

From Blackwood's Magazine for March.

CRYSTALS FROM A CAVERN.

No. I.

THE lunar light of rhetoric has often a similar effect to that of moonshine in the tropics. It strikes those blind who doze under the effluence. A crowd convulsed by the language of a political or religious fanatic is, for the time moonstruck. But dreamer, indeed, would he be who should suppose the source of the mischief to be, like Ariosto's moon, the store-house of all the lost wits of the sufferers.

Every man employs, for a large part of every day, a mechanism far more wonderful than the engine of Watt or Babbage; and an additional wonder is, that few know they use so sublime an instrument, though it is worked by distinct acts of his own thoughts and will. What is it?—Language. By this we build pyramids, fight battles, ordain and administer laws, shape and teach religion, are knitted man to man, cultivate each other, and ourselves. How vast is our self-glorification for the art of writing, how infinite for the smaller art of printing; how silent and null for that of speech! Our noblest gifts are too apparently invaluable and divine to be referred as matter of praise to ourselves, and, therefore, we do not think of them at all, but take them for granted as a portion of ourselves. Yet, are not even we ourselves given to us by a power higher than we?

Mankind moves onward through the night of time like a procession of torch-bearers, and words are the lights which the generations carry. By means of these they kindle abiding lamps beside the track which they have passed: and in the hands of the sage and prophetic leaders of the train, these shoot forward a column of light into the darkness before them. The darkness, indeed, is still great, but it is much that by means of the light which contrasts with it, we know it to be darkness.

A man once said, with an air of much self-complacency, I believe only what is proved. Another answered, you seem to think this a merit; yet, what does it mean but that you believe only what you cannot help believing? That which it is important to believe, is that which we need not believe, unless we will to do so. The ancient oracles often deceived men to believe that which it was a duty to disbelieve. There are modern ones which seek to better the instruction by changing it into the exact converse. On all sides mingle and help each other's discord the thin whines and harsh grunts of a faithless necessity, on all sides yawns before us the grim and stupid falsehood,—the will has nothing to do with the belief.

The prose man knows nothing of poetry, but poetry knows much of him, nay, all that he knows not of himself; and how much is that! as well as all that he does know, which, indeed, is little.

There is a kind of Catholicism of opinion which honours truth in the same way as he who marries many contemporaneous wives honours marriage, or as the man honours property who appropriates as much as possible of his neighbour's.

The harmony and correlation of nature as a whole, are far more perfect than in any reproduction of a part of it by art. But because art cannot represent the great whole except typically, it has, as its peculiar function, to unite and round into a minor whole such fragments as it can grasp. If it created only a literal copy, its work would be not a whole, but still fragmentary. He, therefore, who would substitute a literal copy for a true work of art, manifestly wants the sense of that in his original which art most looks to and draws life from, namely, the peaceful and musical unity which pervades it, and blends together all its portions, in one great image, the outward symbol of one God.

A picture-gallery full of spectators, is an excellent image of the relation of art and reality. The unmoving, unblemished faces, and more than living accuracy of forms, the fine interwoven lines and fixed harmonizing colours, are all fitted in each picture to some single end. They are bounded by the definite purpose of the whole, which shuts up each composition as a distinct world. The thought cannot grow upon the canvas from spring to summer or from year to year. It detains us within its own limits, excluding all the universe beyond. It is unchangeable, indeed, but finite, irreceptive of aught from without, unconscious of aught within, and unproductive. While the beholders look and move before the high, glowing, many-coloured ideas, one recognises with sparkling eyes, some vivid representation of that which he has himself observed in nature; another is delighted and satisfied by the grace and roundness of the group which reveals some ancient story; a third is lifted up and inspired by the sight of beauty beyond all that experience knows of, and owns the presence of a majestic imagination. But of their own faces no one, to a keen eye, is free from grievous defects and offences, or has the perfectly serene and living expression which all may be led to conceive, though none have seen it. There is weakness, meanness, rancour, ugliness, more or less visible in every aspect. The compositions which these real figures form with each other, are broken and harsh, crowded or vacant, confused and undefined, not centralized by any distinct purpose. Yet, on the

other hand, every one of these beings has a life which grows without cessation; stands not in one fixed visible site, but in a thousand shifting and involved relations; is hemmed in by no wooden frame, nor magic circle of an artist's single conception; but has an infinite around it, and works and shapes itself therein, by a destiny that assigns to it no point beyond which it shall not pass.

