

LITERATURE, &c.

FROM BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.

RETRIBUTION.

A MAY-MORNING on Ulswater and the banks of Ulswater—commingled earth and heaven. Spring is many-coloured as Autumn; but Joy, instead of Melancholy, scatters the hues daily brightening into greener life, instead of daily dimming into yellower death. The fear of Winter then—but now the hope of Summer; and Nature rings with hymns hailing the visible advent of the perfect year. If for a moment the woods are silent, it is but to burst forth anew into louder song. The rain is over and gone—but the showery sky speaks in the streams on a hundred hills; and the wide mountain-gloom opens its heart to the sunshine that on many a dripping precipice burns like fire. Nothing seems inanimate. The very clouds and their shadows look alive—the trees, never dead, are wide-awakened from their sleep—families of flowers are frequenting all the dewy places—old walls are splendid with the light of lichens—and birch-crowned cliffs up among the coves send down their fine fragrance to the Lake on every bolder breath that whitens with breaking wavelets the blue of its breezy bosom. Nor mute the voice of man. The shepherd is whooping on the hill—the ploughman speaking to his team somewhere among the furrows in some small late field, won from the woods; and you hear the laughter and the echoes of the laughter—one sound—of children busied in half-work-half-play—for what else in vernal sunshine is the occupation of young rustic life? 'Tis an Arcadia—no golden age. But a lovelier scene—in the midst of all its grandeur—is not in merry and majestic England—nor did the hills of this earth ever circumscribe a pleasanter dwelling for a nobler peasant, than those Cumbrian ranges of rocks and pastures, where the raven croaks in his own region, unregarded in theirs by the fleecy flocks. How beautiful the Church Tower!

On a knoll not far from the shore, and not high above the water, yet by an especial felicity of place gently commanding all that reach of the Lake with all its ranges of mountains—every single tree—every grove—and all the woods seeming to shew or to conceal the scene at the bidding of the Spirit of Beauty—receded two figures—the one almost rustic—but venerable in the simplicity of old age—the other no longer young—but still in the prime of life—and though plainly apparelled—in form and bearing such as are pointed out in cities, because belonging to distinguished men. The old man behaved towards him with deference but not humility; and between them too—in many things unlike—it was clear—even from their silence—that there was Friendship.

A little way off, and sometimes almost running, now up and now down the slopes and hollows, was a girl about eight years old—whether beautiful or not you could not know for her face was either half-hidden in golden hair, or when she tossed the tresses from her brow, it was so bright in the sunshine that you saw no features, only a gleam of joy. Now she was chasing the butterflies, not to hurt them, but to get a nearer sight of their beautiful gauze wings—the first that had come—she wondered whence—to waver and wanton for a little while in the spring sunshine, and then, she felt, as wondrously, one and all—as by consent—to vanish. And now she stooped as if to pull some little wild-flower, her hand for a moment withheld by a loving sense of its loveliness, but ever and anon adding some new colour to the blended bloom intended to gladden her father's eyes—though the happy child knew full well, and sometimes wept to know, that herself had his entire heart. Yet gliding or tripping, or dancing along, she touched not with fairy foot one white clover-flower on which she saw working the silent bee. Her father looked too often sad—and she feared—though what it was, she imagined not even in dreams—that some great misery must have befallen him before they came to live in the glen. And such, too, she had heard from a chance whisper, was the belief of their neighbours. But momentary the shadows on the light of childhood! Nor was she insensible to her own beauty, that with the innocence it enshrined combined to make her happy; and first met her own eyes every morning, when most beautiful, awakening from the hushed awe of her prayers. She was clad in russet, like a cottager's child; but her air spoke sweetly of finer breeding than may be met with among those mountains—though natural grace accompanies there many a maiden going with her pitcher to the well—and gentle blood and old flows there in the veins of now humble men—who, but for the decay of families once high, might have lived in halls, now dilapidated, and scarcely distinguished through masses of ivy from the circumjacent rocks!

The child stole close behind her father, and kissing his cheek, said, "Were there ever such lovely flowers seen on Ulswater before, father? I do not believe that they will ever die." And she put them in his breast. Not a smile came to his countenance—no look of love—no faint recognition—no gratitude for the gift which at other times might haply have drawn a tear. She stood abashed in the sternness of his eyes, which, though fixed on her, seemed to see her not—and feeling that her glee was mistimed—for with such gloom she was not unfamiliar—the child felt as if her own happiness had been sin, and retiring into a glade among the broom, sat down and wept.

"Poor wretch, better far that she never had been born!"

The old man looked on his friend with compassion, but with no surprise; and only said, "God will dry up her tears." These few simple words, uttered in a solemn voice, but without one tone of reproach, seemed somewhat to calm the other's trouble, who first looking towards the spot where his child was sobbing to herself, though he heard it not, and then looking up to heaven, ejaculated, for her sake, a broken prayer. He then would have fain called her to him, in a gush

of love; but he was ashamed that even she should see him in such a passion of grief—and the old man went to her of his own accord, and bade her, as from her father, again to take her pastime among the flowers. Soon was she dancing in her happiness as before; and that her father might hear she was obeying him, singing a song.

