

JOHN AIKIN, MRS. BARBAULD

**MISCELLANEOUS
PIECES, IN PROSE**

John Aikin

Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose

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John Aikin, Anna Lætitia Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose

ON THE PROVINCE OF COMEDY

Various are the methods which art and ingenuity have invented to exhibit a picture of human life and manners. These have differed from each other, both in the mode of representation, and in the particular view of the subject which has been taken. With respect to the first, it is universally allowed that the dramatic form is by far the most perfect. The circumstance of leaving every character to display itself in its own proper language, with all the variations of tone and gesture which distinguish it from others, and which mark every emotion of the mind; and the scenic delusions of dress, painting, and machinery, contribute to stamp such an appearance of reality upon dramatic representations as no other of the imitative arts can attain. Indeed, when in their perfection, they can scarcely be called imitations, but the very things themselves; and real nature would perhaps appear less perfect than her counterfeit.

The Drama has from early antiquity been distinguished into the two grand divisions of Tragedy and Comedy. It would seem that the general character of these was universally understood and agreed on, by the adoption of the terms *tragic* and *comic*, derived from them, into the language of every civilized people. The former of these is, we know, constantly applied to objects of terror and distress; the latter, to those of mirth and pleasantry. There is, however, a more comprehensive distinction of our feelings, which it is proper first to consider.

When we examine the emotions produced in our minds by the view of human actions, we shall observe a division into the *serious*, and the *ludicrous*. I do not think it necessary to define or analyse feelings with which all are well acquainted. It is enough to observe that serious emotions are produced by the display of all the great passions which agitate the soul, and by all those actions, which are under the jurisdiction of the grand rules of religion and morality; and that ludicrous emotions are excited by the improprieties and inconsistencies of conduct or judgment in smaller matters; such as the effects of false taste, or trifling passions. When we now apply the words *tragic* and *comic*, we shall at once perceive that the former can relate solely to such subjects as occasion *serious*, and the latter to such as occasion *ludicrous* emotions.

Now, although the practice of writers has frequently introduced ludicrous parts into the composition called a Tragedy, and serious parts into that called a Comedy, yet it has ever been understood that what constitutes the essential and invariable character of each is something which is expressed by the terms *tragic* and *comic*, and comes under the head of *serious* or *ludicrous* emotions. Referring therefore to a future consideration, the propriety of introducing serious parts in a Comedy, I shall now lay down the character of Comedy as *a dramatic composition, exhibiting a ludicrous picture of human life and manners*.

There are two sources of ludicrous emotions which it is proper here to distinguish. One of these arises from *character*, the other from *incident*. The first is attached and appropriated to the person, and makes a part, as it were, of his composition. The other is merely accidental, proceeding from awkward situations, odd and uncommon circumstances, and the like, which may happen indifferently to every person. If we compare these with regard to their dignity and utility, we shall find a further difference; since that proceeding from *character* belongs to a very respectable part of knowledge, that of human manners; and has for its end the correction of foibles: whereas that proceeding from *incident* is mean and trivial in its origin, and answers no other purpose than present mirth. 'Tis true, it is perfectly natural to be pleased with risible objects, even of the lowest kind, and a fastidious aversion to their exhibition may be accounted mere affected nicety; yet, since we rank Comedy among the higher and

more refined species of composition, let us assign it the more honourable office of exhibiting and correcting the ludicrous part of *characters*; and leave to Bartholomew Fair the ingenious contrivances of facetious drollery, and handicraft merriment.

The following sources may be pointed out from whence comic character is derived.

Nations, like individuals, have certain leading features which distinguish them from others. Of these there are always some of a ludicrous cast which afford matter of entertainment to their neighbours. Comedy has at all times made very free with national peculiarities; and, although the ridicule has often been conducted in a trivial and illiberal manner, by greatly overcharging the picture, and introducing idle and unjust accusations, yet I think we need not go so far as entirely to reject this sort of ludicrous painting; since it may be as important to warn against the imitation of foreign follies, as those of our own growth. Indeed, when a Frenchman or Irishman is brought upon our stage merely to talk broken English, or make bulls, there can be no plea either of wit or utility to excuse the illiberal jest: but, when the nicer distinctions of national character are exposed with a just and delicate ridicule, the spectacle may be both entertaining and instructive. Amidst the tribe of foreign valets to be met with on the English theatre, I would instance Canton in the *Clandestine Marriage*, as an admirable example of true national character, independent on language and grimace. The obsequiousness and attentive flattery of the servile Swiss-Frenchman are quite characteristic, as well as the careless insolence and affected airs of Brush the English footman¹. O'Flaherty, the Irish soldier of fortune in the *West Indian*, is an example of similar merit; much more so, I think, than the character from which the piece has its title.

