

1822

ESSAYS

Charles Lamb

Lamb, Charles (1775-1834) - English essayist and critic well-known for the humorous and informal tone of his writing. His life was marked by tragedy and frustration; his sister Mary, whom he took lifelong care of, killed their parents in a fit of madness, and he himself spent time in a madhouse. Essays (1822) - A collection of essays written by Lamb under the pseudonym, "Elia," including, among others, "On the Tragedies of Shakspeare," "On the Genius and Character of Hogarth," and "Recollections of Christ's Hospital."

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RECOLLECTIONS OF CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

To comfort the desponding parent with the thought that, without diminishing the stock which is imperiously demanded to furnish the more pressing and homely wants of our nature, he has disposed of one or more perhaps out of a numerous offspring, under the shelter of a care scarce less tender than the paternal, where not only their bodily cravings shall be supplied, but that mental pabulum is also dispensed, which HE hath declared to be no less necessary to our sustenance, who said, that, "not by bread alone man can live": for this Christ's Hospital unfolds her bounty. Here neither, on the one hand, are the youth lifted up above their family, which we must suppose liberal, though reduced; nor on the other hand, are they liable to be depressed below its level by the mean habits and sentiments which a common charity-school generates. It is, in a word, an Institution to keep those who have yet held up their heads in the world from sinking; to keep alive the spirit of a decent household, when poverty was in danger of crushing it; to assist those who are the most willing, but not always the most able, to assist themselves; to separate a child from his family for a season, in order to render him back hereafter, with feelings and habits more congenial to it, than he could even have attained by remaining at home in the bosom of it. It is a preserving and renovating principle, an antidote for the *res angusta domi*, when it presses, as it always does, most heavily upon the most ingenuous natures.

This is Christ's Hospital; and whether its character would be improved by confining its advantages to the very lowest of the people, let those judge who have witnessed the looks, the gestures, the behaviour, the manner of their play with one another, their deportment towards strangers, the whole aspect and physiognomy of that vast assemblage of boys on the London foundation, who freshen and make alive again with their sports the else mouldering cloisters of the old Grey Friars which strangers who have never witnessed, if they pass through Newgate Street, or by Smithfield, would do well to go a little out of their way to see.

For the Christ's Hospital boy feels that he is no charity-boy; he feels it in the antiquity and regality of the foundation to which he belongs; in the usage which he meets with at school, and the treatment he is accustomed to out of its bounds; in the respect and even kindness, which his well-known garb never fails to procure him in the streets of the metropolis; he feels it in his education, in that measure of classical attainments, which every individual at that school, though not destined to a learned profession, has it in his power to procure, attainments which it would be worse than folly to put in the reach of the labouring classes to acquire: he feels it in the numberless comforts, and even magnificences, which surround him; in his old and awful cloisters, with their traditions; in his spacious schoolrooms, and in the well-ordered, airy, and lofty rooms where he sleeps; in his stately dining-hall, hung round with pictures, by Verrio, Lely, and others, one of them surpassing in size and grandeur almost any other in the kingdom; 1 above all, in the very extent and magnitude of the body to which he

belongs, and the consequent spirit, the intelligence, and public conscience, which is the result of so many various yet wonderfully combining members. Compared with this lastnamed advantage, what is the stock of information (I do not here speak of booklearning, but of that knowledge which boy receives from boy), the mass of collected opinions, the intelligence in common, among the few and narrow members of an ordinary boarding-school? The Christ's Hospital or Blue-coat boy has a distinctive character of his own, as far removed from the abject qualities of a common charity-boy as it is from the disgusting forwardness of a lad brought up at some other of the public schools.

There is pride in it, accumulated from the circumstances which I have described, as differencing him from the former; and there is a restraining modesty from a sense of obligation and dependence, which must ever keep his deportment from 1 By Verrio, representing James the Second on his throne, surrounded by his courtiers (all curious portraits), receiving the mathematical pupils at their annual presentation: a custom still kept up on New-year's-day at Court.

assimilating to that of the latter. His very garb, as it is antique and venerable, feeds his self-respect; as it is a badge of dependence, it restrains the natural petulance of that age from breaking out into overt acts of insolence. This produces silence and a reserve before strangers, yet not that cowardly shyness which boys mewed up at home will feel; he will speak up when spoken to, but the stranger must begin the conversation with him. Within his bounds he is all fire and play; but in the streets he steals along with all the self-concentration of a young monk.

He is never known to mix with other boys, they are a sort of laity to him. All this proceeds, I have no doubt, from the continual consciousness which he carries about him of the difference of his dress from that of the rest of the world; with a modest jealousy over himself, lest, by over-hastily mixing with common and secular playfellows, he should commit the dignity of his cloth. Nor let any one laugh at this; for, considering the propensity of the multitude, and especially of the small multitude, to ridicule anything unusual in dress- above all, where such peculiarity may be construed by malice into a mark of disparagement- this reserve will appear to be nothing more than a wise instinct in the Blue-coat boy. That it is neither pride nor rusticity, at least that it has none of the offensive qualities of either, a stranger may soon satisfy himself by putting a question to any of these boys: he may be sure of an answer couched in terms of plain civility, neither loquacious nor embarrassed. Let him put the same question to a parish-boy, or to one of the trencher-caps in the __ cloisters, and the impudent reply of the one shall not fail to exasperate any more than the certain servility, and mercenary eye to reward, which he will meet with in the other, can fail to depress and sadden him.

The Christ's Hospital boy is a religious character. His school is eminently a religious foundation; it has its peculiar prayers, its services at set times, its graces, hymns, and anthems, following each other in an almost monastic closeness of succession. This religious character in him is not always untinged with superstition.

That is not wonderful, when we consider the thousand tales and traditions which must circulate, with undisturbed credulity, amongst so many boys, that have so few checks to their belief from any intercourse with the world at large; upon whom their equals in age must work so much, their elders so little. With this leaning towards an over-belief in matters of religion, which will soon correct itself when he comes out into society, may be classed a turn for romance above most other boys. This is to be traced in the same manner to their excess of society with each other, and defect of mingling with the world. Hence the peculiar avidity with which such books as the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, and others of a still wilder cast, are, or at least were in my time, sought for by the boys. I remember when some half-dozen of them set off from school, without map, card, or compass, on a serious expedition to find out Philip Quarll's Island.

The Christ's Hospital boy's sense of right and wrong is peculiarly tender and apprehensive. It is even apt to run out into ceremonial observances, and to impose a yoke upon itself beyond the strict obligations of the moral law. Those who were contemporaries with me at that school thirty years ago, will remember with what more than Judaic rigour the eating of the fat of certain boiled meats, ² was interdicted. A boy would have blushed as at the exposure of some heinous immorality, to have been detected eating that forbidden portion of his allowance of animal food, the whole of which, while he was in health, was little more than sufficient to allay his hunger. The same, or even greater, refinement was shown in the rejection of certain kinds of sweet-cake. What gave rise to these supererogatory penances, these self-denying ordinances, I could never learn; ³ they certainly argue no defect of the conscientious principle. A little excess in that article is not undesirable in youth, to make allowance for the inevitable waste which comes in maturer years. But in the less ambiguous line of duty, in those directions of the moral feelings which cannot be mistaken or depreciated, I will relate what took place in the year 1785, when Mr. Perry, the steward, died. I must be pardoned for taking my instances from my own times. Indeed, the vividness of my recollections, while I am upon this subject, almost bring back those times; they are present to me still. But I believe that in the years which have elapsed since the period which I speak of, the character of the Christ's Hospital boy is very little changed. Their situation in point of many comforts is improved; but that which I ventured before

2 Under the denomination of gags

³ I am told that the late steward [Mr. Hathaway] who evinced on many occasions a most praiseworthy anxiety to promote the comfort of the boys, had occasion for all his address and perseverance to eradicate the first of these unfortunate prejudices, in which he at length happily succeeded, and thereby restored to one-half of the animal nutrition of the school those honours which painful superstition and blind zeal had so long conspired to withhold from it.

to term the public conscience of the school, the pervading moral sense, of which every mind partakes and to which so many individual minds contribute, remains, I believe, pretty much the same as when I left it. I have seen, within this twelvemonth almost, the change which has been produced upon a boy of eight or nine years of age, upon being

admitted into that school; how, from a pert young coxcomb, who thought that all knowledge was comprehended within his shallow brains, because a smattering of two or three languages and one or two sciences were stuffed into him by injudicious treatment at home, by a mixture with the wholesome society of so many schoolfellows, in less time than I have spoken of, he has sunk to his own level, and is contented to be carried on in the quiet orbit of modest self-knowledge in which the common mass of that unpretentious assemblage of boys seem to move: from being a little unfeeling mortal, he has got to feel and reflect. Nor would it be a difficult matter to show how, at a school like this, where the boy is neither entirely separated from home, nor yet exclusively under its influence, the best feelings, the filial for instance, are brought to a maturity which they could not have attained under a completely domestic education; how the relation of a parent is rendered less tender by unremitted association, and the very awfulness of age is best apprehended by some sojourning amidst the comparative levity of youth; how absence, not drawn out by too great extension into alienation or forgetfulness, puts an edge upon the relish of occasional intercourse, and the boy is made the better child by that which keeps the force of that relation from being felt as perpetually pressing on him; how the substituted paternity, into the care of which he is adopted, while in everything substantial it makes up for the natural, in the necessary omission of individual fondnesses and partialities, directs the mind only the more strongly to appreciate that natural and first tie, in which such weaknesses are the bond of strength, and the appetite which craves after them betrays no perverse palate. But these speculations rather belong to the question of the comparative advantages of a public over a private education in general. I must get back to my favourite school; and to that which took place when our old and good steward died. And I will say, that when I think of the frequent instances which I have met with in children, of a hard-heartedness, a callousness, and insensibility to the loss of relations, even of those who have begot and nourished them, I cannot but consider it as a proof of something in the peculiar conformation of that school, favourable to the expansion of the best feelings of our nature, that, at the period which I am noticing, out of five hundred boys there was not a dry eye to be found among them, nor a heart that did not beat with genuine emotion. Every impulse to play, until the funeral day was past, seemed suspended throughout the school; and the boys, lately so mirthful and sprightly, were seen pacing their cloisters alone, or in sad groups standing about, few of them without some token, such as their slender means could provide, a black riband or something, to denote respect and a sense of their loss. The time itself was a time of anarchy, a time in which all authority (out of school hours) was abandoned. The ordinary restraints were for those days superseded; and the gates, which at other times kept us in, were left without watchers. Yet, with the exception of one or two graceless boys at most, who took advantage of that suspension of authorities to skulk out, as it was called, the whole body of that great school kept rigorously within their bounds, by a voluntary self-imprisonment; and they who broke bounds, though they escaped punishment from any master, fell into a general disrepute among us, and, for that which at any other time would have been applauded and admired as a mark of spirit, were consigned to infamy and reprobation; so much natural government have gratitude and the principles

of reverence and love, and so much did a respect to their dead friends prevail with these Christ's Hospital boys, above any fear which his presence among them when living could ever produce. And if the impressions which were made on my mind so long ago are to be trusted, very richly did their steward deserve this tribute. It is a pleasure to me even now to call to mind his portly form, the regal awe which he always contrived to inspire, in spite of a tenderness and even weakness of nature that would have enfeebled the reins of discipline in any other master; a yearning of tenderness towards those under his protection, which could make five hundred boys at once feel towards him each as to their individual father. He had faults, with which we had nothing to do; but, with all his faults, indeed, Mr. Perry was a most extraordinary creature. Contemporary with him and still living, though he has long since resigned his occupation, will it be impertinent to mention the name of our excellent upper grammar-master, the Rev. James Boyer? He was a disciplinarian, indeed, of a different stamp from him whom I have just described; but, now the terrors of the rod, and of a temper a little too hasty to leave the more nervous of us quite at our ease to do justice to his merits in those days, are long since over, ungrateful were we if we should refuse our testimony to that unwearied assiduity with which he attended to the particular improvement of each of us. Had we been the offspring of the first gentry in the land, he could not have been instigated by the strongest views of recompense and reward to have made himself a greater slave to the most laborious of all occupations than he did for us sons of charity, from whom, or from our parents, he could expect nothing. He has had his reward in the satisfaction of having discharged his duty, in the pleasurable consciousness of having advanced the respectability of that institution to which, both man and boy, he was attached; in the honours to which so many of his pupils have successfully aspired at both our Universities; and in the staff with which the Governors of the Hospital, at the close of his hard labours, with the highest expressions of the obligations the school lay under to him, unanimously voted to present him.

I have often considered it among the felicities of the constitution of this school, that the offices of steward and schoolmaster are kept distinct; the strict business of education alone devolving upon the latter, while the former has the charge of all things out of school, the control of the provisions, the regulation of meals, of dress, of play, and the ordinary intercourse of the boys. By this division of management, a superior respectability must attach to the teacher while his office is unmixed with any of these lower concerns. A still greater advantage over the construction of common boarding-schools is to be found in the settled salaries of the masters, rendering them totally free of obligation to any individual pupil or his parents. This never fails to have its effect at schools where each boy can reckon up to a hair what profit the master derives from him, where he views him every day in the light of a caterer, a provider for the family, who is to get so much by him in each of his meals. Boys will see and consider these things; and how much must the sacred character of preceptor suffer in their minds by these degrading associations! The very bill which the pupil carries home with him at Christmas, eked out, perhaps, with elaborate though necessary minuteness, instructs him that his teachers have other ends than the mere love to learning, in the lessons

which they give him; and though they put into his hands the fine sayings of Seneca or Epictetus, yet they themselves are none of those disinterested pedagogues to teach philosophy gratis. The master, too, is sensible that he is seen in this light; and how much this must lessen that affectionate regard to the learners which alone can sweeten the bitter labour of instruction, and convert the whole business into unwelcome and uninteresting task-work, many preceptors that I have conversed with on the subject are ready, with a sad heart, to acknowledge.

From this inconvenience the settled salaries of the masters of this school in great measure exempt them; while the happy custom of choosing masters (indeed every officer of the establishment) from those who have received their education there, gives them an interest in advancing the character of the school, and binds them to observe a tenderness and a respect to the children, in which a stranger, feeling that dependence which I have spoken of, might well be expected to fail.

