

Herculean stature upon its bank; the stream the while mirroring his black locks and moody brow; "silent, the great Titan! and wondering what the end of these things will be;" musing upon the bloody past, and looking forward gloomily to the future, and starting up suddenly with fierce energy and tempestuous resolve, as some wandering wind appears to whisper, "Robespierre!" or as to his awakened fears the guillotine seems to glass itself in the passing waters. And with beating heart we follow him from this to the tribunal of Fouquier, and tremble as he gives in his address, "My name is Danton! a name tolerably well known in the revolution. My dwelling shall soon be with annihilation, but I shall live in the Pantheon of history;" or as we hear his voice for the last time reverberating from the domes, in "words piercing from their wild sincerity, winged with wrath, fire flashing from the eyes of him, piercing to all republican hearts, higher and higher till the lion voice of him dies away in his throat;" or as we follow him to the guillotine, "carrying a high look in the death-cart"—saying to Camille Desmoulins as he struggles and writhes, "Courage, my friend, heed not that vile canaille"—to himself, "Oh, my dear wife, shall I never see thee more, then! but, Danton, no weakness"—to the executioner, "Thou wilt show my head to the people—it is worth showing." Surely this man had in him the elements of a noble being, and, had he lived, would, as effectually as even Napoleon, have backed and bridled the Bucephalus of the revolution. "Thus passes, like a gigantic mass of valour, fury, ostentation, and wild revolutionary manhood, this Danton to his unknown home. He had many sins, but one worst sin he had not, that of cant. No hollow formalist, but a very man—with all his dross he was a man—fiery-real, from the great fire-bosom of Nature herself. He saved France from Brunswick—he walked straight his own wild road, whither it led him. He may live for some generations in the memory of men."

The Edinburgh reviewer seems to have a strong liking for Robespierre, and takes our author to task for his treatment of that "sea green incorruptible." This liking on the part of the reviewer seems to us affected as well as absurd. He grounds it upon the fact that he was incorruptible, and was a worshipper after a fashion of his own. Two pitiful pillars for bolstering up a character bowed down by the weight of Danton's blood, by the execrations of humanity, by the unanimous voice of female France, re-echoing the woman's wild cry, "Go down to hell with the curses of all wives and mothers." But, oh! he was above

a bribe! Nay, he was only beneath it; and so is a hyena. He died a poor man; but so far from making him an Andrew Marvel therefore, let us rather say with Hall, that "ambition in his mind had, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up the whole fry of petty propensities;" and that there are "other virtues besides that of dying poor." Miserable counterbalance! incorruptibility against treachery, ingratitude, infernal cruelty, and systematic hypocrisy—one virtue to a thousand crimes. But he was a worshipper, it seems. Of what? Of Wisdom in the shape of a smoked statue! And this most ridiculous and monstrous of all farces ever enacted in this world—this tomfoolery of hell, with its ghastly ceremonies and ghastlier high-priest, "in sky-blue coat and black breeches," decreeing the existence of a Supreme Being with one foot in Danton's blood, and the immortality of the soul with another on the brink of ruin—this cowardly acknowledgment, more horrible than the blasphemous denial—this patronage of Deity by one of the worst and meanest of his creatures—has at length met with an admirer in the shape of a contributor to *The Edinburgh Review*! "O shame, where is thy blush?" But he had a party who died with him, while Danton stood almost alone. Why, Nero had his friends. "Some hand unseen strewed flowers upon his tomb." The brood of a tiger probably regard their parent as an amiable character, much mis-represented. Satan has his party. Can we wonder, then, that a set of miscreants, driven to desperation, should cling to each other, and to the greatest villain of their number? And as to Danton, not only had he, too, his devoted adherents, Camille Desmoulins, Herault de Sechelles, etc., but the galleries had nearly rushed down and rescued him. His fall secured Robespierre's ruin; and when the wretch attempted to speak in his own behalf, what cry rung in his ears, telling how deeply the people had felt and mourned their Titan's death? "Danton's blood chokes him."

We noticed, too, and wondered at his epithets, and the curious art he has of compounding and recomounding them, till the resources of style stagger, and the reader's eye, familiarised to the ordered and measured tameness of the common run of writers, becomes dim with astonishment. Take some specimens which occur on opening the book:—"Fountain-ocean, flame-image, star-galaxies, sharp-bustling, kind-sparkling, Tantalus-Ixion, Amazonian-graceful, bushy-whiskered, fire-radiant, high-pendant, self-distractive, land-surgling, waste-flashing, honour-worthy, famous-infamous, real-imaginary, pale-dim."

Such are a few, and but a few, of the strange, half-mad, contradictory and chaotic epithets, which furnish a barbaric garnish to the feast which Carlyle has spread before us. Whether in these he had Homer in his eye, or whether he has rather imitated his hero Mirabeau, who, we know, was very fond of such combinations as Grandison-Cromwell, Crispin-Cataline, etc., we cannot tell; but, while questioning their taste, we honestly admit that we love the book all the better for them, and would miss them much were they away. To such faults (as men to the taste of tobacco) we not only become reconciled, for the sake of the pleasure connected with them, but we learn positively to love what seemed at first to breathe the very nausea of affectation. It is just as when you have formed a friendship for a man, you love him all the better for his oddities, and value as parts of him all his singularities, from the twist in his temper and the crack in his brain, to the cast in his eye and the stutter in his speech. So, Carlyle's epithets are not beautiful, but they are his.

We noticed, too, his passion for the personal. His ideas of all his characters are connected with vivid images of their personal appearance. He is not like Grant, of the *Random Recollections*, whose soul is swallowed up in the minutiae of dress, and whose "talk is of" buttons. Carlyle is infinitely above this. But in the strength of his imagination, and the profound philosophical conviction, that nature has written her idea of character and intellect upon countenance and person, and that "faces never lie," he avails himself of all the traditional and historical notices which he can collect; and the result is the addition of the charms of painting to those of history. His book will never need an illustrated edition. It is illustrated beforehand, in his graphic and perpetually repeated pictures. Mirabeau lifts up, on his canvas, his black boar's head, and carbuncled and grim-pitted visage, like "a tiger that had had the small-pox." Robespierre shows his sea-green countenance and bilious eyne, through spectacles, and, ere his fall, is "seen wandering in the fields with an intensely meditative air, and eyes blood-spotted, fruit of extreme bile." Danton strides along heavily, as if shod with thunder, shaking, above his mighty stature, profuse and "coal-black" locks, and speaking as with a cataract in his throat. Marat croaks hoarse, with "bleared soul, looking through bleared, dull, acrid, woe-struck face," "redolent of soot and horse-drugs." Camille Desmoulins stalks on with "long curling locks, and face of dingy black-