Emotion turning back on itself, and not leading on to thought or action, is the element of madness.

Goethe sometimes reminds us of a Titan in a court dress. But the Titan is the reality, the clothing only the fleeting appearance. To his greatness nothing was wanting but the sense how far finite greatness, even such as his, is still below infinity; how much weaker is the strongest independence of an earthly spirit than the dependance upheld by Him who alone can abide for ever, unsubdued, yet peaceful. He was the shaping central figure of a world of light and graceful images, a lovely Greek Olympus. But over the smooth and bland aspects of his marble and ivory works, deep shadows and startling lights are thrown from the larger and more earnest sphere of the infinite, the personal—in a word—the Christian, which encircles like sky and ocean, with huger proportions and immense vistas, his calmer, smaller dominion. These glimpses too, and gigantic shadows of immortal ideas, he endeavoured to unite by soft connexions with his own peculiar forms, and to invest them with the like serene and rounded beauty. But the element was too vital insurgent, and for ever started away beneath his hand, or burst off in fierce discord from the easier and more pliant material of his art. Hence the inconsistency and painful jarring which not seldom molest us in the midst of his quietest and most seductive creations.

These are persons not merely indifferent to knowledge, but who positively dislike it, because it puts them out in the rotary repetition of their ignorance.

One of the commonest of all delusions is that which leads us to weigh men against each other, and not by an absolute standard. The practical application of this error leads to an immoderate admiration of men of great energies ill applied, and to a corresponding contempt for the weaker and narrower minds which have done all the best in their power with the portion of life and activity intrusted to them. We often estimate the man of abounding and busy faculties, by considering, not how far he has faithfully employed his whole being for high and pure ends, but what overbalance of right and arduous endeavours remains, after deducting all that is base, idle, and self-willed. And this overbalance may easily be so important as to cast altogether into shade the utmost and entire labours of lesser minds, though these may, nevertheless, have wrought with perfect singleness of aim and unwearied self-devotion. Glory to the selfish rich man's gorgeous offering, is still the cry of the world's orators, too often even of those most nobly gifted. Glory to the widow's mite, is that still sweet inward song of the true heart taught in endless harmonies issuing from the face of God.

How often is to execute a thought the same thing as to execute a man, that is, to put an end to it.

Philosophy is a Hermes, the messenger of the gods! who leads up some to those transparent and everlasting abodes, and others down to the land of shadows and unrealities, and therefore, of suffering. He sometimes plays divinest music, and is seated hard by Jupiter himself, who listens joyous; at other moments he is a swindler, liar, and thief, among the stalls and styes of earth.

It is worthy only of a Turk to saw down the statue of the Uranium Venus into blocks that may serve as steps to a harem, and to exult in the change. Such is the work of Epicurism.

We perpetually fancy ourselves intellectually transparent when we are opaque, and morally opaque when we are transparent.

It was the middle of August. The sun was setting in a rainy sky, which hid the disk behind a dark bank of cloud. The high tide of the distant sea had caused the river to overflow a portion of its green and wooded banks. The whole unbounded plain, from the height on which the two spectators stood, looked a bed of meadow and vineyard, through which the large and quiet river, with a few small sails upon its surface, flowed unheard and waveless to the city, which extended its shapely bridge, and raised its Gothic towers and spires in the becalmed and noiseless evening. The sun was visible, but hung near enough to the lower edge of the clouds to shoot a bright red gleam obliquely across the river from above the town, and to tinge the lake-like inundation with a glow, broken to the eyes of the gazers by the trees in the hedges of the flooded fields. The town alone broke the straight line of the horizon, and between its building and the skirt of the clouds was spread a pale clear amber air, while all around the sky and over the whole landscape the shades of green and grey were dimly blending. The evening bell sounded from a distant village church, and the red light deepened and broadened on the water with a ruby blaze, while the vapours and land below the sun melted in a purple stream. Then the border of the cloud itself kindled, and from below it the sun's rim dropped and seemed to hang a steady benignant fire. Through the broken clouds in the east, now tinged by the same red light of sunset, the full moon

