

A GRUMBLE ABOUT THE CHRISTMAS-BOOKS.

BY MICHAEL ANGELO TITMARSH.

MY DEAR MR. YORKE,—When, in an unguarded moment, I complied with your request to look through the Christmas-books of the season and report progress upon that new branch of English literature, we had both the idea that the occupation would be exceedingly easy, jovial, and pleasant; that we should be able to make an agreeable lecture upon an amusing subject; that critics, authors, and readers would be brought together in the most enticing and amiable manner possible; and that we should finish off an article with kind hearts, friendly greetings, merry Christmas, and that sort of thing,—a perfect prize-paper, streaky with benevolence, and larded with the most unctuous human kindness, with an appropriate bit of holly placed in its hinder quarter.

Sir, we have both of us made a most dismal mistake. Had it been strong meat which you set before me for a Christmas feast, the above metaphor (which I took from Mr. Slater's shop at Kensington) might have applied. Beef might have invigorated the critic; but, ah, sir! what is that wretch to do who finds himself surfeited with mince-pies? I have read Christmas-books until I have reached a state of mind the most deplorable. "Curses on all fairies!" I gasp out; "I will never swallow another one as long as I live! Perdition seize all Benevolence! Be hanged to the Good and the True! Fling me every drop of the milk of human kindness out of window! — horrible, curdling slops, away with them! Kick old Father Christmas out of doors, the abominable old impostor! Next year I'll go to the Turks, the Scotch, or other Heathens who don't keep Christmas. Is all the street to come for a Christmas-box? Are the waits to be invading us by millions, and yelling

all night? By my soul, if any body offers me plum-pudding again this season, I'll fling it in his face!

The fair writer of one of these volumes, *A Christmas in the Seventeenth Century*,* (I may have read something very like this tale in Vandevelde's novels, but it is a pretty story, and just as good for little dears as if it were quite new,) mentions in the preface the rueful appearance of a Parisian friend of hers at Christmas, who was buying *bonbons* as if he was doing penance, and cursed the odious custom of the *jour de l'an* which compelled him to spend a great part of his quarter's allowance in sugar-plums, to be presented to his acquaintance. The French gentleman was right: the sugar-plum system in France has become a nuisance, and in Protestant England the Christmas-book system is bidding fair to be another. Sir, it was wisely regulated that Christmas should come only once a year, but that does not mean that it is to stay all the year round. Do you suppose that any man could read through all these books and retain his senses? I have swallowed eight or nine out of the five-and-twenty or thirty volumes. I am in a pitiable condition. I speak with difficulty out of my fulness.

"Miss Smith, my love, what is our first Christmas-pie? That in the green and gold dish, if you please."

Miss Smith. — "The dish is Mrs. Gore's, the plates are Mr. Cruikshank's, and very pretty plates they are. He, he, he!"

M. A. T. — "No trifling, madam, if you please. Read on."

Miss Smith reads as follows:—

"Can you read, my boy? and are you sharp enough to undertake an errand?" said a young officer of the Guards, on whose well-fitting uniform little George had fixed a wistful eye, one summer

* *A Christmas in the Seventeenth Century.* By Mrs. Percy Sinnett. London, Chapman and Hall.

morning at the corner of St. James's Street, as he was lounging near Sams's shop, on pretence of looking at the engravings of a fashionable annual.

" 'I can read, sir,' replied the boy, longing to add, 'and if you will employ me for a message, I will do my best to give you satisfaction,' for the handsome countenance of the young officer captivated his fancy. But the often-repeated injunction of his grandmother, that, betide what might, he was never to derogate from the habits of life of a gentleman's son, forbade his endeavouring to earn a shilling, a coin that rarely found its way into the palm of his hand.

" 'You have an honest face of your own,' added the officer, after casting a hasty glance around, to ascertain that no one was at hand to overhear or notice their colloquy. 'Do you think you could make out Belgrave Street, Belgrave Square?'

" 'To be sure I could, sir.'

" 'In that case, my lad, here's half-a-crown for you, to make the best of your way to number seven, where you will leave this letter,' continued he, placing one in his hand; 'and remember, should any questions be asked by the servants, you are to say that it was given you by a lady you never saw before, and of whom you don't know the name.'

" 'If I'm to say *that*, sir, I'm afraid I can't oblige you,' replied the child, returning the money and the letter; 'and, at all events, I should not have accepted the half-crown. I am not an errand-boy, sir; I am a gentleman's son!'

" 'You are a confounded little ass, I suspect!' returned the officer, nettled and surprised. 'What on earth can it signify whether you receive the letter from a gentleman or lady?'

" 'Not the least, sir. It signifies only that I should not say the one, when the other is the case. But I will undertake to carry your letter safe and speedily, and give no explanation at all, however much questioned, if that would suit you.'

" 'I fancy I can trust you, my lad,' replied the officer, more and more surprised by the tone and bearing of the child. 'But I should be glad to learn, on your return, how you have prospered in your errand.'

" 'You are on guard, I think, sir!' said George, glancing at his gay accoutrements. 'I shall be in Belgrave Street and back, in less than twenty minutes. You can manage, perhaps, to remain hereabouts till then?'

" And the appointment once made, George did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. Fresh from a first perusal of *Paul and Virginia*, he seemed to understand (on perceiving that the letter

about which the young captain appeared so anxious was addressed to a 'Miss Hallet') *why* he was so anxious concerning the delivery.

" 'I left it safe, sir, at number seven. No questions were asked,' said he, a little out of breath, as soon as he came within hail of the scarlet coat.

" 'So far, so good,' observed the young man, turning towards a friend on whose arm he was leaning. 'I think I may be sure, *this* time, that it will reach her hand.'

" And as George had now fully discharged his commission, he was making off towards home, when the officer suddenly called him back.

" 'Hillo, my lad! we mustn't part in this way,' said he. 'You've done me better service than you think for; and though you don't choose to be paid for it, you must have something to keep in remembrance of my gratitude.'

" The whole party were now opposite the shop of Palmer the cutler, into which the apparently overjoyed letter-sender ordered his prompt messenger to follow him; and, in a moment, a tray of many-bladed knives—knives after a boy's own heart—glittered before the eyes of George.

" 'Make your choice, youngster!' said the officer, who, by the obsequiousness of the shopman, was apparently well-known and highly considered. 'You seem steady enough to be trusted with sharp implements.'

" 'Recollect, my dear Wroxton,' interrupted his companion, good-humouredly, 'that a knife is the most unlucky keepsake in the world!'

" 'Ay, between lovers!' retorted the young guardsman, pointing out to his *protégé* a handsome four-bladed knife with a mother-of-pearl handle, which he seemed to recommend. 'But in this case, all I want is to remind this trusty Pacolet of mine that I am in existence; and that he will often find me on the same spot, waiting to engage him for the same service he executed so well just now.'

" Scarcely knowing in what words to express his gratitude for the generous manner in which his trifling assistance was requited, poor George thankfully acquiesced in the shopman's suggestion that his initials should be engraved on the silver escutcheon ornamenting the handle of the knife. It could be finished in a few hours. On the morrow, George was to call for it at Palmer's.

" 'And mind you don't disappoint the little fellow!' said his new friend, preparing to leave the shop. 'It is impossible for me to send my own servants to Sir Jasper's,' continued he, addressing his companion, as they proceeded down the

steps to resume their lounge in St. James's Street; 'and this boy is precisely the sort of messenger not to excite suspicion.'"

