

LITERATURE, &c.

REVIEW.

Lights and Shadows of American Life—Edited by Mary Russell Mitford, 3 volumes, 12mo.

A pretty collection of American Tales, bearing upon their face all the graphic characteristics of the country, the portraits of whose inhabitants and manners they are intended to depict. There is a great variety in the aim and tendency of the several stories, and the collection is thus rendered more interesting and lively. Miss Mitford, a delightful writer of tales herself, is no less a judge of their excellence in others, and she has evinced as much judgment and discretion in the Editorship of the melange before us as confirms all our high opinions of her talent and good taste. She appears to us to have shewn a laudable partiality to all stories involving precepts or examples of simple honesty and industrious poverty, which, to tell truth, must affect every one who sees it in either of its forms, whether triumphing over the temptations and misfortunes of the world and so winning its reward, or borne down by the deeper weight of wrong and misery, and so exciting the sympathy of the good and great. Much of this kind of feeling is admirably portrayed in one of the narratives of the collection, called 'The Young Backwoodsman,' but there are also several others that interest us very powerfully, among which the story of 'Elizabeth Latimer' is one of the most tender and beautiful that it has ever been our lot to read; Paulding's tale of the Politician rather amuses than captivates us, but it is nevertheless full of spirit and vivacity, and displays considerable satirical powers. Miss Sedgewick's animated nonsense about 'Modern Chivalry' is as fantastic as we could wish, but nevertheless not precisely to our taste; and there is a good deal of the exaggeration by which it is marked, transplanted to the 'Azure Nose,' another improbable story, though of a different kind. 'The Last of the Boatmen' is a pleasant and interesting fiction, founded on the fact that the introduction of steam navigation in America has almost rendered extinct the old boatmen who managed the boats and barges before the new engines were brought into play. The hero of the following tale is supposed to be the last of his race:

Mike Fink may be viewed as the correct representative of a class of men now extinct, but who once possessed as marked a character as that of the gypsies of England, or the Lazaroni of Naples. The period of their existence was not more than a third of a century. The character was created by the introduction of trade on the western waters, and ceased with the successful establishment of the steam-boat.

There is something inexplicable in the fact, that there could be men found, for ordinary wages who would abandon the systematic but not laborious pursuits of agriculture, to follow a life of all others, except that of the soldier, distinguished by the greatest exposure and privation. The occupation of a boatman was more calculated to destroy the constitution, and to shorten life than any other business. In ascending the river, it was a continued series of toil, rendered more irksome by the snail-like rate at which they moved. The boat was propelled by poles, against which the shoulder of the individual was placed; and the whole strength and skill of the individual were applied in this manner. As the boatmen moved along the running-board, with their heads nearly touching the plank on which they walked, the effect produced on the mind of an observer was similar to that on beholding the ox rocking before an overloaded cart. Their bodies, naked to their waist, for the purpose of moving with greater ease, and of enjoying the breeze of the river, were exposed to the burning suns of summer, and to the rains of autumn. After a hard day's push, they would take their 'fillee,' or ration of whisky, and, having swallowed a miserable supper of meat, half-burnt, and bread half-baked, stretch themselves, without covering, on the deck, and slumber till the steersman's call invited them to the morning 'fillee.' Notwithstanding this, the boatman's life had charms as irresistible as those presented by the splendid illusions of the stage. Sons abandoned the comfortable farms of their fathers, and apprentices fled from the service of their masters. There was a captivation in the idea of 'going down the river,' and the youthful boatman who had 'pushed a keel' from New Orleans felt all the pride of a young merchant, after his first voyage to an English sea-port. From an exclusive association together, they had formed a kind of slang peculiar to themselves; and, from the constant exercise of wit with 'the squatters' on shore, and crews of other boats, they acquired a quickness and smartness of vulgar retort, that was quite amusing. The frequent battles they were engaged in with the boatmen of different parts of the river, and with the less civilized inhabitants of the lower Ohio and Mississippi, invested them with that ferocious reputation, which has made them spoken of throughout Europe.

On board of the boats thus navigated, our merchants entrusted valuable cargoes, without insurance, and with no other guarantee than the receipt of the sternman, who possessed no property but his boat; and the confidence so reposed was seldom abused.