Although some part of the character of a nation is pretty uniform and constant, yet its manners and customs in many points are extremely variable. These variations are the peculiar modes and fashions of the age; and hence the age, as well as the nation, acquires a distinguishing character. Fashion, in general, usurps a dominion only over the smaller and less important part of manners; such as dress, public diversions, and other matters of taste. The improprieties of fashion are therefore of the absurd and ludicrous kind, and consequently fit subjects of comic ridicule. There is no source of Comedy more fertile and pleasing than this; and none in which the end of reformation is likely to be so well answered. An extravagant fashion is exhibited upon the stage with such advantage of ridicule, that it can scarcely stand long against it; and I make no doubt that Moliere's *Marquis de Mascarille*, and Cibber's *Lord Foppington*, had a considerable share in reforming the prevailing foppery of the times. Fashion has also too much interfered in some more serious matters, as the sentiments and studies of the age. Here too Comedy has made its attacks; and the *Alchemist*, the *Virtuoso*, the *Antiquary*, the *Belle Esprit*, have in their turns undergone the ridicule of the stage, when their respective pursuits, by being fashionable, were carried to a fanciful extravagance. It is well known that Moliere, in his comedies of the *Femmes Sçavantes*, and the *Precieuses Ridicules*, was as successful against the pedantry and pretensions to wit which infected the French nation, and particularly the ladies, at that period, as Cervantes in his attack upon knight-errantry.

There is another point of national or fashionable folly in which Comedy might be very useful; yet the attempt has been found dangerous; and perhaps the subject is too delicate for the stage, considering the abuses to which it is liable. I mean popular superstition, and priestcraft. Moliere, who with impunity had attacked every other species of folly, was almost ruined by exposing a hypocrite and a devotee; and the licentious ridicule of Dryden, and others of that age, was generally aimed, not only against superstition, but religion. The *Spanish Friar*, however, is an instance in which, with

¹ I am concerned to observe an instance of illiberal national ridicule without any merit of composition to palliate it, from a respectable dramatic writer, which is also rendered much more obnoxious by the circumstances. M. Voltaire's *Ecossaise* was purposely written to exhibit a worthy English character; marked, indeed, with some whimsical peculiarities, but distinguished by a strong spirit of benevolence. It was impossible to expose national foibles more gently than by combining them with national virtues. When this Piece was brought on our stage under the title of the *English Merchant*, a French valet was inserted among the *personæ dramatis*, characterised by nothing but his false English, and for no other end but to be exhibited as a scoundrel!

exquisite humour, the ridicule can hardly be blamed as improper; and it certainly did more hurt to Roman Catholic superstition than he could ever remedy by his scholastic *Hind and Panther*. How far the *Minor* comes under the same description, would, probably, be a subject of dispute.

Particular ranks and professions of men have likewise characteristical peculiarities which are capable of being placed in a ludicrous view; and Comedy has made frequent use of this source of ridicule. In exposing professional, as well as national absurdities, great illiberality and unfairness have been shewn; both, probably, from the same cause; a want of sufficient acquaintance with the whole characters, and taking a judgment of them from a few external circumstances. Yet, upon the whole, good effects may have arisen even from this branch of Comedy; since, by attacking a profession on a side where it was really weak, the members of it have been made sensible of, and have reformed those circumstances which rendered them ridiculous. A good-natured physician can never be angry at Moliere's most laughable exhibitions of the faculty, when he reflects that the follies ridiculed, though exaggerated in the representation, had a real existence; and, by being held up to public derision, have been in a great measure reformed. The professors of law, being necessarily confined to forms and rules, have not been able to benefit so much from the comic ridicule of which they have enjoyed an equally plentiful share.

Besides the arrangements which nation and profession make of mankind, there are certain natural classes formed from the diversities of personal character. Although the varieties of temper and disposition in men are infinite, so that no two persons probably ever existed in whom there was an exact conformity, yet there are certain leading features of character which produce a general resemblance among numerous individuals. Thus the proud man, the vain, the sanguine, the splenetic, the suspicious, the covetous, the lavish, and so forth, are a sort of abstract characters which divide the whole human race amongst them. Now there are, belonging to all these, objects of ridicule which it has been the business of Comedy to exhibit; and though, perhaps, no one individual of each class perfectly resembled the person held to view on the stage, yet if all the circumstances exhibited are contained in the general character, it appears sufficiently natural. The *Miser* of Moliere is not a picture of any one miser who ever lived, but of a miser considered as forming a class of human characters. As these general classes, however, are few in number, they must be soon exhausted by the writers of Comedy, who have been obliged, for the sake of variety, to exhibit those peculiarities which are more rare and singular. Hence have been derived many pictures of that character which we call an *humourist*; by which is meant a character distinguished by certain ludicrous singularities from the rest of mankind. The humourist is not without those marks of distinction which he may acquire, like others, from rank, profession, or temper of mind; but all these are displayed in him after a manner peculiarly his own, and dashed with his leading oddities. A love of what is uncommon and out of the way has often occasioned such extravagance in the representation of these characters as to disgust from their want of probability; but, where a due moderation is observed, and the peculiarities, though unusual, are such as really exist in nature, great entertainment may be derived from their exhibition. Of this kind are the admirable *Misanthrope* and *Malade Imaginaire* of Moliere; and the *Old Bachelor* and *Sir Sampson Legend* of Congreve.

