

The Spy.

A PERIODICAL PAPER,

OR

LITERARY AMUSEMENT AND INSTRUCTION.

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The following pages contain facsimilies, somewhat reduced in size, of the first and last numbers of *The Spy* as originally published. There then follows a facsimile of the titlepage that was printed on completion of the run, for copies of *The Spy* that were to be bound up in volume form. These facsimilies have been reproduced from the Stirling University Library copy of *The Spy*, and it is hoped that they will convey some impression of the appearance of original numbers, both the early ones printed by Robertson and the later ones printed by Aikman.

*Hail, Land o' Cakes! an' brother Scots
Frae Maiden Kirk to John o' Groats,
If there's a hole in a' your coats,
I red you tent it,
A chiel's amang you takin' notes,
An' faith he'll prent it.*

BURNS.

IT will without doubt be expected of me, and the expectation is perfectly reasonable, that before I make any observations on the characters of others, I should give some account of my own: therefore to this necessary purpose, established by invariable custom, and that of giving some general outlines of the plan I mean to pursue in the course of this publication, I dedicate this day's Paper. Yet though this is a task incumbent on me, it has some fortunate circumstances attending it; for though there is scarcely a single individual in Edinburgh who has not seen me, as have great numbers in the country besides, yet not one of a thousand amongst them know who I am, or what I am about: so that though I am bound to tell the truth, I am not bound to tell the whole truth; and the omissions which I chuse to make have very little chance of being discovered.—I do intend in the course of this work to laugh at a great deal of my fellow-subjects, and to make other people laugh at them likewise; but if I were to give a true and literal detail of all my adventures and misadventures, and the blunders of various kinds which I have committed, they might well laugh at me in their turn. I do not like this entirely; it does not altogether suit my taste to be laughed at; and

he who would reclaim others, should reverse a certain degree of consequence to himself. There is one leading feature in my character, which, if fully investigated, will give you a sufficient idea of it at once. I am wholly intent on the behaviour of other people, and regardless of my own. This abominable propensity seems to have been ingrained in my nature; to have commenced with my existence, but to have grown proportionally with the powers of my mind, and strengthened with its strength: and it is this only that can account for a thousand untoward circumstances which have attended me in almost every undertaking. I am bachelor, about sixty years of age; have spent the most of my days in the country, where I have been engaged in innumerable projects, which have all miscarried: but nothing in the world disturbs or perplexes me. My mind is so buoyant, and my thoughts so vague that if placed before my eyes, that I may contemplate a few of my fellow-creatures, I can get a few of my fellow-creatures, template their various manners and looks, it is sufficient for me: I can laugh at their follies, weep over their misfortunes, and feel as deeply for all their concerns as they can possibly do themselves. You will be very apt to suspect that a simple old man, who has only left the mountains a few years ago, can have no great stock of ideas wherewith to entertain the enlightened and polite circles: but, on my own behalf, let me remind you, that every thing here being quite new to me, any incongruity of taste or character will be

much more ready to strike me, than such as have been used to witness the same scenes all their days. Besides, I am constantly upon the look-out for singularities, and flatter myself that I have discovered great abundance of them: certain it is, I have seen many things that have amused me, both among the books, the men, and the women; but to country manners I am still most attached, as my readers will soon discover; and my friends and correspondents living there, we will be often hearing from them; and as I have spent such a long life in doing nothing else but making observations, it would be mortifying to reflect that none had been the better of them but myself. But I must try to be a little more circumstantial.

When I was a little trifling boy, although the school-house was not above three hundred yards distant from my father's door, there were so many wonderful things to engage my attention by the way, (and the longer I contemplated them they appeared still the more wonderful,) that I often reached the school much about the time the rest came out of it in the middle of the day. Our teacher was a man of peculiar manners, and I could not help regarding him often so earnestly, that I fell insensibly into a habit of imitating him in all his singular attitudes and distortions of feature. I had the same ridiculous loud ha, ha, of a laugh; the same shake in my walk, with my arms set a kimbo, and my hat a little on one side; and even the same way of spitting, and adjusting my neckcloth; so that the pedant having conceived the idea that I mimicked him for sport, for this and my other mistakes I was often belaboured most severely. On my quitting this

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school, my parents had a consultation, which lasted nearly a month, on the most proper calling for me; and at length, my contemplative mood swaying them in a high degree, I was destined to be a Seceder minister. I went to the college when very young, and soon finishing my classes, was sent finally to a country town in the south of Scotland to attend the professor of divinity over that sect; and had hopes of soon being called to some capital benefice, but fell into a most humiliating blunder on my very first attempt at pulpit eloquence in public. I certainly had composed as good a sermon, or at least as good a discourse, for the occasion as any novice was capable of: it was divided into three heads and an improvement, and each of these was branched out again, into first, second, and third places; and though I say it myself, I do not believe that the boldest, and most new modelled bible-thumper amongst the clergy of the present day, could have confounded and puzzled a piece of scripture better than I had contrived to do; no, not even though a maintainer of our angelic purity by nature. However it went all for nothing. In short, I lost the thread of my sermon, and with it my whole powers of recollection, and made a solemn vow that night never to try another, which I have kept.