guardism, wondrously irradiated with genius, as if a naphtha lamp burnt within it." Abbé Sieyes, a "light, thin" man, "elastic, wiry," weaves his everlasting constitutions of still flimsier materials than himself. Bailly "trembles under the guillotine with cold." Vergniaud, during his last night in prison, sings "tumultuous songs." Gross David shows his "swoln cheek," type of genius, in a "state of convulsion." Charlotte Corday hies to Paris, a "stately Norman figure, with beautiful still countenance." Louis stands on the edge of the scaffold, speaking in dumb show, his "face very red." Marie Antoinette, Theresa's daughter, skims along, touching not the ground, till she drops down on it a corpse. Madame Theroigne flutters about, a "brown-locked figure," that might win laughter from the grim guillotine itself. Barbaroux, "beautiful as Antinous," "looks into Madame Roland's eyes, and in silence, in tragical renunciance, feels that she is all too lovely." And last, not least, stands at the foot of the scaffold Madame Roland herself, "a noble white vision, with high queenly face, soft proud eyes, and long black hair flowing down to her girdle." Thus do all Carlyle's characters live and move; no stuffed figures, or breathing corpses, but animated and flesh and blood humanities. And it is this intense love of the picturesque and personal which gives such a deep and dramatic interest to the book, and makes it above all comparison the most lively and eloquent history of the period which has appeared.

We might have dwelt, too, on the sardonic air which pervades the greater part of it. Carlyle's sarcasm is quite peculiar to himself. It is like that of an intelligence who has the power of viewing a great many grave matters at a strange sinister angle, which turns them into figures of mirth. He does not, indeed, resemble the author of *Don Juan*, who describes the horrors of a shipwreck like a demon who had, invisible, sat amid the shrouds, choked with laughter;—with immeasurable glee had heard the wild farewell rising from sea to sky;—had leaped into the long boat, as it put off with its pale crew;—had gloated over the cannibal repast;—had leered, unseen, into the "dim eyes of those shipwrecked men," and, with a loud and savage burst of derision, had seen them, at length, sinking into the waves. Carlyle's laughter is not that of a fiend, but of a water kelpie, —wild, unearthly, but with a certain sympathy and sorrow shuddering down the wind on it as it dies away. More truly than Byron might he say, "And if I laugh at any mortal thing, 'tis that I may not weep." For our parts, we love to see this

great spirit, as he stands beside the boiling abyss of the French Revolution, not, like many, raving in sympathy; nor, like others, coolly sounding the tumultuous surge; nor, like others, vituperating the wild waters; but veiling the profoundest pity, love, terror, and wonder in inextinguishable peals of laughter. This laughter may be hearty, but assuredly it is not heartless.

We remarked, in fine, its singular compression of events, scarce one prominent point in the whole complicated history being omitted;—the art he has of stripping off the prude flesh, and giving the lion's marrow of history;—his want of prejudice, and bias, producing, on the one hand, in him, a perfect and ideal impartiality, and, on the other, in you, an unsatisfied and tantalised feeling, which prompts you to ask, "What, after all, does this man want us to think of the French Revolution,—to love or to hate, to bless or to ban it?"—the appositeness and point of his quotations, which, like strong tributaries, mingle congenially with the main current of his narrative, and are drawn from remote and recondite regions;—and his habitual use of the present tense, thus completing the epic cast of his work, giving a freshness and startling life to its every page, and producing an effect as different from the tame *past* of other writers, as the smoothed locks of a coxcomb are from the roused hair of a Moenad or an Apollo standing bright in the breath of Olympus.

Such is our estimate of a book which, though no model in style, nor yet a final and conclusive history of the period, can never, as long as originality, power, and genius are admired, pass from the memories of men. We trust we shall live to see its grand sequel in the shape of a life of Napoleon, from the same pen. May it be worthy of the subject and the author, and come forth in the fine words of Symmons:—

Thundering the moral of his story,
And rolling boundless as his glory.

Thomas Carlyle was born at Ecclefechan, Annandale. His parents were "good farmer people," his father an elder in the Secession church there, and a man of strong native sense, whose words were said to "nail a subject to the wall." His excellent mother still lives, and we had the pleasure of meeting her lately in the company of her illustrious son; and beautiful it was to see his profound and tender regard, and her motherly and yearning reverence,—to hear her fine old covenanting accents, concerting with his transcendental tones. He studied in Edinburgh. Previous to this, he had become intimate with Edward

Irving, an intimacy which continued unimpaired to the close of the latter's eccentric career. Like most Scottish students, he had many struggles to encounter in the course of his education; and had, we believe, to support himself by private tuition, translations for the booksellers, etc. The day star of German literature arose early in his soul, and has been his guide and genius ever since. He entered into a correspondence with Goethe, which lasted, at intervals, till the latter's death. Yet he has never, we understand, visited Germany. He was, originally, destined for the church. At one period he taught an academy in Dysart, at the same time that Irving was teaching in Kirkcaldy. After his marriage, he resided partly at Comely Bank, Edinburgh; and, for a year or two in Craigenputtock, a wild and solitary farm house in the upper part of Dumfriesshire. Here, however, far from society, save that of the "great dumb monsters of mountains," he wearied out his very heart. A ludicrous story is told of Lord Jeffrey visiting him in this out-of-the-way region, when they were unapprised of his coming—had nothing in the house fit for the palate of the critic, and had, in dire haste and pother, to send off for the wherewithal to a market town about fifteen miles off. Here, too, as we may see hereafter, Emerson, on his way home from Italy, dropped in like a spirit, spent precisely twenty-four hours, and then "forth uprose that lone wayfaring man," to return to his native woods. He has, for several years of late, resided in Chelsea, London, where he lives in a plain simple fashion; occasionally, but seldom, appearing at the splendid soirées of Lady Blessington, but listened to, when he goes, as an oracle; receiving, at his tea-table, visitors from every part of the world; forming an amicable centre for men of the most opposite opinions and professions, poets and preachers, Pantheists and Puritans, Tennysons and Scotts, Cavanaughs and Erskines, Sterlings and Robertsons, smoking his perpetual pipe, and pouring out, in copious stream, his rich and quaint philosophy. His appearance is fine, without being ostentatiously singular;—his hair dark,—his brow marked, though neither very broad nor very lofty,—his cheek tinged with a healthy red,—his eye, the truest index of his genius, flashing out, at times, a wild and mystic fire from its dark and quiet surface. He is above the middle size, stoops slightly, dresses carefully, but without any approach to foppery. His address, somewhat high and distant at first, softens into simplicity and cordial kindness. His conversation is abundant, inartificial, flowing on, and warbling as it flows,

more practical than you would expect from the cast of his writings,—picturesque and graphic in a high measure,—full of the results of extensive and minute observation, often terribly direct and strong, garnished with French and German phrase, rendered racy by the accompaniment of the purest Annandale accent, and coming to its climaxes, ever and anon, in long, deep, chest-shaking bursts of laughter.

