A HAPPY HALF-CENTURY

AND OTHER ESSAYS

AGNES REPPLIER

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AGNES REPPLIER, LITT. D.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
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TO
J. WILLIAM WHITE

PREFACE

THE half-century, whose more familiar aspects this little book is designed to illustrate, has spread its boundary lines. Nothing is so hard to deal with as a period. Nothing is so unmanageable as a date. People will be born a few years too early; they will live a few years too long. Events will happen out of time. The closely linked decades refuse to be separated, and my half-century, that I thought so compact, widened imperceptibly while I wrote.

I have filled my canvas with trivial things, with intimate details, with what now seem the insignificant aspects of life. But the insignificant aspects of life concern us mightily while we live; and it is by their help that we understand the insignificant people who are sometimes reckoned of importance. A hundred years ago many men and women were reckoned of importance, at whose claims their successors to-day smile scornfully. Yet they and their work were woven into the tissue of things, into the warp and woof of social conditions, into the literary history of England. An hour is not too precious to waste upon them, however feeble their pretensions. Perhaps some idle reader in the future will do as much by us.

A. R.

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"A Happy Half-Century," "The Perils of Immortality," and "The Correspondent" appeared first in *Harper's Magazine*, "Our Accomplished Great-Grandmother" in *Harper's Bazar*, and "On the Slopes of Parnassus" in the *Atlantic Monthly*; they are here reprinted by permission of the publishers of those magazines.

A HAPPY HALF-CENTURY

This damn’d unmasculine canting age!

CHARLES LAMB.

THERE are few of us who do not occasionally wish we had been born in other days, in days for which we have some secret affinity, and which shine for us with a mellow light in the deceitful pages of history. Mr. Austin Dobson, for example, must have sighed more than once to see Queen Anne on Queen Victoria’s throne; and the Rt. Hon. Cecil Rhodes must have realized that the reign of Elizabeth was the reign for him. There is a great deal lost in being born out of date. What freak of fortune thrust Galileo into the world three centuries too soon, and held back Richard Burton’s restless soul until he was three centuries too late?

For myself, I confess that the last twenty-five years of the eighteenth century and the first twenty-five years of the nineteenth make up my chosen period, and that my motive for so choosing is contemptible. It was not a time distinguished—in England at least—for wit or wisdom, for public virtues or for private charm; but it *was* a time when literary reputations were so cheaply gained that nobody needed to despair of one. A taste for platitudes, a tinge of Pharisaism, an appreciation of the commonplace,—and the thing was done. It was in the latter half of this blissful period that we find that enthusiastic chronicler, Mrs. Cowley, writing in “Public Characters” of “the proud preëminence which, in all the varieties of excellence produced by the pen, the pencil, or the lyre, the ladies of Great Britain have attained over contemporaries in every other country in Europe.”

When we search for proofs of this proud preëminence, what do we find? Roughly speaking, the period begins with Miss Burney, and closes with Miss Terrier and Miss Jane Porter. It includes—besides Miss Burney—one star of the first magnitude, Miss Austen (whose light never dazzled Mrs. Cowley’s eyes), and one mild but steadfast planet, Miss Edgeworth. The rest of Great Britain’s literary ladies were enjoying a degree of fame and fortune so utterly disproportionate to their merits that their toiling successors to-day may be pardoned for wishing themselves part of that happy sisterhood. Think of being able to find a market for an interminable essay entitled “Against Inconsistency in

our Expectations”! There lingers in all our hearts a desire to utter moral platitudes, to dwell lingeringly and lovingly upon the obvious; but alas! we are not Mrs. Barbaulds, and this is not the year 1780. Foolish and inconsequent we are permitted to be, but tedious, never! And think of hearing one’s own brother burst into song, that he might fondly eulogize our

Sacred gifts whose meed is deathless praise,
Whose potent charm the enraptured soul can raise.

There are few things more difficult to conceive than an enthusiastic brother tunefully entreating his sister to go on enrapturing the world with her pen. Oh, thrice-favoured Anna Letitia Barbauld, who could warm even the calm fraternal heart into a glow of sensibility.

The publication of “Evelina” was the first notable event in our happy half-century. Its freshness and vivacity charmed all London; and Miss Burney, like Sheridan, had her applause “dashed in her face, sounded in her ears,” for the rest of a long and meritorious life. Her second novel, “Cecilia,” was received with such universal transport, that in a very moral epilogue of a rather immoral play we find it seriously commended to the public as an antidote to vice:—

Let sweet Cecilia gain your just applause,
Whose every passion yields to nature’s laws.

Miss Burney, blushing in the royal box, had the satisfaction of hearing this stately advertisement of her wares. Virtue was not left to be its own reward in those fruitful and generous years.

Indeed, the most comfortable characteristic of the period, and the one which incites our deepest envy, is the universal willingness to accept a good purpose as a substitute for good work. Even Madame d’Arblay, shrewd, caustic, and quick-witted, forbears from unkind criticism of the well-intentioned. She has nothing but praise for Mrs. Barbauld’s poems, because of “the piety and worth they exhibit”; and she rises to absolute enthusiasm over the anti-slavery epistle, declaring that its energy “springs from the real spirit of virtue.” Yet to us the picture of the depraved and luxurious West Indian ladies—about whom it is safe to say good Mrs. Barbauld knew very little—seems one of the most unconsciously humorous things in English verse.

Lo! where reclined, pale Beauty courts the breeze,
Diffused on sofas of voluptuous ease.

With languid tones imperious mandates urge,

With arm recumbent wield the household scourge.

There are moments when Mrs. Barbauld soars to the inimitable, when she reaches the highest and happiest effect that absurdity is able to produce.

With arm recumbent wield the household scourge

is one of these inspirations; and another is this pregnant sentence, which occurs in a chapter of advice to young girls: “An ass is much better adapted than a horse to show off a lady.”

To point to Hannah More as a brilliant and bewildering example of sustained success is to give the most convincing proof that it was a good thing to be born in the year 1745. Miss More’s reputation was already established at the dawning of my cherished half-century, and, for the whole fifty years, her life was a series of social, literary, and religious triumphs. In her youth, she was mistaken for a wit. In her old age, she was revered as a saint. In her youth, Garrick called her “Nine,”—gracefully intimating that she embodied the attributes of all the Muses. In her old age, an acquaintance wrote to her: “You who are secure of the approbation of angels may well hold human applause to be of small consequence.” In her youth, she wrote a play that everybody went to see. In her old age, she wrote tracts that everybody bought and distributed. Prelates composed Latin verses in her honour; and when her “Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World” was published anonymously, the Bishop of London exclaimed in a kind of pious transport, “Aut Morus, aut Angelus!” Her tragedy, “Percy,” melted the heart of London. Men “shed tears in abundance,” and women were “choked with emotion” over the “affecting circumstances of the Piece.” Sir William Pepys confessed that “Percy” “broke his heart”; and that he thought it “a kind of profanation” to wipe his eyes, and go from the theatre to Lady Harcourt’s assembly. Four thousand copies of the play were sold in a fortnight; and the Duke of Northumberland sent a special messenger to Miss More to thank her for the honour she had done his historic name.

As a novelist, Hannah was equally successful. Twenty thousand copies of “Cœlebs in Search of a Wife” were sold in England, and thirty thousand in America. “The Americans are a very approving people,” acknowledged the gratified authoress. In Iceland “Cœlebs” was read—so Miss More says—“with great apparent profit”; while certain very popular tracts, like “Charles the Footman” and “The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain,” made their edifying way to Moscow, and were found by the missionary Gericke in the library of the Rajah of Tanjore. “All this and Heaven, too!” as a reward for being born in 1745. The

injustice of the thing stings us to the soul. Yet it was the unhesitating assumption of Heaven's co-partnership which gave to Hannah More the best part of her earthly prestige, and made her verdicts a little like Protestant Bulls. When she objected to "Marmion" and "The Lady of the Lake" for their lack of "practical precept," these sinless poems were withdrawn from Evangelical book-shelves. Her biographer, Mr. Thompson, thought it necessary to apologize for her correspondence with that agreeable worldling, Horace Walpole, and to assure us that "the fascinations of Walpole's false wit must have retired before the bright ascendant of her pure and prevailing superiority." As she waxed old, and affluent, and disputatious, it was deemed well to encourage a timid public with the reminder that her genius, though "great and commanding," was still "lovely and kind." And when she died, it was recorded that "a cultivated taste for moral scenery was one of her distinctions";—as though Nature herself attended a class of ethics before venturing to allure too freely the mistress of Barley Wood.

It is in the contemplation of such sunlight mediocrity that the hardship of being born too late is felt with crushing force. Why cannot we write "Letters on the Improvement of the Mind," and be held, like Mrs. Chapone, to be an authority on education all the rest of our lives; and have people entreating us, as they entreated her, to undertake, at any cost, the intellectual guidance of their daughters? When we consider all that a modern educator is expected to know—from bird-calls to metric measures—we sigh over the days which demanded nothing more difficult than the polite expression of truisms.

"Our feelings are not given us for our ornament, but to spur us on to right action. Compassion, for instance, is not impressed upon the human heart, only to adorn the fair face with tears, and to give an agreeable languor to the eyes. It is designed to excite our utmost endeavour to relieve the sufferer."

Was it really worth while to say this even in 1775? Is it possible that young ladies were then in danger of thinking that the office of compassion was to "adorn a face with tears"? and did they try to be sorry for the poor and sick, only that their bright eyes might be softened into languor? Yet we know that Mrs. Chapone's little volume was held to have rendered signal service to society. It has the honour to be one of the books which Miss Lydia Languish lays out ostentatiously on her table—in company with Fordyce's sermons—when she anticipates a visit from Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony. Some halting verses of the period exalt it as the beacon light of youth; and Mrs. Delany, writing to her six-year-old niece, counsels the little girl to read the "Letters" once a year until she is grown up. "They speak to the heart as well as to the head," she assures the

poor infant; “and I know no book (next to the Bible) more entertaining and edifying.”

Mrs. Montagu gave dinners. The real and very solid foundation of *her* reputation was the admirable manner in which she fed her lions. A mysterious halo of intellectuality surrounded this excellent hostess. “The female Mæcenas of Hill Street,” Hannah More elegantly termed her, adding,—to prove that she herself was not unduly influenced by gross food and drink,—“But what are baubles, when speaking of a Montagu!” Dr. Johnson praised her conversation,—especially when he wanted to tease jealous Mrs. Thrale,—but sternly discountenanced her attempts at authorship. When Sir Joshua Reynolds observed that the “Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare” did its authoress honour, Dr. Johnson retorted contemptuously: “It does *her* honour, but it would do honour to nobody else,”—which strikes me as a singularly unpleasant thing to hear said about one’s literary masterpiece. Like the fabled Caliph who stood by the Sultan’s throne, translating the flowers of Persian speech into comprehensible and unflattering truths, so Dr. Johnson stands undeceived in this pleasant half-century of pretence, translating its ornate nonsense into language we can too readily understand.

But how comfortable and how comforting the pretence must have been, and how kindly tolerant all the pretenders were to one another! If, in those happy days, you wrote an essay on “The Harmony of Numbers and Versification,” you unhesitatingly asked your friends to come and have it read aloud to them; and your friends—instead of leaving town next day—came, and listened, and called it a “Miltonic evening.” If, like Mrs. Montagu, you had a taste for letter-writing, you filled up innumerable sheets with such breathless egotisms as this:—

“I come, a happy guest, to the general feast Nature spreads for all her children, my spirits dance in the sunbeams, or take a sweet repose in the shade. I rejoice in the grand chorus of the day, and feel content in the silent serene of night, while I listen to the morning hymn of the whole animal creation, I recollect how beautiful it is, sum’d up in the works of our great poet, Milton, every rivulet murmurs in poetical cadence, and to the melody of the nightingale I add the harmonious verses she has inspired in many languages.”

So highly were these rhapsodies appreciated, and so far were correspondents from demanding either coherence or punctuation, that four volumes of Mrs. Montagu’s letters were published after her death; and we find Miss More praising Mrs. Boscawen because she approached this standard of excellence: “Mrs. Palk tells me her letters are hardly inferior to Mrs. Montagu’s.”

Those were the days to live in, and sensible people made haste to be born in time. The close of the eighteenth century saw quiet country families tearing the freshly published “Mysteries of Udolpho” into a dozen parts, because no one could wait his turn to read the book. All England held its breath while Emily explored the haunted chambers of her prison-house. The beginning of the nineteenth century found Mrs. Opie enthroned as a peerless novel-writer, and the “Edinburgh Review” praising “Adeline Mowbray, or Mother and Daughter,” as the most pathetic story in the English language. Indeed, one sensitive gentleman wrote to its authoress that he had lain awake all night, bathed in tears, after reading it. About this time, too, we begin to hear “the mellow tones of Felicia Hemans,” whom Christopher North reverently admired; and who, we are assured, found her way to all hearts that were open to “the holy sympathies of religion and virtue.” Murray’s heart was so open that he paid two hundred guineas for the “Vespers of Palermo”; and Miss Edgeworth considered that the “Siege of Valencia” contained the most beautiful poetry she had read for years. Finally Miss Jane Porter looms darkly on the horizon, with novels five volumes long. All the Porters worked on a heroic scale. Anna Maria’s stories were more interminable than Jane’s; and their brother Robert painted on a single canvas, “The Storming of Seringapatam,” seven hundred life-sized figures.

“Thaddeus of Warsaw” and “The Scottish Chiefs” were books familiar to our infancy. They stretched vastly and vaguely over many tender years,—stories after the order of Melchisedec, without beginning and without end. But when our grandmothers were young, and my chosen period had still years to run, they were read on two continents, and in many tongues. The King of Würtemberg was so pleased with “Thaddeus” that he made Miss Porter a “lady of the Chapter of St. Joachim,”—which sounds both imposing and mysterious. The badge of the order was a gold cross; and this unusual decoration, coupled with the lady’s habit of draping herself in flowing veils like one of Mrs. Radcliffe’s heroines, so confused an honest British public that it was deemed necessary to explain to agitated Protestants that Miss Porter had no Popish proclivities, and must not be mistaken for a nun. In our own country her novels were exceedingly popular, and her American admirers sent her a rose-wood armchair in token of appreciation and esteem. It is possible she would have preferred a royalty on her books; but the armchair was graciously accepted, and a pen-and-ink sketch in an album of celebrities represents Miss Porter seated majestically on its cushions, “in the quiet and ladylike occupation of taking a cup of coffee.”

And so my happy half-century draws to its appointed end. A new era, cold, critical, contentious, deprecated the old genial absurdities, chilled the old

sentimental outpourings, questioned the old profitable pietism. Unfortunates, born a hundred years too late, look back with wistful eyes upon the golden age which they feel themselves qualified to adorn.

THE PERILS OF IMMORTALITY

Peu de génie, point de grâce.

THERE is no harder fate than to be immortalized as a fool; to have one's name—which merits nothing sterner than obliteration—handed down to generations as an example of silliness, or stupidity, or presumption; to be enshrined pitilessly in the amber of the "Dunciad"; to be laughed at forever because of Charles Lamb's impatient and inextinguishable raillery. When an industrious young authoress named Elizabeth Ogilvy Benger—a model of painstaking insignificance—invited Charles and Mary Lamb to drink tea with her one cold December night, she little dreamed she was achieving a deathless and unenviable fame; and that, when her half dozen books should have lapsed into comfortable oblivion, she herself should never be fortunate enough to be forgotten. It is a cruel chance which crystallizes the folly of an hour, and makes it outlive our most serious endeavours. Perhaps we should do well to consider this painful possibility before hazarding an acquaintance with the Immortals.

Miss Benger did more than hazard. She pursued the Immortals with insensate zeal. She bribed Mrs. Inchbald's servant-maid into lending her cap, and apron, and tea-tray; and, so equipped, penetrated into the inmost sanctuary of that literary lady, who seems to have taken the intrusion in good part. She was equally adroit in seducing Mary Lamb—as the Serpent seduced Eve—when Charles Lamb was the ultimate object of her designs. Coming home to dinner one day, "hungry as a hunter," he found to his dismay the two women closeted together, and trusted he was in time to prevent their exchanging vows of eternal friendship, though not—as he discovered later—in time to save himself from an engagement to drink tea with the stranger ("I had never seen her before, and could not tell who the devil it was that was so familiar"), the following night.

What happened is told in a letter to Coleridge; one of the best-known and one of the longest letters Lamb ever wrote,—he is so brimful of his grievance. Miss Benger's lodgings were up two flights of stairs in East Street. She entertained her guests with tea, coffee, macaroons, and "much love." She talked to them, or rather *at* them, upon purely literary topics,—as, for example, Miss Hannah More's "Strictures on Female Education," which they had never read. She addressed Mary Lamb in French,—"possibly having heard that neither Mary nor I understood French,"—and she favoured them with Miss Seward's opinion of

Pope. She asked Lamb, who was growing more miserable every minute, if he agreed with D'Israeli as to the influence of organism upon intellect; and when he tried to parry the question with a pun upon organ—"which went off very flat"—she despised him for his feeble flippancy. She advised Mary to carry home two translations of "Pizarro," so that she might compare them *verbatim* (an offer hastily declined), and she made them both promise to return the following week —which they never did—to meet Miss Jane Porter and her sister, "who, it seems, have heard much of Mr. Coleridge, and wish to meet *us* because we are *his* friends." It is a *comédie larmoyante*. We sympathize hotly with Lamb when we read his letter; but there is something piteous in the thought of the poor little hostess going complacently to bed that night, and never realizing that she had made her one unhappy flight to fame.

There were people, strange as it may seem, who liked Miss Benger's evenings. Miss Aikin assures us that "her circle of acquaintances extended with her reputation, and with the knowledge of her excellent qualities, and she was often enabled to assemble as guests at her humble tea-table names whose celebrity would have insured attention in the proudest salons of the metropolis." Crabb Robinson, who was a frequent visitor, used to encounter large parties of sentimental ladies; among them, Miss Porter, Miss Landon, and the "eccentric but amiable" Miss Wesley,—John Wesley's niece,—who prided herself upon being broad-minded enough to have friends of varying religions, and who, having written two unread novels, remarked complacently to Miss Edgeworth: "We sisters of the quill ought to know one another."

The formidable Lady de Crespigny of Campion Lodge was also Miss Benger's condescending friend and patroness, and this august matron—of insipid mind and imperious temper—was held to sanctify in some mysterious manner all whom she honoured with her notice. The praises lavished upon Lady de Crespigny by her contemporaries would have made Hypatia blush, and Sappho hang her head. Like Mrs. Jarley, she was the delight of the nobility and gentry. She corresponded, so we are told, with the *literati* of England; she published, like a British Cornelia, her letters of counsel to her son; she was "courted by the gay and admired by the clever"; and she mingled at Campion Lodge "the festivity of fashionable parties with the pleasures of intellectual society, and the comforts of domestic peace."

To this array of feminine virtue and feminine authorship, Lamb was singularly unresponsive. He was not one of the *literati* honoured by Lady de Crespigny's correspondence. He eluded the society of Miss Porter, though she was held to be

handsome,—for a novelist. (“The only literary lady I ever knew,” writes Miss Mitford, “who didn’t look like a scarecrow to keep birds from cherries.”) He said unkindly of Miss Landon that, if she belonged to him, he would lock her up and feed her on bread and water until she left off writing poetry. And for Miss Wesley he entertained a cordial animosity, only one degree less lively than his sentiments towards Miss Benger. Miss Wesley had a lamentable habit of sending her effusions to be read by reluctant men of letters. She asked Lamb for Coleridge’s address, which he, to divert the evil from his own head, cheerfully gave. Coleridge, very angry, reproached his friend for this disloyal baseness; but Lamb, with the desperate instinct of self-preservation, refused all promise of amendment. “You encouraged that mopsey, Miss Wesley, to dance after you,” he wrote tartly, “in the hope of having her nonsense put into a nonsensical Anthology. We have pretty well shaken her off by that simple expedient of referring her to you; but there are more burs in the wind.”... “Of all God’s creatures,” he cries again, in an excess of ill-humour, “I detest letters-affecting, authors-hunting ladies.” Alas for Miss Benger when she hunted hard, and the quarry turned at bay!

An atmosphere of inexpressible dreariness hangs over the little coterie of respectable, unilluminated writers, who, to use Lamb’s priceless phrase, encouraged one another in mediocrity. A vapid propriety, a mawkish sensibility were their substitutes for real distinction of character or mind. They read Mary Wollstonecraft’s books, but would not know the author; and when, years later, Mrs. Gaskell presented the widowed Mrs. Shelley to Miss Lucy Aikin, that outraged spinster turned her back upon the erring one, to the profound embarrassment of her hostess. Of Mrs. Inchbald, we read in “Public Characters” for 1811: “Her moral qualities constitute her principal excellence; and though useful talents and personal accomplishments, of themselves, form materials for an agreeable picture, moral character gives the polish which fascinates the heart.” The conception of goodness then in vogue is pleasingly illustrated by a passage from one of Miss Elizabeth Hamilton’s books, which Miss Benger in her biography of that lady (now lost to fame) quotes appreciatively:—

“It was past twelve o’clock. Already had the active and judicious Harriet performed every domestic task; and, having completely regulated the family economy for the day, was quietly seated at work with her aunt and sister, listening to Hume’s ‘History of England,’ as it was read to her by some orphan girl whom she had herself instructed.”

So truly ladylike had the feminine mind grown by this time, that the very

language it used was refined to the point of ambiguity. Mrs. Barbauld writes genteelly of the behaviour of young girls “to the other half of their species,” as though she could not bear to say, simply and coarsely, men. So full of content were the little circles who listened to the “elegant lyric poetess,” Mrs. Hemans, or to “the female Shakespeare of her age,” Miss Joanna Baillie (we owe both these phrases to the poet Campbell), that when Crabb Robinson was asked by Miss Wakefield whether he would like to know Mrs. Barbauld, he cried enthusiastically: “You might as well ask me whether I should like to know the Angel Gabriel!”

In the midst of these sentimentalities and raptures, we catch now and then forlorn glimpses of the Immortals,—of Wordsworth at a literary entertainment in the house of Mr. Hoare of Hampstead, sitting mute and miserable all evening in a corner,—which, as Miss Aikin truly remarked, was “disappointing and provoking;” of Lamb carried by the indefatigable Crabb Robinson to call on Mrs. Barbauld. This visit appears to have been a distinct failure. Lamb’s one recorded observation was that Gilbert Wakefield had a peevish face,—an awkward remark, as Wakefield’s daughter sat close at hand and listening. “Lamb,” writes Mr. Robinson, “was vexed, but got out of the scrape tolerably well,”—having had, indeed, plenty of former experiences to help him on the way.

There is a delightful passage in Miss Jane Porter’s diary which describes at length an evening spent at the house of Mrs. Fenwick, “the amiable authoress of ‘Secrecy.’” (Everybody was the amiable authoress of something. It was a day, like our own, given over to the worship of ink.) The company consisted of Miss Porter and her sister Maria, Miss Benger and her brother, the poet Campbell, and his nephew, a young man barely twenty years of age. The lion of the little party was of course the poet, who endeared himself to Mrs. Fenwick’s heart by his attentions to her son, “a beautiful boy of six.”

“This child’s innocence and caresses,” writes Miss Porter gushingly, “seemed to unbend the lovely feelings of Campbell’s heart. Every restraint but those which the guardian angels of tender infancy acknowledge was thrown aside. I never saw Man in a more interesting point of view. I felt how much I esteemed the author of the ‘Pleasures of Hope.’ When we returned home, we walked. It was a charming summer night. The moon shone brightly. Maria leaned on Campbell’s arm. I did the same by Benger’s. Campbell made some observations on *pedantic* women. I did not like it, being anxious for the respect of this man. I was jealous about how nearly he might think *we* resembled that character. When the Bengers

parted from us, Campbell observed my abstraction, and with sincerity I confessed the cause. I know not what were his replies; but they were so gratifying, so endearing, so marked with truth, that when we arrived at the door, and he shook us by the hand, as a sign of adieu immediately prior to his next day's journey to Scotland, we parted with evident marks of being all in tears."

It is rather disappointing, after this outburst of emotion, to find Campbell, in a letter to his sister, describing Miss Porter in language of chilling moderation: "Among the company was Miss Jane Porter, whose talents my *nephew* adores. She is a pleasing woman, and made quite a conquest of him."

Miss Benger was only one of the many aspirants to literary honours whose futile endeavours vexed and affronted Charles Lamb. In reality she burdened him far less than others who, like Miss Betham and Miss Stoddart, succeeded in sending him their verses for criticism, or who begged him to forward the effusions to Southey,—an office he gladly fulfilled. Perhaps Miss Benger's vivacity jarred upon his taste. He was fastidious about the gayety of women. Madame de Staël considered her one of the most interesting persons she had met in England; but the approval of this "impudent clever" Frenchwoman would have been the least possible recommendation to Lamb. If he had known how hard had been Miss Benger's struggles, and how scanty her rewards, he might have forgiven her that sad perversity which kept her toiling in the field of letters. She had had the misfortune to be a precocious child, and had written at the age of thirteen a poem called "The Female Geniad," which was dedicated to Lady de Crespigny, and published under the patronage of that honoured dame. Youthful prodigies were then much in favour. Miss Mitford comments very sensibly upon them, being filled with pity for one Mary Anne Browne, "a fine tall girl of fourteen, and a full-fledged authoress," who was extravagantly courted and caressed one season, and cruelly ignored the next. The "Female Geniad" sealed Miss Benger's fate. When one has written a poem at thirteen, and that poem has been printed and praised, there is nothing for it but to keep on writing until Death mercifully removes the obligation.

It is needless to say that the drama—which then, as now, was the goal of every author's ambition—first fired Miss Benger's zeal. When we think of Miss Hannah More as a successful playwright, it is hard to understand how any one could fail; yet fail Miss Benger did, although we are assured by her biographer that "her genius appeared in many ways well adapted to the stage." She next wrote a mercilessly long poem upon the abolition of the slave-trade (which was read only by anti-slavery agitators), and two novels,—"Marian," and "Valsinore:

or, the Heart and the Fancy." Of these we are told that "their excellences were such as genius only can reach"; and if they also missed their mark, it must have been because—as Miss Aikin delicately insinuates—"no judicious reader could fail to perceive that the artist was superior to the work." This is always unfortunate. It is the work, and not the artist, which is offered for sale in the market-place. Miss Benger's work is not much worse than a great deal which did sell, and she possessed at least the grace of an unflinching and courageous perseverance. Deliberately, and without aptitude or training, she began to write history, and in this most difficult of all fields won for herself a hearing. Her "Life of Anne Boleyn," and her "Memoirs of Mary, Queen of Scots," were read in many an English schoolroom; their propriety and Protestantism making them acceptable to the anxious parental mind. A single sentence from "Anne Boleyn" will suffice to show the ease of Miss Benger's mental attitude, and the comfortable nature of her views:—

"It would be ungrateful to forget that the mother of Queen Elizabeth was the early and zealous advocate of the Reformation, and that, by her efforts to dispel the gloom of ignorance and superstition, she conferred on the English people a benefit of which, in the present advanced state of knowledge and civilization, it would be difficult to conceive or to appreciate the real value and importance."

The "active and judicious Harriet" would have listened to this with as much complacence as to Hume.

In "La Belle Assemblée" for April, 1823, there is an engraving of Miss Smirke's portrait of Miss Benger. She is painted in an imposing turban, with tight little curls, and an air of formidable sprightliness. It was this sprightliness which was so much admired. "Wound up by a cup of coffee," she would talk for hours, and her friends really seem to have liked it. "Her lively imagination," writes Miss Aikin, "and the flow of eloquence it inspired, aided by one of the most melodious of voices, lent an inexpressible charm to her conversation, which was heightened by an intuitive discernment of character, rare in itself, and still more so in combination with such fertility of fancy and ardency of feeling."