I cannot give a distinct account in what manner my thoughts were drawn away so completely from my subject; but my misfortune originated in contemplating the manner and looks of a very old man too minutely during the time that the congregation was singing a psalm; for when the professor arose and called to order, there was a

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speech from Shakespeare, appropriated to the old man's character, flowing spontaneously from my lips. I awaked as from a dream. My flesh crept; my face grew as warm as fire, and all my theological arguments were gone and for ever.

The only effort I was capable of making was that of taking down my hat, and hastening out of the church, into which I have never again entered with a design to preach. I then commenced farmer, and was the foremost in all the country for plausible theory, and new improvements: but as I attended still more to other people's business than my own, my crops, notwithstanding all my expences, never turned well out. There was another thing I never can account for; when I had any of my farm produce to dispose of, if there was a villain in all the market I was sure to meet with him. I blamed, the soil of my farm,—gave it up,—took another.—That was still worse.—I went all to the Devil, as the saying is. I next turned poet; but that was the worst business I ever tried; I wrote epigrams, odes, and pastorals without number, and as every body declared that they possessed a high degree of excellence, I went and offered them to sundry booksellers, but the blockheads declared they would have nothing to do with them. They were without doubt sufficiently punished in the loss they sustained by their unpremeditated refusal, and I consoled myself as well as I could by endeavouring to mimic them, and laugh at their various manners.

It was then I commenced a Spy upon the manners, customs, and particular characters of all ranks of people, and all ranks of authors in particular, as far as my

comprehension served me, which seems to have been the business for which Nature designed me; and this pleasing, but unprofitable employment, I have now continued to pursue with increasing avidity for the space of twenty years.

I have travelled over the greatest part of Britain in various characters, and often got into scrapes extremely embarrassing and ludicrous, some of which I may probably relate by and by.

I am now become an observer so accurate, that by contemplating a person's features minutely, modelling my own after the same manner as nearly as possible, and putting my body into the same posture which seems most familiar to them, I can ascertain the compass of their minds and thoughts, to a few items, either on the one side or the other,—not precisely what they are thinking of at the time, but the way that they would think about any thing. This study has been the source of much pleasure to me, and hath likewise led me into many blunders. For an instance; I was walking one day very lately, by the side of a mill-pond near the Water of Leith, while three beautiful young ladies were walking the same way on the other side.—They were vastly interesting—I fell to studying them with great seriousness.—If I remember aright, I was endeavouring to ascertain the exact degree of value which each of them set upon herself, and how each of them would receive the same proposal or address. For this purpose I was obliged to strain the organs of my vision to the most precise point, that certain smiles and gestures might not be misconstrued; and just when I had very nearly gained my point, I happened

to forget that my own steps might so readily go astray, and setting my foot upon nothing, like the highlander who fell over a stair in the dark, I fell headlong into the pool. It was above my depth, and the shore being a perpendicular wall, I had certainly perished if it had not been for the ladies, the innocent causes of my misfortune. At first they reamed aloud, but seeing no other help appear, they hastened round to the place where I was plunging; and one of them giving me a hold of her silk mantle, saved the poor Spy from a watery grave. The first question they asked me was, how it happened; I said it happened by looking at them. "O fie, said one of them, what a shame for an old grey-headed rogue, like you, to be looking so intently at young girls; upon my word you have got nothing that you did not richly deserve." They went away convulsed with laughter, while I was standing shaking my ears, and spitting incessantly; and as long as they were in view, they looked back now and then, and broke jests upon me; one telling me that "this would learn me when to look at ladies in future;" and another, "that it would have been as becoming in me to have been looking to my own feet, or thinking upon my grave rather than upon them." I understand this story has made considerable noise, and my misfortune has been attributed to causes widely differing from the truth. It may easily be conceived that as an observer of oddities, I never can miss employment in such a place as Edinburgh; and I take so much delight in it that I always endeavour to make the most of my time: I attend all the places of worship by rotation, and the theatre every

night when it is open; Leith and Portobello races; S. Belzoni and the highland pipers; and in short every public place where I can possibly thrust in my head. Even a station in Prince's street for an hour before dinner is a treat to me, and would still be more agreeable if the people would walk a little slower; but there is such a rapid succession of busy, careless, and beautiful faces, that I am obliged to be very quick and decisive in my remarks.

