

Literature, &c.

EXTRACTS FROM NEW WORKS.

FROM THE METROPOLITAN MAGAZINE.

LITERATURE OF THE DAY.—There is no fault so frequently objected against the Literature of the present day, as its lightness, or to use a severer term, its flimsiness. There may be more or less of justice in the assignment of such a quality to the works of our contemporaries, but the propriety of considering it as a fault, is altogether questionable. It is with modern literature as with modern architecture, and books and houses are alike constructed with a view to the short term of other leases. The ancient folios like the old Gothic edifices, are built for long duration, and both have, in many instances, outlived their original purpose and are suffered to fall into neglect and ruin; but the lath-and-plaster volumes of our times are scarcely proof against the elements, and have little more than an ephemeral existence. This, however, is any thing but an evil; for so prolific has the press become, that if the title of a title of its productions outlived a year, no libraries would be vast enough to contain them, nor the days of Nestor or Methuselah be sufficiently long for acquiring the very elements of learning. New books, moreover, like new buildings, receive the progressive improvements of the age, and one contributes to the health and cleanliness of the mind as the other does to that of the body; neither have lumber-holes for dust, rubbish, and cobwebs, and prejudices, like the rats and mice, got a notice to quit on each new re-edification. The older structures both literary and architectural, might have possessed more grandeur, magnificence, and elaboration of detail; but the modern are lighter, more commodious, and are better adapted to the wants and habits of the consumer. One single advantage which literature has gained by the modern state of things, is to be found in the downfall of authority. The hot-bed growth and rapid succession of authors, allow no time for any one of them to be erected into an infallible standard, to which his successors, in all future generations, shall be obliged to conform. Had Aristotle written for Messrs Longman or Murray, there would have been no danger of his ruling philosophy despotically for fourteen hundred years; and it may be more than doubted whether Homer himself, so circumstanced would have set a fashion in epics, and compelled all future spinners of cantos to dedicate their second book, in imitation of his catalogue of ships, to an enumeration of the *matériel* of their subsequent campaign. We of the present day 'come like shadows, so depart;' and this bull-in-a-china-shop sort of influence, is not within our reach. There will be no more conning of Cicero, nor giving of days and nights to Addison, to form a style: each age, hereafter, will choose its own manner of writing, as it will the fashion of its clothes, or the cut of its political constitutions. As the monotony of Grecian architecture has yielded to the pleasing, tho' capricious fancies of the emancipated Mr Nash, so the quaker-like simplicity of Homer has given place to the arabesque originality of certain living liberators of the English Parnassus. The competition which has arisen between the authors of modern times, has had the further advantage of quickening all their movements. Compare the cumbrous periods and floundering verbiage of the very best writers of King James's day, with the snip snap eigram style of newspaper penny-a-line men. It is the difference between a broad wheel waggon and a railway steam carriage. The great business of a modern author is, to sieze his opportunity. He knows that the world will neither await his leisure nor suffer him to 'bestow all this tediousness' upon his readers. The age of things is arrived, and we have no longer time to throw away upon words.

Formerly, when books were scarce, and a well-locked glass-case contained the whole floating capital of a nation's literary amusement, a voluminous proser was a public benefactor, for he helped to pass away the long winter's nights that, two frequently, hung heavily on hand. Burton's folio on melancholy was an inexhaustible mine of cheerfulness, and a ponderous romance, that took a year in perusal, prevented more suicides than the stomach-pomp. But now, a man who is beforehand in his literature, must be a hard reader and a

literary proser is as sedulously avoided as a button-holding monopolist in conversation. He who does not condense his subject within the smallest possible space has no more chance of the public ear than a country put amidst the epidemic coughing of the House of Commons. That this rapidity is generally unfavourable to the interests of literature, is an old woman's prejudice. Brevity is not only the soul of wit, but of perspicuity. That which cannot be well expressed in a few words rarely becomes more intelligible by being wrapt up in many. It is in vain that objection may be taken to the want of clearness in brevity, or the example of Tacitus, whose obscurity is at least as conspicuous as his terseness. Exceptions only prove the rule, and it may be questioned whether the enigmatical puzzles of Tacitus do not reside more in the quaintness of his conceits and a purposed implication of ideas, rendered necessary by the times in which he wrote, than in the mere shortness of his affected sentences. How many verbose definitions are less expressive than the simple term to be defined! What speaking can be plainer, and, at the same time, more brief than the energetic style of the orators of Billingsgate? Lawyers have attempted to make things clear by tautologies and circumlocutions, and, instead of arriving at the unequivocal communication of a venter of haddocks and flounders, they have deluged the world with fraud, sophistry, and injustice. We read books now, like music, and a cramp passage, that requires study to comprehend, is a *sentence* of condemnation against its author. Whatever may be thought of this result, its attainment is not to be insured without labour, and it is some proof of the merit of those authors in whom it is the most conspicuous. '*Questo facile*,' says an Italian, '*quanto e difficile*.' With eight hundred folio pages to turn in a man must be a blunderer indeed who cannot tell his story; and it may be questioned, whether there is any meaning at all in that head which does not contrive to convey its ideas to the reader before he arrives at so remote a 'finis;' but to condense an entire science within two pamphlets of Useful Knowledge, or to bring the history of an empire into as many volumes of a Family Library, requires that the subject should be well digested by the author before he puts pen to paper. If it be true that modern book-makers take less pains than their predecessors, it must follow that they come prepared for their task: and let critics say what they will of an indolent recourse to dictionaries, abridgments, and indexes, a man is not less meritorious for availing himself of these improvements of his age, than he is less a traveller for having circumnavigated the world in a steam-boat.—Thomas Campbell.