From hence it appears but a small gradation to the exhibition of individuals upon the stage; and yet the difference is important and essential. That which marks out the distinction between individuals of the same species is something entirely uncommunicable; therefore the rational end of Comedy, which is the reformation of folly, cannot take place in personal ridicule; for it will not be alledged that reforming the person himself is the object. Nor can it scarcely ever be just to expose an individual to the ridicule of the stage; since folly, and not vice, being the proper subject of that ridicule, it is hardly possible any one can deserve so severe a punishment. Indeed the exposing of folly can scarcely be the plea; for all the common, or even the rarer kinds of folly lie open to the attack of Comedy under fictitious characters, by means of which the failing may be ridiculed without the person. Personal ridicule must therefore turn, as we find it always has done, upon bodily imperfections, awkward

habits, and uncouth gestures; which the low arts of mimicry inhumanly drag forth to public view, for the mean purpose of exciting present merriment. In the best hands, personal Comedy would be a degradation of the stage, and an unwarrantable severity; but in the hands it would be likely, if encouraged, to fall into, it would prove an intolerable nuisance. I should therefore, without hesitation, join those who utterly condemn this species of comic ridicule. It is also to be considered, that the author shews his talents to disadvantage, and cannot lay any basis of future fame, in this walk. For the resemblance which depends so much upon mimicry is lost upon those of the audience who are not acquainted with the original, and upon every one who only reads the piece. Mr. Foote's works will aptly exemplify this matter; in which the fund of genuine Comedy, derived from happy strokes upon the manners of the times, and uncommon, but not entirely singular characters, will secure a lasting admiration, when the mimicry which supported the parts of *Squintum* and *Cadwallader* is despised or forgotten.

Having thus attempted to trace the different sources of what I conceive the essential part of true Comedy, the *ridicule derived from character*, it remains to say somewhat of the mixture of additional matter which it has received as a composition.

During a considerable period of modern literature, *wit* was a commodity in great request, and frequently to be met with in all kinds of composition. It was no where more abundant than in Comedy, the genius of which it appeared peculiarly to suit, from its gaiety and satirical smartness. Accordingly, the language of Comedy was a string of repartees, in which a thought was bandied about from one to another, till it was quite run out of breath. This made a scene pass off with great vivacity; but the misfortune was, that distinction of character was quite lost in the contest. Every personage, from the lord to the valet, was as witty as the author himself; and, provided good things enow were said, it was no matter from whom they came. Congreve, with the greatest talents for true comic humour, and the delineation of ludicrous characters, was so over-run with a fondness for brilliancy, as frequently to break in upon consistency. Wit is an admirable ornament of Comedy, and, judiciously applied, is a high relief to humour, but should never interfere with the more essential parts.

We are now, however, happily free from all manner of danger of an inundation of wit. No Congreve arises to disturb the sententious gravity, and calm simplicity of modern Comedy. A moralist may congratulate the age on hearing from the theatre compositions as pure, serious and delicate, as are given from the pulpit. When we consider how much wit and humour, at the time they were most prevalent, were perverted to vicious purposes, we may rejoice at the sacrifice; yet we may be allowed to feel a regret at the loss of an amusement which might, certainly, have been reconciled with innocence; nay, might perhaps have pleaded utility beyond what is substituted in its room. *Sentimental Comedy*, as it is called, contains but very faint discrimination of character, and scarcely any thing of ridicule. Its principal aim is to introduce elegant and refined sentiment, particularly of the benevolent cast; and to move the heart by tender and interesting situations. Hence they are, in general, much more affecting than our modern Tragedies, which are formed upon nearly the same plan, but labour under the disadvantage of a formal, stately stile, and manners removed too far from the rank of common life. One would not, perhaps, wish altogether to banish from the stage pieces so moral and innocent; yet it is a pity they are not distinguished by some appropriated name from a thing they so little resemble as true Comedy.

I fear, a view of modern manners in other respects will scarcely allow us to flatter ourselves that this change in the theatre chiefly proceeds from improved morality. It may, perhaps, be more justly attributed to a false delicacy of taste, which renders us unable to bear the representation of low life; and to a real deficiency in genius. With respect to the first, genuine Comedy knows no distinction of rank, but can as heartily enjoy a humorous picture in the common walks of life, where indeed the greatest variety is to be found, as in the most cultivated and refined. Some have placed the distinction between Farce and Comedy in the rank from whence the characters are taken; but, I think, very improperly. If there is any real distinction besides the length of the pieces, I should take it

from the different source of the humour; which in Farce is mere ludicrous incident, but in Comedy, ridiculous character. This criterion, however, will not at all agree with the titles under which each species has already appeared.

As to the other cause, deficiency of genius, it too plainly appears in many other productions. Cold correctness has laid her repressing hand upon imagination, and damped all her powers. The example of the ancients has been thought to justify the gravity and simplicity of modern Comedy. But, great as they were in many qualities of the mind, in those of wit and humour they were still more defective than even ourselves in the present age. They, who would eagerly catch at a wretched pun, or a meager piece of plot, were certainly with-held from witticism and drollery by want of invention, not justness of taste. I admire, in the pure Latin of Terence, the elegant sentiment, and still more the knowledge of the human heart, with which he abounds; but I would not on that account compare his genius, at least in Comedy, with Moliere and Congreve.

Lenibus atque utinam scriptis adjuncta foret vis
Comica – —

Moral sentiment is the cheapest product of the mind. Novels, and magazines, and even newspapers, are full of it; but wit and humour threaten to leave us with Chesterfield and Sterne.

