

V. Papers on Literary Subjects.

1. THE IMPROVEMENT OF OPPORTUNITIES.

From "*Caxtoniana*," a Series of Essays, by SIR E. BULWER LYTTON, BART.

Learn all you possibly can, and when you have learned that all, I repeat it, you will never converse with any man of sound brain who does not know something worth knowing, better than yourself.

Sir Walter Scott, in a letter to Joanna Baillie, says, "I never heard of a stranger that utterly baffled all efforts to engage him in conversation except one, whom an acquaintance of mine met in a stage-coach. My friend, who piqued himself on his talents for conversation, assailed this tortoise on all hands, but in vain; and at length descended to expostulation. 'I have talked to you, my friend, on all the ruling subjects,—literature, farming, merchandise, gaming, game-laws, horse races, suits at law, politics, and swindling, and blasphemy, and philosophy,—is there any one subject that you will favour me by opening upon?' The wight writhed his countenance into a grin: 'Sir,' said he, 'can you say anything clever about bend-leather?'"

"There," says Sir Walter Scott, "I own I should have been as much nonplused as my acquaintance."

I venture to doubt that modest assertion. Sir Walter would have perceived that he had not there to teach, but to learn; and I am quite certain that before the end of his journey, he would have extracted from the traveller all that the traveller could have told him about bend-leather. And, if Sir Walter Scott had learned all about bend-leather, what then? What then? It would have been sure to have come out in one of his books, suggested some felicity in humour, or sported into some playful novelty in character, which would have made the whole reading world merrier and wiser.

It is not knowledge that constitutes the difference between the man who adds to the rites and embellishments of life, and the man who leaves the world just as he found it. The difference between the two consists in the reproduction of knowledge,—in the degree to which the mind appropriates, tests, experimentalises on, all the waifs of ideas which are borne to it from the minds of others.

A certain nobleman, very proud of the extent and beauty of his pleasure-grounds, chancing one day to call on a small squire, whose garden might cover about half an acre, was greatly struck with the brilliant colours of his neighbour's flowers. "Ay," my lord, "the flowers are well enough," said the squire, "but permit me to show you my grapes." Conducted into an old-fashioned little greenhouse, which served as a vinery, my lord gazed with mortification and envy on grapes twice as fine as his own. "My dear friend," said my lord, "you have a jewel of a gardener, let me see him." The gardener was called—the single gardener—a simple looking young man, under thirty. "Accept my compliments on your flower-beds and your grapes," said my lord, "and tell me, if you can, why your flowers are so much brighter than mine, and your grapes so much finer? you must have studied horticulture profoundly." "Please your lordship," said the man, "I have not had the advantage of much education, I ben't no scholar; but as to the flowers and the vines, the secret as to treating them just came to me, you see, by chance."

"By chance? Explain."

"Well, my lord, three years ago, master sent me to Lunnion on business of his'n, and it came on to rain, and I took shelter in a mews, you see."

"Yes; you took shelter in a mews—what then?"

"And there were two gentlemen taking shelter too, and they were talking to each other about charcoal."

"About charcoal? Go on."

"And one said that it had done a deal o' good in many cases of sickness, and specially in the first stage of the cholera, and I took a note on my mind of that, because we'd had the cholera in our village the year afore. And I guessed the two gentlemen were doctors, and knew what they were talking about."

"I daresay they did; but flowers and vines do not have the cholera, do they?"

"No, my lord, but they have complaints of their own; and one of the gentlemen went on to say that charcoal had a special good effect upon all vegetable life, and told a story of a vinedresser, in Germany I think, who had made a very sickly poor vineyard one of the best in all those parts, simply by charcoal dressings. So I naturally pricked up my ears at that, for our vines were in so bad a way that master thought of doing away with them altogether. 'Ay,' said the other gentleman, 'and see how a little sprinkling of charcoal will brighten up a flower-bed.'"

"The rain was now over, and the gentlemen left the mews, and I thought,—Well, but before I try the charcoal on my plants, I'd

best make some enquiry of them as ar'n't doctors, but gardeners. So I went to our nurseryman, who has a deal of book-learning, and I asked him if he'd ever heard of charcoal dressing being good for vines, and he said he had read in a book that it was so, but had never tried it. He kindly lent me the book, which was translated from some forren one, and after I had picked out of it all I could, I tried the charcoal in the way the book told me to try it; and that's how the grapes and the flower-beds came to please you, my lord. It was a lucky chance that ever I heard those gentlemen talking in the mews, please your lordship."

"Chance happens to all," answered the peer sentimentally; "but to turn chance to good account, is the gift of few."

His lordship, returning home, gazed gloomily on the hues of his vast parterres; he visited his vineries, and scowled at the clusters; he summoned his head gardener, a gentleman of the highest repute for science, and who never spoke of a cowslip except by its name in Latin. To this learned personage my lord communicated what he had heard and seen of the benignant effects of charcoal, and produced in proof, a magnificent bunch of grapes, which he had brought from the squire's.

"My lord," said the gardener, scarcely glancing at the grapes, "Squire—'s gardener must be a poor ignorant creature to fancy he had discovered a secret in what is so very well-known to every professed horticulturist. Professor Liebig, my lord, has treated of the good effect of charcoal dressings to vines especially; and it is to be explained on these chemical principles." Therewith, the wise man entered into a profound dissertation, of which his lordship did not understand a word.

"Well then," said the peer, cutting short the harangue, "since you know so well that charcoal dressing is good for vines and flowers, have you ever tried it on mine?"

"I can't say I have my lord; it did not chance to come into my head."

"Nay," replied the peer, "chance put it into your head, but thought never took it out of your head."

My lord, who if he did not know much about horticulture, was a good judge of mankind, dismissed the man of learning, and with many apologies for seeking to rob his neighbour of such a treasure, asked the squire to transfer to his service the man of genius. The squire, who thought that now the charcoal had been once discovered, any new gardener could apply it as well as the old one, was too happy to oblige my lord, and advance the fortunes of an honest fellow, born in his village. His lordship knew very well that a man who makes good use of the ideas received through chance, will make a still better use of ideas received through study. He took some kind, but not altogether unselfish, pains with the training and education of the man of genius whom he had gained to his service. The man is now my lord's head forester and bailiff. The woods thrive under him; the farm pays largely. He and my lord are both the richer for the connection between them. He is not the less practically painstaking, though he no longer says "ben't," and "his'n;" nor the less felicitously theoretical, though he no longer ascribes a successful experiment to chance.

2. EDUCATIONAL LITERATURE FOR TEACHERS.

Of all the agencies yet employed to elevate the business of teaching, a live educational literature is unquestionably the most potent. It is, indeed, the life of other agencies. The present condition and substantial success of educational effort are largely due to the spirit of healthy progress infused by the press through all classes of teachers.

During the past fifty years, numerous educational works, both of a standard and of a periodical character, have been widely circulated. A few of these works have inaugurated the most important reforms in education; laying, indeed the foundation of new educational systems. There are, indeed, very few teachers who have attained to eminence in their profession, who are not greatly indebted to the ideas, suggestions, and methods, which they have gleaned from educational works.

And yet strange as it may seem, there are thousands of teachers in our schools, who have never read a page on the subject of teaching; some, indeed, who are not able to name a single educational work that has ever been published. It need not be added, that he who places a practical treatise or periodical in the hands of such teachers, does the cause of education important service.—*Ohio School Commissioner's Report.*

3. ENCOURAGING SCHOLARS TO READ AT HOME.

SIR,—By your kind permission, I will bring before my fellow-teachers a scheme for assisting our scholars to read at home, which I have never seen in print, although perhaps some schools may already have it in operation.