

HISTORICAL AND
LITERARY ESSAYS

MACAULAY



F. A. N. Pessoa.

ESSAYS,
HISTORICAL AND LITERARY.



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LORD MACAULAY.

Walker & Boutall

(From the painting by SIR F. GRANT, in the National Portrait Gallery.)

Macaulay's Essays]

Frontispiece

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HISTORICAL AND LITERARY.

From the "Edinburgh Review."

BY
LORD MACAULAY.

*WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION
ILLUSTRATED FROM PORTRAITS.*

LONDON:
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BY LORD MACAULAY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
THE EDITOR

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INTRODUCTION.

LORD MACAULAY,
ESSAYIST, POLITICIAN, AND HISTORIAN.

AN honourable ancestry, association with men and women of high character from earliest youth, and a liberal education, make a man fit to play a distinguished part in life, impose upon him a heavy responsibility, and give him every advantage in starting. When to these are added natural powers of a high order, memory combined with originality, a sense of the picturesque associated with indefatigable industry, a tendency to noble action with resolution in carrying out plans, we have a man who only needs adequate opportunity to leave an imperishable record behind him. Such a man the world recognizes in Thomas Babington Macaulay.

Macaulay's grandfather and great-grandfather were worthy Scotch ministers. The grandfather, the Rev. John Macaulay, of Inverary, is chiefly known by the rude remarks of Dr. Johnson to him during his tour in the Hebrides, and by a very low estimate which he gave of his abilities. But this was of a piece with Johnson's well-known prejudice against Scotchmen. Despite Dr. Johnson, John Macaulay had a good record as a fluent and acceptable preacher. He had thirteen children, whom he trained in simple habits of living and sound ways of thinking. One son, Aulay, became an English clergyman, and introduced his friend Mr. Thomas Babington, of Rothley Temple, in Leicestershire (where Macaulay was born), to his father's family. Mr. Babington fell in love with Miss Jean Macaulay, whom he married in 1787; and afterwards presented his brother-in-law to the living of Rothley. Another son of John Macaulay, Colin, became a general in the Indian army.

But the most vigorous nature among the Scotch clergyman's sons was that of Zachary Macaulay, the father of Lord Macaulay. He was born in 1768; he went in 1784 to Jamaica, as bookkeeper to an estate, of which he ere long became manager. We must recollect that this was at a time when men of undoubted philanthropy saw no unchristian taint in negro slavery, and we must not be surprised at John Macaulay allowing his son to be connected with a slave-owning firm.

Experience was destined to bring enlightenment to the young bookkeeper. With a genuine love for humanity, and keen observation, he soon became dismayed at the results of a system which allowed human

beings to remain in ignorance, not only of common knowledge, but of the Christian religion. The cruelties practised on the slaves, the shameless immorality of which they were made the victims, gradually impressed themselves on his sensitive nature, and converted the shy boy into a brave opponent of evil. At last, at the age of four-and-twenty, he gave up his post and returned to England, against his father's wishes.

Such a man was a fit agent for the home emancipators—Granville Sharpe, Wilberforce, and Thornton, then about to colonize Sierra Leone with freed slaves. By Thomas Babington's influence, Zachary Macaulay was, in 1793, appointed a member of the Sierra Leone Council, and soon after his arrival became Governor. We have not space to record the extreme difficulties which he successfully surmounted, the shameful destruction wrought upon the infant colony in 1794, the courageous efforts by which the distracted survivors were set on their feet once more. Finally, in 1785, Zachary returned to England invalided, was made acquainted with Hannah More, and introduced by her to Miss Selina Mills, to whom he was soon afterwards engaged. He returned to Sierra Leone in 1796, and held his appointment till 1799, when the settlement seemed on the high road to prosperity. Being made Secretary to the Sierra Leone Company in England, Zachary Macaulay married Miss Mills on August 26th, 1799, and went to live in Lambeth.

Thomas Babington Macaulay was born at Rothley Temple, on October 25th, 1800; but he was not destined to enjoy for long the delights of that country seat. His first two years were passed in Birchin Lane in the City; Drapers' Garden, behind Throgmorton Street, was his chief place of exercise, and long a favourite haunt of his. The next home of the Macaulays was a roomy house in the old High Street at Clapham.

Here Macaulay's tastes began to show themselves. From the age of three he read continually, often lying on a rug before the fire, with his book on the rug, and a piece of bread and butter in one hand. Again, he early learnt to invent stories of enormous length, or repeat what he had read in language strangely contrasting with his years. Hannah More describes him, when four years old, as a fair, pretty, slight child, with abundance of light hair, who came to the front door to receive her, and told her that "his parents were out, but that if she would be good enough to come in he would bring her a glass of old spirits." A similar tinge of the ludicrous is met with in his reply to Lady Waldegrave at Strawberry Hill, when a servant had spilt some hot coffee over his legs, and she inquired how he was feeling: "Thank you, madam, the agony is abated." Still more amusing is his indignant denunciation of a servant who had thrown away some oyster shells which marked out a little piece of ground as his own. Before a number of drawing-room visitors, he marched in and declared: "Cursed be Sally; for it is written, Cursed is he that removeth his neighbour's landmark."

Little Tom Macaulay, having his own notions of spending his time profitably, went most unwillingly to a day-school kept by one Greaves at Clapham. At this time he was prolific in authorship, writing a compendium of Universal History at seven, as well as long poems and many hymns. And these were not only in thought beyond his years, but correctly spelt, in good grammar, and carefully punctuated, as all his after-work was.

It must not be imagined that the young prodigy was forced or stimulated by extravagant praise. In fact, he himself was never told or allowed to infer by his parents that he had talents beyond other children. Playfulness was encouraged, and he is described as playful as a kitten. But every one was impressed by his wonderful command of language and his extraordinary memory. Hannah More's influence was very stimulating to him, especially when he visited her at Barley Wood, notably when people were even got in from the fields to hear him preach sermons, stuck on a chair. Probably a little less of Hannah More's forcing process would have been no loss.

Meanwhile Zachary Macaulay, from being Secretary of the Sierra Leone Company, became an African merchant, in partnership with a nephew, under the style of Macaulay and Babington. His family grew apace. Young Tom had three brothers and five sisters before he was thirteen. In the same year he wrote his well-known epitaph on Henry Martyn, the missionary.

In 1812 Macaulay was sent to a small private school at Shelford, near Cambridge, kept by the Rev. Mr. Preston, a strong Low Churchman, who was a good teacher, if severe in his Evangelicalism. Here he enjoyed his work, read omnivorously, wrote much, both poetry and prose, and gained greatly by his intercourse with a school friend, Henry Malden, afterwards Professor of Greek at University College, London. The school was removed, in 1814, to Aspenden Hall, near Buntingford, in Hertfordshire. Here he remained till 1818, laying up large stores of learning, often imperceptibly, for Macaulay in youth had one of those memories which absorb anything which interests, without needing to make an effort.

In 1813, casually taking up a Cambridge newspaper, he read two poems, one the "Reflections of an Exile," the other a parody on a Welsh ballad. He read them through once, and repeated them after an interval of forty years, during which he had never once thought about them.

Another remarkable instance of his power of memory is the following: As a child, accompanying his father on a call, he picked up Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel," which was new to him. During the conversation, in which he sat quiet, he read it through, and in the evening he repeated to his mother the greater part of the poem.

Macaulay's memory, however, was special for what he had himself written. Long afterwards he told his friend, Lord Jeffrey, that he believed he could repeat all his own printed writings, and nearly everything he had written. In late life his capacity for remembering other people's writings became diminished: he had to use conscious effort to recollect them. But all through life "he read books more quickly than other people skimmed them, and skimmed them as fast as any one else could turn the leaves."

At home, during the vacations, Tom Macaulay was made an idol of by the younger members of his family. His sister, Lady Trevelyan, says, "To us he was an object of passionate love and devotion. To us he could do no wrong. His unruffled sweetness of temper, his unfailing flow of spirits, his amusing talk, all made his presence so delightful that his wishes and his tastes were our law. He hated strangers; and his notion of perfect happiness was to see us all working round him while

he read aloud a novel, and then to walk all together on the common, or, if it rained, to have a frightfully noisy game of hide-and-seek." Meanwhile his father was pursuing his indefatigable labours in securing the suppression of slavery and the slave trade; and to some extent he appeared to repress his son's exuberance. This largely proceeded from his desire to check the growth of conceit, and other faults from which the father was free. "Himself precise in his arrangements, writing a beautiful hand, particular about neatness, very accurate and calm, detesting strong expressions, and remarkably self-controlled; while his eager, impetuous boy, careless of his dress, always forgetting to wash his hands and brush his hair, writing an execrable hand, and folding his letters with a great blotch for a seal, was a constant care and irritation." The fact is, he wanted his son to have his father's virtues as well as his own.

In October, 1818, Tom Macaulay entered upon his Cambridge career at Trinity College, Henry Thornton being his companion. The young historian was fascinated by the mediæval aspect of Cambridge and the memories of its colleges. It was always to him through life as a dearly loved home. His friends had genius, some equal to his own. There was Praed the poet, Charles Austin the Radical utilitarian, who afterwards preferred money and ease to fame as a politician, Romilly, Moultrie, Derwent Coleridge, and others. Among these Charles Austin stood out foremost, and J. S. Mill has said of him: "The impression he gave was that of boundless strength, together with talents which, combined with such apparent force of will and character, seemed capable of dominating the world." His influence over Macaulay was great, and he soon led him out of the Tory opinions in which he had been brought up, and the young man harassed his family circle by pronouncing himself a Radical.

Amid such companions Macaulay's conversational powers shone brightly. He kept every college regulation, but contrived to enjoy himself to the utmost, and to read, as ever, voraciously. The recollection of these days was one of the most prized possessions of many besides himself. In after years a chance meeting between Austin and Macaulay, at Lord Lansdowne's seat at Bowood, led to an interesting proof of the power which the two exercised. After breakfast one morning the two drew up at opposite ends of the mantelpiece, and renewed their college days. Soon the distinguished circle of ladies and gentlemen at table became silent, and listening to the rich stream of reminiscences poured forth by two of the best talkers who ever conversed, remained transfixed in delight till it was time to dress for dinner in the evening.

The debates at the Union Society, then under a considerable ban on the part of the University authorities, of course occupied Macaulay largely. The large room behind the *Red Lion*, in the Petty Cury, resounded with fervid Radicalism, and discussed the present covertly, under the pretence of criticising the affairs of previous centuries, which alone were open to them. It was easy to bring forward a motion, saying that Free Trade ought to have been granted before 1800, or Catholic Emancipation before 1795. Meanwhile Macaulay's course was not idle, and he gained the Chancellor's medal for an English poem twice, in 1819 and in 1821, and in 1821 won a Craven scholarship, together with Henry Malden and George Long, equally illustrious as scholars. The classical tripos did not then exist, and Macaulay, in order to compete for the

Chancellor's classical medals, must pass the mathematical tripos. This, from his repugnance to mathematics, he failed to do in 1822. However, this year he won a college prize for an essay on the Conduct and Character of William the Third, which doubtless led to his future choice of a period for the main interest of his History. In 1824 Macaulay gained the coveted fellowship at Trinity, which gave him "three hundred pounds a year, a stable for his horse, six dozen of audit ale every Christmas, a loaf and two pats of butter every morning, and a good dinner for nothing, with as many almonds and raisins as he could eat at dessert." But Macaulay estimated university honours and successes at their true value. "If a man brings away from Cambridge self-knowledge, accuracy of mind, and habits of strong intellectual exertion," he wrote later, "he has gained more than if he had made a display. . . . What a man does at Cambridge is, in itself, nothing. If he makes a poor figure in life, his having been senior wrangler or university scholar is never mentioned but with derision. If he makes a distinguished figure, his early honours merge in those of a later date."

The bar was Macaulay's profession, which he entered in 1826; but he did not cultivate it. Throughout his short period in chambers he spent more time in the House of Commons than in the courts of law. He made his *début* as a public speaker in London at a meeting of the Anti-slavery Society, in 1824. It was termed by the *Edinburgh Review* "a display of eloquence signal for rare and matured excellence." At the same time Charles Knight's *Quarterly Magazine* was starting on its short-lived career, and Macaulay became a prominent contributor, but his own writings in it seem to have pleased his father no more than those of the other contributors. However, the magazine ceased to exist in 1824, and Macaulay's connection with it was of chief importance because it led to his engagement on the *Edinburgh Review*, then the most powerful arbiter of politics and literary merit. Jeffrey found out Macaulay, and printed his essay on Milton in the August number of 1825.

Fame then grew rapidly. New writers were wanted, and Macaulay fascinated the educated taste of the time. He gave a new vogue to Milton, and demolished the influence of Dr. Johnson's criticism of the poet. Jeffrey paid him the great compliment of saying, "The more I think, the less I can conceive where you picked up that style." The man certainly did not pick up the style. In Macaulay's case, if in any, the style was the man. Robert Hall, racked with pain, lay on the floor learning Italian, that he might follow out and criticise Macaulay's famous parallel between Dante and Milton.

At this time Macaulay was vividly described by Praed, as "a short, manly figure, marvellously upright, with a bad neckcloth, and one hand in his waistcoat pocket." His features, with little beauty, powerful and rugged, were so continually lit up with exquisite expression as to put out of sight the homeliness of his features. As to clothes, though he provided himself with an abundance, he lacked the faculty of putting them on well, and, indeed, was singularly unhandy. He could never get his fingers more than halfway into his gloves. He hacked his face with his razors, of which he possessed a large assortment. In fact, he had no athletic or bodily accomplishments. But he could walk through crowded streets rapidly, reading more rapidly.

As reading was his greatest business as well as pleasure, and writing his chosen occupation, so talking was his recreation—a recreation in which, however, he permitted too few to join who came near him. He was not very capable of believing that there were two sides to a question, and not very willing to listen to the side opposed to his own. Vehement, voluble, but in reality good-tempered and destitute of conceit, he had in him what would make him a prize in any company, and both agreeable and amusing. He soon made way into the best society, and more than held his own; he held sway. Yet he could not make himself really friendly to those for whose characters he had no respect. This quality gave him another equally marked: he stuck to his friends through thick and thin, and was the last to be persuaded of any ill-desert of those whom he trusted.

As a critic he was severe on those who failed to reach the somewhat high standard he set up. Thus budding poets and wearisome hack-writers learned to dread his lash. He particularly hated scandalmongers and placemen, and attacked unmercifully the Right Hon. J. W. Croker, Secretary to the Admiralty from 1810 to 1830, not only for his edition of Boswell's Johnson, but for other proceedings. But the character of Rigby in "Coningsby," universally held to describe Croker, is his justification from the side of Croker's own party.

In 1818 Macaulay's father had quitted Clapham for Cadogan Place, and believed himself worth a hundred thousand pounds. His activity outside his business led him to trust too much to his partner, and before long serious losses came upon the firm. In 1823 the family moved to 50, Great Ormond Street, and lived very simply. The house became endeared by a thousand associations. The younger children were kept in continual enjoyment by games and improvised ballads, by puns and concerts, by capping verses and quoting from endless novels. Lady Trevelyan, forty years after, when dying, took a last drive to the spot, and sat silent many minutes with her eyes fixed on the dear old home.

Meanwhile the *Edinburgh Review* was receiving its full tale of learned and attractive articles. Hallam, Machiavelli, Bentham, were in turn illuminated and dissected. *Blackwood* attacked him, bitter at Southey's severe fate under Macaulay's scalpel; and Professor Wilson affected to dismiss him as a clever lad who would always remain such. But Wilson's fame is dwarfed by that of Macaulay.

By January, 1828, the brilliant essayist had attracted so much attention that Lord Lyndhurst gave him a place as Commissioner of Bankruptcy, an appointment which, however indefensible in these days, when special merits for a particular post are looked for, was a usual way of rewarding other deserts in those times. It was worth about £900 a year to him; and it inspired him in the aspiration for Parliamentary honours, that he might share in the advent of the new liberty which was dawning with the repeal of the Test Act, Catholic Emancipation, and the freeing of the South American States.

Lord Lansdowne and his pocket borough of Calne had the privilege and merit of introducing Macaulay to political life in February, 1830. The nomination was equally unsolicited and unexpected; and it was thoroughly honourable, for it placed no obligation on Macaulay but to

act according to his conscience. He was a welcome visitor to Lord Lansdowne at Bowood in 1830. He went back to the House of Commons ready for the flood-tide of triumphant Liberalism.

His first speech, on April 5th, 1830, on Robert Grant's Bill for the Removal of Jewish Disabilities, was a striking success. It was clear, concise, and sound; but it was many years yet before freedom was won for the Jews. His re-election for Calne, after George IV.'s death in July, was followed by a visit to Paris, to enjoy the new results of the Revolution in Paris. The Palais Royal had for him infinite attractions. The Prime Minister, the Duc de Broglie, received him with special honour; and the aged Lafayette admitted him to his receptions. Macaulay was to have written his views on the state of parties in France for the October number of the *Edinburgh Review*, but Brougham's imperiousness caused a reversal of this arrangement, much to the younger man's indignation.

In the autumn the new parliament of the United Kingdom met, and the Duke of Wellington declaimed in favour of the fossil system of representation then persisting, as the best of all possible schemes. The Ministry was defeated, and Earl Grey came in; Brougham accepted the Chancellorship after having declared he would not take office, and Macaulay heaped coals of fire upon his head by chivalrously defending his action against Croker's sarcasms.

Macaulay's next success was his speech on March 2nd, 1831, on Lord John Russell's first Reform Bill. Its effect was so marked, that Sir Robert Peel was constrained to say, "Portions of the speech were as beautiful as anything I have ever heard or read." A fine passage deserves quoting, that an age which knows Macaulay chiefly as a historian and essayist, may recall that he was a great parliamentary orator. "Turn where we may, within, around, the voice of great events is proclaiming to us, Reform, that you may preserve. Now, therefore, while everything at home and abroad forebodes ruin to those who persist in a hopeless struggle against the spirit of the age; now, while the crash of the proudest throne of the Continent is still resounding in our ears; now, while the roof of a British palace affords an ignominious shelter to the exiled heir of forty kings; now, while we see on every side ancient institutions subverted, and great societies dissolved; now while the heart of England is still sound; now, while old feelings and old associations retain a power and a charm which may too soon pass away; now, in this your accepted time; now, in this your day of salvation, take counsel, not of prejudice, not of party spirit, not of the ignominious pride of a fatal consistency, but of history, of reason, of the ages which are past, of the signs of this most portentous time. Pronounce in a manner worthy of the expectation with which this great debate has been anticipated, and of the long remembrance which it will leave behind. Renew the youth of the State. Save property, divided against itself; save the multitude, endangered by its own ungovernable passions; save the aristocracy, endangered by its own unpopular power. Save the greatest and fairest and most highly civilized community that ever existed, from calamities which may in a few days sweep away all the rich heritage of so many ages of wisdom and glory. The danger is terrible; the time is short. If this Bill should be rejected, I pray to

God that none of those who concur in rejecting it may ever remember their votes with unavailing remorse, amidst the wreck of laws, the confusion of ranks, the spoliation of property, and the dissolution of social order."