Still, however, I would hope the state of Comedy is not desperate. The *Clandestine Marriage* exhibits an example of comic merit, as various and perfect as perhaps any piece in our language. All the sources of ludicrous character have contributed to it. National ridicule appears in Canton, and professional in Sterling. Lord Ogleby is an excellent humourist. Mrs. Heidleberg and her niece, besides a comic pettishness of temper, have plenty of fashionable follies, modified by city vulgarism. Even the lovers of tender sentiment have their share in the entertainment; and I by no means would object to its occasional introduction, when, as it were, offering itself from the circumstances. Then, besides Mr. Foote's comic theatre, we have several pieces, which, though ranged under the list of Farces, contain true and original Comedy. Of these we may instance the *Citizen*, *Polly Honeycomb*, *the Upholsterer*, *the Apprentice*, and *the Oxonian in Town*. It is a mistake to suppose that the matter of Comedy can ever fail. Though general characters may be exhausted, yet the prevailing follies and fashions of the times, with the singularities starting up in particular ranks and orders of men, must constantly supply food for the ridicule of the stage. This is lawful game; and the pursuit of it is well worthy the encouragement of the public, so long as it is unattended with the licentiousness which disgraced the wit of the last age. Let ridicule be sacred to the interests of good sense and virtue; let it never make a good character less respectable, nor a bad one less obnoxious; but let us not resign its use to common-place maxim, and insipid sentiment.

THE HILL OF SCIENCE, A VISION

In that season of the year when the serenity of the sky, the various fruits which cover the ground, the discoloured foliage of the trees, and all the sweet, but fading graces of inspiring autumn, open the mind to benevolence, and dispose it for contemplation; I was wandering in a beautiful and romantic country, till curiosity began to give way to weariness; and I sat me down on the fragment of a rock overgrown with moss, where the rustling of the falling leaves, the dashing of waters, and the hum of the distant city, soothed my mind into the most perfect tranquillity, and sleep insensibly stole upon me, as I was indulging the agreeable reveries which the objects around me naturally inspired.

I immediately found myself in a vast extended plain, in the middle of which arose a mountain higher than I had before any conception of. It was covered with a multitude of people, chiefly youth; many of whom pressed forwards with the liveliest expression of ardour in their countenance, though the way was in many places steep and difficult. I observed, that those who had but just begun to climb the hill, thought themselves not far from the top; but as they proceeded, new hills were continually rising to their view; and the summit of the highest they could before discern, seemed but the foot of another, till the mountain at length appeared to lose itself in the clouds. As I was gazing on these things with astonishment, my good Genius suddenly appeared. 'The mountain before thee,' said he, 'is the hill of science. On the top is the temple of Truth, whose head is above the clouds, and whose face is covered with a veil of pure light. Observe the progress of her votaries; be silent, and attentive.'

I saw that the only regular approach to the mountain was by a gate, called the gate of languages. It was kept by a woman of a pensive and thoughtful appearance, whose lips were continually moving, as though she repeated something to herself. Her name was memory. On entering this first enclosure, I was stunned with a confused murmur of jarring voices, and dissonant sounds; which increased upon me to such a degree, that I was utterly confounded, and could compare the noise to nothing but the confusion of tongues at Babel. The road was also rough and stony, and rendered more difficult by heaps of rubbish, continually tumbled down from the higher parts of the mountain; and by broken ruins of ancient buildings, which the travellers were obliged to climb over at every step; insomuch that many, disgusted with so rough a beginning, turned back, and attempted the mountain no more: while others, having conquered this difficulty, had no spirits to ascend further, and sitting down on some fragment of the rubbish, harangued the multitude below with the greatest marks of importance and self-complacency.

About half way up the hill, I observed on each side the path a thick forest covered with continual fogs, and cut out into labyrinths, cross alleys, and serpentine walks, entangled with thorns and briars. This was called the *wood of error*: and I heard the voices of many who were lost up and down in it, calling to one another, and endeavouring in vain to extricate themselves. The trees in many places shot their boughs over the path, and a thick mist often rested on it; yet never so much but that it was discernable by the light which beamed from the countenance of Truth.

In the pleasantest part of the mountain were placed the bowers of the Muses, whose office it was to cheer the spirits of the travellers, and encourage their fainting steps with songs from their divine harps. Not far from hence were the *fields of fiction*, filled with a variety of wild flowers springing up in the greatest luxuriance, of richer scents and brighter colours than I had observed in any other climate. And near them was the *dark walk of allegory*, so artificially shaded, that the light at noon-day was never stronger than that of a bright moon-shine. This gave it a pleasingly romantic air for those who delighted in contemplation. The paths and alleys were perplexed with intricate windings, and were all terminated with the statue of a Grace, a Virtue, or a Muse.

After I had observed these things, I turned my eyes towards the multitudes who were climbing the steep ascent, and observed amongst them a youth of a lively look, a piercing eye, and something fiery and irregular in all his motions. His name was genius. He darted like an eagle up the mountain,

and left his companions gazing after him with envy and admiration: but his progress was unequal, and interrupted by a thousand caprices. When Pleasure warbled in the valley, he mingled in her train. When Pride beckoned towards the precipice, he ventured to the tottering edge. He delighted in devious and untried paths; and made so many excursions from the road, that his feebleness often outstripped him. I observed that the Muses beheld him with partiality; but Truth often frowned and turned aside her face. While Genius was thus wasting his strength in eccentric flights, I saw a person of a very different appearance, named application. He crept along with a slow and unremitting pace, his eyes fixed on the top of the mountain, patiently removing every stone that obstructed his way, till he saw most of those below him who had at first derided his slow and toilsome progress. Indeed there were few who ascended the hill with equal and uninterrupted steadiness; for, beside the difficulties of the way, they were continually solicited to turn aside by a numerous crowd of Appetites, Passions, and Pleasures, whose importunity, when they had once complied with, they became less and less able to resist; and, though they often returned to the path, the asperities of the road were more severely felt, the hill appeared more steep and rugged, the fruits which were wholesome and refreshing, seemed harsh and ill-tasted, their sight grew dim, and their feet tript at every little obstruction.

