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MILTON ON HIS LOSS OF SIGHT.

(From the Oxford Edition of Milton's Works.)

I am old and blind!

Men point at me as smitten by God's frown;

Afflicted and deserted of my kind,

Yet I am not cast down.

I am weak, yet strong;

I murmur not, that I no longer see;

Poor, old, and helpless, I the more belong,

Father Supreme! to Thee.

O merciful One!

[near;

When men are farthest then Thou art most

When friends pass by, my weaknesses to shun,

Thy chariot I hear.

Thy glorious face

Is leaning toward me, and its holy light

Shines in upon my lonely dwelling-place—

And there is no more night.

On my bended knee,

I recognize Thy purpose, clearly shown;

My vision Thou hast dimmed that I may see

Thyself, Thyself alone.

I have nought to fear;

This darkness is the shadow of thy wing;

Beneath it I am almost sacred—here

Can come no evil thing.

Oh! I seem to stand

[been,

Trembling, where foot of mortal ne'er hath

Wrapped in the radiance from thy sinless land,

Which eye hath never seen.

Visions come and go;

Shapes of resplendent beauty round me throng;

From angel lips I seem to hear the flow

Of soft and holy song.

It is nothing now,

When heaven is opening on my sightless eyes,

When airs from Paradise refresh my brow,

The earth in darkness lies.

In a purer clime,

My being fills with rapture—waves of thought

Roll in upon my spirit—strains sublime

Break over me unsought.

Give me now my lyre!

I feel the stirrings of a gift divine;

Within my bosom glows unearthly fire

Lit by no skill of mine.

THE FLYING POST OFFICE.

This office, which every evening flies away from London to Glasgow, and wherein Government clerks are busily employed in receiving, delivering and sorting letters all the way, is a narrow carpeted room, twenty-one feet in length by about seven in breadth, lighted by four large reflecting lamps inserted in the roof, and by another in a corner of the guard. Along about two thirds of the length of this chamber there is affixed to the side wall a narrow table, or counter, covered with green cloth, beneath which various letter bags are stowed away, and above which the space up to the roof is divided into six shelves fourteen feet in length each containing thirty-five pigeon holes of about the size of the little compartments in a dove cote. At this table, and immediately fronting these pigeon holes, there were standing, as we flew along, three post office clerks intently occupied in snatching up from the green cloth counter, and in dexterously inserting into the various pigeon holes, a mass of letters which lay before them, and which, when exhausted, were instantly replaced from bags which the senior clerk cut open, and which the guard who had presented them then shook out for assortment. On the

right of the chief clerk the remaining one third of the carriage was filled nearly to the roof with letter bags of all sorts and sizes, and which an able bodied post office guard, dressed in his shirt sleeves and laced waistcoat, was hauling at and adjusting according to their respective brass labels. At this laborious occupation the clerks continue standing for about four hours and a half; that is to say, the first set sort letters from London to Tamworth, the second from Tamworth to Preston, the third from Preston to Carlisle, and the fourth, letters from Carlisle to Glasgow. The clerks employed in this duty do not permanently reside at any of the above stations, but are usually removed from one to the other about every three months.

As we sat reclining and ruminating in the corner, the scene was as interesting as it was extraordinary. In consequence of the rapid rate at which we were travelling, the bags which were hanging from the thirty brass pegs on the sides of the office had a tremulous motion, which at every jerk of the train was changed for a moment or two into a slight rolling or pendulous movement, like towels, &c., hanging in a cabin at sea. While the guard's face, besides glistening with perspiration, was—from the labor of stooping and hauling at large letter bags—as red as his scarlet coat, which was hanging before the wall on a little peg, until at last his cheeks appeared as if they were shining at the lamp immediately above them almost as ruddily as the lamp shone upon them—the three clerks were actively moving their right hands in all directions, working vertically with the same dexterity with which compositors in a printing office horizontally restore their type into the various small compartments to which each letter belongs. Sometimes a clerk was seen, to throw into various pigeon holes a batch of mourning letters, all directed in the same handwriting, and evidently announcing some death; then one or two registered letters wrapped in green covers. For some time another clerk was solely employed in stuffing into bags, newspapers for various destinations. Occasionally the guard, leaving his bag, was seen to poke his burly head out of a large window behind him, into pitch darkness, enlivened by the occasional passage of bright sparks from the funnel pipe of the engine, to ascertain, by the flashing of the lamps as he passed them, the precise moment of the train clearing certain stations, in order that he might record it in his "time bill." Then again a strong smell of burning sealing wax announced that he was sealing up and stamping with the post office seal, bags three or four of which he then strapped firmly together for delivery. All of a sudden the flying chamber received a sharp blow, which resounded exactly as if a cannon shot had struck it. This noise, however, merely announced that a station post we were at that moment passing, but which was already far behind us, had just been safely delivered of from letter bags, which, on putting our head out of the window, we saw quietly lying in the far end of a large, strong, iron bound sort of landing net or cradle, which the guard, a few minutes before, had, by a simple movement, lowered on purpose to receive them. But not only had we received four bags, but at the same moment, and apparently by the same blow, we had, as we flew by, dropped at the same station three bags which a post office authority had been waiting to receive. The blow that the pendant bag of letters, moving at the rate say of forty miles an hour, receives in being suddenly snatched away, must be rather greater than that which the flying one receives in being suddenly at that rate dropped on the road. Both operations, however, are effected by a projecting apparatus from the flying post

office coming suddenly into contact with that protruding from the post.