From this time, during the great Reform struggle, and for some years after, Macaulay took a leading part in debate, being at one time termed by his enemy Croker, "the most efficient member of the Government," when as yet he had no official position, at another, complimented by Disraeli, not yet a member, in these terms, "If he speaks half as well as he writes, the House will be in fashion again." The parliamentary athletics of those days were severe, and the athletes vigorous and hard-hitting; and Macaulay yielded to the common practice and hit as hard as any. His own place in the Bankruptcy Court was abolished by the Reform Government without any compensation, and he became comparatively poor, and his father could not help him. His pen was set to work with renewed vigour; but yet he found himself compelled to sell his Cambridge gold medals rather than run into debt, which he abhorred and kept from. The social success following his first great speech compelled him often to mix in the most select society if he would not forfeit the position he had won. Lady Holland received him with special regard, and Rogers the poet took him up; yet, in the midst of "the garish world," he found time to make and consolidate a new private life-long friendship with Thomas Ellis, reporter of the King's Bench, and like himself a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. At this time a visit to Cambridge is recorded, when Macaulay and his sisters met such lions, then young, now lights of a past generation, as Whewell, Sedgwick the geologist, Airy the astronomer, Thirlwall the historian. The vacations were spent in happy seclusion at Rothley Temple.

To Macaulay's deep-rooted affection for his sisters and theirs for him, we owe many of the most charming reminiscences and records respecting him. "My accuracy as to facts," he said one day, "I owe to a cause which many men would not confess. It is due to my love of castle-building. The past is in my mind soon constructed into a romance. With a person of my turn, the minute touches are of as great interest, and perhaps greater, than the most important events. Spending so much time as I do in solitude, my mind would have rusted by gazing vacantly at the shop windows. As it is, I am no sooner in the street than I am in Greece, in Rome, in the midst of the French revolution. Precision in dates, the day or hour in which a man was born or died, becomes absolutely necessary. A slight fact, a sentence, a word, are of importance in my romance. Pepys's Diary formed almost inexhaustible food for my fancy. I seem to know every inch of Whitehall. I go in at Hans Holbein's gate, and come out through the matted gallery. The conversations which I compose between great people of the time are long and sufficiently animated; in the style, if not with the merits, of Sir Walter Scott's. The old parts of London, which you are sometimes surprised at my knowing so well, those old gates and houses down by the river, have all played their part in my stories."

Meanwhile, perhaps because of Brougham's growing antipathy to him, which Macaulay was not slow to return, the latter did not get into office.

He became, however, more and more important to his party, and it appeared probable that his future would be that of active politics, and his name "linked with eventful times and great deeds." It had not yet dawned on him that he was to be more celebrated as a historian than in any other aspect. His private life with his sisters was full of light-hearted mirth, and the outpouring of the rich stores of his mind, delivered with a glad countenance and a happy affectionate smile, in peculiarly beautiful and expressive language, was most charming then when most unconstrained.

At last, on the passing of the great Reform Bill, Macaulay received a reward for his services in the shape of a Commissionership of the Board of Control for India; and he devoted himself to the duties of his office with zeal and industry. His days were spent in the India Office, and his nights in the House of Commons, so that his essays in the *Edinburgh Review* of this date had to be written by rising at five in the morning, when the House had released him early. At this time, among others, he wrote his essays on Lord Chatham and Horace Walpole.

During this period his sister Margaret became engaged to Mr. Edward Cropper of Liverpool, and soon after was married. This was an occasion of bitter pain to Macaulay, who had so concentrated himself upon his home affections, and especially upon his sisters, that he endured pains like those of one who mourns a beloved wife at such a severance. "I am sitting in the midst of two hundred friends (at Leeds election), all mad with exultation and party spirit, all glorying over the Tories, and thinking me the happiest man in the world. And it is all I can do to hide my tears. The separation from dear Margaret has jarred my whole temper."

In 1833 Macaulay, in the debate on the King's Speech, withstood O'Connell valiantly, and won the highest encomiums. "I tell the honourable and learned gentleman," he exclaimed, "that the same spirit which sustained us (the Whigs) in a just contest for him, will sustain us in an equally just contest against him. Calumny, abuse, royal displeasure, popular fury, exclusion from office, exclusion from Parliament, we were ready to endure them all, rather than that he should be less than a British subject. We never will suffer him to be more."

In 1833 Macaulay was greatly engaged in forwarding the new India Bill, which reformed the entire Indian system, relieved the East Indian Company of its commercial functions, and transformed it into a governing corporation. Slavery was abolished, and religious disabilities removed throughout our Indian Empire. Macaulay's speech on the second reading was described by Charles Grant (afterwards Lord Glenelg), then President of the Board of Control, as exhibiting all that was noble in oratory, all that was sublime in poetry, all that was truly great, exalted, and virtuous in human nature. During the debate on the West India Bill, Macaulay imperilled his official position by taking up an independent attitude on the apprenticeship question, in accordance with his father's wishes and his own judgment. He succeeded, with Fowell Buxton, in getting the apprenticeship of slaves reduced to seven years, and four years later found that his prophecy was so far fulfilled that it was thought advisable then to terminate the intermediate period. His resignation, though proffered, was not accepted. This was a severe test for his principles, for his father was in debt, and the son was paying off his debts. By giving up his

office the chance of continuing that reduction was gone. The family generally was in low water, and yet the young politician could risk permanent exclusion from office for the sake of what he believed to be the true interests of liberty and of his father's and his own especial charge, the slaves of the West Indies.

Towards the end of this session it appeared probable that a post on the Supreme Council of India would be offered to Macaulay. The salary was to be £10,000 a year. By accepting it for six years, he could save largely for his family and himself, and a few years would set him at ease. He accepted it in the hope that his sister Hannah would go with him. She consented, and his happiness was complete.

Among the most conspicuous of British gains by Macaulay's voluntary banishment are the two brilliant essays in which he has dealt with Indian history. Studied on the spot, in surroundings which so vividly recalled the notable achievements by which our Indian power was consolidated, his word pictures are likely to remain long the chief means from which English people will derive their impressions of India. The latter country owes to him the noble digest of the Indian Criminal Law, and the introduction to that code, which ranks as one of the most successful efforts of modern jurisprudence. But this was by no means the only sphere in which Macaulay's efforts were of intense value to India. The spread and improvement of popular instruction, both in the vernacular tongues and in English, was so greatly promoted by a minute of his on the subject, that he was nominated President of the Council of Public Instruction, in which capacity he framed a scheme for education in all grades. It is hardly conceivable what opposition he encountered from those who favoured the teaching of Sanscrit, Persian, and Arabic to a select few. But he showed infinite conciliation in dealing with irritable colleagues and subordinates, and with strong practical common sense cut the difficult knots which were presented to him for solution. His minutes on educational questions afford abundance of entertaining and instructive reading.

Soon after his settlement at Calcutta, Miss Macaulay became engaged to Mr. Trevelyan, then gaining high renown as a courageous Indian administrator. The marriage, after which the Trevelyans continued to live with Macaulay, was not only most happy, but most productive of happiness for Macaulay, both in India and afterwards at home. Yet in the midst of Indian work and splendour he longed for England. "I have no words," he writes, "to tell you how I pine for England, or how intensely bitter exile has been to me. I feel as if I had no other wish than to see my country again and die. A complete revolution in all the habits of life; an estrangement from almost every old friend and acquaintance; fifteen thousand miles of ocean between the exile and everything that he cares for; all this is, to me at least, very trying. There is no temptation of wealth or power which would induce me to go through it again." But he could never come back to the same home circle which he had left. His other beloved sister, Margaret, Mrs. Cropper, died in 1834, and the news arrived a few weeks after Hannah's marriage. Its effect on him was only to be prevented from becoming crushing by intense devotion to official work. One result of this labour was the long article on Francis Bacon which appeared in 1837.

A cloud shadowed the return of Macaulay and the Trevelyans to

England. Zachary Macaulay died in May, 1838, while his children were on their homeward voyage. His son took refuge in planning his great History, which now came within the bounds of practicability. The first part, he thought, would occupy five volumes, and extend from the Revolution of 1688 to the beginning of Sir Robert Walpole's administration. He hoped to bring it down to the death of George IV. He wished to quit politics for letters, and this seemed his best mode of doing so. In October, 1838, he started on a tour in Italy, in which his enjoyment, owing to the enormous extent of his classical knowledge, was intense.

But Lord Melbourne wanted his aid in parliament, and the post of Judge Advocate was offered him. The salary was now no temptation, and writing was more attractive. The only thing that would ever tempt him to give up his liberty and his studies was the power to effect great things; and of that power, he said, no man had so little as a man in office out of the Cabinet. He was determined, if he entered Parliament, to have the authority belonging to evident disinterestedness.

In this tour Macaulay wrote, partly, the "Lays of Ancient Rome." Early in 1839, he wrote his vigorous article on Mr. Gladstone's "Church and State." "The Lord hath delivered him into our hand," he wrote. At the same time he admitted the author to be both "a clever and an amiable man." Mr. Gladstone's letter to him in acknowledgment of the fairness and single-mindedness it displayed pleased Macaulay greatly, for it was the only letter he kept unburned. About this time Macaulay scented a crisis which has not yet arrived. He believed the House of Lords must soon be abolished. He even went so far as to draw up a plan for reforming the House of Lords, and re-constituting it upon an elective basis, which he submitted to Lord Lansdowne.

In May, 1839, the Speaker, Abercromby, was raised to the peerage, and to his vacant seat at Edinburgh, Macaulay was recommended. He came forward as a thorough Whig, supporting the Ballot in addition to the regular programme. "I look with pride," he wrote in his election address, "on all that the Whigs have done for the cause of human freedom and of human happiness. I see them now hard pressed, struggling with difficulties, but still fighting the good fight; at their head I see men who have inherited the spirit and the virtues, as well as the blood, of old champions and martyrs of freedom. To these men I propose to attach myself; while one shred of the old banner is flying, by that banner will I, at least, be found."

On his re-appearance in parliament, Macaulay's first speech was upon Mr. Grote's Ballot Bill. As it had been agreed that the more Radical ministers might support it, Macaulay had a good opportunity for defending this degree of freedom, often not permitted by prime ministers. Meanwhile the celebrated essay on Lord Clive was being pushed forward, interrupted unexpectedly by Lord Melbourne's offer of the post of Secretary for War, with a seat in the Cabinet. This high promotion did not fail to inspire many with envy, and to arouse plentiful detraction. The *Times*, which had been vigorously supporting Sir Robert Peel, did not scruple in its leading article to designate him "Mr. Babbletongue Macaulay." Sheil and he were sworn in the Privy Council on the same day; the *Times* exclaimed, "These men Privy Councillors! These men petted at Windsor Castle! Faugh! Why they are hardly fit to fill up

the vacancies that have occurred by the lamented death of Her Majesty's two favourite monkeys." The unlucky dating of his election address from Windsor Castle was made the occasion for comments and sarcasms without number. But Macaulay took newspaper abuse very quietly. He thought it both a cause and a symptom of weakness.

Macaulay too had a very happy home-life now. Fortunately his brother-in-law, Mr. Trevelyan, was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in 1839, before his Indian furlough expired, and Macaulay joyfully set up housekeeping in Great George Street, where his sister and brother-in-law lived with him in unalloyed happiness.

The secretaryship, however, put aside Macaulay's historical work for the time. He wrote in his journal for 1839: "Friday, March 9. I began my History with a sketch of the early revolutions of England. Pretty well; but a little too stately and rhetorical." The secretary mastered his official business with that power which he displayed in everything he undertook, and conducted the parliamentary portion of his work with skill and tact.

In 1840, Macaulay was at first not so successful on other questions. He failed to get a fair hearing in answering a motion of want of confidence in the Ministry, when Sir James Graham made some ungenerous allusions to his former allies. A further motion of censure on the China war was, however, the occasion of one of Macaulay's finest patriotic speeches. "It was natural," he exclaimed, "that they should look up with hope and confidence to that victorious flag. For it reminded them that they belonged to a country unaccustomed to defeat, to submission, or to shame; to a country which had exacted such reparation for the wrongs of her children as had made the ears of all who heard it to tingle; to a country which had made the Dey of Algiers humble himself to the dust before her insulted consul; to a country which had avenged the victims of the Black Hole on the field of Plassey; to a country which had not degenerated since the great Protector vowed that he would make the name of Englishman as much respected as ever had been the name of Roman citizen. They knew that, surrounded as they were by enemies, and separated by great oceans and continents from all help, not a hair of their heads would be harmed with impunity."

In January, 1840, the Clive essay came out, and was received with tremendous plaudits. That on Von Ranke's "History of the Popes" followed. In 1841, Macaulay made himself somewhat unpopular by an official defence of Lord Cardigan, which to a generation that has abolished purchase in the army, loses its force. It was unfortunate that Macaulay should have felt able to defend a man who dragged a fine cavalry regiment "through a slough of scandal, favouritism, petty tyranny, and intrigue. Within the space of a single twelvemonth one of his captains was cashiered for writing him a challenge; he sent a coarse and insulting verbal message to another, and then punished him with prolonged arrest because he respectfully refused to shake hands with the officer who had been employed to convey the affront; he fought a duel with a lieutenant who had left the corps, and shot him through the body; and he flogged a soldier on Sunday, between the services, on the very spot where, half an hour before, the man's comrades had been mustered for public worship."

The Ministry, which had been growing more and more unpopular, was defeated on the 19th of May 1841, on the question of the reduction of the duty on foreign sugar, which was represented as a concession to slaveholding countries as compared with our free colonies. The Ministry, retaining office, was defeated by a majority of one on a direct vote of want of confidence on the 4th of June, after having given notice of a motion to consider the Corn Laws. In the general election which followed, the Whigs were soundly beaten by the Protectionist cry; but Macaulay was returned unopposed for Edinburgh. The Ministry was defeated on the Address, and resigned in August.

Macaulay was now set free for his historical work. To carry it on more effectively, he took chambers at the Albany, while Mr. and Mrs. Trevelyan removed to Clapham. He read again omnivorously, and knew every bookstall in London. He collected old ballads and studied the scraps of the pavement. "He bought every halfpenny song on which he could lay hands, if only it was decent, and a genuine undoubted poem of the people." He rambled about the back lanes of the City with his brother Charles, his private secretary; and meditated and elaborated some of the "Lays of Ancient Rome." In 1842 appeared his celebrated article on Warren Hastings, and with it an absurd mistake, in which Macaulay was made to throw ridicule on the "Vicar of Wakefield," instead of Goldsmith's "History of Greece." Even yet Macaulay did not foresee the lasting fame which his essays would bring him. He was opposed to republishing them, not believing they deserved it; and spurious editions from America became spread. "What the Yankees may do I cannot help; but I will not found my pretensions to the rank of a classic on my reviews. I will remain, according to the excellent precept in the Gospel, at the lower end of the table, where I am constantly accosted with 'Friend, go up higher,' and not push my way to the top at the risk of being compelled with shame to take the lowest room."

In 1842 the "Lays of Ancient Rome" were published, and enthusiastically received. In the same year Macaulay took an active part in moulding the Copyright Act. In 1843 his essays, so far as then written, were republished by Longmans, with many emendations and omissions or severe passages. Of this republication Sir George Trevelyan stated some years ago, that upwards of 120,000 copies had been sold in the United Kingdom alone by a single publisher. The yearly sale has continued to increase with the publication of cheaper editions. "The market for them in their native country is so steady, and apparently so inexhaustible, that it perceptibly falls and rises with the general prosperity of the nation."

In 1843 Macaulay concerned himself deeply about Lord Ellenborough's wrongheaded actions as Governor-General of India, and after a fine oration from him, when a party victory was won by the Government to protect the Governor-General, and another one threatened for a second motion, Sir Robert Peel recalled Lord Ellenborough—another instance of the power which Macaulay's Indian experience had given him.

About the middle of 1844 Macaulay was engaged on an article for the *Edinburgh Review*, upon "Burke and his Times," but finding his subject altogether too large for the allotted canvas, he saw fit to substitute a sketch of Lord Chatham's later years. He made considerable use of

Horace Walpole's "Memoirs of George the Third's Reign," and of the diary of the first Lord Holland.

Macaulay's honourable nature comes out strongly in his attitude towards rogues whose rank or circumstances form a sort of protecting wall about them. It was curious that on his way to Holland he should encounter a civil servant of the East India Company who had been dismissed for fraud. Macaulay resisted all advances on his part with a fine contempt which the rogue fully understood, and which, nevertheless, was so adroitly managed as not to wound the wife and daughter of the man, who were always present on the occasions.

In the early part of 1845 Macaulay found but little time for writing general articles; what time he could spare from his duties to the House of Commons he devoted to his History. But for his doing this, he says, his History would have perished in embryo, like poor Mackintosh's.

At this time the political world was in a ferment. There were the difficulties of Foreign policy, Irish policy, and, above all, the Corn Law question. As regards this last, Macaulay determined to support, heart and soul, the full repeal of the Corn Law, even though he should lose office by taking such a course. However, his party being unable to form a government, he never took the prominent part in the repeal movement that he might otherwise have done.

Macaulay spoke only five times during the sessions of 1846 and 1847, but whenever he did so he withered his opponents by his fiery eloquence. After losing the election at Edinburgh—partly owing to his refusing to support local objects pecuniarily, partly owing to his support of the Establishment—which he felt bitterly, he retired into private life, refusing other seats, of which many were offered him.

He now devoted himself to the completion of his History. He was most zealous in collecting his materials, and when they were obtained, he would think out and realize a graphic picture which he never rested till he had committed to paper. When once the rough draft was complete he gave himself a task of six foolscap sheets a morning. Some might have got over the ground more quickly, but Macaulay would give only of his best, and would pass nothing that had not gone through the severest tests. This combined with the grandest power of visualising and of *living* in any time he wrote of, made a success almost unequalled. Within three days after the appearance of the History it had an assured position. Letters of congratulation rained in from all quarters. Old political opponents joined in the general laudation. Lord Halifax said the whole country ought to be grateful to the author of such a book, which was singularly well timed. Jeffrey wrote, "The mother who bore you, had she been alive, could scarcely have felt prouder or happier than I do at this outburst of your graver fame."

Of all the letters of congratulation Macaulay received none gave him more pleasure than the praises of the book which came from Maria Edgeworth's pen—a pen that had in his early years contributed so much to his pleasure. Enormous editions of the work were sold both in England and abroad, and it was welcomed with enthusiasm on all hands.