What an agreeable vivacity there is about this description! Sparkling, easy, stylish, and so like nature. I think that incident of the knife—a four-bladed knife with a mother-of-pearl handle—from Palmer's, in St. James's Street, is *impayable*. You fancy the scene: the young bucks in scarlet—Palmer himself—the Conservative Club opposite, with the splendid dandies in the bow-window—the red-jackets who hold the hosses—the cab-stand—St. James's Gate and clock. *Que sais-je?* How deftly in a few strokes a real artist can bring out a picture!

The picture is taken from *New Year's Day*, by Mrs. Gore.* This book has nothing earthly in it about New Year's Day. The plot and mystery are as follows:—

There was once a hectoring young Turk of a captain of foot, who married a young woman of inferior rank, and, singular to state, ill-used her. By this lady, Captain Hallet had a little son: he bullied and ill-used this little son too in such a manner that the lad threatened to drown himself; and his coat and cap were all that were found of the young fellow by the side of the poluphlois-boio thalasses, into the deep bosom of which he had committed himself.

The mother's heart broke in twain at the calamity; so did John Talbot's, the captain's man (as far as male heart can be said to break, but this sort mends again almost as good as new commonly): the captain became an altered man too, and no wonder. A couple of murders on his conscience could not make a captain of foot very cheerful.

The Peninsular war breaking out at this juncture, Captain Jasper Hallet joined the heroic Major-General Sir Arthur Wellesley, at present F.M. the Duke of Wellington, K.G. &c. Assaults, scaladoes, ambuscadoes, hurrah, cut-and-thrust, fire away, run-you-through-the-body, Give it 'em, boys! became the captain's chief delight; and forlorn

hopes were his principal diversions. Wounded he was a great deal, as men will be in this sort of sport; and we picture him to ourselves as devilled and scarred like the leg of that turkey which has stood the assault of Christmas-day. But no friendly ball laid low the capting—as how should it? otherwise Mrs. Gore's story could never have been written—on the contrary, he rose to be a major—a colonel—to clasps and ribands innumerable—to command a brigade in the unlucky campaigns of New Orleans, and a division at the attack of Bhurtpore. And I leave you to imagine that his portion of the swag (as the Hindostan phrase is for plunder) must have been considerable, when I state that it amounted to 400,000*l.* Mrs. Gore is a noble creature, and makes the money fly about, that is the truth.

And don't you see when a man has 400,000*l.* how we get to like him, in spite of a murder or two? Our author yields with charming *naïveté* to the general impression. He is a good fellow after all; but he has four hundred thousand; he has repented of his early brutalities; his claret is famous, &c. &c. Lieutenant-General Sir Jasper Hallet, K.C.B., lived last year in Belgrave Street, Belgrave Square, with his niece, the lovely Mira, to whom it was known he had given 20,000*l.*, and on whom many of the old fogies at the United Service Club were looking as eligible partners for their own sons. The United Service—*que dis-je?*—the Guards' Club had an eye on her too; and no less a young fellow than my Lord Wroxton (the rogue!) was smitten by her.

One day, as Miss Hallet was driving in her uncle's elegant chariot with the greys, the Johns behind, and Robert the coachman in the silver wig on the dickey:—as Robert was cutting in and out among the carriages like—blazes, I was going to say, but why use an expression so familiar?—it chanced that he cut over a child—a poor boy—a fair-haired, delicate boy—a bright-eyed thing—cut him over, and very nearly sent the wheels over him. The little cherub was rescued from the chariot-

* *New Year's Day*; a *Winter's Tale*. By Mrs. Gore. With Illustrations by George Cruikshank. London, Fisher and Co.

wheel; but before the lovely but naturally flustered Mira had found out his name, he was gone.

Now, my dears, do you begin to be on the scent? Who can that fair-haired, blue-eyed, bright-eyed thing be? Is it a baker's boy, is it a charity boy, a doctor's boy, or any other ditto? My heart tells me that that child is not *what he seems*. But of that anon.

In a court off St. James's Street—for if we can't be always genteel we'll be always near it—in a dreary room, having spent her money, pawned her spoons, exhausted the little store which misfortune had left her, lives a grumbling old woman, by the name of Mrs. Lawrie. She is an American, and as such the grandmother of the bright-eyed child whose acquaintance we have just had the honour to make.

Yes, but who was his *father*? His father was Colonel *Jasper* Foreman (mark the *Jasper*, S.V.P.!). Coming to this country, his own native place, with ingots of gold packed in chests, on board the Antelope packet, at only three days from shore, and just when the captain, after some conversations with him, had begun to treat Colonel "*Jasper Foreman*" with much more respect than a mere Yankee colonel could expect—at three days off port, the ship went down, with the captain, with Colonel Foreman, all his money, all his papers—every thing except the boy, and his grandmother, and her dozen silver spoons and forks. It's a mercy the old lady was in the habit of carrying them about with her, or what would the pair have done on reaching Albion's shore?

They went to live in the court off St. James's Street, melting away the spoons one by one, and such other valuables as had escaped the shipwreck. The old lady's health was impaired, and her temper abominable. How like a little angel did young George tend that crabbed old grandmother! George had a little bird—a poor little bird, and loved the little warbler as boyhood will love. The old hunx grumbled at the little bird, and said it ate them out of house and home. He took it

into St. James's Park (the keepers let him pass, for George, though poor, mended his clothes most elegantly, and always managed to look genteel, bless him!), and he let loose the little bird in the Park: there's a picture of it, with the towers of Westminster Abbey, and the bird, and a lady and gent walking in the distance. He parted from his darling bird, and went home to his grandmamma. He went home and made her gruel. "*Bitterly did the old lady complain of the over-sugaring of the gruel.*" There is a picture of that too. George is bringing her the gruel in a basin; there's a cow on the chimneypiece, a saucepan in the fender, a cup and a parcel (of Embden groats, probably) on the table. Tears—sweet, gushing tears, sobs of heart-breaking yet heart-soothing affection, break from one over this ravishing scene. I am crying so, I can hardly write. The printers will never sure decipher this blotted page. So she complained of the over-sugaring of the gruel, did she? Dear child! The scene, I feel, is growing too tender.*

As I describe this harrowing tale of innocence and woe, I protest I get so bewildered with grief as to lose the power of coherently continuing the narrative. This little George—this little diddle-iddle-darling, walking in St. James's Street, was accosted by Lord Wroxton, who gave him a letter to carry—a letter to Belgrave Street, to no other than Miss Mira Hallet. The name of the owner of the house, Sir Jasper Hallet, excited in the boy a thousand tumultuously mysterious emotions. Jasper! his papa's name was Jasper! Were the two Jaspers related anyhow? The scoffing menials thrust away the child who asked the question; but still he was hovering about the place—still watching Miss Hallet and following her carriage, and one day, in a chase after it, he received the upset which opens the story.