This leaves little to be desired. It is not at all like the Miss Benger of Lamb's letter, with her vapid pretensions and her stupid insolence. Unhappily, we see through Lamb's eyes, and we cannot see through Miss Aikin's. Of one thing only I feel sure. Had Miss Benger, instead of airing her trivial acquirements, told Lamb that when she was a little girl, bookless and penniless, at Chatham, she used to read the open volumes in the booksellers' windows, and go back again and again, hoping that the leaves might be turned, she would have touched a

responsive chord in his heart. Who does not remember his exquisite sympathy for “street-readers,” and his unlikely story of Martin B——, who “got through two volumes of ‘Clarissa,’” in this desultory fashion. Had he but known of the shabby, eager child, staring wistfully at the coveted books, he would never have written the most amusing of his letters, and Miss Benger’s name would be to-day unknown.

WHEN LALLA ROOKH WAS YOUNG

And give you, mixed with western sentimentalism,
Some glimpses of the finest orientalism.

"STICK to the East," wrote Byron to Moore, in 1813. "The oracle, Staël, told me it was the only poetic policy. The North, South, and West have all been exhausted; but from the East we have nothing but Southey's unsaleables, and these he has contrived to spoil by adopting only their most outrageous fictions. His personages don't interest us, and yours will. You will have no competitors; and, if you had, you ought to be glad of it. The little I have done in that way is merely a 'voice in the wilderness' for you; and if it has had any success, that also will prove that the public are orientalizing, and pave the way for you."

There is something admirably business-like in this advice. Byron, who four months before had sold the "Giaour" and the "Bride of Abydos" to Murray for a thousand guineas, was beginning to realize the commercial value of poetry; and, like a true man of affairs, knew what it meant to corner a poetic market. He was generous enough to give Moore the tip, and to hold out a helping hand as well; for he sent him six volumes of Castellan's "Mœurs des Ottomans," and three volumes of Toderini's "De la Littérature des Turcs." The orientalism afforded by text-books was the kind that England loved.

From the publication of "Lalla Rookh" in 1817 to the publication of Thackeray's "Our Street" in 1847, Byron's far-sighted policy continued to bear golden fruit. For thirty years Caliphs and Deevs, Brahmins and Circassians, rioted through English verse; mosques and seraglios were the stage properties of English fiction; the bowers of Rochnabed, the Lake of Cashmere, became as familiar as Richmond and the Thames to English readers. Some feeble washings of this great tidal wave crossed the estranging sea, to tint the pages of the New York "Mirror," and kindred journals in the United States. Harems and slave-markets, with beautiful Georgians and sad, slender Arab girls, thrilled our grandmothers' kind hearts. Tales of Moorish Lochinvars, who snatch away the fair daughters—or perhaps the fair wives—of powerful rajahs, captivated their imaginations. Gazelles trot like poodles through these stories, and lend colour to their robust Saxon atmosphere. In one, a neglected "favourite" wins back her lord's affection by the help of a slave-girl's amulet; and the inconstant Moslem, entering the harem, exclaims, "Beshrew me that I ever thought another fair!"—which sounds

like a penitent Tudor.

A Persian’s Heaven is easily made,
’Tis but black eyes and lemonade;

and our oriental literature was compounded of the same simple ingredients. When the New York “Mirror,” under the guidance of the versatile Mr. Willis, tried to be impassioned and sensuous, it dropped into such wanton lines as these to a “Sultana”:—

She came,—soft leaning on her favourite’s arm,
She came, warm panting from the sultry hours,
To rove mid fragrant shades of orange bowers,
A veil light shadowing each voluptuous charm.

And for this must Lord Byron stand responsible.

The happy experiment of grafting Turkish roses upon English boxwood led up to some curious complications, not the least of which was the necessity of stiffening the moral fibre of the Orient—which was esteemed to be but lax—until it could bear itself in seemly fashion before English eyes. The England of 1817 was not, like the England of 1908, prepared to give critical attention to the decadent. It presented a solid front of denial to habits and ideas which had not received the sanction of British custom; which had not, through national adoption, become part of the established order of the universe. The line of demarcation between Providence and the constitution was lightly drawn. Jeffrey, a self-constituted arbiter of tastes and morals, assured his nervous countrymen that, although Moore’s verse was glowing, his principles were sound.

“The characters and sentiments of ‘Lalla Rookh’ belong to the poetry of rational, honourable, considerate, and humane Europe; and not to the childishness, cruelty, and profligacy of Asia. So far as we have yet seen, there is no sound sense, firmness of purpose, or principled goodness, except among the natives of Europe and their genuine descendants.”

Starting with this magnificent assumption, it became a delicate and a difficult task to unite the customs of the East with the “principled goodness” of the West; the “sound sense” of the Briton with the fervour and fanaticism of the Turk. Jeffrey held that Moore had effected this alliance in the most tactful manner, and had thereby “redeemed the character of oriental poetry”; just as Mr. Thomas Haynes Bayly, ten years later, “reclaimed festive song from vulgarity.” More carping critics, however, worried their readers a good deal on this point; and the nonconformist conscience cherished uneasy doubts as to Hafed’s irregular

courtship and Nourmahal's marriage lines. From across the sea came the accusing voice of young Mr. Channing in the "North American," proclaiming that "harlotry has found in Moore a bard to smooth her coarseness and veil her effrontery, to give her languor for modesty, and affectation for virtue." The English "Monthly Review," less open to alarm, confessed with a sigh "a depressing regret that, with the exception of 'Paradise and the Peri,' no great moral effect is either attained or attempted by 'Lalla Rookh.' To what purpose all this sweetness and delicacy of thought and language, all this labour and profusion of Oriental learning? What head is set right in one erroneous notion, what heart is softened in one obdurate feeling, by this luxurious quarto?"

It is a lamentable truth that Anacreon exhibits none of Dante's spiritual depth, and that la reine Margot fell short of Queen Victoria's fireside qualities. Nothing could make a moralist of Moore. The light-hearted creature was a model of kindness, of courage, of conjugal fidelity; but—reversing the common rule of life—he preached none of the virtues that he practised. His pathetic attempts to adjust his tales to the established conventions of society failed signally of their purpose. Even Byron wrote him that little Allegra (as yet unfamiliar with her alphabet) should not be permitted to read "Lalla Rookh"; partly because it wasn't proper, and partly—which was prettily said—lest she should discover "that there was a better poet than Papa." It was reserved for Moore's followers to present their verses and stories in the chastened form acceptable to English drawing-rooms, and permitted to English youth. "La Belle Assemblée" published in 1819 an Eastern tale called "Jahia and Meimoune," in which the lovers converse like the virtuous characters in "Camilla." Jahia becomes the guest of an infamous sheik, who intoxicates him with a sherbet composed of "sugar, musk, and amber," and presents him with five thousand sequins and a beautiful Circassian slave. When he is left alone with this damsel, she addresses him thus: "I feel interested in you, and present circumstances will save me from the charge of immodesty, when I say that I also love you. This love inspires me with fresh horror at the crimes that are here committed."

Jahia protests that he respectfully returns her passion, and that his intentions are of an honourable character, whereupon the circumspect maiden rejoins: "Since such are your sentiments, I will perish with you if I fail in delivering you"; and conducts him, through a tangle of adventures, to safety. Jahia then places Meimoune under the chaperonage of his mother until their wedding day; after which we are happy to know that "they passed their lives in the enjoyment of every comfort attending on domestic felicity. If their lot was not splendid or magnificent, they were rich in mutual affection; and they experienced that

fortunate medium which, far removed from indigence, aspires not to the accumulation of immense wealth, and laughs at the unenvied load of pomp and splendour, which it neither seeks, nor desires to obtain."

It is to be hoped that many obdurate hearts were softened, and many erroneous notions were set right by the influence of a story like this. In the "Monthly Museum" an endless narrative poem, "Abdallah," stretched its slow length along from number to number, blooming with fresh moral sentiments on every page; while from an arid wilderness of Moorish love songs, and Persian love songs, and Circassian love songs, and Hindu love songs, I quote this "Arabian" love song, peerless amid its peers:—

Thy hair is black as the starless sky,
And clasps thy neck as it loved its home;
Yet it moves at the sound of thy faintest sigh,
Like the snake that lies on the white sea-foam.

I love thee, Ibla. Thou art bright
As the white snow on the hills afar;
Thy face is sweet as the moon by night,
And thine eye like the clear and rolling star.

But the snow is poor and withers soon,
While thou art firm and rich in hope;
And never (like thine) from the face of the moon
Flamed the dark eye of the antelope.

The truth and accuracy of this last observation should commend the poem to all lovers of nature.

It is the custom in these days of morbid accuracy to laugh at the second-hand knowledge which Moore so proudly and so innocently displayed. Even Mr. Saintsbury says some unkind things about the notes to "Lalla Rookh,"—scraps of twentieth-hand knowledge, *he* calls them,—while pleasantly recording his affection for the poem itself, an affection based upon the reasonable ground of childish recollections. In the well-ordered home of his infancy, none but "Sunday books" might be read on Sundays in nursery or schoolroom. "But this severity was tempered by one of those easements often occurring in a world, which, if not the best, is certainly not the worst of all possible worlds. For the convenience of servants, or for some other reason, the children were much more

in the drawing-room on Sundays than on any other day; and it was an unwritten rule that any book that lived in the drawing-room was fit Sunday reading. The consequence was that from the time I could read until childish things were put away, I used to spend a considerable part of the first day of the week in reading and re-reading a collection of books, four of which were Scott's poems, 'Lalla Rookh,' 'The Essays of Elia,' and Southey's 'Doctor.' Therefore it may be that I rank 'Lalla Rookh' too high."

Blessed memories, and thrice blessed influences of childhood! But if "Lalla Rookh," like "Vathek," was written to be the joy of imaginative little boys and girls (alas for those who now replace it with "Allan in Alaska," and "Little Cora on the Continent"), the notes to "Lalla Rookh" were, to my infant mind, even more enthralling than the poem. There was a sketchiness about them, a detachment from time and circumstance—I always hated being told the whole of everything—which led me day after day into fresh fields of conjecture. The nymph who was encircled by a rainbow, and bore a radiant son; the scimitars that were so dazzling they made the warriors wink; the sacred well which reflected the moon at midday; and the great embassy that was sent "from some port of the Indies"—a welcome vagueness of geography—to recover a monkey's tooth, snatched away by some equally nameless conqueror;—what child could fail to love such floating stars of erudition?

Our great-grandfathers were profoundly impressed by Moore's text-book acquirements. The "Monthly Review" quoted a solid page of the notes to dazzle British readers, who confessed themselves amazed to find a fellow countryman so much "at home" in Persia and Arabia. Blackwood authoritatively announced that Moore was familiar, not only "with the grandest regions of the human soul,"—which is expected of a poet,—but also with the remotest boundaries of the East; and that in every tone and hue and form he was "purely and intensely Asiatic." "The carping criticism of paltry tastes and limited understandings faded before that burst of admiration with which all enlightened spirits hailed the beauty and magnificence of 'Lalla Rookh.'"

Few people care to confess to "paltry tastes" and "limited understandings." They would rather join in any general acclamation. "Browning's poetry obscure!" I once heard a lecturer say with scorn. "Let us ask ourselves, 'Obscure to whom?' No doubt a great many things are obscure to long-tailed Brazilian apes." After which his audience, with one accord, admitted that it understood "Sordello." So when Jeffrey—great umpire of games whose rules he never knew—informed the British public that there was not in "Lalla Rookh" "a simile, a description, a

name, a trait of history, or allusion of romance that does not indicate entire familiarity with the life, nature, and learning of the East," the public contentedly took his word for it. When he remarked that "the dazzling splendours, the breathing odours" of Araby were without doubt Moore's "native element," the public, whose native element was neither splendid nor sweet-smelling, envied the Irishman his softer joys. "Lalla Rookh" might be "voluptuous" (a word we find in every review of the period), but its orientalism was beyond dispute. Did not Mrs. Skinner tell Moore that she had, when in India, translated the prose interludes into Bengali, for the benefit of her moonshee, and that the man was amazed at the accuracy of the costumes? Did not the nephew of the Persian ambassador in Paris tell Mr. Stretch, who told Moore, that "Lalla Rookh" had been translated into Persian; that the songs—particularly "Bendemeer's Stream"—were sung "everywhere"; and that the happy natives could hardly believe the whole work had not been taken originally from a Persian manuscript?

I'm told, dear Moore, your lays are sung
(Can it be true, you lucky man?)
By moonlight, in the Persian tongue,
Along the streets of Ispahan.

And not of Ispahan only; for in the winter of 1821 the Berlin court presented "Lalla Rookh" with such splendour, such wealth of detail, and such titled actors, that Moore's heart was melted and his head was turned (as any other heart would have been melted, and any other head would have been turned) by the reports thereof. A Grand Duchess of Russia took the part of Lalla Rookh; the Duke of Cumberland was Aurungzebe; and a beautiful young sister of Prince Radzivil enchanted all beholders as the Peri. "Nothing else was talked about in Berlin" (it must have been a limited conversation); the King of Prussia had a set of engravings made of the noble actors in their costumes; and the Crown Prince sent word to Moore that he slept always with a copy of "Lalla Rookh" under his pillow, which was foolish, but flattering. Hardly had the echoes of this royal fête died away, when Spontini brought out in Berlin his opera "The Feast of Roses," and Moore's triumph in Prussia was complete. Byron, infinitely amused at the success of his own good advice, wrote to the happy poet: "Your Berlin drama is an honour unknown since the days of Elkanah Settle, whose 'Empress of Morocco' was presented by the court ladies, which was, as Johnson remarks, 'the last blast of inflammation to poor Dryden.'"

Who shall say that this comparison is without its dash of malice? There is a natural limit to the success we wish our friends, even when we have spurred

them on their way.

If the English court did not lend itself with much gayety or grace to dramatic entertainments, English society was quick to respond to the delights of a modified orientalism. That is to say, it sang melting songs about bulbuls and Shiraz wine; wore ravishing Turkish costumes whenever it had a chance (like the beautiful Mrs. Winkworth in the charades at Gaunt House); and covered its locks —if they were feminine locks—with turbans of portentous size and splendour. When Mrs. Fitzherbert, aged seventy-three, gave a fancy dress ball, so many of her guests appeared as Turks, and Georgians, and sultanas, that it was hard to believe that Brighton, and not Stamboul, was the scene of the festivity. At an earlier entertainment, “a rural breakfast and promenade,” given by Mrs. Hobart at her villa near Fulham, and “graced by the presence of royalty,” the leading attraction was Mrs. Bristow, who represented Queen Nourjahad in the “Garden of Roses.” “Draped in all the magnificence of Eastern grandeur, Mrs. Bristow was seated in the larger drawing-room (which was very beautifully fitted up with cushions in the Indian style), smoking her hookah amidst all sorts of the choicest perfumes. Mrs. Bristow was very profuse with otto of roses, drops of which were thrown about the ladies’ dresses. The whole house was scented with the delicious fragrance.”

The “European Magazine,” the “Monthly Museum,” all the dim old periodicals published in the early part of the last century for feminine readers, teem with such “society notes.” From them, too, we learn that by 1823 turbans of “rainbow striped gauze frosted with gold” were in universal demand; while “black velvet turbans, enormously large, and worn very much on one side,” must have given a rakish appearance to stout British matrons. “La Belle Assemblée” describes for us with tender enthusiasm a ravishing turban, “in the Turkish style,” worn in the winter of 1823 at the theatre and at evening parties. This masterpiece was of “pink oriental crêpe, beautifully folded in front, and richly ornamented with pearls. The folds are fastened on the left side, just above the ear, with a Turkish scimitar of pearls; and on the right side are tassels of pearls, surmounted by a crescent and a star.”

Here we have Lady Jane or Lady Amelia transformed at once into young Nourmahal; and, to aid the illusion, a “Circassian corset” was devised, free from encroaching steel or whalebone, and warranted to give its English wearers the “flowing and luxurious lines” admired in the overfed inmates of the harem. When the passion for orientalism began to subside in London, remote rural districts caught and prolonged the infection. I have sympathized all my life with

the innocent ambition of Miss Matty Jenkyns to possess a sea-green turban, like the one worn by Queen Adelaide; and have never been able to forgive that ruthlessly sensible Mary Smith—the chronicler of Cranford—for taking her a "neat middle-aged cap" instead. "I was most particularly anxious to prevent her from disfiguring her small gentle mousy face with a great Saracen's head turban," says the judicious Miss Smith with a smirk of self-commendation; and poor Miss Matty—the cap being bought—has to bow to this arbiter of fate. How much we all suffer in life from the discretion of our families and friends!

Thackeray laughed the dim ghost of "Lalla Rookh" out of England. He mocked at the turbans, and at the old ladies who wore them; at the vapid love songs, and at the young ladies who sang them.

> I am a little brown bulbul. Come and listen in the moonlight. Praise be to Allah! I am a merry bard.

He derided the "breathing odours of Araby," and the Eastern travellers who imported this exotic atmosphere into Grosvenor Square. Yonng Bedwin Sands, who has "lived under tents," who has published a quarto, ornamented with his own portrait in various oriental costumes, and who goes about accompanied by a black servant of most unprepossessing appearance, "just like another Brian de Bois Guilbert," is only a degree less ridiculous than Clarence Bulbul, who gives Miss Tokely a piece of the sack in which an indiscreet Zuleika was drowned, and whose servant says to callers: "Mon maître est au divan," or "Monsieur trouvera Monsieur dans son sérail.... He has coffee and pipes for everybody. I should like you to have seen the face of old Bowly, his college tutor, called upon to sit cross-legged on a divan, a little cup of bitter black mocha put into his hand, and a large amber-muzzled pipe stuck into his mouth before he could say it was a fine day. Bowly almost thought he had compromised his principles by consenting so far to this Turkish manner." Bulbul's sure and simple method of commending himself to young ladies is by telling them they remind him of a girl he knew in Circassia,—Ameena, the sister of Schamyle Bey. "Do you know, Miss Pim," he thoughtfully observes, "that you would fetch twenty thousand piastres in the market at Constantinople?" Whereupon Miss Pim is filled with embarrassed elation. An English girl, conscious of being in no great demand at home, was naturally flattered as well as fluttered by the thought of having market value elsewhere. And perhaps this feminine instinct was at the root of "Lalla Rookh's" long popularity in England.

THE CORRESPONDENT

Correspondences are like small-clothes before the invention of suspenders; it is impossible to keep them up.—SYDNEY SMITH to MRS. CROWE.

IN this lamentable admission, in this blunt and revolutionary sentiment, we hear the first clear striking of a modern note, the first gasping protest against the limitless demands of letter-writing. When Sydney Smith was a little boy, it was not impossible to keep a correspondence up; it was impossible to let it go. He was ten years old when Sir William Pepys copied out long portions of Mrs. Montagu's letters, and left them as a legacy to his heirs. He was twelve years old when Miss Anna Seward—the "Swan of Lichfield"—copied thirteen pages of description which the Rev. Thomas Sedgwick Whalley had written her from Switzerland, and sent them to her friend, Mr. William Hayley. She called this "snatching him to the Continent by Whalleyan magic." What Mr. Hayley called it we do not know; but he had his revenge, for the impartial "Swan" copied eight verses of an "impromptu" which Mr. Hayley had written upon her, and sent them in turn to Mr. Whalley;—thus making each friend a scourge to the other, and widening the network of correspondence which had enmeshed the world.

It is impossible not to feel a trifle envious of Mr. Whalley, who looms before us as the most petted and accomplished of clerical bores, of "literary and chess-playing divines." He was but twenty-six when the kind-hearted Bishop of Ely presented him with the living of Hagworthingham, stipulating that he should not take up his residence there,—the neighbourhood of the Lincolnshire fens being considered an unhealthy one. Mr. Whalley cheerfully complied with this condition; and for fifty years the duties were discharged by curates, who could not afford good health; while the rector spent his winters in Europe, and his summers at Mendip Lodge. He was of an amorous disposition,—"sentimentally pathetic," Miss Burney calls him,—and married three times, two of his wives being women of fortune. He lived in good society, and beyond his means, like a gentleman; was painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds (who has very delicately and maliciously accentuated his resemblance to the tiny spaniel he holds in his arms); and died of old age, in the comfortable assurance that he had lost nothing the world could give. A voluminous correspondence—afterwards published in two volumes—afforded scope for that clerical diffuseness which should have

found its legitimate outlet in the Hagworthingham pulpit.

The Rev. Augustus Jessup has recorded a passionate admiration for Cicero's letters, on the ground that they never describe scenery; but Mr. Whalley's letters seldom do anything else. He wrote to Miss Sophia Weston a description of Vaucluse, which fills three closely printed pages. Miss Weston copied every word, and sent it to Miss Seward, who copied every word of her copy, and sent it to the long-suffering Mr. Hayley, with the remark that Mr. Whalley and Petrarch were "kindred spirits." Later on this kinship was made pleasantly manifest by the publication of "Edwy and Edilda," which is described as a "domestic epic," and which Mr. Whalley's friends considered to be a moral bulwark as well as an epoch-making poem. Indeed, we find Miss Seward imploring him to republish it, on the extraordinary ground that it will add to his happiness in heaven to know that the fruits of his industry "continue to inspire virtuous pleasure through passing generations." It is animating to contemplate the celestial choirs congratulating the angel Whalley at intervals on the "virtuous pleasure" inspired by "Edwy and Edilda." "This," says Mr. Kenwigs, "is an ewent at which Evin itself looks down."

There was no escape from the letter-writer who, a hundred or a hundred and twenty-five years ago, captured a coveted correspondent. It would have been as easy to shake off an octopus or a boa-constrictor. Miss Seward opened her attack upon Sir Walter Scott, whom she had never seen, with a long and passionate letter, lamenting the death of a friend whom Scott had never seen. She conjured him not to answer this letter, because she was "dead to the world." Scott gladly obeyed, content that the lady should be at least dead to him, which was the last possibility she contemplated. Before twelve months were out they were in brisk correspondence, an acquaintance was established, and when she died in earnest, some years later, he found himself one of her literary executors, and twelve quarto manuscript volumes of her letters waiting to be published. These Scott wisely refused to touch; but he edited her poems,—a task he much disliked,—wrote the epitaph on her monument in Lichfield Cathedral, and kindly maintained that, although her sentimentality appalled him, and her enthusiasm chilled his soul, she was a talented and pleasing person.

The most formidable thing about the letters of this period—apart from their length—is their eloquence. It bubbles and seethes over every page. Miss Seward, writing to Mrs. Knowles in 1789 upon the dawning of the French Revolution, of which she understood no more than a canary, pipes an ecstatic trill. "So France has dipped her lilies in the living stream of American freedom, and bids her sons

be slaves no longer. In such a contest the vital sluices must be wastefully opened; but few English hearts I hope there are that do not wish victory may sit upon the swords that freedom has unsheathed." It sounds so exactly like the Americans in "Martin Chuzzlewit" that one doubts whether Mr. Jefferson Brick or the Honourable Elijah Pogram really uttered the sentiment; while surely to Mrs. Hominy, and not to the Lichfield Swan, must be credited this beautiful passage about a middle-aged but newly married couple: "The berries of holly, with which Hymen formed that garland, blush through the snows of time, and dispute the prize of happiness with the roses of youth;—and they are certainly less subject to the blights of expectation and palling fancy."

It is hard to conceive of a time when letters like these were sacredly treasured by the recipients (our best friend, the waste-paper basket, seems to have been then unknown); when the writers thereof bequeathed them as a legacy to the world; and when the public—being under no compulsion—bought six volumes of them as a contribution to English literature. It is hard to think of a girl of twenty-one writing to an intimate friend as Elizabeth Robinson, afterwards the "great" Mrs. Montagu, wrote to the young Duchess of Portland, who appears to have ventured upon a hope that they were having a mild winter in Kent.

"I am obliged to your Grace for your good wishes of fair weather; sunshine gilds every object, but, alas! December is but cloudy weather, how few seasons boast many days of calm! April, which is the blooming youth of the year, is as famous for hasty showers as for gentle sunshine. May, June, and July have too much heat and violence, the Autumn withers the Summer's gayety, and in the Winter the hopeful blossoms of Spring and fair fruits of Summer are decayed, and storms and clouds arise."

After these obvious truths, for which the almanac stands responsible, Miss Robinson proceeds to compare human life to the changing year, winding up at the close of a dozen pages: "Happy and worthy are those few whose youth is not impetuous, nor their age sullen; they indeed should be esteemed, and their happy influence courted."

Twenty-one, and ripe for moral platitudes! What wonder that we find the same lady, when crowned with years and honours, writing to the son of her friend, Lord Lyttelton, a remorselessly long letter of precept and good counsel, which that young gentleman (being afterwards known as the wicked Lord Lyttelton) seems never to have taken to heart.

"The morning of life, like the morning of the day, should be dedicated to

business. Give it therefore, dear Mr. Lyttelton, to strenuous exertion and labour of mind, before the indolence of the meridian hour, or the unabated fervour of the exhausted day, renders you unfit for severe application."

"Unabated fervour of the exhausted day" is a phrase to be commended. We remember with awe that Mrs. Montagu was the brightest star in the chaste firmament of female intellect;—"the first woman for literary knowledge in England," wrote Mrs. Thrale; "and, if in England, I hope I may say in the world." We hope so, indeed. None but a libertine would doubt it. And no one less contumelious than Dr. Johnson ever questioned Mrs. Montagu's supremacy. She was, according to her great-grandniece, Miss Climenson, "adored by men," while "purest of the pure"; which was equally pleasant for herself and for Mr. Montagu. She wrote more letters, with fewer punctuation marks, than any Englishwoman of her day; and her nephew, the fourth Baron Rokeby, nearly blinded himself in deciphering the two volumes of undated correspondence which were printed in 1810. Two more followed in 1813, after which the gallant Baron either died at his post or was smitten with despair; for sixty-eight cases of letters lay undisturbed for the best part of a century, when they passed into Miss Climenson's hands. This intrepid lady received them—so she says—with "unbounded joy"; and has already published two fat volumes, with the promise of several others in the near future. "Les morts n'écrivent point," said Madame de Maintenon hopefully; but of what benefit is this inactivity, when we still continue to receive their letters?

Miss Elizabeth Carter, called by courtesy Mrs. Carter, was the most vigorous of Mrs. Montagu's correspondents. Although a lady of learning, who read Greek and had dipped into Hebrew, she was far too "humble and unambitious" to claim an acquaintance with the exalted mistress of Montagu House; but that patroness of literature treated her with such true condescension that they were soon on the happiest terms. When Mrs. Montagu writes to Miss Carter that she has seen the splendid coronation of George III, Miss Carter hastens to remind her that such splendour is for majesty alone.

"High rank and power require every external aid of pomp and éclat that may awe and astonish spectators by the ideas of the magnificent and sublime; while the ornaments of more equal conditions should be adapted to the quiet tenour of general life, and be content to charm and engage by the gentler graces of the beautiful and pleasing."

Mrs. Montagu *was* fond of display. All her friends admitted, and some deplored the fact. But surely there was no likelihood of her appropriating the coronation

services as a feature for the entertainments at Portman Square.

Advice, however, was the order of the day. As the excellent Mrs. Chapone wrote to Sir William Pepys: “It is a dangerous commerce for friends to praise each other’s Virtues, instead of reminding each other of duties and of failings.” Yet a too robust candour carried perils of its own, for Miss Seward having written to her “beloved Sophia Weston” with “an ingenuousness which I thought necessary for her welfare, but which her high spirits would not brook,” Sophia was so unaffectedly angry that twelve years of soothing silence followed.

