VARIOUS

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Содержание

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MRS HEMANS

Felicia Hemans and the poetesses of England! Such would probably be the form in which the toast would run, if literary toasts were the fashion, or such a mode of compliment the one exactly suited to the case. Not that we would venture positively to assert that Mrs Hemans stands at the head of our poetesses, the first absolutely in point of genius, – though there is but one name, that of Joanna Baillie, which occurs to us, at the moment, as disputing with hers that pre-eminence, – but because she, in a more complete manner than any other of our poetesses, represents the mind, the culture, the feelings, and character, of the English gentlewoman. Her piety, her resignation, her love of nature and of home, – that cheerfulness easily moved by little incidents, that sadness into which reflection almost always settled, – all speak of the cultivated woman bred under English skies, and in English homes. Her attachment to the privacy

of life, her wise dislike and avoidance of the *éclat* of literary renown, and the dull, dry, fever-heat of fashionable circles, tend to complete her qualifications as a fitting representative of her fair countrywomen. The cultivation of her mind, in its weakness as well as elegance, savoured, perhaps, too much of what we are compelled to call feminine. Alive at all times to beauty in all its forms, to music, to tender and imaginative thought, she seems to have been almost equally averse to whatever bore the aspect of an analysis of feeling, or an approach to a severe investigation of truth. Present her with the beautiful, but spare her all scientific dissection of it. Let the flower live as her companion; do not rend it to pieces to show its conformation. Let but the faith be tender and *true to the heart*, and disturb her not with rude inquiries whether it possess any other truth or not. That too much melancholy (at least for her own happiness) which is traceable in her poems, arose in part from events in her life, but in part, also, from this too partial and limited cultivation of the mind. The feelings were excited or refined, but the reasoning powers not enough called forth: no task-work was therefore given to the active intellect; and a mind that could not be at rest was left to brood over sentiments, either the sad heritage of all mortality, or the peculiar offspring of afflictions of her own. We are not imputing, in this remark, any shadow of blame to her; we make the remark because we think that, eminent as she was, she still suffered much from the unwise and arbitrary distinction which is made in the education of the two sexes.

The difference between the mental qualities of the sexes is owing, we apprehend, far more to education than to nature. At all events, there is no such natural difference as warrants the distinction we make in the mental discipline we provide for them. There are certain professional studies with which no one thinks of vexing the mind of any one, man or woman, but those who intend to practise the professions; but why, in a good English library, there should be one half of it, and that the better half, which a young woman is not expected to read – this we never could understand, and never reflect on with common patience. Why may not a Locke, or a Paley, or a Dugald Stewart, train the mind of the future mother of a family? or why may not an intelligent young woman be a companion for her brother or her husband in his more serious moods of thought, as well as in his gayer and more trifling? Would the world lose any thing of social happiness or moral refinement by this intellectual equality of the two sexes? You vex the memory of a young girl with dictionaries and vocabularies without end; you tax her memory in every conceivable manner; and at an after-age you give the literature of sentiment freely to her pillage; but that which should step between the two – the culture of the reason – this is entirely forbidden. If she learns a dozen modern languages, she does not read a single book in any one of them that would make her think. Even in her religious library, the same distinction is preserved. Books of sentimental piety – some of them maudlin enough – are thrust with kindest anxiety and most liberal profusion upon her:

any work of theology, any work that discusses and examines, is as carefully excluded.

We are not contending that there is no difference whatever in the mental constitution of the two sexes. There may be less tendency to ratiocination in woman; there is certainly more of feeling, a quicker and more sensitive nature. One sees this especially in children. Mark them in their play-hours, in their holiday freedom, when they are left to themselves to find matter of enjoyment, – how much more pleasure does the girl evidently derive from any beautiful or living thing that comes before it than the boy! We have an instance of it almost as we write. There is a group of children on the beach. The little girl is in perfect ecstasies, as she looks at the sparkling waves that come bounding to her feet; she shouts, she leaps, she herself bounds towards them, then springs back as they approach, half frightened and half pleased – she knows not how to express her delight at this great playfellow she has found. Meanwhile the boy, her brother, does nothing but throw stones at it – of that he seems never wearied. The beach is a perfect armoury to him, and he pelts the graceful waves remorselessly. What is their grace to him? So, too, in an inland scene, a garden or a lawn, we have often noticed what exquisite pleasure a little girl will feel, as she watches a sparrow alight near her upon the ground, in search of crumbs or other food. Her little frame quite thrills as this other little piece of life comes hopping and pecking about her. She loads it, but with suppressed voice, with all the endearing epithets her vocabulary

supplies. She is evidently embarrassed that they are so few: she makes up by their frequent repetition. She absolutely *loves* the little creature, with all whose movements she seems to have the keenest sympathy. Her brother, the boy, he has nothing for it but his unfailing stone, or he flings his hat at it. Unfailing, fortunately, the stone is not; for, if his skill as a marksman responded to his destructive zeal, there is nothing that a stone would kill that would be left alive, or that a stone would break that would be left whole. A mere blind animal-activity seems, at that very interesting age, to distinguish the future lord of the creation.

At an after period of life, when thought has educated the youth into feeling, the picture is often entirely reversed. Then, unless the man be bred up a mere pleasure-hunter, seeking what he calls amusement in town or country, the superior education he has received makes him the more feeling, the more imaginative, because the more reflective of the two. That brother who once shocked his little sister by his stupid and cruel amusements, now looks with something like contempt at the frivolous tastes and occupations – at the system of poor artificial enjoyments – to which that sister has betaken herself. Now, if they are at the sea-side together, it is he who finds companionship in the waves, who finds thought grow more expanded, freer and bolder, in the presence of the boundless ocean. She, too, dotes upon the sea, and sits down beside it – to read her novel. Now, if they ride or walk through the country together, it is his eye that sees the bird upon the bough – hers is on the distant dust some equipage is

making.

But matters are mending, and will continue to mend. There are so many women of richly cultivated minds who have distinguished themselves in letters or in society, and made it highly feminine to be intelligent as well as good, and to have elevated as well as amiable feelings, that by-and-by the whole sex must adopt a new standard of education. It must, we presume, be by leaders of their own starting out of their own body, that the rest of the soft and timid flock must be led.

Yes, we are mending. Very different are our times from those when Madame de Genlis published her little work, *De l'Influence des Femmes sur la Littérature Française comme Protectrices des Lettres, et comme Auteurs*. She had to contend, with the same acrid energy, for the privilege of a lady to write, as a Turkish dame of the present century might be supposed to display, who should contend for the privilege of walking abroad unveiled, or rather unmuffled. And even she herself thinks it necessary to give certain rules to young women who write – as she would to young women who dance – how to comport themselves with consummate propriety; as not to enter into controversy, or use big words – in short, to deal with printer's ink without soiling the most delicate fingers. As to that argument drawn from the supposed neglect of domestic duties – which it seems, in those days just emerging from barbarity, was still heard of – she dismisses it very briefly. "Comme ces devoirs dans une maison bien ordonnée, ne peuvent jamais prendre *plus d'une heure par*

jour, cette objection est absolument nulle." As there is much implied in that "maison bien ordonnée," and as Madame de Genlis did not write for simple gentle-folks, it is to be hoped that the one hour per diem may admit of extension without any forfeiture of literary privileges. In her time, too, there was thought to be a sort of feud between authors and authoresses – a thing which in our day, is quite inconceivable – for she writes, apropos of a charge of plagiarism, against La Fontaine, in the following indignant strain: – "Quelles que soient le bonhomie et la candeur d'un auteur, il sait que, par une loi tacite mais universelle, il est toujours dispensé de convenir qu'il doit à une femme une idée heureuse. Dans ce cas seulement le plagiat et le silence sont également légitimes."

We have changed all that: we have had too many instances of women of talent and of genius to doubt their ability to excel – we make no exception – in any branch of literature whatever. We give them, on the other hand, no monopoly of elegance or grace, or delicacy of touch, as some affect to do. These qualities they are very likely to display; but they will be superior in them to authors of the male sex, only just so far as they are superior to those authors in genius and talent. There is still a practice in many critics to detect the style feminine from the style masculine. The sooner this is laid aside the better. There are styles which, speaking metaphorically, one may say have a feminine grace, or a feminine weakness. Such an observation has been made, by Sir James Mackintosh, on the style of Addison. But to pretend to

say of a given page of composition whether a man or a woman has penned it, is absurd. We often hear it said, that none but a woman could have written the letters of Madame de Sévigné. If Cowper had been a woman, people would have said the same thing of his letters. They are unrivalled, at least in our own language, for grace and elegance, and wit and playfulness. No woman, we believe – and the epistolary style is supposed to belong by especial right to the female pen – has ever written such charming letters as those to Lady Hesketh, and his old friend Thomas Hill. As to the letters of Madame de Sévigné, they so evidently come from a mother to a daughter, that it is impossible to forget for a moment the sex of the writer. But if the qualities which have given them literary celebrity are, to be pronounced feminine, half the literature of France is of the same gender. Still less can we tolerate the affectation that pretends to discern a certain weakness, a tremulousness of the hand, when the pen is held by a woman. There is grace and elegance, but, forsooth, a certain hesitation – a want of vigour and certainty of touch. Nonsense. Take *Our Village*, by Miss Mitford, and the *Sketch-Book*, by Washington Irving: they are both of the graceful and elegant order of style; but the lady writes the English language with far more freedom, ease, and vigour, than the gentleman. The poetic element is mingled in her diction with far more taste and judgment. It glitters through her prose as the sunlight in the green tree – throwing its gold amongst the foliage, yet leaving it the same green, and simple, and refreshing object as before.

No – we will grant to woman no monopoly in the lighter elegancies, and presume nothing against her ability to excel in the graver qualities of authorship. We have said that Mrs Hemans was peculiarly the poetess of her countrywomen, but we do not mean to imply by this that her style is peculiarly feminine – for we do not pretend to know what a feminine style is; we thus characterised her because the sentiments she habitually expresses are those which will almost universally find a response in the minds of her countrywomen.

It seems an ungracious thing to say, but we do wish that the biographical notice of Mrs Hemans, appended to the last edition of her works, had not been written by a sister. So near a relative may be presumed, indeed, to know more of the person whose life she undertakes to narrate than any one else; but she may not know what to tell us. Her very familiarity with the subject is against her: she cannot place it at a distance from her, and regard it with a freshness of view; she does not think of recording, she does not even remember, what to her has none of the interest of novelty. A sister who should give to any impartial biographer the materials he required of her, would be found to contribute far more to our knowledge of the person whose life was written, than by holding the pen herself. Besides, a sister can have none, and show none, but sisterly feelings; and though these are very proper and amiable, we want something more.

The two or three events which we learn from this biographical notice, and which bear upon the education of *the poetess*, are

soon recorded, and they are the only class of events we feel particularly interested in. Felicia Dorothea Browne – such was the maiden name of Mrs Hemans – was born at Liverpool, 25th September 1793. She is described as distinguished "almost from her cradle by extreme beauty and precocious talents." When of the age of seven years, her father, who had been a merchant of considerable opulence, met with a reverse of fortune, and the family retired to Wales, "where for the next nine years they resided at Gwrych, near Abergele, in Denbighshire, a large old mansion, close to the sea, and shut in by a picturesque range of mountains," – a change of residence which was, at all events, highly propitious for the development of the poetic character. "In the calm seclusion of this romantic region, with ample range through the treasures of an extensive library, the young poetess passed a happy childhood, to which she would often fondly revert amidst the vicissitudes of her after-life. Here she imbibed that intense love of nature which ever afterwards 'haunted her like a passion,' and that warm attachment for the 'green land of Wales' – its affectionate, true-hearted people; their traditions, their music, and all their interesting characteristics – which she cherished to the last hours of her existence." A pleasant picture this – the large old house near the sea, and amongst mountains, with Welsh harpers and Welsh traditions, and great store of books, and the little girl ranging at will through all. This, and the picture we have of the young student conning her Shakspeare, her choicest recreation, "in a secret haunt of her own – a seat amongst the

branches of an old apple-tree – where she revelled in the treasures of the cherished volume" – are all we learn of her childhood, and all perhaps that remained to tell.

Our poetess was very soon in print. Few have commenced their life of authorship so early. In 1808 some friends, "perhaps more partial than judicious," published a collection of her poems, written at and before the age of fourteen, in a quarto volume. "Its appearance" our fair biographer tells us, "drew down the animadversions of some *self-constituted* arbiter of taste." We never heard of any critics being constituted by royal patent, or any mode of popular election – certainly not by a committee of authors. Self-constituted! why did not the lady call him a self-conceited knave, while she was about it? Just or unjust, there would have been some meaning in the phrase, at least. We suspect, for our part, that these friends, "more partial than judicious," who published the rhymes of a young girl of fourteen in a quarto volume, were themselves strangely constituted arbiters of taste.