In affectionate recollections of the place where he was bred up, in hearty recognitions of old schoolfellows met with again after the lapse of years, or in foreign countries, the Christ's Hospital boy yields to none; I might almost say, he goes beyond most other boys. The very compass and magnitude of the school, its thousand bearings, the space it takes up in the imagination beyond the ordinary schools, impresses a remembrance, accompanied with an elevation of mind, that attends him through life. It is too big, too affecting an object, to pass away quickly from his mind. The Christ's Hospital boy's friends at school are commonly his intimates through life. For me, I do not know whether a constitutional imbecility does not incline me too obstinately to cling to the remembrances of childhood; in an inverted ratio to the usual sentiments of mankind, nothing that I have been engaged in since seems of any value or importance, compared to the colours which imagination gave to everything then. I belong to no body corporate such as I then made a part of.- And here, before I close, taking leave of the general reader, and addressing myself solely to my old schoolfellows, that were contemporaries with me from the year 1782 to 1789, let me have leave to remember some of those circumstances of our school, which they will not be unwilling to have brought back to their minds.

And first, let us remember, as first in importance in our childish eyes, the young men (as they almost were) who, under the denomination of Grecians, were waiting the expiration of the period when they should be sent, at the charges of the Hospital, to one or other of our universities, but more frequently to Cambridge. These youths, from their superior acquirements, their superior age and stature, and the fewness of their numbers (for seldom above two or three at a time were inaugurated into that high order), drew the eyes of all, and especially of the younger boys, into a reverent observance and admiration. How tall they used to seem to us! how stately would they pace along the cloisters! while the play of the lesser boys was absolutely suspended, or its boisterousness at least allayed, at their presence! Not that they ever beat or struck the boys- that would have been to have demeaned themselves- the dignity of their persons alone insured them all respect. The task of blows, of corporal chastisement, they left to the common monitors, or heads of wards, who, it must be confessed, in our

time had rather too much licence allowed them to oppress and misuse their inferiors; and the interference of the Grecian, who may be considered as the spiritual power, was not unfrequently called for, to mitigate by its mediation the heavy unrelenting arm of this temporal power, or monitor. In fine, the Grecians were the solemn Muftis of the school. Aeras were computed from their time;- it used to be said, such or such a thing was done when S__ or T__ was Grecian.

As I ventured to call the Grecians, the Muftis of the school, the King's boys, & as their character then was, may well pass for the Janissaries. They were the terror of all the other boys; bred up under that hardy sailor, as well as excellent mathematician, and co-navigator with Captain Cook, William Wales. All his systems were adapted to fit them for the rough element which they were destined to encounter. Frequent and severe punishments, which were expected to be born with 4 The mathematical pupils, bred up to the sea, on the foundation of Charles the Second.

more than Spartan fortitude, came to be considered less as inflictions of disgrace than as trials of obstinate endurance. To make his boys hardy, and to give them early sailor-habits, seemed to be his only aim; to this everything was subordinate.

Moral obliquities, indeed, were sure of receiving their full recompense, for no occasion of laying on the lash was ever let slip; but the effects expected to be produced from it were something very different from contrition or mortification.

There was in William Wales a perpetual fund of humour, a constant glee about him, which heightened by an inveterate provincialism of north-country dialect, absolutely took away the sting from his severities. His punishments were a game at patience, in which the master was not always worst contented when he found himself at times overcome by his pupil. What success this discipline had, or how the effects of it operated upon the after-lives of these King's boys, I cannot say: but I am sure that, for the time, they were absolute nuisances to the rest of the school.

Hardy, brutal, and often wicked, they were the most graceless lump in the whole mass; older and bigger than the other boys (for, by the system of their education they were kept longer at school by two or three years than any of the rest, except the Grecians), they were a constant terror to the younger part of the school; and some who may read this, I doubt not, will remember the consternation into which the juvenile fry of us were thrown, when the cry was raised in the cloisters, that the First Order was coming- for so they termed the first form or class of those boys. Still these sea-boys answered some good purposes in the school. They were the military class among the boys, foremost in athletic exercises, who extended the fame of the prowess of the school far and near; and the apprentices in the vicinage, and sometimes the butchers' boys in the neighboring market, had sad occasion to attest their valour. The time would fail me if I were to attempt to enumerate all those circumstances, some pleasant, some attended with some pain, which, seen through the mist of distance, come sweetly softened to the memory. But I must crave leave to remember our transcending superiority in those invigorating sports, leap-frog, and basting the bear; our delightful excursions in the summer holidays to the New River, near Newington, where, like otters, we would live the long

day in the water, never caring for dressing ourselves, when we had once stripped; our savoury meals afterwards, when we came home almost famished with staying out all day without our dinners; our visits at other times to the Tower, where, by ancient privilege, we had free access to all the curiosities; our solemn processions through the City at Easter, with the Lord Mayor's largess of buns, wine, and a shilling, with the festive questions and civic pleasantries of the dispensing Aldermen, which were more to us than all the rest of the banquet; our stately suppers in public, where the well-lighted hall, and the confluence of well-dressed company who came to see us, made the whole look more like a concert or assembly, than a scene of a plain bread and cheese collation; the annual orations upon St. Matthew's day, in which the senior scholar, before he had done, seldom failed to reckon up, among those who had done honour to our school by being educated in it, the names of those accomplished critics and Greek scholars, Joshua Barnes and Jeremiah Markland (I marvel they left out Camden while they were about it). Let me have leave to remember our hymns and anthems, and well-toned organ; the doleful tune of the burial anthem chaunted in the solemn cloisters, upon the seldom-occurring funeral of some schoolfellow; the festivities at Christmas, when the richest of us would club our stock to have a gaudy day, sitting round the fire, replenished to the height with logs, and the pennyless, and he that could contribute nothing, partook in all the mirth, and in some of the substantialities of the feasting; the carol sung by night at that time of the year, which, when a young boy, I have so often lain awake to hear from seven (the hour of going to bed) till ten, when it was sung by the older boys and monitors, and have listened to it, in their rude chaunting, till I have been transported in fancy to the fields of Bethlehem, and the song which was sung at that season, by angels' voices to the shepherds.

Nor would I willingly forget any of those things which administered to our vanity. The hem-stitched bands and town-made shirts, which some of the most fashionable among us wore; the town-girdles, with buckles of silver, or shining stone; the badges of the sea-boys; the cots, or superior shoe-strings, of the monitors; the medals of the markers (those who were appointed to hear the Bible read in the wards on Sunday morning and evening), which bore on their obverse in silver, as certain parts of our garments carried, in meaner metal, the countenance of our Founder, that godly and royal child, King Edward the Sixth, the flower of the Tudor name- the young flower that was untimely cropt, as it began to fill our land with its early odours- the boy-patron of boys- the serious and holy child who walked with Cranmer and Ridley- fit associate, in those tender years, for the bishops, and future martyrs of our Church, to receive, or (as occasion sometimes proved), to give instruction.

But, ah! what means the silent tear? Why, e'en 'mid joy, my bosom heave? Ye long-lost scenes, enchantments dear! Lo! now I linger o'er your grave.

- Fly, then, ye hours of rosy hue, And bear away the bloom of years! And quick succeed, ye sickly crew Of doubts and sorrows, pains and fears! Of doubts and sorrows, pains and fears!

Still will I ponder Fate's unaltered plan, Nor, tracing back the child, forget that I am man. 5

5 Lines meditated in the cloisters of Christ's Hospital, in the "Poetics" of Mr. George Dyer.

ON THE TRAGEDIES OF SHAKSPEARE

Considered with reference to their fitness for stage-representation TAKING a turn the other day in the Abbey, I was struck with the affected attitude of a figure, which I do not remember to have seen before, and which upon examination proved to be a whole-length of the celebrated Mr. Garrick. Though I would not go so far with some good Catholics abroad as to shut players altogether out of consecrated ground, yet I own I was not a little scandalised at the introduction of theatrical airs and gestures into a place set apart to remind us of the saddest realities. Going nearer, I found inscribed under this harlequin figure the following lines: To paint fair Nature, by divine command Her magic pencil in his glowing hand, A Shakspeare rose; then, to expand his fame Wide o'er this breathing world, a Garrick came.

Though sunk in death the forms the Poet drew, The Actor's genius bade them breathe anew; Though, like the bard himself, in night they lay, Immortal Garrick called them back to day: And till Eternity with power sublime Shall mark the mortal hour of hoary Time, Shakspeare and Garrick like twin-stars shall shine, And earth irradiate with a beam divine.

It would be an insult to my readers' understanding to attempt anything like a criticism on this farrago of false thoughts and nonsense. But the reflection it led me into was a kind of wonder, how, from the days of the actor here celebrated to our own, it should have been the fashion to compliment every performer in his turn, that has had the luck to please the Town in any of the great characters of Shakspeare, with the notion of possessing a mind congenial with the poet's: how people should come thus unaccountably to confound the power of originating poetical images and conceptions with the faculty of being able to read or recite the same when put into words; or what connection that absolute mastery over the heart and soul of man, which a great dramatic poet possesses, has with those low tricks upon the eye and ear, which a player by observing a few general effects, which some common passion, as grief, anger, etc., usually has upon the gestures. It is observable that we fall into this confusion only in dramatic recitations. We never dream that the gentleman who reads Lucretius in public with great applause, is therefore a great poet and philosopher; nor do we find that Tom Davis, the bookseller, who is recorded to have recited the Paradise Lost better than any man in England in his day (though I cannot help thinking there must be some mistake in this tradition) was therefore, by his intimate friends, set upon a level with Milton.

and exterior, can so easily compass. To know the internal workings and movements of a great mind, of an Othello or a Hamlet for instance, the when and the why and the how far they should be moved; to what pitch a passion is becoming; to give the reins and to pull in the curb exactly at the moment when the drawing in or the slackening is most graceful; seems to demand a reach of intellect of a vastly different extent from that

which is employed upon the bare imitation of the signs of these passions in the countenance or gesture, which signs are usually observed to be most lively and emphatic in the weaker sort of minds, and which signs can after all but indicate some passion, as I said before, anger, or grief, generally; but of the motives and grounds of the passion, wherein it differs from the same passion in low and vulgar natures, of these the actor can give no more idea by his face or gesture than the eye (without a metaphor) can speak, or the muscles utter intelligible sounds. But such is the instantaneous nature of the impressions which we take in at the eye and ear at a play-house, compared with the slow apprehension oftentimes of the understanding in reading, that we are apt not only to sink the play-writer in the consideration which we pay to the actor, but even to identify in our minds, in a perverse manner, the actor with the character which he represents. It is difficult for a frequent play-goer to disembarass the idea of Hamlet from the person and voice of Mr. K. We speak of Lady Macbeth, while we are in reality thinking of Mrs. S. Nor is this confusion incidental alone to unlettered persons, who, not possessing the advantage of reading, are necessarily dependent upon the stage-player for all the pleasure which they can receive from the drama, and to whom the very idea of what an author is cannot be made comprehensible without some pain and perplexity of mind: the error is one from which persons otherwise not meanly lettered, find it almost impossible to extricate themselves. Never let me be so ungrateful as to forget the very high degree of satisfaction which I received some years back from seeing for the first time a tragedy of Shakspeare performed, in which those two great performers sustained the principal parts. It seemed to embody and realise conceptions which had hitherto assumed no distinct shape. But dearly do we pay all our life after for this juvenile pleasure, this sense of distinctness. When the novelty is past, we find to our cost that instead of realising an idea, we have only materialised and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood. We have let go a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance.

How cruelly this operates upon the mind, to have its free conceptions thus cramped and pressed down to the measure of a strait-lacing actuality, may be judged from that delightful sensation of freshness, with which we turn to those plays of Shakspeare which have escaped being performed, and to those passages in the acting plays of the same writer which have happily been left out in the performance. How far the very custom of hearing anything spouted, withers and blows upon a fine passage, may be seen in those speeches from Henry the Fifth, etc., which are current in the mouths of schoolboys, from their being to be found in Enfield's Speaker, and such kind of books! I confess myself utterly unable to appreciate that celebrated soliloquy in Hamlet, beginning "To be or not to be," or to tell whether it be good, bad or indifferent, it has been so handled and pawed about by declamatory boys and men, and torn so inhumanly from its living place and principle of continuity in the play, till it is become to me a perfect dead member.

It may seem a paradox, but I cannot help being of opinion that the plays of Shakspeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist

whatever. Their distinguishing excellence is a reason that they should be so. There is so much in them, which comes not under the province of acting, with which eye, and tone, and gesture, have nothing to do.

The glory of the scenic art is to personate passion, and the turns of passion; and the more coarse and palpable the passion is, the more hold upon the eyes and ears of the spectators the performer obviously possesses. For this reason, scolding scenes, scenes where two persons talk themselves into a fit of fury, and then in a surprising manner talk themselves out of it again, have always been the most popular upon our stage. And the reason is plain, because the spectators are here most palpably appealed to, they are the proper judges in this war of words, they are the legitimate ring that should be formed round such "intellectual prize-fighters." Talking is the direct object of the imitation here. But in all the best dramas, and in Shakspeare above all, how obvious it is, that the form of speaking, whether it be in soliloquy or dialogue, is only a medium, and often a highly artificial one, for putting the reader or spectator into possession of that knowledge of the inner structure and workings of mind in a character, which he could otherwise never have arrived at in that form of composition by any gift short of intuition. We do here as we do with novels written in the epistolary form. How many improprieties, perfect solecisms in letter-writing, do we put up with in *Clarissa* and other books, for the sake of the delight which that form upon the whole gives us!

But the practice of stage representation reduces everything to a controversy of elocution. Every character, from the boisterous blasphemings of Bajazet to the shrinking timidity of womanhood, must play the orator. The love dialogues of *Romeo and Juliet*, those silver-sweet sounds of lovers' tongues by night! the more intimate and sacred sweetness of nuptial colloquy between an *Othello* or a *Posthumus* with their married wives, all those delicacies which are so delightful in the reading, as when we read of those youthful dalliances in *Paradise As besem'd Fair couple link'd in happy nuptial league, Alone*; by the inherent fault of stage representation, how are these things sullied and turned from their very nature by being exposed to a large assembly; when such speeches as *Imogen* addresses to her lord, come drawling out of the mouth of a hired actress, whose courtship, though nominally addressed to the personated *Posthumus*, is manifestly aimed at the spectators, who are to judge of her endearments and her returns of love!