Altogether, in an age of singularities, Thomas Carlyle stands peculiarly alone. Generally known, and warmly appreciated, he has of late become—popular, in the strict sense, he is not, and may never be. His works may never climb the family library, nor his name become a household word; but while the Thomsons and the Campbells shed their gentle genius, like light, into the hall and the hovel,—the shop of the artisan and the sheiling of the shepherd, Carlyle, like the Landors and Lambs of this age, and the Brownes and Burtons of a past, will exert a more limited but profounder power,—cast a dimmer but more gorgeous radiance,—attract fewer but more devoted admirers, and obtain an equal, and perhaps more enviable immortality.

GEORGE CRABBE¹

To be the poet of the waste places of Creation—to adopt the orphans of the mighty mother—to wed her dowerless daughters—to find out the beauty which has been spilt in tiny drops in her more unlovely regions—to echo the low music which arises from even her stillest and most sterile spots—was the mission of Crabbe, as a descriptive poet. He preferred the Leahs to the Rachels of nature: and this he did not merely that his lot had cast him amid such scenes, and that early associations had taught him a profound interest in them, but apparently from native taste. He actually loved that beauty which stands shivering on the brink of barrenness—loved it for its timidity and its loneliness. Nay, he seemed to love barrenness itself; brooding over its dull page till there arose from it a strange lustre, which his eye distinctly sees, and which in part he makes visible to his readers. It was even as the darkness of cells has been sometimes peopled to the view of the solitary prisoner, and spiders seemed angels in the depths of his dungeon. We can fancy, too, in Crabbe's mind, a feeling of pity for those unloved spots, and those neglected glories. We can fancy him saying, "Let the gay and the aspiring mate with nature in her towering altitudes, and flatter her more favoured scenes; I will go after her into her secret retirements, bring out her bashful beauties, praise what none are willing to praise, and love what there are few to love." From his early circumstances, besides, there had stolen over his soul a shade of settled though subdued gloom. And for sympathy with this, he betook himself to the sterner and sadder aspects of nature, where he saw, or seemed to see, his own feelings reflected, as in a sea of melancholy faces, in dull skies, waste moorlands, the low beach, and the moaning of the waves upon it, as if weary of their eternal wanderings. Such, too, at moments, was the feeling of Burns, when he strode on the scaur of the Nith, and saw the waters red and turbid below; or walked in a windy day by the side of a plantation, and heard the "sound of a going" upon the tops of the

¹ From *A Second Gallery of Literary Portraits*, 1850.

trees; or when he exclaimed, with a calm simplicity of bitterness which is most affecting—

The leafless trees my fancy please,
Their fate resembles mine.

Oh! where, indeed, can the unhappy repair, to escape from their own sorrows, or worse, from the unthinking glee or constitutional cheerfulness of others, more fitly than into the wastes and naked places of nature? She will not then and there seem to insult them with her laughing luxuriance—her foliage fluttering, as if in vain display, with the glossy gilding of her flowers, or the sunny sparkle and song of her streamlets. But she will uplift a mightier and older voice. She will soothe them by a sterner ministry. She will teach them “old truths, abysmal truths, awful truths.” She will answer their sighs by the groans of the creation travailing in pain; suck up their tears in the sweat of her great agonies; reflect their tiny wrinkles in those deep stabs and scars on her forehead, which speak of struggle and contest; give back the gloom of their brows in the frowns of her forests, her mountain solitudes, and her waste midnight darkness; infuse something, too, of her own sublime expectancy into her spirits; and dismiss them from her society, it may be sadder, but certainly wiser men. How admirably is nature suited to all moods of all men! In spring, she is gay with the light-hearted; in summer, gorgeous as its sun to those fiery spirits who seem made for a warmer day; in autumn, she spreads over all hearts a mellow and unearthly joy; and even in winter—when her temple is deserted of the frivolous and the timid, who quit it along with the smile of the sun—she attracts her own few but faithful votaries, who love her in her naked sculpture, as well as in her glowing pictorial hues, and who enjoy her solemn communion none the less that they enjoy it by themselves. To use the words of a forgotten poet, addressing spring—

Thou op'st a storehouse for all hues of men.
To hardihood thou, blustering from the north,
Roll'st dark—hast sighs for them that would complain;
Sharp winds to clear the head of wit and worth;
And melody for those that follow mirth;
Clouds for the gloomy; tears for those that weep;
Flowers blighted in the bud for those that birth
Untimely sorrow o'er; and skies where sweep
Fleets of a thousand sail for them that plough the deep.