Not long after this first publication of her poems, the next great event of her life took place – her introduction to Captain Hemans. "The young poetess was then only fifteen, in the full glow of that radiant beauty which was destined to fade so early. The mantling bloom of her cheeks was shaded by a profusion of natural ringlets, of a rich golden brown; and the ever-varying expression of her brilliant eyes gave a changeful play to her countenance, which would have made it impossible for any

painter to do justice to it." No wonder that so fair a being should excite the admiration of a gallant captain. And the love on both sides was ardent and sincere: it supported the absence of three years; for Captain Hemans, soon after their introduction, was called upon to embark with his regiment for Spain. On his return, in 1812, they were married. Of their domestic happiness, or unhappiness, nothing is said; but six years after, in 1818, we are simply told that the Captain went to Rome – and never returned. The separated pair never met again.

"To dwell on this subject," says her biographer, "would be unnecessarily painful; yet it must be stated, that nothing like a permanent separation was contemplated at the time, nor did it ever amount to more than a tacit conventional arrangement, which offered no obstacle to the frequent interchange of correspondence, nor to a constant reference to their father in all things relating to the disposal of her boys. But years rolled on – seventeen years of absence, and consequently alienation; and from this time to the hour of her death, Mrs Hemans and her husband never met again."

We are not in general anxious to pry into the domestic afflictions of any pair whom wedlock has mismatched. If we feel a little curiosity to know more than the sister has told us, in this instance, it is merely from a wish to learn how far the poetic temperament of Mrs Hemans could be assigned as the real cause of her matrimonial unhappiness. Did the Captain grow weary of the society of one whose feelings were pitched in too high a

key for him to sympathise with? – was there too much of poetry mingled with the daily food of life?

> "Men, by St Thomas! cannot live like bees."

Did he yearn for something more homely, as she, on her side, yearned for something more elevated? Had he been made to feel that he did not approach the ideal of her imagination, and that the admiration she once had given was withdrawn? Or should we say of her, in lines of her own: —

> There are hearts
> So perilously fashioned, that for them
> God's touch alone hath gentleness enough
> To waken, and not break, their thrilling strings.

Of this perhaps some future biographer may tell us. There are many passages in her poetry which show an intense longing for the sympathy of other minds; which show that, while her feelings were of a rare order for their refinement and elevation, she yet sought – what for such a one it was difficult to obtain – for the kindred sympathy of others. She could not worship her goddesses alone. This tendency of mind many of her verses indicate; and there is one sweet little poem where, if our fancy does not mislead us, she secretly reproves herself for having exacted too much in this respect from others: we do not say from any one in particular, for the verses bear reference to a brother, not a husband. Yet

some personal reminiscence, or regret of this kind, might lead to the strain of thought so beautifully expressed in the following lines: —

KINDRED HEARTS

Oh! ask not, hope not thou too much
Of sympathy below;
Few are the hearts whence one same touch
Bids the sweet fountains flow:
Few – and by still conflicting powers,
Forbidden here to meet;
Such ties would make this life of ours
Too fair for aught so fleet.

It may be that thy brother's eye
Sees not as thine, which turns
In such deep reverence to the sky
Where the rich sunset burns:
It may be that the breath of spring,
Born amidst violets lone,
A rapture o'er thy soul can bring —
A dream, to his unknown.

The tune that speaks of other times —
A sorrowful delight!
The melody of distant chimes,

The sound of waves by night;
The wind that, with so many a tone,
Some chord within can thrill —
These may have language all thine own,
To *him* a mystery still.

Yet scorn thou not, for this, the true
And steadfast love of years;
The kindly, that from childhood grew,
The faithful to thy tears!
If there be one that o'er the dead
Hath in thy grief borne part,
And watched through sickness by thy bed —
Call *his* a kindred heart!

But for those bonds all perfect made,
Wherein bright spirits blend;
Like sister-flowers of one sweet shade,
With the same breeze that bend;
For that full bliss of thought allied,
Never to mortals given —
Oh! lay thy lonely dreams aside,
Or lift them unto heaven.

We follow no further the events of her biography. We have here all that reflects a light upon the poems themselves. That Welsh life among the mountains – the little girl with her Shakspeare in the apple-tree – that beauty of fifteen, full of

poetry and enthusiasm and love – marriage – disappointment – and the living afterwards, with her children round her, in a condition worse than widowhood; – here is all the comment that her biography affords on her sweet and melancholy verse.

And how vividly the verse reflects the life! How redolent of nature is her poetry! how true her pictures of mountain, and forest, and river, and sky! It requires that the reader should have been himself a long and accurate observer of rural scenes, to follow her imagination, and feel the truth of her rapid and unpretending descriptions. It is singular how, without the least apparent effort, all the persons she brings before us are immediately localised on the green earth – trees wave around them, flowers spring at their feet, as if this were quite natural and unavoidable. How sweet a part does the quiet charm of nature take in the piece called

THE VOICE OF HOME TO THE PRODIGAL

Oh! when wilt thou return
To thy spirit's early loves?
To the freshness of the morn,
To the stillness of the groves?

The summer birds are calling
The household porch around,
And the merry waters falling

With sweet laughter in their sound.

And a thousand bright-veined flowers,
From their banks of moss and fern,
Breathe of the sunny hours —
But when wilt thou return?

Oh! thou hast wandered long
From thy home without a guide;
And thy native woodland song
In thine altered heart hath died.

Thou hast flung the wealth away,
And the glory of thy spring;
And to thee the leaves' light play
Is a long-forgotten thing.

There is something very touching in the simplicity of these pleasures, contrasted with what imagination immediately suggests of the career and the tastes of the prodigal.

One great spectacle in nature alone, seems strangely to have lost its fascination upon our poetess – she never kindled to the sea. She seemed to view it as the image only of desolation and of ruin; to have associated it only with tempests and wreck, and have seen in it only the harmless waste of troubled waters. More than once she adopts a scriptural phrase – "And there shall be no more sea," as an expression of singular joy and congratulation. We question whether a single reader of her poems has ever felt

the force of the expression as she did. The sea, next to the sky, is the grandest and most beautiful thing given to the eyes of man. But, by some perverse association, she never saw it in its natural beauty and sublimity, but looked at it always as the emblem of ruthless and destroying power. In *The Last Song of Sappho*, it is singular how much more the dread sea, into which Sappho is about to fling herself, possesses her imagination than the moral tempest within of that hapless poetess: —

> Sound on, thou dark unslumbering sea!
> Sound in thy scorn and pride!
> I ask not, *alien world*, from thee
> What my own kindred earth has still denied.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Yet glory's light hath touched my name,
> The laurel-wreath is mine —
> With a lone heart, a weary frame,
> O restless deep! I come to make them thine!
>
> Give to that crown, that burning crown,
> Place in thy darkest hold!
> Bury my anguish, my renown,
> With hidden wrecks, lost gems, and wasted gold.

And with what an indignant voice, and with what a series of harshest epithets, does she call upon the sea to deliver up its

human prey, in the fine spirited poem, called —

THE TREASURES OF THE DEEP

What hidest thou in thy treasure-caves and cells,
Thou hollow-sounding and mysterious main?
Pale glistening pearls and rainbow-coloured shells,
Bright things which gleam unrecked of and in vain!
Keep, keep thy riches, melancholy sea!
We ask not such from thee.

Yet more, the depths have more! – what wealth untold,
Far down, and shining through their stillness, lies!
Thou hast the starry gems, the burning gold,
Torn from ten thousand royal Argosies!
Sweep o'er thy spoils, thou wild and wrathful main!
Earth claims not *these* again.

Yet more, the depths have more! – thy waves have rolled
Above the cities of a world gone by!
Sand hath filled up the palaces of old,
Sea-weed o'ergrown the halls of revelry —
Dash o'er them, ocean! in thy scornful play!
Man yields them to decay.

Yet more! the billows and the depths have more!
High hearts and brave are gathered to thy breast!

They hear not now the booming waters roar,
The battle-thunders will not break their rest.
Keep thy red gold and gems, thou stormy grave!
Give back the true and brave.

Give back the lost and, lovely! – those for whom
The place was kept at board and hearth so long!
The prayer went up through midnight's breathless gloom,
And the vain yearning woke midst festal song.
Hold fast thy buried isles, thy towers o'er-thrown,
But all is not thine own.

To thee the love of woman hath gone down;
Dark flow thy tides o'er manhood's noble head —
O'er youth's bright locks, and beauty's flowery crown;
Yet must thou hear a voice – Restore the dead!
Earth shall reclaim her precious things from thee!
Restore the dead, thou sea!

But if she loved in nature, pre-eminently, the beautiful and the serene – or what she could represent as such to her imagination – it was otherwise with human life. Here the stream of thought ran always in the shade, reflecting in a thousand shapes the sadness which had overshadowed her own existence. Yet her sadness was without bitterness or impatience – it was a resigned and Christian melancholy; and if the spirit of man is represented as tossed from disappointment to disappointment, there is always a brighter and serener world behind, to receive the wanderer at last. She writes

Songs for Summer Hours, and the first is devoted to Death! and a beautiful chant it is. Death is also in Arcadia; and the first thing we meet with in the land of summer is the marble tomb with the "Et in Arcadia Ego." One might be excused for applying to herself her own charming song, —

A WANDERING FEMALE SINGER

Thou hast loved and thou hast suffered!
Unto feeling deep and strong,
Thou hast trembled like a harp's frail string —
I know it by thy song!

Thou hast loved – it may be vainly —
But well – oh! but too well —
Thou hast suffered all that woman's heart
May bear – but must not tell.

Thou hast wept and thou hast parted,
Thou hast been forsaken long;
Thou hast watch'd for steps that came not back —
I know it by thy song!

By its fond and plaintive lingering
On each word of grief so long,
Oh! thou hast loved and suffered much —
I know it by thy song!

But with this mournful spirit we have no quarrel. It is, as we have said, without a grain of bitterness; it loves to associate itself with all things beautiful in nature; it makes the rose its emblem. It does so in the following lines to

THE SHADOW OF A FLOWER

'Twas a dream of olden days,
That Art, by some strange power,
The visionary form could raise
From the ashes of a flower:

That a shadow of the rose,
By its own meek beauty bowed,
Might slowly, leaf by leaf, unclose,
Like pictures in a cloud.

. . . . .

A fair, yet mournful thing!
For the glory of the bloom
That a flush around it shed,
And the soul within, the rich perfume,
Where were *they*? – fled, all fled!

Naught but the dim, faint line

To speak of vanished hours —
Memory! what are joys of thine?
Shadows of buried flowers!

We should be disposed to dwell entirely on the shorter pieces of Mrs Hemans, but this would hardly be just. There is one of her more ambitious efforts which, at all events, seems to demand a word from us. *The Vespers of Palermo* is not perhaps the most popular, even of her longer productions – it is certainly written in what is just now the most unpopular form – yet it appears to us one of the most vigorous efforts of her genius. It has this advantage too – it can be happily alluded to without the necessity of detailing the plot – always a wearisome thing, to both the critic, and the reader: every body knows the real tragedy of the Sicilian Vespers. The drama is unpopular as a form of composition, because the written play is still considered as a production, the chief object of which is missed if it is not acted; and the acting of plays is going into desuetude. When the acting of tragedies shall be entirely laid aside, (as it bids fair to be,) – that is, as an ordinary amusement of the more refined and cultivated classes of society – and the drama shall become merely a class of literature, like all others, for private perusal – then its popularity, as a form of composition, will probably revive. For there is one order of poetry – and that the more severe and manly – which seems almost to require this form. When an author, careless of description, or not called to it by his

genius, is exclusively bent on portraying character and passion, and those deeper opinions and reflections which passion stirs from the recesses of the human mind, the drama seems the only form natural for him to employ.