The success was great. The price Macaulay paid for it was great, for, in politics, few had more prizes within reach than this gifted author; yet he sacrificed all to literature.

In February, 1848, Macaulay began the second part of his History. In November of the same year, he was elected Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow; and in March, 1849, he gave his inaugural address, which took the form of a history of the university, then celebrating its fourth centenary. The freedom of the city was presented to him. In prospect of the ceremony, he says, "I felt like a man going to be hanged, and as such a man generally does, plucked up courage to behave with decency." In July, Prince Albert pressed him to take the Cambridge Professorship of Modern History, which he declined. The latter half of August he spent in Ireland. After another fortnight in France he again resumed his History, which made rapid progress. In June he made a Scotch tour, especially to see Glencoe and Killiecrankie.

Meanwhile, he was beset by applications for assistance from people he had never seen, and who had used him ill; and he acknowledges with regret that in nearly every case the vices or follies of the recipients frustrated his good intentions.

About Christmas, 1851, unavailing efforts were again made to get Macaulay back into the Cabinet, but he was resolute. But he could not decline another honour which came to him unsolicited in 1852, namely his election for Edinburgh, which had once so unkindly rejected him. But soon after appeared a shadow; he could not work so well as formerly; and his heart was discovered to be affected. He became very depressed, and felt certain that his succeeding volumes of history would be a failure. For some weeks he rested and recruited at Clifton, within a drive of Hannah More's old cottage. But he never was really well again. In the following winter he suffered severely from bronchitis. He was compelled to give up reading aloud, a sore deprivation considering that he had always delighted his family and friends thus, and had read great portions of his own writings aloud to his inner circle to gain their criticism or approval. His comfort was to work as zealously as he was able, and to exert his beneficence and wise counsel for others while life was left to him. In constant illness he maintained cheerfulness, patience, contentment, and industry to the last.

In November, 1852, he nerved himself to give a promised address to his constituents in Edinburgh. It was a mixed historical and party speech, and was very successful. In 1853, his enhanced reputation was evident in the House of Commons; he won whenever he spoke. An especial instance was his speech in favour of the selection of candidates for the Indian Civil Service by competitive examination. His last speech in the House was upon a question of the Edinburgh Church Endowments, and his last words are well worth remembering: "Of the Church it may be said that it is worse than useless if it is unpopular; for it exists only to inspire affection and respect, and if it inspires feelings of a character opposite to respect and affection, it had better not exist at all. Most earnestly, therefore, I implore the House not to support an institution, which is useless unless it is beloved, by means which can only cause it to be hated."

For the next two years he worked almost without interruption at his History. In the autumn of 1855, the final proofs of the second two volumes were read; and on December 17th they were published. What must be the feelings of the man who knows that before his book is ready

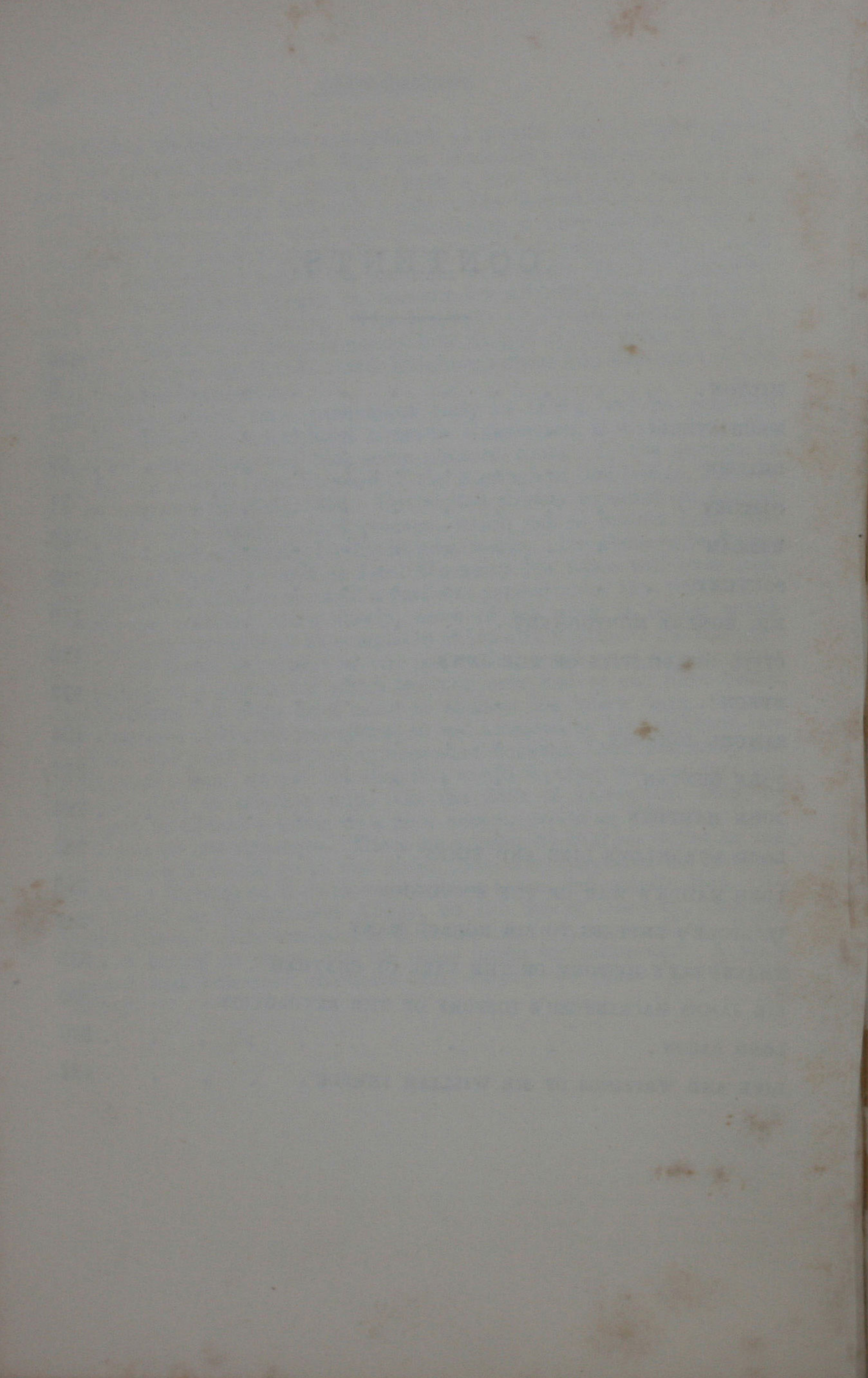
twenty-five thousand copies are ordered, at a price beyond the reach of all but ardent booklovers? This was Macaulay's experience, and no other man's. No such edition of such a book had ever before been printed. No book ever had such a sale in the United States. Six rival translators were at the same time translating it into German. It was translated into every European language with a living literature. And for the first edition, before the accounts were made up, Mr. Longman handed the author a cheque on account for £20,000, the largest ever paid by a publishing house. The Institute of France elected him a member; the King of Prussia named him Knight of the Order of Merit; Oxford gave him the D.C.L.; and Edinburgh chose him President of the Philosophical Institution.

Macaulay retired from parliament early in 1856; and he removed from the Albany to a delightful house in Kensington, Holly Lodge. He rested for some time, and took some pleasant tours. In the autumn of 1857 he was elected High Steward of the Borough of Cambridge, but was not inaugurated till May, 1858. But he had already received, on August 28th, 1857, the highly valued peerage, which has so seldom been conferred on a man especially for his literary works. He chose to be Baron Macaulay of Rothley; and as Lord Macaulay his name will ever live, although of his lifetime so small a part was passed under that title.

Although working more slowly, none of his work is better worth reading than the portions he completed of the fifth volume of his History; but to the heavy detriment of our generation he did not live to write the history of a period for which no man ever had or can have better qualifications. A deep grief came to shadow his latter days, for the Governorship of Madras was offered to and accepted by his brother-in-law early in 1859; and a sad parting impended between Lord Macaulay and his beloved sister. It was felt that this would be their last parting; but it took place in another way. On the 28th of December, 1859, he managed to dictate a letter to a poor curate, enclosing £25; he signed it: it was his last signature. The same evening he told his butler he was very tired and should go to bed early. The man suggested his lying on the sofa. He rose as if to move, sat down again, and quietly died. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, on the 9th of January, 1860, in Poet's Corner. His tombstone, at Addison's feet, is inscribed: "His body is buried in peace, but his name liveth for evermore." A more beloved and honoured character can scarcely be named in English history.

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HISTORICAL AND LITERARY ESSAYS.

MILTON.

(EDINBURGH REVIEW, AUG., 1825.)

Joannis Miltoni, Angli, de Doctrinâ Christianâ libri duo posthumi.

A Treatise on Christian Doctrine, compiled from the Holy Scriptures alone. By JOHN MILTON, translated from the Original by Charles R. Sumner, M.A., etc., etc. 1825.

TOWARDS the close of the year 1823, Mr. Lemon, deputy-keeper of the state papers, in the course of his researches among the presses of his office, met with a large Latin manuscript. With it were found corrected copies of the foreign despatches written by Milton, while he filled the office of Secretary, and several papers relating to the Popish trials and the Rye-house Plot. The whole was wrapped up in an envelope, superscribed *To Mr. Skinner, Merchant*. On examination, the large manuscript proved to be

the long-lost Essay on the Doctrines of Christianity, which, according to Wood and Toland,

Milton finished after the Restoration, and deposited with Cyriac Skinner. Skinner, it is well known, held the same political opinions with his illustrious friend. It is therefore probable, as Mr. Lemon conjectures, that he may have fallen under the suspicions of the government during that persecution of the Whigs which followed the dissolution of the Oxford parliament, and that, in consequence of a general seizure of his papers, this work may have been brought to the office in which it has been found. But whatever the adventures of the manuscript may have been, no doubt can exist that it is a genuine relic of the great poet.

Mr. Sumner, who was commanded by his Majesty to edit and translate the treatise, has acquitted himself of his task in a manner honourable to his talents and to his character. His version is not indeed very easy or elegant; but it is entitled to the praise of clearness and fidelity. His notes abound with interesting quotations, and have the rare merit of really elucidating the text. The preface is evidently the work of a sensible and candid man, firm in his own religious opinions, and tolerant towards those of others.

The book itself will not add much to the fame of Milton. It is, like all his Latin works, well written, though not exactly in the style of the prize essays of Oxford and Cambridge. There

Style of the writing.

is no elaborate imitation of classical antiquity, no scrupulous purity, none of the ceremonial cleanness which characterizes the diction of our academical Pharisees. He does not attempt to polish and brighten his composition into the Ciceronian gloss and brilliancy. He does not, in short, sacrifice sense and spirit to pedantic refinements. The nature of his subject compelled him to use many words

"That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp."

But he writes with as much ease and

freedom as if Latin were his mother-tongue; and, where he is least happy, his failure seems to arise from the carelessness of a native, not from the ignorance of a foreigner. What Denham with felicity says of Cowley may be applied to him. He wears the garb, but not the clothes of the ancients.

Throughout the volume are discernible the traces of a powerful and independent mind, emancipated from the influence of authority, and devoted to the search of truth. He professes to form his system from the Bible alone; and his digest of scriptural texts is certainly among the best that have appeared. But he is not always so happy in his inferences as in his citations.

Some of the heterodox opinions which he avows seem to have excited considerable amazement, particularly his

Heterodox opinions. Arianism, and his notions on the subject of polygamy. Yet we can scarcely conceive that any person could have read the *Paradise Lost* without suspecting him of the former; nor do we think that any reader, acquainted with the history of his life, ought to be much startled at the latter. The opinions which he has expressed respecting the nature of the Deity, the eternity of matter, and the observation of the Sabbath, might, we think, have caused more just surprise.

But we will not go into the discussion of these points. The book, were it far more orthodox or far more heretical than it is, would not much edify or corrupt the present generation. The men of our time are not to be converted or perverted by quartos. A few more days, and this essay will follow the *Defensio Populi* to the dust and silence of the upper shelf. The name of its author, and the remarkable circumstances attending its publication, will secure to it a certain degree of attention. For a month or two it will occupy a few minutes of chat in every drawing-room, and a few columns in every magazine; and it will then, to borrow the elegant language of the play-bills, be withdrawn to make room for the forthcoming novelties.

We wish, however, to avail ourselves of the interest, transient as it may be, which this work has excited. The dexterous Capuchins never choose to preach on the life and miracles of a saint, until they have awakened the devotional feelings of their auditors by exhibiting some relic of him—a thread of his garment, a

lock of his hair, or a drop of his blood. On the same principle, we intend to take advantage of the late interesting discovery, and, while this memorial of a great and good man is still in the hands of all, to say something of his moral and intellectual qualities. Nor, we are convinced, will the severest of our readers

Qualities of
Milton.

blame us if, on an occasion like the present, we turn for a short time from the topics of the day, to commemorate, in all love and reverence, the genius and virtues of John Milton, the poet, the statesman, the philosopher, the glory of English literature, the champion and the martyr of English liberty.

It is by his poetry that Milton is best known; and it is of his poetry that we wish first to speak. By the general suffrage of the civilized world, his place has been assigned among the greatest masters of the art. His detractors, however, though outvoted, have not been silenced. There are many critics, and some of great name, who contrive in the same breath to extol the poems and to decry the poet. The works they acknowledge, considered in themselves, may be classed among the noblest productions of the human mind. But they will not allow the author to rank with those great men who, born in the infancy of civilization, supplied by their own powers, the want of instruction, and, though destitute of models themselves, bequeathed to posterity, models which defy imitation. Milton, it is said, inherited what his predecessors created; he lived in an enlightened age; he received a finished education; and we must therefore, if we would form a just estimate of his powers, make large deductions in consideration of these advantages.

We venture to say, on the contrary, paradoxical as the remark may appear, that no poet has ever had to struggle with more unfavourable circumstances than Milton. He doubted, as he has himself owned, whether he had not been born "an age too late." For this notion Johnson has thought fit to make

The age in

which he lived.

him the butt of much clumsy ridicule. The poet, we believe, understood the nature of his art better than the critic. He knew that his poetical genius derived no advantage from the civilization which surrounded him, or from the learning which he had acquired; and he looked back with something like regret to the

runder age of simple words and vivid impressions.

N. | We think that, as civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines. Therefore, though we admire those great works of imagination which have appeared in dark ages, we do not admire them the more because they have appeared in dark ages. On the contrary, we hold that the most wonderful and splendid proof of genius is a great poem produced in a civilized age. We cannot understand why those who believe in that most orthodox article of literary faith, that the earliest poets are generally the best, should wonder at the rule as if it were the exception. Surely the uniformity of the phenomenon indicates a corresponding uniformity in the cause.

The fact is, that common observers reason from the progress of the experimental sciences to that of the imitative arts. The improvement of the former is gradual and slow. Ages are spent in collecting materials, ages more in separating and combining them. Even when a system has been formed, there is still something to add, to alter, or to reject. Every generation enjoys the use of a vast hoard bequeathed to it by antiquity, and transmits that hoard, augmented by fresh acquisitions, to

Progress in successive ages. future ages. In these pursuits, therefore, the first speculators lie under great disadvantages, and, even when they fail, are entitled to praise. Their pupils, with far inferior intellectual powers, speedily surpass them in actual attainments. Every girl who has read Mrs. Marcet's little dialogues on Political Economy could teach Montague or Walpole many lessons in finance. Any intelligent man may now, by resolutely applying himself for a few years to mathematics, learn more than the great Newton knew after half a century of study and meditation.

But it is not thus with music, with painting, or with sculpture. Still less is it thus with poetry. The progress of refinement rarely supplies these arts with better objects of imitation. It may indeed improve the instruments which are necessary to the mechanical operations of the musician, the sculptor, and the painter. But language, the machine of the poet, is best fitted for his purpose in its rudest state. Nations, like individuals, first perceive, and then abstract. They advance from particular images to general terms. Hence the vocabulary of

an enlightened society is philosophical, that of a half-civilized people is poetical.

This change in the language of men is partly the cause and partly the effect of a corresponding change in the nature of their intellectual operations, a change by which science gains and poetry loses. Generalization is necessary to the advancement of knowledge; but particularity is indispensable to the creations of the imagination. In proportion as men know more and think more, they look less at individuals and more at classes. They therefore make better theories and worse poems. They give us vague phrases instead of images, and personified qualities instead of men. They may be better able to analyze human nature than their predecessors. But analysis is not the business of the poet. His office is to portray, not to dissect. He may believe in a moral sense, like Shaftesbury; he may refer all human actions to self-interest, like Helvetius; or he may never think about the matter at all. His creed on such subjects will no more influence his poetry, properly so called, than the notions which a painter may have conceived respecting the lachrymal glands, or the circulation of the blood, will affect the tears of his Niobe, or the blushes of his Aurora. If Shakespeare had written a book on the motives of human actions, it is by no means certain that it would have been a good one. It is extremely improbable that it would have contained half so much able reasoning on the subject as is to be found in the Fable of the Bees. But could Mandeville have created an Iago? Well as he knew how to resolve characters into their elements, would he have been able to combine those elements in such a manner as to make up a man, a real, living, individual man?

Perhaps no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry, without a certain unsoundness of mind, if anything which gives so much pleasure ought to be called unsoundness. By poetry we mean not all writing in verse, nor even all good writing in verse. Our definition excludes many metrical compositions which, on other grounds, deserve the highest praise. By poetry we mean the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination, the art of doing by means of words what the painter does by means of colours. Thus the greatest of poets has described

Business of a poet.

What is meant by poetry.

it, in lines universally admired for the vigour and felicity of their diction, and still more valuable on account of the just notion which they convey of the art in which he excelled :

“ As imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's
pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy
nothings
A local habitation and a name.”

These are the fruits of the “fine frenzy” which he ascribes to the poet—a fine frenzy doubtless, but still a frenzy. Truth, indeed, is essential to poetry; but it is the truth of madness. The reasonings are just; but the premises are false. After the first suppositions have been made, everything ought to be consistent; but those first suppositions require a degree of credulity which almost amounts to a partial and temporary derangement of the intellect. Hence of all people children are the most imaginative. They abandon themselves without reserve to every illusion. Every image which is strongly presented to their mental eye produces on them the effect of reality. No man, whatever his sensibility may be, is ever affected by Hamlet or Lear, as a little girl is affected by the story of poor Red Riding-hood. She knows that it is all false, that wolves cannot speak, that there are no wolves in England. Yet in spite of her knowledge she believes; she weeps; she trembles; she dares not go into a dark room lest she should feel the teeth of the monster at her throat. Such is the despotism of the imagination over uncultivated minds.