Crabbe, as a descriptive poet, differs from other modern

masters of the art, alike in his selection of subjects, and in his mode of treating the subjects he does select. Byron moves over nature with a fastidious and aristocratic step—touching only upon objects already interesting or ennobled, upon battle fields, castellated ruins, Italian palaces, or Alpine peaks. This, at least, is true of his “Childe Harold,” and his earlier pieces. In the later productions of his pen, he goes to the opposite extreme, and alights, with a daring yet dainty foot, upon all shunned and forbidden things—reminds us of the raven in the Deluge, which found rest for the sole of her foot upon carcasses, where the dove durst not stand—rushes in where modesty and reserve alike have forbidden entrance—and ventures, though still not like a lost archangel, to tread the burning marl of hell, the dim gulf of Hades, the shadowy ruins of the pre-Adamitic world, and the crystal pavement of heaven. Moore practises a principle of more delicate selection, resembling some nice fly which should alight only upon flowers, whether natural or artificial, if so that flowers they seem to be; thus, from sunny bowers, and moonlit roses, and gardens, and blushing skies, and ladies' dresses, does the Bard of Erin extract his finest poetry. Shelley and Coleridge attach themselves almost exclusively to the great—understanding this term in a wide sense, as including much that is grotesque and much that is homely, which the magic of their genius sublimates to a proper pitch of keeping with the rest. Their usual walk is swelling and buskined: their common talk is of great rivers, great forests, great seas, great continents: or else of comets, suns, constellations, and firmaments—as that of all half-mad, wholly miserable, and opium-fed genius is apt to be. Sir Walter Scott, who seldom grappled with the gloomier and grander features of his country's scenery (did he ever describe Glencoe or Foyers, or the wildernesses around Ben-mac-Dhui?), had (need we say?) the most exquisite eye for all picturesque and romantic aspects, in sea, shore, or sky; and in the quick perception of this element of the picturesque lay his principal, if not only descriptive power. Wordsworth, again, seems always to be standing above, though not stooping over, the objects he describes. He seldom looks up in wrapt admiration of what is above him; the bending furze-bush and the lowly broom—the nest lying in the level clover-field—the tarn sinking away seemingly before his eye into darker depths—the prospect from the mountain summit cast far beneath him: at highest, the star burning low upon the mountain's ridge, like an “untended watchfire:” these are

the objects which he loves to describe, and these may stand as emblems of his lowly yet aspiring genius—Crabbe, on the other hand, “stoops to conquer”—nay, goes down on his knees, that he may more accurately describe such objects as the marsh given over to desolation from immemorial time—the slush left by the sea, and revealing the dead body of the suicide—the bare crag and the stunted tree, diversifying the scenery of the saline wilderness—the house on the heath, creaking in the storm, and telling strange stories of misery and crime—the pine in some wintry wood, which had acted as the gallows of some miserable man—the gorse surrounding with yellow light the encampment of the gipsies—the few timid flowers, or “weeds of glorious feature,” which adorn the brink of ocean—the snow putting out the fire of the pauper, or lying unmelted on his pillow of death—the web of the spider blinding the cottager’s window—the wheel turned by the meagre hand of contented or cursing penury—the cards trembling in the grasp of the desperate debauchee—the day stocking forming the cap by night, and the *garter at midnight*—the dunghill becoming the accidental grave of the drunkard—the poor-house of forty years ago, with its patched windows, its dirty environs, its moist and miserable walls, its inmates all snuff, and selfishness, and sin—the receptacle of the outlawed members of English society (how different from “Poosie Nancy’s!”), with its gin-gendered quarrels, its appalling blasphemies, its deep debauches, its ferocity without fun, its huddled murders, and its shrieks of disease dumb in the uproar around—the Bedlam of forty years ago, with its straw on end under the restlessness of the insane; its music of groans, and shrieks and mutterings of still more melancholy meaning; its keepers cold and stern, as the snow-covered cliffs above the wintry cataract; its songs dying away in despairing gurgles down the miserable throat; its cells how devoid of monastic silence; its “confusion worse confounded,” of gibbering idiocy, monomania absorbed and absent from itself as well as from the world, and howling frenzy; its daylight saddened as it shines into the dim, vacant, or glaring eyes of those wretched men: and its moonbeams shedding a more congenial ray upon the solitude, or the sick-bed, or the deathbed of derangement—such familiar faces of want, guilt, and woe—of nakedness, sterility, and shame, does Crabbe delight in showing us; and is, in very truth, “nature’s sternest painter, yet the best.” In his mode of managing his descriptions, Crabbe is equally peculiar. Objects, in themselves counted commonplace or disgusting, fre-

quently become impressive, and even sublime, when surrounded by interesting circumstances—when shown in the moonlight of memory—when linked to strong passion—or when touched by the ray of imagination. Then, in Emerson's words, even the corpse is found to have added a solemn ornament to the house where it lay. But it is the peculiarity and the daring of this poet, that he often, not always, tries us with truth and nothing but truth, as if to bring the question to an issue—whether, in nature, absolute truth be not essential though severe poetry. On this question, certainly, issue was never so fully joined before. In even Wordsworth's eye there is a misty glimmer of imagination, through which all objects, low as well as high, are seen. Even his "five blue eggs" *gleam* upon him through a light which comes not from themselves—which comes, it may be, from the Great Bear, or Arcturus and his sons. And when he does—as in some of his feebler verses—strive to see out of this medium, he drops his mantle, loses his vision, and describes little better than would his own "Old Cumberland Beggar." Shakspeare in his witches' caldron, and Burns in "haly table," are shockingly circumstantial; but the element of imagination creeps in amid all the disgusting details, and the light that never was on sea or shore disdains not to rest on "eye of newt," "toe of frog," "baboon's blood," the garter that strangled the babe, the grey hairs sticking to the haft of the parricidal knife, and all the rest of the fell ingredients; Crabbe, on the other hand, would have described the five blue eggs, and besides, the materials of the nest, and the kind of hedge where it was built, like a bird-nesting schoolboy; but he would never have given the "gleam." He would, as accurately as Hecate, Canidia, or Cuttysark, have given an inventory of the ingredients of the hell-broth, or of the curiosities on the "haly table," had they been presented to his eye: but could not have conceived them, nor would have slipped in that one flashing word, that single cross ray of imagination, which it required to elevate and startle them into high ideal life. And yet in reading his pictures of poor-houses, etc., we are compelled to say, "Well, that is poetry after all, for it is truth; but it is poetry of comparatively a low order—it is the last gasp of the poetic spirit: and, moreover, perfect and matchless as it is in its kind, it is not worthy of the powers of its author, who can, and has, at other times risen into much loftier ground."

