

" THE BOOKSELLERS.

" 'A heavy wit shall hang at every lord :'
 So sung Dan Pope ; but 'pon my word,
 He was a story-teller,
 Or else the times have altered quite,
 For wits, or heavy now, or light,
 Hang each by a bookseller.'

S. T. C.

" Of all the revolutions that have taken place in modern times—or it should perhaps rather be said of all the improvements which the increasing spirit and refining taste of those times have brought about, the greatest in its nature, and the most beneficial in its influence, is that which has taken place in the world of letters—which has removed entirely that incompetent and lumbering class of middle-men—patrons—which has elevated the bookseller into the character of the common agent of the instructors and the instructed—and thereby placed the literature of England even higher in the intellectual scale than the liberality of her institutions, and the consequent vigour of her people, place her in the political one.

" Scarcely a century has elapsed since the portals of fame to men of genius, and the portals of knowledge and intellectual entertainment to all the people, were kept by the Cerberi of the aristocracy. In those days neither the authors nor the publishers of books were freemen ; they were serfs depending upon the pleasure of haughty peers and saucy courtiers ; and, although one of the former happened to possess wisdom that could instruct, or genius that could delight the age, he had not even a chance of being permitted to impart knowledge or inspire delight, unless he in the first place condescended to stand cap in hand until some lordling pleased to cease from caressing his favourite dog, or until some minion of the court had bound him to sink and stain himself in the black flood of political intrigue ;—and even when he did obtain a hearing, he was fain (or rather let us hope forced) to set a Cain's mark of his own degradation on the forehead of his book—to plant talents and virtues in a region which, in respect of these, Heaven had cursed with eternal barrenness. When, indeed, we collect some half-dozen of even classical books—books by men of sterling talent, and look at the prodigiously great and good men to whom these are dedicated, and then turn to the memorials of their times, which the impartial judge has seen meet to spare, without finding so much as a single trace of all this wisdom and all this worth, we are apt to imagine that of all perishable things the talents and the virtues of official and titled persons are the most perishable ; for really, if it

were not for the very sin of the authors in having lied their patrons into remembrance, there would not be one indication of the breed in the world's annals.

“What a change has now taken place! A literary man of the present day would as soon think of seeking patronage from the Emperor of Austria, or setting forth the talents and the virtues of the Spanish Ferdinand, as of placing his hopes of a hearing with the public upon the foremost nobleman in the land; and, as for courtiers, a recommendation of the most noble Hertford or his Grace of the Brazen Achilles, would be no better passport in the Row than a certificate from Aldgate Pump. The public—those fifteen millions of people ‘within the four seas’ of our ‘snug little island,’ the far greater majority of whom, above the years of mere infancy, not only can read but do read, are the patrons of genius and of learning; and every school that is founded, no matter by whom,—every literary or scientific institution that is established, no matter under what appellation,—is another pledge and another security, not only that the information, and through that all the active energies of this country shall not languish and decline, but that they are flourishing and will flourish, with a vigour of which the boldest imagination cannot even now picture the extent. Under such a patronage—so general, that it cannot be affected by caprice,—so powerful, that it cannot be destroyed either by accident or by design,—and so liberal, that its rewards must always be in the full measure, proportioned to that which is offered to it—every talent that can either discover new utility, or invent new amusement, or which can so vary the old as to give them somewhat of the charm of novelty, is sure to meet with its full and honest recompence.

