

From Conversations on Nature and Art.

MANUSCRIPTS OF HERCULANEUM.

Mrs. F.—Before we leave the subject of Manuscripts, I must tell you something of the papyri discovered at Herculaneum.

Henrietta.—Thank you, Aunt; I should so much like to know all about the Herculaneum and Pompeii MSS.

Mrs. F.—Not Pompeii, Henrietta, for those which were found in that city fall into powder as soon as touched. Those of Herculaneum alone are in a state to be unrolled, and the difficulty and delicacy of the undertaking render it a most laborious and ingenious operation.

Esther.—Where were these papyri found?

Mrs. F.—In prosecuting the excavations at Herculaneum the workmen came in 1753 to a small room which had presses all round it, and one in the centre, containing books in both sides, but the wood of the press was so completely carbonised that it fell into pieces when touched.

Esther.—How did they know they were books?

Mrs. F.—The order in which they were found, carefully arranged one over the other, was the only circumstance which excited attention, and convinced the workmen that they could not be wood or cinders. Upon closer examination characters were discovered upon them, which the learned immediately occupied themselves in endeavouring to decipher.

Hen.—Were there none in any other parts of the city?

Mrs. F.—Probably there may have been many lost to us, but as they were in a mass with rubbish, lava, etc. they could not be recognised: for you must recollect that the excavations of Herculaneum are about 100 palmi under ground: indeed the accumulated mass of lava and ashes has buried the city at depths from 70 to 112 feet; and so completely filled up the town, that all the work is carried on with pickaxes. It is to this room (which was in a country house) not being entirely choked up, that we owe the fortunate circumstance of their preservation. A few more were found in the portico of the same house, preserved in little portable boxes, and some others in another room in the same habitation; making together 1756 manuscripts, all written upon papyrus. Various were the means employed to unroll them: some were cut into two longitudinally, by which a small portion of the characters were rendered visible: in short, they were subjected to all kinds of attempts, until Father Piaggio discovered the present manner of unrolling them.

Hen.—What is it?

Mrs. F.—The papyrus is laid upon cotton, supported by a piece of pasteboard, which lies upon two semi-circular pieces of metal. The workman begins by glueing small pieces of goldbeater's skin upon the back of the papyrus until the whole of the exterior of the roll is covered. He then attaches three threads to the end of the goldbeater's skin, and suspending them to the top of the frame, proceeds with the point of a needle, to detach from the roll two or three lines of the end of the papyrus, which has been made of a tolerable consistency by the addition of the goldbeater's skin. As soon as these lines are unrolled, the same operation of applying the goldbeater's skin is repeated, until, by the greatest patience and diligence, the whole MS. is gradually unrolled.

Hen.—But then, Aunt, they can only read one side of the page.

Mrs. F.—Fortunately, the manuscripts are generally only written upon one side of the papyrus, otherwise the operation would be impossible. There is however one papyrus which is written on both sides. It would appear to be an original manuscript; and the author having filled the end of his volume before he had arrived at the conclusion of his subject, has written three pages on the other side of the papyrus. I also saw, in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, a Josephus in papyrus, which is said to be of the fourth century, and is also written upon both sides of the paper.

Est.—How did the ancients arrange their books? because it must have been very difficult to distinguish one from another, among so many rolls?

Mrs. F.—Those found in the kind of press or bookcase which I have described, were arranged horizontally along the shelves. Their titles were either written on the end of the papyrus or upon a piece of papyrus paper fastened to the middle of the papyrus. Some papyri were found tied up in bundles; others in the double rows, as if the last reader had left them open where he left off reading; and some in a box, as I have before mentioned, that they might be carried about in safety. From the blank paper which is often found round the papyri, it would appear that each volume had a sheet of blank paper rolled around it, in order to protect the fragile material of which it was composed. The marks of the lines ruled for the guide of the copyist are still visible; and the ancients appear to have had their large paper copies of their works, as well as the moderns. The size of the Greek MSS. is generally smaller than the Latin; the former being from 8 to 12 inches, the latter from 12 to 16 broad. Some are 110 pages long, others upwards of 62 feet (75 palmi) by measurement.

Hen.—What a ragged torn looking thing it must have been.

Mrs. F.—True; but when you take into consideration the difficulty of the task, it is wonderful that the unrolling is ever effected at all. If the glue be put on in too large quantities, it will probably remove a portion of the next layer of the papyrus; a breath of air will carry away all these pulverized particles, and dust is so fatal, that one manuscript having become covered with dust, it took a whole year to remove it.

Est.—Then, what is done with those that are unrolled to prevent such an accident?

Mrs. F.—They are put into frames with glasses over them, and are eventually hung up in the Museum. One has been left in its whole length in order to give an idea of the original form and extent of the MSS. but this system has not been followed, it being more convenient for the draughtsmen and interpreters, to divide the papyrus into several fragments, as they require to turn the page in different lights in order the better to decipher the characters. The manuscript is first passed to the draughtsman, who copies the characters with the greatest exactness, so as to render it a complete facsimile of the original; his copy is then submitted to the inspection of the interpreters, who having approved of it, pass it to the engraver; he having engraved it, returns it to the interpreters, who then publish it in their learned and elaborate work.

Hen.—How many manuscripts are unrolled?

Mrs. F.—Of the 1756 papyri found at Herculaneum, 210 have been entirely and usefully unrolled; 127 have been partly opened; but the work has been suspended from finding them illegible; and 205 could not be unrolled because they were not sufficiently compact to bear the application of the goldbeater's skin; 27 have been presented by the government to England and France; 23 have been used for the purposes of experiment; and 1164 remain untouched: so they may yet contain much that is valuable and interesting.