TWENTY YEARS.

THEY tell me twenty years have past
Since I have looked upon thee last,
And thought thee fairest of the fair,
With thy sylph-like form and light-brown hair!
I can remember every word
That from those smiling lips I heard:
Oh! how little it appears
Like the lapse of twenty years!

Thou art changed! in thee I find
Beauty of another kind:
Those rich curls lie on thy brow
In a darker cluster now,
And the sylph hath given place
To the matron's form of grace;—
Yet how little it appears
Like the lapse of twenty years!

Still thy cheek is round and fair;
Mid thy curls not one grey hair;
Not one lurking sorrow lies
In the lustre of those eyes:
Thou hast felt, since last we met,
No affliction, no regret!
Wonderful! to shed no tears
In the lapse of twenty years!

But what means that changing brow?
Tears are in those dark eyes now!
Have my rash, incautious words
Wakened Feeling's slumbering chords?
Wherefore dost thou bid me look
At your dark-bound journal-book?—

THERE the register appears
Of the lapse of twenty years!

Thou hast been a happy bride,
Kneeling by a lover's side;
And unclouded was thy life
As his loved and loving wife:
Thou hast worn the garb of gloom,
Kneeling by that husband's tomb;
Thou hast wept a widow's tears
In the lapse of twenty years!

Oh! I see my error now,
To suppose, in cheek and brow,
Strangers may presume to find
Treasured secrets of the mind;
THERE fond Memory still we keep
Her vigil, when she SEEMS to sleep;
Though composure reappears
In the lapse of twenty years!

Where's the hope that can abate
The grief of hearts thus desolate!
That can youth's keenest pangs assuage,
And mitigate the gloom of age?
Religion bids the tempest cease,
And leads her to a port of peace;
And on the lonely pilot steers
Through the lapse of future years!

THOMAS HAYNES BAYLY.

TRANSFUSION OF BLOOD.—Physiology and surgery have shed two of the most brilliant rays on ob- stetric subjects, and have supplied, from their fertile and constantly enlarging sources, remedial means which it has been the office of the obstetrician to apply successfully to the alleviation of human suffering and distress. Through the assistance of one, by which I would allude to the revived operation of transfusion, effects the most marvellous and gladdening have been introduced. By its aid, the tottering and flickering spark of vitality, ready finally to depart from the frame which it animated, has been restored to stability and permanence: its flight has been arrested, and its faint exsiring glow at first gently supported, and afterwards fanned by degrees into the full flame of life and vigour, and joy. When all has seemed desperate, and death was apparently on the point of receiving his victim, when the powers of life have been drained, and its energies were about to succumb, by the influence of this wonderful remedy, the whole scene has been changed, the almost vanquished sufferer has been snatched from the jaws of death, to which she seemed inevitably doomed, and rescued from the brink of destruction, on whose verge she was trembling; distressed relatives, spared the infliction of the pangs and wretchedness hovering around and threatening them, have been brought back to consolation and hope, and the house of mourning has suddenly been transformed into the house of gratitude and delight. Such is an outline of the benefits promised and afforded by timely recourse to transfusion. How illustrious then, ought its second inventor to be considered; how distinguished his name, among those of the benefactors of mankind; how proud may not that science justly be, which numbers a Blundell among her votaries, and can claim him for her own!—Dr. Samuel Malins's Lecture on Midwifery.

Previous to the threatened contest in Devonshire, a noble lord was heard to declare, that he had the election in his pocket. On this being told to Lord Ebrington, he is said to have rejoined, "That may be, but what Lord R. has got in his pocket he likes to keep there."

SUPERSTITION OF SAILORS.—Our chief mate said, that on board a ship, where he had served, the mate on duty ordered some of the youths to reef the main-top sail. When the first got up, he heard a strange voice saying, 'It blows hard.' The lad waited for no more; he was down in a trice and telling his adventure. A second immediately ascended, laughing at the folly of his companion, but returned even more quickly, declaring that he was quite sure that a voice, not of this world, had cried in his ear 'It blows hard.' Another went, and another, but each came back with the same tale. At length the mate, having sent up the whole watch, ran up the shrouds himself and when he reached the haunted spot, heard the dreadful words distinctly uttered in his ears, 'It blows hard.' 'Ay, ay old one, but blow it ever so hard, we must ease the earings for all that,' replied the mate undauntedly; and looking round, he spied a fine parrot perched on one of the clues—the thoughtless author of all the false alarms—which had probably escaped from some other vessel, but had not previously been discovered to have taken refuge on this. Another of our Officers mentioned that on one of his voyages, he remembered a boy having been sent up to clear a rope which had got foul above the mizen top. Presently, however, he came back, trembling and almost tumbling to the bottom, declaring that he had seen "Old Davy, ait the cross-tree; moreover, that the Evil one had a huge head and face, with prick-ears and eyes as bright as fire." Two or three others were sent up in succession; to all of whom the apparition glared forth, and