Another wonderful thing about the letter-writers, especially the female letter-writers, of this engaging period is the wealth of hyperbole in which they rioted. Nothing is told in plain terms. Tropes, metaphors, and similes adorn every page; and the supreme elegance of the language is rivalled only by the elusiveness of the idea, which is lost in an eddy of words. Marriage is always alluded to as the “hymeneal torch,” or the “hymeneal chain,” or “hymeneal emancipation from parental care.” Birds are “feathered muses,” and a heart is a “vital urn.” When Mrs. Montagu writes to Mr. Gilbert West, that “miracle of the Moral World,” to condole with him on his gout, she laments that his “writing hand, first dedicated to the Muses, then with maturer judgment consecrated to the Nymphs of Solyma, should be led captive by the cruel foe.” If Mr. West chanced not to know who or what the Nymphs of Solyma were, he had the intelligent pleasure of finding out. Miss Seward describes Mrs. Tighe’s sprightly charms as “Aonian inspiration added to the cestus of Venus”; and speaks of the elderly “ladies of Llangollen” as, “in all but the voluptuous sense, Armidas of its bowers.” Duelling is to her “the murderous punctilio of Luciferian honour.” A Scotch gentleman who writes verse is “a Cambrian Orpheus”; a Lichfield gentleman who sketches is “our Lichfield Claude”; and a budding clerical writer is “our young sacerdotal Marcellus.” When the “Swan” wished to apprise Scott of Dr. Darwin’s death, it never occurred to her to write, as we in this dull age should do: “Dr. Darwin died last night,” or, “Poor Dr. Darwin died last night.” She wrote: “A bright luminary in this neighbourhood recently shot from his sphere with awful and deplorable suddenness”;—thus pricking Sir Walter’s imagination to the wonder point before descending to facts. Even the rain and snow were never spoken of in the plain language of the Weather Bureau; and the elements had a set of allegories all their own. Miss Carter would have scorned to take a walk by the sea. She “chased the ebbing Neptune.” Mrs. Chapone was not blown by the wind. She was “buffeted by Eolus and his sons.” Miss Seward does not hope that Mr. Whalley’s rheumatism is better; but that he has overcome “the malinfluence of marine damps, and the monotonous murmuring of boundless waters.” Perhaps

the most triumphant instance on record of sustained metaphor is Madame d'Arblay's account of Mrs. Montagu's yearly dinner to the London chimney-sweeps, in which the word sweep is never once used, so that the editor was actually compelled to add a footnote to explain what the lady meant. The boys are "jetty objects," "degraded outcasts from society," and "sooty little agents of our most blessed luxury." They are "hapless artificers who perform the most abject offices of any authorized calling"; they are "active guardians of our blazing hearth"; but plain chimney-sweeps, never! Madame d'Arblay would have perished at the stake before using so vulgar and obvious a term.

How was this mass of correspondence preserved? How did it happen that the letters were never torn up, or made into spills,—the common fate of all such missives when I was a little girl. Granted that Miss Carter treasured Mrs. Montagu's letters (she declared fervidly she could never be so barbarous as to destroy one), and that Mrs. Montagu treasured Miss Carter's. Granted that Miss Weston treasured Mr. Whalley's, and that Mr. Whalley treasured Miss Weston's. Granted that Miss Seward provided against all contingencies by copying her own letters into fat blank books before they were mailed, elaborating her spineless sentences, and omitting everything she deemed too trivial or too domestic for the public ear. But is it likely that young Lyttelton at Oxford laid sacredly away Mrs. Montagu's pages of good counsel, or that young Franks at Cambridge preserved the ponderous dissertations of Sir William Pepys? Sir William was a Baronet, a Master in Chancery, and—unlike his famous ancestor—a most respectable and exemplary gentleman. His innocent ambition was to be on terms of intimacy with the literary lights of his day. He knew and ardently admired Dr. Johnson, who in return detested him cordially. He knew and revered, "in unison with the rest of the world," Miss Hannah More. He corresponded at great length with lesser lights,—with Mrs. Chapone, and Mrs. Hartley, and Sir Nathaniel Wraxall. He wrote endless commentaries on Homer and Virgil to young Franks, and reams of good advice to his little son at Eton. There is something pathetic in his regret that the limitations of life will not permit him to be as verbose as he would like. "I could write for an hour," he assures poor Franks, "upon that most delightful of all passages, the Lion deprived of its Young; but the few minutes one can catch amidst the Noise, hurry and confusion of an Assize town will not admit of any Classical discussions. But was I in the calm retirement of your Study at Acton, I have much to say to you, to which I can only allude."

The publication of scores and scores of such letters, all written to one unresponsive young man at Cambridge (who is repeatedly reproached for not

answering them), makes us wonder afresh who kept the correspondence; and the problem is deepened by the appearance of Sir William's letters to his son. This is the way the first one begins:—

> "My dear Boy,—I cannot let a Post escape me without giving you the Pleasure of knowing how much you have gladdened the Hearts of two as affectionate Parents as ever lived; when you tell us that the Principles of Religion begin already to exert their efficacy in making you look down with contempt on the wretched grovelling Vices with which you are surrounded, you make the most delightful Return you can ever make for our Parental Care and Affection; you make Us at Peace with Ourselves; and enable us to hope that our dear Boy will Persevere in that Path which will ensure the greatest Share of Comfort here, and a certainty of everlasting Happiness hereafter."

I am disposed to think that Sir William made a fair copy of this letter and of others like it, and laid them aside as models of parental exhortation. Whether young Pepys was a little prig, or a particularly accomplished little scamp (and both possibilities are open to consideration), it seems equally unlikely that an Eton boy's desk would have proved a safe repository for such ample and admirable discourses.

The publication of Cowper's letters in 1803 and 1804 struck a chill into the hearts of accomplished and erudite correspondents. Poor Miss Seward never rallied from the shock of their "commonness," and of their popularity. Here was a man who wrote about beggars and postmen, about cats and kittens, about buttered toast and the kitchen table. Here was a man who actually looked at things before he described them (which was a startling innovation); who called the wind the wind, and buttercups buttercups, and a hedgehog a hedgehog. Miss Seward honestly despised Cowper's letters. She said they were without "imagination or eloquence," without "discriminative criticism," without "characteristic investigation." Investigating the relations between the family cat and an intrusive viper was, from her point of view, unworthy the dignity of an author. Cowper's love of detail, his terrestrial turn of mind, his humour, and his veracity were disconcerting in an artificial age. When Miss Carter took a country walk, she did not stoop to observe the trivial things she saw. Apparently she never saw anything. What she described were the sentiments and emotions awakened in her by a featureless principle called Nature. Even the ocean—which is too big to be overlooked—started her on a train of moral reflections, in which she passed easily from the grandeur of the elements to the brevity of life, and the

paltriness of earthly ambitions. “How vast are the capacities of the soul, and how little and contemptible its aims and pursuits.” With this original remark, the editor of the letters (a nephew and a clergyman) was so delighted that he added a pious comment of his own.

“If such be the case, how strong and conclusive is the argument deduced from it, that the soul must be destined to another state more suitable to its views and powers. It is much to be lamented that Mrs. Carter did not pursue this line of thought any further.”

People who bought nine volumes of a correspondence like this were expected, as the editor warns them, to derive from it “moral, literary, and religious improvement.” It was in every way worthy of a lady who had translated Epictetus, and who had the “great” Mrs. Montagu for a friend. But, as Miss Seward pathetically remarked, “any well-educated person, with talents not above the common level, produces every day letters as well worth attention as most of Cowper’s, especially as to diction.” The perverseness of the public in buying, in reading, in praising these letters, filled her with pained bewilderment. Not even the writer’s sincere and sad piety, his tendency to moralize, and the transparent innocence of his life could reconcile her to plain transcripts from nature, or to such an unaffecting incident as this:—

“A neighbour of mine in Silver End keeps an ass; the ass lives on the other side of the garden wall, and I am writing in the greenhouse. It happens that he is this morning most musically disposed; either cheered by the fine weather, or by some new tune which he has just acquired, or by finding his voice more harmonious than usual. It would be cruel to mortify so fine a singer, therefore I do not tell him that he interrupts and hinders me; but I venture to tell you so, and to plead his performance in excuse of my abrupt conclusion.”

Here is not only the “common” diction which Miss Seward condemned, but a very common casualty, which she would have naturally deemed beneath notice. Cowper wrote a great deal about animals, and always with fine and humorous appreciation. He sought relief from the hidden torment of his soul in the contemplation of creatures who fill their place in life without morals, and without misgivings. We know what safe companions they were for him when we read his account of his hares, of his kitten dancing on her hind legs,—“an exercise which she performs with all the grace imaginable,”—and of his goldfinches amorously kissing each other between the cage wires. When Miss Seward bent her mind to “the lower orders of creation,” she did not describe them at all; she gave them the benefit of that “discriminative criticism” which

she felt that Cowper lacked. Here, for example, is her thoughtful analysis of man's loyal servitor, the dog:—

"That a dog is a noble, grateful, faithful animal we must all be conscious, and deserves a portion of man's tenderness and care;—yet, from its utter incapacity of more than glimpses of rationality, there is a degree of insanity, as well as of impoliteness to his acquaintance, and of unkindness to his friends, in lavishing so much more of his attention in the first instance, and of affection in the latter, upon it than upon them."

It sounds like a parody on a great living master of complex prose. By its side, Cowper's description of Beau is certainly open to the reproach of plainness.

"My dog is a spaniel. Till Miss Gunning begged him, he was the property of a farmer, and had been accustomed to lie in the chimney corner among the embers till the hair was singed from his back, and nothing was left of his tail but the gristle. Allowing for these disadvantages, he is really handsome; and when nature shall have furnished him with a new coat, a gift which, in consideration of the ragged condition of his old one, it is hoped she will not long delay, he will then be unrivalled in personal endowments by any dog in this country."

No wonder the Lichfield Swan was daunted by the inconceivable popularity of such letters. No wonder Miss Hannah More preferred Akenside to Cowper. What had these eloquent ladies to do with quiet observation, with sober felicity of phrase, with "the style of honest men"!

THE NOVELIST

Soft Sensibility, sweet Beauty's soul!
Keeps her coy state, and animates the whole.

HAYLEY.

READERS of Miss Burney's Diary will remember her maidenly confusion when Colonel Fairly (the Honourable Stephen Digby) recommends to her a novel called "Original Love-Letters between a Lady of Quality and a Person of Inferior Station." The authoress of "Evelina" and "Cecilia"—then thirty-six years of age—is embarrassed by the glaring impropriety of this title. In vain Colonel Fairly assures her that the book contains "nothing but good sense, moral reflections, and refined ideas, clothed in the most expressive and elegant language." Fanny, though longing to read a work of such estimable character, cannot consent to borrow, or even discuss, anything so compromising as love-letters; and, with her customary coyness, murmurs a few words of denial. Colonel Fairly, however, is not easily daunted. Three days later he actually brings the volume to that virginal bower, and asks permission to read portions of it aloud, excusing his audacity with the solemn assurance that there was no person, not even his own daughter, in whose hands he would hesitate to place it. "It was now impossible to avoid saying that I should like to hear it," confesses Miss Burney. "I should seem else to doubt either his taste or his delicacy, while I have the highest opinion of both." So the book is produced, and the fair listener, bending over her needlework to hide her blushes, acknowledges it to be "moral, elegant, feeling, and rational," while lamenting that the unhappy nature of its title makes its presence a source of embarrassment.

This edifying little anecdote sheds light upon a palmy period of propriety. Miss Burney's self-consciousness, her superhuman diffidence, and the "delicious confusion" which overwhelmed her upon the most insignificant occasions, were beacon lights to her "sisters of Parnassus," to the less distinguished women who followed her brilliant lead. The passion for novel-reading was asserting itself for the first time in the history of the world as a dominant note of femininity. The sentimentalities of fiction expanded to meet the woman's standard, to satisfy her irrational demands. "If the story-teller had always had mere men for an audience," says an acute English critic, "there would have been no romance;

nothing but the improving fable, or the indecent anecdote." It was the woman who, as Miss Seward sorrowfully observed, sucked the "sweet poison" which the novelist administered; it was the woman who stooped conspicuously to the "reigning folly" of the day.

The particular occasion of this outbreak on Miss Seward's part was the extraordinary success of a novel, now long forgotten by the world, but which in its time rivalled in popularity "Evelina," and the well-loved "Mysteries of Udolpho." Its plaintive name is "Emmeline; or the Orphan of the Castle," and its authoress, Charlotte Smith, was a woman of courage, character, and good ability; also of a cheerful temperament, which we should never have surmised from her works. It is said that her son owed his advancement in the East India Company solely to the admiration felt for "Emmeline," which was being read as assiduously in Bengal as in London. Sir Walter Scott, always the gentlest of critics, held that it belonged to the "highest branch of fictitious narrative." The Queen, who considered it a masterpiece, lent it to Miss Burney, who in turn gave it to Colonel Fairly, who ventured to observe that it was not "piquant," and asked for a "Rambler" instead.

"Emmeline" is *not* piquant. Its heroine has more tears than Niobe. "Formed of the softest elements, and with a mind calculated for select friendship and domestic happiness," it is her misfortune to be loved by all the men she meets. The "interesting languor" of a countenance habitually "wet with tears" proves their undoing. Her "deep convulsive sobs" charm them more than the laughter of other maidens. When the orphan leaves the castle for the first time, she weeps bitterly for an hour; when she converses with her uncle, she can "no longer command her tears, sobs obliged her to cease speaking"; and when he urges upon her the advantages of a worldly marriage, she—as if that were possible—"wept more than before." When Delamere, maddened by rejection, carries her off in a post-chaise (a delightful frontispiece illustrates this episode), "a shower of tears fell from her eyes"; and even a rescue fails to raise her spirits. Her response to Godolphin's tenderest approaches is to "wipe away the involuntary betrayers of her emotion"; and when he exclaims in a transport: "Enchanting softness! Is then the safety of Godolphin so dear to that angelic bosom?" she answers him with "audible sobs."

The other characters in the book are nearly as tearful. When Delamere is not striking his forehead with his clenched fist, he is weeping at Emmeline's feet. The repentant Fitz-Edward lays his head on a chair, and weeps "like a woman." Lady Adelina, who has stooped to folly, naturally sheds many tears, and writes

an “Ode to Despair”; while Emmeline from time to time gives “vent to a full heart” by weeping over Lady Adelina’s infant. Godolphin sobs loudly when he sees his frail sister; and when he meets Lord Westhaven after an absence of four years, “the manly eyes of both brothers were filled with tears.” We wonder how Scott, whose heroines cry so little and whose heroes never cry at all, stood all this weeping; and, when we remember the perfunctory nature of Sir Walter’s love scenes,—wedged in any way among more important matters,—we wonder still more how he endured the ravings of Delamere, or the melancholy verses with which Godolphin from time to time soothes his despondent soul.

In deep depression sunk, the enfeebled mind
  Will to the deaf cold elements complain;
  And tell the embosomed grief, however vain,
To sullen surges and the viewless wind.

It was not, however, the mournfulness of “Emmeline” which displeased Miss Seward, but rather the occasional intrusion of “low characters”; of those underbred and unimpassioned persons who—as in Miss Burney’s and Miss Ferrier’s novels—are naturally and almost cheerfully vulgar. That Mr. William Hayley, author of “The Triumphs of Temper,” and her own most ardent admirer, should tune his inconstant lyre in praise of Mrs. Smith was more than Miss Seward could bear. “My very foes acquit me of harbouring one grain of envy in my bosom,” she writes him feelingly; “yet it is surely by no means inconsistent with that exemption to feel a little indignant, and to enter one’s protest, when compositions of mere mediocrity are extolled far above those of real genius.” She then proceeds to point out the “indelicacy” of Lady Adelina’s fall from grace, and the use of “kitchen phrases,” such as “she grew white at the intelligence.” “White instead of pale,” comments Miss Seward severely, “I have often heard servants say, but never a gentleman or a gentlewoman.” If Mr. Hayley desires to read novels, she urges upon him the charms of another popular heroine, Caroline de Lichtfield, in whom he will find “simplicity, wit, pathos, and the most exalted generosity”; and the history of whose adventures “makes curiosity gasp, admiration kindle, and pity dissolve.”

Caroline, “the gay child of Artless Nonchalance,” is at least a more cheerful young person than the Orphan. Her story, translated from the French of Madame de Montolieu, was widely read in England and on the Continent; and Miss Seward tells us that its author was indebted “to the merits and graces of these volumes for a transition from incompetence to the comforts of wealth; from the unprotected dependence of waning virginity to the social pleasures of wedded

friendship." In plain words, we are given to understand that a rich and elderly German widower read the book, sought an acquaintance with the writer, and married her. "Hymen," exclaims Miss Seward, "passed by the fane of Cytherea and the shrine of Plutus, to light his torch at the altar of genius";—which beautiful burst of eloquence makes it painful to add the chilling truth, and say that "Caroline de Lichtfield" was written six years after its author's marriage with M. de Montolieu, who was a Swiss, and her second husband. She espoused her first, M. de Crousaz, when she was eighteen, and still comfortably remote from the terrors of waning virginity. Accurate information was not, however, a distinguishing characteristic of the day. Sir Walter Scott, writing some years later of Madame de Montolieu, ignores both marriages altogether, and calls her Mademoiselle.

No rich reward lay in wait for poor Charlotte Smith, whose husband was systematically impecunious, and whose large family of children were supported wholly by her pen. "Emmeline, or the Orphan of the Castle" was followed by "Ethelinda, or the Recluse of the Lake," and that by "The Old Manor House," which was esteemed her masterpiece. Its heroine bears the interesting name of Monimia; and when she marries her Orlando, "every subsequent hour of their lives was marked by some act of benevolence,"—a breathless and philanthropic career. By this time the false-hearted Hayley had so far transferred to Mrs. Smith the homage due to Miss Seward that he was rewarded with the painful privilege of reading "The Old Manor House" in manuscript,—a privilege reserved in those days for tried and patient friends. The poet had himself dallied a little with fiction, having written, "solely to promote the interests of religion," a novel called "The Young Widow," which no one appears to have read, except perhaps the Archbishop of Canterbury, to whom its author sent a copy.

In purity of motive Mr. Hayley was rivalled only by Mrs. Brunton, whose two novels, "Self-Control" and "Discipline," were designed "to procure admission for the religion of a sound mind and of the Bible where it cannot find access in any other form." Mrs. Brunton was perhaps the most commended novelist of her time. The inexorable titles of her stories secured for them a place upon the guarded book-shelves of the young. Many a demure English girl must have blessed these deluding titles, just as, forty years later, many an English boy blessed the inspiration which had impelled George Borrow to misname his immortal book "The Bible in Spain." When the wife of a clergyman undertook to write a novel in the interests of religion and the Scriptures; when she called it "Discipline," and drew up a stately apology for employing fiction as a medium for the lessons she meant to convey, what parent could refuse to be beguiled?

There is nothing trivial in Mrs. Brunton's conception of a good novel, in the standard she proposes to the world.

"Let the admirable construction of fable in 'Tom Jones' be employed to unfold characters like Miss Edgeworth's; let it lead to a moral like Richardson's; let it be told with the elegance of Rousseau, and with the simplicity of Goldsmith; let it be all this, and Milton need not have been ashamed of the work."

How far "Discipline" and "Self-Control" approach this composite standard of perfection it would be invidious to ask; but they accomplished a miracle of their own in being both popular and permitted, in pleasing the frivolous, and edifying the devout. Dedicated to Miss Joanna Baillie, sanctioned by Miss Hannah More, they stood above reproach, though not without a flavour of depravity. Mrs. Brunton's outlook upon life was singularly uncomplicated. All her women of fashion are heartless and inane. All her men of fashion cherish dishonourable designs upon female youth and innocence. Indeed the strenuous efforts of Laura, in "Self-Control," to preserve her virginity may be thought a trifle explicit for very youthful readers. We find her in the first chapter—she is seventeen—fainting at the feet of her lover, who has just revealed the unworthy nature of his intentions; and we follow her through a series of swoons to the last pages, where she "sinks senseless" into—of all vessels!—a canoe; and is carried many miles down a Canadian river in a state of nicely balanced unconsciousness. Her self-control (the crowning virtue which gives its title to the book) is so marked that when she dismisses Hargrave on probation, and then meets him accidentally in a London print-shop after a four months' absence, she "neither screamed nor fainted"; only "trembled violently, and leant against the counter to recover strength and composure." It is not until he turns, and, "regardless of the inquisitive looks of the spectators, clasped her to his breast," that "her head sunk upon his shoulder, and she lost all consciousness." As for her heroic behaviour when the same Hargrave (having lapsed from grace) shoots the virtuous De Courcy in Lady Pelham's summer-house, it must be described in the author's own words. No others could do it justice.

"To the plants which their beauty had recommended to Lady Pelham, Laura had added a few of which the usefulness was known to her. Agaric of the oak was of the number; and she had often applied it where many a hand less fair would have shrunk from the task. Nor did she hesitate now. The ball had entered near the neck; and the feminine, the delicate Laura herself disengaged the wound from its covering; the feeling, the tender Laura herself performed an office from which false sensibility would have recoiled in horror."

Is it possible that anybody except Miss Burney could have shrunk modestly from the sight of a lover's neck, especially when it had a bullet in it? Could a sense of decorum be more overwhelmingly expressed? Yet the same novel which held up to our youthful great-grandmothers this unapproachable standard of propriety presented to their consideration the most intimate details of libertinism. There was then, as now, no escape from the moralist's devastating disclosures.

One characteristic is common to all these faded romances, which in their time were read with far more fervour and sympathy than are their successors to-day. This is the undying and undeviating nature of their heroes' affections. Written by ladies who took no count of man's proverbial inconstancy, they express a touching belief in the supremacy of feminine charms. A heroine of seventeen (she is seldom older), with ringlets, and a "faltering timidity," inflames both the virtuous and the profligate with such imperishable passions, that when triumphant morality leads her to the altar, defeated vice cannot survive her loss. Her suitors, reversing the enviable experience of Ben Bolt,—

> weep with delight when she gives them a smile,
> And tremble with fear at her frown.

They grow faint with rapture when they enter her presence, and, when she repels their advances, they signify their disappointment by gnashing their teeth, and beating their heads against the wall. Rejection cannot alienate their faithful hearts; years and absence cannot chill their fervour. They belong to a race of men who, if they ever existed at all, are now as extinct as the mastodon.

It was Miss Jane Porter who successfully transferred to a conquering hero that exquisite sensibility of soul which had erstwhile belonged to the conquering heroine,—to the Emmelines and Adelinas of fiction. Dipping her pen "in the tears of Poland," she conveyed the glittering drops to the eyes of "Thaddeus of Warsaw," whence they gush in rills,—like those of the Prisoner of Chillon's brother. Thaddeus is of such exalted virtue that strangers in London address him as "excellent young gentleman," and his friends speak of him as "incomparable young man." He rescues children from horses' hoofs and from burning buildings. He nurses them through small-pox, and leaves their bedsides in the most casual manner, to mingle in crowds and go to the play. He saves women from insult on the streets. He is kind even to "that poor slandered and abused animal, the cat,"—which is certainly to his credit. Wrapped in a sable cloak, wearing "hearse-like plumes" on his hat, a star upon his breast, and a sabre by his side, he moves with Hamlet's melancholy grace through the five hundred pages of the story. "His unrestrained and elegant conversation acquired new

pathos from the anguish that was driven back to his heart: like the beds of rivers which infuse their own nature with the current, his hidden grief imparted an indescribable interest and charm to all his sentiments and actions."

What wonder that such a youth is passionately loved by all the women who cross his path, but whom he regards for the most part with "that lofty tranquillity which is inseparable from high rank when it is accompanied by virtue." In vain Miss Euphemia Dundas writes him amorous notes, and entraps him into embarrassing situations. In vain Lady Sara Roos—married, I regret to say—pursues him to his lodgings, and wrings "her snowy arms" while she confesses the hopeless nature of her infatuation. The irreproachable Thaddeus replaces her tenderly but firmly on a sofa, and as soon as possible sends her home in a cab. It is only when the "orphan heiress," Miss Beaufort, makes her appearance on the scene, "a large Turkish shawl enveloping her fine form, a modest grace observable in every limb," that the exile's haughty soul succumbs to love. Miss Beaufort has been admirably brought up by her aunt, Lady Somerset, who is a person of great distinction, and who gives "conversaziones," as famous in their way as Mrs. Proudie's.—"There the young Mary Beaufort listened to pious divines of every Christian persuasion. There she gathered wisdom from real philosophers; and, in the society of our best living poets, cherished an enthusiasm for all that is great and good. On these evenings, Sir Robert Somerset's house reminded the visitor of what he had read or imagined of the School of Athens."

Never do hero and heroine approach each other with such spasms of modesty as Thaddeus and Miss Beaufort. Their hearts expand with emotion, but their mutual sense of propriety keeps them remote from all vulgar understandings. In vain "Mary's rosy lips seemed to breathe balm while she spoke." In vain "her beautiful eyes shone with benevolence." The exile, standing proudly aloof, watches with bitter composure the attentions of more frivolous suitors. "His arms were folded, his hat pulled over his forehead; and his long dark eye-lashes shading his downcast eyes imparted a dejection to his whole air, which wrapped her weeping heart round and round with regretful pangs." What with his lashes, and his hidden griefs, the majesty of his mournful moods, and the pleasing pensiveness of his lighter ones, Thaddeus so far eclipses his English rivals that they may be pardoned for wishing he had kept his charms in Poland. Who that has read the matchless paragraph which describes the first unveiling of the hero's symmetrical leg can forget the sensation it produces?

"Owing to the warmth of the weather, Thaddeus came out this morning without

boots; and it being the first time the exquisite proportion of his limb had been seen by any of the present company excepting Euphemia" (why had Euphemia been so favoured?), "Lascelles, bursting with an emotion which he would not call envy, measured the count's fine leg with his scornful eye."

When Thaddeus at last expresses his attachment for Miss Beaufort, he does so kneeling respectfully in her uncle's presence, and in these well-chosen words: "Dearest Miss Beaufort, may I indulge myself in the idea that I am blessed with your esteem?" Whereupon Mary whispers to Sir Robert: "Pray, Sir, desire him to rise. I am already sufficiently overwhelmed!" and the solemn deed is done.

"Thaddeus of Warsaw" may be called the "Last of the Heroes," and take rank with the "Last of the Mohicans," the "Last of the Barons," the "Last of the Cavaliers," and all the finalities of fiction. With him died that noble race who expressed our great-grandmothers' artless ideals of perfection. Seventy years later, D'Israeli made a desperate effort to revive a pale phantom of departed glory in "Lothair," that nursling of the gods, who is emphatically a hero, and nothing more. "London," we are gravely told, "was at Lothair's feet." He is at once the hope of United Italy, and the bulwark of the English Establishment. He is—at twenty-two—the pivot of fashionable, political, and clerical diplomacy. He is beloved by the female aristocracy of Great Britain; and mysterious ladies, whose lofty souls stoop to no conventionalities, die happy with his kisses on their lips. Five hundred mounted gentlemen compose his simple country escort, and the coat of his groom of the chambers is made in Saville Row. What more could a hero want? What more could be lavished upon him by the most indulgent of authors? Yet who shall compare Lothair to the noble Thaddeus nodding his hearse-like plumes,—Thaddeus dedicated to the "urbanity of the brave," and embalmed in the tears of Poland? The inscrutable creator of Lothair presented his puppet to a mocking world; but all England and much of the Continent dilated with correct emotions when Thaddeus, "uniting to the courage of a man the sensibility of a woman, and the exalted goodness of an angel" (I quote from an appreciative critic), knelt at Miss Beaufort's feet.