Well, well, a little boy knocked down in the very first page of a story of course gets up again—of course he finds his parents—of course his grandfather makes him a present of at

* Our contributor's MS. is here almost washed out with tears; and two printers have been carried off in hysterics, who were merely setting up the types!—O.Y.

least half the four hundred thousand? No such thing: the little boy sickens all through the volume. Grandpapa goes abroad. Comic business takes place—such dreary comic business!—about the lovers of Miss Mira. In the midst of the comic business at Emms, grandpapa receives a letter,—his boy is found. It is Jasper's son, who, instead of drowning himself *then* (the cheerful catastrophe arriving later), only went to sea. Old John Talbot, the faithful servant, has found him starving in a garret. Away, away!—post haste, treble drink gelt, vite postillon! Sir Jasper arrives, and Mira, *essoufflée*, to find the little boy—just dead. There's a picture of him. A white sheet covers him over—old John Talbot is sobbing at the bedside—enter the general, as from his post-chaise. Horror, horror! Send for the undertaker! It is all up with poor little Georgy!

And I declare I have not the slightest compunction for his demise. The book ought to be bound in crape, and printed on black-edged paper. *This* a Christmas-book! Where's merry Christmas going? Of all, all deadly liveliness—of all maudlin ululations—of all such grandmothers, grandsons, and water-gruel, let us be delivered!—My love, hand me, if you please, the sky-blue-covered book, *January Eve*, by George Soane, B.A.*

I have my doubts whether anybody has a right to compose a story, certainly no one is authorised to write a Christmas story, whereof the end is not perfectly comfortable to all parties—to the readers first, to the heroes and heroines subsequently, and all the minor characters according to their deserts or beyond them. Why, poor rogues in her majesty's very gaols are served with beef and pudding, and mercifulness and hospitality, at this season of the year; and wherefore are you and I, my dear Miss Smith—not ill-natured persons in the main; good-natured, at any rate, when we are pleased—to be made miserable at the conclusion of a history, by being called upon to sympathise with the sickness, the prema-

ture demise, or otherwise undeserved misfortune, of certain honest personages with whose adventures we are made acquainted? That is why, madam, I was so wroth anon with Mrs. Gore. I won't shew mercy unto her. Why should I to a lady who has just been so unmerciful to poor little Whatdycallem—the General Thingumgig's grandson, I mean—who died most miserably just as he was coming into his estate? Mrs. Gore had the fate of the little fellow perfectly in her hands: there is no earthly reason why he should not have got well of the carriage running over him. Why should not Mr. M'Cann of Parliament Street, for instance, have been passing by, as he always is in the newspapers, and set the little chap's shoulder in a twinkling? or why was not my friend Doctor Quintin, of Arlington Street, driving down St. James's Street at the period of the accident? He would have stepped out of his carriage, popped in the little lad, carried him to his grandmother, cured that abominable old woman of her lumbago and her ill-humour, without ever so much as thinking of a fee, and made all straight and pleasant by the time Sir Gasper Whatisit had arrived from Wiesbaden. It was just as easy for Mrs. Gore to save that child and make it perfectly well and hearty, as to throttle it, and go off to the undertaker's with a religious reflection. None of your Herodian stories for me. No, no! I am not jolly at a funeral. I confess it does not amuse me. I have no taste for murders, or measles, or poison, or black jobs of any sort. We will have a word or two with Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer Lytton, Bart. presently, by the way, who, for his infamous and murderous propensities, as lately shewn in his most appalling and arsenical novel of *Lucretia*, deserves to be brought up with a tight hand. But of this anon.

We spake but now of Mrs. Gore going to the undertaker's. When the excellent Mrs. Hubbard went to the undertaker's and got a coffin, what was the upshot of that funereal transaction? Why, as we all know,

* *January Eve*; a Tale of the Times. By G. Soane, Esq., B.A. London Churton.

when she came back her favourite was laughing. As, of course, he should be.

That's your proper sort of pantomime-business—that's the right way in Christmas-books. Haven't you seen Clown in the play; his head cut off by the butcher and left on the block before all beholders; his limbs severally mangled and made into polonies, and yet, in two minutes, he says, "How are you?" (the droll dog!) as lively as ever? Haven't we seen Pantaloon killed before our very eyes, put pitilessly into his mother's mangle, brought from that instrument utterly dead, and stretched eighteen feet in length—and are we hurt, are our feelings outraged? No; we know Harlequin will have him alive again in two minutes by a quiver of his stick, and the old rascal will be kittling Columbine under the chin, while that spangled maniac, her lover, is wagging his head in his frill (as if it were a pudding in a dish), and dancing the most absurd, clumsy hornpipe in the back scene. And as in pantomimes so I say in Christmas stories, those fire-side Christmas pantomimes, which are no more natural than *Mother Goose* or *Harlequin Gulliver*. Kill your people off as much as you like; but always bring 'em to life again. Belabour your villains as you please. As they are more hideous than mortals, pummel them more severely than mortals can bear. But they must always amend, and you must be reconciled to them in the last scene, when the spangled fairy comes out of the revolving star, and, uttering the magic octosyllabic incantations of reconciliation, vanishes into an elysium of blue fire. Sweet, kindly, eight-syllabled incantations, pleasant fantastic fairy-follies, charming mystery, wherein the soul is plunged, as the gentle curtain descends, and covers those scenes of beloved and absurd glory! Do you suppose the people who invented such were fools, and wanted to imitate great blundering realities to inculcate great, stupid, moral apophthegms?—anybody can do that—anybody can say that "Evil communications corrupt good manners," or that "Procrastination is the thief of time," or what not: but a poet does not take his inspirations from the copy-book or his pictures from

the police-office. Is there any moralizing in *Titania*, *Ariosto*, or *Undine*?

All this is *àpropos* of the sky-blue story-book by George Soane, B.A. Now this sky-blue story-book (whereof the flavour somewhat perhaps resembles the beverage of academic youth) has great merits. First, it is improbable; secondly, it is pretty and graceful; thirdly, it has many pleasant pastoral descriptions, and kindly ballet groups and dances; fourthly, the criminals are reformed, the dead come to life again, and the devil is not the devil—to which, by the way, I take objection.

The rich uncle from India is the key of the story—(*mon Dieu*, how I wish I had one coming from that quarter!)—the conduct of a beggar on horseback the theme of satire. Tom Starlight, the poacher, drinking with his club at the Black Lion, and inveighing against the tyranny of a scoundrelly aristocracy, finds himself all of a sudden converted into Squire Starlight, of Taunton Hall. The squire gives up the doctrines of the poacher: he is the strictest of game preservers in all the county, the most severe of landlords and arrogant of men. Honest Jack Lint, the surgeon, was going to marry Tom's sister when he was in low life; but, become a nobleman, Tom says she shall marry old Lord Rheumatiz; and so the poor girl all but breaks her heart. Stella breaks hers outright. She is the blind old schoolmaster's daughter, old Elias Birch—a dear, impossible old gentleman, with pink cheeks, red stockings, and cotton hair, such as you see come out of the canvass cottage in the ballet and bless the lasses and lads (with their shirt sleeves tied up with riband) before the ballet begins.

"At this critical moment, when the question was on his lips, which, if spoken, might perhaps have averted no common calamity, he was interrupted by a chorus of boyish voices, so close and so unexpected as almost to startle him.

'Te, magister, salutamus;
'Te, magister, nunc laudamus;
Semper, semper sis beatus,
Felix dies quo tu natus.'
Hurrah!

"'Why, it's the boys from the free-school!' exclaimed the old man; 'I did not know it was a holiday.'

"No, dear Elias—nor was it a holiday, according to the school-rubric; but it is good sometimes to be merry, even though it is not so set down in the calendar; and this was your birthday—the first since blindness had compelled you to give up the ferula, which you had wielded so gently over the urchins, and in many instances over their fathers and even grandfathers before them. Here they were, grateful little fellows, with full hands, and fuller hearts, come to say, 'We do love you so, kind old master!' And, to use a common phrase, though not in a common sense, there was no love lost between them, for Elias could scarcely have taken a livelier interest in their welfare had they really been his own children.