In a rude state of society men are children with a greater variety of ideas. It is therefore in such a state of society that we may expect to find the poetical temperament in its highest perfection. In an enlightened age there will be much intelligence, much science, much philosophy, abundance of just classification and subtle analysis, abundance of wit and eloquence, abundance of verses, and even of good ones; but little poetry. Men will judge and compare; but they will not create. They will talk about the old poets, and comment on them, and to a certain degree enjoy them. But

Effects of
poetry.

they will scarcely be able to conceive the effect which poetry produced on their ruder ancestors, the agony, the ecstacy, the plenitude of belief. The Greek Rhapsodist, according to Plato,

could scarce recite Homer without falling into convulsions. The Mohawk hardly feels the scalping-knife while he shouts his death-song. The power which the ancient bards of Wales and Germany exercised over their auditors seems to modern readers almost miraculous. Such feelings are very rare in a civilized community, and most rare among those who participate most in its improvements. They linger longest among the peasantry.

Poetry produces an illusion on the eye of the mind, as a magic lantern produces an illusion on the eye of the body. And, as the magic lantern acts best in a dark room, poetry effects its purpose most completely in a dark age. As the light of knowledge breaks in upon its exhibitions, as the outlines of certainty become more and more definite, and the shades of probability more and more distinct, the hues and lineaments of the phantoms which it calls up grow fainter and fainter. We cannot unite the incompatible advantages of reality and deception, the clear discernment of truth and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction.

He who, in an enlightened and literary society, aspires to be a great poet, must first become a little child. He must take to pieces the whole web of his mind. He must unlearn much of that knowledge which has per-
haps constituted hitherto

Characteristics
of a poet.

his chief title to superiority. His very talents will be a hindrance to him. His difficulties will be proportioned to his proficiency in the pursuits which are fashionable among his contemporaries; and that proficiency will in general be proportioned to the vigour and activity of his mind. And it is well if, after all his sacrifices and exertions, his works do not resemble a lisping man or a modern ruin. We have seen in our own time great talents, intense labour, and long meditation, employed in this struggle against the spirit of the age, and employed, we will not say absolutely in vain, but with dubious success and feeble applause.

If these reasonings be just, no poet has ever triumphed over greater difficulties than Milton. He received a learned education—he was a profound and elegant classical scholar—he had studied all the mysteries of Rabbinical literature—he was intimately acquainted with every language of modern Europe,

Education of
Milton.

from which either pleasure or information was then to be derived. He was perhaps the only great poet of later times who has been distinguished by the excellence of his Latin verse. The genius of Petrarch was scarcely of the first order; and his poems in the ancient language, though much praised by those who have never read them, are wretched compositions. Cowley, with all his admirable wit and ingenuity, had little imagination—nor indeed do we think his classical diction comparable to that of Milton. The authority of Johnson is against us on this point. But Johnson had studied the bad writers of the Middle Ages till he had become utterly insensible to the Augustan elegance, and was as ill-qualified to judge between two Latin styles as a habitual drunkard to set up for a wine-taster.

Versification in a dead language is an exotic, a far-fetched, costly, sickly, imitation of that which elsewhere may be found in healthful and spontaneous perfection. The soils on which this rarity flourishes are in general as ill-suited to the production of vigorous native poetry as the flower-pots of a hot-house to the growth of oaks. That the author of the *Paradise Lost* should have written the *Epistle to Manso* was truly wonderful. Never before were such marked originality and such exquisite mimicry found together. Indeed, in all the Latin poems

of Milton the artificial manner indispensable to such works is admirably preserved, while, at the same time, the richness of his fancy and the elevation of his sentiments give to them a peculiar charm, an air of nobleness and freedom, which distinguishes them from all other writings of the same class. They remind us of the amusements of those angelic warriors who composed the cohort of Gabriel:—

“About him exercised heroic games
The unarmed youth of heaven. But o'er
their heads
Celestial armoury, shield, helm, and spear,
Hung high, with diamond flaming and with
gold.”

We cannot look upon the sportive exercises for which the genius of Milton ungirds itself, without catching a glimpse of the gorgeous and terrible panoply which it is accustomed to wear. The strength of his imagination triumphed over every obstacle. So intense and ardent was the fire of his mind, that it

not only was not suffocated beneath the weight of fuel, but penetrated the whole superincumbent mass with its own heat and radiance.

It is not our intention to attempt anything like a complete examination of the poetry of Milton. The public has long been agreed as to the merit of the most remarkable passages, the incomparable harmony of the numbers, and the excellence of that style, which no rival has been able to equal, and no parodist to degrade, which displays in their highest perfection the idiomatic powers of the English tongue, and to which every ancient and every modern language has contributed something of grace, of energy, or of music. In the vast field of criticism on which we are entering, innumerable reapers have already put their sickles. Yet the harvest is so abundant that the negligent search of a straggling gleaner may be rewarded with a sheaf.

The most striking characteristic of the poetry of Milton is the extreme remoteness of the associations by means of which it acts on the reader. Its effect is produced, not so much by what it expresses, as by what it suggests; not so much by the ideas which it directly conveys, as by other ideas which are connected with them. He electrifies the mind through conductors. The most unimaginative man must understand the *Iliad*. Homer gives him no choice, and requires from him no exertion, but takes the whole upon himself, and sets the images in so clear a light, that it is impossible to be blind to them. The works of Milton cannot be comprehended or enjoyed, unless the mind of the reader co-operate with that of the writer. He does not paint a finished picture, or play for a mere passive listener. He sketches, and leaves others to fill up the outline. He strikes the key-note, and expects his hearer to make out the melody.

We often hear of the magical influence of poetry. The expression in general means nothing—but, applied to the writings of Milton, it is most appropriate. His poetry acts like an incantation. Its merit lies less in its obvious meaning than in its occult power. There would seem, at first sight, to be no more in his words than in other words. But they are words of enchantment. No sooner are they pronounced, than the past is present and the distant near. New

forms of beauty start at once into existence, and all the burial-places of the memory give up their dead. Change the structure of the sentence; substitute one synonyme for another, and the whole effect is destroyed. The spell loses its power; and he who should then hope to conjure with it would find himself as much mistaken as Cassim in the Arabian tale, when he stood crying, "Open Wheat," "Open Barley," to the door which obeyed no sound but "Open Sesame." The miserable failure of Dryden in his attempt to rewrite some parts of the *Paradise Lost* is a remarkable instance of this.

In support of these observations we may remark, that scarcely any passages in the poems of Milton are more generally known or more frequently repeated than those which are little more than muster-rolls of names. They are not always more appropriate or more melodious than other names. But they are charmed names. Every one of them is the first link in a long chain of associated ideas. Like the dwelling-place of our infancy revisited in manhood, like the song of our country heard in a strange land, they produce upon us an effect wholly independent of their intrinsic value. One transports us back to a remote period of history. Another places us among the novel scenes and manners of a distant country. A third evokes all the dear classical recollections of childhood, the schoolroom, the dog-eared Virgil, the holiday, and the prize. A fourth brings before us the splendid phantoms of chivalrous romance, the trophied lists, the embroidered housings, the quaint devices, the haunted forests, the enchanted gardens, the achievements of enamoured knights, and the smiles of rescued princesses.

In none of the works of Milton is his peculiar manner more happily displayed

*Allegro and
Penseroso.*

than in the *Allegro* and the *Penseroso*. It is impossible to conceive that the mechanism of language can be brought to a more exquisite degree of perfection. These poems differ from others, as attar of roses differs from ordinary rose-water, the close-packed essence from the thin diluted mixture. They are indeed not so much poems, as collections of hints, from each of which the reader is to make out a poem for himself. Every epithet is a text for a canto.

The *Comus* and the *Samson Agonistes*

are works which, though of very different merit, offer some marked points of resemblance. Both are lyric poems in the form of plays. There are perhaps no two kinds of composition so essentially dissimilar as the drama and the ode. The business of the dramatist is to keep himself out of sight, and to let nothing appear but his characters. As soon as he attracts notice to his personal feelings, the illusion is broken. The effect is as unpleasant as that which is produced on the stage by the voice of a prompter or the entrance of a scene-shifter. Hence it was, that the tragedies of Byron were his least successful performances.

*Tragedies of
Byron.*

They resemble those pasteboard pictures invented by the friend of children, Mr. Newbery, in which a single movable head goes round twenty different bodies, so that the same face looks out upon us successively, from the uniform of a hussar, the furs of a judge, and the rags of a beggar. In all the characters, patriots and tyrants, haters and lovers, the frown and sneer of Harold were discernible in an instant. But this species of egotism, though fatal to the drama, is the inspiration of the ode. It is the part of the lyric poet to abandon himself, without reserve, to his own emotions.

Between these hostile elements many great men have endeavoured to effect an amalgamation, but never with complete success. The Greek drama, on the model of which the *Samson* was written, sprang from the Ode. The dialogue was ingrafted on the chorus, and naturally partook of its character. The genius of the greatest of the Athenian dramatists co-operated with the circumstances under which tragedy made its first appearance. *Æschylus* was, head and heart, a lyric poet. In his time the Greeks had far more intercourse with the East than in the days of Homer; and they had not yet acquired that immense superiority in war, in science, and in the arts, which, in the following generation, led them to treat the Asiatics with contempt. From the narrative of Herodotus it should seem that they still looked up, with the veneration of disciples, to Egypt and Assyria. At this period, accordingly, it was natural that the literature of Greece should be tinctured with the Oriental style.

*The Greek
drama.*

And that style, we think, is discernible in the works of Pindar and *Æschylus*. The latter often reminds us of the Hebrew

writers. The book of Job, indeed, in conduct and diction, bears a considerable resemblance to some of his dramas. Considered as plays, his works are absurd; considered as choruses, they are above all praise. If, for instance, we examine the address of Clytæmnestra to Agamemnon on his return, or the description of the seven Argive chiefs, by the principles of dramatic writing, we shall instantly condemn them as monstrous. But if we forget the characters, and think only of the poetry, we shall admit that it has never been surpassed in energy and magnificence. Sophocles made the Greek drama as dramatic as was consistent with its original form. His portraits of men have a sort of similarity; but it is the similarity not of a painting, but of a bas-relief. It suggests a resemblance; but it does not produce an illusion. Euripides attempted to carry the reform further. But it was a task far beyond his powers, perhaps beyond any powers. Instead of correcting what was bad, he destroyed what was excellent. He substituted crutches for stilts, bad sermons for good odes.

Milton, it is well-known, admired Euripides highly, much more highly than, in our opinion, he deserved. Indeed, the caresses which this partiality leads our countryman to bestow on "sad Electra's poet," sometimes remind us of the beautiful Queen of Fairy-land kissing the long ears of Bottom. At all events, there can be no doubt that this veneration for the Athenian, whether just or not, was injurious to the Samson

Samson
Agonistes.

Agonistes. Had Milton taken Æschylus for his model, he would have given himself up to the lyric inspiration, and poured out profusely all the treasures of his mind, without bestowing a thought on those dramatic proprieties which the nature of the work rendered it impossible to preserve. In the attempt to reconcile things in their own nature inconsistent he has failed, as every one else must have failed. We cannot identify ourselves with the characters, as in a good play. We cannot identify ourselves with the poet, as in a good ode. The conflicting ingredients, like an acid and an alkali mixed, neutralize each other. We are by no means insensible to the merits of this celebrated piece, to the severe dignity of the style, the graceful and pathetic solemnity of the opening speech, or the wild and barbaric melody which gives so striking an

effect to the choral passages. But we think it, we confess, the least successful effort of the genius of Milton.

The Comus is framed on the model of the Italian Masque, as the Samson is framed on the model of the Greek Tragedy. It is certainly the noblest performance of the kind which exists in any language. It is far superior to the Faithful Shepherdess, as the Faithful Shepherdess is to the Aminta, or the Aminta to the Pastor Fido. It was well for Milton that he had here no Euripides to mislead him. He understood and loved the literature of modern Italy. But he did not feel for it the same veneration which he entertained for the remains of Athenian and Roman poetry, consecrated by so many lofty and endearing recollections. The faults, moreover, of his Italian predecessors were of a kind to which his mind had a deadly antipathy. He could stoop to a plain style, sometimes even to a bald style; but false brilliancy was his utter aversion. His Muse had no objection to a russet attire; but she turned with disgust from the finery of Guarini, as tawdry and as paltry as the rags of a chimney-sweeper on May-day. Whatever ornaments she wears are of massive gold, not only dazzling to the sight, but capable of standing the severest test of the crucible.

Comus.

Milton attended in the Comus to the distinction which he afterwards neglected in the Samson. He made it what it ought to be, essentially lyrical, and dramatic only in semblance. He has not attempted a fruitless struggle against a defect inherent in the nature of that species of composition; and he has therefore succeeded, wherever success was not impossible. The speeches must be read as majestic soliloquies; and he who so reads them will be enraptured with their eloquence, their sublimity, and their music. The interruptions of the dialogue, however, impose a constraint upon the writer, and break the illusion of the reader. The finest passages are those which are lyric in form as well as in spirit. "I should much commend," says the excellent Sir Henry Wotton in a letter to Milton, "the tragical part if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Dorique delicacy in your songs and odes, whereunto, I must plainly confess to you, I have seen yet nothing parallel in our language." The criticism was just. It is a just criticism—when Milton escapes from the shackles of the dialogue, when he is

discharged from the labour of uniting two incongruous styles, when he is at liberty to indulge his choral raptures without reserve, that he rises even above himself. Then, like his own good Genius bursting from the earthly form and weeds of Thyrsis, he stands forth in celestial freedom and beauty; he seems to cry exultingly—

“Now my task is smoothly done,
I can fly, or I can run,”

to skim the earth, to soar above the clouds, to bathe in the Elysian dew of the rainbow, and to inhale the balmy smells of nard and cassia, which the musky wings of the zephyr scatter through the cedared alleys of the Hesperides.

“There eternal Summer dwells,
And west winds, with musky wing,
About the cedared alleys fling
Nard and cassia’s balmy smells;
Iris there, with humid bow,
Waters the odorous banks, that blow
Flowers of more mingled hue
Than her purpled scarf can show,
And drenches with Elysian dew
(List, mortals, if your ears be true),
Beds of hyacinths and roses,
Where young Adonis oft reposes,
Waxing well of his deep wound.”

There are several of the minor poems of Milton on which we would willingly make a few remarks. Still more willingly would we enter into a detailed examination of that admirable poem, the *Paradise Regained*, which, strangely enough, is scarcely ever mentioned except as an instance of the blindness of the parental affection which men of letters bear towards the offspring of their intellects. That Milton was mistaken in preferring this work, excellent as it is, to the *Paradise Lost*, we readily admit. But we are sure that the superiority of the *Paradise Lost* to the *Paradise Regained* is not more decided, than the superiority of the *Paradise Regained* to every poem which has since made its appearance. Our limits, however, prevent us from discussing the point at length. We hasten on to that extraordinary production which the general suffrage of critics has placed in the highest class of human compositions.

The only poem of modern times which can be compared with the *Paradise Lost* is the *Divine Comedy*. The subject of Milton, in some points, resembled that of

Dante; but he has treated it in a widely different manner. We cannot, we think, better illustrate our opinion respecting our own great poet, than by contrasting him with the father of Tuscan literature.

The poetry of Milton differs from that of Dante, as the hieroglyphics of Egypt differed from the picture-writing of Mexico. The images which Dante employs speak for themselves; they stand simply for what they are. Those of Milton have a signification which is often discernible only to the initiated. Their value depends less on what they directly represent than on what they remotely suggest. However strange, however grotesque, may be the appearance which Dante undertakes to describe, he never shrinks from describing it. He gives us the shape, the colour, the sound, the smell, the taste; he counts the numbers; he measures the size. His similes are the illustrations of a traveller. Unlike those of other poets, and especially of Milton, they are introduced in a plain business-like manner; not for the sake of any beauty in the objects from which they are drawn; not for the sake of any ornament which they may impart to the poem; but simply in order to make the meaning of the writer as clear to the reader as it is to himself. The ruins of the precipice which led from the sixth to the seventh circle of hell were like those of the rock which fell into the Adige on the south of Trent. The cataract of Phlegethon was like that of Aqua Cheta at the monastery of St. Benedict. The place where the heretics were confined in burning tombs resembled the vast cemetery of Arles.

Now let us compare with the exact details of Dante the dim intimations of Milton. We will cite a few examples. The English poet has never thought of taking the measure of Satan. He gives us merely a vague idea of vast bulk. In one passage the fiend lies stretched out huge in length, floating many a rood, equal in size to the earth-born enemies of Jove, or to the sea-monster which the mariner mistakes for an island. When he addresses himself to battle against the guardian angels, he stands like Teneriffe or Atlas: his stature reaches the sky. Contrast with these descriptions the line in which Dante has described the gigantic spectre of Nimrod. “His face seemed to me as long and as broad as the ball o

Milton and
Dante.

St. Peter's at Rome; and his other limbs were in proportion; so that the bank, which concealed him from the waist downwards, nevertheless showed so much of him, that three tall Germans would in vain have attempted to reach to his hair." We are sensible that we do no justice to the admirable style of the Florentine poet. But Mr. Cary's translation is not at hand; and our version, however rude, is sufficient to illustrate our meaning.

Once more, compare the lazar-house in the eleventh book of the Paradise Lost with the last ward of Malebolge in Dante. Milton avoids the loathsome details, and

**Details and
imagery.**

takes refuge in indistinct but solemn and tremendous imagery, Despair hurrying from couch to couch to mock the wretches with his attendance, Death shaking his dart over them, but, in spite of supplications, delaying to strike. What says Dante? "There was such a moan there as there would be if all the sick, who, between July and September, are in the hospitals of Valdichiana, and of the Tuscan swamps, and of Sardinia, were in one pit together; and such a stench was issuing forth as is wont to issue from decayed limbs."

We will not take upon ourselves the invidious office of settling precedency between two such writers. Each in his own department is incomparable; and each, we may remark, has wisely, or fortunately, taken a subject adapted to exhibit his peculiar talent to the greatest advantage. The Divine Comedy is a personal narrative. Dante is the eye-witness and ear-witness of that which he relates. He is the very man who has heard the tormented spirits crying out for the second death, who has read the dusky characters on the portal within which there is no hope, who has hidden his face from the terrors of the Gorgon, who has fled from the hooks and the seething pitch of Barbariccia and Draghignazzo. His own hands have grasped the shaggy sides of Lucifer. His own feet have climbed the mountain of expiation. His own brow has been marked by the purifying angel. The reader would throw aside such a tale in incredulous disgust, unless it were told with the strongest air of veracity, with a sobriety even in its horrors, with the greatest precision and multiplicity in its details. The narrative of Milton in this respect differs from that of Dante, as the adventures of Amadis differ from those

of Gulliver. The author of Amadis would have made his book ridiculous if he had introduced those minute particulars which give such a charm to the work of Swift, the nautical observations, the affected delicacy about names, the official documents transcribed at full length, and all the unmeaning gossip and scandal of the court, springing out of nothing, and tending to nothing. We are not shocked at being told that a man, who lived nobody knows when, saw many very strange sights, and we can easily abandon ourselves to the illusion of the romance. But when Lemuel Gulliver, surgeon, resident at Rotherhithe, tells us of pigmies and giants, flying islands, and philosophizing horses, nothing but such circumstantial touches could produce for a single moment a deception on the imagination.