Frederick.—What are the subjects of those which have been unrolled?

Mrs. F.—This library was found in what appears to have been the country house of an Epicurean philosopher, and the works which have been as yet deciphered are naturally those of his school: all I believe are writings which were before unknown to the moderns; and when we reflect upon the number yet to be unrolled, we may hope that great riches are still concealed in this unique collection. Whatever may be, however, the intrinsic value of the writings already published, they may yet serve to elucidate others of greater interest; and therefore, the plan which the Academy adopt, of publishing every fragment which they unroll, is the most prudent, the most useful, and the most likely to lead to beneficial results.

THE FRENCH REIGN OF TERROR.—The sun of liberty was in eclipse while the crested hydra of the coalition glared round the horizon; the atmosphere was dark and sultry; there was a dead pause, a stillness in the air, except as the silence was broken by a shout like distant thunder, or the wild chant of patriotic songs; there was a fear, as in the time of a plague—a fierceness as before and after a deadly strife. It was a civil war raging in the heart of a great city as in a field of battle, and turning it into a charnel-house. The eye was sleepless; the brain heated. Sights of horror grew familiar to the mind, which had no other choice than that of being either the victim or the executioner. What at first was stern necessity, or public duty, became a habit and a sport; and the arm, inured to slaughter, struck at random, and spared neither friend nor foe. The soul, harrowed up by the most appalling spectacles, could not do without them, and "nursed the dreadful appetite of death." The habit of going to the place of execution resembled that of visiting the theatre. Legal murder was the order of the day—a holyday sight—till France became one scene of wild disorder and the revolution a stage of blood.—Hazlitt's *Life of Buonaparte*.

THE ARTS.—When the miscellaneous estimates are brought forward, the Chancellor of Exchequer will move the first, and Sir R. Peel the second, of the following estimates:—An estimate of the sum required to be voted in the year 1837, for the purchase of pictures for the National Gallery, £9,035. 'Mercury and the Woodman' (Salvator Rosa), £1,680; 'Holy Family' (Murillo), and 'The Brazen Serpent in the Wilderness,' (Rubens), £7,350." "An estimate of the sum required to be voted to enable the trustees of the British Museum to purchase certain Etruscan vases, part of the collection of the Prince of Canino, £1,200."

The accession of the Queen to the British throne has caused various alterations in law forms and proceedings. In one writ which came down to this city a ludicrous mistake was made in the date, as follows:—"In the year of our Lady 1837," instead of "our Lord."—*Wes. Lumin.*

HALIFAX, SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 1837.

TO THE LADIES.—With all due respect and gallantry we ask our fair readers to what country they export their written effusions, for of the competency of a number of them to compose for the press, there can be but one opinion. Whether do they send their poetic fragments, their interesting tales, their graphic sketches of country, and all the delightful and entertaining views of men and things, which float in the female mind, and in what distant publication do they appear? We should like to ascertain the name of the favoured periodical, but in the meantime ladies, what think you of the Pearl? Is it not neat enough in appearance for your choice contributions? Would not some of your beautiful literary pieces add lustre to its pages? Some of the papers of our neighbours are graced with the products of many a feminine pen, while our poor Pearl cannot boast of a single original article from a lady. Come ladies we present ourselves as candidates for your literary favours—only send us a few and we promise to allot to them the most conspicuous part of our paper—they shall appear in the most beautiful dress for we will give our printer double charge concerning them—nay if we had letters of gold, they should be appropriated to this ornamental purpose. Can the ladies withstand our tempting proposals? Can they refuse our very polite and gallant request? Let the stationers prepare themselves, for they will shortly be besieged for crow quills and fine paper. We are fully prepared for all contingencies of this kind, and with all confidence we shall expect to receive many of the interesting views of our fair readers.

PROVINCIAL PROSPERITY.—Favoured as is the province of Nova Scotia with so many advantages for trade and commerce, we have sometimes wondered that her progress in wealth and prosperity should be so remarkably slow. The wealth of her merchants, the salubrity of her climate, and the general industry of her inhabitants, should we think, have raised Nova Scotia higher in the scale of commercial countries than her present elevation. Where so much capital abounds, so much peace and contentment prevail, and such wide fields of industry present themselves on every side, what can be the reason, that she does not put forth all her energies, and advance with rapid strides to the goal of fortune and success? Were we indigent and altogether destitute of the means wherewith to commence the race of prosperity—or were we like miserable Spain involved in anarchy and bloodshed from coast to coast—or finally were no chances offered for spirit and perseverance to range over the above problem would be easy of solution. But with facts so opposite and overwhelming, the case cannot be decided with such facility. Other countries with fewer advantages have taken the lead of us, while they seem determined, if possible, to continue to outstrip us. Shall it be so always? We think not. We think we can perceive indications in society of a decided improvement in the aspect of our affairs. In a word we think the people are beginning to awake to a sense of their duty. Symptom after symptom is being developed of a determined purpose in the community to exert all its powers for the welfare of the country. These indications of good we hail with delight. At present these signs may be few and feeble, but every day they will multiply and gather strength, and eventually will overcome all obstacles. When this shall be the case, our importations from the mother country will be, doubtless, materially diminished. That we must, however, for a long series of years depend on Great Britain for many articles of manufacture is certain—and to a limited extent this is not to be deprecated as an evil, but is to be considered rather as a solid benefit to the country. While however just views of national wealth will conduct us to this conclusion, they will also as strongly point out the great disadvantages of importing anything and everything into the province. The propriety of this course when Nova Scotia was in her infancy we will not dispute, but