"In they tumbled, thronging, talking, laughing, till as many had crowded into the cottage-parlour as it would well hold, when the younger and weaker fry, who were thus ousted by their seniors, clambered up to the window-sill, where they clustered like a swarm of bees. The new schoolmaster, quite astounded at such a jubilee, would fain have re-established order among them.—Order! silly fellow! what are you thinking of? is order better than those merry faces, all hope and sunshine? is order better than all that mass of happiness, which laughs, and shouts, and climbs, and hustles, and is not to be purchased at any price? leave them alone, for goodness' sake. And he did leave them alone, for he was not a bad fellow, that new master, though he was far from being an Elias Fairfield. Somehow, too, he was beginning to laugh, and be exceedingly merry himself, without exactly knowing why—perhaps it was for company's sake.

"But the head-boy had a grand Latin speech to deliver, a thing of his own concoction, and made expressly for the occasion. Of course he was in a hurry to begin—most orators are—and his influence, assisted by a hint from Stella that the noise was almost too much for her grandfather, effected a temporary lull. A proud moment was it for the young Cicero, and with infinite complacency did the sightless old man listen to his harangue, only throwing in an occasional correction—he could not entirely forget former habits—when the orator blundered in his grammar, as would now and then happen.

"Then came the presentation of gifts, in which each young holiday-maker acted for himself, and in a few minutes the cottage table was covered with nosegays, for as early as the season was—primroses, crocuses, both yellow and purple, polyanthuses, pansies, and I know not what beside. One little fellow, having nothing better within his means, had

tied together a bunch of daisies, which he presented amidst the jeers of his schoolmates—'a pretty gift for any one! on a birthday too!' and again the laugh went round. But the old man caught the child to his bosom, and kissing him tenderly, while the tears ran down his furrowed cheeks, bade Stella take especial care of the daisies.

"Put them in water directly, love, and don't fling them away, either, when they die—mind *that*. You can lay them between the leaves of my great Bible, and then I shall always have them near me.'

"What next? the orator again steps forward. No more Latin speeches, I hope—oh no! not the least fear of that. He is supported, as they say of other deputations, by a dozen of the eldest boys, who for the last two months have clubbed together their weekly allowance to buy a silver goblet for their dear old master. It was second-hand, but just as good as new; the dents and bruises had been carefully hammered out, and it had been polished up both inside and outside, as only a silversmith can do these things. Indeed, their own funds had not sufficed for so magnificent an undertaking, and so they had been helped out by fathers, or brothers, or uncles, who in their day had been scholars of Elias, and now were grown up into substantial yeomen, or thriving shopkeepers.

"What next?—a deputation of young girls from the neighbouring villages, with fowls, and eggs, and bacon. Why, surely, they must fancy the cottage in a state of siege, and badly off for provisions!

"What next?—Sir Edward's game-keeper with a hare, and his kind remembrance to his old master—will call himself before the day's over."

This is as it should be: your proper, pleasant, rouged, grinning, junc-ketting, pantomimic business. It is not intended to be natural—only pretty and kind-hearted—pleasing to the eye—cheerfully ticklesome to the senses—mildly festive, benevolent, and brisk. I doubt, after all, if there is any need for an artist to make his portraits like. What you want is not to be struck by the resemblance, but to be impregnated with the idea. For instance, when the thunder-storm comes, as in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, you don't think of putting up your umbrella: when you read young Mr. S. Rogers's pretty verses—

"Mine be a cot beside a hill,
A beehive's hum salute my," &c.

you are not led to suppose that they contain a real picture of rural life and felicity; but they fill the mind with sweet, pleasant, country-fied, hay-smelling, hawthorn-flowering, tree-whispering, river-babbling, breeze-blowing, rural perceptions, wherein lie the reader's delight and the poet's charm and mystery. As the mesmerists' giving a glass of cold water to their lucky patients can make the liquor assume any taste, from Johannisberg to ginger-beer—it is water still, but it has the effect of wine: so a poet mesmerises you with his magical tap, and ——— but for the tenth time we are straying from the point at hand, which is, Why Stella Birch broke her heart?

She broke her heart, then, because Tom Starlight broke it—that is, he ill-used her—that is, he promised her. Well, well, she jumped into the mill-stream with a shriek and a plunge; and that brute Tom, not contented with the ruin of one poor girl, must endeavour to perpetrate the destruction of another, his sister, by marrying her to the before-mentioned Lord Lumbago. Fancy the fury of poor Jack Pills—Fanny perishing away—the bells actually ringing for her marriage with Lord Sciatia—the trembling victim led to the altar, and Bob Sawyer about to poison himself with the most excruciating black doses in his establishment. When, *presto!* the fairy in the revolving car appears. The old gentleman is not the devil who gave Tom the estate, but Tom's uncle from India, who wishes to try him. Tom is not Squire Starlight of Taunton Hall, but a dumb, penniless, detected young scape-grace, to be handed over to the castigators. Viscount Chalkstones shall not marry poor dear little Fanny, who, on the contrary, shall bless Tom Tourniquet with her hand and twenty thousand pounds administered by the uncle in India. Stella is not dead any more than you are. She jumped into the water, I own; but the miller heard the plop and fished her out, and kept her safe, and now she comes back, and of course Tom Starlight makes an honest woman of her. The only per-

son who dies is old Elias Rodwell, the schoolmaster; but then he is so old, so very old, and his hair so very cottony, that his death is rather a pleasure than otherwise; and you fancy his life was only a sort of make-believe. And so everybody is happy, and the light-blue entertainment of Mr. Soane closes. It is a good, cheap, easy, and profitable Christmas pastime.

I take the Brothers Mayhew to be a couple of good-natured hermits, living out of the world in practices of asceticism, and yet having a kindly recollection of that scene of strife and struggle which they have left behind them. They write, from their monastery, a work of prodigious benevolence, stupendous moralisation, frequent wisdom, and rather a clumsy and doubtful fancy and humour.* To say of a "good genius" that he "turns everything into gold," is, perhaps, an undeserved, though not an unprecedented compliment to bullion. It is an homage to specie. The proposition stands thus: a good genius turns everything into gold; therefore gold is a good genius. And the fable is wrought in the following manner:—

Silvio, a forester in a goat-skin jacket, having lost his paternal hut by a sudden inundation, finds himself in his native wood with no resource but his hatchet and a piece of bread, his last refreshment. In the wood Silvio finds a hive of honey. The houseless and penniless youth is about to give a relish to his last piece of bread with the honey so discovered, when a sentimental objection suddenly makes him pause. "No," says he (but in the finest language), "I will not deprive these innocent bees of the produce of their labour; that which they have gathered, as they roamed from flower to flower, let them enjoy in dignified otiosity; I will dip my crust into the stream, content myself with that wholesome repast; and not rob them of the results of their industry.

This unexampled benevolence touches the Queen Bee, who is a fairy in disguise. She suddenly appears before Silvio in her character

* The Good Genius that Turned Everything into Gold; or, the Queen Bee and the Magic Dress. A Christmas Fairy Tale. By the Brothers Mayhew. With Illustrations by George Cruikshank. London, Bogue.

of Fairy Bee-queen—bids him to state in what manner she can be serviceable to him—and, in fact, fulfils every possible wish that the young Silvio can form. “Only come out in that goat-skin jacket,” says she, “so that I may know you, and anything you like shall be yours.”