During the middle of the day I saunter from one bookseller's shop to another, and though I sometimes hear the clerks complaining, that they are eternally plagued with that long, lean, hungry-looking d——l, I am obliged to put up with it; and as I seldom lift a newspaper, but only pore over the reviews, magazines, and new productions (with all of which I mean to have a bout by and by,) so I think I do the people very little injury. But I believe ere long, they will either be much more civil to me, or else expel me altogether: I have seen, I have seen the transgressions of these people, and am fully persuaded if it were not for some of the lean, hungry-looking d——ls as they call them, they would not in general be so fat. Yes, my dear readers; would you believe it, there is a numerous race of beings in this world who feed themselves upon the brains of their own species.

Such then is the man who hath set himself up as a Spy upon the taste and genius of his countrymen. He is a being of the utmost simplicity; and subject to many weaknesses, follies, and wayward fancies; not to give any of them a worse name: and the only suitable qualifications

which he has, or pretends to have, fitting him for the employment he has assumed, are, the possession of some little powers of discernment betwixt right and wrong; sense and nonsense; an anxious desire to give merit its due, in whatever rank or station it appears. And he recommends it earnestly to all the curious throughout the nation, to keep a scrutinizing eye upon our literary, rural and national economy; and to pick up whatever is excellent on the one hand, or reprehensible on the other, for the purpose of communicating it to the public, by the means, and under the sanction of the *Spy*. There is certainly at least some probability, that by their united efforts I may contribute somewhat to the laudable intention of bringing light out of darkness, and order out of confusion. I think the above sketch, which is fair and impartial, is sufficient to give a perfect idea of my character, and the nature and extent of the entertainment my genius is calculated to furnish. Neither can I relate any more circumstances of my life without breaking in upon some excellent stories, which I have laid up in store, on purpose to supply future deficiencies of matter. As to my plan of conducting this publication, it must of course be ruled considerably by concurring circumstances. The subjects must be varied; and it will not be possible at all times to command an essay or tale, the length of which is exactly calculated to make up a complete number. But as none who purchase for the sake of reading will probably approve of white paper for that end; consequently the remainder of the sheet will always be filled closely up with elegant, or comparative extracts, illustrative of the preceding subject.

I am very fond of comparing one author, or one public character, with another; as I look upon that to be the surest way of ascertaining their several degrees of excellency; consequently in the course of this publication, I intend to compare all the Scottish poets, reviewers, &c. with each other, and to cite their several ways of defining the same or similar subjects.

This is a very curious study, but it is even still more curious to remark the singular changes which take place in the taste and opinions of the same person. Whether this be occasioned by the influence which the different seasons of the year have upon great and capacious minds or by the impressions and prejudices left upon them by former studies, is not so easily determined; though it appears more than probable, that the former is in part the cause, for a winter review by *certain people*, is generally severe and capricious in the extreme, and worse to suffer by a great deal than either their spring or summer ones. But to whatever changes in climate or constitution this may be ascribed, there is nothing more certain than that it frequently happens: and as I have dwelt too long on vague and unprofitable subjects, I shall cite an uncommon instance of it in a celebrated literary character of this town. In No 31. of the Edinburgh Review, we are presented with a criticism on Graham's British Georgics, which is certainly a most excellent one, and gives as fair and candid an estimate, not only of the poem in question, but of Graham's poetry in general as it is possible for an unbiassed mind to conceive. Nevertheless I think it will scarcely ever be disputed, whether the Sabbath or the Georgics be the most complete, or excellent poem: nor yet, which of them dis-

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They the most evident marks of genius. Let us observe and wonder how differently they affect an ingenious and decisive critic. In his review of the Sabbath, after charging the author with diffusion, want of originality, and of borrowing his ideas from an indefinite number of poets both English and Scotch, he gives the following general view of the poem, and the talents of its author—

“The greater part of it is written in a heavy and inelegant manner. The diction throughout is tainted with vulgarity, and there is no selection of words, images, or sentiments, to conciliate the favour of the fastidious reader. The author has evidently some talents for poetical composition, and is never absolutely absurd, tedious or silly; but he has no delicacy of taste or imagination: he does not seem to feel the force of the sanction against poetical mediocrity, and his ear appears to have no perception of the finer harmony of versification. If he be a young man, we think there are considerable hopes of him; but if this be the production of maturer talents, we cannot in our conscience exhort him to continue in the service of the muses.