The character of *Hamlet* is perhaps that by which, since the days of *Betterton*, a succession of popular performers have had the greatest ambition to distinguish themselves. The length of the part may be one of their reasons. But for the character itself, we find it in a play, and therefore we judge it a fit subject of dramatic representation. The play itself abounds in maxims and reflections beyond any other, and therefore we consider it as a proper vehicle for conveying moral instruction. But *Hamlet* himself- what does he suffer meanwhile by being dragged forth as the public schoolmaster, to give lectures to the crowd! Why, nine parts in ten of what *Hamlet* does, are transactions between himself and his moral sense; they are the effusions of his solitary musings, which he retires to holes and corners and the most sequestered parts of the palace to pour forth; or rather, they are the silent meditations with which his

bosom is bursting, reduced to words for the sake of the reader, who must else remain ignorant of what is passing there. These profound sorrows, these light-and-noise-abhorring ruminations, which the tongue scarce dares utter to deaf walls and chambers, how can they be represented by a gesticulating actor, who comes and mouths them out before an audience, making four hundred people his confidants at once! I say not that it is the fault of the actor so to do; he must pronounce them ore rotundo; he must accompany them with his eye; he must insinuate them into his auditory by some trick of eye, tone or gesture, or he fails. He must be thinking all the while of his appearance, because he knows that all the while the spectators are judging of it. And this is the way to represent the shy, negligent, retiring Hamlet!

It is true that there is no other mode of conveying a vast quantity of thought and feeling to a great portion of the audience, who otherwise would never earn it for themselves by reading, and the intellectual acquisition gained this way may, for aught I know, be inestimable; but I am not arguing that Hamlet should not be acted, but how much Hamlet is made another thing by being acted. I have heard much of the wonders which Garrick performed in this part; but as I never saw him, I must have leave to doubt whether the representation of such a character came within the province of his art. Those who tell me of him, speak of his eye, of the magic of his eye, and of his commanding voice: physical properties, vastly desirable in an actor, and without which he can never insinuate meaning into an auditory,- but what have they to do with Hamlet; what have they to do with intellect? In fact, the things aimed at in theatrical representation, are to arrest the spectator's eye upon the form and the gesture, and so to gain a more favourable hearing to what is spoken: it is not what the character is, but how he looks; not what he says, but how he speaks it. I see no reason to think that if the play of Hamlet were written over again by some such writer as Banks or Lillo, retaining the process of the story, but totally omitting all the poetry of it, all the divine features of Shakspeare, his stupendous intellect; and only taking care to give us enough of passionate dialogue, which Banks or Lillo were never at a loss to furnish; I see not how the effect could be much different upon an audience, nor how the actor has it in his power to represent Shakspeare to us differently from his representation of Banks or Lillo. Hamlet would still be a youthful accomplished prince, and must be gracefully personated; he might be puzzled in his mind, wavering in his conduct, seemingly cruel to Ophelia; he might see a ghost, and start at it, and address it kindly when he found it to be his father; all this in the poorest and most homely language of the servilest creeper after nature that ever consulted the palate of an audience; without troubling Shakspeare for the matter: and I see not but there would be room for all the power which an actor has, to display itself. All the passions and changes of passion might remain: for those are much less difficult to write or act than is thought; it is a trick easy to be attained, it is but rising or falling a note or two in the voice, a whisper with a significant foreboding look to announce its approach, and so contagious the counterfeit appearance of any emotion is, that let the words be what they will, the look and tone shall carry it off and make it pass for deep skill in the passions.

It is common for people to talk of Shakspeare's plays being so natural; that everybody can understand him. They are natural indeed, they are grounded deep in nature, so deep that the depth of them lies out of the reach of most of us. You shall hear the same persons say that George Barnwell is very natural, and Othello is very natural, that they are both very deep; and to them they are the same kind of thing. At the one they sit and shed tears, because a good sort of young man is tempted by a naughty woman to commit a trifling peccadillo, the murder of an uncle or so, 7 that is all, and so comes to an untimely end, which is so moving; and 7 If this note could hope to meet the eye of any of the Managers, I would entreat and beg of them, in the name of both the Galleries, that this insult upon the morality of the common people of at the other, because a blackamoor in a fit of jealousy kills his innocent white wife; and the odds are that ninety-nine out of a hundred would willingly behold the same catastrophe happen to both the heroes, and have thought the rope more due to Othello than to Barnwell. For of the texture of Othello's mind, the inward construction marvellously laid open with all its strengths and weaknesses, its heroic confidences and its human misgivings, its agonies of hate springing from the depths of love, they see no more than the spectators at a cheaper rate, who pay their pennies a-piece to look through the man's telescope in Leicester Fields, see into the inward plot and topography of the moon. Some dim thing or other they see; they see an actor personating a passion, of grief, or anger, for instance, and they recognise it as a copy of the usual external effects of such passions; or at least as being true to that symbol of the emotion which passes current at the theatre for it, for it is often no more than that: but of the grounds of the passion, its correspondence to a great or heroic nature, which is the only worthy object of London should cease to be eternally repeated in the holiday weeks. Why are the 'Prentices of this famous and well-governed city, instead of an amusement, to be treated over and over again with a nauseous sermon of George Barnwell? Why at the end of their vistas are we to place the gallows? Were I an uncle, I should not much like a nephew of mine to have such an example placed before his eyes. It is really making uncle-murder too trivial to exhibit it as done upon such slight motives;- it is attributing too much to such characters as Millwood:- it is putting things into the heads of good young men, which they would never otherwise have dreamed of. Uncles that think anything of their lives, should fairly petition the Chamberlain against it.

tragedy,- that common auditors know anything of this, or can have any such notions dinned into them by the mere strength of an actor's lungs,- that apprehensions foreign to them should be thus infused into them by storm, I can neither believe, nor understand how it can be possible. We talk of Shakspeare's admirable observation of life, when we should feel, that not from a petty inquisition into those cheap and everyday characters which surrounded him, as they surround us, but from his own mind, which was, to borrow a phrase of Ben Jonson's, the very "sphere of humanity," he fetched those images of virtue and of knowledge, of which every one of us recognising a part, think we comprehend in our natures the whole; and oftentimes mistake the powers which he positively creates in us, for nothing more than indigenuous

faculties of our own minds, which only waited the application of corresponding virtues in him to return a full and clear echo of the same.

To return to Hamlet.- Among the distinguishing features of that wonderful character, one of the most interesting (yet painful) is that soreness of mind which makes him treat the intrusions of Polonius with harshness, and that asperity which he puts on in his interviews with Ophelia. These tokens of an unhinged mind (if they be not mixed in the latter case with a profound artifice of love, to alienate Ophelia by affected discourtesies, so to prepare her mind for the breaking off of that loving intercourse, which can no longer find a place amidst business so serious as that which he has to do) are parts of his character, which to reconcile with our admiration of Hamlet, the most patient consideration of his situation is no more than necessary; they are what we forgive afterwards, and explain by the whole of his character, but at the time they are harsh and unpleasant. Yet such is the actor's necessity of giving strong blows to the audience, that I have never seen a player in this character, who did not exaggerate and strain to the utmost these ambiguous features,- these temporary deformities in the character. They make him express a vulgar scorn at Polonius which utterly degrades his gentility, and which no explanation can render palatable; they make him show contempt, and curl up the nose at Ophelia's father,- contempt in its very grossest and most hateful form; but they get applause by it: it is natural, people say; that is, the words are scornful, and the actor expresses scorn, and that they can judge of: but why so much scorn, and of that sort, they never think of asking.

So to Ophelia.- All the Hamlets that I have ever seen, rant and rave at her as if she had committed some great crime, and the audience are highly pleased, because the words of the part are satirical, and they are enforced by the strongest expression of satirical indignation of which the face and voice are capable. But then, whether Hamlet is likely to have put on such brutal appearances to a lady whom he loved so dearly, is never thought on. The truth is, that in all such deep affections as had subsisted between Hamlet and Ophelia, there is a stock of supererogatory love (if I may venture to use the expression), which in any great grief of heart, especially where that which preys upon the mind cannot be communicated, confers a kind of indulgence upon the grieved party to express itself, even to its heart's dearest object, in the language of a temporary alienation; but it is not alienation, it is a distraction purely, and so it always makes itself to be felt by that object: it is not anger, but grief assuming the appearance of anger,- love awkwardly counterfeiting hate, as sweet countenances when they try to frown: but such sternness and fierce disgust as Hamlet is made to show, is no counterfeit, but the real face of absolute aversion,- of irreconcilable alienation. It may be said he puts on the madman; but then he should only so far put on this counterfeit lunacy as his own real distraction will give him leave; that is, incompletely, imperfectly; not in that confirmed, practised way, like a master of his art, or as Dame Quickly would say, "like one of those harlotry players." I mean no disrespect to any actor, but the sort of pleasure which Shakspeare's plays give in the acting seems to me not at all to differ from that which the audience receive from those of other writers; and, they being in themselves essentially so different from all others, I must conclude that there is

something in the nature of acting which levels all distinctions. And, in fact, who does not speak indifferently of the Gamester and of Macbeth as fine stage performances, and praise the Mrs. Beverley in the same way as the Lady Macbeth of Mrs. S.? Belvidera, and Calista, and Isabella, and Euphrasia, are they less liked than Imogen, or than Juliet, or than Desdemona? Are they not spoken of and remembered in the same way? Is not the female performer as great (as they call it) in one as in the other? Did not Garrick shine, and was he not ambitious of shining, in every drawling tragedy that his wretched day produced,- the productions of the Hills, and the Murphys, and the Browns,- and shall he have that honour to dwell in our minds for ever as an inseparable concomitant with Shakspeare? A kindred mind! O who can read that affecting sonnet of Shakspeare which alludes to his profession as a player: Oh for my sake do you with Fortune chide, The guilty goddess of my harmless deeds, That did not better for my life provide Than public means which public custom breeds Thence comes it that my name receives a brand; And almost thence my nature is subdued To what it works in, like the dyer's hand. Or that other confession: Alas! 'tis true, I have gone here and there, And made myself a motley to thy view, Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear Who can read these instances of jealous self-watchfulness in our sweet Shakspeare, and dream of any congeniality between him and one that, by every tradition of him, appears to have been as mere a player as ever existed; to have had his mind tainted with the lowest players' vices,- envy and jealousy, and miserable cravings after applause; one who in the exercise of his profession was jealous even of the women-performers that stood in his way; a manager full of managerial tricks and stratagems and finesse; that any resemblance should be dreamed of between him and Shakspeare,- Shakspeare who, in the plenitude and consciousness of his own powers, could with that noble modesty, which we can neither imitate nor appreciate, express himself thus of his own sense of his own defects: Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, Featured like him, like him with friends possess; Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope.

I am almost disposed to deny to Garrick the merit of being an admirer of Shakspeare! A true lover of his excellences he certainly was not; for would any true lover of them have admitted into his matchless scenes such ribald trash as Tate and Cibber, and the rest of them, that With their darkness durst affront his light, have foisted into the acting plays of Shakspeare? I believe it impossible that he could have had a proper reverence for Shakspeare, and have condescended to go through that interpolated scene in Richard the Third, in which Richard tries to break his wife's heart by telling her he loves another woman, and says, "if she survives this she is immortal." Yet I doubt not he delivered this vulgar stuff with as much anxiety of emphasis as any of the genuine parts: and for acting, it is as well calculated as any. But we have seen the part of Richard lately produce great fame to an actor by his manner of playing it, and it lets us into the secret of acting, and of popular judgments of Shakspeare derived from acting. Not one of the spectators who have witnessed Mr. C.'s exertions in that part, but has come away with a proper conviction that Richard is a very wicked man, and kills little children in their beds, with something like the pleasure which the giants and ogres in

children's books are represented to have taken in that practice; moreover, that he is very close and shrewd, and devilish cunning, for you could see that by his eye.

But is, in fact, this the impression we have in reading the Richard of Shakspeare? Do we feel anything like disgust, as we do at that butcher-like representation of him that passes for him on the stage? A horror at his crimes blends with the effect which we feel, but how is it qualified, how is it carried off, by the rich intellect which he displays, his resources, his wit, his buoyant spirits, his vast knowledge and insight into characters, the poetry of his part,- not an atom of all which is made perceivable in Mr. C.'s way of acting it. Nothing but his crimes, his actions, is visible; they are prominent and staring; the murderer stands out, but where is the lofty genius, the man of vast capacity,- the profound, the witty, accomplished Richard?

The truth is, the characters of Shakspeare are so much the objects of meditation rather than of interest or curiosity as to their actions, that while we are reading any of his great criminal characters,- Macbeth, Richard, even Iago,- we think not so much of the crimes which they commit, as of the ambition, the aspiring spirit, the intellectual activity, which prompts them to overleap these moral fences. Barnwell is a wretched murderer; there is a certain fitness between his neck and the rope; he is the legitimate heir to the gallows; nobody who thinks at all can think of any alleviating circumstances in his case to make him a fit object of mercy. Or to take an instance from the higher tragedy, what else but a mere assassin is Glenalvon? Do we think of anything but of the crime which he commits, and the rack which he deserves? That is all which we really think about him.

Whereas in corresponding characters in Shakspeare, so little do the actions comparatively affect us, that while the impulses, the inner mind in all its perverted greatness, solely seems real and is exclusively attended to, the crime is comparatively nothing. But when we see these things represented, the acts which they do are comparatively everything, their impulses nothing. The state of sublime emotion into which we are elevated by those images of night and horror which Macbeth is made to utter, that solemn prelude with which he entertains the time till the bell shall strike which is to call him to murder Duncan,- when we no longer read it in a book, when we have given up that vantage ground of abstraction which reading possesses over seeing, and come to see a man in his bodily shape before our eyes actually preparing to commit a murder, if the acting be true and impressive, as I have witnessed it in Mr. K.'s performance of that part, the painful anxiety about the act, the natural longing to prevent it while it yet seems unperpetrated, the too close pressing semblance of reality, give a pain and an uneasiness which totally destroy all the delight which the words in the book convey, where the deed doing never presses upon us with the painful sense of presence: it rather seems to belong to history,- to something past and inevitable, if it has anything to do with time at all. The sublime images, the poetry alone, is that which is present to our minds in the reading.