First, he wishes to have his cottage restored to him; the Good Genius instantly reinstates him in that tenement. The Princess of the Country calls upon him, and is dissatisfied with the accommodation. Silvio, of course, finds out that it is no longer convenient. He demands a neat little villa, whither the Princess too follows him. Encouraged by her visit, the audacious young man proposes marriage to her. “What! *you*,” says she, “a mere country householder, wish to marry the likes of *me*?” And she leaves him in a huff. “Make me a prince,” says Silvio to his fairy patroness, “so that I may be her equal;” and immediately the Queen Bee erects a principality and city for him. Silvio marries the princess, and—they live happy ever after, you would imagine?

Not so. Prince Silvio plunges into idleness and debaucheries: he is driven out of his capital by his indignant subjects. He loses his goat-skin jacket, the great talisman of his fortune. He is plunged into misfortunes, which he bears with great philosophy and most eloquent benevolence; but finally finding his goat-skin again, his kingdom is restored, his prosperity returns, and he and his princess and daughter are doubtless happy to this very day.

The history is interspersed with some comic-business. Silvio's barber, in fact, gets hold of the goat-skin jacket when the prince makes his precipitate flight from his dominions—enjoys unintelligible property whilst wearing this article; and goes mad upon losing it when Silvio comes back to his own again. I protest against the whole affair—against the fable—against the jacket—against the bee—against Silvio—against his bad fortune and his good—against the fairy turning everything into money, &c. &c.

If a man wants to make a mere fantastic tale, nobody calls upon him to be tight and close in his logic. If he wants to moralise, his proposition

should be neat and clear, as his argument is correct. I am reconciled now to the wolf eating up Red Riding Hood (though I was sceptical in my childhood on this point), because I have given up believing that this is a moral tale altogether, and am content to receive it as a wild, odd, surprising, and not unkindly fairy story. But if gentlemen set out professing a laborious moral, inculcating the beauties of industry, and how it turns every thing into gold or pinchbeck, as the matter may be, I and other little children have a right to demand a pure fable along with all this didactic solemnity. “Brothers Mayhew,” I exclaim, “if you are going to amuse me, do so. Awaken my wonder—my laughter—my sense of pleasure; excite me by sweet rural pictures, or brilliant fairy colours, or jovial grotesque perplexities: but if you would instruct, in the name of Justice let us have the real sort of morals. Sermons and snapdragon do not go well together. Plum-pudding is good in its way; but a dose of brandy is better with it than a brimming ladlefull of virtue. If there were really your sort of good geniuses in the world, Socrates ought to have driven off from his trial in a coach-and-six to Xantippe, the loveliest and best-natured of women; and yet we know to the contrary. She was a shrew, and her husband was hanged. A banker's account is a fine thing when properly organised, and the balance agreeably preponderating upon your side; but there are other accounts we have to settle, and if they look at this sublunary sphere, *mes frères*, and the misfortunes of the good and the prosperity of their opposites—at Genius and Virtue in neglect and penury, and Dulness blundering into success, and Knavery filching Reputation, how can sublime moralists talk about goodness and gold together? Whatever we may do privately as individuals, let us sublime moralists never publicly worship twopence-halfpenny. I, for my part (as one of the aforesaid), will always make an uproar when I meet with any apologue conveying such a foolish signification; and I wish that some Christmas-storytellers would make us a few tales, in which all the rogues should prosper, and all the honest men go to gaol, just to correct the

present odious tendency of the guides of public taste.

The truth is, that the book of the Brothers Mayhew has so much merit, and is written often with so much brilliancy, and frequently with such dulness,—is so wise at times, and so unsatisfactory in the main, that it seems to me to be the critical office to abuse and deny it altogether,—the which I cordially do; and I warn the public, firstly, that under pretence of giving him a fairy story, the authors of the *Good Genius that Turned Everything into, &c.*, inveigle the reader into a sermon,—that the sermon is quite unsatisfactory, but that the preachers have a plenty of brains to supply their abundance of doctrine.

A very able and complimentary review of this book appeared under the title of "Fairy Politics;" for be it known that Silvio and the fairy discuss a prodigious deal of political ethics together. If any fairy presumes to talk any such nonsense to me, I will do my best from my place in the pit to hiss him off the stage. Had it been any the best known and dearest author—had it been Dickens himself, we would assume the privilege of replying to him with the cat-call, or other Protestant instrument, until the policeman ordered us off the premises.

"To see the faults of a great master, look at his imitators," Reynolds says in his *Discourses*; and the sins of Mr. Dickens's followers must frighten that gentleman not a little. Almost every one of the Christmas carollers are exaggerating the master's own exaggerations, and caricaturing the face of Nature most shamelessly. Every object in the world is brought to life, and invested with a vulgar knowingness and outrageous jocularity. Winds used to whistle in former days, and oaks to toss their arms in the storm. Winds are now made to laugh, to howl, to scream, to triumph, to sing choruses; trees to squint, to shiver, to leer, to grin, to smoke pipes, dance hornpipes, and smoke those of tobacco. When the Brothers Mayhew wish to be funny and in the fashion, they say,—

"The bright eye of day was now fast getting bloodshot with the coming cold of night." "A bee goes singing past him, merry as though he had taken a

flower-cup too much." "Aurora had just begun to light her fire in the grate of the East, and the old Sun was still snug under the blankets of the horizon." "The king thanked his stars that he was not always called upon to leave his bed until the sun had passed his bright copper warming-pan over the damp clouds, and properly aired the atmosphere for his reception."

What clumsy joking this is! what dreary buffooning! by men who can write, too, as well as this! It must be premised that the Princess Amaranth, Silvio's wife, is longing to see her father, the old king, and she breaks her wish to her husband in the Eastern manner by an allegory:

"It is related that the Sea-shell was the favourite daughter of the Wave; and that he watched over her with love, shielding her from injury! and folded her in his bosom, and cherished her as his best beloved, ever whispering the music of affection in her ear. Now the Sea-shell loved the noble Rock upon the shore; but the Wave and the Rock were enemies, battling with each other; so that when the haughty Wave found out the love of his rosy-lipped child, he spoke in a voice of rage to her thus: 'If thou sighest to wed with yonder Rock, I will cast thee from my bosom, and turn from thee. Go where thou wilt, my anger shall haunt thee, and ever ring in thy ear!' But the Shell loved on, and the swelling Wave dashed her from him. And though the steadfast Rock cherished his ocean Bride with every kindness, and kept her always by his side, still the Shell pined in sorrow; for, as her white-headed sire had said, the anger of the Wave kept ever haunting her, and ringing in her ear."

A fairy lecturer:—

"And so saying, the fairy hummed the following charm:—

'Quick! let him read the Rocks! and
see
In them the Earth's Biography!
Discover Stars beyond the sight!
Weigh them! and time the speed of
Light!
Within the dew-drop's tiny sphere
Let Animalcule Worlds appear!
Each puny Monster let him scan,
Then mark the Animalcule Man!
And tracing use in great and small,
See Good in each, and God in all!