“This volume, however, at all events, has nothing but its poetical merit to stand upon. It contains indeed a good deal of doctrine and argumentation both in the text and in the notes, but nothing that is not either very trifling, or very shallow and extravagant. The author talks very big about the inhumanity and injustice of imprisonment for debt, and about the cruel monopoly by which the Highland shepherds are driven from their mountains. He dogmatizes in the same presumptuous style on the character of Bonaparte, and on the most advisable plan for recruiting the British army; and seems as perfectly persuaded of his own infallibility on all these subjects, as his readers, we apprehend, must be of his insufficiency. In a poem with such a title, it was certainly natural to expect some consistency in the ecclesiastical tenets of the author; but we have been completely baffled in our attempts to discover to what persuasion he belongs. He seems in many passages to be desperately enamoured of the old Covenanters, Cameronians, and Independents, and gives some obscure hints of his intention to immortalize the names of their

chief pastors in another poem; but by and by we find him talking with great enthusiasm of the funeral service of the Church of England, and of the lofty pealing of the organ, both of which would have been regarded as antichristian abominations either by the old Covenanters or by the modern Presbyterians of Scotland.”

But, speaking of the Georgics he says,

“In thus putting the whole year into blank verse, it was evidently next to impossible to avoid clashing with the author of the Seasons;—and those, accordingly, who are jealous of Thomson’s original invention, will find frequent occasion to complain of the author before us. At the same time, there are many points in which we think his merits must be admitted by all lovers of poetry, and his originality confessed by the warmest admirers of Thomson. The singular fidelity and clearness of his descriptions, prove him to have studied all his pictures for himself, in nature;—a certain simplicity of thought, and softness of heart, give a peculiar character to his manner, that excludes all idea of imitation; and his fine and discriminating pictures of the Scottish landscape, and the Scottish peasantry, are as new in their subjects, as they are excellent in their execution.”

“Mr Grahame’s descriptions appear to us to be remarkable for their great fidelity, minuteness and brevity;—for the singular simplicity and directness with which they are brought out;—and for a kind of artless earnestness in the manner of their execution, which shows the author to have been entirely occupied with the care of rendering faithfully and exactly what was present to his eye or his memory. There is no ambition to be fine or striking;—and no great concern, apparently, about the distant effect or ideal perfection of his landscape;—but an honest determination and endeavour to give his readers precisely what was before him;—and to communicate faithfully to them what had actually made an impression on himself. In this way, he seldom thinks it necessary to call in the aid of exaggeration, or to invent any picturesque or extraordinary circumstances, to bespeak an interest for his delineations; but presents his scenes successively in all their native plainness and simplicity, — nothing down all the features that really occur in them, without concerning himself whether other poets have represented them or not, —and stopping when these are exhausted, however

though an imperfect the composition may consequently appear. The effect of this plan of writing is, that his descriptions are almost always strong and impressive, and present the most distinct and vivid images to the fancy; although they are not often heightened by any great glow of genius or animation, and are frequently broken and irregular, or deficient in that keeping which may be found in the works of those who write more from the love of the art than of the subject.

“The great charm, however, of Mr Grahame’s poetry, appears to us to consist in its moral character;—in that natural expression of kindness and tenderness of heart, which gives such a peculiar air of paternal goodness and patriarchal simplicity to his writings;—and that earnest and intimate sympathy with the objects of his compassion, which assures us at once that he is not making a theatrical display of sensibility, but merely giving vent to the familiar sentiments of his bosom. We can trace here, in short, and with the same pleasing effects, that entire absence of all art, effort and affectation, which we have already noticed as the most remarkable distinction of his attempts in description. Almost all the other poets with whom we are acquainted, appear but too obviously to put their feelings and affections, as well as their fancies and phrases, into a sort of studied dress, before they venture to present them to the crowded assembly of the public; and though the style and fashion of this dress varies according to the taste and ability of the inventors, still it serves almost equally to hide their native proportions, and to prove that they were a little ashamed or afraid to exhibit them, as they really were. The greater part of those who have aimed at producing a pathetic effect, have attempted to raise and exalt both the characters of their personages and the language in which they are spoken of; and thus to seek an excuse as it were for their sensibility in the illusions of vulgar admiration: others have aggravated their distresses with strange and incredible complications;—that it might appear that they did not disturb themselves on light and ordinary grounds: and some few have dressed out both themselves and heroes in such a tissue of whimsical and capricious affectations, that they are still less in danger than their neighbours of being suspected of indulging in the vulgar sympathies of our nature. Now, Mr Grahame, we think, has got