“This change has brought the publishers of books into an attitude of the greatest importance and honour;—it has made them the connecting link between the people of England and that which has made, is making, and shall continue to make, the people of England superior to the people of every land where intellect has not the same unbounded scope. The result has been that, as in all similar cases, the men have risen both in character and in affluence, as their status and importance in society have been raised. When they lived huddled together in their small shops, and waited the sanction of this or the other patron, before they dared venture to publish, they were men of narrow and illiberal views, and, in point of opulence, far down in the scale of metropolitan citizens; but they and those to whom they give employment have now risen to the very top; and taking the Court of Alder-

men as a test of civic wealth and local respectability, there are more of its members connected with the book-trade than with any other three trades in the capital. Perhaps also the quantity of labour which they employ is greater, and in many branches of it more intellectual and ingenious, than that which is employed in any other branch of industry. There is none in which the manufactured article is so valuable, even in a merely mercantile point of view, as compared with the raw material from which it is made; and though the taxes are certainly not the most liberal or judicious on the statute-book, there are few branches of industry which produce a greater revenue to the state. Let any one imagine how many paper-makers, typefounders, engine-makers, printers, bookbinders, shopkeepers, and agents, the millions of works (for taking them in all their variety, there are millions) which are annually published in England must employ,—to all of which the bookseller is really the moving power—the grand engine that puts the whole in motion; and then their great value in a political point of view may be guessed at. When to this are added their intellectual and moral influence, the talents which they create (for without them those talents would lie dormant, and therefore be of no more use than if they did not exist), it is certainly not saying too much to describe them as at once the most important and the most generally influential profession in the whole kingdom.

“It is true that the booksellers of the present day have, not in one instance, but in hundreds of instances, become rich beyond all former precedent; but their riches have not, like the riches of mere speculators, been obtained by a transfer of those of others,—nor have they, like the comparatively small possessions of the elder bibliopoles, been ground out of an oppressed and degraded literati: they have become rich, because they have opened the mines of intellect to the people; and just as they have been liberal to those who have supplied them with materials, the public has been liberal to them—or perhaps, one should say, just to itself.

“Constable of Edinburgh was perhaps the first who saw clearly the advantages of this liberality; Murray soon followed; nor was it long ere, with a very few exceptions, the whole trade adopted the same system,—so that now, unless it be from those who have mistaken their man or their occupation, we hear nothing of the illiberality of booksellers. No doubt they are still cautious with strangers; but this caution, instead of an injury to the public, is a service; inasmuch as the bookseller, by incurring the whole of his expense before he is certain of realizing a single shilling, plays a game which is more hazardous

than that of an ordinary merchant, whose goods, however injudiciously he may buy them, are always sure to fetch a certain portion of the price.

“ Another proof of the liberality and discernment of the booksellers is the readiness with which they adapt the form and mode of publishing their books to the spirit of the times. Since the reading public became the world generally, and not the merely professional students, a new literature has been demanded, and it has been demanded in a new form. Men, whose occupations are connected with the passing time, have become the majority of readers, and they accordingly desire that the reading shall also not only be connected with the passing time, but shall come in portions as that time passes. Hence the great demand for periodical literature; and hence, too, the breaking down of larger works into numbers, so that they may be published periodically.

“ This, which began with obscurer publishers, and with works of a less important nature, is extending itself over the whole trade, and over the whole empire of letters, in such a way as proves that reading is becoming universal both as to the readers and the subjects read.”—*News of Literature*, Dec. 10, 1825.

“CONSTABLE'S MISCELLANY.”

“ The name of Constable has strong claims to respect from those who feel an interest in the literary honours of Scotland. To hundreds it has been the passport to fame, to consequence, and to emolument; and it is indeed associated with almost every work of genius which has appeared in the last and brightest period of our literary history. It would be ungrateful in the Press and the Public to forget this; and we can truly say, therefore, that it gives us sincere pleasure to see that name reappear, after an interval of gloom and misfortune, in connexion with a work of undisputed utility. This First Volume of the Miscellany is now ready, and we hope will meet with the encouragement which it amply merits. It is a reprint of Captain Hall's very interesting Voyage to Loo-Choo, with various additions, and, among others, an account of his interview with Bonaparte in 1817. This small volume, neatly printed, enables the reader to obtain, for three shillings, what would cost in another shape twelve or fourteen. The plan of progressive publication in weekly numbers puts it within the reach of all but the very poorest classes, while the style of its typography, and its general appearance, render it not unworthy of a place in the libraries