I saw, with some surprize, that the Muses, whose business was to cheer and encourage those who were toiling up the ascent, would often sing in the bowers of Pleasure, and accompany those who were enticed away at the call of the Passions. They accompanied them, however, but a little way, and always forsook them when they lost sight of the hill. Their tyrants then doubled their chains upon the unhappy captives, and led them away without resistance to the cells of Ignorance, or the mansions of Misery. Amongst the innumerable seducers, who were endeavouring to draw away the votaries of Truth from the path of Science, there was one so little formidable in her appearance, and so gentle and languid in her attempts, that I should scarcely have taken notice of her, but for the numbers she had imperceptibly loaded with her chains. Indolence (for so she was called), far from proceeding to open hostilities, did not attempt to turn their feet out of the path, but contented herself with retarding their progress; and the purpose she could not force them to abandon, she persuaded them to delay. Her touch had a power like that of the Torpedo, which withered the strength of those who came within its influence. Her unhappy captives still turned their faces towards the temple, and always hoped to arrive there; but the ground seemed to slide from beneath their feet, and they found themselves at the bottom before they suspected that they had changed their place. The placid serenity which at first appeared in their countenance, changed by degrees into a melancholy languor, which was tinged with deeper and deeper gloom as they glided down the *stream of insignificance*; a dark and sluggish water, which is curled by no breeze, and enlivened by no murmur, till it falls into a dead sea, where the startled passengers are awakened by the shock, and the next moment buried in the gulph of oblivion.

Of all the unhappy deserters from the paths of Science, none seemed less able to return than the followers of Indolence. The captives of Appetite and Passion could often seize the moment when their tyrants were languid or asleep to escape from their enchantment; but the dominion of Indolence was constant and unremitted, and seldom resisted till resistance was in vain.

After contemplating these things, I turned my eyes towards the top of the mountain, where the air was always pure and exhilarating, the path shaded with laurels and other ever-greens, and the effulgence which beamed from the face of the Goddess seemed to shed a glory round her votaries. Happy, said I, are they who are permitted to ascend the mountain! – but while I was pronouncing this exclamation with uncommon ardour, I saw standing beside me a form of diviner features and a more benign radiance. Happier, said she, are those whom virtue conducts to the mansions of Content! – What, said I, does Virtue then reside in the vale? – I am found, said she, in the vale, and I illuminate the mountain. I cheer the cottager at his toil, and inspire the sage at his meditation. I mingle in the crowd of cities, and bless the hermit in his cell. I have a temple in every heart that owns my influence; and to him that wishes for me I am already present. Science may raise you to eminence, but I alone

can guide you to felicity! While the Goddess was thus speaking, I stretched out my arms towards her with a vehemence which broke my slumbers. The chill dews were falling around me, and the shades of evening stretched over the landscape. I hastened homeward, and resigned the night to silence and meditation.

ON ROMANCES, AN IMITATION

Of all the multifarious productions which the efforts of superior genius, or the labours of scholastic industry, have crowded upon the world, none are perused with more insatiable avidity, or disseminated with more universal applause, than the narrations of feigned events, descriptions of imaginary scenes, and delineations of ideal characters. The celebrity of other authors is confined within very narrow limits. The Geometrician and Divine, the Antiquary and the Critic, however distinguished by uncontested excellence, can only hope to please those whom a conformity of disposition has engaged in similar pursuits; and must be content to be regarded by the rest of the world with the smile of frigid indifference, or the contemptuous sneer of self-sufficient folly. The collector of shells and the anatomist of insects is little inclined to enter into theological disputes: the Divine is not apt to regard with veneration the uncouth diagrams and tedious calculations of the Astronomer: the man whose life has been consumed in adjusting the disputes of lexicographers, or elucidating the learning of antiquity, cannot easily bend his thoughts to recent transactions, or readily interest himself in the unimportant history of his contemporaries: and the Cit, who knows no business but acquiring wealth, and no pleasure but displaying it, has a heart equally shut up to argument and fancy, to the batteries of syllogism, and the arrows of wit. To the writer of fiction alone, every ear is open, and every tongue lavish of applause; curiosity sparkles in every eye, and every bosom is throbbing with concern.