We may illustrate still farther what we mean by comparing the different ways in which Crabbe and Foster (certainly a

prose poet) deal with a library. Crabbe describes minutely and successfully the outer features of the volumes, their colours, clasps, the stubborn ridges of their bindings, the illustrations which adorn them, etc., so well that you feel yourself among them, and they become sensible to touch almost as to sight. But there he stops, and sadly fails, we think, in bringing out the living and moral interest which gathers around a multitude of books, or even around a single volume. This Foster has amply done. The speaking silence of a number of books, where, though it were the wide Bodleian or Vatican, not one whisper could be heard, and yet, where, as in an antechamber, so many great spirits are waiting to deliver their messages—their churchyard stillness continuing even when their readers are moving to their pages, in joy or agony, as to the sound of martial instruments—their awaking, as from deep slumber, to speak with miraculous organ, like the shell which has only to be lifted, and “pleased it remembers its august abodes, and murmurs as the ocean murmurs there”—their power of drawing tears, kindling blushes, awakening laughter, calming or quickening the motions of the life’s blood, lulling to repose, or rousing to restlessness, often giving life to the soul, and sometimes giving death to the body—the meaning which radiates from their quiet countenances—the tale of shame or glory which their title pages tell—the memories suggested by the character of their authors, and of the readers who have throughout successive centuries perused them—the thrilling thoughts excited by the sight of names and notes inscribed on their margins or blank pages by hands long since mouldered in the dust, or by those dear to us as our life’s blood, who had been snatched from our sides—the aspects of gaiety or of gloom connected with the bindings and the age of volumes—the effects of sunshine playing as if on a congregation of happy faces, making the duskiest shine, and the gloomiest be glad—or of shadow suffusing a sombre air over all—the joy of the proprietor of a large library who feels that Nebuchadnezzar watching great Babylon, or Napoleon reviewing his legions, will not stand comparison with himself seated amid the broad maps, and rich prints, and numerous volumes which his wealth has enabled him to collect and his wisdom entitled him to enjoy—all such hieroglyphics of interest and meaning has Foster included and interpreted in one gloomy but noble meditation, and his introduction to Doddridge is the true “Poem on the Library.”

In Crabbe’s descriptions the great want is of selection. He

writes inventories. He describes all that his eye sees with cold, stern, lingering accuracy—he marks down all the items of wretchedness, poverty, and vulgar sin—counts the rags of the mendicant—and, as Hazlitt has it, describes a cottage like one who has entered it to distrain for rent. His copies, consequently, would be as displeasing as their originals, were it not that imagination is so much less vivid than eyesight, that we can endure in picture what we cannot in reality, and that our own minds, while reading, can cast that softening and ideal veil over disgusting objects which the poet himself has not sought, or has failed to do. Just as, in viewing even the actual scene, we might have seen it through the medium of imaginative illusion, so the same medium will more probably invest, and beautify its transcript in the pages of the poet.

As a moral poet and sketcher of men, Crabbe is characterised by a similar choice of subject and the same stern fidelity. The mingled yarn of man's everyday life—the plain homely virtues, or the robust and burly vices of Englishmen—the quiet tears which fall on humble beds—the passions which flame up in lowly bosoms—the *amari aliquid*, the deep and permanent bitterness which lies at the heart of the down-trodden English poor—the comedies and tragedies of the fireside—the lover's quarrels—the unhappy marriages—the vicissitudes of common fortunes—the early death—the odd characters—the lingering superstitions—all the elements, in short, which make up the simple annals of lowly or middling society, are the materials of this poet's song. Had he been a Scottish clergyman we should have said that he had versified his Session-book; and certainly many curious chapters of human life might be derived from such a document, and much light cast upon the devious windings and desperate wickedness of the heart, as well as upon that inextinguishable instinct of good which resides in it. Crabbe, perhaps, has confined himself too exclusively to this circle of common things which he found lying around him. He has seldom burst its confines, and touched the loftier themes, and snatched the higher laurels which were also within his reach. He has contented himself with being a Lillo (with occasional touches of Shakspeare) instead of something far greater. He has, however, in spite of this self-injustice, effected much. He has proved that a poet, who looks resolutely around him—who stays at home—who draws the realities which are near him, instead of the phantoms that are afar—who feels and records the passion and poetry of his daily life—may found a firm and enduring reputa-

tion. With the dubious exception of Cowper, no one has made out this point so effectually as Crabbe.

And in his mode of treating such themes, what strikes us first is his perfect coolness. Few poets have reached that calm of his which reminds us of Nature's own great quiet eye, looking down upon her monstrous births, her strange anomalies, and her more ungainly forms. Thus Crabbe sees the loathsome, and does not loathe—handles the horrible, and shudders not—feels with firm fingers the palpitating pulse of the infanticide or the murderer—and snuffs a certain sweet odour in the evil savours of putrefying misery and crime. This delight, however, is not an inhuman, but entirely an artistic delight—perhaps, indeed, springing from the very strength and width of his sympathies. We admire as well as wonder at that almost *asbestos* quality of his mind, through which he retains his composure and critical circumspection so cool amid the conflagrations of passionate subjects, which might have burned others to ashes. Few, indeed, can walk through such fiery furnaces unscathed. But Crabbe—what an admirable physician had he made to a lunatic asylum! How severely would he have sifted out every grain of poetry from those tumultuous exposures of the human mind! What clean breasts had he forced the patients to make! What tales had he wrung out from them, to which Lewis's tales of terror were feeble and trite! How he would have commanded them, by his mild, steady, and piercing eye! And yet how calm would his brain have remained, when others, even of a more prosaic mould, were reeling in sympathy with the surrounding delirium! It were, indeed, worth while inquiring how much of this coolness resulted from Crabbe's early practice as a surgeon. That combination of warm inward sympathy and outward phlegm—of impulsive benevolence and mechanical activity—of heart all fire and manner all ice—which distinguishes his poetry, is very characteristic of the medical profession.

In correspondence with this, Crabbe generally leans to the darker side of things. This, perhaps, accounts for his favour in the sight of Byron, who saw his own eagle-eyed fury at man corroborated by Crabbe's stern and near-sighted vision. And it was accounted for partly by Crabbe's early profession, partly by his early circumstances, and partly by the clerical office he assumed. Nothing so tends to sour us with mankind as a general refusal on their part to give us bread. How can a man love a race which seems combined to starve him? This misanthropical influence Crabbe did not entirely escape. As a medical man,

too, he had come in contact with little else than human miseries and diseases; and as a clergyman, he had occasion to see much sin and sorrow; and these, combining with the melancholy incidental to the poetic temperament, materially discoloured his view of life. He became a searcher of dark—of the darkest bosoms; and we see him sitting in the gloom of the hearts of thieves, murderers, and maniacs, and watching the remorse, rancour, fury, dull disgust, ungratified appetite, and ferocious or stupefied despair, which are their inmates. And even when he pictures livelier scenes and happier characters, there steals over them a shade of sadness, reflected from his favourite subjects, as a dark, sinister countenance in a room will throw a gloom over many happy and beautiful faces beside it.