"For five years every Sabbath have I attended divine service in your chapel—yet dare I not call myself a Christian. I have prayed for faith—nor, wretch that I am, am I an unbeliever. But I fear to fling myself at the foot of the cross. God be merciful to me a sinner!"

The old man opened not his lips; for he felt that there was about to be made some confession. Yet he doubted not that the sufferer had been more sinned against than sinning; for the goodness of the stranger—so called still after five years' residence among the mountains—was known in many a vale—and the Pastor knew that charity covereth a multitude of sins—and even as a moral virtue prepares the heart for heaven. So sacred a thing is solace in this woful world.

"We have walked together, many hundred times, for great part of a day, by ourselves too, over long tracts of uninhabited moors, and yet never once from my lips escaped one word about my fates or fortunes—so frozen was the secret in my heart. Often have I heard the sound of your voice, as if it were that of the idle wind; and often the words I did hear seemed, in the confusion, to have no relation to us, and to be strange syllabings in the wilderness, as from the hauntings of some evil spirit insigating me to self-destruction."

"I saw that your life was oppressed by some perpetual burden; but God darkened not your mind while your heart was disturbed so grievously; and well pleased were we all to think, that in caring so kindly for the griefs of others, you might come at last to forget your own, or, if that were impossible, to feel, that with the alleviations of time, and sympathy, and religion, yours was no more than the common lot of sorrow."

They rose—and continued to walk in silence—but not apart—up and down that small silvan enclosure overlooked but by rocks. The child saw her father's distraction—no unusual sight to her—yet on each recurrence as mournful and full of fear as if seen for the first time—and pretended to be playing aloof with her face pale in tears.

"That child's mother is not dead. Where she is now I know not—perhaps in a foreign country hiding her guilt and her shame. All say that a lovelier child was never seen than that wretch—God bless her—how beautiful is the poor creature now in her happiness singing over her flowers! Just such another must her mother have been at her age—she who is now an outcast—and an adulteress."

The pastor turned away his face, for in the silence he heard groans, and the hollow voice again spoke:—

"Through many dismal days and nights have I striven to forgive her, but never for many hours together have I been enabled to repent my curse. For on my knees I implored God to curse her—her head, her eyes, her breast, her body, mind, heart, and soul—and that she might go down a loathsome leper to the grave."

"Remember what He said to the woman,—'Go and sin no more!'"

"The words have haunted me all up and down the hills—his words and mine—but mine have always sounded liker justice at last—for my nature was created human—and human are all the passions that pronounced that holy or unholy curse!"

"Yet you would not curse her now—were she lying here at your feet—or if you were standing by her death-bed?"

"Lying here at my feet! Even here—on that very spot—not blasted, but green through all the year—within the shelter of those two rocks—she did lie at my feet in her beauty—and as I thought her innocence—my own happy bride! Hither I brought her to the best—and blest I was even up to the measure of my misery. This world is hell to me now, but then it was heaven!"

"These awful names are of the mysteries beyond the grave."

"Hear me and judge. She was an orphan; all her father's and mother's relations were dead, but a few who were very poor. I married her and secured her life against this heartless and wicked world. That child was born, and while it grew like a flower, she left it, and its father, me who loved her beyond light and life, and would have given up both for her sake."

"And have not yet found heart to forgive her, miserable as she needs must be, seeing she has been a great sinner?"

"Who forgives? The father his profligate son, or disobedient daughter? No; he disinherits his first-born, and suffers him to perish, perhaps by an ignominious death. He leaves his only daughter to drag out her days in penury, a widow with orphans. The world condemns, but is silent; he goes to church every Sabbath, but no preacher denounces punishment on the unrelenting, the unforgiving parent. Yet how easily might he have taken them both back to his heart, and loved them better than ever! But she poisoned my cup of life when it seemed to overflow with heaven. Had God dashed it from my lips, I could have borne my doom. But with her own hand which I had clasped at the altar, and with our Lucy at her knees, she gave me that loathsome draught of shame and sorrow;—I drank it to the dregs, and it is burning all through my being, now, as if it had been hell-fire from the hands of a fiend in the shape of an angel. In what page of the New Testament am I told to forgive her? Let me see the verse, and then shall I know that Christianity is an imposture; for the voice of God within me, the conscience which is his still small voice, commands me never from my memory to obliterate that curse, never to forgive her, and her wickedness, not even if we should see each other's shadows in a future state, after the day of judgment."