glanced serene. All was so peaceful and unmoving while the far-off chime scarcely floated to the ear that Time appeared to have ceased its beatings, and for a moment these two hearts lived in eternity.

From the Metropolitan for March.

SOLITUDE.

In early youth I shunned mankind,
From books alone to store my mind;
In woods, and ruins moss-ogrownd,
I sat, and read, and thought alone.

An impulse did I feel, a flame,—
I never questioned whence it came;
A feeling powerful as unknown,
That urged me still to be alone.

I climb the mountain, through the cloud,
Midst lightnings, and the thunders loud:
Thence looked around as from a throne,
And triumphed I was there alone.

At midnight, deep in torrent caves,
I listened to the dash of waves,
Down horrid chasms darkly thrown,
And felt an awful joy alone.

The earliest flush the morning gave,
Soft trembling o'er the ocean-wave,
Thence, crimson'd, through the darkness blown,
Midst flying mists, I met alone.

Ever in darkness and in light,
At cheerful noon, at pitchy night,
Around me, like an Iris thrown
Was joy, that still I walked alone.

In sleep was heard the sound of streams,
The sunset mingled with my dreams;
The weltering ocean had the tone,
Which lives in slumbering ears alone.

With passing years a change there came,
Though Nature's charms were still the same:
No more that impulse strong might speed
My steps to mountain or to mead.

The wood, the stream, the rock, the tree,
The bud, the blossom, bird and bee,
Still were—but were no more desired—
My mind into itself retired.

My soul was full of Nature's light;
In vain the morn was dewy, bright;
In vain to win my gaze did eve
Its long and lingering shadows weave.

For, with an overflowing mind,
I turned from Nature to my kind:
From all things was the freshness flown—
I could not bear to be alone.

RICHARD HOWITT.

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ANECDOTES OF A BLIND PERSON.

In a small village in one of the northern counties of England there resides a man of the name of J *** W****, who at present is between thirty and forty years of age. When he was a little boy, he had the misfortune to become totally deprived of sight, though not before he had been a short period at school, where he had learned a little of both reading and writing, being considered a child of remarkably quick parts. His parents, who owned and occupied a small farm, both died about this time, and their little blind son was received into the family of his paternal grandfather, where he continued to reside until he grew up to manhood. During this period no attempts were made to impart to him any useful knowledge; for in that part of the country there were then no institutions for the education of the blind. Such being the case, the only active employment he engaged in was that of lending a helping-hand wherever he could assist in the duties attendant upon the management of his grandfather's farm. While a mere youth, he was considered a sort of prodigy by his neighbours and acquaintances; for he not only attempted many things that seemed far beyond the reach of persons labouring under the severe affliction with which he was visited, but he often actually succeeded where others failed who enjoyed the full possession of all their faculties.

Amongst his youthful predilections was that of music, and in this respect he was by no means singular; since it is generally remarked that the solace of sweet sounds has peculiar charms for most persons labouring under blindness. Accordingly, a violin was procured for the poor boy, who without any aid or instructions soon made such proficiency in the musical art, that the name of J *** W**** was placed upon the already long list of "blind fiddlers."

When he attained the age of twenty-one he came into the possession of a small farm that had belonged to his father; and notwithstanding that the nearest and best friends advised him to rent it out to some one, and live upon the proceeds (limited as they necessarily must be), and not incommode and trouble himself with its management,—he unfortunately was deaf to good advice, and actually entered upon his patrimony at the term sub-