In his pictures of life, we find an unfrequent but true pathos. This is not often, however, of the profoundest or most heart-rending kind. The grief he paints is not that which refuses to be comforted—whose expressions, like Agamemnon's face, must be veiled—which dilates almost to despair, and complains almost to blasphemy—and which, when it looks to heaven, it is

With that frantic air,
Which seems to ask if a God be there.

Crabbe's, as exhibited in *Phœbe Dawson*, and other of his tales, is gentle, submissive; and its pathetic effects are produced by the simple recital of circumstances which might and often have occurred. It reminds us of the pathos of *Rosamund Gray*, that beautiful story of Lamb's, of which we once, we regret to say, presumptuously pronounced an unfavourable opinion, but which has since commended itself to our heart of hearts, and compelled that tribute in tears which we had denied it in words. Hazlitt is totally wrong when he says that Crabbe carves a tear to the life in marble, as if his pathos were hard and cold. Be it the statuary of woe—has it, consequently, no truth or power? Have the chiselled tears of the Niobe never awakened other tears, fresh and burning, from their fountain? Horace's *vis me flere*, etc., is not always a true principle. As the wit, who laughs not himself, often excites most laughter in others, so the calm recital of an affecting narrative acts as the meek rod of Moses applied to the rock, and is answered in gushing torrents. You close Crabbe's tale of grief, almost ashamed that you have left so quiet a thing pointed and starred with tears. His pages, while sometimes wet with pathos, are never moist with humour. His satire is often pointed with wit, and sometimes irritates into

invective; but of that glad, genial, and bright-eyed thing we call humour (how well *named*, in its oily softness and gentle glitter!) he has little or none. Compare, in order to see this, his *Borough* with the *Annals of the Parish*. How dry, though powerful, the one; how sappy the other! How profound the one; how pawky the other! Crabbe goes through his *Borough*, like a scavenger with a rough, stark, and stiff besom, sweeping up all the filth: Galt, like a knowing watchman of the old school—a *canny Charlie*—keeping a sharp look-out, but not averse to a sly joke, and having an eye to the humours as well as misdemeanours of the streets. Even his wit is not of the finest grain. It deals too much in verbal quibbles, puns, and antitheses with their points broken off. His puns are neither good nor bad—the most fatal and anti-ideal description of a pun that can be given. His quibbles are good enough to have excited the laugh of his curate, or gardener; but he forgets that the public is not so indulgent. And though often treading in Pope's track, he wants entirely those touches of satire, at once the lightest and the most withering, as if dropped from the fingers of a malignant fairy—those faint whispers of poetic perdition—those drops of concentrated bitterness—those fatal bodkin-stabs—and those invectives, glittering all over with the polish of profound malignity—which are Pope's glory as a writer, and his shame as a man.

We have repeatedly expressed our opinion, that in Crabbe there lay a higher power than he often exerted. We find evidence of this in his *Hall of Justice* and his *Eustace Grey*. In these he is fairly in earnest. No longer dozing by his parlour fire over the "*Newspaper*," or napping in a corner of his "*Library*," or peeping in through the windows of the "*Workhouse*," or recording the select scandal of the "*Borough*," he is away out into the wide and open fields of highest passion and imagination. What a tale that *Hall of Justice* hears—to be paralleled only in the *Thousand and One Nights of the Halls of Eblis*!—a tale of misery, rape, murder, and furious despair; told, too, in language of such lurid fire as has been seen to shine o'er the graves of the dead! But, in *Eustace Grey*, our author's genius reaches its climax. Never was madness—in its misery—its remorse—the dark companions, "the ill-favoured ones," who cling to it in its wild way and will not let it go, although it curse them with the eloquence of hell—the visions it sees—the scenery it creates and carries about with it in dreadful keeping—and the language it uses, high, aspiring, but broken

as the wing of a struck eagle—so strongly and meltingly revealed. And, yet, around the dismal tale there hangs the breath of beauty, and, like poor Lear, Sir Eustace goes about crowned with flowers—the flowers of earthly poetry—and a hope which is not of the earth. And, at the close, we feel to the author all that strange gratitude which our souls are constituted to entertain for those who have most powerfully wrung and tortured them.

Would that Crabbe had given us a century of such things. We would have preferred to the *Tales of the Hall*, *Tales of Greyling Hall*, or more tidings from the *Hall of Justice*. It had been a darker Decameron, and brought out more effectually—what the "Village Poorhouse," and the sketches of Elliot have since done—the passions, miseries, crushed aspirations, and latent poetry, which dwell in the hearts of the plundered poor; as well as the wretchedness which, more punctually than their veriest menial, waits often behind the chairs, and hands the silver dishes of the great.

We will not dilate on his other works individually. In glancing back upon them as a whole, we will endeavour to answer the following questions: (1), What was Crabbe's object as a moral poet? (2), How far is he original as an artist? (3), What is his relative position to his great contemporaries? And, (4), what is likely to be his fate with posterity? (1), His object.—The great distinction between man and man, and author and author, is purpose. It is the edge and point of character; it is the stamp on the subscription of genius; it is the direction on the letter of talent. Character without it is blunt and torpid. Talent without it is a letter, which, undirected, goes no whither. Genius without it is bullion, sluggish, splendid, uncirculating. Purpose yearns after and secures artistic culture. It gathers, as by a strong suction, all things which it needs into itself. Crabbe's artistic object is tolerably clear, and has been already indicated. His moral purpose is not quite so apparent. Is it to satirise, or is it to reform vice? Is it pity, or is it contempt, that actuates his song? What are his plans for elevating the lower classes in the scale of society? Has he any, or does he believe in the possibility of their permanent elevation? Such questions are more easily asked than answered. We must say that we have failed to find in him any one overmastering and earnest object, subjugating everything to itself, and producing that unity in all his works which the trunk of a tree gives to its smallest, its remotest, to even its withered leaves. And yet, without apparent intention, Crabbe has done good moral service.

He has shed much light upon the condition of the poor. He has spoken in the name and stead of the poor dumb mouths that could not tell their own sorrows or sufferings to the world. He has opened the mine, which Ebenezer Elliot and others, going to work with a firmer and more resolute purpose, have dug to its depths.