As fast as the clerks could fill the pigeon holes before them, the letters were quickly taken therefrom, tied up into a bundle, and then by the guard deposited into the leather bag to which they belonged. On very closely observing the clerks as they worked, we discovered that instead of sorting their letters into the pigeon holes according to their superscriptions, they placed them into compartments of their own arrangement, and which were only correctly labelled in their own minds; but as every clerk is held responsible for the accuracy of his assortment, he is very properly allowed to execute it in whatever way may be most convenient to the mind or hand.

Besides lame writing, and awkward spelling, it was curious to observe what a quantity of irrelevant nonsense is superscribed upon many letters, as if the writer's object was purposely to conceal from the sorting clerk the only fact he ever cares to ascertain, namely, the post town. Their patience and intelligence, however, are really beyond all praise; and although sometimes they stand for eight or ten seconds holding a letter close to their lamp, turning sometimes their head and then it, yet it rarely happens that they fail to decipher it. In opening one bag, a lady's pasteboard working-box appeared all in shivers. It had been packed in the thinnest description of whitey brown paper. The clerk spent nearly two minutes in searching among the fragments for the direction, which he at last discovered in very pale ink, written apparently through a microscope with the point of a needle. The letters sorted in the flying post office are, excepting a few 'late letters,' principally cross-post letters, which, although packed into one bag, are for various localities. For instance, at Stafford, the mails take up a bag made up for Birmingham, Wolverhampton and intermediate places, the letters for which, being intermixed, are sorted by the way, and left at the several stations.

The bags have also to be stowed away in compartments according to their respective destinations. One lot for Manchester, Liverpool and Dublin; one for Chester; a bundle of bags for Newcastle-under-Lyne, Market-Drayton, Eccles-hall, Stowe, Crewe, Rhubabon; a quantity of empty bags to be filled coming back; a lot for Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Carlisle; and one great open bag contained all the letter bags for Dublin taken up on the road.

The minute arrangements necessary for the transaction of all this important business at midnight, while the train is flying through the dark, it would be quite impossible to describe. The occupation is not only highly confidential, but it requires unceasing attention, exhausting to body and mind. Some time ago, while the three clerks, with their right elbows moving in all directions, were vigorously engaged in sorting their letters, and while the guard, with the light of his lamp shining on the gilt buttons and gold lace which emblazoned the pockets of his waistcoat, was busily sealing a letter bag, a collision took place, which, besides killing four men, at the same moment threw the sorting clerks from their pigeon holes to the letter bags in the guard's compartment. In due time the chief clerk recovered from the shock: but what had happened—why he was lying on the letter bags—why nobody was sorting—until he recovered from his stupor he could not imagine!—*London Quarterly.*

Christ will come and abide with those who prepare a place for him.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.

When I first knew him, he had all that Westminster and Oxford could give him.—He was, as the Mores said, to whom I had introduced him, "brimful of literature;" decisive and enthusiastic in all his sentiments, and impetuous in all his feelings, whether of approval or dislike. I never knew one more uncompromising in what he believed either to be right or wrong; thereby marking the integrity of his mind, which ever shrunk from the most distant approximation to duplicity or meanness.

There was in Southey, alas! his sun is set!—I must write in the third person!—one other quality which commands admiration; an habitual delicacy in his conversation, evidencing that cheerfulness and wit might exist without ribaldry, grossness, or profanation. He neither violated decorum himself, nor tolerated it in others. I have been present when a trespasser of the looser class has received a rebuke, I might say a castigation, well deserved, and not readily forgotten. His abhorrence also of injustice, or unworthy conduct, in its diversified shapes, had all the decision of a Roman censor; while this apparent austerity was associated, when in the society he liked, with so bland and playful a spirit, that it abolished all constraint, and rendered him one of the most agreeable, as well as the most intelligent of companions.

It must occasionally have been exemplified in your experience, that some writers who have acquired a transient popularity, perchance more from adventitious causes than sterling merit, appear at once to occupy an increased space, and fancy that he who fills his own field of vision occupies the same space in the view of others. This disposition will almost invariably be found in those who most readily depreciate those whom they cannot excel; as if every concession to the merits of another subtracted from their own claims. Southey was eminently exempt from this little feeling. He heartily encouraged genius, wherever it was discoverable; whether, "with all appliances," the jewel shone forth from academic bowers, or whether the gem was incrustured with extraneous matter, and required the toil of polishing; indifferent to him, it met with the encouraging smile and the fostering care.

It seems almost invidious to single out one distinguishing quality in his mind, when so many deserve notice; but I have often been struck with the quickness of his perception; the promptitude with which he discovered whatever was good or bad in composition, either in prose or verse. When reading the production of another, the tones of his voice became a merit-thermometer, a sort of *Æolian-harp-test*; in the flat parts his voice was unimpassioned, but if the gust of genius swept over the wires, his tones rose in intensity, till his own energy of feeling and expression kindled in others a sympathetic impulse, which the dull were forced to feel, whilst his animated recitations threw fresh meaning into the minds of the most discerning.

It was always a luxury with Southey to talk of old times, places, and persons; and Bristol, with its vicinities, he thought the most beautiful city he had ever seen. When a boy he was almost a resident among St. Vincent's Rocks and Leigh Woods. The view, from the Coronation Road, of the Hotwells, with Clifton, and its triple crescents, he thought surpassed any view of the kind in Europe. He loved also to extol his own mountain scenery; and, at his last visit, upbraided me for not paying him a visit at Greta Hall, where, he said, he would have shown me the glories of the district, and also have given me a sail on the lake, in his own boat, "The Royal Noah." After dwelling on his entrancing water-scenes, and misty eminences, he wanted much, he