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over this general nervousness and shyness about showing the natural and simple feelings with which the contemplation of human emotion should affect us—or rather, has been too seriously occupied, and too constantly engrossed with the feelings themselves, to think how the confession of them might be taken by the generality of his readers, to concern himself about the contempt of the fastidious, or the derision of the unfeeling. In his poetry, therefore, we meet neither with the Maudslows and Damons of Thomson, nor the Gypsywomen and Ellen Orford of Crabbe; and still less with the Matthew Schoolmasters, Alice Fells, or Martha Raes of Mr Wordsworth;—but we meet with the ordinary peasants of Scotland in their ordinary situations, and with a touching and simple expression of concern for their sufferings, and of generous indulgence for their faults. He is not ashamed for his kindness and condescension, on the one hand; nor is he ostentatious or vain of it, on the other;—but gives expression in the most plain and unaffected manner to sentiments that are neither counterfeited nor disguised. We do not know any poetry, indeed, that lets us in so directly to the heart of the writer, and produces so full and pleasing a conviction that it is dictated by the genuine feelings which it aims at communicating to the reader. If there be less fire and elevation than in the strains of some of his contemporaries, there is more truth and tenderness than is commonly found along with those qualities, and less getting up, either of language or of sentiment, than we recollect to have met with in any modern composition.”

It is impossible for a literary Spy to pass over a change of taste so palpable as this: and though it is but one instance of many which I have observed, it may tend to show how little dependence ought to be placed upon the discriminating and appreciating powers of any one mind. It will be impossible ever to persuade me, that this popular editor always sets the real merits of every book he reviews in their proper lights; yet there is no man whom I would less suspect of saying what he does not think. There is no other way, then, of accounting for

Respice ad longe, jussit spiritus ultima vice.

JUV.

many of his reviews, than by attributing the violent remarks contained in them, to the temperature of the weather, his own frame and disposition at the time of reading the works; or the nature of the books which he has been reading immediately before them. Nothing is more evident, than that a book or essay which will at one time please a man, will at another time appear quite intolerable, and this perversion of taste commonly originates in one or other of the above mentioned causes.

For an instance, we shall suppose this notable reviewer, on a cold day in December, sitting at his desk; the window perhaps facing to the north—his feet smarting with cold, and his hand scarcely able to hold the pen wherewith he marks the delible (fake care and do not read damnable) passages. His eagle eye brushing impatiently over the pages.

“Then woe to the author, and woe to his cause,

“When I—his weapon indignantly draws,”
Again, with respect to the case of which we are speaking; if it should so have happened, that he had just been perusing *the Lay of the last Minister* before he took up *the Sabbath* for inspection, and *Brown's Philimon* before he began the *Georgics*, neither of which is unlikely, the effects produced by these contrasts, could scarcely have been otherwise upon any mind than exactly such as are here displayed. But there is no-

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thing critics should be more cautious of, than perusing a book of which they mean to give an impartial review, for the first time, while they are in any bad humour, either with themselves or others. First impressions are always most permanent. This, the inherent principle of self-esteem will ever secure to us; for when once we have formed an opinion of any thing in our own minds, we have too high a sense of our own judgments again to retract, without the utmost reluctance; even though reason should re-monstrate both from our own breaths and the mouths of other men.

Many authors, especially the poets, value their existence as men of genius, more than as natural men; consequently it becomes to them a matter of little less importance than that of life and death; surely then it manifests a most cruel and malicious mind, to take a pleasure in cutting them up.

Those tender buds of genius, whose appearance give the smallest hopes of one day opening in full and beauteous blossom, even though venturing up their timid heads in the barren waste, or amongst rankling and noxious weeds, should rather be fostered by a careful hand, and sheltered from the chilling blasts of scorn, than unfeelingly crushed in the dust with the rest of the garbage with which they are surrounded.

The *SPY* must now, though with great reluctance, bid adieu to his readers; and will, therefore, for this once, address them in his real character;—like the culprit who has always persisted in maintaining an untruth, until his last moments, when he is obliged to speak, or for evermore be silent;—then it is that almighty truth prevails: of course, the last speech and confession of every person is sealed with a stamp so sacred, that the surmises of doubt are hushed to silence. This, then, is the last speech and testimony of the *Spy* to his kind and benevolent readers: in that capacity he will never address them more. They will, therefore, believe him sincere, when leaving them his warmest wishes and assurances, that in whatever vocation he next appears, their favours will be doubly dear to him;—that the first complimentary calls he makes will be at those hospitable doors where he has already been so long admitted as a welcome guest; and he will be more proud of a situation at the corners of their chimneys than those of any other person.

