder's den. Or to put this case in its extremest point of view, I have more patience with men in a rude state of nature outraging the human form, than I have with apes "making mops and mows" at the extravagances they have first provoked. I can endure the brutality (as it is termed) of mobs better than the inhumanity of courts. The vio-

lence of the one rages like a fire; the insidious policy of the other strikes like a pestilence, and is more fatal and inevitable. The slow poison of despotism is worse than the convulsive struggles of anarchy. "Of all evils," says Hume, "anarchy is the shortest lived." The one may "break out like a wild overthrow;" but the other from its secret, sacred stand, operates unseen, and undermines the happiness of kingdoms for ages, lurks in the hollow cheek and stares you in the face in the ghastly eye of want and agony and woe. It is dreadful to hear the noise and uproar of an infuriated multitude stung by the sense of wrong, and maddened by sympathy: it is more appalling to think of the smile answered by other gracious smiles, of the whisper echoed by other assenting whispers, which doom them first to despair and then to destruction. Popular fury finds its counterpart in courtly servility. If every outrage is to be apprehended from the one, every iniquity is deliberately sanctioned by the other, without regard to justice or decency. The word of a king, "Go thou and do likewise," makes the stoutest heart dumb: truth and honesty shrink before it*. If there are watch-

* A lady of quality, in allusion to the gallantries of a reigning Prince, being told, "I suppose it will be your

words for the rabble, have not the polite and fashionable their hackneyed phrases, their fulsome unmeaning jargon as well? Both are to me anathema!

To return to the first question, as it regards individual and private manners. There is a fine illustration of the effects of preposterous and affected gentility in the character of Gertrude, in the old comedy of *Eastward Ho*, written by Ben Jonson, Marston, and Chapman in conjunction. This play is supposed to have given rise to Hogarth's series of prints of the *Idle and Industrious Apprentice*; and there is something exceedingly Hogarthian in the view both of vulgar and of genteel life here displayed. The character of Gertrude in particular, the heroine of the piece, is inimitably drawn. The mixture of vanity and meanness, the internal worthlessness and external pretence, the rustic ignorance and fine lady-like airs, the intoxication of novelty and infatuation of pride, appear like a dream or romance, rather than any thing in real life. *Cinderella* and her glass-slipper are common-place to it. She is not, like *Millamant* (a century afterwards) the accomplished fine lady, but a pre-

turn next?" said, "No: I hope not; for you know it is impossible to refuse!"

tender to all the foppery and finery of the character. It is the honey-moon with her ladyship, and her folly is at the full. To be a wife and the wife of a knight are to her pleasures "worn in their newest gloss," and nothing can exceed her raptures in the contemplation of both parts of the dilemma. It is not familiarity but novelty, that weds her to the court. She rises into the air of gentility from the ground of a city life, and flutters about there with all the fantastic delight of a butterfly that has just changed its caterpillar state. The sound of *My Lady* intoxicates her with delight, makes her giddy, and almost turns her brain. On the bare strength of it she is ready to turn her father and mother out of doors, and treats her brother and sister with infinite disdain and judicial hardness of heart. With some speculators the modern philosophy has deadened and distorted all the natural affections: and before abstract ideas and the mischievous refinements of literature were introduced, nothing was to be met with in the primeval state of society but simplicity and pastoral innocence of manners—

"And all was conscience and tender heart."

This historical play gives the lie to the above theory pretty broadly, yet delicately. Our heroine

is as vain as she is ignorant, and as unprincipled as she is both; and without an idea or wish of any kind but that of adorning her person in the glass, and being called and thought a lady, something superior to a citizen's wife*. She

* "*Girtred.* For the passion of patience, look if Sir Petronel approach. That sweet, that fine, that delicate, that —for love's sake, tell me if he come. Oh, sister Mill, though my father be a low-capt tradesman, yet I must be a lady, and I praise God my mother must call me madam. Does he come? Off with this gown for shame's sake, off with this gown! Let not my knight take me in the city cut, in any hand! Tear't! Pox on't (does he come?) tear't off! *Thus while she sleeps, I sorrow for her sake.* (Sings.)

Mildred. Lord, sister, with what an immodest impatience and disgraceful scorn do you put off your city-tire! I am sorry to think you imagine to right yourself in wronging that which hath made both you and us.

Gir. I tell you, I cannot endure it: I must be a lady: do you wear your quoiff with a London licket! your stamel petticoat with two guards! the buffin gown with the tuffittity cap and the velvet lace! I must be a lady, and I will be a lady. I like some humours of the city dames well: to eat cherries only at an angel a pound; good: to dye rich scarlet black; pretty: to line a grogram gown clean through with velvet; tolerable: their pure linen, their smocks of three pound a smock, are to be borne withal: but your mincing niceries, taffity pipkins, durance petticoats, and silver bodkins—God's my life! as I shall be a lady, I cannot endure it.

Mil. Well, sister, those that scorn their nest, oft fly with a sick wing.

Gir. Bow-bell! Alas, poor Mill, when I am a lady, I'll

is so bent on finery that she believes in miracles to obtain it, and expects the fairies to bring it pray for thee yet i'faith; nay, and I'll vouchsafe to call thee sister Mill still; for though thou art not like to be a lady as I am, yet surely thou art a creature of God's making, and may'st peradventure be saved as soon as I (does he come?).
And ever and anon she doubled in her song.

Mil. Now (lady's my comfort) what a profane ape's here!

Enter Sir PETRONEL FLASH, Mr. TOUCHSTONE, and Mrs. TOUCHSTONE.

Gir. Is my knight come? O the lord, my band! Sister, do my cheeks look well? Give me a little box o'the ear, that I may seem to blush. Now, now! so, there, there! here he is! O my dearest delight! Lord, lord! and how does my knight?