"Then Silvio was lifted up in the air,

and carried by winged spirits far into the realms of space, until the world beneath him dwindled into a star, and the stars above him swelled into worlds. And as he flew past them, and they past him, he saw systems rise after systems, and suns upon suns, whose light had never yet reached the eyes of man. And still, as he looked before him, the stars lay thick as sands in the blue sea of the heavens; while, as he travelled on, that which in the distance appeared only one brilliant mass of confusion, separated as he advanced, into new worlds, threading with wondrous order the glittering maze, and spinning in their lightning course, until the air vibrated again, and the universe was melodious with the hum of their motion.

"Suddenly Silvio was on the earth again, with the fairy bee at his side. Then, waving her wand, she shewed him a little universe in every atom—a busy world in every drop; and how each grain of the earth was itself a globe teeming with life, and peopled with a minnikin race, whose structure was as wonderful and as perfect as his own.

"Then she took him down with her deep into the earth, and turning over with her wand the layers of rocks, as though they were the leaves of a mighty volume, Silvio read within them the Wondrous Tale of Creation. And instantly he lived in the time when man was yet unborn, and monster beasts roamed through the giant forests, the undisputed monarchs of a desert world.

"And again ascending to the surface, the fairy opened to him the affinities of things, shewing him how the air he breathed made metals moulder and fires burn; and how the black charcoal was the parent of the glittering diamond; and how the water he drank sprang from the burning of gases that he could neither feel, taste, smell, nor see; and how the atmosphere around him consisted of the self-same ingredients as the acid, which scarcely any metal could withstand.

"Then she disclosed to him all the mysteries of herbs and minerals, shewing him their good and evil powers, and how a little flower or a few small crystals might save or take a life.

"And, lastly, laying bare to him the mechanism of his own mysterious frame, she shewed Silvio how the bread he ate became the blood of his arteries and veins; and how the sanguine stream meandered through his body like a ruby river, giving life and vigour to all within its course; and how thin nerves, like

threads, worked his puppet limbs, and running to his brain, became the conduits of his will and feelings, and the cords which linked his immortal spirit to the world without.

"Bewildered with wonder, and with his brain aching with the knowledge he had learnt, Silvio returned home."

Honest and fine as this writing is, surely it is out of place, and little to be understood by children. I protest neither against pantomimes nor against Walker's Orrery, but I protest against Walker's Orrery in a pantomime. And this is my ground for grumbling against this wise, this ingenious, this clever, but this clumsy and ponderous allegory of the Brothers Mayhew.

But the personification-mania of the Mayhew brothers is as nothing compared to the same malady in the author of the *Yule Log*,* Mr. A. Chamerovzow, who has summoned the admirable George Cruikshank to his aid, and produced *his* Christmas legend with gilt leaves and cover; in which there is the usual commodity of fairies, and a prize rustic, who, impelled by the demon of avarice, neglects his friends, knocks down his blessed angel of a wife, turns his seduced daughter out of doors, and is on the point of being murdered by his eldest son; but just at the critical moment of throttling he wakes up and finds it all a dream! Isn't this a novelty? Isn't this a piece of ingenuity? Take your rustic, your fairies, your nightmare, finish off with a plum-pudding and a dance under the holly-bush, and a benign invocation to Christmas, kind hearts, and what not. Are we to have this sort of business for ever? *Mon Dieu!* will people never get tired of reading what they know, and authors weary of inventing what every body has been going on inventing for ages past?

Read the following specimen of the style of Mr. Chamerovzow, and say, Is not the animated landscape nuisance becoming most tolerable, and no longer to be endured?—

"Still the years rolled on, and still the sturdy Beech mocked and braved

* The Yule Log, for Everybody's Christmas Hearth; shewing where it Grew; how it was Cut and brought Home; and how it was Burnt. By the Author of *The Chronicles of the Bastile*. Illustrated by George Cruikshank. London, Newby.

the Tempest as boldly as ever! In the dingle it stood, unmolested and respected; almost venerated: for now it was known to be haunted, nobody durst expose himself to the fury of the Spirits by attempting to fell it. Nevertheless, some half-dozen times it was tried; but, invariably, the Woodman renounced the task in despair, after he had blunted his best axes, without cutting even through the bark.

"At length, Time beat the tree hollow: it was a long race, notwithstanding, and the gallant old Beech stood it out bravely, and proved itself game to the last; for though its inside was growing weaker and weaker, it still kept up a good appearance; so that one might have taken odds it would never give in, for all that its leaves shewed later than they used, and fell earlier. Then its giant foot, which covered no end of ground, grew gouty; and large wooden corns and bunions spread all over it; its trunk, lately so solid and hale, began to crack, and peel, and to come out in broad, unhealthy looking blotches; let alone that it wheezed asthmatically when the Wind blew; its massive limbs, too, betrayed rheumatic symptoms, and creaked and groaned at every puff.

"And now it was the Wind's turn to laugh at and buffet the Beech, that had for so many years mocked its power, and set its rage at defiance: every time it got a chance, away it swept with a branch, amputating it at one blow, and flinging the disabled member back into its teeth with savage malignity; then it would catch hold of its noble head, and tear, and tug, and pull, and twist it, until obliged to give over from sheer exhaustion; and all to loosen its roots, that it might enjoy the satisfaction of knocking the tree down and trampling upon it: still the old fellow fought hard, and did his best to roar and laugh at his ancient enemy as he used of yore; though any body might have perceived the difference with only half an eye."

See in the second paragraph what happens to the beech:—

1. He is running a race with Time, who beats him.
2. He is brave and game.
3. His inside is getting weak.
4. His feet are gouty.
5. He has corns and bunions.
6. His body comes out in blotches.
7. He wheezes asthmatically.
8. He has the rheumatism.

There's a collection of cheerful ideas for you! There's a jolly, rol-

licking, buniony, wheezy, gouty, rheumatic, blotchy Christmas metaphor! Is this the way a gentleman takes to make himself pleasant? Is it ingenious? Is it poetical, or merely foolish, in a word? I believe it to be the easiest and silliest kind of composition in which any poetaster can indulge. I will engage to vivify my tailor's bill; to make a romance of the heart out of my boot-jack; to get up a tender interest for mashed turnips and boiled mutton; to invest my breeches with pathos; to communicate an air of mystery to my coat (dash its buttons!); to make my waistcoat split its sides with jocularly; or so to treat and degrade, with clumsy joking, any thing natural or supernatural; to make a farce of a thunderstorm, or a tragedy of a teapot: but shall we do so? No! in the name of honest humour, no! Suppose Leslie (I take him as the finest, humorous artist in England) were to make the chairs and tables in his pictures to squint at you, and set the tongs and pokers grinning, would Sancho and Don Quixote be rendered more funny by these foolish tricks? Suppose when Mr. and Mrs. Keeley want to make you laugh in a comedy, they were to order all the supernumeraries to rush on to the stage and squint and grin; to have all the scenes painted with goggle-eyed caricatures; and all the fiddlers imitating the squeaking of pigs, the braying of donkeys, or what not, on their instruments, would the story and the fun of the play be more comprehensible for this insane interruption? A comic artist, as I take it, has almost the entire range of thought to play upon; the maddest foolery at times becomes him perfectly as the deepest pathos; but this systematic fooling, this dreary cut-and-dry fancy, this grinning without fun, makes my gorge rise, my dear Mr. YORKE; and I protest, for the honour of the trade. Mr. Merryman in the ring is not a humorist, but a poor half-witted impostor: I have my own opinion of a fellow who deliberately cuts sham jokes. They should come from a humorist's heart, or they are but acts of dishonesty on his part and forgeries on the public.