So to see Lear acted,- to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is

painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakspeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements, than any actor can be to represent Lear; they might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano; they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear,- we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason, we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodised from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks, or tones, to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the heavens themselves, when, in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds them that "they themselves are old"? What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things? But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it show: it is too hard and stony; it must have love-scenes, and a happy ending. It is not enough that Cordelia is a daughter, she must shine as a lover too. Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his followers, the show-men of the scene, to draw the mighty beast about more easily. A happy ending!- as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through,- the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after, if he could sustain this world's burden after, why all this pudder and preparation,- why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station- as if, at his years and with his experience, anything was left but to die.

Lear is essentially impossible to be represented on a stage. But how many dramatic personages are there in Shakspeare, which though more tractable and feasible (if I may so speak) than Lear, yet from some circumstance, some adjunct to their character, are improper to be shown to our bodily eye! Othello for instance.

Nothing can be more soothing, more flattering to the nobler parts of our natures, than to read of a young Venetian lady of the highest extraction, through the force of love and from a sense of merit in him whom she loved, laying aside every consideration of kindred, and country, and colour, and wedding with a coal-black Moor- (for such he is represented, in the imperfect state of knowledge respecting foreign countries in those days, compared with our own, or in compliance with popular notions, though the Moors are now well enough known to be by many shades less unworthy of a white woman's fancy)- it is the perfect triumph of virtue over accidents, of the imagination

over the senses. She sees Othello's colour in his mind. But upon the stage, when the imagination is no longer the ruling faculty, but we are left to our poor unassisted senses, I appeal to every one that has seen Othello played, whether he did not, on the contrary, sink Othello's mind in his colour; whether he did not find something extremely revolting in the courtship and wedded caresses of Othello and Desdemona; and whether the actual sight of the thing did not over-weigh all that beautiful compromise which we make in reading;- and the reason it should do so is obvious, because there is just so much reality presented to our senses as to give a perception of disagreement, with not enough of belief in the internal motives,- all that which is unseen,- to overpower and reconcile the first and obvious prejudices. 8 What we see upon a stage is body and bodily action; what we are conscious of in reading is almost exclusively the mind, and its movements; and this I think may sufficiently account for the very different sort of delight with which the same play so often affects us in the reading and the seeing. It requires little reflection to perceive, that if those characters in Shakspeare which are within the precincts of nature, have yet something in them which appeals too exclusively to the imagination, to admit of their being made objects to the senses without suffering a change and a diminution,- that still stronger the objection must lie against representing another line of characters, which Shakspeare has introduced to give a wildness and a supernatural elevation to his scenes, as if to remove them still farther from that assimilation to common life in which their excellence is vulgarly supposed to consist. When we read the incantations of those terrible beings the Witches in Macbeth, though some of the ingredients of their hellish composition savour of the grotesque, yet is the effect upon us other than the most serious and appalling that can be imagined? Do we not feel spellbound as Macbeth was? Can any mirth accompany a sense of their presence? We 8 The error of supposing that because Othello's colour does not offend us in the reading, it should also not offend us in the seeing, is just such a fallacy as supposing that an Adam and Eve in a picture shall affect us just as they do in the poem. But in the poem we for a while have Paraisaical senses given us, which vanish when we see a man and his wife without clothes in the picture. The painters themselves feel this, as is apparent by the awkward shifts they have recourse to, to make them look not quite naked; by a sort of prophetic anachronism, antedating the invention of fig-leaves. So in the reading of the play, we see with Desdemona's eyes: in the seeing of it, we are forced to look with our own.

might as well laugh under a consciousness of the principle of Evil himself being truly and really present with us. But attempt to bring these things on to a stage, and you turn them instantly into so many old women, that men and children are to laugh at. Contrary to the old saying, that "seeing is believing," the sight actually destroys the faith; and the mirth in which we indulge at their expense, when we see these creatures upon a stage, seems to be a sort of indemnification which we make to ourselves for the terror which they put us in when reading made them an object of belief,- when we surrendered up our reason to the poet, as children to their nurses and their elders; and we laugh at our fears as children, who thought they saw something in the dark, triumph when the bringing in of a candle discovers the vanity of their fears. For this

exposure of supernatural agents upon a stage is truly bringing in a candle to expose their own delusiveness. It is the solitary taper and the book that generates a faith in these terrors: a ghost by chandelier light, and in good company, deceives no spectators,- a ghost that can be measured by the eye, and his human dimensions made out at leisure. The sight of a welllighted house, and a well-dressed audience, shall arm the most nervous child against any apprehensions: as Tom Brown says of the impenetrable skin of Achilles with his impenetrable armour over it, "Bully Dawson would have fought the devil with such advantages." Much has been said, and deservedly, in reprobation of the vile mixture which Dryden has thrown into the *Tempest*: doubtless without some such vicious alloy, the impure ears of that age would never have sate out to hear so much innocence of love as is contained in the sweet courtship of Ferdinand and Miranda. But is the *Tempest* of Shakspeare at all a subject for stage representation? It is one thing to read of an enchanter, and to believe the wondrous tale while we are reading it; but to have a conjurer brought before us in his conjuring-gown, with his spirits about him, which none but himself and some hundred of favoured spectators before the curtain are supposed to see, involves such a quantity of the hateful incredible, that all our reverence for the author cannot hinder us from perceiving such gross attempts upon the senses to be in the highest degree childish and inefficient.

Spirits and fairies cannot be represented, they cannot even be painted,- they can only be believed. But the elaborate and anxious provision of scenery, which the luxury of the age demands, in these cases works a quite contrary effect to what is intended. That which in comedy, or plays of familiar life, adds so much to the life of the imitation, in plays which appeal to the higher faculties positively destroys the illusion which it is introduced to aid. A parlour or a drawing-room,- a library opening into a garden- a garden with an alcove in it,- a street, or the piazza of Covent Garden, does well enough in a scene; we are content to give as much credit to it as it demands; or rather, we think little about it,- it is little more than reading at the top of a page, "Scene, a garden"; we do not imagine ourselves there, but we readily admit the imitation of familiar objects. But to think by the help of painted trees and caverns, which we know to be painted, to transport our minds to Prospero, and his island and his lonely cell; or by the aid of a fiddle dexterously thrown in, in an interval of speaking, to make us believe that we hear those super-natural noises of which the isle was full: the Orrery Lecturer at the Haymarket might as well hope, by his musical glasses cleverly stationed out of sight behind his apparatus, to make us believe that we do indeed hear the crystal spheres ring out that chime, which if it were to enwrap our fancy long, Milton thinks, Time would run back and fetch the age of gold, And speckled Vanity Would sicken soon and die, And leprous Sin would melt from earthly mould; Yea, Hell itself would pass away, And leave its dolorous mansions to the peering day.

The garden of Eden, with our first parents in it, is not more impossible to be shown on a stage, than the Enchanted Isle, with its no less interesting and innocent first settlers. The subject of Scenery is closely connected with that of the Dresses, which are so anxiously attended to on our stage. I remember the last time I saw *Macbeth* played, the

discrepancy I felt at the changes of garment which he varied, the shiftings and reshiftings, like a Romish priest at mass. The luxury of stage-improve 9 It will be said these things are done in pictures. But pictures and scenes are very different things.

Painting is a world of itself, but in scene-painting there is the attempt to deceive: and there is the discordancy, never to be got over, between painted scenes and real people.

ments, and the importunity of the public eye, require this. The coronation robe of the Scottish monarch was fairly a counterpart to that which our King wears when he goes to the Parliament House, just so full and cumbersome, and set out with ermine and pearls. And if things must be represented, I see not what to find fault with in this. But in reading, what robe are we conscious of? Some dim images of royalty- a crown and sceptre may float before our eyes, but who shall describe the fashion of it? Do we see in our mind's eye what Webb or any other robe-maker could pattern? This is the inevitable consequence of imitating everything, to make all things natural. Whereas the reading of a tragedy is a fine abstraction. It presents to the fancy just so much of external appearances as to make us feel that we are among flesh and blood, while by far the greater and better part of our imagination is employed upon the thoughts and internal machinery of the character. But in acting, scenery, dress, the most contemptible things, call upon us to judge of their naturalness.

Perhaps it would be no bad similitude, to liken the pleasure which we take in seeing one of these fine plays acted, compared with that quiet delight which we find in the reading of it, to the different feelings with which a reviewer, and a man that is not a reviewer, reads a fine poem. The accursed critical habit- the being called upon to judge and pronounce, must make it quite a different thing to the former. In seeing these plays acted, we are affected just as judges. When Hamlet compares the two pictures of Gertrude's first and second husband, who wants to see the pictures? But in the acting, a miniature must be lugged out; which we know not to be the picture, but only to show how finely a miniature may be represented. This showing of everything levels all things: it makes tricks, bows, and curtseys, of importance. Mrs. S. never got more fame by anything than by the manner in which she dismisses the guests in the banquet-scene in Macbeth: it is as much remembered as any of her thrilling tones or impressive looks. But does such a trifle as this enter into the imaginations of the readers of that wild and wonderful scene? Does not the mind dismiss the feasters as rapidly as it can? Does it care about the gracefulness of the doing it? But by acting, and judging of acting, all these non-essentials are raised into an importance, injurious to the main interest of the play.

I have confined my observations to the tragic parts of Shakspeare. It would be no very difficult task to extend the inquiry to his comedies; and to show why Falstaff, Shallow, Sir Hugh Evans, and the rest, are equally incompatible with stage representation. The length to which this Essay has run will make it, I am afraid, sufficiently distateful to the Amateurs of the Theatre, without going any deeper into the subject at present.

SPECIMENS FROM THE WRITINGS OF FULLER, THE CHURCH HISTORIAN

THE writings of Fuller are usually designated by the title of quaint, and with sufficient reason; for such was his natural bias to conceits, that I doubt not upon most occasions it would have been going out of his way to have expressed himself out of them. But his wit is not always a lumen siccum, a dry faculty of surprising; on the contrary, his conceits are oftentimes deeply steeped in human feeling and passion. Above all, his way of telling a story, for its eager liveliness, and the perpetual running commentary of the narrator happily blended with the narration, is perhaps unequalled.

As his works are now scarcely perused but by antiquaries, I thought it might not be unacceptable to my readers to present them with some specimens of his manner, in single thoughts and phrases; and in some few passages of greater length, chiefly of a narrative description. I shall arrange them as I casually find them in my book of extracts, without being solicitous to specify the particular work from which they are taken.

Pyramids.- “The Pyramids themselves, dotting with age, have forgotten the names of their founders.” Virtue in a short person.- “His soul had but a short diocese to visit, and therefore might the better attend the effectual informing thereof.”

Intellect in a very tall one.- “Ofttimes such who are built four stories high, are observed to have little in their cock-loft.” Naturals.- “Their heads sometimes so little, that there is no room for wit; sometimes so long, that there is no wit for so much room.” Negroes.- “The image of God cut in ebony.” School-divinity.- “At the first it will be as welcome to thee as a prison, and their very solutions will seem knots unto thee.” Mr. Perkins the Divine.- “He had a capacious head, with angles winding and roomy enough to lodge all controversial intricacies.” The same. - “He would pronounce the word Damn with such an emphasis as left a doleful echo in his auditors’ ears a good while after.” Judges in capital cases.- “O let him take heed how he strikes, that hath a dead hand.” Memory. - “Philosophers place it in the rear of the head, and it seems the mine of memory lies there, because there men naturally dig for it, scratching it when they are at a loss.” Fancy.- “It is the most boundless and restless faculty of the soul; for while the Understanding and the Will are kept, as it were, in libera custodia to their objects of verum et bonum, the Fancy is free from all engagements: it digs without spade, sails without ship, flies without wings, builds without charges, fights without bloodshed: in a moment striding from the centre to the circumference of the world; by a kind of omnipotency creating and annihilating things in an instant; and things divorced in Nature are married in Fancy as in a lawless place.” Infants.- “Some, admiring what motives to mirth infants meet with in their silent and solitary smiles, have resolved, how truly I know not, that then they converse with angels; as indeed such cannot among mortals find any fitter companions.” Music.- “Such is the sociableness of music, it conforms itself to all companies both in mirth and mourning; complying to improve that passion with which it finds the auditors most affected. In a word, it is an invention

which might have beseemed a son of Seth to have been the father thereof: though better it was that Cain's great-grandchild should have the credit first to find it, than the world the unhappiness longer to have wanted it." St. Monica.- "Drawing near her death, she sent most pious thoughts as harbingers to heaven, and her soul saw a glimpse of happiness through the chinks of her sickness-broken body." 10 Lets in new lights through chinks which time has made.

WALLER.