(2), His originality.—This has been questioned by some critics. He has been called a version, in coarse paper and print, of Goldsmith, Pope, and Cowper. His pathos comes from Goldsmith—his wit and satire from Pope—and his minute and literal description from Cowper. If this were true, it were as complimentary to him as his warmest admirer could wish. To combine the characteristic excellences of three true poets is no easy matter. But Crabbe has not combined them. His pathos wants altogether the naiveté of sentiment and *curiosa felicitas* of expression which distinguish Goldsmith's "Deserted Village." He has something of Pope's terseness, but little of his subtlety, finish, or brilliant malice. And the motion of Cowper's mind and style in description differs as much from Crabbe's as the playful leaps and gambols of a kitten from the measured, downright, and indomitable pace of a hound—the one is the easiest, the other the severest, of describers. Resemblances, indeed, of a minor kind are to be found; but still Crabbe is as distinct from Goldsmith, Cowper, and Pope, as Byron from Scott, Wordsworth, and Coleridge.

Originality consists of two kinds—one, the power of inventing new materials; and the other, of dealing with old materials in a new way. We do not decide whether the first of these implies an act of absolute creation; it implies all we can conceive in an act of creative power; from elements bearing to the result the relation which the alphabet does to the *Iliad*—genius brings forth its bright progeny, and we feel it to be new. In this case, you can no more anticipate the effect from the elements than you can, from the knowledge of the letters, anticipate the words which are to be compounded out of them. In the other kind of originality, the materials bear a larger proportion to the result—they form an appreciable quantity in our calculations of what it is to be. They are found for the poet, and all he has to do is, with skill and energy, to construct them. Take, for instance, Shakspeare's "Tempest," and Coleridge's *Anciente Marinere*—of what more creative act can we conceive than is exemplified in these? Of course, we have all had beforehand ideas similar to a storm, a desert island, a witch, a magician, a

mariner, a hermit, a wedding-guest; but these are only the alphabet to the spirits of Shakspeare and Coleridge. As the sun, from the invisible air, draws up in an instant all pomps of cloudy forms—paradises brighter than Eden, mirrored in waters, which blush and tremble as their reflection falls wooingly upon them—mountains, which seem to bury their snowy or rosy summits in the very heaven of heavens—throne-shaped splendours, worthy of angels to sit on them, flushing and fading in the west—seas of aerial blood and fire—momentary cloud-crowns and golden avenues, stretching away into the azure infinite beyond them;—so, from such stuff as dreams are made of, from the mere empty air, do those wondrous magicians build up their new worlds, where the laws of nature are repealed—where all things are changed without any being confused—where sound becomes dumb and silence eloquent—where the earth is empty, and the sky is peopled—where material beings are invisible, and where spiritual beings become gross and palpable to sense—where the skies are opening to show riches—where the isle is full of noises—where beings proper to this sphere of dream are met so often that you cease to fear them, however odd or monstrous—where magic has power to shut now the eyes of kings and now the great bright eye of ocean—where, at the bidding of the poet, new, complete, beautiful mythologies, at one time sweep across the sea, and anon dance down from the purple and mystic sky—where all things have a charmed life, the listening ground, the populous air, the still or the vexed sea, the human or the imaginary beings—and where, as in deep dreams, the most marvellous incidents are most easily credited, slide on most softly, and seem most native to the place, the circumstances, and the time. “This is creation,” we exclaim; nor did Ferdinand seem to Miranda a fresher and braver creature than does to us each strange settler, whom genius has planted upon its own favourite isle. Critics may, indeed, take these imaginary beings—such as Caliban and Ariel—and analyse them into their constituent parts; but there will be some one element which escapes them—laughing, as it leaps away, at their baffled sagacity, and proclaiming the original power of its Creator: as in the chemical analysis of an *aerolite*, amid the mere earthy constituents, there is something which declares its unearthly origin. Take creation as meaning, not so much Deity bringing something out of nothing, as *filling the void with his spirit*, and genius will seem a lower form of the same power.

The other kind of originality is, we think, that of Crabbe.

It is magic at second-hand. He takes, not makes, his materials. He finds a good foundation—wood and stone in plenty—and he begins laboriously, successfully, and after a plan of his own, to build. If in any of his works he approaches to the higher property, it is in *Eustace Grey*, who moves here and there, on his wild wanderings, as if to the rubbing of Aladdin's lamp.

This prepares us for coming to the third question, What is Crabbe's relative position to his great contemporary poets? He belongs to the second class. He is not a philosophic poet, like Wordsworth. He is not, like Shelley, a Vates, moving upon the uncertain but perpetual and furious wind of his inspiration. He is not, like Byron, a demoniac exceeding fierce, and dwelling among the tombs. He is not, like Keats, a sweet and melancholy voice, a tune bodiless, bloodless—dying away upon the waste air, but for ever to be remembered as men remember a melody they have heard in youth. He is not, like Coleridge, all these almost by turns, and, besides, a psalmist, singing at times strains so sublime and holy, that they might seem snatches of the song of Eden's cherubim, or caught in trance from the song of Moses and the Lamb. To this mystic brotherhood Crabbe must not be added. He ranks with a lower but still lofty band—with Scott (as a poet), and Moore, and Hunt, and Campbell, and Rogers, and Bowles, and James Montgomery, and Southey; and surely they nor he need be ashamed of each other, as they shine in one soft and peaceful cluster.

We are often tempted to pity poor posterity on this score. How is it to manage with the immense number of excellent works which this age has bequeathed, and is bequeathing it? How is it to economise its time so as to read a tithe of them? And should it in mere self-defence proceed to decimate, with what principle shall the process be carried on, and who shall be appointed to preside over it? Critics of the twenty-second century, be merciful as well as just. Pity the *disjecta membra* of those we thought mighty poets. Respect and fulfil our prophecies of immortality. If ye must carp and cavil, do not, at least, in mercy, abridge. Spare us the prospect of this last insult, an abridged copy of the *Pleasures of Hope*, or "Don Juan," a *new* abridgment. If ye must operate in this way, be it on *Madoc*, or the *Course of Time*. Generously leave room for *O'Connor's Child* in the poet's corner of a journal, or for *Eustace Grey* in the space of a crown piece. Surely, living in the Millennium, and resting under your vines and fig-trees, you will have more time to read than we, in this bustling age, who move, live

eat, drink, *sleep, and die*, at railway speed. If not, we fear the case of many of our poets is hopeless, and that others, besides the author of *Silent Love* would be wise to enjoy their present laurels, for verily there are none else for them.