Ten years later "Pride and Prejudice" made its unobtrusive appearance, and was read by that "saving remnant" to whom is confided the intellectual welfare of their land. Mrs. Elwood, the biographer of England's "Literary Ladies," tells us, in the few careless pages which she deems sufficient for Miss Austen's novels, that there *are* people who think these stories "worthy of ranking with those of Madame d'Arblay and Miss Edgeworth"; but that in their author's estimation (and, by inference, in her own), "they took up a much more humble station."

Yet, tolerant even of such inferiority, Mrs. Elwood bids us remember that although “the character of Emma is perhaps too manœuvring and too plotting to be perfectly amiable,” that of Catherine Morland “will not suffer greatly even from a comparison with Miss Burney’s interesting Evelina”; and that “although one is occasionally annoyed by the underbred personages of Miss Austen’s novels, the annoyance is only such as we should feel if we were actually in their company.”

It was thus that our genteel great-grandmothers, enamoured of lofty merit and of refined sensibility, regarded Elizabeth Bennet’s relations.

ON THE SLOPES OF PARNASSUS

> Perhaps no man ever thought a line superfluous when he wrote it. We are seldom tiresome to ourselves.—DR. JOHNSON.

IT is commonly believed that the extinction of verse—of verse in the bulk, which is the way in which our great-grandfathers consumed it—is due to the vitality of the novel. People, we are told, read rhyme and metre with docility, only because they wanted to hear a story, only because there was no other way in which they could get plenty of sentiment and romance. As soon as the novel supplied them with all the sentiment they wanted, as soon as it told them the story in plain prose, they turned their backs upon poetry forever.

There is a transparent inadequacy in this solution of a problem which still confronts the patient reader of buried masterpieces. Novels were plenty when Mr. William Hayley's "Triumphs of Temper" went through twelve editions, and when Dr. Darwin's "Botanic Garden" was received with deferential delight. But could any dearth of fiction persuade us now to read the "Botanic Garden"? Were we shipwrecked in company with the "Triumphs of Temper," would we ever finish the first canto? Novels stood on every English book-shelf when Fox read "Madoc" aloud at night to his friends, and they stayed up, so he says, an hour after their bedtime to hear it. Could that miracle be worked to-day? Sir Walter Scott, with indestructible amiability, reread "Madoc" to please Miss Seward, who, having "steeped" her own eyes "in transports of tears and sympathy," wrote to him that it carried "a master-key to every bosom which common good sense and anything resembling a human heart inhabit." Scott, unwilling to resign all pretensions to a human heart, tried hard to share the Swan's emotions, and failed. "I cannot feel quite the interest I would like to do," he patiently confessed.

If Southey's poems were not read as Scott's and Moore's and Byron's were read (give us another Byron, and we will read him with forty thousand novels knocking at our doors!); if they were not paid for out of the miraculous depths of Murray's Fortunatus's purse, they nevertheless enjoyed a solid reputation of their own. They are mentioned in all the letters of the period (save and except Lord Byron's ribald pages) with carefully measured praise, and they enabled their author to accept the laureateship on self-respecting terms. They are at least, as Sir Leslie Stephen reminds us, more readable than Glover's "Leonidas," or

Wilkie's "Epigoniad," and they are shorter, too. Yet the "Leonidas," an epic in nine books, went through four editions; whereupon its elate author expanded it into twelve books; and the public, undaunted, kept on buying it for years. The "Epigoniad" is also in nine books. It is on record that Hume, who seldom dallied with the poets, read all nine, and praised them warmly. Mr. Wilkie was christened the "Scottish Homer," and he bore that modest title until his death. It was the golden age of epics. The ultimatum of the modern publisher, "No poet need apply!" had not yet blighted the hopes and dimmed the lustre of genius. "Everybody thinks he can write verse," observed Sir Walter mournfully, when called upon for the hundredth time to help a budding aspirant to fame.

With so many competitors in the field, it was uncommonly astute in Mr. Hayley to address himself exclusively to that sex which poets and orators call "fair." There is a formal playfulness, a ponderous vivacity about the "Triumphs of Temper," which made it especially welcome to women. In the preface of the first edition the author gallantly laid his laurels at their feet, observing modestly that it was his desire, however "ineffectual," "to unite the sportive wildness of Ariosto and the more serious sublime painting of Dante with some portion of the enchanting elegance, the refined imagination, and the moral graces of Pope; and to do this, if possible, without violating those rules of propriety which Mr. Cambridge has illustrated, by example as well as by precept, in the 'Scribleriad,' and in his sensible preface to that elegant and learned poem."

Accustomed as we are to the confusions of literary perspective, this grouping of Dante, Ariosto, and Mr. Cambridge does seem a trifle foreshortened. But our ancestors had none of that sensitive shrinking from comparisons which is so characteristic of our timid and thin-skinned generation. They did not edge off from the immortals, afraid to breathe their names lest it be held lèse-majesté; they used them as the common currency of criticism. Why should not Mr. Hayley have challenged a contrast with Dante and Ariosto, when Miss Seward assured her little world—which was also Mr. Hayley's world—that he had the "wit and ease" of Prior, a "more varied versification" than Pope, and "the fire and the invention of Dryden, without any of Dryden's absurdity"? Why should he have questioned her judgment, when she wrote to him that Cowper's "Task" would "please and instruct the race of common readers," who could not rise to the beauties of Akenside, or Mason, or Milton, or of his (Mr. Hayley's) "exquisite 'Triumphs of Temper'"? There was a time, indeed, when she sorrowed lest his "inventive, classical, and elegant muse" should be "deplorably infected" by the growing influence of Wordsworth; but, that peril past, he rose again, the bright particular star of a wide feminine horizon.

Mr. Hayley's didacticism is admirably adapted to his readers. The men of the eighteenth century were not expected to keep their tempers; it was the sweet prerogative of wives and daughters to smooth the roughened current of family life. Accordingly the heroine of the "Triumphs," being bullied by her father, a fine old gentleman of the Squire Western type, maintains a superhuman cheerfulness, gives up the ball for which she is already dressed, wreathes her countenance in smiles, and

> with sportive ease,
> Prest her Piano-forte's favourite keys.

The men of the eighteenth century were all hard drinkers. Therefore Mr. Hayley conjures the "gentle fair" to avoid even the mild debauchery of siruped fruits,—

> For the sly fiend, of every art possest,
> Steals on th' affection of her female guest;
> And, by her soft address, seducing each,
> Eager she plies them with a brandy peach.
> They with keen lip the luscious fruit devour,
> But swiftly feel its peace-destroying power.
> Quick through each vein new tides of frenzy roll,
> All evil passions kindle in the soul;
> Drive from each feature every cheerful grace,
> And glare ferocious in the sallow face;
> The wounded nerves in furious conflict tear,
> Then sink in blank dejection and despair.

All this combustle, to use Gray's favourite word, about a brandy peach! But women have ever loved to hear their little errors magnified. In the matter of poets, preachers and confessors, they are sure to choose the denunciatory.

Dr. Darwin, as became a scientist and a sceptic, addressed his ponderous "Botanic Garden" to male readers. It is true that he offers much good advice to women, urging upon them especially those duties and devotions from which he, as a man, was exempt. It is true also that when he first contemplated writing his epic, he asked Miss Seward—so, at least, she said—to be his collaborator; an honour which she modestly declined, as not "strictly proper for a female pen." But the peculiar solidity, the encyclopædic qualities of this masterpiece, fitted it for such grave students as Mr. Edgeworth, who loved to be amply instructed. It is a poem replete with information, and information of that disconnected order in which the Edgeworthian soul took true delight. We are told, not only about

flowers and vegetables, but about electric fishes, and the salt mines of Poland; about Dr. Franklin's lightning rod, and Mrs. Damer's bust of the Duchess of Devonshire; about the treatment of paralytics, and the mechanism of the common pump. We pass from the death of General Wolfe at Quebec to the equally lamented demise of a lady botanist at Derby. We turn from the contemplation of Hannibal crossing the Alps to consider the charities of a benevolent young woman named Jones.

Sound, Nymphs of Helicon! the trump of Fame,
And teach Hibernian echoes Jones's name;
Bind round her polished brow the civic bay,
And drag the fair Philanthropist to day.

Pagan divinities disport themselves on one page, and Christian saints on another. St. Anthony preaches, not to the little fishes of the brooks and streams, but to the monsters of the deep,—sharks, porpoises, whales, seals and dolphins, that assemble in a sort of aquatic camp-meeting on the shores of the Adriatic, and "get religion" in the true revivalist spirit.

The listening shoals the quick contagion feel,
Pant on the floods, inebriate with their zeal;
Ope their wide jaws, and bow their slimy heads,
And dash with frantic fins their foamy beds.

For a freethinker, Dr. Darwin is curiously literal in his treatment of hagiology and the Scriptures. His Nebuchadnezzar (introduced as an illustration of the "Loves of the Plants") is not a bestialized mortal, but a veritable beast, like one of Circe's swine, only less easily classified in natural history.

Long eagle plumes his arching neck invest,
Steal round his arms and clasp his sharpened breast;
Dark brindled hairs in bristling ranks behind,
Rise o'er his back and rustle in the wind;
Clothe his lank sides, his shrivelled limbs surround,
And human hands with talons print the ground.
Lolls his red tongue, and from the reedy side
Of slow Euphrates laps the muddy tide.
Silent, in shining troups, the Courtier throng
Pursue their monarch as he crawls along;
E'en Beauty pleads in vain with smiles and tears,
Not Flattery's self can pierce his pendant ears.

The picture of the embarrassed courtiers promenading slowly after this royal phenomenon, and of the lovely inconsiderates proffering their vain allurements, is so ludicrous as to be painful. Even Miss Seward, who held that the "Botanic Garden" combined "the sublimity of Michael Angelo, the correctness and elegance of Raphael, with the glow of Titian," was shocked by Nebuchadnezzar's pendant ears, and admitted that the passage was likely to provoke inconsiderate laughter.

The first part of Dr. Darwin's poem, "The Economy of Vegetation," was warmly praised by critics and reviewers. Its name alone secured for it esteem. A few steadfast souls, like Mrs. Schimmelpenninck, refused to accept even vegetation from a sceptic's hands; but it was generally conceded that the poet had "entwined the Parnassian laurel with the balm of Pharmacy" in a very creditable manner. The last four cantos, however,—indiscreetly entitled "The Loves of the Plants,"—awakened grave concern. They were held unfit for female youth, which, being then taught driblets of science in a guarded and muffled fashion, was not supposed to know that flowers had any sex, much less that they practised polygamy. The glaring indiscretion of their behaviour in the "Botanic Garden," their seraglios, their amorous embraces and involuntary libertinism, offended British decorum, and, what was worse, exposed the poem to Canning's pungent ridicule. When the "Loves of the Triangles" appeared in the "Anti-Jacobin," all England—except Whigs and patriots who never laughed at Canning's jokes—was moved to inextinguishable mirth. The mock seriousness of the introduction and argument, the "horrid industry" of the notes, the contrast between the pensiveness of the Cycloid and the innocent playfulness of the Pendulum, the solemn headshake over the licentious disposition of Optics, and the description of the three Curves that requite the passion of the Rectangle, all burlesque with unfeeling delight Dr. Darwin's ornate pedantry.

> Let shrill Acoustics tune the tiny lyre,
> With Euclid sage fair Algebra conspire;
> Let Hydrostatics, simpering as they go,
> Lead the light Naiads on fantastic toe.

The indignant poet, frigidly vain, and immaculately free from any taint of humour, was as much scandalized as hurt by this light-hearted mockery. Being a dictator in his own little circle at Derby, he was naturally disposed to consider the "Anti-Jacobin" a menace to genius and to patriotism. His criticisms and his prescriptions had hitherto been received with equal submission. When he told his friends that Akenside was a better poet than Milton,—"more polished, pure, and

dignified," they listened with respect. When he told his patients to eat acid fruits with plenty of sugar and cream, they obeyed with alacrity. He had a taste for inventions, and first made Mr. Edgeworth's acquaintance by showing him an ingenious carriage of his own contrivance, which was designed to facilitate the movements of the horse, and enable it to turn with ease. The fact that Dr. Darwin was three times thrown from this vehicle, and that the third accident lamed him for life, in no way disconcerted the inventor or his friends, who loved mechanism for its own sake, and apart from any given results. Dr. Darwin defined a fool as one who never in his life tried an experiment. So did Mr. Day, of "Sandford and Merton" fame, who experimented in the training of animals, and was killed by an active young colt that had failed to grasp the system.

The "Botanic Garden" was translated into French, Italian, and Portuguese, to the great relief of Miss Seward, who hated to think that the immortality of such a work depended upon the preservation of a single tongue. "Should that tongue perish," she wrote proudly, "translations would at least retain all the host of beauties which do not depend upon felicities of verbal expression."

If the interminable epics which were so popular in these halcyon days had condescended to the telling of stories, we might believe that they were read, or at least occasionally read, as a substitute for prose fiction. But the truth is that most of them are solid treatises on morality, or agriculture, or therapeutics, cast into the blankest of blank verse, and valued, presumably, for the sake of the information they conveyed. Their very titles savour of statement rather than of inspiration. Nobody in search of romance would take up Dr. Grainger's "Sugar Cane," or Dyer's "Fleece," or the Rev. Richard Polwhele's "English Orator." Nobody desiring to be idly amused would read the "Vales of Weaver," or a long didactic poem on "The Influence of Local Attachment." It was not because he felt himself to be a poet that Dr. Grainger wrote the "Sugar Cane" in verse, but because that was the form most acceptable to the public. The ever famous line,

"Now Muse, let's sing of rats!"

which made merry Sir Joshua Reynolds and his friends, is indicative of the good doctor's struggles to employ an uncongenial medium. He wanted to tell his readers how to farm successfully in the West Indies; how to keep well in a treacherous climate; what food to eat, what drugs to take, how to look after the physical condition of negro servants, and guard them from prevalent maladies. These were matters on which the author was qualified to speak, and on which he does speak with all a physician's frankness; but they do not lend themselves to lofty strains. Whole pages of the "Sugar Cane" read like prescriptions and

dietaries done into verse. It is as difficult to sing with dignity about a disordered stomach as about rats and cockroaches; and Dr. Grainger's determination to leave nothing untold leads him to dwell with much feeling, but little grace, on all the disadvantages of the tropics.

Musquitoes, sand-flies, seek the sheltered roof,
And with fell rage the stranger guest assail,
Nor spare the sportive child; from their retreats
Cockroaches crawl displeasingly abroad.

The truthfulness and sobriety of this last line deserve commendation. Cockroaches in the open *are* displeasing to sensitive souls; and a footnote, half a page long, tells us everything we could possibly desire—or fear—to know about these insects. As an example of Dr. Grainger's thoroughness in the treatment of such themes, I quote with delight his approved method of poisoning alligators.

With Misnian arsenic, deleterious bane,
Pound up the ripe cassada's well-rasped root,
And form in pellets; these profusely spread
Round the Cane-groves where skulk the vermin-breed.
They, greedy, and unweeting of the bait,
Crowd to the inviting cates, and swift devour
Their palatable Death; for soon they seek
The neighbouring spring; and drink, and swell, and die.

Then follow some very sensible remarks about the unwholesomeness of the water in which the dead alligators are decomposing,—remarks which Mr. Kipling has unconsciously parodied:—

But 'e gets into the drinking casks, and then o' course we dies.

The wonderful thing about the "Sugar Cane" is that it was read;—nay, more, that it was read aloud at the house of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and though the audience laughed, it listened. Dodsley published the poem in handsome style; a second edition was called for; it was reprinted in Jamaica, and pirated (what were the pirates thinking about!) in 1766. Even Dr. Johnson wrote a friendly notice in the London "Chronicle," though he always maintained that the poet might just as well have sung the beauties of a parsley-bed or of a cabbage garden. He took the same high ground when Boswell called his attention to Dyer's "Fleece."—"The subject, Sir, cannot be made poetical. How can a man write poetically of serges and druggets?"

It was not for the sake of sentiment or story that the English public read "The

Fleece.” Nor could it have been for practical guidance; for farmers, even in 1757, must have had some musty almanacs, some plain prose manuals to advise them. They could never have waited to learn from an epic poem that

> the coughing pest
> From their green pastures sweeps whole flocks away,

or that

> Sheep also pleurisies and dropsies know,

or that

> The infectious scab, arising from extremes
> Of want or surfeit, is by water cured
> Of lime, or sodden stave-acre, or oil
> Dispersive of Norwegian tar.

Did the British woolen-drapers of the period require to be told in verse about

> Cheyney, and bayse, and serge, and alepine,
> Tammy, and crape, and the long countless list
> Of woolen webs.

Surely they knew more about their own dry-goods than did Mr. Dyer. Is it possible that British parsons read Mr. Polwhele’s “English Orator” for the sake of his somewhat confused advice to preachers?—

> Meantime thy Style familiar, that alludes
> With pleasing Retrospect to recent Scenes
> Or Incidents amidst thy Flock, fresh graved
> On Memory, shall recall their scattered Thoughts,
> And interest every Bosom. With the Voice
> Of condescending Gentleness address
> Thy kindred People.

It was Miss Seward’s opinion that the neglect of Mr. Polwhele’s “poetic writings” was a disgrace to literary England, from which we conclude that the reverend author outwore the patience of his readers. “Mature in dulness from his earliest years,” he had wisely adopted a profession which gave his qualities room for expansion. What his congregation must have suffered when he addressed it with “condescending gentleness,” we hardly like to think; but free-born Englishmen, who were so fortunate as not to hear him, refused to make good their loss by reading the “English Orator,” even after it had been revised by a

bishop. Miss Seward praised it highly; in return for which devotion she was hailed as a “Parnassian sister” in six benedictory stanzas.

Still gratitude her stores among,
  Shall bid the plausive poet sing;
And, if the last of all the throng
  That rise on the poetic wing,
Yet not regardless of his destined way,
If Seward’s envied sanction stamps the lay.

The Swan, indeed, was never without admirers. Her “Louisa; a Poetical Novel in four Epistles,” was favourably noticed; Dr. Johnson praised her ode on the death of Captain Cook; and no contributor to the Bath Easton vase received more myrtle wreaths than she did. “Warble” was the word commonly used by partial critics in extolling her verse. “Long may she continue to warble as heretofore, in such numbers as few even of our favourite bards would be shy to own.” Scott sorrowfully admitted to Miss Baillie that he found these warblings—of which he was the reluctant editor—“execrable”; and that the despair which filled his soul on receiving Miss Seward’s letters gave him a lifelong horror of sentiment; but for once it is impossible to sympathize with Sir Walter’s sufferings. If he had never praised the verses, he would never have been called upon to edit them; and James Ballantyne would have been saved the printing of an unsalable book. There is no lie so little worth the telling as that which is spoken in pure kindness to spare a wholesome pang.

It was, however, the pleasant custom of the time to commend and encourage female poets, as we commend and encourage a child’s unsteady footsteps. The generous Hayley welcomed with open arms these fair competitors for fame.

The bards of Britain with unjaundiced eyes
Will glory to behold such rivals rise.

He ardently flattered Miss Seward, and for Miss Hannah More his enthusiasm knew no bounds.

But with a magical control,
  Thy spirit-moving strain
Dispels the languor of the soul,
  Annihilating pain.

“Spirit-moving” seems the last epithet in the world to apply to Miss More’s strains; but there is no doubt that the public believed her to be as good a poet as a preacher, and that it supported her high estimate of her own powers. After a visit

to another lambent flame, Mrs. Barbauld, she writes with irresistible gravity:

“Mrs. B. and I have found out that we feel as little envy and malice towards each other, as though we had neither of us attempted to ‘build the lofty rhyme’; although she says this is what the envious and the malicious can never be brought to believe.”

Think of the author of “The Search after Happiness” and the author of “A Poetical Epistle to Mr. Wilberforce” loudly refusing to envy each other’s eminence! There is nothing like it in the strife-laden annals of fame.

Finally there stepped into the arena that charming embodiment of the female muse, Mrs. Hemans; and the manly heart of Protestant England warmed into homage at her shrine. From the days she “first carolled forth her poetic talents under the animating influence of an affectionate and admiring circle,” to the days when she faded gracefully out of life, her “half-etherealized spirit” rousing itself to dictate a last “Sabbath Sonnet,” she was crowned and garlanded with bays. In the first place, she was fair to see,—Fletcher’s bust shows real loveliness; and it was Christopher North’s opinion that “no really ugly woman ever wrote a truly beautiful poem the length of her little finger.” In the second place, she was sincerely pious; and the Ettrick Shepherd reflected the opinion of his day when he said that “without religion, a woman’s just an even-down deevil.” The appealing helplessness of Mrs. Hemans’s gentle and affectionate nature, the narrowness of her sympathies, and the limitations of her art were all equally acceptable to critics like Gifford and Jeffrey, who held strict views as to the rounding of a woman’s circle. Even Byron heartily approved of a pious and pretty woman writing pious and pretty poems. Even Wordsworth flung her lordly words of praise. Even Shelley wrote her letters so eager and ardent that her very sensible mamma, Mrs. Browne, requested him to cease. And as for Scott, though he confessed she was too poetical for his taste, he gave her always the honest friendship she deserved. It was to her he said, when some tourists left them hurriedly at Newark Tower: “Ah, Mrs. Hemans, they little know what two lions they are running away from.” It was to her he said, when she was leaving Abbotsford: “There are some whom we meet, and should like ever after to claim as kith and kin; and you are of this number.”

Who would not gladly have written “The Siege of Valencia” and “The Vespers of Palermo,” to have heard Sir Walter say these words?

THE LITERARY LADY

Out-pensioners of Parnassus.—HORACE WALPOLE.

IN this overrated century of progress, when women have few favours shown them, but are asked to do their work or acknowledge their deficiencies, the thoughtful mind turns disconsolately back to those urbane days when every tottering step they took was patronized and praised. It must have been very pleasant to be able to publish "Paraphrases and Imitations of Horace," without knowing a word of Latin. Latin is a difficult language to study, and much useful time may be wasted in acquiring it; therefore Miss Anna Seward eschewed the tedious process which most translators deem essential. Yet her paraphrases were held to have caught the true Horatian spirit; and critics praised them all the more indulgently because of their author's feminine attitude to the classics. "Over the lyre of Horace," she wrote elegantly to Mr. Repton, "I throw an unfettered hand."

It may be said that critics were invariably indulgent to female writers (listen to Christopher North purring over Mrs. Hemans!) until they stepped, like Charlotte Brontë, from their appointed spheres, and hotly challenged the competition of the world. This was a disagreeable and a disconcerting thing for them to do. Nobody could patronize "Jane Eyre," and none of the pleasant things which were habitually murmured about "female excellence and talent" seemed to fit this firebrand of a book. Had Charlotte Brontë taken to heart Mrs. King's "justly approved work" on "The Beneficial Effects of the Christian Temper upon Domestic Happiness," she would not have shocked and pained the sensitive reviewer of the "Quarterly."

It was in imitation of that beacon light, Miss Hannah More, that Mrs. King wrote her famous treatise. It was in imitation of Miss Hannah More that Mrs. Trimmer (abhorred by Lamb) wrote "The Servant's Friend," "Help to the Unlearned," and the "Charity School Spelling Book,"—works which have passed out of the hands of men, but whose titles survive to fill us with wonder and admiration. Was there ever a time when the unlearned frankly recognized their ignorance, and when a mistress ventured to give her housemaids a "Servant's Friend"? Was spelling in the charity schools different from spelling elsewhere, or were charity-school children taught a limited vocabulary, from which all words of rank had been eliminated? Those were days when the upper classes were affable and

condescending, when the rural poor—if not intoxicated—curtsied and invoked blessings on their benefactors all day long, and when benevolent ladies told the village politicians what it was well for them to know. But even at this restful period, a “Charity School Spelling Book” seems ill calculated to inspire the youthful student with enthusiasm.

Mrs. Trimmer’s attitude to the public was marked by that refined diffidence which was considered becoming in a female. Her biographer assures us that she never coveted literary distinction, although her name was celebrated “wherever Christianity was established, and the English language was spoken.” Royalty took her by the hand, and bishops expressed their overwhelming sense of obligation. We sigh to think how many ladies became famous against their wills a hundred and fifty years ago, and how hard it is now to raise our aspiring heads. There was Miss —— or, as she preferred to be called, Mrs. —— Carter, who read Greek, and translated Epictetus, who was admired by “the great, the gay, the good, and the learned”; yet who could with difficulty be persuaded to bear the burden of her own eminence. It was the opinion of her friends that Miss Carter had conferred a good deal of distinction upon Epictetus by her translation, —by setting, as Dr. Young elegantly phrased it, this Pagan jewel in gold. We find Mrs. Montagu writing to this effect, and expressing in round terms her sense of the philosopher’s obligation. “Might not such an honour from a fair hand make even an Epictetus proud, without being censured for it? Nor let Mrs. Carter’s amiable modesty become blameable by taking offence at the truth, but stand the shock of applause which she has brought upon her own head.”

It was very comforting to receive letters like this, to be called upon to brace one’s self against the shock of applause, instead of against the chilly douche of disparagement. Miss Carter retorted, as in duty bound, by imploring her friend to employ her splendid abilities upon some epoch-making work,—some work which, while it entertained the world, “would be applauded by angels, and registered in Heaven.” Perhaps the uncertainty of angelic readers daunted even Mrs. Montagu, for she never responded to this and many similar appeals; but suffered her literary reputation to rest secure on her defence of Shakespeare, and three papers contributed to Lord Lyttelton’s “Dialogues of the Dead.” Why, indeed, should she have laboured further, when, to the end of her long and honoured life, men spoke of her “transcendent talents,” her “magnificent attainments”? Had she written a history of the world, she could not have been more reverently praised. Lord Lyttelton, transported with pride at having so distinguished a collaborator, wrote to her that the French translation of the “Dialogues” was as well done as “the poverty of the French tongue would

permit”; and added unctuously, “but such eloquence as yours must lose by being translated into *any* other language. Your form and manner would seduce Apollo himself on his throne of criticism on Parnassus.”

Lord Lyttelton was perhaps more remarkable for amiability than for judgment; but Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, who wrote good letters himself, ardently admired Mrs. Montagu’s, and pronounced her “the Madame du Deffand of the English capital.” Cowper meekly admitted that she stood at the head “of all that is called learned,” and that every critic “veiled his bonnet before her superior judgment.” Even Dr. Johnson, though he despised the “Dialogues,” and protested to the end of his life that Shakespeare stood in no need of Mrs. Montagu’s championship, acknowledged that the lady was well informed and intelligent. “Conversing with her,” he said, “you may find variety in one”; and this charming phrase stands now as the most generous interpretation of her fame. It is something we can credit amid the bewildering nonsense which was talked and written about a woman whose hospitality dazzled society, and whose assertiveness dominated her friends.