His efforts have, without doubt, met with at least as much encouragement as they deserved; he frankly acknowledges that encouragement has

not been much to boast of: as his name became known the number of his subscribers diminished. The learned, the enlightened, and polite circles of this flourishing metropolis, distinguished either to be amused or instructed by the ebullitions of humble genius. Enemies, swelling with the most rancorous spite, grunted in every corner; and from none has the *Spy* suffered so much injury and blame, as from some pretended friends, who were indeed liberal in their advice, and ardent in their professions of friendship, yet took every method in their power to lessen the work in the esteem of others, by branding its author with designs the most subversive of all civility and decorum, and which, of all others, were the most distant from his heart. As they, however, did all for the best—all out of pure friendship for the author—and told him his faults with the utmost freedom—of course they conceived suspicion could never rest upon them.—It did light upon them. The *Spy* selected some of his essays, which he was certain were his worst, and insinuated that they were the productions of such and such gentlemen, famous for their literary abilities. Their excellencies were so apparent, and so striking, that they even made the tears stream from the cheeks of the ladies on reading them, and manifested to the gentle-

men that every sentence bespoke the hand of a master.

As a further proof, the best papers were selected from the works of Johnson and Addison, and shewn to these infallible monitors, in the Spy's own handwriting, as his own productions, and their opinions of them asked with the utmost seriousness, as of pieces concerning whose merits the author himself was not certain. He was soon convinced, to his utter astonishment, by arguments he could not controvert, that they were dull monotonous stuff; that the humour was coarse,—the grammar incorrect,—and that the philosophy contained in them was either inaccurate or inconsistent with common sense; and, in a word, that, besides being blurred with the most fulsome egotism, every sentence manifested a total ignorance of the principles of composition, who could be blamed for giving up the counsels of such friends? This is no chimera or jest, but a positive truth, a part of one of these papers is published, mutilated so by their alterations, that it will scarcely be discovered, and of that, and another, the Spy has yet the copies, which he corrected as they dictated.

There have still, however, been a few, and not a very few either, who have stood the Spy's most strenuous advocates through good report, and through bad report. Of these he has been careful to preserve the names, and these names he will ever cherish with the most grateful remembrance; and were he certain that they would regret the discontinuation of the Spy, and feel the same disappointment on missing it on a Saturday evening, that they would do on

being deprived of an old friend or dependant, whose conversation, though not without faults, was become familiar and dear to them, he would, in his turn, experience sensations such as none save an enthusiast in the pursuits of literature can enjoy; and he may surely be allowed to indulge the hope so congenial to the soul of every candidate for literary honours, that the awards of posterity will in part justify that cause which his friends have maintained against such odds. They have had, at all events, the honour of patronizing an undertaking quite new in the records of literature; for that a common shepherd who never was at school, who went to service at seven years of age, and could neither write nor read with accuracy when twenty, yet who, smitten with an unconquerable thirst after knowledge, should run away from his master, leave his native mountains, and his flocks to wander where they chose, come to the metropolis with his plaid wrap round his shoulders, and all at once set up for a connoisseur in manners, taste, and genius, has certainly much more the appearance of a romance than a matter of fact. Yet a matter of fact it certainly is, and such a person is the editor of the Spy.

He, indeed, expected no indulgence on that score, which he testified by giving his papers, even to his intimate acquaintances, anonymously; and as he could not conceive that ever he would be suspected as the writer, determined to remain in concealment; his first printer and publisher did not even know who the editor was, but took him always for one who transacted business between them, in order to keep

the real one concealed. The inquiries concerning the author, and the observations on the work which he witnessed in that shop, were certainly the most amusing scenes that can well be conceived.

He is, however, willing to believe, that these considerations will account in part for some inadvertencies which raised such a prejudice against the Spy on its first outset. It is hoped the candid reader will easily discover that these never have proceeded from the slightest intention of injuring the cause of virtue and truth, but either from inattention or mere simplicity of heart. To write an occasional essay is an easy matter, but to be *obliged* to write one of such length is more difficult than most people seem inclined to believe; and why should it excite wonder that a stranger in travelling over a field, where every object is new to him, should sometimes take a view of them from a wrong point? The maxim of Horace may surely be applied without offence:—

*Uti plura nitent in castris non ego paucis
Opertar maculis quas at invisita Juno,
Aut humana parvi cavi natura.*

Thus far may be said in justification of those papers, that in no one instance is the cause of religion, virtue, or benevolence injured or violated, but always encouraged, however ineffectively; therefore, though the Spy merits not admiration, he is at least entitled to kindness for his good intentions.

He is deeply indebted to a few ladies and gentlemen for their liberal support, to whose exertions the work certainly owes a large proportion of the little merit it lays claim to. It was intended,

and indeed promised, that the names of contributors should appear in the index, each affixed to the title of his essay; but upon second thoughts, it appears proper to defer it to a future edition, when the errors in the composition and printing will likewise be carefully corrected.