The opinion we have ventured to express on the inevitable decease of the acting drama – of tragic representations – as a general amusement of an age increasing in refinement, will probably subject us, in certain quarters, to an indignant reproof. Shakspeare, and the legitimate drama! seems, with some, to have all the sacredness of a national cause. Shakspeare, by all means – Shakspeare for ever! eternally! – only we would rather read him – if we could creep up there – with little Felicia Browne, in the apple-tree. Shakspeare supports the stage – so far as it remains supported – not the stage Shakspeare. And can he support it long? Consider what sort of amusement it is which tragic representation affords – for of comedy we say nothing – consider that it must either thrill us with emotions of a most violent order, (which the civilised man in general avoids), or it becomes one of the saddest platitudes in the world. Your savage can support prolonged ennui, and delights in excitement approaching to madness; your civilised man can tolerate neither one nor the other. Now your tragedy deals largely in both. It knows no medium. Every body has felt that, whether owing to the actor or the poet, the moment the interest of the piece is no longer at its height, it becomes intolerable. You are to be either moved beyond all self-control, which is not very desirable, or you

are to sit in lamentable sufferance. In short, you are to be driven out of your senses, one way or the other. Depend upon it, it is a species of amusement which, however associated with great names – though Garrick acted, and Dr Johnson looked on – is destined, like the bull-fights of Spain, or the gladiatorial combats of old Rome, to fall before the advancing spirit of civilisation.

But to Mrs Hemans' *Vespers of Palermo*. It was not the natural bent of genius which led her to the selection of the dramatic form; and when we become thoroughly acquainted with her temperament, and the feelings she loved to indulge, we are rather surprised that she performed the task she undertook with so much spirit, and so large a measure of success, than that she falls short in some parts of her performance. Nothing can be better conceived, or more admirably sustained, than the character of Raimond de Procida. The elder Procida, and the dark revengeful Montalba, are not so successfully treated. We feel that she has designed these figures with sufficient propriety, but she has not animated them; she could not draw from within those fierce emotions which were to infuse life into them. The effort to sympathise, even in imagination, with such characters, was a violence to her nature. The noble and virtuous heroism of the younger Procida was, on the contrary, no other than the overflow of her own genuine feeling. Few modern dramas present more spirit-stirring scenes, than those in which Raimond takes the leading part. Two of those we would particularly mention – one when, on joining the patriot-conspirators, and learning the mode

in which they intended to free their country, he refuses, even for so great an object, to stain his soul with assassination and murder; and the other, where, towards the close of the piece, he is imprisoned by the more successful conspirators – is condemned to die for imputed treachery to their cause, and hears that the *battle* for his country, for which his spirit had so longed, is going forward. We cannot refrain from making a quotation from both these parts of the drama. We shall take the liberty of omitting some lines, in order to compress our extracts.

The conspirators have met, and proclaimed their intended scheme —

> *Sicilians.* Be it so!
> If one amongst us stay the avenging steel
> For love or pity, be his doom as theirs!
> Pledge we our faith to this.
>
> *Raim.* (*rushing forward indignantly.*) Our faith to *this!*
> No! I but *dreamt* I heard it: Can it be?
> My countrymen, my father! – Is it thus
> That freedom should be won? – Awake! – awake
> To loftier thoughts! – Lift up, exultingly,
> On the crowned heights, and to the sweeping winds,
> Your glorious banner! – Let your trumpet's blast
> Make the tombs thrill with echoes! Call aloud,
> Proclaim from all your hills, the land shall bear
> The stranger's yoke no longer! – What is he
> Who carries on his practised lip a smile,

Beneath his vest a dagger, which but waits
Till the heart bounds with joy, to still its beatings?
That which our nature's instinct doth recoil from,
And our blood curdle at – ay, yours and mine —
A murderer! Heard ye? – Shall that name with ours
Go down to after days?

Mont. I tell thee, youth,
Our souls are parched with agonising thirst,
Which must be quenched though death were in the draught:
We must have vengeance, for our foes have left
No other joy unblighted.

Pro. O, my son!
The time has passed for such high dreams as thine:
Thou knowest not whom we deal with. We must meet
Falsehood with wiles, and insult with revenge.
And, for our names – whate'er the deeds by which
We burst our bondage – is it not enough
That, in the chronicle of days to come,
We, through a bright "For ever," shall be called
The men who saved their country.

Raim. Many a land
Hath bowed beneath the yoke, and then arisen,
As a strong lion rending silken bonds,
And on the open field, before high heaven,
Won such majestic vengeance as hath made
Its name a power on earth.

Mon. Away! when thou dost stand
On this fair earth as doth a blasted tree,
Which the warm sun revives not, *then* return
Strong in thy desolation; but till then,
Thou art not for our purpose; – we have need
Of more unshrinking hearts.

Raim. Montalba! know,
I shrink from crime alone. Oh! if my voice
Might yet have power among you, I would say,
Associates, leaders, *be* avenged! but yet
As knights, as warriors!
Mon. Peace! Have we not borne
Th'indelible taint of contumely and chains?
We are *not* knights and warriors: Our bright crests
Have been defiled and trampled to the earth.
Boy! we are slaves – and our revenge shall be
Deep as a slave's disgrace.

Raim. Why, then, farewell:
I leave you to your counsels. What proud hopes
This hour hath blighted! – yet, whate'er betide,
It is a noble privilege to look up
Fearless in heaven's bright face – and this is mine,
And shall be still. [Exit.

Our other extract is from a later scene in the drama, which we think very happily conceived. Raimond, accused of treachery,

and condemned to die by his own father, is in chains and in prison. The day of his execution has arrived, but the Sicilians are called on to give battle before their gates; he is left alone, respited, or rather forgotten, for the present. His alternation of feeling, as he at first attempts to respond to the consolations of the priest Anselmo, and then, on hearing of the battle that is being fought for his country, breaks out into all that ardent love of glory, which was the main passion of his soul, is very admirably expressed.

Ans. But thou, my son!
Is thy young spirit mastered, and prepared
For nature's fearful and mysterious change?

Raim. Ay, father! of my brief remaining task
The least part is to die! And yet the cup
Of life still mantled brightly to my lips,
Crowned with that sparkling bubble, whose proud name
Is – glory! Oh! my soul from boyhood's morn
Hath nursed such mighty dreams! It was my hope
To leave a name, whose echo from the abyss
Of time should rise, and float upon the winds
Into the far hereafter; there to be
A trumpet-sound, a voice from the deep tomb,
Murmuring – Awake, Arise! But this is past!
Erewhile, and it had seemed enough of shame
To sleep *forgotten* in the dust; but now,
Oh God! the undying record of my grave
Will be – Here sleeps a traitor! One whose crime

Was – to deem brave men might find nobler weapons
Than the cold murderer's dagger!

Ans. O my son!
Subdue these troubled thoughts! Thou wouldst not change
Thy lot for theirs, o'er whose dark dreams will hang
The avenging shadows, which the blood-stained soul
Doth conjure from the dead!

Raim. Thou'rt right. I would not.
Yet 'tis a weary task to school the heart,
Ere years or griefs have tamed its fiery spirit
Into that still and passive fortitude
Which is but learned from suffering. Would the hour
To hush these passionate throbbings were at hand!

Ans. It will not be to-day. The foe hath reached
Our gates, and all Palermo's youth, and all
Her warrior men, are marshalled and gone forth.
Thy father leads them on.

Raim. (*starting up.*) They are gone forth!
my father leads them on!
All – all Palermo's youth! No! *one* is left,
Shut out from glory's race! They are gone forth!
Ay, now the soul of battle is abroad —
It burns upon the air! The joyous winds
Are tossing warrior-plumes, the proud white foam
Of battle's roaring billows! On my sight

The vision bursts – it maddens! 'tis the flash,
The lightning-shock of lances, and the cloud
Of rushing arrows, and the broad full blaze
Of helmets in the sun! Such things are
Even now – and I am here!

Ans. Alas, be calm!
To the same grave ye press – thou that dost pine
Beneath a weight of chains, and they that rule
The fortunes of the fight.

Raim. Ay, *thou* canst feel
The calm thou wouldst impart, for unto thee
All men alike, the warrior and the slave,
Seem, as thou say'st, but pilgrims, pressing on
To the same bourne.

Vittoria, who had taken a leading part in the conspiracy, now rushes in, bringing the intelligence that the Sicilians are worsted – are in flight. Procida still strives —

But all in vain! The few that breast the storm,
With Guido and Montalba, by his side,
Fight but for graves upon the battle-field.

Raim. And I am *here*! Shall there be power, O God!
In the roused energies of fierce despair.
To burst my heart – and not to rend my chains?

Vittoria, however, gives orders for his release, and he rushes forth to the field, where he turns the tide of battle, and earns that glorious death he sighed for.

The failure of the play at Covent Garden theatre was attributed, amongst the friends of the authoress, to the indifferent acting of the lady who performed the part of Constance. In justice to the actress, we must confess she had a most difficult part to deal with. There is not a single speech set down for Constance, which, we think, the most skilful recitation could make effective. The failure of Mrs Hemans, in this part of the drama, is not very easily accounted for. Constance is a gentle, affectionate spirit, in love with the younger Procida, and the unfortunate cause of the suspicion that falls upon him of being a traitor. It is a character which, in her lyrical effusions, she would have beautifully portrayed. But we suppose that the exclusion from her favourite haunts of nature – the inability of investing the grief of her heroine in her accustomed associations of woods, and fields, and flowers – the confinement of her imagination to what would be suitable to the *boards* of a theatre – embarrassed and cramped her powers. Certain it is, she seems quite at a loss here to express a strain of feeling which, on other occasions, she has poured out with singular fluency and force. Constance has no other manner of exhibiting her distress but swooning or dreaming, or thinking she must have been dreaming, and recovering herself to the remembrance of what no mortal so situated could ever have forgotten – the most common, and, to

our taste, one of the most unfortunate expedients that dramatists and novelists have recourse to. We are loath to quote any thing half so uninteresting as instances of this practice; we shall content ourselves with giving, in a note below, two brief passages to exemplify what we mean.[1]

It ought to be borne in remembrance, however, that the *Vespers of Palermo*, although not the "first" with respect to publication, was the first written of Mrs Hemans' dramatic works. It was produced in solitude, and away from the bustle of theatres, and, be it also confessed, probably with a very scanty knowledge of what stage-representation required. Indeed, the result proved this to be the case. The *Siege of Valencia*, written on a different principle, although probably even less adapted for stage representation, possesses loftier claims as a composition,

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[1] Vittoria has told Constance that Raimond is to die; she then leaves her with the priest Anselmo —Con. (Endeavouring to rouse herself.) Did she not sayThat some one was to die? Have I not heardSome fearful tale? Who said that there should restBlood on my soul? What blood? I never boreHatred, kind father! unto aught that breathes;Raimond doth know it well. Raimond! High Heaven!It bursts upon me now! and he must die!For my sake – e'en for mine!Is it very probable that a person in the situation of Constance should have to go this round of associations to recall what had just been told her, that her lover was to be tried for his life?Constance, in order to save him by surrendering herself, rushes to the tribunal, where this mock trial is taking place. Their judges sentence both. Constance swoons in the arms of Raimond, and then ensues this piece of *unaffecting* bewilderment.Con. (slowly recovering.)There was a voice which call'd me. Am I notA spirit freed from earth? – Have I not pass'dThe bitterness of death?Ans. Oh, haste, away!Con. Yes, Raimond calls me – (There he stands beside her!)He, too, is releasedFrom his cold bandage. We are free at last,And all is well – away![She is led out by Anselmo.

and, as a poem, is decidedly superior. Its pervading fault consists in its being pitched on too high a key. All the characters talk in heroics – every sentiment is strained to the utmost; and the prevailing tone of the author's mind characterises the whole. We do not say that it is deficient in nature – it overflows alike with power and tenderness; but its nature is too high for the common purposes of humanity. The wild, stern enthusiasm of the priest – the inflexibility of the father – the wavering of the mother between duty and affection – the heroic devotion of the gentle Ximena, are all well brought out; but there is a want of individuality – the want of that, without which elaboration for the theatre is vain, and with which, compositions of very inferior merit often attract attention, and secure it.

Passing over *Sebastian of Portugal*, and the two or three sketches in the *Scenes and Hymns of Life*, as of minor importance, *De Chatillon* is the only other regular drama that Mrs Hemans subsequently attempted. Unfortunately for her, the *Vespers*, although long prior in point of composition, had not been brought out when the *Siege of Valencia* was written; and, consequently, she could not benefit by the fate and failure which was destined for that drama. This is much to be lamented, for *De Chatillon*, as a play, far exceeds either in power and interest. The redundancies in imagery and description, the painting instead of acting, which were the weaker side of its precursors, were here corrected. It is unfortunate that it wanted the benefit of her last corrections, as it was not published till some years after her death,

and from the first rough draft – the amended one, which had been made from it, having been unfortunately lost. But, imperfect in many respects as it may be found to be, it is beyond compare the best and most successful composition of the author in this department. Without stripping her language of that richness and poetic grace which characterises her genius, or condescending to a single passage of mean baldness, so commonly mistaken by many modern dramatists as essentially necessary to the truth of dialogue, she has in this attempt preserved adherence to reality, amid scenes allied to romance; brevity and effect, in situations strongly alluring to amplification; and, in her delineation of some of the strongest as well as the finest emotions of the heart, she has exhibited a knowledge of nature's workings, remarkable alike for minuteness and truth.