There were other literary ladies belonging to this charmed circle whose reputations rested on frailer foundations. Mrs. Montagu *did* write the essay on Shakespeare and the three dialogues. Miss Carter *did* translate Epictetus. Mrs. Chapone *did* write “Letters on the Improvement of the Mind,” which so gratified George the Third and Queen Charlotte that they entreated her to compose a second volume; and she *did* dally a little with verse, for one of her odes was prefixed—Heaven knows why!—to Miss Carter’s “Epictetus”; and the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, even little Prince William, were all familiar with this masterpiece. There never was a lady more popular with a reigning house, and, when we dip into her pages, we know the reason why. A firm insistence upon admitted truths, a loving presentation of the obvious, a generous championship of those sweet commonplaces we all deem dignified and safe, made her especially pleasing to good King George and his consort. Even her letters are models of sapiency. “Tho’ I meet with no absolutely perfect character,” she writes to Sir William Pepys, “yet where I find a good disposition, improved by good principles and virtuous habits, I feel a moral assurance that I shall not find any flagrant vices in the same person, and that I shall never see him fall into any very criminal action.”

The breadth and tolerance of this admission must have startled her correspondent, seasoned though he was to intellectual audacity. Nor was Mrs. Chapone lacking in the gentle art of self-advancement; for, when about to

publish a volume of “Miscellanies,” she requested Sir William to write an essay on “Affection and Simplicity,” or “Enthusiasm and Indifference,” and permit her to print it as her own. “If your ideas suit my way of thinking,” she tells him encouragingly, “I can cool them down to my manner of writing, for we must not have a hotchpotch of Styles; and if, for any reason, I should not be able to make use of them, you will still have had the benefit of having written them, and may peaceably possess your own property.”

There are many ways of asking a favour; but to assume that you are granting the favour that you ask shows spirit and invention. Had Mrs. Chapone written nothing but this model of all begging letters, she would be worthy to take high rank among the literary ladies of Great Britain.

It is more difficult to establish the claim of Mrs. Boscawen, who looms nebulously on the horizon as the wife of an admiral, and the friend of Miss Hannah More, from whom she received flowing compliments in the “Bas Bleu.”

> Each art of conversation knowing,
> High-bred, elegant Boscawen.

We are told that this lady was “distinguished by the strength of her understanding, the poignancy of her humour, and the brilliancy of her wit”; but there does not survive the mildest joke, the smallest word of wisdom to illustrate these qualities. Then there was Mrs. Schimmelpenninck, whose name alone was a guarantee of immortality; and the “sprightly and pleasing Mrs. Ironmonger”; and Miss Lee, who could repeat the whole of Miss Burney’s “Cecilia” (a shocking accomplishment); and the vivacious Miss Monckton, whom Johnson called a dunce; and Miss Elizabeth Hamilton, a useful person, “equally competent to form the minds and manners of the daughters of a nobleman, and to reform the simple but idle habits of the peasantry”; and Mrs. Bennet, whose letters—so Miss Seward tells us—“breathed Ciceronean spirit and eloquence,” and whose poems revealed “the terse neatness, humour, and gayety of Swift,” which makes it doubly distressful that neither letters nor poems have survived. Above all, there was the mysterious “Sylph,” who glides—sylphlike—through a misty atmosphere of conjecture and adulation; and about whom we feel some of the fond solicitude expressed over and over again by the letter-writers of this engaging period.

Translated into prose, the Sylph becomes Mrs. Agmondesham Vesey,—

> Vesey, of verse the judge and friend,—

a fatuous deaf lady, with a taste for literary society, and a talent for arranging

chairs. She it was who first gathered the “Blues” together, placing them in little groups—generally back to back—and flitting so rapidly from one group to another, her ear-trumpet hung around her neck, that she never heard more than a few broken sentences of conversation. She had what Miss Hannah More amiably called “plastic genius,” which meant that she fidgeted perpetually; and what Miss Carter termed “a delightful spirit of innocent irregularity,” which meant that she was inconsequent to the danger point. “She united,” said Madame d’Arblay, “the unguardedness of childhood to a Hibernian bewilderment of ideas which cast her incessantly into some burlesque situation.” But her kind-heartedness (she proposed having her drawing-room gravelled, so that a lame friend could walk on it without slipping) made even her absurdities lovable, and her most fantastic behaviour was tolerated as proof of her aerial essence. “There is nothing of mere vulgar mortality about our Sylph,” wrote Miss Carter proudly.

It was in accordance with this pleasing illusion that, when Mrs. Vesey took a sea voyage, her friends spoke of her as though she were a mermaid, disporting herself in, instead of on, the ocean. They not only held “the uproar of a stormy sea to be as well adapted to the sublime of her imagination as the soft murmur of a gliding stream to the gentleness of her temper” (so much might at a pinch be said about any of us); but we find Miss Carter writing to Mrs. Montagu in this perplexing strain:—

“I fancy our Sylph has not yet left the coral groves and submarine palaces in which she would meet with so many of her fellow nymphs on her way to England. I think if she had landed, we should have had some information about it, either from herself or from somebody else who knows her consequence to us.”

The poor Sylph seems to have had rather a hard time of it after the death of the Honourable Agmondesham, who relished his wife’s vagaries so little, or feared them so much, that he left the bulk of his estate to his nephew, a respectable young man with no unearthly qualities. The heir, however, behaved generously to his widowed aunt, giving her an income large enough to permit her to live with comfort, and to keep her coach. Miss Carter was decidedly of the opinion that Mr. Vesey made such a “detestable” will because he was lacking in sound religious principles, and she expressed in plain terms her displeasure with her friend for mourning persistently over the loss of one who “so little deserved her tears.” But the Sylph, lonely, middle-aged, and deaf, realized perhaps that her little day was over. Mrs. Montagu’s profuse hospitality had supplanted “the biscuit’s ample sacrifice.” People no longer cared to sit back to back, talking

platitudes through long and hungry evenings. The “innocent irregularity” deepened into melancholy, into madness; and the Sylph, a piteous mockery of her old sweet foolish self, faded away, dissolving like Niobe in tears.

It may be noted that the mission of the literary lady throughout all these happy years was to elevate and refine. Her attitude towards matters of the intellect was one of obtrusive humility. It is recorded that “an accomplished and elegant female writer” (the name, alas! withheld) requested Sir William Pepys to mark all the passages in Madame de Staël’s works which he considered “above her comprehension.” Sir William “with ready wit” declined this invidious task; but agreed to mark all he deemed “worthy of her attention.” We hardly know what to admire the most in a story like this;—the lady’s modesty, Sir William’s tact, or the revelation it affords of infinite leisure. When we remember the relentless copiousness of Madame de Staël’s books, we wonder if the amiable annotator lived long enough to finish his task.

In matters of morality, however, the female pen was held to be a bulwark of Great Britain. The ambition to prove that—albeit a woman—one may be on terms of literary intimacy with the seven deadly sins (“Je ne suis qu’un pauvre diable de perruquier, mais je ne crois pas en Dieu plus que les autres”) had not yet dawned upon the feminine horizon. The literary lady accepted with enthusiasm the limitations of her sex, and turned them to practical account; she laid with them the foundations of her fame. Mrs. Montagu, an astute woman of the world, recognized in what we should now call an enfeebling propriety her most valuable asset. It sanctified her attack upon Voltaire, it enabled her to snub Dr. Johnson, and it made her, in the opinion of her friends, the natural and worthy opponent of Lord Chesterfield. She was entreated to come to the rescue of British morality by denouncing that nobleman’s “profligate” letters; and we find the Rev. Montagu Pennington lamenting years afterwards her refusal “to apply her wit and genius to counteract the mischief which Lord Chesterfield’s volumes had done.”

Miss Hannah More’s dazzling renown rested on the same solid support. She was so strong morally that to have cavilled at her intellectual feebleness would have been deemed profane. Her advice (she spent the best part of eighty-eight years in offering it) was so estimable that its general inadequacy was never ascertained. Rich people begged her to advise the poor. Great people begged her to advise the humble. Satisfied people begged her to advise the discontented. Sir William Pepys wrote to her in 1792, imploring her to avert from England the threatened dangers of radicalism and a division of land by writing a dialogue “between two

persons of the lowest order," in which should be set forth the discomforts of land ownership, and the advantages of labouring for small wages at trades. This simple and childlike scheme would, in Sir William's opinion, go far towards making English workmen contented with their lot, and might eventually save the country from the terrible bloodshed of France. Was ever higher tribute paid to sustained and triumphant propriety? Look at Mary Wollstonecraft vindicating the rights of woman in sordid poverty, in tears and shame; and look at Hannah More, an object of pious pilgrimage at Cowslip Green. Her sisters were awestruck at finding themselves the guardians of such preëminence. Miss Seward eloquently addressed them as

> sweet satellites that gently bear
> Your lesser radiance round this beamy star;

and, being the humblest sisters ever known, they seemed to have liked the appellation. They guarded their luminary from common contact with mankind; they spoke of her as "she" (like Mr. Rider Haggard's heroine), and they explained to visitors how good and great she was, and what a condescension it would be on her part to see them, when two peeresses and a bishop had been turned away the day before. "It is an exquisite pleasure," wrote Miss Carter enthusiastically, "to find distinguished talents and sublime virtue placed in such an advantageous situation"; and the modern reader is reminded against his will of the lively old actress who sighed out to the painter Mulready her unavailing regrets over a misspent life. "Ah, Mulready, if I had only been virtuous, it would have been pounds and pounds in my pocket."

"Harmonious virgins," sneered Horace Walpole, "whose thoughts and phrases are like their gowns, old remnants cut and turned"; and it is painful to know that in these ribald words he is alluding to the Swan of Lichfield, and to the "glowing daughter of Apollo," Miss Helen Maria Williams. The Swan probably never did have her gowns cut and turned, for she was a well-to-do lady with an income of four hundred pounds; and she lived very grandly in the bishop's palace at Lichfield, where her father ("an angel, but an ass," according to Coleridge) had been for many years a canon. But Apollo having, after the fashion of gods, bequeathed nothing to his glowing daughter but the gift of song, Miss Williams might occasionally have been glad of a gown to turn. Her juvenile poem "Edwin and Eltruda" enriched her in fame only; but "Peru," being published by subscription (blessed days when friends could be turned into subscribers!), must have been fairly remunerative; and we hear of its author in London giving "literary breakfasts," a popular but depressing form of entertainment. If ever

literature be “alien to the natural man,” it is at the breakfast hour. Miss Williams subsequently went to Paris, and became an ardent revolutionist, greatly to the distress of poor Miss Seward, whose enthusiasm for the cause of freedom had suffered a decline, and who kept imploring her friend to come home. “Fly, my dear Helen, that land of carnage!” she wrote beseechingly. But Helen couldn’t fly, being then imprisoned by the ungrateful revolutionists, who seemed unable, or unwilling, to distinguish friends from foes. She had moreover by that time allied herself to Mr. John Hurford Stone, a gentleman of the strictest religious views, but without moral prejudices, who abandoned his lawful wife for Apollo’s offspring, and who, as a consequence, preferred living on the Continent. Therefore Miss Williams fell forever from the bright circle of literary stars; and Lady Morgan, who met her years afterwards in Paris, had nothing more interesting to record than that she had grown “immensely fat,”—an unpoetic and unworthy thing to do. “For when corpulence, which is a gift of evil, cometh upon age, then are vanished the days of romance and of stirring deeds.”

Yet sentiment, if not romance, clung illusively to the literary lady, even when she surrendered nothing to persuasion. Strange shadowy stories of courtship are told with pathetic simplicity. Miss Carter, “when she had nearly attained the mature age of thirty,” was wooed by a nameless gentleman of unexceptionable character, whom “she was induced eventually to refuse, in consequence of his having written some verses, of the nature of which she disapproved.” Whether these verses were improper (perish the thought!) or merely ill-advised, we shall never know; but as the rejected suitor “expressed ever after a strong sense of Miss Carter’s handsome behaviour to him,” there seems to have been on his part something perilously akin to acquiescence. “I wonder,” says the wise Elizabeth Bennet, “who first discovered the efficacy of poetry in driving away love.” It is a pleasure to turn from such uncertainties to the firm outlines and providential issues of Miss Hannah More’s early attachment. When the wealthy Mr. Turner, who had wooed and won the lady, manifested an unworthy reluctance to marry her, she consented to receive, in lieu of his heart and hand, an income of two hundred pounds a year, which enabled her to give up teaching, and commence author at the age of twenty-two. The wedding day had been fixed, the wedding dress was made, but the wedding bells were never rung, and the couple—like the lovers in the story-books—lived happily ever after. The only measure of retaliation which Miss More permitted herself was to send Mr. Turner a copy of every book and of every tract she wrote; while that gentleman was often heard to say, when the tracts came thick and fast, that Providence had overruled his desire to make so admirable a lady his wife, because she was destined for higher things.

It was reserved for the Lichfield Swan to work the miracle of miracles, and rob love of inconstancy. She was but eighteen when she inspired a passion “as fervent as it was lasting” in the breast of Colonel Taylor, mentioned by discreet biographers as Colonel T. The young man being without income, Mr. Seward, who was not altogether an ass, declined the alliance; and when, four years later, a timely inheritance permitted a renewal of the suit, Miss Seward had wearied of her lover. Colonel Taylor accordingly married another young woman; but the remembrance of the Swan, and an unfortunate habit he had acquired of openly bewailing her loss, “clouded with gloom the first years of their married life.” The patient Mrs. Taylor became in time so deeply interested in the object of her husband’s devotion that she opened a correspondence with Miss Seward,—who was the champion letter-writer of England,—repeatedly sought to make her acquaintance, and “with melancholy enthusiasm was induced to invest her with all the charms imagination could devise, or which had been lavished upon her by description.”

This state of affairs lasted thirty years, at the end of which time Colonel Taylor formed the desperate resolution of going to Lichfield, and seeing his beloved one again. He went, he handed the parlour-maid a prosaic card; and while Miss Seward—a stoutish, middle-aged, lame lady—was adjusting her cap and kerchief, he strode into the hall, cast one impassioned glance up the stairway, and rapidly left the house. When asked by his wife why he had not stayed, he answered solemnly: “The gratification must have been followed by pain and regret that would have punished the temerity of the attempt. I had no sooner entered the house than I became sensible of the perilous state of my feelings, and fled with precipitation.”

And the Swan was fifty-two! Well may we sigh over the days when the Literary Lady not only was petted and praised, not only was the bulwark of Church and State; but when she accomplished the impossible, and kindled in man’s inconstant heart an inextinguishable flame.

THE CHILD

I was not initiated into any rudiments ’till near four years of age.—JOHN EVELYN.

THE courage of mothers is proverbial. There is no danger which they will not brave in behalf of their offspring. But I have always thought that, for sheer foolhardiness, no one ever approached the English lady who asked Dr. Johnson to read her young daughter’s translation from Horace. He did read it, because the gods provided no escape; and he told his experience to Miss Reynolds, who said soothingly, “And how was it, Sir?” “Why, very well for a young Miss’s verses,” was the contemptuous reply. “That is to say, as compared with excellence, nothing; but very well for the person who wrote them. I am vexed at being shown verses in that manner.”

The fashion of focussing attention upon children had not in Dr. Johnson’s day assumed the fell proportions which, a few years later, practically extinguished childhood. It is true that he objected to Mr. Bennet Langton’s connubial felicity, because the children were “too much about”; and that he betrayed an unworthy impatience when the ten little Langtons recited fables, or said their alphabets in Hebrew for his delectation. It is true also that he answered with pardonable rudeness when asked what was the best way to begin a little boy’s education. He said it mattered no more how it was begun, that is, what the child was taught first, than it mattered which of his little legs he first thrust into his breeches,—a callous speech, painful to parents’ ears. Dr. Johnson had been dead four years when Mrs. Hartley, daughter of Dr. David Hartley of Bath, wrote to Sir William Pepys:—

“Education is the rage of the times. Everybody tries to make their children more wonderful than any children of their acquaintance. The poor little things are so crammed with knowledge that there is scant time for them to obtain by exercise, and play, and *vacancy of mind*, that strength of body which is much more necessary in childhood than learning.”

I am glad this letter went to Sir William, who was himself determined that his children should not, at any rate, be less wonderful than other people’s bantlings. When his eldest son had reached the mature age of six, we find him writing to Miss Hannah More and Mrs. Chapone, asking what books he shall give the poor infant to read, and explaining to these august ladies his own theories of

education. Mrs. Chapone, with an enthusiasm worthy of Mrs. Blimber, replies that she sympathizes with the rare delight it must be to him to teach little William Latin; and that she feels jealous for the younger children, who, being yet in the nursery, are denied their brother's privileges. When the boy is ten, Sir William reads to him "The Faerie Queene," and finds that he grasps "the beauty of the description and the force of the allegory." At eleven he has "an animated relish for Ovid and Virgil." And the more the happy father has to tell about the precocity of his child, the more Mrs. Chapone stimulates and confounds him with tales of other children's prowess. When she hears that the "sweet Boy" is to be introduced, at five, to the English classics, she writes at once about a little girl, who, when "rather younger than he is" (the bitterness of that!), "had several parts of Milton by heart." These "she understood so well as to apply to her Mother the speech of the Elder Brother in 'Comus,' when she saw her uneasy for want of a letter from the Dean; and began of her own accord with

'Peace, Mother, be not over exquisite
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils'";—

advice which would have exasperated a normal parent to the boxing point.

There were few normal parents left, however, at this period, to stem the tide of infantile precocity. Child-study was dawning as a new and fascinating pursuit upon the English world; and the babes of Britain responded nobly to the demands made upon their incapacity. Miss Anna Seward lisped Milton at three, "recited poetical passages, with eyes brimming with delight," at five, and versified her favourite psalms at nine. Her father, who viewed these alarming symptoms with delight, was so ill-advised as to offer her, when she was ten, a whole half-crown, if she would write a poem on Spring; whereupon she "swiftly penned" twenty-five lines, which have been preserved to an ungrateful world, and which shadow forth the painful prolixity of future days. At four years of age, little Hannah More was already composing verses with ominous ease. At five, she "struck mute" the respected clergyman of the parish by her exhaustive knowledge of the catechism. At eight, we are told her talents "were of such a manifestly superior order that her father did not scruple to combine with the study of Latin some elementary instruction in mathematics; a fact which her readers might very naturally infer from the clear and logical cast of her argumentative writings."

It is not altogether easy to trace the connection between Miss More's early sums and her argumentative writings; but, as an illustration of her logical mind, I may venture to quote a "characteristic" anecdote, reverently told by her biographer,

Mr. Thompson. A young lady, whose sketches showed an unusual degree of talent, was visiting in Bristol; and her work was warmly admired by Miss Mary, Miss Sally, Miss Elizabeth, and Miss Patty More. Hannah alone withheld all word of commendation, sitting in stony silence whenever the drawings were produced; until one day she found the artist hard at work, putting a new binding on a petticoat. *Then*, "fixing her brilliant eyes with an expression of entire approbation upon the girl, she said: 'Now, my dear, that I find you can employ yourself usefully, I will no longer forbear to express my admiration of your drawings.'"

Only an early familiarity with the multiplication table could have made so ruthless a logician.

If Dr. Johnson, being childless, found other people's children in his way, how fared the bachelors and spinsters who, as time went on, were confronted by a host of infant prodigies; who heard little Anna Letitia Aikin—afterwards Mrs. Barbauld—read "as well as most women" at two and a half years of age; and little Anna Maria Porter declaim Shakespeare "with precision of emphasis and firmness of voice" at five; and little Alphonso Hayley recite a Greek ode at six. We wonder if anybody ever went twice to homes that harboured childhood; and we sympathize with Miss Ferrier's bitterness of soul, when she describes a family dinner at which Eliza's sampler and Alexander's copy-book are handed round to the guests, and Anthony stands up and repeats "My name is Norval" from beginning to end, and William Pitt is prevailed upon to sing the whole of "God save the King." It was also a pleasant fashion of the time to write eulogies on one's kith and kin. Sisters celebrated their brothers' talents in affectionate verse, and fathers confided to the world what marvellous children they had. Even Dr. Burney, a man of sense, poetizes thus on his daughter Susan:—

> Nor did her intellectual powers require
> The usual aid of labour to inspire
> Her soul with prudence, wisdom, and a taste
> Unerring in refinement, sound and chaste.

This was fortunate for Susan, as most young people of the period were compelled to labour hard. There was a ghastly pretence on the part of parents that children loved their tasks, and that to keep them employed was to keep them happy. Sir William Pepys persuaded himself without much difficulty that little William, who had weak eyes and nervous headaches, relished Ovid and Virgil. A wonderful and terrible letter written in 1786 by the Baroness de Bode, an Englishwoman married to a German and living at Deux-Ponts, lays bare the

process by which ordinary children were converted into the required miracles of precocity. Her eldest boys, aged eight and nine, appear to have been the principal victims. The business of their tutor was to see that they were “fully employed,” and this is an account of their day.

“In their walks he [the tutor] teaches them natural history and botany, not dryly as a task, but practically, which amuses them very much. In their hours of study come drawing, writing, reading, and summing. Their lesson in writing consists of a theme which they are to translate into three languages, and sometimes into Latin, for they learn that a little also. The boys learn Latin as a recreation, and not as a task, as is the custom in England. Perhaps *one or two hours a day* is at most all that is given to that study. ’Tis certainly not so dry a study, when learnt like modern languages. We have bought them the whole of the Classical Authors, so that they can instruct themselves if they will; between ninety and a hundred volumes in large octavo. You would be surprised,—even Charles Auguste, who is only five, reads German well, and French tolerably. They all write very good hands, both in Roman and German texts. Clem and Harry shall write you a letter in English, and send you a specimen of their drawing. Harry (the second) writes musick, too. He is a charming boy, improves very much in all his studies, plays very prettily indeed upon the harpsichord, and plays, too, all tunes by ear. Clem will, I think, play well on the violin; but ’tis more difficult in the beginning than the harpsichord. He is at this moment taking his lesson, the master accompanying him on the pianoforte; and when Henry plays that, the master accompanies on the violin, which forms them both, and pleases them at the same time. In the evening their tutor generally recounts to them very minutely some anecdote from history, which imprints it on the memory, amuses them, and hurts no eyes.”

There is nothing like it on record except the rule of life which Frederick William the First drew up for little Prince Fritz, when that unfortunate child was nine years old, and which disposed of his day, hour by hour, and minute by minute. But then Frederick William—a truth-teller if a tyrant—made no idle pretence of pleasing and amusing his son. The unpardonable thing about the Baroness de Bode is her smiling assurance that one or two hours of Latin a day afforded a pleasant pastime for children of eight and nine.

This was, however, the accepted theory of education. It is faithfully reflected in all the letters and literature of the time. When Miss More’s redoubtable “Cœlebs” asks Lucilla Stanley’s little sister why she is crowned with woodbine, the child replies: “Oh, sir, it is because it is my birthday. I am eight years old to-

day. I gave up all my gilt books with pictures this day twelvemonth; and to-day I give up all my story-books, and I am now going to read such books as men and women read." Whereupon the little girl's father—that model father whose wisdom flowers into many chapters of counsel—explains that he makes the renouncing of baby books a kind of epoch in his daughters' lives; and that by thus distinctly marking the period, he wards off any return to the immature pleasures of childhood. "We have in our domestic plan several of these artificial divisions of life. These little celebrations are eras that we use as marking-posts from which we set out on some new course."

Yet the "gilt books," so ruthlessly discarded at eight years of age, were not all of an infantile character. For half a century these famous little volumes, bound in Dutch gilt paper—whence their name—found their way into every English nursery, and provided amusement and instruction for every English child. They varied from the "histories" of Goody Two-Shoes and Miss Sally Spellwell to the "histories" of Tom Jones and Clarissa Harlowe, "abridged for the amusement of youth"; and from "The Seven Champions of Christendom" to "The First Principles of Religion, and the Existence of a Deity; Explained in a Series of Conversations, Adapted to the Capacity of the Infant Mind." The capacity of the infant mind at the close of the eighteenth century must have been something very different from the capacity of the infant mind to-day. In a gilt-book dialogue (1792) I find a father asking his tiny son: "Dick, have you got ten lines of Ovid by heart?"

"Yes, Papa, and I've wrote my exercise."

"Very well, then, you shall ride with me. The boy who does a little at seven years old, will do a great deal when he is fourteen."

This was poor encouragement for Dick, who had already tasted the sweets of application. It was better worth while for Miss Sally Spellwell to reach the perfection which her name implies, for *she* was adopted by a rich old lady with a marriageable son,—"a young Gentleman of such purity of Morals and good Understanding as is not everywhere to be found." In the breast of this paragon "strange emotions arise" at sight of the well-informed orphan; his mother, who sets a proper value on orthography, gives her full consent to their union; and we are swept from the contemplation of samplers and hornbooks to the triumphant conclusion: "Miss Sally Spellwell now rides in her coach and six." Then follows the unmistakable moral:—

If Virtue, Learning, Goodness are your Aim,
Each pretty Miss may hope to do the same;

an anticipation which must have spurred many a female child to diligence. There was no ill-advised questioning of values in our great-grandmothers' day to disturb this point of view. As the excellent Mrs. West observed in her "Letters to a young Lady," a book sanctioned by bishops, and dedicated to the Queen: "We unquestionably were created to be the wedded mates of man. Nature intended that man should sue, and woman coyly yield."

The most appalling thing about the precocious young people of this period was the ease with which they slipped into print. Publishers were not then the adamantine race whose province it is now to blight the hopes of youth. They beamed with benevolence when the first fruits of genius were confided to their hands. Bishop Thirlwall's first fruits, his "Primitiæ," were published when he was eleven years old, with a preface telling the public what a wonderful boy little Connop was;—how he studied Latin at three, and read Greek with ease and fluency at four, and wrote with distinction at seven. It is true that the parent Thirlwall appears to have paid the costs, to have launched his son's "slender bark" upon seas which proved to be stormless. It is true also that the bishop suffered acutely in later years from this youthful production, and destroyed every copy he could find. But there was no proud and wealthy father to back young Richard Polwhele, who managed, when he was a schoolboy in Cornwall, to get his first volume of verse published anonymously. It was called "The Fate of Llewellyn," and was consistently bad, though no worse, on the whole, than his maturer efforts. The title-page stated modestly that the writer was "a young gentleman of Truro School"; whereupon an ill-disposed critic in the "Monthly Review" intimated that the master of Truro School would do well to keep his young gentlemen out of print. Dr. Cardew, the said master, retorted hotly that the book had been published without his knowledge, and evinced a lack of appreciation, which makes us fear that his talented pupil had a bad half-hour at his hands.

Miss Anna Maria Porter—she who delighted "critical audiences" by reciting Shakespeare at five—published her "Artless Tales" at fifteen; and Mrs. Hemans was younger still when her "Blossoms of Spring" bloomed sweetly upon English soil. Some of the "Blossoms" had been written before she was ten. The volume was a "fashionable quarto," was dedicated to that hardy annual, the Prince Regent, and appears to have been read by adults. It is recorded that an unkind notice sent the little girl crying to bed; but as her "England and Spain; or Valour and Patriotism" was published nine months later, and as at eighteen she "beamed forth with a strength and brilliancy that must have shamed her reviewer," we

cannot feel that her poetic development was very seriously retarded.

And what of the marvellous children whose subsequent histories have been lost to the world? What of the two young prodigies of Lichfield, “Aonian flowers of early beauty and intelligence,” who startled Miss Seward and her friends by their “shining poetic talents,” and then lapsed into restful obscurity? What of the wonderful little girl (ten years old) whom Miss Burney saw at Tunbridge Wells; who sang “like an angel,” conversed like “an informed, cultivated, and sagacious woman,” played, danced, acted with all the grace of a comédienne, wept tears of emotion without disfiguring her pretty face, and, when asked if she read the novels of the day (what a question!), replied with a sigh: “But too often! I wish I did not.” Miss Burney and Mrs. Thrale were so impressed—as well they might be—by this little Selina Birch, that they speculated long and fondly upon the destiny reserved for one who so easily eclipsed the other miraculous children of this highly miraculous age.