In respect of *The Drawing-Room*

Scrap-Book.* As the seaman in real life and Cooper's novels knows, by the peculiar gaff in her binnacle, the luff in her topsail-halyards, or what not, his old ship, the "Lively Sally," though the "Mary Anne" is now painted on her stern, so old critical hands, in taking up Mr. Fisher's book, recognise old friends with new titles among the prints—old pictures with wonderful subjects marvellously gathered together from all quarters. Pictorially, *The Drawing-Room Scrap-Book* is a sea-pie, made up of scraps that have been served at many tables before. Her majesty, in company with Richard Cobden and Charles Villiers; the Chinese necromancers; Lord Hardinge welcoming in the spring; Sir Robert Sale at a Spanish bull-fight in the Mozenigo Palace. A rich and wonderful hash indeed!

The fair editor, Mrs. Norton, has been painted by two artists in the present volume; by Mr. Carrick on ivory, and by Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer Lytton in a kind of verses, against which we put a strenuous protest. Sir Bulwer calls her a radiant Stranger—a spirit of the Star, and a daughter of the Beam, with a large B, meaning that there is something quite unearthly in the appearance of the fair editor of *The Drawing-Room Scrap-Book*; that it is clear to Sir Lytton's perception that she belongs to another orb, in which he, Sir Edward (being possibly likewise of an angelical supernaturality himself), has made her acquaintance. He states, that while mere mortals have changes of comfort and care in life, to supernatural beings, like the Honourable Mrs. Norton, our very air is silent pain—a heavy pain; in fact, that they are doomed to a perpetual sadness, under the never-ending domination of the Old Blue Devil.

Let us hope that the statement is erroneous, and the pedigree not also correct. Over the very verses in which Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton makes the above extraordinary assertions, some downright prose writer says the Hon. Mrs. Norton is "Second daughter of Thomas Sheridan, Esq. (son of the Right Hon. R. B.

Sheridan and his first wife, the celebrated Miss Lindley) and Caroline Henrietta Callander, daughter of Colonel Callander, of Craigforth, and Lady Elizabeth Mac Donnell." How can a man, in the face of such a genealogy, declare that Mrs. Norton's parent was a Beam, with a large B? Isn't the prose-tree a sufficient pedigree? Had Genius ever a directer descent? "No human beauty," says the baronet,—

"No human beauty ever bore

An aspect thus divine:

The crown the brows of seraphs wear,

Hath left its mark on thine;—

The unconscious glories round thee, bear

The stamp divine,

Of One divine,

Who trod the spheres of yore."

Come, come, Sir Bulwer, how can you talk to a lady so to her face? Whereabouts have you seen seraphs and their crowns? When made acquaintance with ones divine? What are all these attitudes, platitudes, beatitudes? Isn't a woman good enough for you that inherits Sheridan's genius and sweet Cecilia's eyes and voice, but you must assume an inspired air, and declare she is a stray angel? In the picture of the lady, she has a black velvet band round her forehead, and buttons on her dress. Fancy an angel in buttons! No! no! There's some error in the Bard's (or, to speak more correctly, the Bart's) description. This sort of writing, this flimsy, mystical, namby-pamby, we hold to be dangerous to men and reprehensible in Barts. When Irreverence puts on a sanctified look, when Mayfair begins to have revelations, when—but let us restrain our beautiful and outraged feelings, and return to the matter in hand.

The fact is, then (while strenuously denying the Beam in Mrs. Norton's family-tree—indeed it is the big B buzzing about it that roused the critical peevishness), that though we fearlessly assert Mrs. Norton to be only a woman, and always a woman, Mr. Carrick's picture no more represents her magnificent beauty than Mr. Joseph Hume resembles Apollo. To have seen it is to have

* Fisher's Drawing-Room Scrap-Book. By the Hon. Mrs. Norton. London, Fisher, Son, and Co.

seen something in history. Would you not like to have seen Helen or Cleopatra, Marie Antoinette (about whose beauty we doubt whether the late Mr. Burke did not make exaggerated statements), Fair Rosamond, or the Queen of Prussia, or Fox's Duchess of Devonshire, or that sweet ancestor of Mrs. Norton's own, who smiles on Reynolds's canvass with such ravishing, delicious purity—the charming, charming Lindley? As good as this a man may haply see, this very season, at the French play. There these eyes beheld it; not a daughter of a Beam—not a spirit of a Star, but a woman in black, with buttons—those very buttons probably—only a woman. Is it not enough, Sir Lytton? Stars and Beams!—buttons and buttonhooks! *Quando invenies parem?* In our

presence no man shall call such a woman a Spirit without a word in his ear.

And now to speak of the moral part, the soul *above* those buttons. Of all the genuine poets I ever—but perhaps we had best not. When he has a mind to pick a hole in a man's coat, who so active and mischievous as your humble servant? When he wishes to address a person in terms of unbounded laudation and respect, this present critic stutters and bungles most awkwardly—makes a dash for his hat, and a rush out of the room, perfectly overpowered by modesty. What a charming characteristic and confession! But did we prate and criticise, dear Miss S. in early days, when we went to hear Pasta sing? Harken to this sad tale of false love and broken vows:—

“He remembers the light of her smile,—of that smile, in itself a caress,
So warmly and softly it fell, on the heart it was willing to bless;
He remembers the touch of her hand, as it lay gently clasped in his own,
And he crushes the flowers which she gave, and bows down his head with a groan.
How oft in the twilight of eve,—how oft in the glory of day,—
Hath she leaned on his bosom and vowed—the vows she has lived to betray.
Oh! lovely as angels above,—oh! false as the devils below,
Oh! hope that seemed more than divine,—oh! fountain of fathomless woe,
How *couldst* thou forsake me!—Return,—return, still beloved, as thou art:
Wide open yet standeth the door of thy home in this desolate heart:
Return! We will bury the past,—and the light on my eyelids shall beam
With the rapture of one who at dawn breaks the spell of a terrible dream!
In vain: even now, while I reel,—blind, helpless, and faint with despair—
Thou bendest with triumph to hear, the *new* voice that whispers thee fair.
Oh! fickle, and shallow, and cold—in all but thy fever of blood—
Unfit, from thy nature, to cling, to aught that was earnest and good,
Thy love was an instinct of sex; it palled, when thy passion was o'er,
Like a wild bird that answers in spring the mate it remembers no more.
I shame that a creature so light should bid me thus quiver and bleed,—
I shame to have leaned and been pierced by my trust in so brittle a reed,—
I scorn thee! Go forth to the world, a parade of thy beauty to make;
Thrill, fever, and madden more hearts;—let them pine,—let them die,—for thy
sake!
Let them yield up their manhood of soul, and adore their ideal in thee.
I laugh, as thou breathest false vows,—to break them again, as with me;
I laugh, as they anchor their hopes, where the quicksand forbids them to live;
Will they glean from the dregs of thy heart what the fresh faith of youth could
not give?
Let them sink, let them perish,—like me,—of thy smiles and thy glances bereft,—
Yet, if *thou* wert in sorrow and pain,—would I leave thee,—as I have been left!”

Did we prate and criticise when we heard Pasta sing? Didn't you, on the contrary, come closer and closer, and sit quite silent, and listen with all your soul? And I'm not sure that we applauded much when the song was over. A great clapping of hands is but a coarse sort of sympathy. We applaud in that way when a musical mountebank spins down

the scale, or leaps astonishingly over a bravura. But before a great artist we are silent. And is not this a true poet? What a mournful, artless beauty is here! What a brooding, tender woman's heart!