His countenance grew ghastly; and staggering to a stone, he sat down and eyed the skies with a vacant stare, like a man whom dreams carry about in his sleep. His face was like ashes, and he gasped like one about to fall into a fit. "Bring me water," and the old man motioned on the child, who, giving ear to him for a moment, flew away to the Lake-side with an urn she had brought with her for flowers; and held it to her father's lips. His eyes saw it now; there was her sweet pale face all wet with tears, almost touching his own, her innocent mouth breathed that pure balm that seems to a father's soul to be inhaled from the sinless spirit of love. He took her into his bosom, and kissed her dewy eyes, and begged her to cease her sobbing, to smile, to laugh, to sing, to dance away in the sunshine, to be happy; and Lucy afraid, not of her father, but of his kindness, for the simple creature was not able to understand his wild utterance of blessings, returned to the glade but not to her pastime, and couched like a fawn among the fern, kept her eyes on her father, and left her flowers to fade unheeded beside her empty urn.

"Unintelligible mystery of wickedness! That child was just three years old the very day it was forsaken, she abandoned it and me on its birth-day! Twice had that day been observed by us, as the sweetest, the most sacred of holidays, and now that it had again come round, but I not present, for I was on foreign service, thus did she observe it, and disappeared with her paramour. It so happened that we went that day into action, and I committed her and our child to the mercy of God in fervent prayers, for love made me religious, and for their sakes I feared though I shunned not death. I lay all night among the wounded on the field of battle, and it was a severe frost. Pain kept me from sleep, but I saw them distinctly as in a dream, the mother lying with her child in her bosom in our own bed. Was not that vision mockery enough to drive me mad? After a few weeks a letter came to me from herself and I kissed it and pressed it to my heart, for no black seal was there, and I knew that our Lucy was alive. No meaning for a while seemed to be in the words, and then they began to blacken into ghastly characters, till at last I gathered from the horrid revelation that she was sunk in sin and shame, steeped in the utmost pollution of unimaginable guilt."

"A friend was with me, and I gave it to him to read, for in my anguish at first I felt no shame, and I watched his face as he read it, that I might see corroboration of the incredible truth, which continued to look like falsehood, even while it pierced my heart with agonizing pangs. 'It may be a forgery,' was all he could utter, after long agitation; but the shape of each letter was too familiar to my eyes, the way in which the paper was folded, and I knew my doom was sealed. Hours must have passed, for the room grew dark, and I asked him to leave me for the night. He kissed my forehead, for we had been as brothers. I saw him next morning, dead, cut nearly in two, yet, had he left a paper with me, written an hour before he fell, so filled with holiest friendship, that oh! how, even in my agony, I wept for him, now but a lump of cold clay and blood, and envied him at the same time a soldier's grave!

[To be Concluded.]

FROM THE EDINBURGH REVIEW.

CHARACTER OF HORACE WALPOLE.

He was, unless we have formed a very erroneous judgment of his character, the most eccentric, the most artificial, the most fastidious, of men. His mind was a bundle of inconsistent whims and affectations. His features were covered by a mask in a mask. When the outer disguise of obvious affectation was removed, you are still as far as ever from seeing the real man. He played innumerable parts, and overacted them all. When he talked misanthropy, he out-Timoned Timon. When he talked philanthropy, he left Howard at an immeasurable distance. He scoffed at Courts, and kept a chronicle of their most trifling scandals; at society, and was blown about by its slightest veerings of opinion; at literary fame, and left fair copies of his private letters, with copious notes, to be published after his disease; at rank, and never for a moment forgot that he was an honorable; at the practice of entail, and tasked the ingenuity of conveyancers to tie up his villa in the strictest settlement. The conformation of his mind was such, that whatever was little seemed to him great, and whatever was great seemed to him little. Serious business was a trifle to him, and trifles were his serious business. To chat with blue-stockings, to write little copies of complimentary verses on little occasions; to superintend a private press; to preserve from natural decay the perishable topics of Renelagh and White's; to record divorces and bets, Miss Chudleigh's absurdities, and George Selwyn's good sayings; to decorate a grotesque house with pierce-battlements; to procure rare engravings and antique chimney boards; to match odd gauntlets; to lay out a maze of walks within five acres of ground; these were the grave employments of his long life. From these he turned to politics as to an amusement. After the labours of the print-shop and the auction room, he unbent his mind in the house of commons. And having indulged in the recreation of making laws and voting millions, he returned to more important pursuits, to researches after Queen Mary's comb, Wolsley's red hat, the pipe which Van Tromp smoked during his last sea fight, and the spur which King William struck into the flank of Sorrel. In every thing in which he busied himself, in the fine arts, in literature, in public affairs, he was drawn by some strange attraction from the great to the little, and from the useful to the mean. The politics in which he took the keenest interests, were politics scarcely deserving the name. The growling of George the Second, the flirtations of the princess Emily with the Duke of Grafton; the amours of prince Frederick with lady Middlesex; the squabbles between Gold Stick and the Master of the Buck Hounds; the disagreements between the tutors of Prince George;