The papers which have given the greatest personal offence, are those of Mr. Shuffleton, which clamour obliged the editor reluctantly to discontinue. Of all the poets and poetesses whose works are there emblematically introduced, one gentleman alone stood the test, and his firmness was even by himself attributed to forgiveness; all the rest, male and female, tossed up their noses, and pronounced the writer an ignorant and incorrigible barbarian.—The Spy acknowledges himself the author of these papers, and adheres to the figurative characters which he has there given of the poetical works of these authors. He knows it is expected in a future edition that they will all be altered—they never shall—though the entreaties of respected friends prevailed on him to relinquish a topic which was his favourite one, what he has published, he has published; and no private considerations shall induce him to an act of such apparent servility, as that of making a renunciation; and those who are so grossly ignorant as to suppose the figurative characteristics of the poetry, as having the smallest reference to the personal characters of the authors of these poems, are below arguing with. Since it is of late become fashionable for some great poets to give an estimate of their own wonderful powers and abilities in periodical works of disinc-

tion, surely others have a right to give likewise their own estimates of the works of such bards. It is truly amusing to see how artfully a gentleman can place himself at the head of a school, and make himself appear as the greatest genius ever existed; with what address he can paint his failings as beauties, and depict his greatest excellencies as slight defects, finding fault only with those parts which every one must admire.—The design is certainly an original, though not a very creditable one; great authors cannot remain always concealed, let them be as cautious as they will, the smallest incident assists curiosity in making the discovery.

The Spy must now hasten to conclude his paper, and with it his work, yet with feelings which convince him of the truth of the old adage, that the idea that any thing is the last, brings with it a degree of pain to the reflecting mind, for in truth, the consideration that this is his last paper, gives more pain to his mind than he is willing to acknowledge; and his only comfort is in the hope of a fellow-feeling in his readers, and that they too will be sorry when they are informed that they have the Spy's last paper in their hands—that they will read this paper over with greater attention than they read any of the others, and will set a higher value upon the work in general than they ever did before. Peace to the gentleman bosom where these kind regrets are cherished—may it never feel a loss more severe, nor a pang more poignant—may the close of every succeeding week arrive fraught with reflections more elevated, and the dawn of every new one produce contemplations more rational

and refined, than by the loss of the Spy they are deprived of.

From the boldness of such an attempt by an illiterate person, it will naturally be expected, that the Spy should make some acknowledgements, if not absolutely cringe to the critics; but the truth is, he expects only such meanness as an intruder deserves, either to keep his ground by main force, or be kicked out of the premises of genius and learning, bruised and maimed.—He whose confidence in his own merit incites him to meet, without any apparent sense of inferiority, those who flattered themselves with their own dignity, may justly be considered as an insolent leveller, impatient of the just prerogatives of rank and wealth, eager to usurp the station to which he has no right, and to confound the subordinations of society; and who would contribute to the exaltation of that spirit which even want and calamity are not able to restrain. But no better success will commonly be found to attend servility and dejection, which tend only to give pride the confidence to treat them with contempt. A request made with diffidence and timidity is easily denied, because the petitioner himself seems to doubt of his fitness. The Spy is therefore determined, that though he is weak and friendless, the honourable fraternity shall at least find that he does not want courage, and that the smallest injury shall not be inflicted on him with impunity.

The character of a writer, especially of a periodical writer, has at least ten chances of being blasted for one of attaining eminence. He solicits the regard of a multitude fluctuating in plea-

sure, or immersed in business, without time for intellectual amusements. He appeals to judges prepossessed by passions, or corrupted by prejudices, which preclude their approbation of any new performance. Many are too indolent to read any thing till its reputation is established, others too envious to promote that fame which gives them pain by its increase. What appears new is opposed, because most are unwilling to be taught; and what is known is rejected, because it is not sufficiently considered, that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed.

The learned are afraid to declare their opinion early, lest they should put their reputation to hazard; the ignorant always imagine themselves giving some proof of delicacy when they refuse to be pleased; and he that finds his way to reputation through all these obstructions, must acknowledge that he is indebted to other causes besides his industry, originality, or wit. At all events, the reflection that a man has done all that he could do, is in some degree satisfactory. A little more than nothing is as much as can be expected from a being who, with respect to the multitudes around him, is himself little more than nothing. Every man is under obligations to the supreme master of the universe, to improve all the opportunities of good which are afforded him.—But he has no reason to repine, though his abilities are small, and his opportunities few. He that has improved the virtue or advanced the happiness of one fellow-creature—he that has ascertained a single moral proposition, or added one useful experiment to natural knowledge, may be contented with his own

performance; and, with respect to others like himself, may demand, like Augustus, to be dismissed at his departure with applause: "*Est quodum pro-dire si non datur ultra.*"