“Doubtful as it is whether we shall ever see the sweet Syren again,” writes Miss Burney, “nothing, as Mrs. Thrale said to her” (this, too, was well advised), “can be more certain than that we shall hear of her again, let her go whither she will. Charmed as we all were, we agreed that to have the care of her would be distraction. ‘She seems the girl in the world,’ Mrs. Thrale wisely said, ‘to attain the highest reach of human perfection as a man’s mistress. As such she would be a second Cleopatra, and have the world at her command.’

“Poor thing! I hope to Heaven she will escape such sovereignty and such honours!”

She did escape scot-free. Whoever married—let us hope he married—Miss Birch, was no Mark Antony to draw fame to her feet. His very name is unknown to the world. Perhaps, as “Mrs.—Something—Rogers,” she illustrated in her respectable middle age that beneficent process by which Nature frustrates the educator, and converts the infant Cleopatra or the infant Hypatia into the rotund matron, of whom she stands permanently in need.

THE EDUCATOR

The Schoolmaster is abroad.—LORD BROUGHAM.

IT is recorded that Boswell once said to Dr. Johnson, "If you had had children, would you have taught them anything?" and that Dr. Johnson, out of the fulness of his wisdom, made reply: "I hope that I should have willingly lived on bread and water to obtain instruction for them; but I would not have set their future friendship to hazard for the sake of thrusting into their heads knowledge of things for which they might have neither taste nor necessity. You teach your daughters the diameters of the planets, and wonder, when you have done it, that they do not delight in your company."

It is the irony of circumstance that Dr. Johnson and Charles Lamb should have been childless, for they were the two eminent Englishmen who, for the best part of a century, respected the independence of childhood. They were the two eminent Englishmen who could have been trusted to let their children alone. Lamb was nine years old when Dr. Johnson died. He was twenty-seven when he hurled his impotent anathemas at the heads of "the cursed Barbauld crew," "blights and blasts of all that is human in man and child." By that time the educator's hand lay heavy on schoolroom and nursery. In France, Rousseau and Mme. de Genlis had succeeded in interesting parents so profoundly in their children that French babies led a *vie de parade*. Their toilets and their meals were as open to the public as were the toilets and the meals of royalty. Their bassinettes appeared in salons, and in private boxes at the playhouse; and it was an inspiring sight to behold a French mother fulfilling her sacred office while she enjoyed the spectacle on the stage. In England, the Edgeworths and Mr. Day had projected a system of education which isolated children from common currents of life, placed them at variance with the accepted usages of society, and denied them that wholesome neglect which is an important factor in self-development. The Edgeworthian child became the pivot of the household, which revolved warily around him, instructing him whenever it had the ghost of a chance, and guarding him from the four winds of heaven. He was not permitted to remain ignorant upon any subject, however remote from his requirements; but all information came filtered through the parental mind, so that the one thing he never knew was the world of childish beliefs and happenings. Intercourse with servants was prohibited; and it is pleasant to record that Miss Edgeworth found

even Mrs. Barbauld a dangerous guide, because little Charles of the "Early Lessons" asks his nurse to dress him in the mornings. Such a personal appeal, showing that Charles was on speaking terms with the domestics, was something which, in Miss Edgeworth's opinion, no child should ever read; and she praises the solicitude of a mother who blotted out this, and all similar passages, before confiding the book to her infant son. He might—who knows?—have been so far corrupted as to ask his own nurse to button him up the next day.

Another parent, still more highly commended, found something to erase in *all* her children's books; and Miss Edgeworth describes with grave complacency this pathetic little library, scored, blotted, and mutilated, before being placed on the nursery shelves. The volumes were, she admits, hopelessly disfigured; "but shall the education of a family be sacrificed to the beauty of a page? Few books can safely be given to children without the previous use of the pen, the pencil, and the scissors. These, in their corrected state, have sometimes a few words erased, sometimes half a page. Sometimes many pages are cut out."

Even now one feels a pang of pity for the little children who, more than a hundred years ago, were stopped midway in a story by the absence of half a dozen pages. Even now one wonders how much furtive curiosity was awakened by this process of elimination. To hover perpetually on the brink of the concealed and the forbidden does not seem a wholesome situation; and a careful perusal of that condemned classic, "Bluebeard," might have awakened this excellent mother to the risks she ran. There can be no heavier handicap to any child than a superhumanly wise and watchful custodian, whether the custody be parental, or relegated to some phœnix of a tutor like Mr. Barlow, or that cock-sure experimentalist who mounts guard over "Émile," teaching him with elaborate artifice the simplest things of life. We know how Tommy Merton fell from grace when separated from Mr. Barlow; but what *would* have become of Émile if "Jean Jacques" had providentially broken his neck? What would have become of little Caroline and Mary in Mary Wollstonecraft's "Original Stories," if Mrs. Mason—who is Mr. Barlow in petticoats—had ceased for a short time "regulating the affections and forming the minds" of her helpless charges? All these young people are so scrutinized, directed, and controlled, that their personal responsibility has been minimized to the danger point. In the name of nature, in the name of democracy, in the name of morality, they are pushed aside from the blessed fellowship of childhood, and from the beaten paths of life.

That Mary Wollstonecraft should have written the most priggish little book of her day is one of those pleasant ironies which relieves the tenseness of our pity

for her fate. Its publication is the only incident of her life which permits the shadow of a smile; and even here our amusement is tempered by sympathy for the poor innocents who were compelled to read the “Original Stories,” and to whom even Blake’s charming illustrations must have brought scant relief. The plan of the work is one common to most juvenile fiction of the period. Caroline and Mary, being motherless, are placed under the care of Mrs. Mason, a lady of obtrusive wisdom and goodness, who shadows their infant lives, moralizes over every insignificant episode, and praises herself with honest assiduity. If Caroline is afraid of thunderstorms, Mrs. Mason explains that *she* fears no tempest, because “a mind is never truly great until the love of virtue overcomes the fear of death.” If Mary behaves rudely to a visitor, Mrs. Mason contrasts her pupil’s conduct with her own. “I have accustomed myself to think of others, and what they will suffer on all occasions,” she observes; “and this loathness to offend, or even to hurt the feelings of another, is an instantaneous spring which actuates my conduct, and makes me kindly affected to everything that breathes.... Perhaps the greatest pleasure I have ever received has arisen from the habitual exercise of charity in its various branches.”

The stories with which this monitress illustrates her precepts are drawn from the edifying annals of the neighbourhood, which is rich in examples of vice and virtue. On the one hand we have the pious Mrs. Trueman, the curate’s wife, who lives in a rose-covered cottage, furnished with books and musical instruments; and on the other, we have “the profligate Lord Sly,” and Miss Jane Fretful, who begins by kicking the furniture when she is in a temper, and ends by alienating all her friends (including her doctor), and dying unloved and unlamented. How far her mother should be held responsible for this excess of peevishness, when she rashly married a gentleman named Fretful, is not made clear; but all the characters in the book live nobly, or ignobly, up to their patronymics. When Mary neglects to wash her face—apparently that was all she ever washed—or brush her teeth in the mornings, Mrs. Mason for some time only hints her displeasure, “not wishing to burden her with precepts”; and waits for a “glaring example” to show the little girl the unloveliness of permanent dirt. This example is soon afforded by Mrs. Dowdy, who comes opportunely to visit them, and whose reluctance to perform even the simple ablutions common to the period is as resolute as Slovenly Peter’s.

In the matter of tuition, Mrs. Mason is comparatively lenient. Caroline and Mary, though warned that “idleness must always be intolerable, because it is only an irksome consciousness of existence” (words which happily have no meaning for childhood), are, on the whole, less saturated with knowledge than

Miss Edgeworth's Harry and Lucy; and Harry and Lucy lead rollicking lives by contrast with "Edwin and Henry," or "Anna and Louisa," or any other little pair of heroes and heroines. Edwin and Henry are particularly ill used, for they are supposed to be enjoying a holiday with their father, "the worthy Mr. Friendly," who makes "every domestic incident, the vegetable world, sickness and death, a real source of instruction to his beloved offspring." How glad those boys must have been to get back to school! Yet they court disaster by asking so many questions. All the children in our great-grandmothers' story-books ask questions. All lay themselves open to attack. If they drink a cup of chocolate, they want to know what it is made of, and where cocoanuts grow. If they have a pudding for dinner, they are far more eager to learn about sago and the East Indies than to eat it. They put intelligent queries concerning the slave-trade, and make remarks that might be quoted in Parliament; yet they are as ignorant of the common things of life as though new-born into the world. In a book called "Summer Rambles, or Conversations Instructive and Amusing, for the Use of Children," published in 1801, a little girl says to her mother: "Vegetables? I do not know what they are. Will you tell me?" And the mother graciously responds: "Yes, with a great deal of pleasure. Peas, beans, potatoes, carrots, turnips, and cabbages are vegetables."

At least the good lady's information was correct as far as it went, which was not always the case. The talented governess in "Little Truths" warns her pupils not to swallow young frogs out of bravado, lest perchance they should mistake and swallow a toad, which would poison them; and in a "History of Birds and Beasts," intended for very young children, we find, underneath a woodcut of a porcupine, this unwarranted and irrelevant assertion:—

This creature shoots his pointed quills,
And beasts destroys, and men;
But more the ravenous lawyer kills
With his half-quill, the pen.

It was thus that natural history was taught in the year 1767.

The publication in 1798 of Mr. Edgeworth's "Practical Education" (Miss Edgeworth was responsible for some of the chapters) gave a profound impetus to child-study. Little boys and girls were dragged from the obscure haven of the nursery, from their hornbooks, and the casual slappings of nursery-maids, to be taught and tested in the light of day. The process appears to have been deeply engrossing. Irregular instruction, object lessons, and experimental play afforded scant respite to parent or to child. "Square and circular bits of wood, balls, cubes, and triangles" were Mr. Edgeworth's first substitutes for toys; to be followed by

“card, pasteboard, substantial but not sharp-pointed scissors, wire, gum, and wax.” It took an active mother to superintend this home kindergarten, to see that the baby did not poke the triangle into its eye, and to relieve Tommy at intervals from his coating of gum and wax. When we read further that “children are very fond of attempting experiments in dyeing, and are very curious about vegetable dyes,” we gain a fearful insight into parental pleasures and responsibilities a hundred years ago.

Text-book knowledge was frowned upon by the Edgeworths. We know how the “good French governess” laughs at her clever pupil who has studied the “Tablet of Memory,” and who can say when potatoes were first brought into England, and when hair powder was first used, and when the first white paper was made. The new theory of education banished the “Tablet of Memory,” and made it incumbent upon parent or teacher to impart in conversation such facts concerning potatoes, powder, and paper as she desired her pupils to know. If books were used, they were of the deceptive order, which purposed to be friendly and entertaining. A London bookseller actually proposed to Godwin “a delightful work for children,” which was to be called “A Tour through Papa’s House.” The object of this precious volume was to explain casually how and where Papa’s furniture was made, his carpets were woven, his curtains dyed, his kitchen pots and pans called into existence. Even Godwin, who was not a bubbling fountain of humour, saw the absurdity of such a book; and recommended in its place “Robinson Crusoe,” “if weeded of its Methodism” (alas! poor Robinson!), “The Seven Champions of Christendom,” and “The Arabian Nights.”

The one great obstacle in the educator’s path (it has not yet been wholly levelled) was the proper apportioning of knowledge between boys and girls. It was hard to speed the male child up the stony heights of erudition; but it was harder still to check the female child at the crucial point, and keep her tottering decorously behind her brother. In 1774 a few rash innovators conceived the project of an advanced school for girls; one that should approach from afar a college standard, and teach with thoroughness what it taught at all; one that might be trusted to broaden the intelligence of women, without lessening their much-prized femininity. It was even proposed that Mrs. Barbauld, who was esteemed a very learned lady, should take charge of such an establishment; but the plan met with no approbation at her hands. In the first place she held that fifteen was not an age for school-life and study, because then “the empire of the passions is coming on”; and in the second place there was nothing she so strongly discountenanced as thoroughness in a girl’s education. On this point she

had no doubts, and no reserves. “Young ladies,” she wrote, “ought to have only such a general tincture of knowledge as to make them agreeable companions to a man of sense, and to enable them to find rational entertainment for a solitary hour. They should gain these accomplishments in a quiet and unobserved manner. The thefts of knowledge in our sex are connived at, only while carefully concealed; and, if displayed, are punished with disgrace. The best way for women to acquire knowledge is from conversation with a father, a brother, or a friend; and by such a course of reading as they may recommend.”

There was no danger that an education conducted on these lines would result in an undue development of intelligence, would lift the young lady above “her own mild and chastened sphere.” In justice to Mrs. Barbauld we must admit that she but echoed the sentiments of her day. “Girls,” said Miss Hannah More, “should be led to distrust their own judgments.” They should be taught to give up their opinions, and to avoid disputes, “even if they know they are right.” The one fact impressed upon the female child was her secondary place in the scheme of creation; the one virtue she was taught to affect was delicacy; the one vice permitted to her weakness was dissimulation. Even her play was not like her brother’s play,—a reckless abandonment to high spirits; it was play within the conscious limits of propriety. In one of Mrs. Trimmer’s books, a model mother hesitates to allow her eleven-year-old daughter to climb three rounds of a ladder, and look into a robin’s nest, four feet from the ground. It was not a genteel thing for a little girl to do. Even her schoolbooks were not like her brother’s schoolbooks. They were carefully adapted to her limitations. Mr. Thomas Gisborne, who wrote a much-admired work entitled “An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex,” was of the opinion that geography might be taught to girls without reserve; but that they should learn only “select parts” of natural history, and, in the way of science, only a few “popular and amusing facts.” A “Young Lady’s Guide to Astronomy” was something vastly different from the comprehensive system imparted to her brother.

In a very able and subtle little book called “A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters,” by Dr. John Gregory of Edinburgh,—

> He whom each virtue fired, each grace refined,
> Friend, teacher, pattern, darling of mankind![1]

—we find much earnest counsel on this subject. Dr. Gregory was an affectionate parent. He grudged his daughters no material and no intellectual advantage; but he was well aware that by too great liberality he imperilled their worldly prospects. Therefore, although he desired them to be well read and well

informed, he bade them never to betray their knowledge to the world. Therefore, although he desired them to be strong and vigorous,—to walk, to ride, to live much in the open air,—he bade them never to make a boast of their endurance. Rude health, no less than scholarship, was the exclusive prerogative of men. His deliberate purpose was to make them rational creatures, taking clear and temperate views of life; but he warned them all the more earnestly against the dangerous indulgence of seeming wiser than their neighbours. “Be even cautious in displaying your good sense,” writes this astute and anxious father. “It will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of your company. But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from men, who are apt to look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts and cultivated understanding.”

This is plain speaking. And it must be remembered that “learning” was not in 1774, nor for many years afterwards, the comprehensive word it is to-day. A young lady who could translate a page of Cicero was held to be learned to the point of pedantry. What reader of “Cœlebs”—if “Cœlebs” still boasts a reader—can forget that agitating moment when, through the inadvertence of a child, it is revealed to the breakfast table that Lucilla Stanley studies Latin every morning with her father. Overpowered by the intelligence, Cœlebs casts “a timid eye” upon his mistress, who is covered with confusion. She puts the sugar into the cream jug, and the tea into the sugar basin; and finally, unable to bear the mingled awe and admiration awakened by this disclosure of her scholarship, she slips out of the room, followed by her younger sister, and commiserated by her father, who knows what a shock her native delicacy has received. Had the fair Lucilla admitted herself to be an expert tight-rope dancer, she could hardly have created more consternation.

No wonder Dr. Gregory counselled his daughters to silence. Lovers less generous than Cœlebs might well have been alienated by such disqualifications. “Oh, how lovely is a maid’s ignorance!” sighs Rousseau, contemplating with rapture the many things that Sophie does not know. “Happy the man who is destined to teach her. She will never aspire to be the tutor of her husband, but will be content to remain his pupil. She will not endeavour to mould his tastes, but will relinquish her own. She will be more estimable to him than if she were learned. It will be his pleasure to enlighten her.”

This was a well-established point of view, and English Sophies were trained to meet it with becoming deference. They heard no idle prating about an equality which has never existed, and which never can exist. “Had a third order been

necessary," said an eighteenth-century schoolmistress to her pupils, "doubtless one would have been created, a midway kind of being." In default of such a connecting link, any impious attempt to bridge the chasm between the sexes met with the failure it deserved. When Mrs. Knowles, a Quaker lady, not destitute of self-esteem, observed to Boswell that she hoped men and women would be equal in another world, that gentleman replied with spirit: "Madam, you are too ambitious. *We* might as well desire to be equal with the angels."

The dissimulation which Dr. Gregory urged upon his daughters, and which is the safeguard of all misplaced intelligence, extended to matters more vital than Latin and astronomy. He warned them, as they valued their earthly happiness, never to make a confidante of a married woman, "especially if she lives happily with her husband"; and never to reveal to their own husbands the excess of their wifely affection. "Do not discover to any man the full extent of your love, no, not although you marry him. *That* sufficiently shows your preference, which is all he is entitled to know. If he has delicacy, he will ask for no stronger proof of your affection, for your sake; if he has sense, he will not ask it, for his own. Violent love cannot subsist, at least cannot be expressed, for any time together on both sides. Nature in this case has laid the reserve on you." In the passivity of women, no less than in their refined duplicity, did this acute observer recognize the secret strength of sex.

A vastly different counsellor of youth was Mrs. West, who wrote a volume of "Letters to a Young Lady" (the young lady was Miss Maunsell, and she died after reading them), which were held to embody the soundest morality of the day. Mrs. West is as dull as Dr. Gregory is penetrating, as verbose as he is laconic, as obvious as he is individual. She devotes many agitated pages to theology, and many more to irrefutable, though one hopes unnecessary, arguments in behalf of female virtue. But she also advises a careful submission, a belittling insincerity, as woman's best safeguards in life. It is not only a wife's duty to tolerate her husband's follies, but it is the part of wisdom to conceal from him any knowledge of his derelictions. Bad he may be; but it is necessary to his comfort to believe that his wife thinks him good. "The lordly nature of man so strongly revolts from the suspicion of inferiority," explains this excellent monitress, "that a susceptible husband can never feel easy in the society of his wife when he knows that she is acquainted with his vices, though he is well assured that her prudence, generosity, and affection will prevent her from being a severe accuser." One is reminded of the old French gentleman who said he was aware that he cheated at cards, but he disliked any allusion to the subject.

To be “easy” in a wife’s society, to relax spiritually as well as mentally, and to be immune from criticism;—these were the privileges which men demanded, and which well-trained women were ready to accord. In 1808 the “Belle Assemblée” printed a model letter, which purported to come from a young wife whose husband had deserted her and her child for the more lively society of his mistress. It expressed in pathetic language the sentiments then deemed correct,—sentiments which embodied the patience of Griselda, without her acquiescence in fate. The wife tells her husband that she has retired to the country for economy, and to avoid scandalous gossip; that by careful management she is able to live on the pittance he has given her; that “little Emily” is working a pair of ruffles for him; that his presence would make their poor cottage seem a palace. “Pardon my interrupting you,” she winds up with ostentatious meekness. “I mean to give you satisfaction. Though I am deeply wronged by your error, I am not resentful. I wish you all the happiness of which you are capable, and am your once loved and still affectionate, Emilia.”

That last sentence is not without dignity, and certainly not without its sting. One doubts whether Emilia’s husband, for all her promises and protestations, could ever again have felt perfectly “easy” in his wife’s society. He probably therefore stayed away, and soothed his soul elsewhere. “We can with tranquillity forgive in ourselves the sins of which no one accuses us.”

THE PIETIST

They go the fairest way to Heaven that would serve God without a Hell.
—Religio Medici.

"How cutting it is to be the means of bringing children into the world to be the subjects of the Kingdom of Darkness, to dwell with Divils and Damned Spirits."

In this temper of pardonable regret the mother of William Godwin wrote to her erring son; and while the maternal point of view deserves consideration (no parent could be expected to relish such a prospect), the letter is noteworthy as being one of the few written to Godwin, or about Godwin, which forces us to sympathize with the philosopher. The boy who was reproved for picking up the family cat on Sunday—"demeaning myself with such profaneness on the Lord's day"—was little likely to find his religion "all pure profit." His account of the books he read as a child, and of his precocious and unctuous piety, is probably over-emphasized for the sake of colour; but the Evangelical literature of his day, whether designed for young people or for adults, was of a melancholy and discouraging character. The "Pious Deaths of Many Godly Children" (sad monitor of the Godwin nursery) appears to have been read off the face of the earth; but there have descended to us sundry volumes of a like character, which even now stab us with pity for the little readers long since laid in their graves. The most frivolous occupation of the good boy in these old story-books is searching the Bible, "with mamma's permission," for texts in which David "praises God for the weather." More serious-minded children weep floods of tears because they are "lost sinners." In a book of "Sermons for the Very Young," published by the Vicar of Walthamstow in the beginning of the last century, we find the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah selected as an appropriate theme for infancy, and its lessons driven home with all the force of a direct personal application. "Think, little child, of the fearful story. The wrath of God is upon them. Do they now repent of their sins? It is all too late. Do they cry for mercy? There is none to hear them.... Your heart, little child, is full of sin. You think of what is not right, and then you wish it, and that is sin.... Ah, what shall sinners do when the last day comes upon them? What will they think when God shall punish them forever?"

Children brought up on these lines passed swiftly from one form of hysteria to another, from self-exaltation and the assurance of grace to fears which had no

easement. There is nothing more terrible in literature than Borrow's account of the Welsh preacher who believed that when he was a child of seven he had committed the unpardonable sin, and whose whole life was shadowed by fear. At the same time that little William Godwin was composing beautiful death-bed speeches for the possible edification of his parents and neighbours, we find Miss Elizabeth Carter writing to Mrs. Montagu about her own nephew, who realized, at seven years of age, how much he and all creatures stood in need of pardon; and who, being ill, pitifully entreated his father to pray that his sins might be forgiven. Commenting upon which incident, the reverent Montagu Pennington, who edited Miss Carter's letters, bids us remember that it reflects more credit on the parents who brought their child up with so just a sense of religion than it does on the poor infant himself. "Innocence," says the inflexible Mr. Stanley, in "Cœlebs in Search of a Wife," "can never be pleaded as a ground of acceptance, because the thing does not exist."

With the dawning of the nineteenth century came the controversial novel; and to understand its popularity we have but to glance at the books which preceded it, and compared to which it presented an animated and contentious aspect. One must needs have read "Elements of Morality" at ten, and "Strictures on Female Education" at fifteen, to be able to relish "Father Clement" at twenty. Sedate young women, whose lightest available literature was "Cœlebs," or "Hints towards forming the Character of a Princess," and who had been presented on successive birthdays with Mrs. Chapone's "Letters on the Improvement of the Mind," and Mrs. West's "Letters to a Young Lady," and Miss Hamilton's "Letters to the Daughter of a Nobleman," found a natural relief in studying the dangers of dissent, or the secret machinations of the Jesuits. Many a dull hour was quickened into pleasurable apprehension of Jesuitical intrigues, from the days when Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, stoutly refused to take cinchona—a form of quinine—because it was then known as Jesuit's bark, and might be trusted to poison a British constitution, to the days when Sir William Pepys wrote in all seriousness to Hannah More: "You surprise me by saying that your good Archbishop has been in danger from the Jesuits; but I believe they are concealed in places where they are less likely to be found than in Ireland."

Just what they were going to do to the good Archbishop does not appear, for Sir William at this point abruptly abandons the prelate to tell the story of a Norwich butcher, who for some mysterious and unexplained reason was hiding from the inquisitors of Lisbon. No dignitary was too high, no orphan child too low to be the objects of a Popish plot. Miss Carter writes to Mrs. Montagu, in 1775, about a little foundling whom Mrs. Chapone had placed at service with some country

neighbours.

“She behaves very prettily, and with great affection to the people with whom she is living,” says Miss Carter. “One of the reasons she assigns for her fondness is that they give her enough food, which she represents as a deficient article in the workhouse; and says that on Fridays particularly she never had any dinner. *Surely the parish officers have not made a Papist the mistress!* If this is not the case, the loss of one dinner in a week is of no great consequence.”

To the poor hungry child it was probably of much greater consequence than the theological bias of the matron. Nor does a dinnerless Friday appear the surest way to win youthful converts to the fold. But devout ladies who had read Canon Seward’s celebrated tract on the “Comparison between Paganism and Popery” (in which he found little to choose between them) were well on their guard against the insidious advances of Rome. “When I had no religion at all,” confesses Cowper to Lady Hesketh, “I had yet a terrible dread of the Pope.” The worst to be apprehended from Methodists was their lamentable tendency to enthusiasm, and their ill-advised meddling with the poor. It is true that a farmer of Cheddar told Miss Patty More that a Methodist minister had once preached under his mother’s best apple tree, and that the sensitive tree had never borne another apple; but this was an extreme case. The Cheddar vestry resolved to protect their orchards from blight by stoning the next preacher who invaded the parish, and their example was followed with more or less fervour throughout England. In a quiet letter written from Margate (1768), by the Rev. John Lyon, we find this casual allusion to the process:—

“We had a Methodist preacher hold forth last night. I came home just as he had finished. I believe the poor man fared badly, for I saw, as I passed, eggs, stones, etc., fly pretty thick.”

It was all in the day’s work. The Rev. Lyon, who was a scholar and an antiquarian, and who wrote an exhaustive history of Dover, had no further interest in matters obviously aloof from his consideration.

This simple and robust treatment, so quieting to the nerves of the practitioners, was unserviceable for Papists, who did not preach in the open; and a great deal of suppressed irritation found no better outlet than print. It appears to have been a difficult matter in those days to write upon any subject without reverting sooner or later to the misdeeds of Rome. Miss Seward pauses in her praise of Blair’s sermons to lament the “boastful egotism” of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, who seems tolerably remote; and Mr. John Dyer, when wrapped in peaceful

contemplation of the British wool-market, suddenly and fervently denounces the "black clouds" of bigotry, and the "fiery bolts of superstition," which lay desolate "Papal realms." In vain Mr. Edgeworth, stooping from his high estate, counselled serenity of mind, and that calm tolerance born of a godlike certitude; in vain he urged the benignant attitude of infallibility. "The absurdities of Popery are so manifest," he wrote, "that to be hated they need but to be seen. But for the peace and prosperity of this country, the misguided Catholic should not be rendered odious; he should rather be pointed out as an object of compassion. His ignorance should not be imputed to him as a crime; nor should it be presupposed that his life cannot be right, whose tenets are erroneous. Thank God that I am a Protestant! should be a mental thanksgiving, not a public taunt."

Mr. Edgeworth was nearly seventy when the famous "Protestant's Manual; or, Papacy Unveiled" (endeared forever to our hearts by its association with Mrs. Varden and Miggs), bowled over these pleasant and peaceful arguments. There was no mawkish charity about the "Manual," which made its way into every corner of England, stood for twenty years on thousands of British book-shelves, and was given as a reward to children so unfortunate as to be meritorious. It sold for a shilling (nine shillings a dozen when purchased for distribution), so Mrs. Varden's two post-octavo volumes must have been a special edition. Reviewers recommended it earnestly to parents and teachers; and it was deemed indispensable to all who desired "to preserve the rising generation from the wiles of Papacy and the snares of priestcraft. They will be rendered sensible of the evils and probable consequences of Catholic emancipation; and be confirmed in those opinions, civil, political, and religious, which have hitherto constituted the happiness and formed the strength of their native country."