Among these men, Mike Fink stood an acknowledged leader for many years. Endowed by nature with those qualities of intellect that gave the possessor influence, he would have been a conspicuous member of any society in which his lot might have been cast. A acute observer of human nature has said—'Opportunity alone makes the hero. Change but their situations, and Caesar would have been but the best wrestler in the green.' With a figure cast in a mould that added much of the symmetry of an Apollo to the limbs of a Hercules, he possessed gigantic strength; and, accustomed from an early period, to brave the dangers of a frontier life, his character was noted for the most daring intrepidity. He was the hero of a hundred fights, and the leader in a thousand adventures. From Pittsburg to St. Louis and New Orleans, his fame was established. Every farmer on the shore

kept on good terms with Mike, otherwise there was no safety for his property. Whenever he was an enemy, like his great prototype, Rob Roy, he levied the contribution of Black Mail for the use of his boat. Often at night, when his tired companions slept, he would take an excursion of five or six miles, and return before morning, rich in spoil. On the Ohio, he was known by his companions by the appellation of the 'Snapping Turtle;' and on the Mississippi, he was called 'The Snag.'

At the early age of seventeen, Mike's character was displayed, by enlisting himself in a corps of Scouts—a body of irregular rangers, which was employed on the north-western frontiers of Pennsylvania, to watch the Indians, and to give notice of any threatened incursion.

At that time, Pittsburg was on the extreme verge of white population, and the spies who were constantly employed, generally extended their explorations forty or fifty miles to the west of this post. They went out, singly, lived as did the Indian, and in every respect became perfectly assimilated in habits, taste, and feeling, with the red men of the desert. A kind of border warfare was kept up, and the scout thought it as praiseworthy to bring in the scalp of a Shawnee as the skin of a panther. He would remain in the woods for weeks together, using parched corn for bread, and depending on his rifle for meat, and slept at night in perfect comfort, rolled in his blanket.

In this corps, while yet a stripling, Mike acquired a reputation for boldness and cunning, far beyond his companions. A thousand legends illustrate the fearlessness of his character. There was one, which he told himself with much pride, and which made an indelible impression on my boyish memory. He had been out on the hills of Mahoning, when, to use his own words, he 'saw signs of Indians being about.' He had discovered the recent print of the moccasin on the grass, and found drops of the fresh blood of a deer on the green bush. He became cautious, skulked for some time in the deepest thickets of hazel and briar, and for several days did not discharge his rifle. He subsisted patiently on parched corn and jerk, which he had dried on his first coming into the woods. He gave no alarm to the settlements, because he discovered, with certainty, that the enemy consisted of a small hunting-party, who were receding from the Alleghany.

As he was creeping along one morning, with the stealthy tread of a cat, his eye fell upon a beautiful buck, browsing on the edge of a barren spot, three hundred yards distant. The temptation was too strong for the woodsman, and he resolved to have a shot at every hazard. Re-priming his gun, and picking his flint, he made his approaches in the usual noiseless manner. At the moment he reached the spot from which he meant to take his aim, he observed a large savage, intent upon the same object, advancing from a direction a little different from his own. Mike shrunk behind a tree with the quickness of thought, and keeping his eye fixed on the hunter, waited the result with patience. In a few moments, the Indian halted within fifty paces, and levelled his piece at the deer. In the meanwhile, Mike presented his rifle at the body of the savage, and, at the moment the smoke issued from the gun of the latter, the bullet of Fink passed through the red man's breast. He uttered a yell, and fell dead at the same instant with the deer. Mike re-loaded his rifle, and remained in his covert for some minutes, to ascertain whether there were more enemies at hand. He then stepped up to the prostrate savage, and, having satisfied himself that life was extinguished, turned his attention to the buck, and took from the carcass those pieces suited to the process of jerking.

In the mean time, the country was filling up with a white population; and in a few years, the red men, with the exception of a few fractions of tribes, gradually receded to the Lakes and beyond the Mississippi. The corps of Scouts was abolished, after acquiring habits which unfitted them for the pursuits of civilized society. Some incorporated themselves with the Indians; and others, from a strong attachment to their erratic mode of life, joined the boatmen, then just becoming a distinct class. Among these was our hero, Mike Fink, whose talents were soon developed; and for many years, he was as celebrated on the rivers of the West, as he had been in the woods.

Some years after my visit to Cincinnati, business called me to New Orleans. On board of the steam boat, on which I had embarked at Louisville, I recognized, in the person of the pilot, one of those men who had formerly been a patroon, or keel-boat captain. I entered into conversation with him on the subject of his former associates.

'They are scattered in all directions,' said he. 'A few, who had capacity, have become pilots of steam-boats. Many have joined the trading parties that cross the Rocky Mountains; and a few have settled down as farmers.'

'What has become,' I asked, 'of my old acquaintance, Mike Fink?'

'Mike was killed in a skirmish,' replied the pilot. 'He had refused several good offers on steam-boats. He said he could not bear the hissing of steam, and he wanted room to throw his pole. He went to the Missouri, and about a year since was shooting the tin cup, when he had corned too heavy. He elevated too low, and shot his companion through the head. A friend of the deceased who was present, suspecting foul play, shot Mike through the heart before he had time to re-load his rifle.'

'With Mike Fink expired the spirit of the Boatmen.'