When we consider the doubtful success which attended the only drama of Mrs Hemans which was brought out, we cannot wonder that she latterly abandoned this species of writing, and confined herself to what she must have felt as much more accordant with her own impulses. The most laboured of all her writings was *The Forest Sanctuary*, and it would appear that, in her own estimation, it was considered her best. Not so we. It has many passages of exquisite description, and it breathes throughout an exalted spirit; but withal it is monotonous in sentiment, and possesses not the human interest which ought to have attached to it, as a tale of suffering. To us *The Last Constantine*, which appears to have attracted much less attention,

is in many respects a finer and better poem. Few things, indeed, in our literature, can be quoted as more perfect than the picture of heroic and Christian courage, which, amid the ruins of his empire, sustained the last of the Cæsars. The weight of the argument is sustained throughout. The reader feels as if breathing a finer and purer atmosphere, above the low mists and vapours of common humanity; and he rises from the perusal of the poem alike with an admiration of its hero and its author.

The Last Constantine may be considered as the concluding great effort of Mrs Hemans, in what of her writings may be said to belong to the classical school. She seems here first to have felt her own power, and, leaving precept and example, and the leading-strings of her predecessors, to have allowed her muse to soar adventurously forth. The *Tales and Historic Scenes*, the *Sceptic*, *Dartmoor*, and *Modern Greece*, are all shaped according to the same model – the classical. The study of modern German poetry, and of Wordsworth, changed, while it expanded, her views; and the *Forest Sanctuary* seems to have been composed with great elaboration, doubtless, while in this transition state. In matter it is too flimsy and etherial for a tale of life; it has too much sentiment and too little action. But some things in it it would be difficult to rival. The scenery of Southern America is painted with a gorgeousness which reminds us of the Isle of Palms and its fairy bowers; and the death and burial at sea is imbued with a serene and soul-subduing beauty.

Diminishing space warns us to betake ourselves again to the

lyrics and shorter pieces, where so much poetry "of purest ray serene" lies scattered. Of these we prefer such as are apparently the expressions of spontaneous feelings of her own to those which are built upon some tale or legend. It happens too, unfortunately, that in the latter case we have first to read the legend or fable in prose, and then to read it again in verse. This gives something of weariness to the *Lays of Many Lands*. Still less fortunate, we think, is the practice Mrs Hemans indulges in of ushering in a poem of her own by a long quotation – a favourite stanza, perhaps – of some celebrated poet. We may possibly read the favourite stanza twice, and feel reluctant to proceed further. For instance, she quotes the beautiful and well-known passage from Childe Harold upon the spring, ending with —

> I turned from all she brought to all she could not bring;

and on another occasion, that general favourite, beginning —

> And slight, withal, may be the things which bring;

and then proceeds to enlarge upon the same sentiments. Her own strain that follows is good – but not *so* good. Is it wise to provoke the comparison? – and does it not give a certain frivolity, and the air of a mere exercise, to the verse which only repeats, and modifies, and *varies*, so to speak, the melody that has been already given? Or if the quotation set out with is looked on as a mere prelude, is it good policy to run the risk of the prelude being more interesting than the strain itself? The beautiful passage from Southey —

They sin who tell us love can die, &c.,

is too long to be quoted as merely a key-note to what is to follow, and is too good to be easily surpassed.

But this is a trifling remark, and hardly deserving of even the little space we have given to it. It is more worthy of observation, that Mrs Hemans, a reader and admirer of German poetry, contrived to draw a deep inspiration from this noble literature, without any disturbance to her principles of taste. A careful perusal of her works, by one acquainted with the lyrical poetry of Germany, will prove how well and how wisely she had studied that poetry – drawing from it just that deeper spirit of reflection which would harmonise with her own mind, without being tempted to imitate what, either in thought or in manner, would have been foreign to her nature.

We fancy we trace something of this Teutonic inspiration in the poem, amongst others, that follows: —

THE SILENT MULTITUDE

A mighty and a mingled throng
Were gathered in one spot;
The dweller, of a thousand homes —
Yet midst them voice was not.

The soldier and his chief were there —

The mother and her child:
The friends, the sisters of one hearth —
None spoke – none moved – none smiled.

There lovers met, between whose lives
Years had swept darkly by;
After that heart-sick hope deferred,
They met – but silently.

You might have heard the rustling leaf,
The breeze's faintest sound,
The shiver of an insect's wing,
On that thick-peopled ground.

Your voice to whispers would have died
For the deep quiet's sake;
Your tread the softest moss have sought,
Such stillness not to break.

What held the countless multitude
Bound in that spell of peace?
How could the ever-sounding life
Amid so many cease?

Was it some pageant of the air,
Some glory high above,
That linked and hushed those human souls
In reverential love?

Or did some burdening passion's weight
Hang on their indrawn breath?
Awe – the pale awe that freezes words?
Fear – the strong fear of death?

A mightier thing – Death, Death himself,
Lay on each lonely heart!
Kindred were there – yet hermits all,
Thousands – but each apart.

In any notice of Mrs Hemans' works, not to mention *The Records of Woman* would seem an unaccountable omission. Both the subject, and the manner in which it is treated especially characterise our poetess. Of all these *Records* there is not one where the picture is not more or less pleasing, or drawn with more or less power and fidelity. Estimated according to sheer literary merit, it would perhaps be impossible to give the preference to any one of them. Judging by the peculiar pleasure which its perusal gave us, we should select, for our favourite, *The Switzer's Wife*. Werner Stauffacher was one of the three confederates of the field of Grutli. He had been marked out by the Austrian bailiff as a fit subject for pillage; but it was to the noble spirit of his wife that he owed the final resolution he took to resist the oppressor of his country. The whole scene is brought before us with singular distinctness. It is a beautiful evening in the Alpine valley, —

For Werner sat beneath the linden tree,
That sent its lulling whispers through his door,
Even as man sits, whose heart alone would be
With some deep care, and thus can find no more
Th' accustomed joy in all which evening brings
Gathering a household with her quiet wings.

His wife stood hushed before him, sad, yet mild
In her beseeching mien, – he marked it not.
The silvery laughter of his bright-haired child
Rang from the greensward round the sheltered spot,
But seemed unheard; until at last the boy
Raised from his heaped up flowers a glance of joy,

And met his father's face; but then a change
Passed swiftly o'er the brow of infant glee,
And a quiet sense of something dimly strange
Brought him from play to stand beside the knee
So often climbed, and lift his loving eyes,
That shone through clouds of sorrowful surprise.

Then the proud bosom of the strong man shook;
But tenderly his babe's fair mother laid
Her hand on his, and with a pleading look
Through tears half-quivering, o'er him bent and said,
"What grief, dear friend, hath made thy heart its prey,
That thou shouldst turn thee from our love away?

"It is too sad to see thee thus, my friend!

Mark'st thou the wonder on thy boy's fair brow,
Missing the smile from thine? Oh, cheer thee! bend
To his soft arms, unseal thy thoughts e'en now!
Thou dost not kindly to withhold the share
Of tried affection in thy secret care."

He looked up into that sweet earnest face,
But sternly, mournfully: not yet the band
Was loosened from his soul.

He then tells how the oppressor's envious eye "had been upon his heritage," and to-morrow eve might find him in chains. The blood leaves her cheek, and she leans back on the linden stem, but only for a moment; the free Alpine spirit wakes within her —

And she that ever through her home had moved
With the meek thoughtfulness and quiet smile
Of woman, calmly loving and beloved
And timid in her happiness the while,
Stood brightly forth, and steadfastly, that hour —
Her clear glance kindling into sudden power.

Ay, pale she stood, but with an eye of light,
And took her fair child to her holy breast,
And lifted her soft voice, that gathered might
As it found language: – "Are we thus oppressed?
Then must we rise upon our mountain-sod,
And man must arm, and woman call on God!

"I know what thou wouldst do; – and be it done!
Thy soul is darkened with its fears for me.
Trust me to heaven, my husband; this, thy son,
The babe whom I have borne thee, must be free!
And the sweet memory of our pleasant hearth
May well give strength – if aught be strong on earth.

"Thou hast been brooding o'er the silent dread
Of my desponding tears; now lift once more,
My hunter of the hills, thy stately head,
And let thine eagle glance my joy restore!
I can bear all but seeing *thee* subdued —
Take to thee back thine own undaunted mood.

"Go forth beside the waters, and along
The chamois' paths, and through the forests go;
And tell in burning words thy tale of wrong
To the brave hearts that midst the hamlets glow,
God shall be with thee, my beloved! – away!
Bless but thy child and leave me – I can pray!"

It is ever thus with all her women, – gentle, courageous, full of self-devotion, and, alas! of sorrow and suffering. This is her ideal of woman, from which she rarely departs – a heart, overflowing with tenderest affection – ill-requited – yet refusing to receive any earthly boon as a substitute for the returned affection it seeks. Fame is no compensation —

Away! to me, a woman, bring
Sweet waters from affection's spring.

Genius when she sings to Love is made to say —

They crown me with the glistening crown,
Borne from a deathless tree;
I hear the pealing music of renown —
O Love, forsake me not!
Mine were a lone dark lot,
Bereft of thee!
They tell me that my soul can throw
A glory o'er the earth;
From thee, from *thee*, is caught that golden glow!
Shed by thy gentle eyes,
It gives to flower and skies
A bright new birth!

Genius singing to Love.

It is not often we find the superstitions of dark and ignorant ages dealt with in so gentle and agreeable a manner as by Mrs Hemans. She seizes, in common with others, the poetic aspect these present, but diffuses over them, at the same time, a refinement of sentiment gathered entirely from her own feelings. A subject which from another pencil would have been disagreeable and offensive to us, is made by her graceful touches to win upon our imagination. Witness the poem called *The Wood Walk and Hymn*; we will quote the commencement of it.

WOOD WALK AND HYMN

"Move along these shades
In gentleness of heart – with gentle hand
Touch – for there is a spirit in the woods."

Wordsworth

FATHER – CHILD

Child.– There are the aspens with their silvery leaves
Trembling, for ever trembling; though the lime
And chestnut boughs, and these long arching sprays
Of eglantine, hang still, as if the wood
Were all one picture!

Father.– Hast thou heard, my boy,
The peasant's legend of that quivering tree?

Child.– No, father; doth he say the fairies dance
Amidst the branches?

Father.– Oh! a cause more deep,
More solemn far, the rustic doth assign
To the strange restlessness of those wan leaves!

The cross, he deems, the blessed cross, whereon
The meek Redeemer bow'd his head to death,
Was framed of aspen wood; and since that hour,
Through all its race the pale tree hath sent down
A thrilling consciousness, a secret awe,
Making them tremulous, when not a breeze
Disturbs the airy thistle down, or shakes
The light lines of the shining gossamer.

An eminent critic in the *Edinburgh Review* has spoken of the neatness and perfect finish which characterise female writers in general, and Mrs Hemans in particular. Now, these qualities imply a certain terseness and concentration of style, which is no more a peculiarity of all authoresses than of all authors, and which we should not pronounce to be peculiarly characteristic of Mrs Hemans' poetry. To us it often appears wanting in this very conciseness; we occasionally wish that some lines and verses were excluded – not because they are faulty in themselves, but because they weaken the effect, and detract from the vigour of the whole: we wish the verses, in short, were more closely packed together, so that the commencement and the close, which are generally both good, could be brought a little nearer to each other. It is not so much a redundancy of expression, as of images and illustrations, that we have sometimes to complain of in Mrs Hemans. She uses two of these where one would not only suffice, but do the work much better. There is a very pleasing little poem, called *The Wandering Wind*: we will quote – first, because it

is thus pleasing; and, secondly, because we think it would have been rendered still more so had there been somewhat more of concentration and terseness in the style. The lines which we have printed in italics, and which contain the pith and marrow of the whole, would then have struck upon the ear with more distinctness and prominence.

THE WANDERING WIND

The wind, the wandering wind
Of the golden summer eves —
Whence is the thrilling magic
Of its tones amongst the leaves?
Oh! is it from the waters,
Or from the long tall grass?
Or is it from the hollow rocks
Through which its breathings pass?

Or is it from the voices
Of all in one combined,
That it wins the tone of mastery?
The wind, the wandering wind!
No, no! the strange, sweet accents
That with it come and go,
They are not from the osiers,
Nor the fir trees whispering low.