This was a strong appeal. A universal uneasiness prevailed, manifesting itself in hostility to innovations, however innocent and orthodox. Miss Hannah More's Sunday Schools were stoutly opposed, as savouring of Methodism (a religion she disliked), and of radicalism, for which she had all the natural horror of a well-to-do, middle-class Christian. Even Mrs. West, an oppressively pious writer, misdoubted the influence of Sunday Schools, for the simple reason that it was difficult to keep the lower orders from learning more than was good for them. "Hard toil and humble diligence are indispensably needful to the community," said this excellent lady. "Writing and accounts appear superfluous instructions in the humblest walks of life; and, when imparted to servants, have the general effect of making them ambitious, and disgusted with the servile offices which they are required to perform."

Humility was a virtue consecrated to the poor, to the rural poor especially; and what with Methodism on the one hand, and the jarring echoes of the French Revolution on the other, the British ploughman was obviously growing less humble every day. Crabbe, who cherished no illusions, painted him in colours grim enough to fill the reader with despair; but Miss More entertained a feminine conviction that Bibles and flannel waistcoats fulfilled his earthly needs. In all her stories and tracts the villagers are as artificial as the happy peasantry of an old-fashioned opera. They group themselves deferentially around the squire and the rector; they wear costumes of uncompromising rusticity; and they sing a chorus of praise to the kind young ladies who have brought them a bowl of soup. It is curious to turn from this atmosphere of abasement, from perpetual curtsies and the lowliest of lowly virtues, to the journal of the painter Haydon, who was a sincerely pious man, yet who cannot restrain his wonder and admiration at seeing the Duke of Wellington behave respectfully in church. That a person so august should stand when the congregation stood, and kneel when the congregation knelt, seemed to Haydon an immense condescension. “Here was the greatest hero in the world,” he writes ecstatically, “who had conquered the greatest genius, prostrating his heart and being before his God in his venerable age, and praying for His mercy.”

It is the most naïve impression on record. That the Duke and the Duke’s scullion might perchance stand equidistant from the Almighty was an idea which failed to present itself to Haydon’s ardent mind.

The pious fiction put forward in the interest of dissent was more impressive, more emotional, more belligerent, and, in some odd way, more human than “Cœlebs,” or “The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain.” Miss Grace Kennedy’s stories are as absurd as Miss More’s, and—though the thing may sound incredible—much duller; but they give one an impression of painful earnestness, and of that heavy atmosphere engendered by too close a contemplation of Hell. A pious Christian lady, with local standards, a narrow intelligence, and a comprehensive ignorance of life, is not by election a novelist. Neither do polemics lend themselves with elasticity to the varying demands of fiction. There are, in fact, few things less calculated to instruct the intellect or to enlarge the heart than the perusal of controversial novels.

But Miss Kennedy had at least the striking quality of temerity. She was not afraid of being ridiculous. She was undaunted in her ignorance. And she was on fire with all the bitter ardour of the separatist. Miss More, on the contrary, entertained a judicial mistrust for fervour, fanaticism, the rush of ardent hopes

and fears and transports, for all those vehement emotions which are apt to be disconcerting to ladies of settled views and incomes. Her model Christian, Candidus, “avoids enthusiasm as naturally as a wise man avoids folly, or as a sober man shuns extravagance. He laments when he encounters a real enthusiast, because he knows that, even if honest, he is pernicious.” In the same guarded spirit, Mrs. Montagu praises the benevolence of Lady Bab Montagu and Mrs. Scott, who had the village girls taught plain sewing and the catechism. “These good works are often performed by the Methodist ladies in the heat of enthusiasm; but, thank God! my sister’s is a calm and rational piety.” “Surtout point de zèle,” was the dignified motto of the day.

There is none of this chill sobriety about Miss Kennedy’s Bible Christians, who, a hundred years ago, preached to a listening world. They are aflame with a zeal which knows no doubts and recognizes no forbearance. Their methods are akin to those of the irrepressible Miss J——, who undertook, Bible in hand, the conversion of that pious gentleman, the Duke of Wellington; or of Miss Lewis, who went to Constantinople to convert that equally pious gentleman, the Sultan. Miss Kennedy’s heroes and heroines stand ready to convert the world. They would delight in expounding the Scriptures to the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople. Controversy affords their only conversation. Dogma of the most unrelenting kind is their only food for thought. Piety provides their only avenue for emotions. Elderly bankers weep profusely over their beloved pastor’s eloquence, and fashionable ladies melt into tears at the inspiring sight of a village Sunday School. Young gentlemen, when off on a holiday, take with them “no companion but a Bible”; and the lowest reach of worldliness is laid bare when an unconverted mother asks her daughter if she can sing something more cheerful than a hymn. Conformity to the Church of England is denounced with unsparing warmth; and the Church of Rome is honoured by having a whole novel, the once famous “Father Clement,” devoted to its permanent downfall.

Dr. Greenhill, who has written a sympathetic notice of Miss Kennedy in the “Dictionary of National Biography,” considers that “Father Clement” was composed “with an evident wish to state fairly the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, even while the authoress strongly disapproves of them”;—a point of view which compels us to believe that the biographer spared himself (and who shall blame him?) the reading of this melancholy tale. That George Eliot, who spared herself nothing, was well acquainted with its context, is evidenced by the conversation of the ladies who, in “Janet’s Repentance,” meet to cover and label the books of the Paddiford Lending Library. Miss Pratt, the autocrat of the circle, observes that the story of “Father Clement” is, in itself,

a library on the errors of Romanism, whereupon old Mrs. Linnet very sensibly replies: “One ’ud think there didn’t want much to drive people away from a religion as makes ’em walk barefoot over stone floors, like that girl in ‘Father Clement,’ sending the blood up to the head frightful. Anybody might see that was an unnat’ral creed.”

So they might; and a more unnatural creed than Father Clement’s Catholicism was never devised for the extinction of man’s flickering reason. Only the mental debility of the Clarenham family can account for their holding such views long enough to admit of their being converted from them by the Montagus. Only the militant spirit of the Clarenham chaplain and the Montagu chaplain makes possible several hundred pages of polemics. Montagu Bibles run the blockade, are discovered in the hands of truth-seeking Clarenhams, and are hurled back upon the spiritual assailants. The determination of Father Dennis that the Scriptures shall be quoted in Latin only (a practice which is scholarly but inconvenient), and the determination of Edward Montagu “not to speak Latin in the presence of ladies,” embarrass social intercourse. Catherine Clarenham, the young person who walks barefooted over stone floors, has been so blighted by this pious exercise that she cannot, at twenty, translate the Pater Noster or Ave Maria into English, and remains a melancholy illustration of Latinity. When young Basil Clarenham shows symptoms of yielding to Montagu arguments, and begins to want a Bible of his own, he is spirited away to Rome, and confined in a monastery of the Inquisition, where he spends his time reading “books forbidden by the Inquisitors,” and especially “a New Testament with the prohibitory mark of the Holy Office upon it,” which the weak-minded monks have amiably placed at his disposal. Indeed, the monastery library, to which the captive is made kindly welcome, seems to have been well stocked with interdicted literature; and, after browsing in these pastures for several tranquil months, Basil tells his astonished hosts that their books have taught him that “the Romish Church is the most corrupt of all churches professing Christianity.” Having accomplished this unexpected but happy result, the Inquisition exacts from him a solemn vow that he will never reveal its secrets, and sends him back to England, where he loses no time in becoming an excellent Protestant. His sister Maria follows his example (her virtues have pointed steadfastly to this conclusion); but Catherine enters a convent, full of stone floors and idolatrous images, where she becomes a “tool” of the Jesuits, and says her prayers in Latin until she dies.

No wonder “Father Clement” went through twelve editions, and made its authoress as famous in her day as the authoress of “Elsie Dinsmore” is in ours. No wonder the Paddiford Lending Library revered its sterling worth. And no

wonder it provoked from Catholics reprisals which Dr. Greenhill stigmatizes as "flippant." To-day it lives by virtue of half a dozen mocking lines in George Eliot's least-read story: but for a hundred years its progeny has infested the earth,—a crooked progeny, like Peer Gynt's, which can never be straightened into sincerity, or softened into good-will. "For first the Church of Rome condemneth us, we likewise them," observes Sir Thomas Browne with equanimity; "and thus we go to Heaven against each others' wills, conceits, and opinions."

THE ACCURSED ANNUAL

> Why, by dabbling in those accursed Annuals, I have become a by-word of infamy all over the kingdom.—CHARLES LAMB.

THE great dividing line between books that are made to be read and books that are made to be bought is not the purely modern thing it seems. We can trace it, if we try, back to the first printing-presses, which catered indulgently to hungry scholars and to noble patrons; and we can see it in another generation separating "Waverley" and "The Corsair," which everybody knew by heart, from the gorgeous "Annual" (bound in Lord Palmerston's cast-off waistcoats, hinted Thackeray), which formed a decorative feature of well-appointed English drawing-rooms. The perfectly natural thing to do with an unreadable book is to give it away; and the publication, for more than a quarter of a century, of volumes which fulfilled this one purpose and no other is a pleasant proof, if proof were needed, of the business principles which underlay the enlightened activity of publishers.

The wave of sentimentality which submerged England when the clear-headed, hard-hearted eighteenth century had done its appointed work, and lay a-dying, the prodigious advance in gentility from the days of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to the days of the Countess of Blessington, found their natural expression in letters. It was a period of emotions which were not too deep for words, and of decorum which measured goodness by conventionalities. Turn where we will, we see a tear in every eye, or a simper of self-complacency on every lip. Moore wept when he beheld a balloon ascension at Tivoli, because he had not seen a balloon since he was a little boy. The excellent Mr. Hall explained in his "Memories of a Long Life" that, owing to Lady Blessington's anomalous position with Count D'Orsay, "Mrs. Hall never accompanied me to her evenings, though she was a frequent day caller." Criticism was controlled by politics, and sweetened by gallantry. The Whig and Tory reviewers supported their respective candidates to fame, and softened their masculine sternness to affability when Mrs. Hemans or Miss Landon, "the Sappho of the age," contributed their glowing numbers to the world. Miss Landon having breathed a poetic sigh in the "Amulet" for 1832, a reviewer in "Fraser's" magnanimously observed: "This gentle and fair young lady, so undeservedly neglected by critics, we mean to take under our special protection." Could it ever have lain within the

power of any woman, even a poetess, to merit such condescension as this?

Of a society so organized, the Christmas annual was an appropriate and ornamental feature. It was costly,—a guinea or a guinea and a half being the usual subscription. It was richly bound in crimson silk or pea-green levant; Solomon in all his glory was less magnificent. It was as free from stimulus as eau sucrée. It was always genteel, and not infrequently aristocratic,—having been known to rise in happy years to the schoolboy verses of a royal duke. It was made, like Peter Pindar's razors, to sell, and it was bought to be given away; at which point its career of usefulness was closed. Its languishing steel engravings of Corfu, Ayesha, The Suliote Mother, and The Wounded Brigand, may have beguiled a few heavy moments after dinner; and perhaps little children in frilled pantalets and laced slippers peeped between the gorgeous covers, to marvel at the Sultana's pearls, or ask in innocence who was the dying Haidee. Death, we may remark, was always a prominent feature of annuals. Their artists and poets vied with one another in the selection of mortuary subjects. Charles Lamb was first "hooked into the 'Gem'" with some lines on the editor's dead infant. From a partial list, extending over a dozen years, I cull this funeral wreath:—

The Dying Child. *Poem.*
The Orphans. *Steel engraving.*
The Orphan's Tears. *Poem.*
The Gypsy's Grave. *Steel engraving.*
The Lonely Grave. *Poem.*
On a Child's Grave. *Poem.*
The Dying Mother to her Infant. *Poem.*

Blithesome reading for the Christmas-tide!

The annual was as orthodox as it was aristocratic. "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain" was not more edifying. "The Washerwoman of Finchley Common" was less conspicuously virtuous. Here in "The Winter's Wreath" is a long poem in blank verse, by a nameless clergyman, on "The Efficacy of Religion." Here in the "Amulet," Mrs. Hemans, "leading the way as she deserves to do" (I quote from the "Monthly Review"), "clothes in her own pure and fascinating language the invitations which angels whisper into mortal ears." And here in the "Forget-Me-Not," Leontine hurls mild defiance at the spirit of doubt:—

Thou sceptic of the hardened brow,
  Attend to Nature's cry!
Her sacred essence breathes the glow
  O'er that thou wouldst deny;

—an argument which would have carried conviction to Huxley's soul, had he been more than eight years old when it was written. Poor Coleridge, always in need of a guinea or two, was bidden to write some descriptive lines for the "Keepsake," on an engraving by Parris of the Garden of Boccaccio; a delightful picture of nine ladies and three gentlemen picnicking in a park, with arcades as tall as aqueducts, a fountain as vast as Niagara, and butterflies twice the size of the rabbits. Coleridge, exempt by nature from an unserviceable sense of humour, executed this commission in three pages of painstaking verse, and was severely censured for mentioning "in terms not sufficiently guarded, one of the most impure and mischievous books that could find its way into the hands of an innocent female."

The system of first securing an illustration, and then ordering a poem to match it, seemed right and reasonable to the editor of the annual, who paid a great deal for his engravings, and little or nothing for his poetry. Sometimes the poet was not even granted a sight of the picture he was expected to describe. We find Lady Blessington writing to Dr. William Beattie,—the best-natured man of his day,—requesting "three or four stanzas" for an annual called "Buds and Blossoms," which was to contain portraits of the children of noble families. The particular "buds" whose unfolding he was asked to immortalize were the three sons of the Duke of Buccleuch; and it was gently hinted that "an allusion to the family would add interest to the subject";—in plain words, that a little well-timed flattery might be trusted to expand the sales. Another year the same unblushing petitioner was even more hardy in her demand.

"Will you write me a page of verse for the portrait of Miss Forester? The young lady is seated with a little dog on her lap, which she looks at rather pensively. She is fair, with light hair, and is in mourning."

Here is an inspiration for a poet. A picture, which he has not seen, of a young lady in mourning looking pensively at a little dog! And poor Beattie was never paid a cent for these effusions. His sole rewards were a few words of thanks, and Lady Blessington's cards for parties he was too ill to attend.

More business-like poets made a specialty of fitting pictures with verses, as a tailor fits customers with coats. A certain Mr. Harvey, otherwise lost to fame, was held to be unrivalled in this art. For many years his "chaste and classic pen" supplied the annuals with flowing stanzas, equally adapted to the timorous taste of editors, and to the limitations of the "innocent females" for whom the volumes were predestined. "Mr. Harvey embodies in two or three lines the

expression of a whole picture," says an enthusiastic reviewer, "and at the same time turns his inscription into a little gem of poetry." As a specimen gem, I quote one of four verses accompanying an engraving called Morning Dreams,—a young woman reclining on a couch, and simpering vapidly at the curtains:—

She has been dreaming, and her thoughts are still
  On their far journey in the land of dreams;
The forms we call—but may not chase—at will,
  And sweet low voices, soft as distant streams.

This is a fair sample of the verse supplied for Christmas annuals, which, however "chaste and classic," was surely never intended to be read. It is only right, however, to remember that Thackeray's "Piscator and Piscatrix" was written at Lady Blessington's behest, to accompany Wattier's engraving of The Happy Anglers; and that Thackeray told Locker he was so much pleased with this picture, and so engrossed with his own poem, that he forgot to shave for the two whole days he was working at it. To write "good occasional verse," by which he meant verse begged or ordered for some such desperate emergency as Lady Blessington's, was, in his eyes, an intellectual feat. It represented difficulties overcome, like those wonderful old Italian frescoes fitted so harmoniously into unaccommodating spaces. Nothing can be more charming than "Piscator and Piscatrix," and nothing can be more insipid than the engraving which inspired the lively rhymes:

As on this pictured page I look,
This pretty tale of line and hook,
As though it were a novel-book,
  Amuses and engages:
I know them both, the boy and girl,
She is the daughter of an Earl,
The lad (that has his hair in curl)
  My lord the County's page is.

A pleasant place for such a pair!
The fields lie basking in the glare;
No breath of wind the heavy air
  Of lazy summer quickens.
Hard by you see the castle tall,
The village nestles round the wall,
As round about the hen, its small
  Young progeny of chickens

Young progeny of chickens.

The verses may be read in any edition of Thackeray's ballads; but when we have hunted up the "pictured page" in a mouldy old "Keepsake," and see an expressionless girl, a featureless boy, an indistinguishable castle, and no village, we are tempted to agree with Charles Lamb, who swore that he liked poems to explain pictures, and not pictures to illustrate poems. "Your woodcut is a rueful *lignum mortis*."

There was a not unnatural ambition on the part of publishers and editors to secure for their annuals one or two names of repute, with which to leaven the mass of mediocrity. It mattered little if the distinguished writer conscientiously contributed the feeblest offspring of his pen; that was a reasonable reckoning,—distinguished writers do the same to-day; but it mattered a great deal if, as too often happened, he broke his word, and failed to contribute anything. Then the unhappy editor was compelled to publish some such apologetic note as this, from the "Amulet" of 1833. "The first sheet of the 'Amulet' was reserved for my friend Mr. Bulwer, who had kindly tendered me his assistance; but, in consequence of various unavoidable circumstances" (a pleasure trip on the Rhine), "he has been compelled to postpone his aid until next year." On such occasions, the "reserved" pages were filled by some veteran annualist, like Mr. Alaric Attila Watts, editor of the "Literary Souvenir"; or perhaps Mr. Thomas Haynes Bailey, he who wrote "I'd be a Butterfly," and "Gaily the Troubadour," was persuaded to warble some such appropriate sentiment as this in the "Forget-Me-Not":—

It is a book we christen thus,
  Less fleeting than the flower;
And 'twill recall the past to us
  With talismanic power;

which was a true word spoken in rhyme. Nothing recalls that faded past, with its simpering sentimentality, its reposeful ethics, its shut-in standards, and its differentiation of the masculine and feminine intellects, like the yellow pages of an annual.

Tom Moore, favourite of gods and men, was singled out by publishers as the lode-star of their destinies, as the poet who could be best trusted to impart to the "Amethyst" or the "Talisman" (how like Pullman cars they sound!) that "elegant lightness" which befitted its mission in life. His accounts of the repeated attacks made on his virtue, and the repeated repulses he administered, fill by no means the least amusing pages of his journal. The first attempt was made by Orne, who,

in 1826, proposed that Moore should edit a new annual on the plan of the "Souvenir"; and who assured the poet—always as deep in difficulties as Micawber—that, if the enterprise proved successful, it would yield him from five hundred to a thousand pounds a year. Moore, dazzled but not duped, declined the task; and the following summer, the engraver Heath made him a similar proposition, but on more assured terms. Heath was then preparing to launch upon the world of fashion his gorgeous "Keepsake"—"the toy-shop of literature," Lockhart called it; and he offered Moore, first five hundred, and then seven hundred pounds a year, if he would accept the editorship. Seven hundred pounds loomed large in the poet's fancy, but pride forbade the bargain. The author of "Lalla Rookh" could not consent to bow his laurelled head, and pilot the feeble Fatimas and Zelicas, the noble infants in coral necklets, and the still nobler ladies with pearl pendants on their brows, into the safe harbour of boudoir and drawing-room. He made this clear to Heath, who, nothing daunted, set off at once for Abbotsford, and laid his proposals at the feet of Sir Walter Scott, adding to his bribe another hundred pounds.

Scott, the last man in Christendom to have undertaken such an office, or to have succeeded in it, softened his refusal with a good-natured promise to contribute to the "Keepsake" when it was launched. He was not nervous about his literary standing, and he had no sensitive fear of lowering it by journeyman's work. "I have neither the right nor the wish," he wrote once to Murray, "to be considered above a common labourer in the trenches." Moore, however, was far from sharing this modest unconcern. When Reynolds, on whom the editorship of the "Keepsake" finally devolved, asked him for some verses, he peremptorily declined. Then began a system of pursuit and escape, of assault and repulse, which casts the temptations of St. Anthony into the shade. "By day and night," so Moore declares, Reynolds was "after" him, always increasing the magnitude of his bribe. At last he forced a check for a hundred pounds into the poet's empty pocket (for all the world like a scene in Caran d'Ache's "Histoire d'un Chèque"), imploring in return a hundred lines of verse. But Moore's virtue—or his vanity—was impregnable. "The task was but light, and the money would have been convenient," he confesses; "but I forced it back on him again. The fact is, it is my *name* brings these offers, and my name would suffer by accepting them."

One might suppose that the baffled tempter would now have permanently withdrawn, save that the strength of tempters lies in their never knowing when they are beaten. Three years later, Heath renewed the attack, proposing that Moore should furnish *all* the letter-press, prose and verse, of the "Keepsake" for

1832, receiving in payment the generous sum of one thousand pounds. Strange to say, Moore took rather kindly to this appalling suggestion, admitted he liked it better than its predecessors, and consented to think the matter over for a fortnight. In the end, however, he adhered to his original determination to hold himself virgin of annuals; and refused the thousand pounds, which would have paid all his debts, only to fall, as fall men must, a victim to female blandishments. He was cajoled into writing some lines for the “Casket,” edited by Mrs. Blencoe; and had afterwards the pleasure of discovering that the astute lady had added to her list of attractions another old poem of his, which, to avoid sameness, she obligingly credited to Lord Byron;—enough to make that ill-used poet turn uneasily in his grave.

Charles Lamb’s detestation of annuals dates naturally enough from the hour he was first seduced into becoming a contributor; and every time he lapsed from virtue, his rage blazed out afresh. When his ill-timed sympathy for a bereaved parent—and that parent an editor—landed him in the pages of the “Gem,” he wrote to Barton in an access of ill-humour which could find no phrases sharp enough to feed it.

“I hate the paper, the type, the gloss, the dandy plates, the names of contributors poked up into your eyes in the first page, and whistled through all the covers of magazines, the bare-faced sort of emulation, the immodest candidateship, brought into so little space; in short I detest to appear in an annual.... Don’t think I set up for being proud on this point; I like a bit of flattery tickling my vanity as well as any one. But these pompous masquerades without masks (naked names or faces) I hate. So there’s a bit of my mind.”

“Frippery,” “frumpery,” “show and emptiness,” are the mildest epithets at Lamb’s command, as often as he laments his repeated falls from grace; and a few years before his death, when that “dumb soporifical good-for-nothingness” (curse of the Enfield lanes) weighted his pen, and dulled the lively processes of his brain, he writes with poignant melancholy:—

“I cannot scribble a long letter. I am, when not on foot, very desolate, and take no interest in anything, scarce hate anything but annuals.” It is the last expression of a just antipathy, an instinctive clinging to something which can be reasonably hated to the end.

The most pretentious and the most aristocratic of the annuals was the ever famous “Book of Beauty,” edited for many years by the Countess of Blessington. Resting on a solid foundation of personal vanity (a superstructure

never known to fail), it reached a heroic measure of success, and yielded an income which permitted the charming woman who conducted it to live as far beyond her means as any leader of the fashionable world in London. It was estimated that Lady Blessington earned by the “gorgeous inanities” she edited, and by the vapid tales she wrote, an income of from two thousand to three thousand pounds; but she would never have been paid so well for her work had she not supported her social position by an expenditure of twice that sum. Charles Greville, who spares no scorn he can heap upon her editorial methods, declares that she attained her ends “by puffing and stuffing, and untiring industry, by practising on the vanity of some and the good-nature of others. And though I never met with any one who had read her books, except the ‘Conversations with Byron,’ which are too good to be hers, they are unquestionably a source of considerable profit, and she takes her place confidently and complacently as one of the literary celebrities of her day.”

Greville’s instinctive unkindness leaves him often wide of the mark, but on this occasion we can only say that he might have spoken his truths more humanely. If Lady Blessington helped to create the demand which she supplied, if she turned her friendships to account, and made of hospitality a means to an end (a line of conduct not unknown to-day), she worked with unsparing diligence, and with a sort of desperate courage for over twenty years. Rival Books of Beauty were launched upon a surfeited market, but she maintained her precedence. For ten years she edited the “Keepsake,” and made it a source of revenue, until the unhappy bankruptcy and death of Heath. In her annuals we breathe the pure air of ducal households, and consort with the peeresses of England, turning condescendingly now and then to contemplate a rusticity so obviously artificial, it can be trusted never to offend. That her standard of art (she had no standard of letters) was acceptable to the British public is proved by the rapturous praise of critics and reviewers. Thackeray, indeed, professed to think the sumptuous ladies, who loll and languish in the pages of the year-book, underclad and indecorous; but this was in the spirit of hypercriticism. Hear rather how a writer in “Fraser’s Magazine” describes in a voice trembling with emotion the opulent charms of one of the Countess of Blessington’s “Beauties”:—

“There leans the tall and imperial form of the enchantress, with raven tresses surmounted by the cachemire of sparkling red; while her ringlets flow in exuberant waves over the full-formed neck; and barbaric pearls, each one worth a king’s ransom, rest in marvellous contrast with her dark and mysterious loveliness.”

“Here’s richness!” to quote our friend Mr. Squeers. Here’s something of which it is hard to think a public could ever tire. Yet sixteen years later, when the Countess of Blessington died in poverty and exile, but full of courage to the end, the “Examiner” tepidly observed that the probable extinction of the year-book “would be the least of the sad regrets attending her loss.”

For between 1823 and 1850 three hundred annuals had been published in England, and the end was very near. Exhausted nature was crying for release. It is terrible to find an able and honest writer like Miss Mitford editing a preposterous volume called the “Iris,” of inhuman bulk and superhuman inanity; a book which she well knew could never, under any press of circumstances, be read by mortal man or woman. There were annuals to meet every demand, and to please every class of purchaser. Comic annuals for those who hoped to laugh; a “Botanic Annual” for girls who took country walks with their governess; an “Oriental Annual” for readers of Byron and Moore; a “Landscape Annual” for lovers of nature; “The Christian Keepsake” for ladies of serious minds; and “The Protestant Annual” for those who feared that Christianity might possibly embrace the Romish Church. There were five annuals for English children; from one of which, “The Juvenile Keepsake,” I quote these lines, so admirably adapted to the childish mind. Newton is supposed to speak them in his study:—

Pure and ethereal essence, fairest light,
Come hither, and before my watchful eyes
Disclose thy hidden nature, and unbind
Thy mystic, fine-attenuated parts;
That so, intently marking, I the source
May learn of colours, Nature’s matchless gifts.

There are three pages of this poem, all in the same simple language, from which it is fair to infer that the child’s annual, like its grown-up neighbour, was made to be bought, not read.

OUR ACCOMPLISHED GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Next to mere idleness, I think knotting is to be reckoned in the scale of insignificance.—DR. JOHNSON.

READERS of Dickens (which ought to mean all men and women who have mastered the English alphabet) will remember how that estimable schoolmistress, Miss Monflathers, elucidated Dr. Watts's masterpiece, which had been quoted somewhat rashly by a teacher. "'The little busy bee,'" said Miss Monflathers, drawing herself up, "is applicable only to genteel children.

In books, or work, or healthful play,

is quite right as far as they are concerned; and the work means painting on velvet, fancy needlework, or embroidery."

It also meant, in the good Miss Monflathers's day, making filigree baskets that would not hold anything, Ionic temples of Bristol-board, shell flowers, and paper landscapes. It meant pricking pictures with pins, taking "impressions" of butterflies' wings on sheets of gummed paper, and messing with strange, mysterious compounds called diaphanie and potichomanie, by means of which a harmless glass tumbler or a respectable window-pane could be turned into an object of desolation. Indeed, when the genteel young ladies of this period were not reading "Merit opposed to Fascination; exemplified in the story of Eugenio," or "An Essay on the Refined Felicity which may arise from the Marriage Contract," they were cultivating what were then called "ornamental arts," but which later on became known as "accomplishments." "It is amazing to me," says that most amiable of sub-heroes, Mr. Bingley, "how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished as they all are. They paint tables, cover screens, and net purses. I scarcely know any one who cannot do all this; and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished."