Of all the poets who have introduced into their works the agency of supernatural beings, Milton has succeeded best. Here Dante decidedly yields to him: and as this is a point on which many rash and ill-considered judgments have been pronounced, we feel inclined to dwell on it a little longer. The most fatal error which a poet can possibly commit in the management of his machinery, is that of attempting to philosophize too much. Milton has been often censured for ascribing to spirits many functions of which spirits must be incapable. But these objections, though sanctioned by eminent names, originate, we venture to say, in profound ignorance of the art of poetry.

What is spirit? What are our own minds, the portion of spirit with which we are best acquainted? We observe certain phenomena. We cannot explain them into material causes. We therefore infer that there exists something which is not material. But of this something we have no idea. We can define it only by negatives. We can reason about it only by symbols. We use the word; but we have no image of the thing; and the business of poetry is with images, and not with words. The poet uses words indeed; but they are merely the instruments of his art, not its objects. They are the materials which he is to dispose in such a manner as to present a picture to the mental eye. And if they are not so disposed, they are no more

entitled to be called poetry than a bale of canvas and a box of colours to be called a painting.

Logicians may reason about abstractions. But the great mass of mankind can never feel an interest in them. They must have images. The strong tendency of the multitude in all ages and nations to idolatry can be explained on no other principle. The first inhabitants of Greece, there is reason to believe, worshipped one invisible Deity. But the necessity of having something more definite to adore produced, in a few centuries, the innumerable crowd of gods and goddesses. In like manner the ancient Persians thought it impious to exhibit the Creator under a human form. Yet even these transferred to the Sun the worship which, speculatively, they considered due only to the Supreme Mind. The history of the Jews is the record of a continued struggle between pure Theism, supported by the most terrible sanctions, and the strangely fascinating desire of having some visible and tangible object of adoration. Perhaps none of the secondary causes which Gibbon has assigned for the rapidity with which Christianity spread over the world, while Judaism scarcely ever acquired a proselyte, operated more powerfully than this feeling. God, the uncreated, the incomprehensible, the invisible, attracted few worshippers. A philosopher might admire so noble a conception; but the crowd turned away in disgust from words which presented no image to their minds. It was before Deity embodied in a human form, walking among men, partaking of their infirmities, leaning on their bosoms, weeping over their graves, slumbering in the manger, bleeding on the cross, that the prejudices of the Synagogue, and the

Need of
imagery.

doubts of the Academy, and the pride of the Portico, and the fasces of the Lictor, and the swords of thirty legions, were humbled in the dust. Soon after Christianity had achieved its triumph, the principle which had assisted it began to corrupt it. It became a new Paganism. Patron saints assumed the offices of household gods. St. George took the place of Mars. St. Elmo consoled the mariner for the loss of Castor and Pollux. The Virgin Mother and Cecilia succeeded to Venus and the Muses. The fascination of sex and loveliness was again joined to that of celestial dignity; and the homage of chivalry was blended with that of religion.

Reformers have often made a stand against these feelings; but never with more than apparent and partial success. The men who demolished the images in cathedrals have not always been able to demolish those which were enshrined in their minds. It would not be difficult to show that in politics the same rule holds good. Doctrines, we are afraid, must generally be embodied before they can excite a strong public feeling. The multitude is more easily interested for the most unmeaning badge, or the most insignificant name, than for the most important principle.

From these considerations, we infer that no poet, who should affect that metaphysical accuracy for the want of which Milton has been blamed, would escape a disgraceful failure. Still, however, there was another extreme which, though far less dangerous, was also to be avoided. The imaginations of men are in a great measure under the control of their opinions. The most exquisite art of poetical colouring can produce no illusion when it is employed to represent that which is at once perceived to be incongruous and absurd. Milton wrote in an age of philosophers and theologians. It was necessary, therefore, for him to abstain from giving such a shock to their understandings as might break the charm which it was his object to throw over their imaginations. This is the real explanation of the indistinctness and inconsistency with which he has often been reproached. Dr. Johnson acknowledges that it was absolutely necessary for him to clothe his spirits with material forms. "But," says he, "he should have secured the consistency of his system by keeping immateriality out of sight, and seducing the reader to drop it from his thoughts." This is easily said; but what if he could not seduce the reader to drop it from his thoughts? What if the contrary opinion had taken so full a possession of the minds of men as to leave no room even for the *quasi belief* which poetry requires? Such we suspect to have been the case. It was impossible for the poet to adopt altogether the material of the immaterial system. He therefore took his stand on the debatable ground. He left the whole in ambiguity. He has doubtless, by so doing, laid himself open to the charge of inconsistency. But though philosophically in the wrong, we cannot but believe that he was poetically

Imagination
and opinion.

in the right. This task, which almost any other writer would have found impracticable, was easy to him. The peculiar art which he possessed of communicating his meaning circuitously through a long succession of associated ideas, and of intimating more than he expressed, enabled him to disguise those incongruities which he could not avoid.

Poetry which relates to the beings of another world ought to be at once mysterious and picturesque. That of Milton is so. That of Dante is picturesque indeed beyond any that ever was written. Its effect approaches to that produced by the pencil or the chisel. But

Picturesque-ness and mystery.

it is picturesque to the exclusion of all mystery. This is a fault indeed on the right side, a fault inseparable from the plan of his poem, which, as we have already observed, rendered the utmost accuracy of description necessary. Still it is a fault. The supernatural agents excite an interest; but it is not the interest which is proper to supernatural agents. We feel that we could talk with his ghost and demons, without any emotion of unearthly awe. We could, like Don Juan, ask them to supper, and eat heartily in their company. His angels are good men with wings. His devils are spiteful, ugly executioners. His dead men are merely living men in strange situations. The scene which passes between the poet and Facinata is justly celebrated. Still Facinata in the burning tomb is exactly what Facinata would have been at an *auto-da-fe*. Nothing can be more touching than the first interview of Dante and Beatrice. Yet what is it, but a lovely woman chiding, with sweet austere composure, the lover for whose affection she is grateful, but whose vices she reprobates? The feelings which give the passage its charm would suit the streets of Florence as well as the summit of the Mount of Purgatory.

The spirits of Milton are unlike those of almost all other writers. His fiends, in particular, are wonderful creations. They are not metaphysical abstractions. They are not wicked men. They are not ugly beasts. They have no horns, no tails, none of the fee-faw-fum of Tasso and Klopstock. They have just enough in common with human nature to be intelligible to human beings. Their characters are like their forms, marked by a certain dim resemblance to those of men, but exag-

gerated to gigantic dimensions, and veiled in mysterious gloom.

Perhaps the gods and demons of Æschylus may best bear a comparison with the angels and devils of Milton. The style of the Athenian had, as we have remarked, something of the Oriental character; and the same peculiarity may be traced in his mythology. It has nothing of the amenity and elegance which we generally find in the superstitions of Greece. All is rugged, barbaric, and colossal. The legends of Æschylus seem to harmonize less with the fragrant groves and graceful porticoes in which his countrymen paid their vows to the God of Light and Goddess of Desire, than with those huge and grotesque labyrinths of eternal granite in which Egypt enshrined her mystic Osiris, or in which Hindostan still bows down to her seven-headed idols. His favourite gods are those of the elder generation, the sons of heaven and earth, compared with whom Jupiter himself was a stripling and an upstart, the gigantic Titans, and the inexorable Furies. Foremost among his creations of this class stands Prometheus, half-fiend, half-redeemer, the friend of man, the sullen and implacable enemy of heaven. He bears undoubtedly a considerable resemblance to the Satan of Milton. In both we find the same impatience of control, the same ferocity, the same unconquerable pride. In both characters also are mingled, though in very different proportions, some kind and generous feelings. Prometheus, however, is hardly superhuman enough. He talks too much of his chains and his uneasy posture; he is rather too much depressed and agitated. His resolution seems to depend on the knowledge which he possesses that he holds the fate of his torturer in his hands, and that the hour of his release will surely come. But Satan is a creature of another sphere. The might of his intellectual nature is victorious over the extremity of pain. Amidst agonies which cannot be conceived without horror, he deliberates, resolves, and even exults. Against the sword of Michael, against the thunder of Jehovah, against the flaming lake, and the marl burning with solid fire, against the prospect of an eternity of unintermitted misery, his spirit bears up unbroken, resting on its own innate energies, requiring no support from anything external, nor even from hope itself.

To return for a moment to the parallel which we have been attempting to draw between Milton and Dante, we would add that the poetry of these great men has in a considerable degree taken its character from their moral qualities. They are not egotists. They rarely obtrude their idiosyncrasies on their readers. They have nothing in common with those modern beggars for fame, who extort a pittance from the compassion of the inexperienced by exposing the nakedness and sores of their minds. Yet it would be difficult to name two writers whose works have been more completely, though undesignedly, coloured by their personal feelings.

The character of Milton was peculiarly distinguished by loftiness of thought, that of Dante by intensity of feeling. In every line of the *Divine Comedy* we discern the asperity which is produced by pride struggling with misery. There is perhaps no work in the world so deeply and uniformly sorrowful. The melancholy of Dante was no fantastic

Melancholy of Dante. caprice. It was not, as far as at this distance of time can be judged, the effect of external circumstances. It was from within. Neither love nor glory, neither the conflicts of earth nor the hope of heaven, could dispel it. It twined every consolation and every pleasure into its own nature. It resembled that noxious Sardinian soil of which the intense bitterness is said to have been perceptible even in its honey. His mind was, in the noble language of the Hebrew poet, "a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and where the light was as darkness." The gloom of his character discolours all the passions of men, and all the face of Nature, and tinges with its own livid hue the flowers of Paradise and the glories of the eternal throne. All the portraits of him are singularly characteristic. No person can look on the features, noble even to ruggedness, the dark furrows of the cheek, the haggard and woeful stare of the eye, the sullen and contemptuous curve of the lip, and doubt that they belonged to a man too proud and too sensitive to be happy.

Milton was, like Dante, a statesman and a lover; and, like Dante, he had been unfortunate in ambition and in love. He had survived his health and his sight, the comforts of his home, and the prosperity of his party. Of the great men by whom he had been distinguished at

his entrance into life, some had been taken away from the evil to come; some had carried into foreign climates their unconquerable hatred of oppression; some were pining in dungeons; and some had poured forth their blood on scaffolds. That hateful proscription, facetiously termed the Act of Indemnity and Oblivion, had set a mark on the poor blind, deserted poet, and held him up by name to the hatred of a profligate court and an inconstant people. Venal and licentious scribblers, with just sufficient talent to clothe the thoughts of a pander in the style of a bellman, were now the favourite writers of the Sovereign and of the public. It was a loathsome herd, which could be compared to nothing so fitly as to the rabble of Comus, grotesque monsters, half bestial, half human, dropping with wine, bloated with gluttony, and reeling in obscene dances. Amidst these his Muse was placed, like the chaste lady of the Masque, lofty, spotless, and serene, to be chattered at, and pointed at, and grinned at, by the whole rout of Satyrs and Goblins. If ever despondency and asperity could be excused in any man, they might have been excused in Milton. But the strength of his mind overcame every calamity. Neither blindness, nor gout, nor age, nor penury, nor domestic afflictions, nor political disappointments, nor abuse, nor proscription, nor neglect, had power to disturb his sedate and majestic patience. His spirits do not seem to have been high, but they were singularly equable. His temper was serious, perhaps stern; but it was a temper which no sufferings could render sullen or fretful. Such as it was when, on the eve of great events, he returned from his travels, in the prime of health and manly beauty, loaded with literary distinctions, and glowing with patriotic hopes, such it continued to be when, after having experienced every calamity, which is incident to our nature, old, poor, sightless, and disgraced, he retired to his hovel to die.

Milton's strength of mind.

Hence it was, that though he wrote *Paradise Lost* at a time of life when images of beauty and tenderness are in general beginning to fade, even from those minds in which they have not been effaced by anxiety and disappointment, he adorned it with all that is most lovely and delightful in the physical and in the moral world. Neither Theocritus nor Ariosto had a finer or a more healthful

sense of the pleasantness of external objects, or loved better to luxuriate amidst sunbeams and flowers, the songs of nightingales, the juice of summer fruits, and the coolness of shady fountains. His conception of love unites all the voluptuousness of the Oriental harem, and all the gallantry of the chivalric tournament, with all the pure and quiet affection of an English fireside. His poetry reminds us of the miracles of Alpine scenery. Nooks and dells, beautiful as fairy land, are embosomed in its most rugged and gigantic elevations. The roses and myrtles bloom unchilled on the verge of the avalanche.

Traces, indeed, of the peculiar character of Milton may be found in all his works; but it is most strongly displayed in the Sonnets. Those remarkable poems have been undervalued by critics who have not understood their nature. They have no epigrammatic point. There is none of the ingenuity of Filicaja in the thought, none of the hard and brilliant enamel of Petrarch in the style. They are simple but majestic records of the feelings of the poet; as little tricked out for the public eye as his diary would have been. A victory, an unexpected attack upon the city, a momentary fit of depression or exultation, a jest thrown out against one of his books, a dream which for a short time restored to him that beautiful face over which the grave had closed for ever, led him to musings which, without effort, shaped themselves into verse. The unity of sentiment and severity of style which characterize these little pieces remind us of the Greek Anthology, or perhaps still more of the Collects of the English Liturgy. The noble poem on the Massacres of Piedmont is strictly a collect in verse.

The Sonnets are more or less striking, according as the occasions which gave birth to them are more or less interesting.

Milton's sonnets.

But they are, almost without exception, dignified by a sobriety and greatness of mind to which we know not where to look for a parallel. It would, indeed, be scarcely safe to draw any decided inferences as to the character of a writer from passages directly egotistical. But the qualities which we have ascribed to Milton, though perhaps most strongly marked in those parts of his works which treat of his personal feelings, are distinguishable in every page, and impart to all his writings,

prose and poetry, English, Latin, and Italian, a strong family likeness.

His public conduct was such as was to be expected from a man of a spirit so high and of an intellect so powerful. He lived at one of the most memorable eras in the history of mankind, at the very crisis of the great conflict between Oromasdes and Arimanes, liberty and despotism, reason and prejudice. That great battle was fought for no single generation, for no single land. The destinies of the human race were staked on the same cast with the freedom of the English people. Then were first proclaimed those mighty principles which have since worked their way into the depths of the American forests, which have roused Greece from the slavery and degradation of two thousand years, and which, from one end of Europe to the other, have kindled an unquenchable fire in the hearts of the oppressed, and loosed the knees of the oppressors with an unwonted fear.

Of those principles, then struggling for their infant existence, Milton was the most devoted and eloquent literary champion. We need not say how much we admire his public conduct. But we cannot disguise from ourselves that a large portion of his countrymen still think it unjustifiable. The civil war, indeed, has been more discussed, and is less understood, than any event in English history. The Roundheads laboured under the disadvantage of which the lion in the fable complained so bitterly. Though they were the conquerors, their enemies were the painters. As a body, they had done their utmost to decry and ruin literature; and literature was even with them, as, in the long run, it always is with its enemies. The best book on their side of the question is the charming narrative of Mrs. Hutchinson. May's History of the Parliament is good; but it breaks off at the most interesting crisis of the struggle. The performance of Ludlow is very foolish and violent; and most of the later writers who have espoused the same cause. Oldmixon for instance, and Catherine Macaulay, have, to say the least, been more distinguished by zeal than either by candour or by skill. On the other side are the most authoritative and the most popular historical works in our language, that of Clarendon, and that of Hume. The former is not only ably written and full of valuable information, but has also an air of dignity and sincerity which

makes even the prejudices and errors with which it abounds respectable. Hume, from whose fascinating narrative the great mass of the reading public are still contented to take their opinions, hated religion so much that he hated liberty for having been allied with religion, and has pleaded the cause of tyranny with the dexterity of an advocate, while affecting the impartiality of a judge.

The public conduct of Milton must be approved or condemned according as the resistance of the people to Charles the First shall appear to be justifiable or criminal. We shall therefore make no apology for dedicating a few pages to the discussion of that interesting and most important question. We shall not argue it on general grounds. We shall not recur to those primary principles from which the claim of any government to the obedience of its subjects is to be deduced. It is a vantage-ground to which we are entitled; but we will relinquish it. We are, on this point, so confident of superiority, that we have no objection to imitate the ostentatious generosity of those ancient knights, who vowed to joust without helmet or shield against all enemies, and to give their antagonists the advantage of sun and wind. We will take the naked constitutional question. We confidently affirm that every reason which can be urged in favour of the Revolution of 1688 may be urged with at least equal force in favour of what is called the Great Rebellion.

In one respect only, we think, can the warmest admirers of Charles venture to say that he was a better sovereign than his son. He was not, in name and profession, a Papist; we say in name and profession, because both Charles himself and his creature Laud, while they abjured the innocent badges of Popery, retained all its worst vices, a complete subjection of reason to authority, a weak preference of form to substance, a childish passion for mummeries, an idolatrous veneration for the priestly character, and, above all, a stupid and ferocious intolerance. This, however, we waive. We will concede that Charles was a good Protestant; but we say that his Protestantism does not make the slightest distinction between his case and that of James.

The principles of the Revolution have often been grossly misrepresented, and

never more than in the course of the present year. There is a certain class of men, who, while they profess to hold in reverence the great names and great actions of former times, never look at them for any other purpose than in order to find in them some excuse for existing abuses. In every venerable precedent they pass by what is essential, and take only what is accidental: they keep out of sight what is beneficial, and hold up to public imitation all that is defective. If, in any part of any great example, there be anything unsound, these flesh-flies detect it with an unerring instinct, and dart upon it with a ravenous delight. If some good end has been attained in spite of them, they feel, with their prototype, that

“Their labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil.”

To the blessing which England has derived from the Revolution these people are utterly insensible. The expulsion of a tyrant, the solemn recognition of popular rights, liberty, security, toleration, all go for nothing with them. One sect there was, which, from unfortunate temporary causes, it was thought necessary to keep under close restraint. One part of the empire there was so unhappily circumstanced, that at that time its misery was necessary to our happiness, and its slavery to our freedom. These are the parts of the Revolution which the politicians of whom we speak, love to contemplate, and which seem to them not indeed to vindicate, but in some degree to palliate, the good which it has produced. Talk to them of Naples, of Spain, or of South America. They stand forth zealots for the doctrine of Divine Right which has now come back to us, like a thief from transportation, under the *alias* of Legitimacy. But mention the miseries of Ireland. Then William is a hero. Then Somers and Shrewsbury are great men. Then the Revolution is a glorious era. The very same persons who, in this country, never omit an opportunity of reviving every wretched Jacobite slander respecting the Whigs of that period, have no sooner crossed St. George's Channel, than they begin to fill their bumpers to the glorious and immortal memory. They may truly boast that they look not at men, but at measures. So that evil be done, they care not who does it; the arbitrary

The essential
lost in the
accidental.