The Spy had still a greater obstacle to surmount than any of these, and one which no periodical writer before him was perhaps ever necessitated to struggle with. The truth of this will be readily admitted, if the following considerations are impartially weighed. Surely he that has been confined from his infancy to the conversation of the lowest classes of mankind, must necessarily want those accomplishments which are the usual means of attracting favour; and, though truth, fortitude, and probity may be supposed to give an indisputable right to respect and kindness, they will not be distinguished by common eyes, unless they are brightened by elegance, but must be cast aside like unpolished gems, of which none but the artist knows the intrinsic value. The occasional impurity and harshness of his style, must impair the force of his reasoning, and the ruggedness of his numbers, turn off the mind from the artifice of disposition, and the fertility of his invention. It is well known that few men have strength of reason to over-rule the perceptions of sense; and that fewer still have curiosity or benevolence to struggle long against first impressions; he therefore who fails at first to please by his polished address, is commonly at once rejected, and never obtains an opportunity of shewing his latent excellencies or essential qualities; when, to these considerations is added, the difficulty with which valuable or pleasing qualities force themselves into

view, when they are obscured by indigence, and the little power which native beauty has to charm, without the ornaments which fortune bestows, the Spy's chance for literary eminence must appear a desperate cause. He is then utterly at a loss to conceive what estimate his friends will make of his intellects, when he assures them, that though he has all the disadvantages above supposed, and but a small share of the qualifications, they are to him only so many motives for further exertion. The world has a thousand times witnessed what mighty things can be accomplished by the assistance of learning, but it has never yet ascertained how much may be accomplished without it. The pleasure then of making the experiment, though in a branch of literature which some may ridicule, and others despise, offers to him sufficient inducement for perseverance. The chief art of attaining eminence in any thing, is to attempt but little at a time. The widest excursions of the mind are made by short flights, often repeated; the most lofty fabrics of science have been formed by the continued accumulation of single propositions—the Spy may be worsted—he shall never be discouraged.

As the contemplation of the final end of any thing brings along with it feelings of regret, so should the end of every thing we witness, though ever so trivial, lead our contemplations to a survey of the final end of things more important to us. If this train of ideas is habitually cherished, it will naturally bring before the minds eye, the approaching termination of every earthly enjoyment, which at present administers to the comfort of human existence,

and finally the end of that existence itself, to which time is every moment waiving us nearer and nearer. When we leave a scene which we have long frequented, and every image of which is familiar to us—even though in that scene we have experienced little else save misery and disappointment; yet, when taking a last look of it, and knowing that it is to be the last, a soft sympathetic sorrow swells the heart, and often forces the sharp corrosive tear into the eye. When taking leave of a beloved friend, even though but for a short season, if an officious thought chances to intrude on the fancy, that it is possible we shall never see that friend again, how repulsive is every feeling of the heart to such an idea? but when we know that we never can see him again, though the mind is obliged to bend to the stroke, it is, of all other feelings, the most painful, and fraught with the most tender sorrow. Few there are who have not experienced these emotions, in a greater or lesser degree, yet how seldom have they been productive of the effects for which the author of our nature seems to have bestowed them. Surely the horror of mind attending a last adieu, has been meant as a monitor of a fast approaching day, when we must bid adieu to all who are near and dear to us in life.—That such an hour is posting towards us, we are all certain; and, how very near it may be, not one of us knows; and therefore, that the pangs of parting regret may be somewhat mollified, ought we not to be constantly endeavouring to secure some interest in that country in which we all hope to find a final retreat, by gaining that friendship

which alone can be of everlasting value to us. Then, on being forced from the embraces of our friends here, we know that we have one before us, to whose

house we will be welcome; whose benevolent heart has already bled for us, and whose kind hand will at last wipe all the tears of sorrow from our eyes.

Alas! alas! the time draws nigh,
When low that beauteous form shall lie!
That eye that beams with love and duty,
Must quickly lose its beaming beauty!
That heart that beats so brisk and gaily,
Must turn a clod in yonder valley!
No more the morn shall dawn on thee,
But long thy starless night shall be,
Chill, chill, and damp, thy lonely room!
And hemlock o'er thy bosom bloom!
Oh then be wise! the time draws nigh,
When low that beauteous form shall lie!

But, Oh! within that lovely frame,
There dwells a spark of heavenly flame!
A spark shall ever, ever burn,
Shall smile o'er nature's closing urn,
And mix its beams in cloudless day,
When sun and stars have past away.
To nurse that spark, that ray divine,
The task, the pleasing task be thine!
Then thy delights shall never die,
Though low that beauteous form shall lie.