It is, however, easy to account for this enchantment. To follow the chain of perplexed ratiocination, to view with critical skill the airy architecture of systems, to unravel the web of sophistry, or weigh the merits of opposite hypotheses, requires perspicacity, and presupposes learning. Works of this kind, therefore, are not so well adapted to the generality of readers as familiar and colloquial composition; for few can reason, but all can feel; and many who cannot enter into an argument, may yet listen to a tale. The writer of Romance has even an advantage over those who endeavour to amuse by the play of fancy; who, from the fortuitous collision of dissimilar ideas produce the scintillations of wit; or by the vivid glow of poetical imagery delight the imagination with colours of ideal radiance. The attraction of the magnet is only exerted upon similar particles; and to taste the beauties of Homer, it is requisite to partake his fire; but every one can relish the author who represents common life, because every one can refer to the originals from whence his ideas were taken. He relates events to which all are liable, and applies to passions which all have felt. The gloom of solitude, the languor of inaction, the corrosions of disappointment, and the toil of thought, induce men to step aside from the rugged road of life, and wander in the fairy land of fiction; where every bank is sprinkled with flowers, and every gale loaded with perfume; where every event introduces a hero, and every cottage is inhabited by a Grace. Invited by these flattering scenes, the student quits the investigation of truth, in which he perhaps meets with no less fallacy, to exhilarate his mind with new ideas, more agreeable, and more easily attained: the busy relax their attention by desultory reading, and smooth the agitation of a ruffled mind with images of peace, tranquillity, and pleasure: the idle and the gay relieve the listlessness of leisure, and diversify the round of life by a rapid series of events pregnant with rapture and astonishment; and the pensive solitary fills up the vacuities of his heart by interesting himself in the fortunes of imaginary beings, and forming connections with ideal excellence.

It is, indeed, no ways extraordinary that the mind should be charmed by fancy, and attracted by pleasure; but that we should listen with complacency to the groans of misery, and delight to view the exacerbations of complicated anguish, that we should choose to chill the bosom with imaginary fears, and dim the eyes with fictitious sorrow, seems a kind of paradox of the heart, and can only be credited because it is universally felt. Various are the hypotheses which have been formed to account for the disposition of the mind to riot in this species of intellectual luxury. Some have imagined that

we are induced to acquiesce with greater patience in our own lot, by beholding pictures of life, tinged with deeper horrors, and loaded with more excruciating calamities; as, to a person suddenly emerging out of a dark room, the faintest glimmering of twilight assumes a lustre from the contrasted gloom. Others, with yet deeper refinement, suppose that we take upon ourselves this burden of adscititious sorrows, in order to feast upon the consciousness of our own virtue. We commiserate others, say they, that we may applaud ourselves; and the sigh of compassionate sympathy is always followed by the gratulations of self-complacent esteem. But surely they who would thus reduce the sympathetic emotions of pity to a system of refined selfishness, have but ill attended to the genuine feelings of humanity. It would, however, exceed the limits of this paper, should I attempt an accurate investigation of these sentiments. But, let it be remembered, that we are more attracted by those scenes which interest our passions, or gratify our curiosity, than those which delight our fancy: and, so far from being indifferent to the miseries of others, we are, at the time, totally regardless of our own. And let not those on whom the hand of Time has impressed the characters of oracular wisdom, censure with too much acrimony productions which are thus calculated to please the imagination, and interest the heart. They teach us to think, by inuring us to feel: they ventilate the mind by sudden gusts of passion; and prevent the stagnation of thought, by a fresh infusion of dissimilar ideas.

SELÁMA; AN IMITATION OF OSSIAN

What soft voice of sorrow is in the breeze? what lovely sun-beam of beauty trembling on the rock? Its bright hair is bathed in showers; and it looks faint and dim, through its mist on the rushy plain. Why art thou alone, maid of the mournful look? The cold dropping rain is on the rocks of Torléna, the blast of the desert lifts thy yellow locks. Let thy steps be in the hall of shells, by the blue winding stream of Clutha: let the harp tremble beneath thy fingers; and the sons of heroes listen to the music of songs.

Shall my steps be in the hall of shells, and the aged low in the dust? The father of Seláma is low behind this rock, on his bed of wither'd leaves: the thistle's down is strewed over him by the wind, and mixes with his grey hair. Thou art fallen, chief of Etha! without thy fame; and there is none to revenge thy death. But thy daughter will sit, pale, beside thee, till she sinks, a faded flower, upon thy lifeless form. Leave the maid of Clutha, son of the stranger! in the red eye of her tears!

How fell the car-borne Connal, blue-eyed mourner of the rock. Mine arm is not weakened in battle; nor my sword without its fame.