What has struck myself and Miss Smith with especial admiration in these songs of Mrs. Norton and her accomplished sister, Lady Dufferin, is

the spontaneity of them. They sing without labour, like birds: as if it were their nature—

“ Pouring their full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art!”

There is something surprising in the faculty; and one listens with charmed astonishment to the song, sometimes gay, often sad, always tender and musical.

I have, I trust, been tolerably ill-humored hitherto; but what man can go on grumbling in the presence of such an angelical spirit as Hans Christian Andersen? Seeing him praised in the *Athenæum* journal, I was straight put away from reading a word of Hans's other works: and it was only last night, when going to bed, perfectly bored with the beef-fed English fairies, their hob-nailed gambols, and elephantine friskiness, his *Shoes of Fortune* and his *Wonderful Stories** came under the eyes of your humble servant. Heaven bless Hans Christian! Here are fairies! Here is fancy, and graceful wit, and delicate humour, and sweet, naïve kindness, flowing from the heart! Here is frolic without any labour! Here is admirable fooling without any consciousness or degradation! Though we have no sort of respect for a great, hulking, whiskered, red-faced, middle-aged man, who dresses himself in a pinafore and affects to frolic like a baby, may we not be charmed by the play and prattle of a child? And Hans Christian Andersen so affects me.

Every page of the volumes sparkles with delightful grace and genial fancy. Hans and you are friends for life after an hour's talk with him. I shake thy hands, Hans Christian, thou kindly prattler and warbler! A happy Christmas to thee, thou happy-minded Christian! You smile, dear Miss Smith! When we become acquainted with so delicate and charming a genius, have we no right to be thankful? Yes: let us respect every one of those friends whom Heaven has sent us—those sweet, Christian messengers of peace and goodwill.

Do you remember the dainty description of the Prioress in Chaucer? It has lately been quoted in Leigh Hunt's charming volume of *Wit and Humour*, and concludes with an account of a certain talisman this delicate creature wore:—

“ About hire arm a broche of golde ful
shene,
On which was first ywritten a crowned A,
And after *Amor vincit omnia*.”

The works of the real humorist always have this sacred press mark, I think. Try Shakespeare, first of all: Cervantes, Addison, poor Dick Steele, and dear Harry Fielding: the tender and delightful Jean Paul, Sterne, and Scott,—and Love is the humorist's best characteristic, and gives that charming ring to their laughter in which all the good-natured world joins in chorus. Foremost of all, at present, I think Mr. Dickens may assume the Amor and Crown for his badge and cognisance. His humanity has mastered the sympathy of almost all: of wise men, of duffers, of all sorts of honest people. He makes good jokes, bad jokes, the best and the worst jokes indeed possible. The critics fasten on the latter and sneer: the public sympathy kicks the flimsy barriers away, and pours on. The kindly spirit melts all critical doubts. Can he be worthless, or a sceptic, in whom all the world is putting faith—who has the ear of all England—who has done as much to make the poor known to the rich, and reconcile each to the other, as much as Hansard, ay, or Exeter Hall? Is this a man to be railed at by his literary brethren? In the American war (this is an historical allegory), the man who sneered at Washington most was that brave officer, and spotless patriot, General Arnold.

If I judge Mr. Dickens's present volume† rightly, it has been the author's aim, not to produce a prose tale of mingled fun and sadness, and a close imitation of life, but a prose poem, designed to awaken emotions tender, mirthful, pastoral, wonderful. As in some of Mr. Maclise's charm-

* Wonderful Stories for Children. By Hans Christian Andersen, Author of *The Improvisatore*, &c. Translated from the Danish by Mary Howitt. London, Chapman and Hall.

† The Battle of Life; a Love Story. By Charles Dickens. London, Bradbury and Evans.

ing designs to the book, the costume of the figures is rather a hint of the costume of the last century than a portrait of it, so the writer's characters seem to me modified—prettified, so to speak. The action of the piece you see clearly enough, but the actors speak and move to measure and music. The drolls are more violently funny; the serious heroes and heroines more gracefully and faultlessly beautiful. Such figures are never seen among real country people. No more are Tityrus and Melibœus like, or Hermann and Dorothea like, or Taglioni, bounding through air in gauze, like a Scotch peasant girl. *Tityre tu patule* is a ballet in hexameters; the *Sylphide*, a poem performed on the toes; these charming little books of Mr. Dickens's are chorals for Christmas executed in prose.

Last year the critics were specially outraged by the famous clock-and-kettle overture of the Christmas-piece. "Is this truth, is this nature?" cries the Cynic, growling from his tub. You might say, Is it the multiplication-table, or is it the *pons asinorum*? It is not intended to be true or natural, as I hold; it is intended to be a brisk, dashing, startling caricature. The poet does not want you to believe him, he wants to provoke your mirth and wonder. He is appealing, not to your reason and feelings as in a prose narrative, but to your fancy and feelings. He peoples the familiar hearth with sprites, and the church-tower with goblins: all the commonest objects swarm with preternatural life. The haymaker has convulsions, the warming-pan is vivified, the chairs are ambulatory, and the poker writhes with life. In the midst of these wonders goes on a little, common, kind-hearted, tender, every-day story of poverty averted, true hearts rewarded, the poor loving one another, a tyrant grotesquely punished. It is not much. But in these performances the music is every thing. The *Zauberflöte* or the *Barbieri* are not like life; *mais*——!

That is why we lose patience or

affect to have no respect for minor performers. Numbers of unknown fiddlers, hearing of the success of Mr. Dickens's opera, rush forward fiddle in hand, of the very same shape by the very same maker. "Come and hear *our* partition," they say; "see how we have set the Barber to music, and what tunes *we* make Papageno sing!" Away with your miserable fiddlesticks, misguided people! *You* play after such a master! You take a bad moment. We may have heard some indifferent music from this composer, and some very weak and bad music from him too; but we have had, likewise, strains so delightful and noble, specimens of skill so unapproachable by others, that we protest against all followers. The grumbling fit seizes on me again as I think of them, and I long for some one to devour.

Ha! what have we here? *M. A. Titmarsh's Christmas-Book* — *MRS. PERKINS'S BALL*.* Dedicated to the Mulligan of Ballymulligan. Ballymulligan! Ballyfiddlestick! What *you*, too, Mr. Titmarsh? You, you sneering wretch, setting up a Christmas-book of your own? This, then, is the meaning of your savage feelings towards "the minor fiddlers!" Is your kit, sirrah, any bigger than theirs? You, who in the columns of this very Magazine have sneered at the works of so many painters, look at your own performances! Some of your folks have scarcely more legs than Miss Biffin; they have fins instead of hands—they squint almost every one of them!

* * * *

All this is quite true. But see where we have come to!—to the very last page of the very last sheet; and the writer is called upon to stop just at the very moment he was going to cut his own head off.

So have I seen Mr. Clown (in that Christmas drama which has been foremost in my thoughts during all the above meditations) set up the gallows, adjust the rope, try the noose curiously, and—tumble head over heels.

* *Mrs. Perkins's Ball*; depicted in Twenty-three Plates; containing Portraits of the Principal Personages present, with their Characters. By Mr. M. A. Titmarsh. London, Chapman and Hall.