Charles, or the liberal William, Ferdinand the Catholic, or Frederic the Protestant. On such occasions their deadliest opponents may reckon upon their candid construction. The bold assertions of these people have of late impressed a large portion of the public with an opinion that James the Second was expelled simply because he was a Catholic, and that the Revolution was essentially a Protestant Revolution.

But this certainly was not the case; nor can any person who has acquired more knowledge of the history of those times than is to be found in Goldsmith's Abridgment believe that, if James had held his own religious opinions without wishing to make proselytes, or if, wishing even to make proselytes, he had contented himself with exerting only his constitutional influence for that purpose, the Prince of Orange would ever have been invited over. Our ancestors, we suppose, knew their own meaning; and, if we may believe them, their hostility was primarily not to popery, but to

Popery and
tyranny.

tyranny. They did not drive out a tyrant because he was a Catholic; but they excluded Catholics from the crown, because they thought them likely to be tyrants. The ground on which they, in their famous resolution, declared the throne vacant, was this, "that James had broken the fundamental laws of the kingdom." Every man, therefore, who approves of the Revolution of 1688 must hold that the breach of fundamental laws on the part of the sovereign justifies resistance. The question, then, is this: Had Charles the First broken the fundamental laws of England?

No person can answer in the negative, unless he refuses credit, not merely to all the accusations brought against Charles by his opponents, but to the narratives of the warmest Royalists, and to the confessions of the King himself. If there be any truth in any historian of any party who has related the events of that

Illegal doings
of Charles I.

reign, the conduct of Charles, from his accession to the meeting of the Long Parliament, had been a continued course of oppression and treachery. Let those who applaud the Revolution, and condemn the Rebellion, mention one act of James the Second to which a parallel is not to be found in the history of his father. Let them lay their fingers on a single article in the Declaration of Right,

presented by the two Houses to William and Mary, which Charles is not acknowledged to have violated. He had, according to the testimony of his own friends, usurped the functions of the legislature, raised taxes without the consent of parliament, and quartered troops on the people in the most illegal and vexatious manner. Not a single session of parliament had passed without some unconstitutional attack on the freedom of debate; the right of petition was grossly violated; arbitrary judgments, exorbitant fines, and unwarranted imprisonments, were grievances of daily occurrence. If these things do not justify resistance, the Revolution was treason; if they do, the Great Rebellion was laudable.

But, it is said, why not adopt milder measures? Why, after the King had consented to so many reforms, and renounced so many oppressive prerogatives, did the parliament continue to rise in their demands at the risk of provoking a civil war? The ship-money had been given up. The Star Chamber had been abolished. Provision had been made for the frequent convocation and secure deliberation of parliaments. Why not pursue an end confessedly good by peaceable and regular means? We recur again to the analogy of the Revolution. Why was James driven from the throne? Why was he not retained upon conditions? He, too, had offered to call a free parliament and to submit to its decision all the matters in dispute. Yet we are in the habit of praising our forefathers who preferred a revolution, a disputed succession, a dynasty of strangers, twenty years of foreign and intestine war, a standing army, and a national debt, to the rule, however restricted, of a tried and proved tyrant.

Want of trust
in Charles.

The Long Parliament acted on the same principle, and is entitled to the same praise. They could not trust the King. He had no doubt passed salutary laws; but what assurance was there that he would not break them? He had renounced oppressive prerogatives, but where was the security that he would not resume them? They had to deal with a man whom no tie could bind, a man who made and broke promises with equal facility, a man whose honour had been a hundred times pawned, and never redeemed.

Here, indeed, the Long Parliament stands on still stronger ground than the Convention of 1688. No action of James

can be compared to the conduct of Charles with respect to the Petition of Right. The Lords and Commons present him with a bill in which the constitutional limits of his power are marked out. He hesitates; he evades; at last he bargains to give his assent for five subsidies. The bill receives his solemn assent; the subsidies are voted; but no sooner is the tyrant relieved, than he returns at once to all the arbitrary measures which he had bound himself to abandon, and violates all the clauses of the very Act which he had been paid to pass.

For more than ten years the people had seen the rights which were theirs by a double claim, by immemorial inheritance and by recent purchase, infringed by the perfidious king who had recognized them. At length circumstances compelled Charles to summon another Parliament; another chance was given them for liberty. Were they to throw it away as they had thrown away the former? Were they again to be cozened by *le Roi le veut*? Were they again to advance their money on pledges which had been forfeited over and over again? Were they to lay a second Petition of Right at the foot of the throne, to grant another lavish aid in exchange for another unmeaning ceremony, and then to take their departure, till, after ten years more of fraud and oppression, their prince should again require a supply, and again repay it with a perjury? They were compelled to choose whether they would trust a tyrant or conquer him. We think that they chose wisely and nobly.

The advocates of Charles, like the advocates of other malefactors against whom overwhelming evidence is produced, generally decline all controversy about the facts, and content themselves with calling testimony to character. He had so many private virtues! And had James the Second no private virtues? Was Oliver Cromwell, his bitterest enemies themselves being judges, destitute of private virtues? And what, after all, are the virtues ascribed to Charles? A religious zeal, not more sincere than that of his son, and fully as weak and narrow-minded, and a few of the ordinary household decencies which half the tombstones in England claim for those who lie beneath them. A good father! A good

husband! Ample apologies indeed for fifteen years of persecution, tyranny, and falsehood!

We charge him with having broken his coronation oath; and we are told that he kept his marriage vow! We accuse him of having given up his people to the merciless inflictions of the most hot-headed and hard-hearted of prelates; and the defence is, that he took his little son on his knee and kissed him! We censure him for having violated the articles of the Petition of Right, after having, for good and valuable consideration, promised to observe them; and we are informed that he was accustomed to hear prayers at six o'clock in the morning!

It is to such considerations as these, together with his Vandyke dress, his handsome face, and his peaked beard, that he owes, we verily believe, most of his popularity with the present generation.

For ourselves, we own that we do not understand the common phrase, a good man, but a bad king. We can as easily conceive a good man and an unnatural father, or a good man and a treacherous friend. We cannot, in estimating the character of an individual, leave out of our consideration his conduct in the most important of all human relations; and if, in that relation, we find him to have been selfish, cruel, and deceitful, we shall take the liberty to call him a bad man, in spite of all his temperance at table, and all his regularity at chapel.

We cannot refrain from adding a few words respecting a topic on which the defenders of Charles are fond of dwelling. If, they say, he governed his people ill, he at least governed them after the example of his predecessors. If he violated their privileges, it was because those privileges had not been accurately defined. No act of oppression has ever been imputed to him which has not a parallel in the annals of the Tudors. This point Hume has laboured, with an art which is as discreditable in a historical work as it would be admirable in a forensic address. The answer is short, clear, and decisive. Charles had assented to the Petition of Right. He had renounced the oppressive powers said to have been exercised by his predecessors, and he had renounced them for money. He was not entitled to set up his antiquated claims against his own recent release.

Reasons for popularity.

Parallels in history.

These arguments are so obvious, that it may seem superfluous to dwell upon them. But those who have observed how much the events of that time are misrepresented and misunderstood will not blame us for stating the case simply. It is a case of which the simplest statement is the strongest.

The enemies of the Parliament, indeed, rarely choose to take issue on the great points of the question. They content themselves with exposing some of the crimes and follies to which public commotions necessarily give birth. They bewail the unmerited fate of Strafford. They execrate the lawless violence of the army. They laugh at the Scriptural names of the preachers. Major-generals fleecing their districts; soldiers revelling on the spoils of a ruined peasantry; upstarts, enriched by the public plunder, taking possession of the hospitable firesides and hereditary trees of the old gentry; boys smashing the beautiful windows of cathedrals; Quakers riding naked through

the market-place; Fifth-monarchy-men shouting for King Jesus; agitators lecturing from the tops of tubs on the fate of Agag;—all these, they tell us, were the offspring of the Great Rebellion.

Be it so. We are not careful to answer in this matter. These charges, were they infinitely more important, would not alter our opinion of an event which alone has made us to differ from the slaves who crouch beneath the sceptres of Brandenburg and Braganza. Many evils, no doubt, were produced by the civil war. They were the price of our liberty. Has the acquisition been worth the sacrifice? It is the nature of the Devil of tyranny to tear and rend the body which he leaves. Are the miseries of continued possession less horrible than the struggles of the tremendous exorcism?

If it were possible that a people brought up under an intolerant and arbitrary system could subvert that system without acts of cruelty and folly, half the objections to despotic power would be removed. We should, in that case, be compelled to acknowledge that it at least produces no pernicious effects on the intellectual and moral character of a people. We deplore the outrages which accompany revolutions. But the more violent the outrages, the more assured we feel that a revolution was necessary. The violence of those

outrages will always be proportioned to the ferocity and ignorance of the people; and the ferocity and ignorance of the people will be proportioned to the oppression and degradation under which they have been accustomed to live. Thus it was in our civil war. The rulers in the church and state reaped only that which they had sown. They had prohibited free discussion—they had done their best to keep the people unacquainted with their duties and their rights. The retribution was just and natural. If they suffered from popular ignorance, it was because they had themselves taken away the key of knowledge. If they were assailed with blind fury, it was because they had exacted an equally blind submission.

It is the character of such revolutions that we always see the worst of them at first. Till men have been some time free, they know not how to use their freedom. The natives of wine countries are generally sober. In climates where wine is a rarity intemperance abounds. A newly-liberated people may be compared to a northern army encamped on the Rhine or the Xeres. It is said that, when soldiers in such a situation first find themselves able to indulge without restraint in such a rare and expensive luxury, nothing is to be seen but intoxication. Soon, however, plenty teaches discretion; and, after wine has been for a few months their daily fare, they become more temperate than they had ever been in their own country. In the same manner, the final and permanent fruits of liberty are wisdom, moderation, and mercy.

Its immediate effects are often atrocious crimes, conflicting errors, scepticism on points the most clear, dogmatism on points the most mysterious. It is just at this crisis that its enemies love to exhibit it. They pull down the scaffolding from the half-finished edifice—they point to the flying dust, the falling bricks, the comfortless rooms, the frightful irregularity of the whole appearance; and then ask in scorn where the promised splendour and comfort is to be found. If such miserable sophisms were to prevail, there would never be a good house or a good government in the world.

Ariosto tells a pretty story of a fairy, who, by some mysterious law of her nature, was condemned to appear at cer-

Reaping the harvest.

Final and immediate effects of liberty.

tain seasons in the form of a foul and poisonous snake. Those who injured her during the period of her disguise were for ever excluded from participation in the blessings which she bestowed. But to those who, in spite of her loathsome aspect, pitied and protected her, she afterwards revealed herself in the beautiful and celestial form which was natural to her, accompanied their steps, granted all their wishes, filled their houses with wealth, made them happy in love and

Spirit of
liberty.

victorious in war. Such a spirit is Liberty. At times she takes the form of a hateful reptile. She grovels, she hisses, she stings. But woe to those who in disgust shall venture to crush her! And happy are those who, having dared to receive her in her degraded and frightful shape, shall at length be rewarded by her in the time of her beauty and her glory!

There is only one cure for the evils which newly-acquired freedom produces;

Light and
freedom.

and that cure is freedom. When a prisoner first leaves his cell, he cannot bear the light of day—he is unable to discriminate colours, or recognize faces. But the remedy is, not to remand him into his dungeon, but to accustom him to the rays of the sun. The blaze of truth and liberty may at first dazzle and bewilder nations which have become half-blind in the house of bondage. But let them gaze on, and they will soon be able to bear it. In a few years men learn to reason. The extreme violence of opinions subsides. Hostile theories correct each other. The scattered elements of truth cease to conflict, and begin to coalesce. And at length a system of justice and order is educed out of the chaos.

Many politicians of our time are in the habit of laying it down as a self-evident proposition, that no people ought to be free till they are fit to use their freedom. The maxim is worthy of the fool in the old story, who resolved not to go into the water till he had learnt to swim. If men are to wait for liberty till they become wise and good in slavery, they may indeed wait for ever.

Therefore it is that we decidedly approve of the conduct of Milton and the other wise and good men who, in spite of much that was ridiculous and hateful in the conduct of their associates, stood firmly by the cause of Public Liberty.

We are not aware that the poet has been charged with personal participation in any of the blamable excesses of that time. The favourite topic of his enemies is the line of conduct which he pursued with regard to the execution of the King. Of that celebrated proceeding we by no means approve. Still we must say, in justice to the many eminent persons who conquered in it, and in justice more particularly to the eminent person who defended it, that nothing can be more absurd than the imputations which, for the last hundred and sixty years, it has been the fashion to cast upon the Regicides. We have, throughout, abstained from appealing to first principles. We will not appeal to them now. We recur again to the parallel case of the Revolution. What essential distinction can be drawn between the execution of the father and the deposition of the son? What constitutional maxim is there which applies to the former and not to the latter? The King can do no wrong. If so, James was as innocent as Charles could have been. The minister only ought to be responsible for the acts of the Sovereign. If so, why not impeach Jefferies and retain James? The person of a King is sacred. Was the person of James considered sacred at the Boyne? To discharge cannon against an army in which a King is known to be posted is to approach pretty near to regicide. Charles, too, it should always be remembered, was put to death by men who had been exasperated by the hostilities of several years, and who had never been bound to him by any other tie than that which was common to them with all their fellow-citizens. Those who drove James from his throne, who seduced his army, who alienated his friends, who first imprisoned him in his palace, and then turned him out of it, who broke in upon his slumbers by imperious messages, who pursued him with fire and sword from one part of the empire to another, who hanged, drew, and quartered his adherents, and attainted his innocent heir, were his nephew and his two daughters. When we reflect on all these things, we are at a loss to conceive how the same persons who, on the fifth of November, thank God for wonderfully conducting his servant William, and for making all opposition fall before him until he became our King and Governor, can, on the thirtieth of January, contrive to be afraid that the blood of the Royal

Martyr may be visited on themselves and their children.

We do not, we repeat, approve of the execution of Charles; not because the constitution exempts the King from responsibility, for we know that all such maxims, however excellent, have their exceptions; nor because we feel any peculiar interest in his character, for we think that his sentence describes him with perfect justice as "a tyrant, a traitor, a murderer, and a public enemy;" but because we are convinced that the

Execution of Charles injurious to the cause of freedom. measure was most injurious to the cause of freedom. He whom it removed was a captive and a hostage: his heir, to whom the allegiance of every Royalist

was instantly transferred, was at large. The Presbyterians could never have been perfectly reconciled to the father—they had no such rooted enmity to the son. The great body of the people also contemplated that proceeding with feelings which, however unreasonable, no government could safely venture to outrage.

But though we think the conduct of the Regicides blamable, that of Milton appears to us in a very different light. The deed was done. It could not be undone. The evil was incurred; and the object was to render it as small as possible. We censure the chiefs of the army for not yielding to the popular opinion; but we cannot censure Milton for wishing to change that opinion. The very feeling which would have restrained us from committing the act would have led us, after it had been committed, to defend it against the ravings of servility and superstition. For the sake of public liberty, we wish that the thing had not been done, while the people disapproved of it. But, for the sake of public liberty, we should also have wished the people to approve of it when it was done. If anything more were wanting to the justification of Milton, the book of Salmasius would furnish it. That miserable performance is now with justice considered only as a beacon to word-catchers, who wish to become statesmen. The celebrity of the man who refuted it, the "*Æneæ magni dextra*," gives it all its fame with the present generation. In that age the state of things was different. It was not then fully understood how vast an interval separates the mere classical scholar from the political philosopher. Nor can it be doubted that a treatise

which, bearing the name of so eminent a critic, attacked the fundamental principles of all free governments, must, if suffered to remain unanswered, have produced a most pernicious effect on the public mind.

We wish to add a few words relative to another subject, on which the enemies of Milton delight to dwell,—his conduct during the administration of the Protector. That an enthusiastic votary of liberty should accept office under a military usurper seems, no doubt, at first sight, extraordinary. But all the circumstances in which the country was then placed were extraordinary. The ambition of Oliver was of no vulgar kind. He never seems to have coveted despotic power. He at first fought sincerely and manfully for the Parliament, and never deserted it, till it had deserted its duty. If he dissolved it by force, it was not till he found that the few members who remained after so many deaths, secessions, and expulsions, were desirous to appropriate to themselves a power which they held only in trust, and to inflict upon England the curse of a Venetian oligarchy. But even

when thus placed by violence at the head of affairs, he did not assume unlimited power. He gave the country a constitution far more perfect than any which had at that time been known in the world. He reformed the representative system in a manner which has extorted praise even from Lord Clarendon. For himself he demanded indeed the first place in the commonwealth; but with powers scarcely so great as those of a Dutch stadtholder, or an American president. He gave the Parliament a voice in the appointment of ministers, and left to it the whole legislative authority, not even reserving to himself a veto on its enactments; and he did not require that the chief magistracy should be hereditary in his family. Thus far, we think, if the circumstances of the time and the opportunities which he had of aggrandizing himself be fairly considered, he will not lose by comparison with Washington or Bolivar. Had his moderation been met by corresponding moderation, there is no reason to think that he would have overstepped the line which he had traced for himself. But when he found that his Parliaments questioned the authority under which they met, and that he was in danger of being deprived of the restricted power which

Milton's conduct during the Protectorate.

was absolutely necessary to his personal safety, then, it must be acknowledged, he adopted a more arbitrary policy.

Yet, though we believe that the intentions of Cromwell were at first honest, though we believe that he was driven from the noble course which he had marked out for himself by the most irresistible force of circumstances, though we admire, in common with all men of all parties, the ability and energy of his splendid administration, we are not pleading for arbitrary and lawless power, even in his hands. We know that a good constitution is infinitely better than the best despot. But we suspect, that at the time of which we speak, the violence of religious and political enmities rendered a stable and happy settlement next to impossible. The choice lay, not between Cromwell and liberty, but between Cromwell and the Stuarts. That Milton chose well, no man can doubt, who fairly compares the events of the protectorate with those of the thirty years which succeeded it, the darkest and most disgraceful in the English annals. Cromwell was evidently laying, though in an irregular

Foundations of
an admirable
system.

manner, the foundations
of an admirable system.
Never before had reli-
gious liberty and the free-

dom of discussion been enjoyed in a greater degree. Never had the national honour been better upheld abroad, or the seat of justice better filled at home. And it was rarely that any opposition which stopped short of open rebellion provoked the resentment of the liberal and magnanimous usurper. The institutions which he had established, as set down in the Instrument of Government, and the Humble Petition and Advice, were excellent. His practice, it is true, too often departed from the theory of these institutions. But, had he lived a few years longer, it is probable that his institutions would have survived him, and that his arbitrary practice would have died with him. His power had not been consecrated by ancient prejudices. It was upheld only by his great personal qualities. Little, therefore, was to be dreaded from a second protector, unless he were also a second Oliver Cromwell. The events which followed his decease are the most complete vindication of those who exerted themselves to uphold his authority. For his death dissolved the whole frame of society. The army rose against the Parliament, the different corps of the army against

each other. Sect raved against sect. Party plotted against party. The Presbyterians, in their eagerness to be revenged on the Independents, sacrificed their own liberty, and deserted all their old principles. Without casting one glance on the past, or requiring one stipulation for the future, they threw down their freedom at the feet of the most frivolous and heartless of tyrants.