Touchstone. Fie, with more modesty.

Gir. Modesty! why, I am no citizen now. Modesty! am I not to be married? You're best to keep me modest, now I am to be a lady.

Sir Petronel. Boldness is a good fashion, and court-like.

Gir. Aye, in a country lady I hope it is, as I shall be. And how chance ye came no sooner, knight?

Sir Pet. Faith, I was so entertained in the progress with one Count Epernoun, a Welch knight: we had a match at baloon too with my Lord Whackum for four crowns.

Gir. And when shall's be married, my knight?

Sir Pet. I am come now to consummate: and your father may call a poor knight son-in-law.

Mrs. Touchstone. Yes, that he is a knight: I know where he had money to pay the gentlemen ushers and heralds their fees. Aye, that he is a knight: and so might you have been too, if you had been aught else but an ass, as well as some of your neighbours. An I thought you would not ha' been knighted, as I am an honest woman, I would ha' dubbed

her*. She is quite above thinking of a settlement, jointure, or pin-money. She takes the you myself. I praise God, I have wherewithal. But as for you, daughter——

Gir. Aye, mother, I must be a lady to-morrow; and by your leave, mother (I speak it not without my duty, but only in the right of my husband) I must take place of you, mother.

Mrs. Touch. That you shall, lady-daughter; and have a coach as well as I.

Gir. Yes, mother; but my coach-horses must take the wall of your coach-horses.

Touch. Come, come, the day grows low; 'tis supper-time: and sir, respect my daughter; she has refused for you wealthy and honest matches, known good men.

Gir. Body o' truth, citizen, citizens! Sweet knight, as soon as ever we are married, take me to thy mercy, out of this miserable city. Presently: carry me out of the scent of Newcastle coal and the hearing of Bow-bell, I beseech thee; down with me, for God's sake." Act I. Scene I.

This dotage on sound and show seemed characteristic of that age (see *New Way to Pay Old Debts, &c.*)—as if in the grossness of sense, and the absence of all intellectual and abstract topics of thought and discourse (the thin, circulating medium of the present day) the mind was attracted without the power of resistance to the tinkling sound of its own name with a title added to it, and the image of its own person tricked out in old-fashioned finery. The effect, no doubt, was also more marked and striking from the contrast between the ordinary penury and poverty of the age and the first and more extravagant demonstrations of luxury and artificial refinement.

* "*Girtred.* Good lord, that there are no fairies now-a-days, Syn.

will for the deed all through the piece, and is so besotted with this ignorant, vulgar notion of rank and title as a real thing that cannot be counterfeited, that she is the dupe of her own fine stratagems, and marries a gull, a dolt, a broken adventurer for an accomplished and brave gentleman. Her meanness is equal to her folly and her pride (and nothing can be greater), yet she holds out on the strength of her original pretensions for a long time, and plays the upstart with decent and imposing consistency. Indeed

Syndefy. Why, Madam?

Gir. To do miracles, and bring ladies money. Sure; if we lay in a cleanly house, they would haunt it, Synne? I'll try. I'll sweep the chamber soon at night, and set a dish of water o' the hearth. A fairy may come and bring a pearl or a diamond. We do not know, Synne: or there may be a pot of gold hid in the yard, if we had tools to dig for 't. Why may not we two rise early i' the morning, Synne, afore any body is up, and find a jewel i' the streets worth a hundred pounds? May not some great court-lady, as she comes from revels at midnight, look out of her coach, as 'tis running, and lose such a jewel, and we find it? ha!

Syn. They are pretty waking dreams, these.

Gir. Or may not some old usurer be drunk over-night with a bag of money, and leave it behind him on a stall? For God's sake, Syn, let's rise to-morrow by break of day, and see. I protest, la, if I had as much money as an alderman, I would scatter some on't i' the streets, for poor ladies to find when their knights were laid up. And now I remember my song of the Golden Shower, why may not I have such a fortune? I'll sing it, and try what luck I shall have after it." Act V. Scene I.

her infatuation and caprices are akin to the flighty perversity of a disordered imagination; and another turn of the wheel of good or evil fortune would have sent her to keep company with Hogarth's *Merveilleuses* in Bedlam, or with Deekar's group of coquets in the same place.—The other parts of the play are a dreary lee-shore, like Cuckold's Point on the coast of Essex, where the preconcerted ship-wreck takes place that winds up the catastrophe of the piece. But this is also characteristic of the age, and serves as a contrast to the airy and factitious character which is the principal figure in the plot. We had made but little progress from that point till Hogarth's time, if Hogarth is to be believed in his description of city manners. How wonderfully we have distanced it since!

Without going into this at length, there is one circumstance I would mention in which I think there has been a striking improvement in the family economy of modern times—and that is in the relation of mistresses and servants. After visits and finery, a married woman of the old school had nothing to do but to attend to her housewifery. She had no other resource, no other sense of power, but to harangue and lord it over her domestics. Modern book-education supplies the place of the old-fashioned

system of kitchen persecution and eloquence. A well-bred woman now seldom goes into the kitchen to look after the servants:—formerly what was called a good manager, an exemplary mistress of a family, did nothing but hunt them from morning to night, from one year's end to another, without leaving them a moment's rest, peace, or comfort. Now a servant is left to do her work without this suspicious and tormenting interference and fault-finding at every step, and she does it all the better. The proverbs about the mistress's eye, &c. are no longer held for current. A woman from this habit, which at last became an unconquerable passion, would scold her maids for fifty years together, and nothing could stop her: now the temptation to read the last new poem or novel, and the necessity of talking of it in the next company she goes into, prevent her—and the benefit to all parties is incalculable!

THE END.

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