They are not of the waters,
Nor of the cavern'd hill,
'Tis the human love within us
that gives the power to thrill.
They touch the links of memory
Around our spirits twined,
And we start, and weep, and tremble,
To the wind, the wandering wind!

The verses beginning "I dream of all things free" might also be cited as an instance of this tendency to over-amplify – a tendency which seems the result of a great affluence of poetical imagery. This would be a more powerful poem merely by being made shorter. We wait too long, and the imagination roves too far, before we arrive at the concluding lines, which contain all the point and significance of the piece: —

"My heart *in chains* is bleeding,
And I dream of all things free."

Of the measures and the melody of a lyrical poet something is expected to be said. But what we feel we have chiefly to thank Mrs Hemans for here is, that, in the search after novelty and variety of metre, she has made so few experiments upon our ear, and that she has not disdained to write with correctness and regularity. She has not apparently laboured after novelties of this kind, but has adopted that verse into which her thoughts

spontaneously ran. An author who does this is not very likely to select a rhythm, or measure, which is incongruous with the subject-matter of his poem; nor, do we think, could many instances of such a fault be detected in Mrs Hemans.

We will close our extracts with a strain that fairly exemplifies the serene and lucid current of sentiment, and the genuine natural pathos, of our poetess. It is thus she makes the Hebrew mother sing to her first-born, whom she has devoted to the Lord.

> Alas! my boy, thy gentle grasp is on me;
> The bright tears quiver in thy pleading eyes;
> And now fond thoughts arise,
> And silver cords again to earth have won me,
> And like a vine thou claspest my full heart —
> How shall I hence depart?
>
> How the lone paths retrace where thou wert playing
> So late along the mountains at my side?
> And I, in joyous pride,
> By every place of flowers my course delaying,
> Wove, e'en as pearls, the lilies round thy hair
> Beholding thee so fair!
>
> And oh! the home whence thy bright smile hath parted,
> Will it not seem as if the sunny day
> Turn'd from its door away!
> While through its chambers wandering, weary-hearted,
> I languish for thy voice, which past me still

Went like a singing rill?

Under the palm-tree thou no more shalt meet me,
When from the fount at evening I return,
With the full water urn;
Nor will thy sleep's low dove-like breathings greet me,
As midst the silence of the stars I wake,
And watch for thy dear sake.

And thou, will slumber's dewy cloud fall round thee,
Without thy mother's hand to smooth thy bed?
Wilt thou not vainly spread
Thine arms when darkness as a veil hath wound thee,
To fold my neck, and lift up, in thy fear,
A cry which none shall hear?

What have I said, my child? Will *He* not hear thee,
Who the young ravens heareth from their nest?
Shall He not guard thy rest,
And in the hush of holy midnight near thee,
Breathe o'er thy soul, and fill its dreams with joy?
Thou shalt sleep soft, my boy.

I give thee to thy God – the God that gave thee
A well-spring of deep gladness to my heart!
And, precious as thou art,
And pure as dew of Hermon, He shall have thee,
My own, my beautiful, my undefiled!
And thou shalt be His child.

"Therefore farewell! I go – my soul may fail me,
As the hart panteth for the water brooks,
Yearning for thy sweet looks.
But thou, my first-born, droop not, nor bewail me,
Thou in the Shadow of the Rock shalt dwell,
The Rock of Strength – Farewell!"

We must now draw to a conclusion. One great and pervading excellence of Mrs Hemans, as a writer, is her entire dedication of her genius and talents to the cause of healthy morality and sound religion. The sentiment may be, on occasion, somewhat refined; it may be too delicate, in some instances, for the common taste, but never is it mawkish or morbid. Never can it be construed into a palliative of vice – never, when followed out to its limits, will it be found to have led from the paths of virtue. For practical purposes, we admit that her exemplars are not seldom too ideal and picturesque. The general fault of her poetry consists in its being rather, if we may use the term, too *romantical*. We have a little too much of banners in churches, and flowers on graves, – of self-immolated youths, and broken-hearted damsels; – too frequent a reference to the Syrian plains, and knights in panoply, and vigils of arms, as mere illustrations of the noble in character, or the heroic in devotion. Situations are adduced as applicable to general conduct, which have only occurred, or could only have occurred, in particular states of society, and are never likely, from existing circumstances, to occur again. Far better this,

however, than a contrary fault; for it is the purpose of poetry to elevate, and not to repress. Admitting that the effervescence is adventitious, still it is of virtuous growth, and proceeds from no distortion of principle. If not the reflection of human nature as it actually is, it is the delineation of the *fata morgana* of a noble mind – of something that occurs to us "in musings high," and which we sigh to think of as of something loftier and better, to which that nature would willingly aspire. We can readily conceive, that to a woman of the exquisite taste possessed by Mrs Hemans, any attempt at the startling or *bizarre*, either in conception or subject, was a thing especially to be avoided. We do not mean to imply by this, that, as every true poet must have, she had not a manner of her own. To this honour, no author of our day has higher or less equivocal claims. She knew what to admire in others, but she felt that she had a mission of her own. To substantiate this, we have only to suppose her productions blotted out from our literature, and then remark whether or not any blank be left; for, wherever we have originality, we have accession. We admit that originality is of all shades and grades, from a Burns to a Bloomfield, from a Crabbe to a Clare – still the names of the second and the fourth are those of true poets, as well as those of the authors of "The Cottar's Saturday Night," and "Sir Eustace Gray," – Parnassus, as Dr Johnson observes, having its "flowers of transient fragrance, as well as its cedars of perennial growth, and its laurels of eternal verdure." In the case of Mrs Hemans, this question is set at rest, from her having

become the founder of a school, and that only eclipsed in the number of its adherents and imitators by those of Scott, Byron, and Wordsworth. In America especially has this been the case; a great part of the recent poetry in that country – more particularly that of its female writers – has been little more than an echo of her *Records of Woman*, and *Lays of Many Lands*, and lyrical strains; and, from Mrs Sigourney – "the American Mrs Hemans" – downwards, there are only corroborative proofs of a Cisatlantic fact, that no copyist, however acute and faithful, has ever yet succeeded in treading on the kibes of his master, far less of outstripping him in the struggle for excellence.

Like all original writers, Mrs Hemans has her own mode and her own province. In reading the poetry of Wordsworth, we feel as if transferred to the mountainous solitudes, broken only by the scream of the eagle and the dash of the cataract, where human life is indicated but by the shieling in the sheltered holm, and the shepherd boy, lying wrapt up in his plaid by the furze-bush, with his "little flock at feed beside him." By Scott we are placed amid the men and things of departed ages. The bannered castle looms in the distance, and around it are the tented plain – the baron and his vassals – all that pertains to "ladye-love and war, renown and knightly worth." We have the cathedral-pomp, and the dark superstition, and the might that stands in the place of right, – all the fire and air, with little of the earth and water of our elemental nature. The lays of Wilson reflect the patriarchal calm of life in its best, and purest, and happiest aspects – or, indeed,

of something better than mere human life, as the image of the islet in the sunset mirror of the lake is finer and fairer than the reality. Coleridge's inspiration is emblemed by ruins in the silver and shadow of moonlight, – quaint, and queer, and fantastic, haunted by the whooping owl, and screamed over by the invisible nighthawk. Campbell reminds of the Portland vase, exquisite in taste and materials, but recalling always the conventionalities of art.

When placed beside, and contrasted with her great cotemporaries, the excellences of Mrs Hemans are sufficiently distinct and characteristic. There can be no doubt of this, more especially in her later and best writings, in which she makes incidents elucidate feelings. In this magic circle – limited it may be – she has no rival. Hence, from the picturesqueness, the harmony, the delicacy and grace, which her compositions display, she is peculiarly the poet of her own sex. Her pictures are not more distinguished for accuracy of touch than for elegance of finish. Every thing is clear, and defined, and palpable; nothing is enveloped in accommodating haze; and she never leaves us, as is the trick of some late aspiring and mystical versifiers, to believe that she must be profound because she is unintelligible. She is ever alive to the dignity of her calling, and the purity of her sex. Aware of the difficulties of her art, she aspired towards excellence with untiring perseverance, and improved herself by the study of the best models, well knowing that few things easy of attainment can be worth much. Her taste thus

directed her to appropriate and happy subjects; and hence it has been, as with all things of sterling value, that her writings have not been deteriorated by time. They were not, like the ice-palace of the Empress Catherine, thrown up to suit the whim of the season, or directed to subjects of mere occasional interest, to catch the gale of a passing popularity. Mrs Hemans built on surer foundations, and with less perishable materials. The consequence is, that her reputation has been steadily on the increase. Of no one modern writer can it be affirmed with less hesitation, that she has become an English classic; nor, until human nature becomes very different from what it now is, can we imagine the least probability that the music of her lays will cease to soothe the ear, or the beauty of her sentiment to charm the gentle heart.

ON THE MISERIES OF IRELAND, AND THEIR REMEDIES

In resuming this subject, we feel that we cannot be justly accused of going out of our own province, or of meddling with matters which concern only our neighbours. In the present state of this country, we not only recognise the people of Ireland as our fellow-subjects, but we practically feel, as we ought to do, that their miseries are reflected upon us. This might be illustrated in various ways, but there is one illustration which comes peculiarly home to all people of this country at this moment. Much has been said and written, of late years, on the sanitary condition of the great towns of this country, and on the importance of thorough cleansing and draining, as a preservative against the epidemic diseases which have so often lately afflicted, and in some instances nearly decimated, our population; and when we state that, in the neighbouring city of Glasgow, during last year only, the mortality was one in nineteen of the population, and that the number of deaths exceeded the number of births by more than sixteen thousand, – that the mortality from fever, in particular, is known very generally to fall upon those who, in a worldly point of view, are the most valuable lives in society, and that a new and still more appalling epidemic is already among us – we have surely said enough to show that there cannot be a

more important or serious object of contemplation, or of inquiry, than the means of purification and sanitary improvement of such graves of the human race, as so many parts of that and others of our great towns are at this moment.

It is equally certain that "atmospheric impurity" has been justly charged as the most general and effective of all the causes, which so depress the vital energies as to dispose the living human body to suffer, and sink under, such visitations of Providence.

But, in order to understand how this prolific cause of evil acts on the human race, it is necessary not only to look to the draining, sweeping, and cleaning of streets, courts, and closes, but to enter the houses, and attend to the "conditions of existence" of their inmates, in the lowest and most unhealthy portions of all our great towns. When we do this, we find that, in all those houses which are the chief seats of epidemic disease, there are congregated together in small and dirty rooms such masses of destitute human beings, usually ill-clothed and inadequately protected from cold, that it is mere mockery to speak of improving the atmosphere of their rooms, especially during the night, by any appliances to the streets or courts from which they are entered, or even by any means of ventilation to which, at least in cold weather, the inmates will submit.

It is even in vain that we issue directions for the cleansing of the rooms, or regulations, in the case of lodging-houses, for limiting the number of persons to be taken into them, or that we form model lodging-houses, in which a certain number of

persons may be decently accommodated. All such measures have a good effect on a certain number of the people; but those among whom the epidemic diseases are always found making most progress have no means of availing themselves of these advantages: they can no more pay for clean or well-aired rooms than they could pay for any of the luxuries of civilised life. "Their state of destitution binds them firmly to one description of locality," and forces them to congregate together in masses, necessarily implying such a contamination of the atmosphere in which they live, as no such measures can counteract for six hours.

Now, if we inquire further into the history of the inhabitants who live crowded together in this miserable way, we shall find, no doubt, a certain number, in every great town, in whom this state of destitution is the result of disease, death of relations, or personal profligacy; and of the best means to be adopted to limit the evils resulting from these causes, we do not propose to speak at present, only observing that they may be and are met much more effectually in some countries and some towns than in others. But we maintain, also, with perfect confidence, from much personal observation and many inquiries, that at this moment, in all the great towns of this country, the most numerous class of the destitute poor, among whom epidemic diseases prevail – from whom they extend to other ranks of society, and by whose illness or death their families become a burden on all other ranks – are not more profligate or less deserving of compassion and assistance than the great body of our labouring classes, and

have no distinctive peculiarity but this, that *they are Irish*.[2] Many of them have had possession of bits of land, others have been labourers, or are families of labourers: they have formed part of that enormous immigration of human beings, from Ireland to Britain, which has been going on for many years, which has given Irish labourers to all our public works, has formed an Irish quarter in every one of our great towns, and has impressed all the promoters of our schemes of philanthropy with the intimate conviction, that "if we would cut off the sources of mendicity and misery, we must *first cut off Ireland*;" *i. e.*, looking on the Irish as fellow-subjects, if we wish to perform towards them, or towards all who suffer in common with them, the great Christian duty of charity, we must endeavour to ascertain and counteract, in Ireland itself, whatever causes have swelled that flood of poverty and destitution which has been so prolific of evils to us.