10 The soul's dark cottage, batter'd and decayed, Mortality.- "To smell to a turf of fresh earth is wholesome for the body, no less are thoughts of mortality cordial to the soul." Virgin.- "No lordling husband shall at the same time command her presence and distance; to be always near in constant attendance, and always to stand aloof in awful observance." Elder Brother.- "Is one who made haste to come into the world to bring his parents the first news of male posterity, and is well rewarded for his tidings." Bishop Fletcher.- "His pride was rather on him than in him, as only gait and gesture deep, not sinking to his heart, though causelessly condemned for a proud man, as who was a good hypocrite, and far more humble than he appeared." Masters of Colleges.- "A little allay of dulness in a Master of a College makes him fitter to manage secular affairs." The Good Yeoman.- "Is a gentleman in ore, whom the next age may see refined." Good Parent.- "For his love, therein like a well-drawn picture, he eyes all his children alike." Deformity in Children.- "This partiality is tyranny, when parents despise those that are deformed; enough to break those whom God had bowed before." Good Master.- "In correcting his servant he becomes not a slave to his own passion. Not cruelly making new indentures of the flesh of his apprentice. He is tender of his servant in sickness and age. If crippled in his service, his house is his hospital. Yet how many throw away those dry bones, out of the which themselves have sucked the marrow!" Good Widow.- "If she can speak but little good of him [her dead husband] she speaks but little of him. So handsomely folding up her discourse, that his virtues are shown outwards, and his vices wrapt up in silence; as counting it barbarism to throw dirt on his memory, who hath mould cast on his body." Horses.- "These are men's wings, wherewith they make such speed. A generous creature a horse is, sensible in some sort of honour; and made most handsome by that which deforms men most- pride." Martyrdom.- "Heart of oak hath sometimes warped a little in the scorching heat of persecution. Their want of true courage herein cannot be excused. Yet many censure them for surrendering up their forts after a long siege, who would have yielded up their own at the first summons.- Oh! there is more required to make one valiant, than to call Cranmer or Jewel coward; as if the fire in Smithfield had been no hotter than what is painted in the Book of Martyrs." Text of St. Paul.- "St. Paul saith, Let not the sun go down on your wrath, to carry news to the antipodes in another world of thy revengeful nature. Yet let us take the Apostle's meaning rather than his words, with all possible speed to depose our passion; not understanding him so literally, that we may take leave to be angry till sunset: then might our wrath lengthen with the days; and men in

Greenland, where the day lasts above a quarter of a year, have plentiful scope for revenge.”¹¹

Bishop Brownrig.- “He carried learning enough in numerato about him in his pockets for any discourse, and had much more at home in his chests for any serious dispute.”

Modest Want.- “Those that with diligence fight against poverty, though neither conquer till death makes it a drawn battle, expect not but prevent their craving of thee: for God forbid the heavens should never rain, till the earth first opens her mouth; seeing some grounds will sooner burn than chap.” Death-bed Temptations.- “The devil is most busy on the last day of his term; and a tenant to be outed cares not what mischief he doth.” Conversation.- “Seeing we are civilised Englishmen, let us not be naked savages in our talk.” Wounded Soldier.- “Halting is the stateliest march of a soldier; and ‘tis a brave sight to see the flesh of an ancient as torn as his colours.”

11 This whimsical prevention of a consequence which no one would have thought of deducing, setting up an absurdum on purpose to hunt it down,- placing guards as it were at the very outposts of possibility,- gravely giving out laws to insanity and prescribing moral fences to distempered intellects, could never have entered into a head less entertainingly constructed than that of Fuller, or Sir Thomas Browne, the very air of whose style the conclusion of this passage most aptly imitates.

Wat Tyler.- “A misogrammatist; if a good Greek word may be given to so barbarous a rebel.” Heralds.- “Heralds new mould men’s names- taking from them, adding to them, melting out all the liquid letters, torturing mutes to make them speak, and making vowels dumb,- to bring it to a fallacious homonymy at the last, that their names may be the same with those noble houses they pretend to.” Antiquarian Diligence.- “It is most worthy observation, with what diligence he [Camden] inquired after ancient places, making hue and cry after many a city which was run away, and by certain marks and tokens pursuing to find it; as by the situation on the Roman highways, by just distance from other ancient cities, by some affinity of name, by tradition of the inhabitants, by Roman coins digged up, and by some appearance of ruins. A broken urn is a whole evidence; or an old gate still surviving, out of which the city is run out. Besides, commonly some new spruce town not far off is grown out of the ashes thereof, which yet hath so much natural affection as dutifully to own those reverend ruins for her mother.” Henry de Essex.- “He is too well known in our English Chronicles, being Baron of Raleigh, in Essex, and Hereditary Standard Bearer of England. It happened in the reign of this king [Henry II.] there was a fierce battle fought in Flintshire, at Coleshall, between the English and Welsh, wherein this Henry de Essex animum et signum simul abjecit, betwixt traitor and coward, cast away both his courage and banner together, occasioning a great overthrow of English. But he that had the baseness to do, had the boldness to deny the doing, of so foul a fact; until he was challenged in combat by Robert de Momford, a knight, eyewitness thereof, and by him overcome in a duel. Whereupon his large inheritance was confiscated to the king, and he himself, partly thrust, partly going, into a convent, hid his head in a cowl, under which, betwixt shame and sanctity, he blushed out the remainder of his life.”¹² - Worthies, article Bedfordshire. Sir Edward Harwood, Knt.- “I have read of a bird, which hath a face like,

and yet will prey upon, a man: who coming to the water to drink, and finding there by reflection, that he had killed one like himself, pineth away by degrees, and never afterwards enjoyeth itself. 13 Such is in some sort the condition of Sir 12 The fine imagination of Fuller has done what might have been pronounced impossible: it has given an interest and a holy character to coward infamy. Nothing can be more beautiful than the concluding account of the last days, and expiatory retirement, of poor Henry de Essex. The address with which the whole of this little story is told is most consummate: the charm of it seems to consist in a perpetual balance of antitheses not too violently opposed, and the consequent activity of mind in which the reader is kept:- “Betwixt traitor and coward”!“baseness to do, boldness to deny”- “partly thrust, partly going, into a convent”- “betwixt shame and sanctity.” The reader by this artifice is taken into a kind of partnership with the writer,- his judgment is exercised in settling the preponderance,- he feels as if he were consulted as to the issue. But the modern historian flings at once the dead weight of his own judgment into the scale, and settles the matter.

13 I do not know where Fuller read of this bird; but a more awful and affecting story, and moralising of a story, in Natural History, or rather in that Fabulous Natural History where poets Edward. This accident, that he had killed one in a private quarrel, put a period to his carnal mirth, and was a covering to his eyes all the days of his life. No possible provocations could afterwards tempt him to a duel; and no wonder that one’s conscience loathed that whereof he had surfeited. He refused all challenges with more honour than others accepted them; it being well known, that he would set foot as far in the face of his enemy as any man alive.”- Worthies, article Lincolnshire. Decayed Gentry.- “It happened in the reign of King James, when Henry Earl of Huntingdon was Lieutenant of Leicestershire, that a labourer’s son in that country was pressed into the wars; as I take it, to go over with Count Mansfield. The old man at Leicester requested his son might be discharged, as being the only staff of his age, who by his industry maintained him and his mother. The Earl demanded his name, which the man for a long time was loath to tell (as suspecting it and mythologists found the Phoenix and the Unicorn, and other “strange fowl,” is nowhere extant.

It is a fable which Sir Thomas Browne, if he had heard of it, would have exploded among his Vulgar Errors; but the delight which he would have taken in the discussing of its probabilities, would have shown that the truth of the fact, though the avowed object of his search was not so much the motive which put him upon the investigation, as those hidden affinities and poetical analogies,- those essential verities in the application of strange fable, which made him linger with such reluctant delay among the last fading lights of popular tradition; and not seldom to conjure up a superstition, that had been long extinct, from its dusty grave, to inter it himself with greater ceremonies and solemnities of burial.

a fault for so poor a man to confess the truth), at last he told his name was Hastings. ‘Cousin Hastings,’ said the Earl, ‘we cannot all be top branches of the tree, though we all spring from the same root; your son, my kinsman, shall not be pressed.’ So good was the meeting of modesty in a poor, with courtesy in an honourable person, and

gentry I believe in both. And I have reason to believe, that some who justly own the surnames and blood of Bohuns, Mortimers, and Plantagenets (though ignorant of their own extractions), are hid in the heap of common people, where they find that under a thatched cottage which some of their ancestors could not enjoy in a leaded castle,- contentment, with quiet and security.” - Worthies, article Of Shire-Reeves or Shiriffes.

Tenderness of Conscience in a Tradesman.- “Thomas Curson, born in Allhallows, Lombard Street, armourer, dwelt without Bishopsgate. It happened that a stage-player borrowed a rusty musket, which had lain long leger in his shop: now though his part were comical, he therewith acted an unexpected tragedy, killing one of the standers-by, the gun casually going off on the stage, which he suspected not to be charged. Oh the difference of divers men in the tenderness of their consciences! some are scarce touched with a wound, whilst others are wounded with a touch therein. This poor armourer was highly afflicted therewith, though done against his will, yea, without his knowledge, in his absence, by another, out of mere chance. Hereupon he resolved to give all his estate to pious uses: no sooner had he gotten a round sum, but presently he posted with it in his apron to the Court of Aldermen, and was in pain till by their direction he had settled it for the relief of poor in his own and other parishes, and disposed of some hundreds of pounds accordingly, as I am credibly informed by the then churchwardens of the said parish. Thus as he conceived himself casually (though at a great distance) to have occasioned the death of one, he was the immediate and direct cause of giving a comfortable living to many.” Burning of Wickliffe’s Body by Order of the Council of Constance.- “Hitherto [A.D. 1428] the corpse of John Wickliffe had quietly slept in his grave about forty-one years after his death, till his body was reduced to bones, and his bones almost to dust. For though the earth in the chancel of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, where he was interred, hath not so quick a digestion with the earth of Aceldama, to consume flesh in twenty-four hours, yet such the appetite thereof, and all other English graves, to leave small reversion of a body after so many years. But now such the spleen of the Council of Constance, as they not only cursed his memory as dying an obstinate heretic, but ordered that his bones (with this charitable caution,- if it may be discerned from the bodies of other faithful people) be taken out of the ground, and thrown far off from any Christian burial.

In obedience hereunto, Richard Fleming, Bishop of Lincoln, Diocesan of Lutterworth, sent his officers (vultures with a quick sight, scent, at a dead carcass) to ungrave him. Accordingly to Lutterworth they come, Sumner, Commissary, Official, Chancellor, Proctors, Doctors, and their servants (so that the remnant of the body would not hold out a bone amongst so many hands), take what was left out of the grave, and burnt them to ashes, and cast them into Swift, a neighbouring brook, running hard by. Thus this brook has conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean; and thus the ashes of Wickliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over.” 14 - Church History. I have seen this passage smiled at, and set down as a quaint conceit of old Fuller. But what is not a conceit to those who read it in a temper different from that in which the writer composed it? The most pathetic parts of poetry to cold tempers seem and are nonsense,

as divinity was to the Greeks foolishness. When Richard II., meditating on his own utter annihilation as to royalty, cries out, "O that I were a mockery king of snow, To melt before the sun of Bolingbroke,"

14 The concluding period of this most lively narrative I will not call a conceit: it is one of the grandest conceptions I ever met with. One feels the ashes of Wickliffe gliding away out of the reach of the Sumners, Commissaries, Officials, Proctors, Doctors, and all the puddering rout of executioners of the impotent rage of the baffled Council: from Swift into Avon, from Avon into Severn, from Severn into the narrow seas, from the narrow seas into the main ocean, where they become the emblem of his doctrine, "dispersed all the world over." Hamlet's tracing the body of Caesar to the clay that stops a beer barrel is a no less curious pursuit of "ruined mortality"; but it is in an inverse ratio to this: it degrades and saddens us, for one part of our nature at least; but this expands the whole of our nature, and gives to the body a sort of ubiquity,- a diffusion as far as the actions of its partner can have reach or influence.

if we had been going on pace for pace with the passion before, this sudden conversion of a strong-felt metaphor into something to be actually realised in nature, like that of Jeremiah, "Oh! that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears," is strictly and strikingly natural; but come unprepared upon it, and it is a conceit: and so is a "head' turned into "waters."

**ON THE GENIUS AND CHARACTER OF HOGARTH; WITH SOME REMARKS
ON A PASSAGE IN THE WRITINGS OF THE LATE MR. BARRY**

ONE of the earliest and noblest enjoyments I had when a boy, was in the contemplation of those capital prints by Hogarth, the Harlot's and Rake's Progresses, which, along with some others, hung upon the walls of a great hall in an old-fashioned house in __shire, and seemed the solitary tenants (with myself) of that antiquated and life-deserted apartment.

Recollection of the manner in which those prints used to affect me has often made me wonder, when I have heard Hogarth described as a mere comic painter, as one of those whose chief ambition was to raise a laugh. To deny that there are throughout the prints which I have mentioned circumstances introduced of a laughable tendency, would be to run counter to the common notions of mankind; but to suppose that in their ruling character they appeal chiefly to the risible faculty, and not first and foremost to the very heart of man, its best and most serious feelings, would be to mistake no less grossly their aim and purpose. A set of severer Satires (for they are not so much Comedies, which they have been likened to, as they are strong and masculine Satires) less mingled with anything of mere fun, were never written upon paper, or graven upon copper. They resemble Juvenal, or the satiric touches in Timon of Athens.

I was pleased with the reply of a gentleman, who being asked which book he esteemed most in his library, answered, - "Shakspeare": being asked which he esteemed next best, replied, "Hogarth." His graphic representations are indeed books: they have the teeming, fruitful, suggestive meaning of words. Other pictures we look at, - his prints we read.

In pursuance of this parallel, I have sometimes entertained myself with comparing the Timon of Athens of Shakspeare (which I have just mentioned) and Hogarth's Rake's Progress together. The story, the moral, in both is nearly the same. The wild course of riot and extravagance, ending in the one with driving the Prodigal from the society of men into the solitude of the deserts, and in the other with conducting the Rake through his several stages of dissipation into the still more complete desolations of the mad-house, in the play and in the picture, are described with almost equal force and nature. The levee of the Rake, which forms the subject of the second plate in the series, is almost a transcript of Timon's levee in the opening scene of that play. We find a dedicating poet, and other similar characters, in both.

The concluding scene in the Rake's Progress is perhaps superior to the last scenes of Timon. If we seek for something of kindred excellence in poetry, it must be in the scenes of Lear's beginning madness, where the King and the Fool and the Tom-o'-Bedlam conspire to produce such a medley of mirth checked by misery, and misery rebuked by mirth; where the society of those "strange bed-fellows" which misfortunes have brought Lear acquainted with, so finely sets forth the destitute state of the monarch; while the lunatic bans of the one, and the disjointed sayings and wild but

pregnant allusions of the other, so wonderfully sympathise with that confusion, which they seem to assist in the production of, in the senses of that "child-changed father." In the scene in Bedlam, which terminates the Rake's Progress, we find the same assortment of the ludicrous with the terrible. Here is desperate madness, the overturning of originally strong thinking faculties, at which we shudder, as we contemplate the duration and pressure of affliction which it must have asked to destroy such a building;- and here is the gradual hurtless lapse into idiocy, of faculties, which at their best of times never having been strong, we look upon the consummation of their decay with no more of pity than is consistent with a smile.