We leave the unamiable Mr. Darcy snorting at his friend's remark, to consider the paucity of Mr. Bingley's list. Tables, screens, and purses represent but the first beginnings of that misdirected energy which for the best part of a century embellished English homes. The truly accomplished young lady in Miss More's "Cœlebs" paints flowers and shells, draws ruins, gilds and varnishes wood, is an adept in Japan work, and stands ready to begin modelling, etching, and

engraving. The great principle of ornamental art was the reproduction of an object—of any object—in an alien material. The less adapted this material was to its purpose, the greater the difficulties it presented to the artist, the more precious became the monstrous masterpiece. To take a plain sheet of paper and draw a design upon it was ignominious in its simplicity; but to construct the same design out of paper spirals, rolling up some five hundred slips with uniform tightness, setting them on end, side by side, and painting or gilding the tops,—that was a feat of which any young lady might be proud. It was so uncommonly hard to do, it ought to have been impossible. Cutting paper with fine sharp scissors and a knife was taught in schools (probably in Miss Monflathers's school, though Dickens does not mention it) as a fashionable pastime. The "white design"—animals, landscape, or marine—was printed on a black background, which was cut away with great dexterity, the spaces being small and intricate. When all the black paper had been removed, the flimsy tracery was pasted on a piece of coloured paper, thus presenting—after hours of patient labour—much the same appearance that it had in the beginning. It was then glassed, framed, and presented to appreciative parents, as a proof of their daughter's industry and taste.

The most famous work of art ever made out of paper was probably the celebrated "herbal" of Mrs. Delany,—Mrs. Delany whom Burke pronounced "the model of an accomplished gentlewoman." She acquired her accomplishments at an age when most people seek to relinquish theirs,—having learned to draw when she was thirty, to paint when she was forty, and to write verse when she was eighty-two. She also "excelled in embroidery and shell-work"; and when Miss Burney made her first visit to St. James's Place, she found Mrs. Delany's walls covered with "ornaments of her own execution of striking elegance, in cuttings and variegated stained papers." The herbal, however, was the crowning achievement of her life. It contained nearly a thousand plants, made of thin strips of coloured paper, pasted layer over layer with the utmost nicety upon a black background, and producing an effect "richer than painting."

> Cold Winter views amid his realms of snow
> Delany's vegetable statues blow;
> Smoothes his stern brow, delays his hoary wing,
> And eyes with wonder all the blooms of Spring.

The flowers were copied accurately from nature, and florists all over the kingdom vied with one another in sending Mrs. Delany rare and beautiful

specimens. The Queen ardently admired this herbal, and the King, who regarded it with veneration not untinged by awe, expressed his feelings by giving its creator a house at Windsor, and settling upon her an annuity of three hundred pounds. Yet Miss Seward complained that although England "teemed with genius," George III was "no Cæsar Augustus," to encourage and patronize the arts. To the best of his ability, he did. His conception of genius and art may not have tallied with that of Augustus; but when an old lady made paper flowers to perfection, he gave her a royal reward.

Mrs. Delany's example was followed in court circles, and in the humbler walks of life. Shell-work, which was one of her accomplishments, became the rage. Her illustrious friend, the Duchess of Portland, "made shell frames and feather designs, adorned grottoes, and collected endless objects in the animal and vegetable kingdom." Young ladies of taste made flowers out of shells, dyeing the white ones with Brazil wood, and varnishing them with gum arabic. A rose of red shells, with a heart of knotted yellow silk, was almost as much admired as a picture of birds with their feathers pasted on the paper. This last triumph of realism presented a host of difficulties to the perpetrator. When the bill and legs of the bird had been painted in water colours on heavy Bristol-board, the space for its body was covered with a paste of gum arabic as thick as a shilling. This paste was kept "tacky or clammy" to hold the feathers, which were stripped off the poor little dead bird, and stuck on the prepared surface, the quills being cut down with a knife. Weights were used to keep the feathers in place, the result being that most of them adhered to the lead instead of to the Bristol-board, and came off discouragingly when the work was nearly done. As a combination of art and nature, the bird picture had no rival except the butterfly picture, where the clipped wings of butterflies were laid between two sheets of gummed paper, and the "impressions" thus taken, reinforced with a little gilding, were attached to a painted body. It may be observed that the quality of mercy was then a good deal strained. Mrs. Montagu's famous "feather-room," in her house on Portman Square, was ornamented with hangings made by herself from the plumage of hundreds of birds, every attainable variety being represented; yet no one of her friends, not even the sainted Hannah More, ever breathed a sigh of regret over the merry little lives that were wasted for its meretricious decorations.

Much time and ingenuity were devoted by industrious young people to the making of baskets, and no material, however unexpected, came amiss to their patient hands. Allspice berries, steeped in brandy to soften them and strung on wire, were very popular; and rice baskets had a chaste simplicity of their own. These last were made of pasteboard, lined with silk or paper, the grains of rice

being gummed on in solid diamond-shaped designs. If the decoration appeared a trifle monotonous, as well it might, it was diversified with coloured glass beads. Indeed, we are assured that “baskets of this description may be very elegantly ornamented with groups of small shells, little artificial bouquets, crystals, and the fine feathers from the heads of birds of beautiful plumage”;—with anything, in short, that could be pasted on and persuaded to stick. When the supply of glue gave out, wafer baskets—wafers required only moistening—or alum baskets (made of wire wrapped round with worsted, and steeped in a solution of alum, which was coloured yellow with saffron or purple with logwood) were held in the highest estimation. The modern mind, with its puny resources, is bewildered by the multiplicity of materials which seem to have lain scattered around the domestic hearth a hundred years ago. There is a famous old receipt for “silvering paper without silver,” a process designed to be economical, but which requires so many messy and alien ingredients, like “Indian glue,” and “Muscovy talc,” and “Venice turpentine,” and “Japan size,” and “Chinese varnish,” that mere silver seems by comparison a cheap and common thing. Young ladies whose thrift equalled their ingenuity made their own varnish by boiling isinglass in a quart of brandy,—a lamentable waste of supplies.

Genteel parcels were always wrapped in silver paper. We remember how Miss Edgeworth’s Rosamond tries in vain to make one sheet cover the famous “filigree basket,” which was her birthday present to her Cousin Bell, and which pointed its own moral by falling to pieces before it was presented. Rosamond’s father derides this basket because he is implored not to grasp it by its myrtle-wreathed handle. “But what is the use of the handle,” he asks, in the conclusive, irritating fashion of the Edgeworthian parent, “if we are not to take hold of it? And pray is this the thing you have been about all week? I have seen you dabbling with paste and rags, and could not conceive what you were doing.”

Rosamond’s half-guinea—her godmother’s gift—is spent buying filigree paper, and medallions, and a “frost ground” for this basket, and she is ruthlessly shamed by its unstable character; whereas Laura, who gives her money secretly to a little lace-maker, has her generosity revealed at exactly the proper moment, and is admired and praised by all the company. Apart from Miss Edgeworth’s conception of life, as made up of well-adjusted punishments and rewards, a half-guinea does seem a good deal to spend on filigree paper; but then a single sheet of gold paper cost six shillings, unless gilded at home, after the following process, which was highly commended for economy:—

“Take yellow ochre, grind it with rain-water, and lay a ground with it all over the

paper, which should be fine wove. When dry, take the white of an egg and about a quarter of an ounce of sugar candy, and beat them together until the sugar candy is dissolved. Then strike it all over the ground with a varnish brush, and immediately lay on the gold leaf, pressing it down with a piece of fine cotton. When dry, polish it with a dog's tooth or agate. A sheet of this paper may be prepared for eighteen pence."

No wonder little Rosamond was unequal to such labour, and her half-guinea was squandered in extravagant purchases. Miss Edgeworth, trained in her father's theory that children should be always occupied, was a good deal distressed by the fruits of their industry. The "chatting girls cutting up silk and gold paper," whom Miss Austen watched with unconcern, would have fretted Miss Edgeworth's soul, unless she knew that sensible needle-cases, pin-cushions, and work-bags were in process of construction. Yet the celebrated "rational toy-shop," with its hand-looms instead of dolls, and its machines for drawing in perspective instead of tin soldiers and Noah's arks, stood responsible for the inutilities she scorned. And what of the charitable lady in "Lazy Lawrence," who is "making a grotto," and buying shells and fossils for its decoration? Even a filigree basket, which had at least the grace of impermanence, seems desirable by comparison with a grotto. It will be remembered also that Madame de Rosier, the "Good French Governess," traces her lost son, that "promising young man of fourteen," by means of a box he has made out of refuse bits of shell thrown aside in a London restaurant; while the son in turn discovers a faithful family servant through the medium of a painted pasteboard dog, which the equally ingenious domestic has exposed for sale in a shop. It was a good thing in Miss Edgeworth's day to cultivate the "ornamental arts," were it only for the reunion of families.

Pasteboard, a most ungrateful and unyielding material, was the basis of so many household decorations that a little volume, published in the beginning of the last century, is devoted exclusively to its possibilities. This book, which went through repeated editions, is called "The Art of Working in Pasteboard upon Scientific Principles"; and it gives minute directions for making boxes, baskets, tea-trays, caddies,—even candlesticks, and "an inkstand in the shape of a castle with a tower,"—a baffling architectural design. What patience and ingenuity must have been expended upon this pasteboard castle, which had a wing for the ink well, a wing for the sand box, five circular steps leading up to the principal entrance, a terrace which was a drawer, a balcony surrounded by a "crenelled screen," a tower to hold the quills, a vaulted cupola which lifted like a lid, and a lantern with a "quadrilateral pyramid" for its roof, surmounted by a real pea or a

glass bead as the final bit of decoration. There is a drawing of this edifice, which is as imposing as its dimensions will permit; and there are four pages of mysterious instructions which make the reader feel as though he were studying architecture by correspondence.

Far more difficult of accomplishment, and far more useless when accomplished, —for they could not even hold pens and ink,—were the Grecian temples and Gothic towers, made of pasteboard covered with marbled paper, and designed as "elegant ornaments for the mantelpiece." A small Ionic temple requires ten pages of directions. It is built of "the best Bristol-board, except the shafts of the pillars and some of the decorations, which are made of royal drawing-paper"; and its manufacturers are implored not to spare time, trouble, or material, if they would attain to anything so classic. "The art of working in pasteboard," says the preface of this engaging little book, "may be carried to a high degree of usefulness and perfection, and may eventually be productive of substantial benefits to young persons of both sexes, who wisely devote their leisure hours to pleasing, quiet, and useful recreations, preferably to frivolous, noisy, and expensive amusements."

A pleasing, quiet, and useful recreation which wasted nothing but eyesight,—and that nobody valued,—was pricking pictures with pins. The broad lines and heavy shadows were pricked with stout pins, the fine lines and high lights with little ones, while a toothed wheel, sharply pointed, was used for large spaces and simple decorative designs. This was an ambitious field of art, much of the work being of a microscopic delicacy. The folds of a lady's dress could be pricked in such film-like waves that only close scrutiny revealed the thousand tiny holes of which its billowy softness was composed. The cleanness and dryness of pins commend them to our taste after a long contemplation of varnish and glue pots; of "poonah work," which was a sticky sort of stencilling; of "Japan work," in which embossed figures were made of "gum-water, thickened to a proper consistence with equal parts of bole ammoniac and whiting"; of "Chinese enamel," which was a base imitation of ebony inlaid with ivory; and of "potichomanie," which converted a piece of English glass into something that "not one in a hundred could tell from French china." We sympathize with the refined editor of the "Monthly Museum," who recommends knotting to his female readers, not only because it had the sanction of a queen,

> Who, when she rode in coach abroad,
> Was always knotting threads;

but because of its "pure nature" and "innocent simplicity." "I cannot but think,"

says this true friend of my sex, “that shirts and smocks are unfit for any lady of delicacy to handle; but the shuttle is an easy flowing object, to which the eye may remove with propriety and grace.”

Grace was never overlooked in our great-grandmother’s day, but took rank as an important factor in education. A London schoolmistress, offering in 1815 some advice as to the music “best fitted for ladies,” confesses that it is hard to decide between the “wide range” of the pianoforte and the harp-player’s “elegance of position,” which gives to her instrument “no small powers of rivalry.” Sentiment was interwoven with every accomplishment. Tender mottoes, like those which Miss Euphemia Dundas entreats Thaddeus of Warsaw to design for her, were painted upon boxes and hand-screens. Who can forget the white leather “souvenir,” adorned with the words “Toujours cher,” which Miss Euphemia presses upon Thaddeus, and which that attractive but virtuous exile is modestly reluctant to accept. A velvet bracelet embroidered with forget-me-nots symbolized friendship. A handkerchief, designed as a gift from a young girl to her betrothed, had a celestial sphere worked in one corner, to indicate the purity of their flame; a bouquet of buds and blossoms in another, to mark the pleasures and the brevity of life; and, in a third, Cupid playing with a spaniel, “as an emblem of the most passionate fidelity.” Even samplers, which represented the first step in the pursuit of accomplishments, had their emblematic designs no less than their moral axioms. The village schoolmistress, whom Miss Mitford knew and loved, complained that all her pupils wanted to work samplers instead of learning to sew; and that all their mothers valued these works of art more than they did the neatest of caps and aprons. The sampler stood for gentility as well as industry. It reflected credit on the family as well as on the child. At the bottom of a faded canvas, worked more than a hundred years ago, and now hanging in a great museum of art, is this inspiring verse:—

I have done this that you may see
What care my parents took of me.
And when I’m dead and in my grave,
This piece of work I trust you’ll save.

If the little girl who embodied her high hopes in the painful precision of cross-stitch could but know of their splendid fulfilment!

THE ALBUM AMICORUM

She kept an album too, at home,
  Well stocked with all an album's glories,
Paintings of butterflies and Rome,
  Patterns for trimmings, Persian stories.

PRAED.

MODERN authors who object to being asked for their autographs, and who complain piteously of the persecutions they endure in this regard, would do well to consider what they have gained by being born in an age when commercialism has supplanted compliment. Had they been their own great-grandfathers, they would have been expected to present to their female friends the verses they now sell to magazines. They would have written a few playful and affectionate lines every time they dined out, and have paid for a week's hospitality with sentimental tributes to their hostess. And not their hostess only. Her budding daughters would have looked for some recognition of their charms, and her infant son would have presented a theme too obvious for disregard. It is recorded that when Campbell spent two days at the country seat of Mr. James Craig, the Misses Craig kept him busy most of that time composing verses for their albums, —a pleasant way of entertaining a poet guest. On another occasion he writes to Mrs. Arkwright, lamenting, though with much good-humour, the importunities of mothers. "Mrs. Grahame has a plot upon me that I should write a poem upon her boy, three years old. Oh, such a boy! But in the way of writing lines on lovely children, I am engaged three deep, and dare not promise."

It seems that parents not only petitioned for these poetic windfalls, but pressed their claims hard. Campbell, one of the most amiable of men, yielded in time to this demand, as he had yielded to many others, and sent to little Master Grahame some verses of singular ineptitude.

Sweet bud of life! thy future doom
  Is present to my eyes,
And joyously I see thee bloom
  In Fortune's fairest skies.

One day that breast, scarce conscious now

One day that breast, scarce conscious now,
Shall burn with patriot flame;
And, fraught with love, that little brow
Shall wear the wreath of fame.

There are many more stanzas, but these are enough to make us wonder why parents did not let the poet alone. Perhaps, if they had, he would have volunteered his services. We know that when young Fanny Kemble showed him her nosegay at a ball, and asked how she should keep the flowers from fading, he answered hardily: “Give them to me, and I will immortalize them,”—an enviable assurance of renown.

Album verses date from the old easy days, when rhyming was regarded as a gentlemanly accomplishment rather than as a means of livelihood. Titled authors, poets wealthy and well-born—for there were always such—naturally addressed themselves to the ladies of their acquaintance. They could say with Lord Chesterfield that they thanked Heaven they did not have to live by their brains. It was a theory, long and fondly cherished, that poetry was not common merchandise, to be bought and sold like meal and malt; that it was, as Burns admirably said, either above price or worth nothing at all. Later on, when poets became excellent men of business, when Byron had been seduced by Murray’s generosity, when Moore drove his wonderful bargains, and poetic narrative was the best-selling commodity in the market, we hear a rising murmur of protest against the uncommercial exactions of the album. Sonneteers who could sell their wares for hard cash no longer felt repaid by a word of flattery. Even the myrtle wreaths which crowned the victors of the Bath Easton contests appeared but slender compensation, save in Miss Seward’s eyes, or in Mrs. Hayley’s. When Mrs. Hayley went to Bath in 1781, and witnessed the solemn ceremonies inaugurated by Lady Miller; when she saw the laurels, and myrtles, and fluttering ribbons, her soul was fired with longing, and she set to work to persuade her husband that the Bath Easton prize was not wholly beneath his notice. The author of “The Triumphs of Temper” was naturally fearful of lowering his dignity by sporting with minor poets; and there was much wifely artifice in her assumption that such playfulness on his part would be recognized as true condescension. “If you should feel disposed to honour this slight amusement with a light composition, I am persuaded you will oblige very highly.” The responsive Hayley was not unwilling to oblige, provided no one would suspect him of being in earnest. He “scribbled” the desired lines “in the most rapid manner,” “literally in a morning and a half” (Byron did not take much longer to write “The Corsair”), and sent them off to Bath, where they were

“admired beyond description,” and won the prize, so that the gratified Mrs. Hayley appeared that night with the myrtle wreath woven in her hair. The one famous contributor to the Bath Easton vase who did *not* win a prize was Sheridan. He, being entreated to write for it some verses on “Charity,” complied in these heartless lines:—

THE VASE SPEAKS

For heaven’s sake bestow on me
A little wit, for that would be
Indeed an act of charity.

Complimentary addresses—those flowery tributes which seem so ardent and so facile—were beginning to drag a little, even in Walpole’s day. He himself was an adept in the art of polite adulation, and wrote without a blush the obliging comparison between the Princess Amelia and Venus (greatly to the disparagement of Venus), which the flattered lady found in the hand of the marble Apollo at Stowe. “All women like all or any praise,” said Lord Byron, who had reason to know the sex. The Princess Amelia, stout, sixty, and “strong as a Brunswick lion,” was pleased to be designated as a “Nymph,” and to be told she had routed Venus from the field. Walpole also presented to Madame de Boufflers a “petite gentillesse,” when she visited Strawberry Hill; and it became the painful duty of the Duc de Nivernois to translate these lines into French, on the occasion of Miss Pelham’s grand fête at Esher Place. The task kept him absorbed and preoccupied most of the day, “lagging behind” while the others made a cheerful tour of the farms, or listened to the French horns and hautboys on the lawn. Finally, when all the guests were drinking tea and coffee in the Belvidere, poor Nivernois was delivered of his verselets, which were received with a polite semblance of gratification, and for the remaining hours his spirit was at peace. But it does seem a hard return to exact for hospitality, and must often have suggested to men of letters the felicity of staying at home.

Miss Seward made it her happy boast that the number and the warmth of Mr. Hayley’s tributes—inserted duly in her album—raised her to a rivalry with Swift’s Stella, or Prior’s Chloe. “Our four years’ correspondence has been enriched with a galaxy of little poetic gems of the first water.” Nor was the lady backward in returning compliment for compliment. That barter of praise, that exchange of felicitation, which is both so polite and so profitable, was as well understood by our sentimental ancestors as it is in this hard-headed age. Indeed, I am not sure that the Muse did not sometimes calculate more closely then than she ventures to do to-day. We know that Canon Seward wrote an elegiac poem

on a young nobleman who was held to be dying, but who—perversely enough—recovered; whereupon the reverend eulogist changed the name, and transferred his heartfelt lamentations to another youth whose death was fully assured. In the same business-like spirit Miss Seward paid back Mr. Hayley flattery for flattery, until even the slow-witted satirists of the period made merry over this commerce of applause.

Miss Seward. Pride of Sussex, England's glory,
Mr. Hayley, is that you?
Mr. Hayley. Ma'am, you carry all before you,
Trust me, Lichfield swan, you do.
Miss Seward. Ode, dramatic, epic, sonnet,
Mr. Hayley, you're divine!
Mr. Hayley. Ma'am, I'll give my word upon it,
You yourself are all the Nine.

Moore, as became a poet of ardent temperament, wrote the most gallant album verses of his day; for which reason, and because his star of fame rode high, he endured sharp persecution at the hands of admiring but covetous friends. Young ladies asked him in the most offhand manner to "address a poem" to them; and women of rank smiled on him in ballrooms, and confided to him that they were keeping their albums virgin of verse until "an introduction to Mr. Moore" should enable them to request *him* to write on the opening page. "I fight this off as well as I can," he tells Lord Byron, who knew both the relentlessness of such demands and the compliant nature of his friend. On one occasion Lady Holland showed Moore some stanzas which Lord Holland had written in Latin and in English, on the subject of a snuff-box given her by Napoleon; bidding him imperiously "do something of the kind," and adding that she greatly desired a corresponding tribute from Lord Byron. Moore wisely declined to make any promises for Byron (one doubts whether the four lines which that nobleman eventually contributed afforded her ladyship much pleasure), but wrote his own verses before he was out of bed the next morning, and carried them to Holland House, expecting to breakfast with its mistress. He found her, however, in such a captious mood, so out of temper with all her little world, that, although he sat down to the table, he did not venture to hint his hunger; and as no one asked him to eat or drink, he slipped off in half an hour, and sought (his poem still in his pocket) the more genial hospitality of Rosset's restaurant. Had all this happened twenty years earlier, Moore's self-esteem would have been deeply wounded; but the poet was by now a man of mark, and could afford to laugh at his own discomfiture.

Moore’s album verses may be said to make up in warmth what they lack in address. Minor poets—minims like William Robert Spencer—surpassed him easily in adroitness; and sometimes won for themselves slender but abiding reputations by expressing with consummate ease sentiments they did not feel. Spencer’s pretty lines beginning,—

Too late I stayed,—forgive the crime!
Unheeded flew the hours:
How noiseless falls the foot of time
That only treads on flowers!

—lines which all our grandmothers had by heart—may still be found in compilations of English verse. Their dexterous allusions to the diamond sparks in Time’s hour-glass, and to the bird-of-paradise plumage in his grey wings, their veiled and graceful flattery, contrast pleasantly with Moore’s Hibernian boldness, with his offhand demand to be paid in kisses for his songs—

That rosy mouth alone can bring
What makes the bard divine;
Oh, Lady! how my lip would sing,
If once ’twere prest to thine.

A discreet young woman might have hesitated to show *this* album page to friends.

Byron’s “tributes,” when he paid them, were singularly chill. He may have buried his heart at Mrs. Spencer Smith’s feet; but the lines in her album which record this interment are eloquent of a speedy resurrection. When Lady Blessington demanded some verses, he wrote them; but he explained with almost insulting lucidity that his heart was as grey as his head (he was thirty-one), and that he had nothing warmer than friendship to offer in place of extinguished affections. Moore must have wearied painfully of albums and of their rapacious demands; yet to the end of his life he could be harassed into feigning a poetic passion; but Byron stood at bay. He was a hunted creature, and the instinct of self-preservation taught him savage methods of escape.

There are people who, from some delicacy of mental fibre, find it exceedingly difficult to be rude; and there are people who—like Charles Lamb—have a curious habit of doing what they do not want to do, and what they know is not worth doing, for the sake of giving pleasure to some utterly insignificant acquaintance. The first class lacks a valuable weapon in life’s warfare. The second class is so small, and the motives which govern it are so inscrutable, that

we are apt to be exasperated by its amiability. It is easy to sympathize with Thackeray, who, being badgered to write in an album already graced by the signatures of several distinguished musicians, said curtly: “What! among all those fiddlers!” This hardy British superciliousness commends itself to our sense of humour, no less than to our sense of self-protection. A great deal has been said, especially by Frenchmen, about the wisdom of polite denials; but a rough word, spoken in time, is seldom without weight in England.

Yet, for a friend, Thackeray found no labour hard. The genial tolerance of “The Pen and the Album” suggests something akin to affection for these pillaging little books when the right people owned them,—when they belonged to “Chesham Place.” Locker tells a pleasant story of meeting Thackeray in Pall Mall, on his way to Kensington, and offering to join him in his walk. This offer was declined, Thackeray explaining that he had some rhymes trotting through his head, and that he was trying to polish them off in the course of a solitary stroll. A few days later they met again, and Thackeray said, “I finished those verses, and they are very nearly being very good. I call them ‘Mrs. Katherine’s Lantern.’ I did them for Dickens’s daughter.”

“Very nearly being very good!” This is an author’s modest estimate. Readers there are who have found them so absolutely good that they leaven the whole heavy mass of album verse. Shall not a century of extortion on the one side and debility on the other be forgiven, because upon one blank page, the property of one thrice fortunate young woman, were written these lines, fragrant with imperishable sentiment:—

When he was young as you are young,
When he was young, and lutes were strung,
And love-lamps in the casement hung.

But when we turn to Lamb, and find him driving his pen along its unwilling way, and admitting ruefully that the road was hard, we see the reverse of the medal, and we resent that inexplicable sweetness of temper which left him defenceless before marauders.

My feeble Muse, that fain her best would
Write at command of Frances Westwood,
But feels her wits not in their best mood.

Why should Frances Westwood have commanded his services? Why should Frances Brown, “engaged to a Mr. White,” have wrung from him a dozen lines of what we should now call “copy”? She had no recognizable right to that copy;

but Lamb confided to Mrs. Moxon that he had sent it to her at twenty-four hours' notice, because she was going to be married and start with her husband for India. Also that he had forgotten what he had written, save only two lines:—

May your fame
And fortune, Frances, Whiten with your name!

of which conceit he was innocently proud.

Mrs. Moxon (Emma Isola) was herself an old and hardened offender. Her album, enriched with the spoils of a predatory warfare, travelled far afield, extorting its tribute of verse. We find Lamb first paying, as was natural, his own tithes, and then actually aiding and abetting injustice by sending the book to Mr. Procter (Barry Cornwall), with an irresistible appeal for support.

"I have another favour to beg, which is the beggarliest of beggings; a few lines of verse for a young friend's album (six will be enough). M. Burney will tell you who I want 'em for. A girl of gold. Six lines—make 'em eight—signed Barry C ——. They need not be very good, as I chiefly want 'em as a foil to mine. But I shall be seriously obliged by any refuse scraps. We are in the last ages of the world, when St. Paul prophesied that women should be 'headstrong lovers of their own wills, having albums.' I fled hither to escape the albumean persecution, and had not been in my new house twenty-four hours when a daughter of the next house came in with a friend's album, to beg a contribution, and, the following day, intimated she had one of her own. Two more have sprung up since. 'If I take the wings of the morning, and fly unto the uttermost parts of the earth, there will albums be.' New Holland has albums. The age is to be complied with."

"Ask for this little book a token of remembrance from friends, and from fellow students, and from wayfarers whom you may never see again. He who gives you his name and a few kind words, gives you a treasure which shall keep his memory green."

So wrote Goethe—out of the abyss of German sentimentality—in his son's album; and the words have a pleasant ring of good fellowship and unforced fraternity. They are akin to those gracious phrases with which the French monarchy—"despotism tempered by epigram"—was wont to designate the taxes that devoured the land. There was a charming politeness in the assumption that

taxes were free gifts, gladly given; but those who gave them knew.

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FOOTNOTE:

[1] Beattie’s *Minstrel*.

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