Now, without entering on any abstruse discussions, either metaphysical or economical, we think it quite possible to state certain principles, drawn from observations of human nature, and generalised in the same manner as any general truths in physical science, by which the phenomenon in question may be explained; and the only truly effective remedies that can be devised for the present peculiarly miserable condition of Ireland must be applied and regulated.

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[2] The numbers of Irish in the fever wards of the Royal Infirmary Edinburgh, in 1847, were, to the number of native Scotch, as 100 to 38; and in the fever hospitals of Glasgow, as 100 to 62; and the number of Irish were to the number of English in those wards, in both towns, as 100 to less than 2.

In the present state of that country, all her peculiar sufferings may be ranked under the single head of redundant population, or, what is the same thing, an overstocked labour market, – a population greater than is required for all the works, productive or unproductive, for which the possessors of capital, or the richer classes generally, are willing to pay; and, in consequence, great numbers of the lower classes whose employment is precarious, whose wages are scanty, whose mode of life is irregular and debased, who are continually liable to disease from poor living and insufficient clothing, and whose sufferings under disease and destitution are greater, and extend their effects more among the higher classes in their own country, and among neighbouring nations – England, Scotland, even America – than those of any other nation in Europe. As long as this miserable condition of the Irish poor exists, it must be regarded both as a national disgrace, indicating that, notwithstanding the boasted excellence of our constitution, the British government is really less effective as regards one-third of its subjects, in securing the main object of all governments, *ut cives feliciter vivant*, than that of any other civilised country.

Now, whatever secondary causes for a redundant population may be assigned, all who attend carefully to the subject must admit that the great, primary, and fundamental cause for it in all countries is, the power of reproduction granted by nature to human beings, and which is capable of multiplying the species more rapidly than the means of their subsistence can be

increased.

If it be true that this is a general law of human nature, and yet that, in other countries, where ample time and opportunity have been afforded for similar indications of redundant population to show themselves, these are altogether absent, the first question for consideration is not, why are not the resources of Ireland more developed, but why has not the population accommodated itself better to the resources that exist? Comparing Ireland with other countries long inhabited, we find that in many others, – viz. in Switzerland, in many districts of England, in Sweden, Norway, &c., – although the resources of the country and the demand for labour are small, the population has accommodated itself to them; it has remained nearly stationary for ages, or has gradually increased only as the productions of the country and the demand for labour extended; and the miseries of redundant population are comparatively unknown.

Continuing this line of inquiry, we observe that the most powerful and the only desirable check on population, by which it is habitually restrained from passing the limits which the demand for labour may be regarded as imposing, is that to which political economists give the name of *moral restraint*, by which we know that men and women, in all ranks of society, may frequently, and, to a certain degree, uniformly limit the reproduction of the species greatly within the bounds of its possible increase, rather than allow their progeny to incur any imminent risk of descent in the scale of society, and of abject destitution.

If we next inquire what are the circumstances in which this beneficial limitation on our population operates most efficiently, and what are those which counteract its influence, we shall find distinctly and unequivocably – whether we limit our observations to individuals, where we can assure ourselves of the most influential motives of conduct, or extend our views to large communities, and so avoid the fallacies attending partial collections of facts – that the only security for the existence of moral restraint is the habit of comfort, and the feeling of artificial wants which that habit gradually imposes on the human mind; and that those who are brought up in a state of destitution, who are themselves strangers to that habit and feeling in early life, hardly ever look forward to the means of securing the supply of these wants for their children, and yield to the instincts of nature, as to the propagation of their species, almost as blindly and recklessly as animals do.

If this be so, it is obvious that the first subject for consideration, as to the social state of any country, and the only means by which we can hope to avert the evils, which the known tendency of human nature to multiply more rapidly than the means of its subsistence would otherwise involve, is to extend and secure the habit of comfort among the poorer classes of society, and preserve them from sinking into those habits of alternate physical suffering and reckless indulgence, which abject destitution implies. And we have the more confidence in this conclusion, as it is in strict accordance with the distinct,

authoritative, and frequently repeated injunction of Scripture, as to the duty of those who have the means, to supply the wants of the poor.

This being so, the question as to the means of preventing or correcting the evils of redundant population in any country, resolves itself simply into the question, how the lower ranks of society there may be best and most permanently preserved in habits of comfort? And this question, likewise, is held to be sufficiently decided by experience.

A moment's reflection is enough to show that there can be no claim on the higher ranks in any country to place the poor —*i. e.*, those who are unable to work from age, sex, or infirmity, or who are unable to find work – on a better footing than the lowest of those who can maintain themselves by labour, and that any such attempt would speedily tend to disorder and do injury to the whole frame of society, and especially to the working classes; but it is confidently maintained, that a country in which these classes are regularly and uniformly preserved, by the contributions of the higher ranks, from falling into lower habits than those which prevail among the poorest of the people who maintain themselves by regular labour, – is also that in which the population will adapt itself most strictly to the demand for labour – remaining, if necessary for this purpose, quite stationary for ages together.

There are different modes in which the contributions of the rich for these purposes have been received and applied; but it may be stated with perfect confidence, as the result of experience,

that the only truly and uniformly effectual means is, to give them the security and uniformity of a legal enactment. For several ages, the general mode throughout Europe was through the intervention of the Christian church, for "the distribution of alms and food by the clergy was not merely a voluntary charity, but was a legal obligation. It was a rule of ecclesiastical discipline throughout Europe, and was a condition expressed in all the grants by which they held their possessions, and in every appropriation of benefices to the regular orders." The maintenance of the religious houses was thus the poor-law of the Middle Ages; and when their property was alienated, the necessity of another law, to secure the same object, soon became manifest throughout the greater part of Europe.

We need not inquire how it has happened that no such law for the benefit of the poor has succeeded to the alienation of the church lands from the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, during the long interval that has elapsed between that event and the present time; but, on the contrary, that various laws, securing to the higher ranks the undisturbed possession of their property, and repressing all claims of the lower ranks, have succeeded to that change. It is enough for our purpose to state the fact, and to observe that, consistently with the principles above stated, all the results which have followed were naturally to be expected. That unprofitable but important portion of every social fabric – the poor, as distinguished from the working classes – has been left to precarious and insufficient charity.

The consequences have been, a general reduction of the diet, clothing, lodging, and whole habits of the whole lower classes; frequent destitution, and its uniform attendant, a peculiar liability to epidemic diseases; much vagrancy and mendicity; the general prevalence of an irregular, precarious, reckless mode of life; a general failure of the grand preventive check on population; a continually-increasing redundancy; a minute subdivision of the land to support this redundancy, and a ruinous competition for these small portions of land, keeping the cultivators of the soil in a constant dependence on the proprietors; much voluntary emigration; and, both among the emigrants and the lower orders at home – all feeling these miseries, but few of them rightly comprehending the cause – a blind hatred at their rulers, very generally diffused. In thus asserting the powerful operation of this legal neglect of the poor in producing the miseries of Ireland, it is not, of course, intended to deny that various causes have co-operated in different parts of the country —*e. g.*, the ignorance of the people, and the effect of the Roman Catholic religion in checking, rather than encouraging, any habits of thought or reflection; the absence of so many proprietors, and their habitual estrangement from the cultivators of the soil; political excitement, and the bad passions generated by it and religious dissensions: all these have been injurious; but the experience of other nations may show us that they could not have produced this specific effect on population, if they had not been aided by that general predisposing cause of redundancy —*neglect of the poor*.

This state of things has, however, naturally rendered residence in Ireland much less agreeable to the feelings of the proprietors of the soil, than residence in almost any other country. Those sufferings of their neighbours and dependants, which the laws of other countries would have imposed on them the duty of mitigating at their source, have, in consequence, fallen rarely under their personal observation; while the frauds and falsehoods by which poverty, when taking the form of mendicity, always attempts to arrest attention and procure sympathy, have been constantly obtruded on them. Add to this, that they have continually been told that the peculiarity of their situation, which absolved them from any legal obligation to relieve the wants of their poor – which secured to them the rights of property, and released them from its obligations – was a wise and judicious regulation, and a great advantage to themselves and their country; and without attributing to the Irish proprietors, and particularly to the absentees, more carelessness or selfishness than we must all admit to be a common attribute of human nature, we can easily understand that the general conduct of the Irish proprietors and capitalists must be such as to aggravate, instead of relieving, the miseries resulting from the over-population of their country.

To this state of things we do not pretend to apply a single specific; but we assert with confidence, that experience has sufficiently demonstrated the efficacy and expediency of several powerful remedies, and that, by the combined influence of these, a gradual improvement may be certainly obtained.

The first step has been already taken in the enactment of a law – unfortunately delayed till nearly half a century had elapsed after the union with England, – probably imperfect, and brought first into operation at a time of famine, therefore beginning to act in the most unfavourable circumstances possible, but by which the right to relief, under circumstances of destitution, is granted to every description of the poor. By the gradual operation of this law, correcting the habits of vagrancy and mendicity, it maybe expected that the process of degradation hitherto extending among the Irish poor may be corrected, and the same motives which, in other nations, are found to restrain excessive population, will gradually be introduced. But a more immediate effect of the law is on the views and habits of the proprietors. When the aged poor, the sick poor, the widows and orphans, and the unemployed poor, become immediately a charge on the land and capital of the country, it becomes the obvious and undoubted interest of every proprietor and capitalist, first, to throw all obstacles in his power in the way of early marriages, and excessive reproduction of the species; and, secondly, to exert himself to procure for the existing population as much as possible of remunerative employment. Such employment as he would hardly regard as remunerative, with a view only to his own profits, becomes an object of real importance to him, when the alternative is the maintenance of able-bodied labourers in idleness. That these motives are already operating extensively among the Irish proprietors, appears from

their general complaint of the hardship of being obliged to maintain the poor in unremunerating employment, and from their increased anxiety to clear their estates of cottars and small crofters, among whom the most rapid redundancy of population shows itself. If the law is firmly and steadily administered, they will not be allowed to rid themselves of the burden of these poor; and the true question will be, Whether they are to maintain them in idleness, or devise for them reproductive labour? Thus it may be hoped that the resources of the country will be gradually developed, and its power of supporting industry be increased contemporaneously with a diminution of vagrancy and mendicity, and an improvement of the habits of the people.

But it must be observed, that this expectation proceeds on two suppositions —*first*, That resources not yet developed for the maintenance of industry do exist in the country; and, *secondly*, That the proprietors have the means and the knowledge necessary to enable them to avail themselves of these. The first of these, we are fully assured, is truly the case; but the latter supposition, although we may expect it to be realised in the course of time, is certainly very far from being an element in the existing condition of the country; nor can it become so within such a time as would be requisite to enable us to reckon on it as a means of meeting a pressing emergency. And although the newly-enacted Irish Poor-Law is equally just as that under which all English proprietors have for centuries held their possessions, yet it must be admitted that, in the present circumstances of

Ireland, as to redundancy of population, it must fall with peculiar severity on that country, and that, in some districts, the sacrifice thus required of the proprietors – particularly on such of them as may not comprehend the means which we believe to be in their power, for the improvement of the country – may almost amount to a confiscation of their property.

Now, if the foregoing exposition of the main cause of the redundant population in Ireland is correct, it follows that the legislature of this country, which has so long approved and sanctioned that state of the laws which withhold from the suffering population of Ireland the right of relief, as it has shared the national sin, ought also to share the sacrifices by which the consequences of that sin may be expiated. For a time, therefore, and particularly after the famine which has befallen their country, the proprietors and capitalists in Ireland may reasonably expect a certain amount of aid from the legislature of England (granted, of course, with proper safeguards against abuse or misapplication), to enable them to perform their newly-prescribed duties towards their own poor.

Now, there are two modes of relief, both to the proprietors and the poor in Ireland, which may be afforded by government, or rather which may be aided and directed by government, to a much greater degree than has been yet done – certainly at a much less expense than the relief-works of the year 1846, when several millions, contributed from the British treasury, were expended on the roads in Ireland, with an injurious rather than beneficial

effect; – and the results of which, if they are carried into effect with common prudence, may be expected to be so distinctly beneficial, as assuredly to reconcile the British public to the expenditure.