The mad tailor, the poor driveller that has gone out of his wits (and truly he appears to have had no great journey to go to get past their confines) for the love of Charming Betty Careless,- these half-laughable, scarce-pitiable objects, take off from the horror which the principal figure would of itself raise, at the same time that they assist the feeling of the scene by contributing to the general notion of its subject:Madness, thou chaos of the brain, What art, that pleasure giv'st and pain? Tyranny of Fancy's reign! Mechanic Fancy, that can build Vast labyrinths and mazes wild, With rule disjointed, shapeless measure, Fill'd with horror, fill'd with pleasure! Shapes of horror, that would even Cast doubts of mercy upon heaven; Shapes of pleasure, that but seen, Would split the shaking sides of Spleen.¹⁵

Is it carrying the spirit of comparison to excess to remark, that in the poor kneeling weeping female who accompanies her seducer in his sad decay, there is something analogous to Kent, or Caius, as he delights rather to be called, in Lear, the noblest pattern of virtue which even Shakspeare has conceived,- who follows his royal master in banishment, that had pronounced his banishment, and, forgetful at once of his wrongs and dignities, taking on himself the disguise of a menial, retains his fidelity to the figure, his loyalty to the carcass, the shadow, the shell and empty husk of Lear? In the perusal of a book, or of a picture, much of the impression which we receive depends upon the habit of mind which we bring with us to such perusal.

The same circumstance may make one person laugh, which shall render another 15 Lines inscribed under the plate.

very serious; or in the same person the first impression may be corrected by afterthought. The misemployed incongruous characters at the Harlot's Funeral, on a superficial inspection, provoke to laughter; but when we have sacrificed the first emotion to levity a very different frame of mind succeeds, or the painter has lost half his purpose. I never look at that wonderful assemblage of depraved beings, who, without a grain of reverence or pity in their perverted minds, are performing the sacred exteriors of duty to the relics of their departed partner in folly, but I am as much moved to sympathy from the very want of it in them, as I should be by the finest representation of a virtuous death-bed surrounded by real mourners, pious children, weeping friends,- perhaps more by the very contrast. What reflections does it not awake, of the dreadful heartless state in which the creature (a female too) must have lived, who in death wants the accompaniment of one genuine tear. That wretch who is

removing the lid of the coffin to gaze upon the corpse with a face which indicates a perfect negation of all goodness or womanhood- the hypocrite parson and his demure partner- all the fiendish group- to a thoughtful mind present a moral emblem more affecting than if the poor friendless carcass had been depicted as thrown out to the woods, where wolves had assisted at its obsequies, itself furnishing forth its own funeral banquet.

It is easy to laugh at such incongruities as are met together in this picture,- incongruous objects being of the very essence of laughter,- but surely the laugh is far different in its kind from that thoughtless species to which we are moved by mere farce and grotesque. We laugh when Ferdinand Count Fathom, at the first sight of the white cliffs of Britain, feels his heart yearn with filial fondness towards the land of his progenitors, which he is coming to fleece and plunder,- we smile at the exquisite irony of the passage,- but if we are not led on by such passages to some more salutary feeling than laughter, we are very negligent perusers of them in book or picture.

It is the fashion with those who cry up great Historical School in this country, at the head of which Sir Joshua Reynolds is placed, to exclude Hogarth from that school, as an artist of an inferior and vulgar class. Those persons seem to me to confound the painting of subjects in common or vulgar life with the being a vulgar artist. The quantity of thought which Hogarth crowds into every picture would alone unvulgarise every subject which he might choose. Let us take the lowest of his subjects, the print called Gin Lane. Here is plenty of poverty and low stuff to disgust upon a superficial view; and accordingly a cold spectator feels himself immediately disgusted and repelled. I have seen many turn away from it, not being able to bear it. The same persons would perhaps have looked with great complacency upon Poussin's celebrated picture of the Plague at Athens. 16 Disease and Death and bewildering Terror, in Athenian garments, are endurable, and come, as the delicate critics express it, within the "limits of pleasurable sensation." But the scenes of their own St. Giles's, delineated by their own countryman, are too shocking to think of. Yet if we could abstract our minds 16 At the late Mr. Hope's, in Cavendish Square from the fascinating colours of the picture, and forget the coarse execution (in some respects) of the print, intended as it was to be a cheap plate, accessible to the poorer sort of people, for whose instruction it was done, I think we could have no hesitation in conferring the palm of superior genius upon Hogarth, comparing this work of his with Poussin's picture. There is more of imagination in it- that power which draws all things to one,- which makes things animate and inanimate, beings with their attributes, subjects, and their accessories, take one colour and serve to one effect. Everything in the print, to use a vulgar expression, tells. Every part is full of "strange images of death." It is perfectly amazing and astounding to look at. Not only the two prominent figures, the woman and the half-dead man, which are as terrible as anything which Michael Angelo ever drew, but everything else in the print, contributes to bewilder and stupefy,- the very houses, as I heard a friend of mine express it, tumbling all about in various directions, seem drunk seem absolutely reeling from the effect of that diabolical spirit of frenzy which goes forth over the whole composition. To show the poetical and almost prophetic

conception in the artist, one little circumstance may serve. Not content with the dying and dead figures, which he has strewed in profusion over the proper scene of the action, he shows you what (of a kindred nature) is passing beyond it.

Close by the shell, in which, by direction of the parish beadle, a man is depositing his wife, is an old wall, which, partaking of the universal decay around it, is tumbling to pieces. Through a gap in this wall are seen three figures, which appear to make a part in some funeral procession which is passing by on the other side of the wall, out of the sphere of the composition. This extending of the interest beyond the bounds of the subject could only have been conceived by a great genius.

Shakspeare, in his description of the painting of the Trojan War, in his Tarquin and Lucrece, has introduced a similar device, where the painter made a part stand for the whole: For much imaginary work was there, Conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind, That for Achilles' image stood his spear, Grip'd in an armed hand; himself behind Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind: A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head, Stood for the whole to be imagined.

This he well calls imaginary work, where the spectator must meet the artist in his conceptions half-way; and it is peculiar to the confidence of high genius alone to trust so much to spectators or readers. Lesser artists show everything distinct and full, as they require an object to be made out to themselves before they can comprehend it.

When I think of the power displayed in this (I will not hesitate to say) sublime print, it seems to me the extreme narrowness of system alone, and of that rage for classification, by which, in matters of taste at least, we are perpetually perplexing, instead of arranging, our ideas, that would make us concede to the work of Poussin above mentioned, and deny to this of Hogarth, the name of a grand serious composition.

We are for ever deceiving ourselves with names and theories. We call one man a great historical painter, because he has taken for his subjects kings or great men, or transactions over which time has thrown a grandeur. We term another the painter of common life, and set him down in our minds for an artist of an inferior class, without reflecting whether the quantity of thought shown by the latter may not much more than level the distinction which their mere choice of subjects may seem to place between them; or whether, in fact, from that very common life a great artist may not extract as deep an interest as another man from that which we are pleased to call history.

I entertain the highest respect for the talents and virtues of Reynolds, but I do not like that his reputation should overshadow and stifle the merits of such a man as Hogarth, nor that to mere names and classifications we should be content to sacrifice one of the greatest ornaments of England.

I would ask the most enthusiastic admirer of Reynolds, whether in the countenances of his Staring and Grinning Despair, which he has given us for the faces of Ugolino and dying Beaufort, there be anything comparable to the expression which Hogarth has put into the face of his broken-down rake in the last plate but one of the Rake's Progress, 17 where a letter from the manager is brought to him to say that his play "will not do"?

Here all is easy, natural, undistorted, but withal what a mass of woe is here accumulated!- the long history of a mis-spent life is compressed into the countenance as plainly as the series of plates before had told it; here is no attempt at Gorgonian looks, which are to freeze the beholder- no grinning at the antique bed-posts- no face-making, or consciousness of the presence of spectators in or out of the picture, but grief kept to a man's self, a face retiring from notice with the shame which great anguish sometimes brings with it, a final leave taken of hope,- the coming on of vacancy and stupefaction,- a beginning alienation of mind looking like tranquillity. Here is matter for the mind of the beholder to feed on for the hour together,- matter to feed and fertilise the mind. It is too real to admit one thought about the power of the artist who did it.

When we compare the expression in subjects which so fairly admit of comparison, and find the superiority so clearly to remain with Hogarth, shall the mere contemptible difference of the scene of it being laid, in the one case, in our Fleet or King's Bench Prison, and, in the other, in the State Prison of Pisa, or the bedroom of a cardinal,- or that the subject of the one has never been authenticated, and the other is matter of history,- so weigh down the real points of the comparison, as to induce us to rank the artist who has chosen the one scene or subject (though confessedly inferior in that which constitutes the soul of his art) in a class from which 17 The first perhaps in all Hogarth for serious expression. That which comes next to it, I think, is the jaded morning countenance of the debauchee in the second plate of the Marriage Alamode, which lectures on the vanity of pleasure as audibly as anything in Ecclesiastes we exclude the better genius (who has happened to make choice of the other) with something like disgrace? 18 The Boys under Demoniacal Possession of Raphael and Domenichino, by what law of classification are we bound to assign them to belong to the great style in painting, and to degrade into an inferior class the Rake of Hogarth when he is the Madman in the Bedlam scene? I am sure he is far more impressive than either.

It is a face which no one that has seen can easily forget. There is the stretch of human suffering to the utmost endurance, severe bodily pain brought on by strong mental agony, the frightful obstinate laugh of madness,- yet all so unforced and 18 Sir Joshua Reynolds, somewhere in his Lectures, speaks of the presumption of Hogarth in attempting the grand style in painting, by which he means his choice of certain Scripture subjects. Hogarth's excursions into Holy Land were not very numerous, but what he has left us in this kind have at least this merit, that they have expression of some sort or other in them,- the Child Moses before Pharaoh's Daughter, for instance: which is more than can be said of Sir Joshua Reynolds's Repose in Egypt, painted for Macklin's Bible, where for a Madonna he has substituted a sleepy, insensible, unmotherly girl, one so little worthy to have been selected as the Mother of the Saviour, that she seems to have neither heart nor feeling to entitle her to become a mother at all. But indeed the race of Virgin Mary painters seems to have been cut up, root and branch, at the Reformation. Our artists are too good Protestants to give life to that admirable commixture of maternal tenderness with reverential awe and wonder approaching to worship, with which the Virgin Mothers of L. da Vinci and Raphael

(themselves by their divine countenances inviting men to worship) contemplate the union of the two natures in the person of their Heaven-born Infant.

natural, that those who never were witness to madness in real life, think they see nothing but what is familiar to them in this face. Here are no tricks of distortion, nothing but the natural face of agony. This is high tragic painting, and we might as well deny to Shakspeare the honours of a great tragedian, because he has interwoven scenes of mirth with the serious business of his plays, as refuse to Hogarth the same praise for the two concluding scenes of the Rake's Progress, because of the Comic Lunatics 19 which he has thrown into the one, or the Alchemist that he has introduced in the other, who is paddling in the coals of his furnace, keeping alive the flames of vain hope within the very walls of the prison to which the vanity has conducted him, which have taught the darker lesson of extinguished hope to the desponding figure who is the principal person of the scene. All humour'd not alike. We have here some So apish and fantastic, play with a feather; And though 'twould grieve a soul to see God's image So blemish'd and defac'd, yet do they act Such antick and such pretty lunacies, That, spite of sorrow, they will make you smile.

Others again we have, like angry lions, Fierce as wild bulls, untameable as flies.

19 There are of madmen, as there are of tame, Honest Whore.

It is the force of these kindly admixtures which assimilates the scenes of Hogarth and of Shakspeare to the drama of real life, where no such thing as pure tragedy is to be found; but merriment and infelicity, ponderous crime and featherlight vanity, like twi-formed births, disagreeing complexions of one intertexture, perpetually unite to show forth motley spectacles to the world. Then it is that the poet or painter shows his art, when in the selection of these comic adjuncts he chooses such circumstances as shall relieve, contrast with, or fall into, without forming a violent opposition to his principal object. Who sees not that the Gravedigger in Hamlet, the Fool in Lear, have a kind of correspondency to, and fall in with, the subjects which they seem to interrupt: while the comic stuff in Venice Preserved, and the doggerel nonsense of the Cook and his poisoning associates in the Rollo of Beaumont and Fletcher, are pure, irrelevant, impertinent discords,- as bad as the quarrelling dog and cat under the table of the Lord and the Disciples at Emmaus of Titian? Not to tire the reader with perpetual reference to prints which he may not be fortunate enough to possess, it may be sufficient to remark, that the same tragic cast of expression and incident, blended in some instances with a greater alloy of comedy, characterises his other great work, the Marriage Alamode, as well as those less elaborate exertions of his genius, the prints called Industry and Idleness, the Distrest Poet, etc., forming, with the Harlot's and Rake's Progresses, the most considerable if not the largest class of his productions,- enough surely to rescue Hogarth from the imputation of being a mere buffoon, or one whose general aim was only to shake the sides.

There remains a very numerous class of his performances, the object of which must be confessed to be principally comic. But in all of them will be found something to distinguish them from the droll productions of Bunbury and others. They have this difference, that we do not merely laugh at, we are led into long trains of reflection by

them. In this respect they resemble the characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims, which have strokes of humour in them enough to designate them for the most part as comic, but our strongest feeling still is wonder at the comprehensiveness of genius which could crowd, as poet and painter have done, into one small canvas so many diverse yet co-operating materials.

The faces of Hogarth have not a mere momentary interest, as in caricatures, or those grotesque physiognomies which we sometimes catch a glance of in the street, and, struck with their whimsicality, wish for a pencil and the power to sketch them down; and forget them again as rapidly, - but they are permanent abiding ideas. Not the sports of nature, but her necessary eternal classes. We feel that we cannot part with any of them, lest a link should be broken.