Seriously, we hope that much of Crabbe's writing will every year become less and less readable, and less and less easily understood; till, in the milder day, men shall have difficulty in believing that such physical, mental, and moral degradation, as he describes, ever existed in Britain; and till, in future encyclopædias, his name be found recorded as a powerful but barbarous writer, writing in a barbarous age. The like may be the case with many, who have busied themselves more in recalling the past or picturing the present, than in anticipating the future. But there are, or have been among us, a few who have plunged beyond their own period, nay, beyond "all ages"—who have seen and shown us the coming eras:

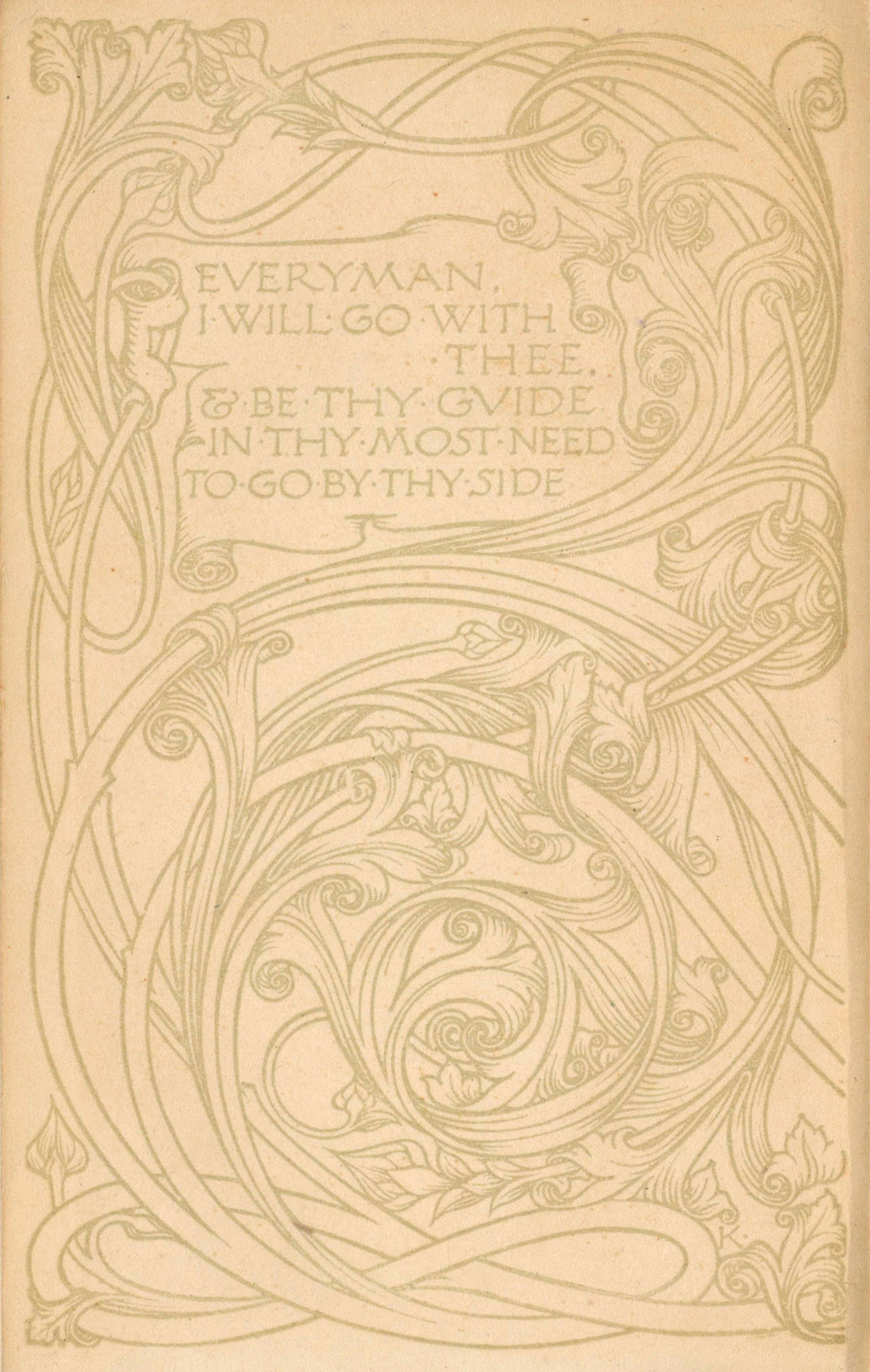
As in a cradled Hercules you trace
The lines of empire in his infant face—

and whose voice must go down, in tones becoming more authoritative as they last, and in volume becoming vaster as they roll, like mighty thunderings and many waters, through the minster of all future time; in lower key, concerting with those more awful voices from within the veil which have already shaken earth, and which, uttered once "more," shall shake not earth only, but also heaven. High destiny! but not his whose portrait we have now drawn.

We have tried to draw his mental, but not his physical likeness. And yet it has all along been blended with our thoughts, like the figure of one known from childhood, like the figure of our own beloved and long-lost father. We see the venerable old man, newly returned from a botanical excursion, laden with flowers and weeds (for no one knew better than he that every weed is a flower—it is the secret of his poetry), with his high narrow forehead, his grey locks, his glancing shoe-buckles, his clean dress somewhat ruffled in the woods, his mild countenance, his simple abstracted air. We, too, become abstracted as we gaze, following in thought the outline of his history—his early struggles—his love—his adventures in London—his journal, where, on the brink of starvation, he wrote the affecting words "*O Sally for you*"—his rescue by Burke—his taking orders—his return to his native place—his mounting the pulpit stairs, not caring what his old enemies thought of him or his sermon—

his marriage—the entry, more melancholy by far than the other, made years after in reference to it, “*yet happiness was denied*” —the publication of his different works—the various charges he occupied—his child-like surprise at getting so much money for *Tales of the Hall*—his visit to Scotland—his mistaking the Highland chiefs for foreigners, and bespeaking them in bad French—his figure as he went, dogged by the *caddie* through the lanes of the auld town of Edinburgh, which he preferred infinitely to the new—the “aul’ fule” he made of himself in pursuit of a second wife, etc. etc.; so absent do we become in thinking over all this, that it disturbs his abstraction; he starts, stares, asks us in to his parsonage, and we are about to accept the offer, when we awake, and, lo! it is a dream.





EVERYMAN,
I WILL GO WITH
THEE.
& BE THY GUIDE
IN THY MOST NEED
TO GO BY THY SIDE

Season of Spring with fruit



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