Then came those days, never to be recalled without a blush, the days of servitude without loyalty, and sensuality without love, of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices, the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds, the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave. The King cringed to his rival that he might trample on his people, sank into a viceroy of France, and pocketed, with complacent infamy, her degrading insults, and her more degrading gold. The caresses of harlots, and the jests of buffoons, regulated the measures of a government which had just ability enough to deceive, and just religion enough to persecute. The principles of liberty were the scoff of every grinning courtier, and the Anathema

Maranatha of every fawn-
ing dean. In every high
place worship was paid

After the
Restoration.

to Charles and James, Belial and Moloch; and England propitiated those obscene and cruel idols with the blood of her best and bravest children. Crime succeeded to crime, and disgrace to disgrace, till the race, accursed of God and man, was a second time driven forth, to wander on the face of the earth, and to be a by-word and a shaking of the head to the nations.

Most of the remarks which we have hitherto made on the public character of Milton, apply to him only as one of a large body. We shall proceed to notice some of the peculiarities which distinguished him from his contemporaries. And, for that purpose, it is necessary to take a short survey of the parties into which the political world was at that time divided. We must premise, that our observations are intended to apply only to those who adhered, from a sincere preference, to one or to the other side. At a period of public commotion, every faction, like an Oriental army, is attended by a crowd of camp-followers, an useless and heartless rabble, who

prowl round its line of
march in the hope of pick-
ing up something under its protection,

Worthless
rabble.

but desert it in the day of battle, and

often join to exterminate it after a defeat. England, at the time of which we are treating, abounded with such fickle and selfish politicians, who transferred their support to every government as it rose; who kissed the hand of the King in 1640, and spat in his face in 1649. Who shouted with equal glee when Cromwell was inaugurated in Westminster Hall, and when he was dug up to be hanged at Tyburn. Who dined on calves' head or on broiled rumps, and cut down oak-branches, or stuck them up, as circumstances altered, without the slightest shame or repugnance. These we leave out of the account. We take our estimate of parties from those who really deserve to be called partisans.

We would speak first of the Puritans, the most remarkable body of men, perhaps, which the world has ever produced. The odious and ridiculous parts of their character lie on the surface. He that runs may read them; nor have there been wanting attentive and malicious observers to point them out. For many years after the Restoration they were the theme of unmeasured invective and

The Puritans. derision. They were exposed to the utmost licentiousness of the press and of the stage, at the time when the press and the stage were most licentious. They were not men of letters; they were, as a body, unpopular; they could not defend themselves; and the public would not take them under its protection. They were therefore abandoned, without reserve, to the tender mercies of the satirists and dramatists. The ostentatious simplicity of their dress, their sour aspect, their nasal twang, their stiff posture, their long graces, their Hebrew names, the Scriptural phrases which they introduced on every occasion, their contempt of human learning, their detestation of polite amusements, were indeed fair game for the laughers. But it is not from the laughers alone that the philosophy of history is to be learnt. And he who approaches this subject should carefully guard against the influence of that potent ridicule which has already misled so many excellent writers.

“Ecco il fonte del riso, ed ecco il rio
Che mortali perigli in se contiene:
Hor qui tener a fren nostro desio,
Ed esser cauti molto a noi conviene.”

Those who roused the people to resistance, who directed their measures through a long series of eventful years, who

formed, out of the most unpromising materials, the finest army that Europe had ever seen, who trampled down King, Church, and Aristocracy, who, in the short intervals of domestic sedition and rebellion, made the name of England terrible to every nation on the face of the earth, were no vulgar fanatics. Most of their absurdities were mere external badges, like the signs of freemasonry, or the dresses of friars. We regret that these badges were not more attractive. We regret that a body to whose courage and talents mankind has owed inestimable obligations, had not the lofty elegance which distinguished some of the adherents of Charles the First, or the easy good-breeding for which the court of Charles the Second was celebrated. But, if we must make our choice, we shall, like Bassanio in the play, turn from the specious caskets which contain only the Death's head and the Fool's head, and fix on the plain leaden chest which conceals the treasure.

The Puritans were men whose minds had derived a peculiar character from the daily contemplation of superior beings and eternal interests. Not content with acknowledging, in general terms, an overruling providence, they habitually ascribed every event to the will of the Great Being, for Whose power nothing was too vast, for Whose inspection nothing was too minute. To know Him, to serve Him, to enjoy Him, was with them the great end of existence. They rejected with contempt the ceremonious homage which other sects substituted for the pure worship of the soul. Instead of catching occasional glimpses of the Deity **Pure worship of the soul.** through an obscuring veil, they aspired to gaze full on the intolerable brightness, and to commune with Him face to face. Hence originated their contempt for terrestrial distinctions. The difference between the greatest and the meanest of mankind seemed to vanish, when compared with the boundless interval which separated the whole race from Him on Whom their own eyes were constantly fixed. They recognized no title to superiority but His favour; and, confident of that favour, they despised all the accomplishments and all the dignities of the world. If they were unacquainted with the works of philosophers and poets, they were deeply read in the oracles of God. If their names were not found in the registers of heralds, they

felt assured that they were recorded in the Book of Life. If their steps were not accompanied by a splendid train of menials, legions of ministering angels had charge over them. Their palaces were houses not made with hands; their diadems crowns of glory which should never fade away. On the rich and the eloquent, on nobles and priests, they looked down with contempt, for they esteemed themselves rich in a more precious treasure, and eloquent in a more sublime language, nobles by the right of an earlier creation, and priests by the imposition of a mightier hand. The very meanest of them was a being to whose fate a mysterious and terrible importance belonged, on whose slightest action the spirits of light and darkness looked with anxious interest, who had been destined, before heaven and earth were created, to enjoy a felicity which should continue when heaven and earth should have passed away. Events which short-sighted politicians ascribed to earthly causes, had been ordained on his account. For his sake empires had risen, and flourished, and decayed. For his sake the Almighty had proclaimed His will by the pen of the Evangelist, and the harp of the prophet. He had been wrested by no common deliverer from the grasp of no common foe. He had been ransomed by the sweat of no vulgar agony, by the blood of no earthly sacrifice. It was for him that the sun had been darkened, that the rocks had been rent, that the dead had risen, that all nature had shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God.

Thus the Puritan was made up of two different men, the one all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passion; the other proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself in the dust before his Maker: but he set his foot on the neck of his king. In his devotional retirement he prayed with convulsions, and groans, and tears. He was half-maddened by glorious or terrible illusions. He heard the lyres of angels or the tempting whispers of fiends. He caught a gleam of the Beatific vision, or woke screaming from dreams of everlasting fire. Like Vane, he thought himself intrusted with the sceptre of the millennial year. Like Fleetwood, he cried in the bitterness of his soul that God had hid His face from him. But when he took his seat in the council, or girt on his sword for war, these tempestuous workings of the soul had left no perceptible trace behind them.

People who saw nothing of the godly but their uncouth visages, and heard nothing from them but their groans and their whining hymns, might laugh at them. But those had little reason to laugh who encountered them in the hall of debate or in the field of battle. These fanatics brought to civil and military affairs a coolness of judgment and an immutability of purpose which some writers have thought inconsistent with their religious zeal, but which were in fact the necessary effects of it. The intensity of their feelings on one subject made them tranquil on every other. One overpowering sentiment had subjected to itself pity and hatred, ambition and fear. Death had lost its terrors and pleasure its charms. They had their smiles and their tears, their raptures and their sorrows, but not for the things of this world. Enthusiasm had made them Stoics, had cleared their minds from every vulgar passion and prejudice, and raised them above the influence of danger and of corruption. It sometimes might lead them to pursue unwise ends, but never to choose unwise means. They went through the world, like Sir Artegal's iron man Talus with his flail, crushing and trampling down oppressors, mingling with human beings, but having neither part nor lot in human infirmities, insensible to fatigue, to pleasure, and to pain, not to be pierced by any weapon, not to be withstood by any barrier.

Stoical
enthusiasm.

Such we believe to have been the character of the Puritans. We perceive the absurdity of their manners. We dislike the sullen gloom of their domestic habits. We acknowledge that the tone of their minds was often injured by straining after things too high for mortal reach: and we know that, in spite of their hatred of Popery, they too often fell into the worst vices of that bad system, intolerance and extravagant austerity, that they had their anchorites and their crusades, their Dunstons and their De Montforts, their Dominics and their Escobars. Yet, when all circumstances are taken into consideration, we do not hesitate to pronounce them a brave, a wise, an honest, and a useful body.

The Puritans espoused the cause of civil liberty mainly because it was the cause of religion. There was another party, by no means numerous, but distinguished by learning and ability, which co-operated with them on very different

principles. We speak of those whom Cromwell was accustomed to call the Heathens, men who were in the phraseology of that time, doubting Thomases or careless Gallios with regard to religious subjects, but passionate worshippers of freedom. Heated by the study of ancient literature, they set up their country as their idol, and proposed to themselves the heroes of Plutarch as their examples. They seem to have borne some resemblance to the Brissotines of the French Revolution. But it is not very easy to draw the line of distinction between them and their devout associates, whose tone and manner they sometimes found it convenient to affect, and sometimes, it is probable, imperceptibly adopted.

We now come to the Royalists. We shall attempt to speak of them, as we have spoken of their antagonists, with perfect candour. We shall not charge upon a whole party the profligacy and baseness of the horse-boys, gamblers, and bravoës, whom the hope of license and plunder attracted from all the dens of Whitefriars to the standard of Charles, and who disgraced their associates by excesses which, under the stricter discipline of the Parliamentary armies, were never tolerated. We will select a more favourable specimen. Thinking as we do that the cause of the King was the cause of bigotry and tyranny, we yet cannot refrain from looking with complacency on the character of the honest old Cavaliers. We feel a national pride in comparing them with the instruments which the despots of other countries are compelled to employ, with the mutes who throng their antechambers, and the Janissaries who mount guard at their

Royalists. Our royalist countrymen were not heartless, dangling courtiers, bowing at every step, and simpering at every word. They were not mere machines for destruction dressed up in uniforms, caned into skill, intoxicated into valour, defending without love, destroying without hatred. There was a freedom in their subserviency, a nobleness in their very degradation. The sentiment of individual independence was strong within them. They were indeed misled, but by no base or selfish motive. Compassion and romantic honour, the prejudices of childhood, and the venerable names of history, threw over them a spell potent as that of Duessa; and, like the Red-Cross Knight, they thought that

they were doing battle for an injured beauty, while they defended a false and loathsome sorceress. In truth they scarcely entered at all into the merits of the political question. It was not for a treacherous king or an intolerant church that they fought, but for the old banner which had waved in so many battles over the heads of their fathers, and for the altars at which they had received the hands of their brides. Though nothing could be more erroneous than their political opinions, they possessed, in a far greater degree than their adversaries, those qualities which are the grace of private life. With many of the vices of the Round Table, they had also many of its virtues, courtesy, generosity, veracity, tenderness, and respect for women. They had far more both of profound and of polite learning than the Puritans. Their manners were more engaging, their tempers more amiable, their tastes more elegant, and their households more cheerful.

Milton did not strictly belong to any of the classes which we have described. He was not a Puritan. He was not a free-thinker. He was not a Cavalier. In his character the noblest qualities of every party were combined in harmonious union. From the Parliament and from the Court, from the conventicle and from the Gothic cloister, from the gloomy and sepulchral circles of the Roundheads, and from the Christmas revel of the hospitable Cavalier, his nature selected and drew to itself whatever was great and good, while it rejected all the base and pernicious ingredients by which those finer elements were defiled. Like the Puritans, he lived

“As ever in his great task-master’s eye.”

Like them, he kept his mind continually fixed on an Almighty Judge and an eternal reward. And hence he acquired their contempt of external circumstances, their fortitude, their tranquillity, their inflexible resolution. But not the coolest sceptic or the most profane scoffer was more perfectly free from the contagion of their frantic delusions, their savage manners, their ludicrous jargon, their scorn of science, and their aversion to pleasure. Hating tyranny with a perfect hatred, he had nevertheless all the estimable and ornamental qualities which were almost entirely monopolized by the party of the tyrant. There was none who had

Character of
Milton.

a stronger sense of the value of literature, a finer relish for every elegant amusement, or a more chivalrous delicacy of honour and love. Though his opinions were democratic, his tastes and his associations were such as harmonize best with monarchy and aristocracy. He was under the influence of all the feelings by which the gallant Cavaliers were misled. But of those feelings he was the master and not the slave. Like the hero of Homer, he enjoyed all the pleasures of fascination; but he was not fascinated. He listened to the song of the Syrens; yet he glided by without being seduced to their fatal shore. He tasted the cup of Circe; but he bore about him a sure antidote against the effects of its bewitching sweetness. The illusions which captivated his imagination never impaired his reasoning powers. The statesman was proof against the splendour, the solemnity, and the romance which enchanted the poet. Any person who will contrast the sentiments expressed in his treatises on Prelacy with the exquisite lines on ecclesiastical architecture and music in the *Penseroso*, which was published about the same time, will understand our meaning. This is an inconsistency which, more than anything else, raises his character in our estimation, because it shows how many private tastes and feelings he sacrificed, in order to do what he considered his duty to mankind. It is the very struggle of the noble Othello. His heart relents; but his hand is firm. He does nought in hate, but all in honour. He kisses the beautiful deceiver before he destroys her.

That from which the public character of Milton derives its great and peculiar splendour still remains to be mentioned. If he exerted himself to overthrow a forsworn king and a persecuting hierarchy, he exerted himself in conjunction with others. But the glory of the battle which he fought for, that species of freedom which is the most valuable, and which was then at least understood, the freedom of the human mind, is all his own. Thousands and tens of thousands among his contemporaries raised their voices against Ship-money and the Star-chamber. But there were few indeed who discerned the more fearful evils of moral and intellectual slavery, and the benefits which would re-

Liberty of the press. These were the objects which

Milton justly conceived to be the most important. He was desirous that the people should think for themselves as well as tax themselves, and should be emancipated from the dominion of prejudice as well as from that of Charles. He knew that those who, with the best intentions, overlooked these schemes of reform, and contented themselves with pulling down the King, and imprisoning the malignants, acted like the heedless brothers in his own poem, who, in their eagerness to disperse the train of the sorcerer, neglected the means of liberating the captive. They thought only of conquering when they should have thought of disenchanting.

“Oh, ye mistook! Ye should have snatched his wand!

* * * Without the rod reversed,
And backward mutters of dissevering power,
We cannot free the lady that sits here
Bound in strong fetters fixed and motionless.”

To reverse the rod, to spell the charm backward, to break the ties which bound the stupefied people to the seat of enchantment, was the noble aim of Milton. To this all his public conduct was directed. For this he joined the Presbyterians; for this he forsook them. He fought their perilous battle; but he turned away with disdain from their insolent triumph. He saw that they, like those whom they had vanquished, were hostile to the liberty of thought. He therefore joined the Independents, and called upon Cromwell to break the secular chain, and to save free conscience from the paw of the Presbyterian wolf. With a view to the same great object, he attacked the licensing system, in that sublime treatise which every statesman should wear as a sign upon his hand and as frontlets between his eyes. His attacks were, in general, directed less against particular abuses than against those deeply-seated errors on which almost all abuses are founded, the servile worship of eminent men and the irrational dread of innovation.

That he might shake the foundations of these debasing sentiments more effectually, he always selected for himself the boldest literary services. He never came up in the rear, when the outworks had been carried and the breach entered. He pressed into the forlorn hope. At the beginning of the changes, he wrote with incomparable energy and eloquence against the bishops. But, when his

opinion seemed likely to prevail, he passed on to other subjects, and abandoned prelacy to the crowd of writers who now hastened to insult a falling party. There is no more hazardous enterprise than that of bearing the torch of truth into those dark and infected recesses in which no light has ever shone. But it was the choice and the pleasure of Milton to penetrate the noisome vapours, and to brave the terrible explosion. Those who

Hardihood of opinion. most disapprove of his opinions must respect the hardihood with which he

maintained them. He, in general, left to others the credit of expounding and defending the popular parts of his religious and political creed. He took his own stand upon those which the great body of his countrymen reprobated as criminal, or derided as paradoxical. He stood up for divorce and regicide. He ridiculed the Eikon. He attacked the prevailing systems of education. His radiant and beneficent career resembled that of the god of light and fertility.

"Nitor in adversum; nec me, qui cætera, vincit
Impetus, et rapido contrarius evehor orbi."

It is to be regretted that the prose writings of Milton should, in our time, be so little read. As compositions, they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language. They abound with passages compared with which the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field of cloth of gold. The style is stiff with gorgeous embroidery. Not even in the earlier books of the *Paradise Lost* has he ever risen higher than in those parts of his controversial works in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent in bursts of devotional and lyric rapture. It is, to borrow his own majestic language, "a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies."*

We had intended to look more closely at these performances, to analyze the peculiarities of the diction, to dwell at some length on the sublime wisdom of the *Areopagitica* and the nervous rhetoric of the *Iconoclast*, and to point out some of those magnificent passages which occur in the *Treatise of Reformation*, and the animadversions on the *Remonstrant*.

* The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelacy, book ii.

But the length to which our remarks have already extended renders this impossible.

We must conclude. And yet we can scarcely tear ourselves away from the subject. The days immediately following the publication of this relic of Milton appear to be peculiarly set apart, and consecrated to his memory. And we shall scarcely be censured if, on this his festival, we be found lingering near his shrine, how worthless soever may be the offering which we bring to it. While this book lies on our table, we seem to be contemporaries of the great poet. We are transported a hundred and fifty years back. We can almost fancy that we are visiting him in his small lodging; that we see him sitting at the old organ beneath the faded green hangings; that we can catch the quick twinkle

A vision of Milton.

of his eyes, rolling in vain to find the day; that we are reading in the lines of his noble countenance the proud and mournful history of his glory and his affliction. We image to ourselves the breathless silence in which we should listen to his slightest word, the passionate veneration with which we should kneel to kiss his hand and weep upon it, the earnestness with which we should endeavour to console him, if indeed such a spirit could need consolation, for the neglect of an age unworthy of his talents and his virtues, the eagerness with which we should contest with his daughters, or with his Quaker friend Elwood, the privilege of reading Homer to him, or of taking down the immortal accents which flowed from his lips.