Connal was a fire in his youth, that lighten'd through fields of renown: but the flame weakly glimmered through grey ashes of age. His course was like a star moving through the heavens: it walketh in brightness, but leaveth no track behind; its silver path cannot be found in the sky. The strength of Etha is rolled away like a tale of other years; and his eyes have failed. Feeble and dark, he sits in his hall, and hears the distant tread of a stranger's steps; the haughty steps of Tonthormo, from the roar of Duvranno's echoing stream. He stood in the hall like a pillar of darkness, on whose top is the red beam of fire: wide rolled his eyes beneath the gloomy arch of his bent brow; as flames in two caves of a rock, over-hung with the black pine of the desert. They had rolled on Seláma, and he asked the daughter of Connal. Tonthormo! breaker of shields! thou art a meteor of death in war, whose fiery hair streams on the clouds, and the nations are withered beneath its path. Dwell, Tonthormo! amidst thy hundred hills, and listen to thy torrent's roar; but the soft sigh of the virgins is with the chief of Crono; Hidallan is the dream of Seláma, the dweller of her secret thoughts. A rushing storm in war, a breeze that sighs over the fallen foe; pleasant are thy words of peace, and thy songs at the mossy brook. Thy smiles are like the moon-beams trembling on the waves. Thy voice is the gale of summer that whispers among the reeds of the lake, and awakens the harp of Moilena with all its lightly-trembling strings. Oh that thy calm light was around me! my soul should not fear the gloomy chief of Duvranno. He came with his stately steps. – My shield is before thee, maid of my love! a wall of shelter from the lightning of swords. They fought. Tonthormo bends in all his pride, before the arm of youth. But a voice was in the breast of Hidallan, shall I slay the love of Seláma? Seláma dwells in thy dark bosom, shall my steel enter there? Live, thou storm of war! He gave again his sword. But, careless as he strode away, rage arose in the troubled thoughts of the vanquish'd. He mark'd his time, and sidelong pierced the heart of the generous son of Semo. His fair hair is spread on the dust, his eyes are bent on the trembling beam of Clutha. Farewel, light of my soul! They are closed in darkness. Feeble wast thou then, my father! and in vain didst thou call for help. Thy grey locks are scatter'd, as a wreath of snow on the top of a wither'd trunk; which the boy brushes away with his staff; and careless singeth as he walks. Who shall defend thee, my daughter! said the broken voice of Etha's chief. Fair flower of the desert! the tempest shall rush over thee; and thou shalt be low beneath the foot of the savage son of prey. But I will wither, my father, on thy tomb. Weak and alone I dwell amidst my tears, there is no young warrior to lift the spear, no brother of love! Oh that mine arm were strong! I would rush amidst the battle. Seláma has no friend!

But Seláma has a friend, said the kindling soul of Reuthamir. I will fight thy battles, lovely daughter of kings; and the sun of Duvranno shall set in blood. But when I return in peace, and the spirits of thy foes are on my sword, meet me with thy smiles of love, maid of Clutha! with thy slow-

rolling eyes. Let the soft sound of thy steps be heard in my halls, that the mother of Reuthamir may rejoice. Whence, she will say, is this beam of the distant land? Thou shalt dwell in her bosom.

My thoughts are with him who is low in the dust, son of Cormac! But lift the spear, thou friend of the unhappy! the light of my soul may return.

He strode in his rattling arms. Tall, in a gloomy forest, stood the surly strength of Duvranno. Gleaming behind the dark trees was his broad shield; like the moon when it rises in blood, and the dusky clouds sail low, and heavy, athwart its path. Thoughts, like the troubled ocean, rush'd over his soul, and he struck, with his spear, the sounding pine. Starting, he mix'd in battle with the chief of woody Morna. Long was the strife of arms; and the giant sons of the forest trembled at their strokes. At length Tonthormo fell – The sword of Reuthamir wav'd, a blue flame, around him. He bites the ground in rage. His blood is poured, a dark red stream, into Oithona's trembling waves. Joy brighten'd in the soul of Reuthamir; when a young warrior came, with his forward spear. He moved in the light of beauty; but his words were haughty and fierce. Is Tonthormo fallen in blood, the friend of my early years? Die, thou dark-soul'd chief! for never shall Seláma be thine, the maid of his love. Lovely shone her eyes, through tears, in the hall of her grief, when I stood by the chief of Duvranno, in the rising strife of Clutha.

Retire, thou swelling voice of pride! thy spear is light as the taper reed. Pierce the roes of the desert; and call the hunter to the feast of songs, but speak not of the daughter of Connal, son of the feeble arm! Seláma is the love of heroes.

Try thy strength with the feeble arm, said the rising pride of youth. Thou shalt vanish like a cloud of mist before the sun, when he looks abroad in the power of his brightness, and the storms are rolled away from before his face.

But thou thyself didst fall before Reuthamir, in all thy boasting words. As a tall ash of the mountain, when the tempest takes its green head and lays it level on the plain.

Come from thy secret cave, Seláma! thy foes are silent and dark. Thou dove that hidest in the clefts of the rocks! the storm is over and past. Come from thy rock, Seláma! and give thy white hand to the chief who never fled from the face of glory, in all its terrible brightness.

She gave her hand, but it was trembling and cold, for the spear was deep in her side. Red, beneath her mail, the current of crimson wandered down her white breast, as the track of blood on Cromla's mountains of snow, when the wounded deer slowly crosses the heath, and the hunters cries are in the breeze. Blest be the spear of Reuthamir! said the faint voice of the lovely, I feel it cold in my heart. Lay me by the son of Semo. Why should I know another love? Raise the tomb of the aged, his thin form shall rejoice, as he sails on a low-hung cloud, and guides the wintry storm. Open your airy halls, spirits of my love!

And have I quench'd the light which was pleasant to my soul? said the chief of Morna. My steps moved in darkness, why were the words of strife in thy tale? Sorrow, like a cloud, comes over my soul, and shades the joy of mighty deeds. Soft be your rest in the narrow house, children of grief! The breeze in the long whistling grass shall not awaken you. The tempest shall rush over you, and the bulrush bow its head upon your tomb, but silence shall dwell in your habitation; long repose, and the peace of years to come. The voice of the bard shall raise your remembrance in the distant land, and mingle your tale of woe with the murmur of other streams. Often shall the harp send forth a mournful sound, and the tear dwell in the soft eyes of the daughters of Morna.