SONGS. BY F. W. N. BAYLEY.

THE SWAN.

Down the blue stream gaily gliding,
Watch the Bird of Beauty pass,
Like a snowy pillar sliding
Smoothly over a bed of glass—
Fairest of the lake's lone daughters—
Seeming as it moves to rest,
Hardly ruffling calmest waters,
While it sweepeth o'er their breast!

Beautiful—in peace reclining—
Care for her hath found no stog,
But the summer sun is shining
Brightly on her silver wing,
Hark how sweetly nature singeth
Musical on her bed of death—
As her only song she singeth,
Faintly with her dying breath.

THE PORTRAIT.

It hung in its old and dingy frame
On my father's walls for years,
And the old man used to sit and smile
On its young face—through his tears!
As though its looks of loveliness—
Where Beauty's light did fall—
Brought the sweetest, yet the saddest thought
That memory could recall.

He had been her child, and now looked back
Through the misty vale of years,
To the early time when she wooed his laugh,
To the late, when she won his tears!
'My boy, we have all one friend on earth,
She dies—we have left no other.'
And again would the old man turn and look!
With a smile through a tear on his mother!

FROM THE COURT MAGAZINE AND BELLE ASSEMBLEE.

THE COQUETTE.

BY THE HONORABLE MRS. NORTON.

Now it so happened, that one of the inimitable Fitzroy's peculiarities was, that he never could be in love with the same woman for more than three months at a time. Upon this failing, therefore, the young Countess undertook to lecture him, and succeeded so well, that he suddenly told her one morning, when she was gathering a geranium in her beautiful conservatory in Park Lane, that if there ever existed a being he could worship for ever, it was herself. Lady Glenallan let fall the flower she had gathered. She blushed a deep crimson. She felt—that she was a married woman, and ought to be excessively shocked—she thought of forbidding him the house, but then it would be so awkward to make a quarrel between Glenallan and his cousin; so she only forbid him ever to mention the subject again; and to prove that she was in earnest in her wish to discourage his attentions, she gave two hours every morning, and a perpetual ticket to her opera-box, to young Lord Linton, who knew nobody in town, poor fellow, was only just two-and-twenty, and most touchingly attached to a pale pretty little sister of his, with whom he rode, walked, and talked unceasingly, and who, he assured Lady Glenallan, was the last of seven, that eating worm, consumption, being the inheritance of his family. Fitzroy Glenallan was not, however, a man to be slighted with impunity—he ceased to be Lady Glenallan's lover, but oh! how infinitely more irksome and troublesome did he contrive to make the attentions of Lady Glenallan's friend. What unasked-for advice did he not pour into her ear! what gentle hints and laughing allusions did he not bestow on her husband! what an unwearied watch did he not keep over the very curl of her lip, and the lifting of her eye-lash, when her smiles or her glances were directed to her new favourite. A thousand times in a fit of irritation did she determine on freeing herself from the tyranny of this self-erected monitor; and a thousand times did she shrink from the attempt under the bitter consciousness that her own folly had in some measure placed her in his power. He might incense Lord Glenallan, who was gradually becoming, not openly jealous—he was too fashionable a husband for that—but coldly displeased, and distant at times, and sneeringly reproachful at others. He might ridicule her to his companions; he might—in short she felt, without exactly knowing why, that it would be better to keep well with the person whose admiration had once been so grateful to her. Meanwhile, young Linton gradually became absorbed by his passion for his beautiful protectress:—that a being so gifted, so worshipped, so divine, should devote her time, her talents, her affection to one as unknown and insignificant as himself, was as extraordinary as it was intoxicating. His mornings were spent in her boudoir—his afternoons in riding by her side—his evenings in wandering through the crowded assembly, restless, fevered, and dissatisfied, till her arm was linked in his, and then—all beyond was a blank—a void—a nullity that would scarce be deemed existence. His little fair consumptive sister was almost forgotten; or, when remembered, the sudden pang of having neglected her would strike him, and he would hurry her here and there and everywhere, in search of amusement, and load her table with new books and hot house flowers; and kiss away the tears that trembled in her eyes; and murmur, between those light kisses, how willingly he would lay down his life to save her one hour's vexation; and wonder she still looked fatigued and still seemed unhappy. But by degrees these fits of kindness grew more rare—the delirium which steeped his senses shut out all objects but one. Day after day—day after day—Lucy Linton sat alone in the dark, hot drawing-room, in South Audley-Street, and with a weakness, which was more of the body than of the mind, wept and prophesied to herself that she should die very soon; while her brother persuaded himself that she was too ill—too tired to go out—too anything—rather than she should be in the way. It is true Lady Glenallan could not be aware of all these solitary musings; but it is equally true that she was jealous of Linton's love even for his sister; and in the early days