It is worthy of observation, that he has seldom drawn a mean or insignificant countenance. ²⁰ Hogarth's mind was eminently reflective; and, as it has been well observed of Shakspeare, that he has transfused his own poetical character into the persons of his drama (they are all more or less poets) Hogarth has impressed a thinking character upon the persons of his canvas. This remark must not be taken universally. The exquisite idiotism of the little gentleman in the bag and sword beating his drum in the print of the Enraged Musician, would of itself rise up against so sweeping an assertion. But I think it will be found to be true of the generality of his countenances. The knife-grinder and Jew flute-player in the plate just mentioned, may serve as instances instead of a thousand. They have intense thinking faces, though the purpose to which they are subservient by no means required it; but indeed it seems as if it was painful to Hogarth to contemplate mere vacancy or insignificance. This reflection of the artist's own intellect from the faces of his characters, is one reason why the works of Hogarth, so much more than those of any other artist, are objects of meditation. Our intellectual natures love the mirror which gives them back their own likenesses. The mental eye will not bend long with delight upon vacancy.

Another line of eternal separation between Hogarth and the common painters of droll or burlesque subjects, with whom he is often confounded, is the sense of ²⁰ If there are any of that description, they are in his Strolling Players, a print which has been cried up by Lord Orford as the richest of his productions, and it may be, for what I know, in the mere lumber, the properties, and dead furniture of the scene, but in living character and expression it is (for Hogarth) lamentably poor and wanting; it is perhaps the only one of his performances at which we have a right to feel disgusted.

beauty, which in the most unpromising subjects seems never wholly to have deserted him. "Hogarth himself," says Mr. Coleridge, ²¹ from whom I have borrowed this observation, speaking of a scene which took place at Ratzeburg, "never drew a more ludicrous distortion, both of attitude and physiognomy, than this effect occasioned: nor was there wanting beside it one of those beautiful female faces which the same Hogarth, in whom the satirist never extinguished that love of beauty which belonged to him as a poet, so often and so gladly introduces as the central figure in a crowd of humorous deformities, which figure (such is the power of true genius) neither acts nor

is meant to act as a contrast; but diffuses through all and over each of the group a spirit of reconciliation and human kindness; and even when the attention is no longer consciously directed to the cause of this feeling, still blends its tenderness with our laughter: and thus prevents the instructive merriment at the whims of nature, or the foibles or humours of our fellow-men, from degenerating into the heart-poison of contempt or hatred." To the beautiful females in Hogarth, which Mr. C. has pointed out, might be added, the frequent introduction of children (which Hogarth seems to have taken a particular delight in) into his pieces. They have a singular effect in giving tranquillity and a portion of their own innocence to the subject. The baby riding in its mother's lap in the March to Finchley (its careless innocent face placed directly behind the intriguing time-furrowed countenance of the treason-plotting 21 The Friend, No. XVI. French priest), perfectly sobers the whole of that tumultuous scene. The boy mourner winding up his top with so much unpretending insensibility in the plate of the Harlot's Funeral (the only thing in that assembly that is not a hypocrite), quiets and soothes the mind that has been disturbed at the sight of so much depraved man and woman kind. I had written thus far, when I met with a passage in the writings of the late Mr. Barry, which, as it falls in with the vulgar notion respecting Hogarth, which this Essay has been employed in combating, I shall take the liberty to transcribe, with such remarks as may suggest themselves to me in the transcription; referring the reader for a full answer to that which has gone before.

Notwithstanding Hogarth's merit does undoubtedly entitle him to an honourable place among the artists, and that his little compositions, considered as so many dramatic representations, abounding with humour, character, and extensive observations on the various incidents of low, faulty, and vicious life, are very ingeniously brought together, and frequently tell their own story with more facility than is often found in many of the elevated and more noble inventions of Raphael and other great men; yet it must be honestly confessed, that in what is called knowledge of the figure, foreigners have justly observed, that Hogarth is often so raw and unformed, as hardly to deserve the name of an artist. But this capital defect is not often perceivable, as examples of the naked and of elevated nature but rarely occur in his subjects, which are for the most part filled with characters that in their nature tend to deformity; besides his figures are small, and the junctures, and other difficulties of drawing that might occur in their limbs, are artfully concealed with their clothes, rags, etc. But what would atone for all his defects, even if they were twice told, is his admirable fund of invention, ever inexhaustible in its resources; and his satire, which is always sharp and pertinent, and often highly moral, was (except in a few instances, where he weakly and meanly suffered his integrity to give way to his envy) seldom or never employed in a dishonest or unmanly way. Hogarth has been often imitated in his satirical vein, sometimes in his humorous: but very few have attempted to rival him in his moral walk. The line of art pursued by my very ingenious predecessor and brother Academician, Mr. Penny, is quite distinct from that of Hogarth, and is of a much more delicate and superior relish; he attempts the heart, and reaches it, whilst Hogarth's general aim is only to shake the sides; in other respects no comparison can be thought of, as Mr. Penny has all that

knowledge of the figure and academical skill which the other wanted. As to Mr. Bunbury, who had so happily succeeded in the vein of humour and caricatura, he has for some time past altogether relinquished it, for the more amiable pursuit of beautiful nature: this, indeed, is not to be wondered at, when we recollect that he has, in Mrs. Bunbury, so admirable an exemplar of the most finished grace and beauty continually at his elbow. But (to say all that occurs to me on this subject) perhaps it may be reasonably doubted, whether the being much conversant with Hogarth's method of exposing meanness, deformity, and vice, in many of his works, is not rather a dangerous, or, at least, a worthless pursuit; which, if it does not find a false relish and a love of and search after satire and buffoonery in the spectator, is at least not unlikely to give him one. Life is short; and the little leisure of it is much better laid out upon that species of art which is employed about the amiable and the admirable, as it is more likely to be attended with better and nobler consequences to ourselves. These two pursuits in art may be compared with two sets of people with whom we might associate; if we give ourselves up to the Footes, the Kenricks, etc., we shall be continually busied and paddling in whatever is ridiculous, faulty, and vicious in life; whereas there are those to be found with whom we should be in the constant pursuit and study of all that gives a value and a dignity to human nature. [Account of a Series of Pictures in the Great Room of the Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, at the Adelphi, by James Barry, R.A., Professor of Painting to the Royal Academy; reprinted in the last quarto edition of his works.]

- It must be honestly confessed, that in what is called knowledge of the figure, foreigners have justly observed, etc.

It is a secret well known to the professors of the art and mystery of criticism, to insist upon what they do not find in a man's works, and to pass over in silence what they do. That Hogarth did not draw the naked figure so well as Michael Angelo might be allowed, especially as "examples of the naked," as Mr. Barry acknowledges, "rarely (he might almost have said never) occur in his subjects"; and that his figures under their draperies do not discover all the fine graces of an Antinous or an Apollo, may be conceded likewise; perhaps it was more suitable to his purpose to represent the average forms of mankind in the mediocrity (as Mr. Burke expresses it) of the age in which he lived: but that his figures in general, and in his best subjects, are so glaringly incorrect as is here insinuated, I dare trust my own eye so far as positively to deny the fact. And there is one part of the figure in which Hogarth is allowed to have excelled, which these foreigners seem to have overlooked, or perhaps calculating from its proportion to the whole (a seventh or an eighth, I forget which), deemed it of trifling importance; I mean the human face; a small part, reckoning by geographical inches, in the map of man's body, but here it is that the painter of expression must condense the wonders of his skill, even at the expense of neglecting the "jonctures and other difficulties of drawing in the limbs," which it must be a cold eye that, in the interest so strongly demanded by Hogarth's countenances, has leisure to survey and censure.

The line of art pursued by my very ingenious predecessor and brother Academician, Mr. Penny.

The first impression caused in me by reading this passage was an eager desire to know who this Mr. Penny was. This great surpasser of Hogarth in the "delicacy of his relish," and the "line which he pursued," where is he, what are his works, what has he to show? In vain I tried to recollect, till by happily putting the question to a friend who is more conversant in the works of the illustrious obscure than myself, I learnt that he was the painter of a Death of Wolfe which missed the prize the year that the celebrated picture of West on the same subject obtained it; that he also made a picture of the Marquis of Granby relieving a Sick Soldier; moreover, that he was the inventor of two pictures of Suspended and Restored Animation, which I now remember to have seen in the Exhibition some years since, and the prints from which are still extant in good men's houses. This then, I suppose, is the line of subjects in which Mr. Penny was so much superior to Hogarth. I confess I am not of that opinion. The relieving of poverty by the purse, and the restoring a young man to his parents by using the methods prescribed by the Humane Society, are doubtless very amiable subjects, pretty things to teach the first rudiments of humanity; they amount to about as much instruction as the stories of good boys that give away their custards to poor beggar-boys in children's books. But, good God! is this milk for babes to be set up in opposition to Hogarth's moral scenes, his strong meat for men? As well might we prefer the fulsome verses upon their own goodness to which the gentlemen of the Literary Fund annually sit still with such shameless patience to listen, to the satires of Juvenal and Persius; because the former are full of tender images of Worth relieved by Charity, and Charity stretching out her hand to rescue sinking Genius, and the theme of the latter is men's crimes and follies with their black consequences- forgetful meanwhile of those strains of moral pathos, those sublime heart-touches, which these poets (in them chiefly showing themselves poets) are perpetually darting across the otherwise appalling gloom of their subject- consolatory remembrancers, when their pictures of guilty mankind have made us even to despair for our species, that there is such a thing as virtue and moral dignity in the world, that her unquenchable spark is not utterly out- refreshing admonitions, to which we turn for shelter from the too great heat and asperity of the general satire.

And is there nothing analogous to this in Hogarth? nothing which "attempts and reaches the heart"?- no aim beyond that of "shaking the sides"?- If the kneeling ministering female in the last scene of the Rake's Progress, the Bedlam scene, of which I have spoken before, and have dared almost to parallel it with the most absolute idea of Virtue which Shakspeare has left us, be not enough to disprove the assertion; if the sad endings of the Harlot and the Rake, the passionate heartbleeding entreaties for forgiveness which the adulterous wife is pouring forth to her assassinated and dying lord in the last scene but one of the Marriage a la Mode,- if these be not things to touch the heart, and dispose the mind to a meditative tenderness: is there nothing sweetly conciliatory in the mild patient face and gesture with which the wife seems to allay and ventilate the feverish irritated feelings of her poor poverty-distracted mate (the true copy of the genus irritabile) in the print of the Distrest Poet? or if an image of maternal love be required, where shall we find a sublimer view of it than in that aged woman in Industry and Idleness (Plate V.) who is clinging with the fondness of hope not quite

extinguished to her brutal vice-hardened child, whom she is accompanying to the ship which is to bear him away from his native soil, of which he has been adjudged unworthy: in whose shocking face every trace of the human countenance seems obliterated, and a brute beast's to be left instead, shocking and repulsive to all but her who watched over it in its cradle before it was so sadly altered, and feels it must belong to her while a pulse by the vindictive laws of his country shall be suffered to continue to beat in it. Compared with such things, what is Mr. Penny's "knowledge of the figure and academical skill which Hogarth wanted"? With respect to what follows concerning another gentleman, with the congratulations to him on his escape out of the regions of "humour and caricatura," in which it appears he was in danger of travelling side by side with Hogarth, I can only congratulate my country, that Mrs. Hogarth knew her province better than, by disturbing her husband at his palette, to divert him from that universality of subject, which has stamped him perhaps, next to Shakspeare, the most inventive genius which this island has produced, into the "amiable pursuit of beautiful nature," i.e., copying ad infinitum the individual charms and graces of Mrs. H. Hogarth's method of exposing meanness, deformity, and vice, paddling in whatever is ridiculous, faulty, and vicious.

A person unacquainted with the works thus stigmatised would be apt to imagine that in Hogarth there was nothing else to be found but subjects of the coarsest and most repulsive nature. That his imagination was naturally unsweet, and that he delighted in raking into every species of moral filth. That he preyed upon sore places only, and took a pleasure in exposing the unsound and rotten parts of human nature:- whereas, with the exception of some of the plates of the Harlot's Progress, which are harder in their character than any of the rest of his productions (the Stages of Cruelty I omit as mere worthless caricaturas, foreign to his general habits, the offspring of his fancy in some wayward humour), there is scarce one of his pieces where vice is most strongly satirised, in which some figure is not introduced upon which the moral eye may rest satisfied; a face that indicates goodness, or perhaps mere good-humouredness and carelessness of mind (negation of evil) only, yet enough to give a relaxation to the frowning brow of satire, and keep the general air from tainting. Take the mild, supplicating posture of patient Poverty in the poor woman that is persuading the pawnbroker to accept her clothes in pledge, in the plate of Gin Lane, for an instance. A little does it, a little of the good nature overpowers a world of bad. One cordial honest laugh of a Tom Jones absolutely clears the atmosphere that was reeking with the black putrefying breathings of a hypocrite Blifil. One homely expostulating shrug from Strap warms the whole air which the suggestions of a gentlemanly ingratitude from his friend Random had begun to freeze. One "Lord bless us!" of Parson Adams upon the wickedness of the time, exorcises and purges off the mass of iniquity which the world-knowledge of even a Fielding could cull out and rake together. But of the severer class of Hogarth's performances, enough, I trust, has been said to show that they do not merely shock and repulse; that there is in them the "scorn of vice" and the "pity" too; something to touch the heart, and keep alive the sense of moral beauty; the "lacrymae rerum," and the sorrowing by which the heart is made better. If they be bad things,

then is satire and tragedy a bad thing; let us proclaim at once an age of gold, and sink the existence of vice and misery in our speculations: let us -wink, and shut our apprehensions up From common sense of what men were and are: let us make believe with the children, that everybody is good and happy; and, with Dr. Swift, write panegyrics upon the world.

But that larger half of Hogarth's works, which were painted more for entertainment than instruction (though such was the suggestiveness of his mind that there is always something to be learnt from them), his humorous scenes,- are they such as merely to disgust and set us against our species? The confident assertions of such a man as I consider the late Mr. Barry to have been, have that weight of authority in them which staggers at first hearing, even a long preconceived opinion. When I read his pathetic admonition concerning the shortness of life, and how much better the little leisure of it were laid out upon "that species of art which is employed about the amiable and the admirable"; and Hogarth's "method," proscribed as a "dangerous or worthless pursuit," I began to think there was something in it; that I might have been indulging all my life a passion for the works of this artist, to the utter prejudice of my taste and moral sense; but my first convictions gradually returned, a world of good-natured English faces came up one by one to my recollection, and a glance at the matchless Election Entertainment, which I have the happiness to have hanging up in my parlour, subverted Mr. Barry's whole theory in an instant.

