

reader has enrolled among his "favourite authors," there will be an issue raised between them; but even in this case, the reader will not feel half the bitterness he would feel if he had surrendered his judgment into the hands of a reviewer, and afterwards found his confidence had been betrayed, and that he had been cherishing groundless suspicions, or giving currency to false views of an author, whom the reviewer had wilfully or ignorantly misrepresented.

Retrospective Reviews are safer than those which are prospective, and which are written with the announced intention of guiding public taste. The reviewer can devote as much time as he pleases to his subject, for there is no fear of his criticism being forestalled by a more expeditious rival. He is not bound to notice a work written a month after it issues from the press, or it may be without having had time to do more than write some general strictures on the subject of the work, and then prick with a pin for passages to send forth as specimens of the author's forte. He is not the pioneer through a new country, on whom the responsibility is thrown, and to whom all look for direction; whose every step must be made with caution, and who is perpetually on the rack, lest he take a wrong course. He is rather as the guide through a well known and frequented parish, through which he could make his way blindfolded; leads a company, not strangers to the beautiful prospects which lie here and there scattered on every side; his office is to conduct to the breezy upland where the eye can rove far and wide, with scenes of sublimity and beauty to revel in at will, to point out the unobtrusive beauties which lie slumbering and smiling away from the dusty high road, or trodden bye path, in nooks which the "unregarding eye of business" would never have found out.

If Retrospective reviewing be thus comparatively an easy task, demanding less acuteness, and less liable to be swayed by personal and party feeling, than criticism, strictly prospective; if it be safer for the reader to compare the opinion retrospective, with that which he has himself formed, than to be obliged to pin his faith to a reviewer without any means of deciding from an inspection of the new work, what confidence the reviewer is entitled to claim, if there be less to hurry and distract the reviewer, in his retrospective labours, there is something also to reward both him and the reader in the associations which a review retrospective can scarcely fail to excite. It is not a review of a book merely that we engage in, but a review of our own lives, of our own intellectual and moral progress. "We discourse, (by implication at least) of infancy, childhood, boyhood and youth, of pleasures lying upon the unfolding intellect, plenteously as morning dew drops—of knowledge inhaled, insensibly like fragrance—of dispositions stealing into the spirit

like music from unknown quarters—of images uncalled for, and rising up like exhalations—of hopes plucked, like beautiful wild flowers from the ruined tombs of antiquity, to make a garland for a living forehead"—and are led back to the time when the words, the sentiments, the truths we now look upon as fixed and immutable, the best and most beautiful efforts of genius, were but unmeaning jargon, or at least hidden mysteries which the young spirit thrust aside, as not fit for its wants and wishes. Or it may be the reverse of this, the books of our youth, our daily and nightly companions, which enticed us from sleep and even from play, and led us into bye corners to feast on their enchanting and forbidden delights, may be now taken up with scarcely another feeling than that of surprise, that they could ever have so deeply enchanted us. A Retrospective Review! Brings it not with it something which the ablest criticism on a new untried, unknown work, can never awaken? Does it not call up from within, from the depths of memory, something better and more useful than the wisdom which magisterial critics would force upon us? Is it not as a leaf from a forgotten Diary, or as a dream of the past, when the future was not to us what it is now? What hand rested with ours on the page which we then devoured with greedy eyes? Does the eye now beam upon us that once gladdened and filled at the strange story, the mournful tragedy, which was not then known to be but fiction? Or was it dimmed long since by the shadow of Death? Is the voice now mute which gave reality and being to the conceptions of the poet? The aspirations which we then indulged, the hopes of the future, the generous credulity, the single-hearted though foolish resolves—have they all fled, and been forgotten? No, not all.

"The youth who daily further from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended."

A Retrospective Review may enable us to recall the vision, and to return, though but for a brief season, to

Those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Uphold us—cherish—and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal silence; truths that wake
To perish never:
Which neither littleness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor man nor boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!