The first is Emigration to the colonies, on a larger scale than has been yet undertaken, and with a more earnest desire, on the part of government, to make it a really effective means of relief than has been yet shown – the arrangements to be made, and the vessels to be contracted for and victualled, at the public expense, and the emigrants, therefore, having no further pecuniary burdens imposed on them than the means of supporting themselves from the time of their landing until they can procure employment. Even this last difficulty of emigrants may undoubtedly be much lessened by a little pains, and a little well-directed expense, on the part of the colonial governments, to ascertain during the winter season, and make known to those arriving in spring, the precise districts where there is the most demand for their labour; and it seems impossible to doubt that, if there were a regular provision made by government, for a few seasons, for receiving, from the different parts of Ireland, families recommended by the clergy of all persuasions in the different districts, as proper for emigration, and unable to afford the passage-money, and for removing these families at the public expense to Canada or Australia – directing them at once to the proper points – a very considerable relief could be afforded to the most crowded districts in Ireland, at the same time that the

danger of such sufferings during the passage, and after arrival in the colonies, as befel too many of the emigrants of 1847, and deterred too many of their countrymen from following their example, may be almost certainly avoided.

Emigration, however, even on these terms, (which it is certainly within the power of government to arrange,) should only be recommended to those who can command the means of tolerably comfortable outfitting, and subsistence for a short time after their arrival in the colonies. For a much larger number of the Irish poor, the resource so perseveringly advocated by Mr P. Scrope and others, is the only one yet shown to be really available, viz., their employment on some of the waste lands, ascertained to be reclaimable, which abound in Ireland itself. The improvement of these, chiefly by spade labour, would give employment to nearly all the labourers now in Ireland; and, when reclaimed, they might be divided into allotments of from five to eight acres each, which should afterwards become the property of the men by whose labour they have chiefly been reclaimed, on the payment of a moderate quit-rent.

There may be some difference of opinion as to the details of this plan, and particularly as to the kind and extent of the direct assistance which the government should give; and we know that in all countries, and perhaps more especially in Ireland, there will be a disposition on the part of many persons to avail themselves of and to abuse this public aid, by no means confined to the poorest classes of society, and against

which it behoves a beneficent government to be constantly on their guard. The simplest mode of procedure seems to be, that the waste lands destined for this purpose (and on which government officers, employed at a great expense to the public, have already reported) – should be purchased by government, by compulsion if necessary – in all the distressed parts of the country; that these should be presented to the different poor-law unions, on condition of their being reclaimed by the labours of their able-bodied paupers, and in conformity with plans to be proposed, and the execution of which shall be superintended by persons employed by government. The preliminary operations of drainage, and of making roads for the benefit of these lands only, may likewise be undertaken by government; and with this aid, and under this direction, it is reasonable to expect, that the operations by which certain of the waste lands are to be reclaimed, and the unions to be gradually provided with productive farms, let to industrious cottars, may serve as a model for similar improvements by individuals. There are difficulties of detail, which the government of the United Kingdom may be expected to foresee and to surmount. But as to the principle that it is wise and right for the legislature of Britain; – nay, that it is incumbent on that legislature, looking to its duty towards all classes of the people, to the extent of misery in Ireland, and the disgrace and injury thereby brought on itself, to the legal neglect of the poor in Ireland, so long sanctioned by the British legislature, and to the deficiency of capital actually existing in

that country, – to direct and aid the operations by which its surplus population may be reduced, and its resources for the maintenance of population in future may be augmented; and that these operations, if skilfully conducted, must eventually lead to a great increase, both of wealth and of happiness, in Ireland and in the colonies, – are propositions which we hold to be fully demonstrated, and which, we think, the periodical press of this country cannot at this moment be better employed than in keeping constantly before the public, and impressing, by all possible means, on the attention of the legislature. The property of those lands remaining, in part, in the poor-law unions, the produce raised on them will contribute to the support of the poor, and the relief of the rate-payers in Ireland, in all time coming.

That the opinion we have thus given of the feasibility and of the wisdom of the plan of bringing the idle hands of Ireland to bear on the waste lands, is supported by men of thorough knowledge of the subject, of all parties of the state, may be easily shown. Preparations for such a measure were made, and plans of the drainage requisite for the purpose were laid down, at an expense of nearly £50,000 to the country, and deposited in the archives of the Irish government, so long ago as 1814, by the Bog Commission. It was part of the recommendation of the Poor-Law Inquiry Commission in 1836; it was strongly recommended in the report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Tenure of Land, presided over by Lord Devon; it has been frequently proposed, and fully and ably discussed in various publications

both by speculative reasoners, and by practical men, – by Mr Mill, in his standard work on Political Economy; by Mr Thornton, in his pamphlets on Over-Population, and on Peasant Proprietorship; by Mr Fagan, member for Wexford, in his work on the Improvement of Ireland by means of her Waste Lands; by Mr Poulett Scrope, in several pamphlets as well as speeches in Parliament, to which nothing like an intelligible answer has been returned; by Mr Douglas, and several other writers in England; by Mr French, and several other Irish members; by public meetings in Ireland – one of them, of the freeholders in Waterford, presided over by Lord Stuart de Decies; – nay, it was announced in the beginning of 1847, under the name of a Waste Lands Bill, by Lord John Russell, as an accompaniment of his Poor-Law Bill, but withdrawn without any reason for the change ever having been assigned. Whether this was done, as has been stated, as a compromise with certain Irish landlords on their withdrawing their opposition to the latter bill, or not, is a matter of small importance to the country, although, certainly, of very considerable importance to the character of any such landlords for judgment or intelligence. A much stronger measure of what appears to them as justice towards the cottar population of Ireland, has been strongly recommended by several intelligent foreigners who have visited and examined the country. But, without quoting any of these authorities in favour of the proposal, let us merely ask what answer can be returned to the following simple statements in support of it by an intelligent and practical

author: – "An addition of three million acres of cultivable surface would be an incalculable advantage, and contribute to the health, comfort, and happiness of millions of our fellow-subjects. *We ought not to be behind the Chinese in this work of civilisation.* During my recent examination of the middle and northern districts of China, I noticed every where a great extent of reclaimed land. Every inlet where the sea formerly encroached on the land was embanked, drained, and cultivated. No capital or labour was spared to augment the surface capable of yielding sustenance to man; and I feel satisfied that, *if the extent of bog-land now existing in Ireland were in the central provinces of China, five years would not elapse without its being made fertile and productive*. Ought the people of England or of Ireland to show inferiority to the Chinese in the most requisite of all labour? Ought the government, in deference to some abstract principle, to refuse the fulfilment of the first natural duty – the providing food for its subjects?"[3]

Examples are not wanting in Ireland itself to show the feasibility of this plan of relief to its poverty. "Mr Stuart French, of Monaghan, has reclaimed three hundred acres of mountain-land in four years, and raised its value from two shillings to thirty-five shillings per acre. The entire cost was repaid by the crops in three years. Mr Reade, of Wood-Park, county Galway, reclaimed five hundred acres of moorland and mountain at a cost of from £10 to £17 per acre, which was repaid by the crop of the second

[3] *Ireland before and after the Union.* By R. M. Martin, Esq., 3d edit., p. 88.

year, and the land, formerly worth two shillings and sixpence per acre, now pays twenty shillings per acre annually. This same Mr Reade, who has made the experiment on a large scale, and can speak from experience, says, *there are 128,000 acres of such reclaimable wastes in Galway, where thousands have died during the past year*, and many are now (April 1848) dragging out a miserable and useless existence. Mr Coulthurst, in county Cork, reclaimed a bog farm for which the tenants could not pay four shillings per acre. The drainage and reclamation cost £16 per acre, which was repaid before the fifth year, and the land is now rated at the poor-law valuation at £4 per acre. Sir Charles Sligh, Bart., and his amiable lady, have effected great good on their estate in Donegal, by locating the surplus population on the waste lands, and assisting the poor farmers to cultivate them. This English family gave up their rents for two years, and *permanent employment has been found for six times as many persons as the land could formerly support; and its produce has been multiplied tenfold*."[4]

It may be asked, why are these examples not followed? and doubts have been thrown out as to the accuracy of the statements of the able inquirers who have reported on the Irish waste lands, because they are not actually reclaimed. One simple reason has been stated by Lord Cloncurry, viz., that "arterial drainage on a large scale is indispensable as a commencement, cutting through many properties, deepening river-beds, perhaps

[4] *Ireland before and after the Union.* By R. M. Martin, Esq., 3d edit., p. 90.

to a considerable distance. Hence government alone can set on foot such undertakings on that comprehensive scale, and with that engineering skill, which is necessary."[5] But a more general answer will suggest itself to any one who knows the general habits and circumstances of the great Irish proprietors. Many of them have not the habits of life or the knowledge which would enable them to superintend or judge of such improvements; and many more have not the means of encountering even the small expense which will be requisite in their commencement. Further, it is always to be observed, that, in the present state of the country, another mode of greatly and rapidly improving the value of their estates, without any such outlay either of skill or capital, always presents itself to the Irish proprietors – viz., that of clearing their estates of the cottar population, and throwing them into large farms, to be cultivated in the improved English or Scotch style of agriculture – or even into pasture; the objection to which is simply that, in that case, they would not require for their cultivation more than a third part of the population now located on them, and, therefore, that this is a system relieving the landlords only, and greatly aggravating all the evils which make the management of Ireland an object of concern to the nation at large.

This leads us to consider the question, which is the most momentous of any that can be proposed on this topic – If the plan of locating the idle hands of Ireland on her waste lands

[5] Mr Scrope's *Letter* in the *Morning Chronicle*, April 26, 1848.

is not adopted, what other resource exists for the relief of the redundant population, which is, as we have stated, so enormous and unquestionable a burden on England and Scotland? It is clear that, in Ireland itself, as the law now stands, two plans only are thought of, and if government does not bring forward a third plan, one or other of these must quickly predominate. Either the main body of the landlords, who are known to be quite incredulous as to any improvements being effected by their cottar tenants, must be allowed to pursue their own system of keeping them on hand —*i. e.*, only as tenants-at-will – and clearing their lands of them as rapidly as possible, with a view to large farms or sheep-pastures; or else that system must be adopted, which is demanded generally by the tenantry and by the Roman Catholic priests in Ireland, of giving to the tenants one form or other of what has been called "fixity of tenure" —*i. e.*, such security against a ruinous rise of rent, or dispossession, as may induce them to exert all their energies, and sometimes to bring forth concealed capital, for the improvement of the soil, and, in many instances, for the reclamation of wastes; – this party maintaining that the main cause of the generally wretched condition of the cottars, and imperfect cultivation of the soil, is not the indolence of the people, but their knowledge that they are constantly liable to a rise of rent, or expulsion from their farms, immediately on its being perceived that they are effecting any improvement.

These are the two remedies for the existing state of matters in Ireland, which these two parties wish to apply, and unless

a third plan be adopted by government, one or other of these must quickly predominate. Now, let us consider the results to be expected in either case.

If government does nothing, but merely protects, by an armed force, the proprietors and their agents from the fury of the people, the system of clearance of the estates will be more and more acted on; and we must reckon on one-half or even two-thirds of the still existing population on most of the estates being turned adrift. No doubt the poor-law will make these outcasts a heavy burden on the proprietors; and it is held by many, and very probably with justice, that, instead of turning their cottar tenants adrift, and then having to deal with them as unemployed poor, if they were to accord to them such a tenant-right as exists generally, as a voluntary compact, in Ulster, they might expect the poor-rate to be so much less, the cultivation so to improve and extend, and the payment of rents to become gradually so much more punctual, that their own condition would be gradually amended. But it is certain that *this is not the view that they take of their own position* at this moment, nor that on which they will voluntarily act; *for if it were, the tenant-right, or at least the practice of granting long leases, would be as general* in other parts of Ireland as it now is in Ulster, or in Scotland.

This being so, the poor-law, giving the right to relief to the ejected poor, must either be enforced or not enforced. If it is enforced, and no other resource for the relief of those people is presented, there is every prospect of many of the unions

becoming bankrupt, and the proprietors being involved in the ruin. We know that this consummation is already proclaimed by many of the proprietors in Ireland and their friends as nigh at hand; and the only advantage which in that case can be said to be derived from the poor-rate is, that the ruin and degradation, otherwise confined to the lower ranks, will have extended, as in justice they should, to every class of society. Again, if the poor-law is not enforced, and the redundant population is thrown, as heretofore, on its own resources, we have *first*, that *res pessimi exempli*– a law openly violated – that the rich may escape its inflictions, and the poor be deprived of its protection; and *secondly*, we have no other prospect before us but a continuance and increase of all that misery, vagrancy, famine, and pestilence in Ireland, and all that extension of these evils to the great towns of England and Scotland, which have made our connexion with Ireland the bane of this country.