These are perhaps foolish feelings. Yet we cannot be ashamed of them; nor shall we be sorry if what we have written shall in any degree excite them in other minds. We are not much in the habit of idolizing either the living or the dead. And we think that there is no more certain indication of a weak and ill-regulated intellect than that propensity which, for want of a better name, we will venture to christen *Boswellism*. But *there are* a few characters which have stood the closest scrutiny and the severest tests, which have been tried in the furnace and have proved pure, which have been weighed in the balance and have not been found wanting, which have been declared sterling by the general consent of mankind, and which are visibly stamped with the image and

superscription of the Most High. These great men we trust that we know how to prize; and of these was Milton. The sight of his books, the sound of his name, are refreshing to us. His thoughts resemble those celestial fruits and flowers which the Virgin Martyr of Massinger sent down from the gardens of Paradise to the earth, there distinguished from the productions of other soils, not only by superior bloom and sweetness, but by miraculous efficacy to invigorate and to heal. They are powerful, not only to delight, but to elevate and purify. Nor do we envy the man who can study

either the life or the writings of the great poet and patriot, without aspiring to emulate, not indeed the sublime works with which his genius has enriched our literature, but the zeal with which he laboured for the public good, the fortitude with which he endured every private calamity, the lofty disdain with which he looked down on temptations and dangers, the deadly hatred which he bore to bigots and tyrants, and the faith which he so sternly kept with his country and with his fame.

Invigorating
quality of Mil-
ton's writings.

MACHIAVELLI.

(EDINBURGH REVIEW, MARCH, 1827.)

Œuvres complètes de MACHIAVEL, traduites par J. V. PÉRIER.

Paris: 1825.

THOSE who have attended to the practice of our literary tribunal are well aware that, by means of certain legal fictions similar to those of Westminster Hall, we are frequently enabled to take cognizance of cases lying beyond the sphere of our original jurisdiction. We need hardly say, therefore, that in the present instance M. Périer is merely a Richard Roe, and that he will not be mentioned in any subsequent stage of the proceedings, and that his name is used for the sole purpose of bringing Machiavelli into court.

We doubt whether any name in literary history be so generally odious as that of the man whose character and writings

Name odious
in history.

we now propose to consider. The terms in which he is commonly described

would seem to impart that he was the Tempter, the Evil Principle, the discoverer of ambition and revenge; the original inventor of perjury, and that, before the publication of his fatal Prince, there had never been a hypocrite, a tyrant, or a traitor, a simulated virtue, or a convenient crime. One writer gravely assures us that Maurice of Saxony learned all his fraudulent policy from that execrable volume. Another remarks that since it was translated into Turkish the Sultans have been more addicted than formerly to the custom of strangling their brothers. Our own foolish Lord Lyttelton charges the poor Florentine with the manifold treasons of the house of Guise, and with the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Several authors have hinted that the Gunpowder Plot is to be primarily attributed to his doctrines, and seem to think that his effigy ought to be substituted for that of Guy Faux, in those processions by which the ingenuous youth of England

annually commemorate the preservation of the Three Estates. The Church of Rome has pronounced his works accursed things. Nor have our own countrymen been backward in testifying their opinion of his merits. Out of his surname they have coined an epithet for a knave, and out of his Christian name a synonyme for the Devil.*

It is indeed scarcely possible for any person, not well acquainted with the history and literature of Italy, to read without horror and amazement the celebrated treatise which has brought so much obloquy on the name of Machiavelli. The celebrated treatise.

Such a display of wickedness, naked, yet not ashamed, such cool, judicious, scientific atrocity, seemed rather to belong to a fiend than to the most depraved of men. Principles which the most hardened ruffian would scarcely hint to his most trusted accomplice, or avow, without the disguise of some palliating sophism, even to his own mind, are professed without the slightest circumlocution, and assumed as the fundamental axioms of all political science.

It is not strange that ordinary readers should regard the author of such a book as the most depraved and shameless of human beings. Wise men, however, have always been inclined to look with great suspicion on the angels and demons of the multitude; and in the present instance, several circumstances have led even superficial observers to question the justice of the vulgar decision. It is notorious that Machiavelli was, through

* "Nick Machiavel had ne'er a trick,
Tho' he gave his name to our old Nick."
Hudibras, Part III., Canto I

But, we believe, there is a schism on this subject among the antiquaries.

life, a zealous republican. In the same year in which he composed his manual of Kingcraft, he suffered imprisonment and torture in the cause of public liberty. It seems inconceivable that the martyr of freedom should have designedly acted as the apostle of tyranny. Several eminent writers have, therefore, endeavoured to detect in this unfortunate performance some concealed meaning, more consistent with the character and conduct of the author than that which appears at the first glance.

One hypothesis is that Machiavelli intended to practise on the young Lorenzo de Medici a fraud similar to that which Sunderland is said to have employed against our James the Second, that he urged his pupil to violent and perfidious measures, as the surest means of accelerating the moment of deliverance and revenge. Another supposition, which Lord

Different hypotheses. Bacon seems to countenance,

is that the treatise was merely a piece of grave irony, intended to warn nations against the arts of ambitious men. It would be easy to show that neither of these solutions is consistent with many passages in *The Prince* itself. But the most decisive refutation is that which is furnished by the other works of Machiavelli. In all the writings which he gave to the public, and in all those which the research of editors has, in the course of three centuries, discovered, in his *Comedies* designed for the entertainment of the multitude, in his *Comments on Livy*, intended for the perusal of the most enthusiastic patriots of Florence, in his *History*, inscribed to one of the most amiable and estimable of the Popes, in his public despatches, in his private memoranda, the same obliquity of moral principle for which *The Prince* is so severely censured is more or less discernible. We doubt whether it would be possible to find, in all the many volumes of his compositions, a single expression indicating that dissimulation and treachery had ever struck him as discreditable.

After this, it may seem ridiculous to say that we are acquainted with few writings which exhibit so much elevation of sentiment, so pure and warm a zeal for the public good, or so just a view of the duties and rights of citizens, as those of Machiavelli. Yet so it is. And even from *The Prince* itself we could select many passages in support of this remark.

To a reader of our age and country, this inconsistency is, at first, perfectly bewildering. The whole man seems to be an enigma, a grotesque assemblage of incongruous qualities, selfishness and generosity, cruelty and benevolence, craft and simplicity, abject villany and romantic heroism. One sentence is such as a veteran diplomatist would scarcely write in cipher for the direction of his most confidential spy; the next seems to be extracted from a theme composed by an ardent schoolboy on the death of Leonidas. An act of dexterous perfidy, and an act of patriotic self-devotion, call forth the same kind and the same degree of respectful admiration. The moral sensibility of the writer seems at once to be morbidly obtuse and morbidly acute. Two characters altogether dissimilar are united in him. They are not merely joined, but interwoven. They are the warp and the woof of his mind; and their combination, like that of the variegated threads in shot silk, gives to the whole texture a glancing and ever-changing appearance. The explanation might have been easy, if he had been a very weak or a very affected man. But he was evidently neither the one nor the other. His works prove, beyond all contradiction, that his understanding was strong, his taste pure, and his sense of the ridiculous exquisitely keen.

This is strange, and yet the strangest is behind. There is no reason whatever to think that those amongst whom he lived saw anything shocking or incongruous in his writings. Abundant proofs remain of the high estimation in which both his works and his person were held by the most respectable among his contemporaries. Clement the Seventh patronized the publication of those very books which the Council of Trent, in the following generation, pronounced unfit for the perusal of Christians. Some members of the democratical party censured the Secretary for dedicating *The Prince* to a patron who bore the unpopular name of Medici. But to those immoral doctrines which have since called forth such severe reprehensions no exception appears to have been taken. The cry against them was first raised beyond the Alps, and seems to have been heard with amazement in Italy. The earliest assailant, as far as we are aware, was a countryman of our own, Cardinal Pole,

Remarkable inconsistency.

Esteemed among contemporaries.

The author of the *Anti-Machiavelli* was a French Protestant.

It is, therefore, in the state of moral feeling among the Italians of those times that we must seek for the real explanation of what seems most mysterious in the life and writings of this remarkable man. As this is a subject which suggests many interesting considerations, both political and metaphysical, we shall make no apology for discussing it at some length.

During the gloomy and disastrous centuries which followed the downfall of the Roman Empire, Italy had preserved, in a far greater degree than any other part of Western Europe, the traces of ancient civilization. The night which descended upon her was the night of an Arctic summer. The dawn began to reappear before the last reflection of the preceding sunset had faded from the horizon. It was in the time

State of Italy. of the French Merovingians, and of the Saxon Heptarchy, that ignorance and ferocity seemed to have done their worst. Yet even then the Neapolitan provinces, recognizing the authority of the Eastern Empire, preserved something of Eastern knowledge and refinement. Rome, protected by the sacred character of its Pontiffs, enjoyed at least comparative security and repose. Even in those regions where the sanguinary Lombards had fixed their monarchy, there was incomparably more of wealth, of information, of physical comfort, and of social order, than could be found in Gaul, Britain, or Germany.

That which most distinguished Italy from the neighbouring countries was the importance which the population of the towns, at a very early period, began to acquire. Some cities, founded in wild and remote situations, by fugitives who

Early importance of cities. had escaped from the rage of the barbarians, preserved their freedom by

their obscurity, till they became able to preserve it by their power. Others seem to have retained, under all the changing dynasties of invaders, under Odoacer and Theodoric, Narses and Albion, the municipal institutions which had been conferred on them by the liberal policy of the Great Republic. In provinces which the central government was too feeble either to protect or to oppress, these institutions first required stability and vigour. The citizens, defended by their walls, and governed by their own

magistrates and their own by-laws, enjoyed a considerable share of republican independence. Thus a strong democratic spirit was called into action. The Carlovingian sovereigns were too imbecile to subdue it. The generous policy of Otho encouraged it. It might perhaps have been suppressed by a close coalition between the Church and the Empire. It was fostered and invigorated by their disputes. In the twelfth century it attained its full vigour, and, after a long and doubtful conflict, triumphed over the abilities and courage of the Suabian Princes.

The assistance of the Ecclesiastical power had greatly contributed to the success of the Guelfs. That success would, however, have been a doubtful good, if its only effect had been to substitute a moral for a political servitude, and to exalt the Popes at the expense of the Cæsars. Happily the public mind of Italy had long contained the seeds of free opinions, which were now rapidly developed by the genial influence of free institutions. The people of that country had observed the whole machinery of the Church—its saints and its miracles, its lofty pretensions and its splendid ceremonial, its worthless blessings and its harmless curses—too long and too closely to be duped. They stood behind the scenes on which others were gazing with childish awe and interest. They witnessed the arrangement of the pulleys, and the manufacture of the thunders. They saw the natural faces, and heard the natural voices of the actors. Distant nations looked on the Pope as the viceroy of the Almighty, the oracle of the All-wise, the umpire from whose decisions, in the disputes either of theologians or of kings, no Christian ought to appeal. The Italians were acquainted with all the **Italians and the Pope.** follies of his youth, and with all the dishonest arts by which he had attained power. They knew how often he had employed the keys of the Church to release himself from the most sacred engagements, and its wealth to pamper his mistresses and nephews. The doctrines and rites of the established religion they treated with decent reverence. But though they still called themselves Catholics, they had ceased to be Papists. Those spiritual arms which carried terror into the palaces and camps of the proudest sovereigns excited only their contempt. When Alexander com-

manded our Henry the Second to submit to the lash before the tomb of a rebellious subject, he was himself an exile. The Romans, apprehending that he entertained designs against their liberties, had driven him from their city; and, though he solemnly promised to confine himself for the future to his spiritual functions, they still refused to readmit him.

In every other part of Europe a large and powerful privileged class trampled on the people and defied the government. But, in the most flourishing parts of Italy, the feudal nobles were reduced to comparative insignificance. In some districts they took shelter under the protection of the powerful commonwealths which they were unable to oppose, and gradually sank into the mass of burghers. In other places they possessed great influence; but it was an influence widely different from that which was exercised by the aristocracy of any Transalpine kingdoms. They were not petty princes, but eminent citizens.

Power of citizens. Instead of strengthening their fastnesses among the mountains, they embellished their palaces in the marketplace. The state of society in the Neapolitan dominions, and in some parts of the Ecclesiastical State, more nearly resembled that which existed in the great monarchies of Europe. But the governments of Lombardy and Tuscany, through all their revolutions, preserved a different character. A people, when assembled in a town, is far more formidable to its rulers than when dispersed over a wide extent of country. The most arbitrary of the Cæsars found it necessary to feed and divert the inhabitants of their unwieldy capital at the expense of the provinces. The citizens of Madrid have more than once besieged their sovereign in his own palace, and extorted from him the most humiliating concessions. The Sultans have often been compelled to propitiate the furious rabble of Constantinople with the head of an unpopular Vizier. From the same cause there was a certain tinge of democracy in the monarchies and aristocracies of Northern Italy.

Thus liberty, partially indeed and transiently, revisited Italy; and with liberty came commerce and empire, science and taste, all the comforts and all the ornaments of life. The Crusades, from which the inhabitants of other countries gained nothing but relics and

wounds, brought to the rising commonwealths of the Adriatic and Tyrrhene seas a large increase of wealth, dominion, and knowledge. Their moral and their geographical position enabled them to profit alike by the barbarism of the West and by the civilization of the East. Their ships covered every sea. Their factories rose on every shore. Their money-changers set their tables in every city. Manufactures flourished. Banks were established. The operations of the commercial machine were facilitated by many useful and beautiful inventions. We doubt whether any country of Europe, our own excepted, have at the present time reached so high a point of wealth and civilization as some parts of Italy had attained four hundred years ago. Historians rarely descend to those details from which alone the real state of a community can be collected. Hence posterity is too often deceived by the vague hyperboles of poets and rhetoricians, who mistake the splendour of a court for the happiness of a people. Fortunately, John Villani has given us an ample and precise account of the state of Florence in the early part of the fourteenth century. The Wealth of Italy. revenue of the Republic amounted to three hundred thousand florins; a sum which, allowing for the depreciation of the precious metals, was at least equivalent to six hundred thousand pounds sterling; a larger sum than England and Ireland, two centuries ago, yielded annually to Elizabeth; a larger sum than, according to any computation which we have seen, the Grand Duke of Tuscany now derives from a territory of much greater extent. The manufacture of wool alone employed two hundred factories and thirty thousand workmen. The cloth annually produced sold, at an average, for twelve hundred thousand florins; a sum fully equal, in exchangeable value, to two millions and a half of our money. Four hundred thousand florins were annually coined. Eighty banks conducted the commercial operations, not of Florence only, but of all Europe. The transactions of these establishments were sometimes of a magnitude which may surprise even the contemporaries of the Barings and the Rothschilds. Two houses advanced to Edward the Third of England upwards of three hundred thousand marks, at a time when the mark contained more silver than fifty shillings of the present

day, and when the value of silver was more than quadruple of what it now is. The city and its environs contained a hundred and seventy thousand inhabitants. In the various schools about ten thousand children were taught to read; twelve hundred studied arithmetic; six hundred received a learned education.

The progress of elegant literature and of the fine arts was proportioned to that of the public prosperity. Under the despotic successors of Augustus, all the fields of the intellect had been turned into arid waters, still marked out by formal boundaries, still retaining the traces of old cultivation, but yielding neither flowers nor fruit. The deluge of barbarism came. It swept away all the landmarks. It obliterated all the signs of former tillage. But it fertilized while it devastated. When it receded, the wilderness was as the garden of God, rejoicing on every side, laughing, clapping its hands, pouring forth, in spontaneous abundance, everything brilliant, or fragrant, or nourishing. A

Progress of literature.

new language, characterized by simple sweetness and simple energy, had attained perfection. No tongue ever furnished more gorgeous and vivid tints to poetry; nor was it long before a poet appeared, who knew how to employ them. Early in the fourteenth century came forth the Divine Comedy, beyond comparison the greatest work of imagination which had appeared since the poems of Homer. The following generation produced indeed no second Dante: but it was eminently distinguished by general intellectual activity. The study of the Latin writers had ever been wholly neglected in Italy. But Petrarch introduced a more profound, liberal, and elegant scholarship, and communicated to his countrymen that enthusiasm for the literature, the history, and the antiquities of Rome, which divided his own heart with a frigid mistress and a more frigid Muse. Boccaccio turned their attention to the more sublime and graceful models of Greece.

From this time, the admiration of learning and genius became almost an idolatry among the people of Italy. Kings and republics, cardinals and doges, vied with each other in honouring and flattering Petrarch. Embassies from rival states solicited the honour of his instructions. His coronation agitated the Court of Naples and the people of

Rome as much as the most important political transaction could have done. To collect books and antiques, to found professorships, to patronize men of learning became almost universal fashions among the great. The spirit of literary research allied itself to that of commercial enterprise. Every place to which the merchant princes of Florence extended their gigantic traffic, from the bazaars of the Tigris to the monasteries of the Clyde, was ransacked for medals and manuscripts. Architecture, painting, and sculpture, were munificently encouraged. Indeed it would be difficult to name an Italian of eminence, during the period of which we speak, who, whatever may have been his general character, did not at least affect a love of letters and of the arts.

Knowledge and public prosperity continued to advance together. Both attained their meridian in the age of Lorenzo the Magnificent. We cannot refrain from quoting the splendid passage, in which the Tuscan Thucydides describes the state of Italy at that period. "Ridotta tutta in somma pace e tranquillità, coltivata non meno ne' luoghi più montuosi e più sterili che nelle pianure e regioni più fertili, nè sottoposta ad altro imperio che de' suoi medesimi, non solo era abbondantissima d'abitatori e di ricchezze; ma illustrata sommamente dalla magnificenza di molti principi, dallo splendore di molte nobilissime e bellissime città, dalla sedia e maestà della religione, fioriva d'uomini prestantissimi nell'amministrazione delle cose pubbliche, e d'ingegni molto nobili in tutte le scienze, ed in qualunque arte preclara ed industriosa."* When we peruse this just and splendid description, we can scarcely persuade ourselves that we are reading of times in which the annals of England and France present us only with a frightful spectacle of poverty, barbarity, and ignorance. From the oppressions of illiterate masters, and the sufferings of a brutalized peasantry, it is delightful to turn to the opulent and enlightened States of Italy, to the vast and magnificent cities, the ports, the arsenals, the villas, the museums, the libraries, the marts filled with every article of comfort or luxury, the factories swarming with artisans, the Apennines covered with rich cultivation up to their very summits, the

Fine Arts.

Times of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

* Guicciardini, lib. i.