In that inimitable print (which in my judgment as far exceeds the more known and celebrated March to Finchley, as the best comedy exceeds the best farce that ever was written), let a person look till he be saturated, and when he has done wondering at the inventiveness of genius which could bring so many characters (more than thirty distinct classes of face) into a room and set them down at table together, or otherwise dispose them about, in so natural a manner, engage them in so many easy sets and occupations, yet all partaking of the spirit of the occasion which brought them together, so that we feel that nothing but an election time could have assembled them; having no central figure or principal group (for the hero of the piece, the Candidate, is properly set aside in the levelling indistinction of the day, one must look for him to find him), nothing to detain the eye from passing from part to part, where every part is alike instinct with life,- for here are no furniture-faces, no figures brought in to fill up the scene like stage choruses, but all dramatis personae: when he shall have done wondering at all these faces so strongly characterized, yet finished with the accuracy of the finest miniature; when he shall have done admiring the numberless appendages of the scene, those gratuitous doles which rich genius flings into the heap when it has already done enough, the over-measure which it delights in giving, as if it felt its stores were exhaustless; the dumb rhetoric of the scenery- for tables, and chairs, and jointstools in Hogarth are living and significant things; the witticisms that are expressed by words (all artists but Hogarth have failed when they have endeavoured to combine two mediums of expression, and have introduced words into their pictures), and the unwritten numberless little allusive pleasantries that are scattered about; the work that is going on in the scene, and beyond it, as is made visible to the "eye of mind," by the

mob which chokes up the doorway, and the sword that has forced an entrance before its master; when he shall have sufficiently admired this wealth of genius, let him fairly say what is the result left on his mind. Is it an impression of the vileness and worthlessness of his species? or is it not the general feeling which remains, after the individual faces have ceased to act sensibly on his mind, a kindly one in favour of his species? was not the general air of the scene wholesome? did it do the heart hurt to be among it? Something of a riotous spirit to be sure is there, some worldly-mindedness in some of the faces, a Doddingtonian smoothness which does not promise any superfluous degree of sincerity in the fine gentleman who has been the occasion of calling so much good company together; but is not the general cast of expression in the faces of the good sort? do they not seem cut out of the good old rock, substantial English honesty? would one fear treachery among characters of their expression? or shall we call their honest mirth and seldom-returning relaxation by the hard names of vice and profligacy? That poor country fellow, that is grasping his staff (which, from that difficulty of feeling themselves at home which poor men experience at a feast, he has never parted with since he came into the room), and is enjoying with a relish that seems to fit all the capacities of his soul the slender joke, which that facetious wag his neighbour is practising upon the gouty gentleman, whose eyes the effort to suppress pain has made as round as rings- does it shock the "dignity of human nature" to look at that man, and to sympathise with him in the seldomheard joke which has unbent his careworn, hardworking visage, and drawn iron smiles from it? or with that full-hearted cobbler, who is honouring with the grasp of an honest fist the unused palm of that annoyed patrician, whom the licence of the time has seated next him? I can see nothing "dangerous" in the contemplation of such scenes as this, or the Enraged Musician, or the Southwark Fair, or twenty other pleasant prints which come crowding in upon my recollection, in which the restless activities, the diversified bents and humours, the blameless peculiarities of men, as they deserve to be called, rather than their "vices and follies," are held up in a laughable point of view. All laughter is not of a dangerous or soul-hardening tendency. There is the petrifying sneer of a demon which excludes and kills Love, and there is the cordial laughter of a man which implies and cherishes it. What heart was ever made the worse by joining in a hearty laugh at the simplicities of Sir Hugh Evans or Parson Adams, where a sense of the ridiculous mutually kindles and is kindled by a perception of the amiable? That tumultuous harmony of singers that are roaring out the words, "The world shall bow to the Assyrian throne," from the opera of Judith, in the third plate of the series called the Four Groups of Heads; which the quick eye of Hogarth must have struck off in the very infancy of the rage for sacred oratorios in this country, while "Music yet was young"; when we have done smiling at the deafening distortions, which these tearers of devotion to rags and tatters, these takers of heaven by storm, in their boisterous mimicry of the occupation of angels, are making,- what unkindly impression is left behind, or what more of harsh or contemptuous feeling, than when we quietly leave Uncle Toby and Mr. Shandy riding their hobby-horses about the room? The conceited, longbacked Sign-painter, that with all the self-applause of a Raphael or Correggio (the twist of body which his conceit has thrown him into has something of the Correggisque in it), is contemplating the picture

of a bottle, which he is drawing from an actual bottle that hangs beside him, in the print of Beer Street,- while we smile at the enormity of the self-delusion, can we help loving the good-humour and selfcomplacency of the fellow? would we willingly wake him from his dream? I say not that all the ridiculous subjects of Hogarth have, necessarily, something in them to make us like them; some are indifferent to us, some in their natures repulsive, and only made interesting by the wonderful skill and truth to nature in the painter; but I contend that there is in most of them that sprinkling of the better nature, which, like holy water, chases away and disperses the contagion of the bad. They have this in them, besides, that they bring us acquainted with the everyday human face,- they give us skill to detect those gradations of sense and virtue (which escape the careless or fastidious observer) in the countenances of the world about us; and prevent that disgust at common life, that *taedium quotidianarum formarum*, which an unrestricted passion for ideal forms and beauties is in danger of producing. In this, as in many other things, they are analogous to the best novels of Smollett or Fielding.

ON THE POETICAL WORKS OF GEORGE WITHER

THE poems of G. Wither are distinguished by a hearty homeliness of manner, and a plain moral speaking. He seems to have passed his life in one continued act of an innocent self-pleasing. That which he calls his Motto is a continued self-eulogy of two thousand lines, yet we read it to the end without any feeling of distaste, almost without a consciousness that we have been listening all the while to a man praising himself. There are none of the cold particles in it, the hardness and self-ends, which render vanity and egotism hateful. He seems to be praising another person, under the mask of self: or rather, we feel that it was indifferent to him where he found the virtue which he celebrates; whether another's bosom or his own were its chosen receptacle. His poems are full, and this in particular is one downright confession, of a generous self-seeking. But by self he sometimes means a great deal,- his friends, his principles, his country, the human race.

Whoever expects to find in the satirical pieces of this writer any of those peculiarities which pleased him in the satires of Dryden or Pope, will be grievously disappointed. Here are no high-finished characters, no nice traits of individual nature, few or no personalities. The game run down is coarse general vice, or folly as it appears in classes. A liar, a drunkard, a coxcomb, is stript and whipt; no Shaftesbury, no Villiers, or Wharton, is curiously anatomised, and read upon. But to a well-natured mind there is a charm of moral sensibility running through them, which amply compensates the want of those luxuries. Wither seems everywhere bursting with a love of goodness, and a hatred of all low and base actions. At this day it is hard to discover what parts of the poem here particularly alluded to, *Abuses Stript and Whipt*, could have occasioned the imprisonment of the author.

Was Vice in High Places more suspicious than now? had she more power; or more leisure to listen after ill reports? That a man should be convicted of a libel when he named no names but Hate, and Envy, and Lust, and Avarice, is like one of the indictments in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, where Faithful is arraigned for having "railed on our noble Prince Beelzebub, and spoken contemptibly of his honourable friends, the Lord Old Man, the Lord Carnal Delight, and the Lord Luxurious." What unlucky jealousy could have tempted the great men of those days to appropriate such innocent abstractions to themselves? Wither seems to have contemplated to a degree of idolatry his own possible virtue. He is for ever anticipating persecution and martyrdom; fingering, as it were, the flames, to try how he can bear them. Perhaps his premature defiance sometimes made him obnoxious to censures which he would otherwise have slipped by.

The homely versification of these Satires is not likely to attract in the present day. It is certainly not such as we should expect from a poet "soaring in the high region of his fancies, with his garland and his singing robes about him"; nor is Milton. It is such as he has shown in his *Philarete*, and in some parts of his *Shepherds Hunting*. He

seems to have adopted this dress with voluntary humility, as fittest for a moral teacher, as our divines choose sober grey or black; but in their humility consists their sweetness. The deepest tone of moral feeling in them (though all throughout is weighty, earnest, and passionate) is in those pathetic injunctions against shedding of blood in quarrels, in the chapter entitled Revenge. The story of his own forbearance, which follows, is highly interesting. While the Christian sings his own victory over Anger, the Man of Courage cannot help peeping out to let you know, that it was some higher principle than fear which counselled this forbearance. Whether engaged, or roaming at liberty, Wither never seems to have abated a jot of that free spirit which sets its mark upon his writings, as much as a predominant feature of independence impresses every page of our late glorious Burns; for the elder poet wraps his proof-armour closer about him, the other wears his too much outwards; he is thinking too much of annoying the foe to be quite easy within; the spiritual fences of Wither are a perpetual source of inward sunshine, the magnanimity of the modern is not without its alloy of soreness, and a sense of injustice, which seems perpetually to gall and irritate. Wither was better skilled in the "sweet uses of adversity"; he knew how to extract the "precious jewel" from the head of the "toad," without drawing any of the "ugly venom" along with it.

The prison notes of Wither are finer than the wood notes of most of his poetical brethren. The description in the Fourth Eclogue of his Shepherds Hunting (which was composed during his imprisonment in the Marshalsea) of the power of the Muse to extract pleasure from common objects, has been oftener quoted, and is more known, than any part of his writings. Indeed, the whole Eclogue is in a strain so much above not only what himself, but almost what any other poet has written, that he himself could not help noticing it; he remarks that his spirits had been raised higher than they were wont, "through the love of poesy." The praises of Poetry have been often sung in ancient and in modern times; strange powers have been ascribed to it of influence over animate and inanimate auditors; its force over fascinated crowds has been acknowledged; but, before Wither, no one ever celebrated its power at home, the wealth and the strength which this divine gift confers upon its possessor. Fame, and that too after death, was all which hitherto the poets had promised themselves from their art. It seems to have been left to Wither to discover that poetry was a present possession, as well as a rich reversion, and that the Muse had promise of both lives,- of this, and of that which was to come.

The Mistress of Philarete is in substance a panegyric protracted through several thousand lines in the mouth of a single speaker, but diversified, so as to produce an almost dramatic effect, by the artful introduction of some ladies, who are rather auditors than interlocutors in the scene; and of a boy, whose singing furnishes pretence for an occasional change of metre: though the seven-syllable line, in which the main part of it is written, is that in which Wither has shown himself so great a master, that I do not know that I am always thankful to him for the exchange.

Wither has chosen to bestow upon the lady whom he commends the name of Arete, or Virtue; and, assuming to himself the character of Philarete, or Lover of Virtue, there is a sort of propriety in that heaped measure of perfections which he attributes to this partly

real, partly allegorical, personage. Drayton before him had shadowed his mistress under the name of Idea, or Perfect Pattern, and some of the old Italian love-strains are couched in such religious terms as to make it doubtful whether it be a mistress, or Divine Grace, which the poet is addressing.

In this poem (full of beauties) there are two passages of pre-eminent merit.

The first is where the lover, after a flight of rapturous commendation, expresses his wonder why all men that are about his mistress, even to her very servants, do not view her with the same eyes that he does.

Sometime I do admire All men burn not with desire: Nay, I muse her servants are not Pleading love; but O! they dare not.

And I therefore wonder, why They do not grow sick and die.
Sure they would do so, but that, By the ordinance of fate,
There is some concealed thing, So each gazer limiting, He can see no more of merit,
Than beseems his worth and spirit.

For in her a grace there shines, That o'er-daring thoughts confines, Making worthless men despair To be loved of one so fair.

Yea, the destinies agree, Some good judgments blind should be, And not gain the power of knowing Those rare beauties in her growing.

Reason doth as much imply: For, if every judging eye, Which beholdeth her, should there Find what excellences are, All, o'ercome by those perfections, Would be captive to affections.

So, in happiness unblest, She for lovers should not rest.

The other is, where he has been comparing her beauties to gold, and stars, and the most excellent things in nature; and, fearing to be accused of hyperbole, the common charge against poets, vindicates himself by boldly taking upon him, that these comparisons are no hyperboles; but that the best things in nature do, in a lover's eye, fall short of those excellences which he adores in her.

What pearls, what rubies can Seem so lovely fair to man, As her lips whom he doth love, When in sweet discourse they move, Or her lovelier teeth, the while She doth bless him with a smile? Stars indeed fair creatures be; Yet amongst us where is he Joys not more the whilst he lies Sunning in his mistress' eyes, Than in all the glimmering light Of a starry winter's night? Note the beauty of an eye And if aught you praise it by Leave such passion in your mind, Let my reason's eye be blind.

Mark if ever red or white

Any where gave such delight, As when they have taken place In a worthy woman's face I must praise her as I may, Which I do mine own rude way, Sometimes setting forth her glories By unheard of allegories- etc.

To the measure in which these lines are written the wits of Queen Anne's days contemptuously gave the name of Namby Pamby, in ridicule of Ambrose Philips, who has used it in some instances, as in the lines on Cuzzoni, to my feeling at least, very deliciously; but Wither, whose darling measure it seems to have been, may show, that in skilful hands it is capable of expressing the subtlest movements of passion. So true it is, which Drayton seems to have felt, that it is the poet who modifies metre, not the metre the poet; in his own words, that It's possible to climb; To kindle, or to slake; Altho' in Skelton's rhyme. *

23 A long line is a line we are long repeating. In the Shepherds Hunting take the following: If thy verse doth bravely tower, As she makes wing, she gets power; Yet the higher she doth soar, She's affronted still the more, Till she to the high'st hath past, Then she rests with fame at last.

What longer measure can go beyond the majesty of this! what Alexandrine is half so long in pronouncing or expresses labour slowly but strongly surmounting difficulty with the life with which it is done in the second of these lines? or what metre could go beyond these from Philarete

23 * * * *

Her true beauty leaves behind Apprehensions in my mind Of more sweetness, than all art Or inventions can impart.

Thoughts too deep to be expressd, And too strong to be suppress'd. -

THE END OF THE ESSAYS OF CHARLES LAMB