On the other hand, if the legislature were to adopt the only effectual means of restraining the clearances by the landlords —*i. e.*, to grant the desired boon of fixity of tenure, at the existing rent, to all the tenants – or even absolutely require leases of a certain duration to be given to them all – it cannot be denied that they would commit the grave political offence of extensive interference not only with portions of private property, (which, all admit, may be justly taken, on reasonable compensation, for public objects,) but with the whole income of many individuals. This offence is of such a character, that we can hardly expect

to see a measure involving it ever adopted by any legislature in this country; and it must be confessed that, however well adapted such a measure may be to the exigency of the present time in Ireland, the precedent thereby established would go far to justify many acts, as regards other possessions of property, which can hardly be called by any other name than spoliation.

These are the considerations which lead us to believe that, in the present circumstances of Ireland – a population having grown up in the absence of any poor-law – with which a law, enacted tardily, and at a most disastrous period, cannot be expected to cope – the newly-acquired right to existence of the Irish poor must be aided and supported – as was always desired by Mr P. Scrope, and all the more enlightened advocates of that measure, and at one time proposed by the present Premier – by another measure, on the part of government, whereby *employment may be procured for them, the resources of the country improved*, and the proprietors taught, by example much more effectually than they can ever be by precept, how these duties, now legally imposed on them for the benefit of the poor, may be made to consist with improvement of their own position.

What is often said of the impolicy of government coming into the market for the purchase and improvement of lands in Ireland, as deterring private speculators from coming forward, and checking the influx of really productive capital, would be a very fair allegation, if the object in view were merely the economical one of raising the value of the land and the income

of the landed proprietors. But this is not adverting to the real difficulty of the case, *the existence of a redundant population*– the result of the causes above explained, *but now possessing a legal right to existence in the country—much more numerous than is required for that improved cultivation of the soil, which would be the most obviously and rapidly profitable to the proprietors*. The problem for solution is, not simply how to enrich the country, but how to enrich it without exterminating any part of this redundant population. This is no object for private speculators, looking only to pounds, shillings, and pence; but it is, or should be, an object of paramount importance to the government of a country, to whom even an increase of wealth ought to be desirable, not for its own sake, but because it is the essential condition, and therefore the exponent, of an extension of human happiness; to whom, therefore, the lives of the poor ought to be at least as sacred as the purses of the proprietors and capitalists in Ireland.

Taking this view of the duty of government, we may cordially acquiesce in the statement of Mr Thornton, quoted and approved by Mill, that the great want of Ireland at this moment is, not the influx of capital (as it might be if we were at liberty to disregard the lives of the people, and look only to the wealth of the country,) but the protection and encouragement of its industry, and such an increase of its capital only as may be consistent with, or even produced by, an increase of the labour of all its able-bodied inhabitants. And it is because it is evident that the existing proprietors cannot in general perceive how this is to

be done, or command the means of doing it, that the interference of government appears to be the only possible means of rescuing that unhappy country from misery.

Many high authorities are fully convinced that the improvement of the cultivated portion of the land, and even of the rents of the proprietors, may be equally well effected by the *petite culture*, by keeping the cottars in their places, and merely giving them instruction as to cultivation, and security for a fair share of the profits of the improvements they effect – as by clearing the land of them, and enlarging the farms. All who have studied the subject, seem to be agreed as to the very general "almost superhuman" industry of peasant *proprietors*, in all parts of the world, and among all races of men. "The idea of property, however," says Mr Mill, "does not necessarily imply that there should be no rent, any more than that there should be no taxes. It merely implies, that the rent should be a fixed charge, not liable to be raised against the possessor by his own improvements, or by the will of a landlord." "Give a man a secure possession of a bleak rock," says Arthur Young, "and he will turn it into a garden; give him only a nine-years' lease of a garden, and he will convert it into a desert." It is accordingly stated by this author, and by others, as the result of experience, that long leases, at a low rent, will effect wonders, even in Ireland; and in proof of this, Mr Mill refers to the example of a company, called the Irish Waste Land Improvement Society, who have undertaken improvements in Ireland, not by creating large farms,

and cultivating them by hind labour, but by farms only of a size sufficient for a single family – giving, however, small advances of capital, and a temporary security of tenure by thirty-one years' leases. Col. Robinson, the manager of this Society, reports of their operations in 1845, – "These 245 tenants and their families have, by spade husbandry, reclaimed and brought into cultivation 1032 acres of land, previously unproductive waste, on which they raised, last year, crops valued at £3896, being the proportion of £15, 18s. each tenant; and their live stock, now on the estates, is valued, according to present prices in the neighbouring markets, at £4162, being at the rate of £16, 19s. for each – £1304, a sum equal to their present annual rent, having been added since February 1844;" and he adds, "By the statistical tables and returns, it is proved that the tenants, in general, improve their little farms, and increase their cultivation and crops, in *nearly direct proportion to the number of available working persons* of both sexes of which their families consist." The occupants of larger farms than 20 acres, he states to be "a class too often deficient in the enduring industry indispensable for the successful prosecution of mountain improvements."[6] Mr Mill's general conclusion is, that "under the new Irish Poor-Law there are no means for the landlords for escaping ruin," (as has been stated above,) "unless, by some potent stimulant to the industrial energies of the people, they can largely increase the produce of agriculture; and since there is no stimulant available

[6] *Mill's Principles of Political Economy*, vol. i. p. 387.

so potent as a permanent interest in the soil, either the present landlords, or their English mortgagees, to whom the estates of the more impoverished landowners must inevitably pass, would find it to their advantage, if not to grant at once this permanent interest to their tenants, at least to hold out to them, the prospect of acquiring it."[7] To the same purpose, Sir Robert Kane states his belief that "there are not people enough in Ireland for the small-farm system" if it were carried on in the manner which the experience of other countries has shown to be practicable, and which requires only a certain amount of instruction and of encouragement to the tenants, to enable them to raise at least as much produce, and pay a better rent, than large farms would do.[8] But although this appears a very probable, as well as hopeful view, of the position of the cultivated parts of Ireland, and of the prospects of individual proprietors undertaking to reclaim the wastes, yet it is obvious that we can have no security for the landlords taking this view of their position, and that it would be a very questionable stretch of power to compel them to act upon it. And what we wish particularly to urge is, that *it is not necessary to come to any decision* on the disputed question of the grand or *petite culture* as applicable to the *cultivated* districts of Ireland, because the *waste* lands fortunately furnish a resource which is *clear addition* to the existing means of maintaining the

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[7] Ibid. 398.

[8] *See the Large and Small Farm Question, considered in regard to the Present Circumstances of Ireland.*

agricultural population, available at a small preliminary expense only, which, we maintain, ought to be borne by the government of this country. The redundant population being thus disposed of, all the landlords will be left at liberty to try whatever modes of improving their estates they may think fit – subject always to this salutary check, that if by any of these modes they render an additional part of the population redundant, they will be compelled, by the poor-law, to pay more or less for them.

The digest of Lord Devon's report shows, that there were in Ireland, when it was drawn up, "326,089 occupiers of land, whose holdings were under eight acres each, and that the consolidation of these small holdings, up to eight acres, would require the removal of about 192,363 families; but, then, the *first* class of *improvable waste lands* in Ireland (on which we wish to see them employed) would furnish to all those removed families locations of about eight acres each – or, the first and second qualities of improvable waste land, taken together, would furnish them with locations of twenty acres each." These facts seem fully sufficient to justify Mr Mill's conclusion, (formerly quoted,) that if we "suppose such a number drafted off to a state of independence and comfort, together with a very moderate additional relief by emigration, the introduction of English capital and farming over the *remaining surface* of Ireland (at least where the proprietors may think it necessary) would at once cease to be chimerical."[9] At least we feel justified by these

[9] Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, vol. i. p. 393.

facts, by all the statements here made, and by the authorities by whom this plan has been recommended, in demanding that a measure which promises so much relief, not only to the miseries of Ireland, but to the various philanthropic designs in this country – which are so continually thwarted by the influx of Irish poor – should be fairly and openly canvassed; and that, if any serious objections can be stated to it, they should be publicly brought forward and discussed.

As to the simply economical objection, on the score of the outlay that would be required, we do not lay stress on the statement made on no less authority than Lord Devon's Commission, that, in fact, it ought to cost nothing; and that the improved rental of the land ought to bring in a return of ten per cent on the capital invested in the speculation. We may admit that this is too sanguine a view of the matter – that the sums advanced by the government of this country will probably be tardily and only partially repaid. Still, when we reflect on the facts that have been stated as to the actual cultivation of waste lands in Ireland, and on the concurrent opinion of so many able and experienced men, who have examined the country carefully, and report specifically on the facilities for the improvement of its different parts, it seems impossible to doubt, that, if the expenditure of the sums advanced by government is superintended and controlled by the talent and experience which the country may expect that the government can command, the repayment of a considerable part of the outlay, particularly of that which may be advanced

on the credit of the poor-law unions, may be expected within a few years. And even if there were ultimately a loss to the extent of one-half of the £10,000,000, which has been stated as the probable expense of the whole change, the money will at all events have gone to the immediate relief of Irish suffering, and been better spent than what was formerly voted for that purpose; and we cannot think that a nation which spent a larger sum, only two years ago, in the mere relief of the sufferings of the Irish people, without any attempt at improvement, and very generally with a deteriorating (because not previously considered) effect on the resources of the country – and which spent £20,000,000 only a few years ago with very questionable effect, but certainly without being grudged, in attempting to assuage the sufferings, and raise the condition of the negroes in the West Indies – can repent the loss of a fourth part of that sum, in an attempt which can hardly by possibility fail of producing considerable effect, to provide remunerative employment for the hordes of Irish labourers in their own country, and arrest those grievous calamities which their diffusion over this country has brought on themselves, and on so many others who have come in contact with them.

In thus stating the grounds of a very decided opinion as to the measure supplementary to the new poor-law, which is most essentially required for Ireland, we do not of course mean to deny, that various other means may be adopted, with more or less of good effect, in furtherance of the same grand object. We

have no doubt that both religious and secular education are of the utmost importance to the civilisation and improvement of every country; and although we do not regard education, as some authors do, as the main remedy for the evils of over-population, (being thoroughly persuaded that nature has provided for this object more surely than education can, by that growth of artificial wants in the human mind, which is the result and the reward of pains taken to relieve suffering and secure comfort during youth,) we are as anxious as any of our contemporaries for the extension of education in Ireland. We believe that instruction in agriculture, as well as encouragement to industry, is very much needed in most parts of Ireland; and that measures for the direct communication of such instruction, both to landlords and tenants, may be very useful. We believe that in Ireland, as in this country, there is great need of sanitary regulations; and we trust that the draining, cleaning, and paving of the Irish towns will be regarded with as much interest as similar purifications in England and Scotland. But we think no one who reflects on the subject can fail to perceive two truths, and to acknowledge their direct bearing on the subject of Irish misery —*first*, that to a people nurtured in destitution and amidst scenes of suffering, something of the great mental stimuli of *employment* and *hope* must be applied, in order to enable them to appreciate, or permanently to profit by, any kind of education; and, *secondly*, that in the existence of laws securing sustenance to all the poor of a country, and at the same time enabling the higher ranks

to exact labour as the price of that sustenance, we possess a security such as no other social arrangements can afford, for habitual attention to all means of bettering the condition of the poor, on the part of those who have it in their power to apply those means, and on whose exertions their successful application must necessarily depend. Thus the poor-laws of Ireland, and the subsidiary measures for procuring employment for the poor there, so far from being opposed to any wise system of instruction, or of sanitary improvement, must be regarded as in truth an essential preliminary to the truly beneficial operation of any system that may be devised for either of these purposes.

THE CAXTONS.
PART VIII

CHAPTER XXXV

There entered, in the front drawing-room of my father's house in Russell Street – an Elf!!! clad in white, – small, delicate, with curls of jet over her shoulders; – with eyes so large and so lustrous that they shone through the room, as no eyes merely human could possibly shine. The Elf approached, and stood facing us. The sight was so unexpected, and the apparition so strange, that we remained for some moments in startled silence. At length my father, as the bolder and wiser man of the two, and the more fitted to deal with the eirie things of another world, had the audacity to step close up to the little creature, and, bending down to examine its face, said, "What do you want, my pretty child?"

Pretty child! was it only a pretty child after all? Alas! it would be well if all we mistake for fairies at the first glance could resolve themselves only into pretty children!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.