Such were the words of Reuthamir, while he raised the tombs of the fallen. Sad were his steps towards the towers of his fathers, as musing he cross'd the dark heath of Lena, and struck, at times, the thistle's beard.

AGAINST INCONSISTENCY IN OUR EXPECTATIONS

“What is more reasonable, than that they who take pains for any thing, should get most in that particular for which they take pains? They have taken pains for power, you for right principles; they for riches, you for a proper use of the appearances of things: see whether they have the advantage of you in that for which you have taken pains, and which they neglect: If they are in power, and you not, why will not you speak the truth to yourself, that you do nothing for the sake of power, but that they do every thing? No, but since I take care to have right principles, it is more reasonable that I should have power. Yes, in respect to what you take care about, your principles. But give up to others the things in which they have taken more care than you. Else it is just as if, because you have right principles, you should think it fit that when you shoot an arrow, you should hit the mark better than an archer, or that you should forge better than a smith.”
Carter’s Epictetus.

As most of the unhappiness in the world arises rather from disappointed desires, than from positive evil, it is of the utmost consequence to attain just notions of the laws and order of the universe, that we may not vex ourselves with fruitless wishes, or give way to groundless and unreasonable discontent. The laws of natural philosophy, indeed, are tolerably understood and attended to; and though we may suffer inconveniences, we are seldom disappointed in consequence of them. No man expects to preserve orange-trees in the open air through an English winter; or when he has planted an acorn, to see it become a large oak in a few months. The mind of man naturally yields to necessity; and our wishes soon subside when we see the impossibility of their being gratified. Now, upon an accurate inspection, we shall find, in the moral government of the world, and the order of the intellectual system, laws as determinate fixed and invariable as any in Newton’s Principia. The progress of vegetation is not more certain than the growth of habit; nor is the power of attraction more clearly proved than the force of affection or the influence of example. The man therefore who has well studied the operations of nature in mind as well as matter, will acquire a certain moderation and equity in his claims upon Providence. He never will be disappointed either in himself or others. He will act with precision; and expect that effect and that alone from his efforts, which they are naturally adapted to produce. For want of this, men of merit and integrity often censure the dispositions of Providence for suffering characters they despise to run away with advantages which, they yet know, are purchased by such means as a high and noble spirit could never submit to. If you refuse to pay the price, why expect the purchase? We should consider this world as a great mart of commerce, where fortune exposes to our view various commodities, riches, ease, tranquillity, fame, integrity, knowledge. Every thing is marked at a settled price. Our time, our labour, our ingenuity, is so much ready money which we are to lay out to the best advantage. Examine, compare, choose, reject; but stand to your own judgment; and do not, like children, when you have purchased one thing, repine that you do not possess another which you did not purchase. Such is the force of well-regulated industry, that a steady and vigorous exertion of our faculties, directed to one end, will generally insure success. Would you, for instance, be rich? Do you think that single point worth the sacrificing every thing else to? You may then be rich. Thousands have become so from the lowest beginnings by toil, and patient diligence, and attention to the minutest articles of expence and profit. But you must give up the pleasures of leisure, of a vacant mind, of a free unsuspicious temper. If you preserve your integrity, it must be a coarse-spun and vulgar honesty. Those high and lofty notions of morals which you brought with you from the schools must be considerably lowered, and mixed with the baser alloy of a jealous and worldly-minded prudence. You must learn to do hard, if not unjust things; and for the nice embarrassments of a delicate and ingenuous spirit, it is necessary for you to get rid of them as fast

as possible. You must shut your heart against the Muses, and be content to feed your understanding with plain, household truths. In short, you must not attempt to enlarge your ideas, or polish your taste, or refine your sentiments; but must keep on in one beaten track, without turning aside either to the right hand or to the left. “But I cannot submit to drudgery like this – I feel a spirit above it.” ’Tis well: be above it then; only do not repine that you are not rich.

Is knowledge the pearl of peace? That too may be purchased – by steady application, and long solitary hours of study and reflection. Bestow these, and you shall be wise. “But (says the man of letters) what a hardship is it that many an illiterate fellow who cannot construe the motto of the arms on his coach, shall raise a fortune and make a figure, while I have little more than the common conveniences of life.” *Et tibi magna satis!*– Was it in order to raise a fortune that you consumed the sprightly hours of youth in study and retirement? Was it to be rich that you grew pale over the midnight lamp, and distilled the sweetness from the Greek and Roman spring? You have then mistaken your path, and ill employed your industry. “What reward have I then for all my labours?” What reward! A large comprehensive soul, well purged from vulgar fears, and perturbations, and prejudices; able to comprehend and interpret the works of man – of God. A rich, flourishing, cultivated mind, pregnant with inexhaustible stores of entertainment and reflection. A perpetual spring of fresh ideas; and the conscious dignity of superior intelligence. Good heaven! and what reward can you ask besides?

“But is it not some reproach upon the œconomy of Providence that such a one, who is a mean dirty fellow, should have amassed wealth enough to buy half a nation?” Not in the least. He made himself a mean dirty fellow for that very end. He has paid his health, his conscience, his liberty for it; and will you envy him his bargain? Will you hang your head and blush in his presence because he outshines you in equipage and show? Lift up your brow with a noble confidence, and say to yourself, I have not these things, it is true; but it is because I have not sought, because I have not desired them; it is because I possess something better. I have chosen my lot. I am content and satisfied.

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