

ORIGINAL.

CRITIQUE ON SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMAS.

(Continued from page 212.)

IV. TWELFTH NIGHT.

We believe that this piece is classed among our author's earliest productions—we conceive that the internal evidence it affords as to this point, sufficient to prove it. We have just read in Schlegel that this piece is said to be the *LAST* of his productions, and this statement is accompanied by the remark, that this proves him to have retained to the very last the freshness and even the wildness of his fancy. We readily corroborate the reflection, for so strongly had these peculiarities touched us, that we had referred it without hesitation to his early youth. This circumstance enhances our persuasion that Shakspeare is the least forced, the least *conscious* genius in the whole range of our own, or perhaps any modern literature. That at the close of a long and fatiguing career, full of struggles, of griefs, of almost superhuman efforts of intellect, he should throw off a work so light, so full of fancy, so redolent of strength, proves something untameable about his genius which we can find nothing to parallel. Perhaps, after all, we little men overrate the labour which it costs the mental giant to give birth to his glorious creations. In the highest cases of intellect there is probably something much more *instinctive* than we are apt to imagine, and when, measured after our own ideas, it would seem to struggle, perhaps it is but casting off a little of its superabundant energy, which it would find harder to keep in than to give scope.

The excellence of this piece does not consist in the regularity of the plot, or the perfect harmony of the details, but in the freshness of the fancy, the exuberance of the wit, the brilliant colouring of many of its passages. As to the plan, it is loose, involved and tardily developed, abounding with improbabilities, to a greater degree than the majority of his pieces. The connection of parts is far from being intimate, and altogether it seems to us to disclose more of the easy graces of a youthful fancy than of the sobered perfections of a matured understanding. There is too much incident about all his pieces for any one of them to present what is called a simple plot—that framework in which our puny classicists of modern days enclose their unfertile conceptions, excluding all episode, all decoration, all that does not directly tend to advance the business of the play;—within such a narrow range he could not have compressed his exuberant imagination, still we often meet in him a complexity without confusion which we think is not to be recognised in this instance. There is a certain vagueness thrown around the place and period of the piece, a peculiarity which is to be met with in many of his productions, and which here harmonises well with the nature of the incidents, for when these are of a wild or improbable character, they could produce a want of keeping to give precision to the above circumstances. It is on this account, and not from any want of geographical science, as Schlegel has proved, that we meet with so many cases in which the scene is surrounded by a sort of mist, and the name of a country is given to the piece merely from a compliance with established forms. The whole of the piece wears the colouring of the middle age;—the vagueness of the scene, the nature of the incidents, the mode of life and habits of the actors, their busy *fur niente*, their practical jokes, their pleasantries, their ideas of love, their continual light-heartedness, their word-play, their smuttiness, the mistress with her fool and her waiting-maid, the disguise and the duello, all refer us back to the days of semi-barbarous magnificence, upon which so much has been written, and on which so much more yet remains to be said.

The clown here plays a very conspicuous part—he appears frequently, and greatly aids the interest and business of the piece. Shakspeare's clown varies like his other personages—no two of them are the same. This one is less of a motley fool than some of the others. He condescends, indeed, to wear the cap and bells, but he is aware of the condescension. He assumes the disguise to be able more freely to give forth his jokes and his gibes. For the same reason he speaks in character, making use of that gibberish which has descended in a right line from the fool of the olden time to our modern Merry-Andrew, underneath which often lurks a keen vein of satire upon men and manners in general, or upon the other personages of the piece in particular. His wit varies in its character—sometimes it consists in the ingenious word-play, of which we have already spoken, sometimes of amusing sophistical argument in which we think that we recognize the logic of the period, sometimes it shoots at the absurdities of the age and country, among which the peculiarities of the modern and affected dialect are a frequent topic,—at times he rises even above this, and forgetting for an instant his character of fool, with all its accompaniments, delivers some deep and pungent truth which might have proceeded from the lips of Lucian or Hamlet. Our antiquarians seem often at a loss for subjects. We might propose to them a worse one than this—an investigation into the origin and character of the fool of the middle ages, the purpose which he served, and the proportions of reason and folly which formed his nature. In the actual fool we have little doubt that the latter element generally predominated to such a degree, that his pleasantries could only have suited the rude palate of his own days. Shakspeare has taken a most justifiable liberty with fact, in presenting us with a fool who, from beneath his motley garb, gives forth things which may please the appetite of every period.

The comic personages of the piece are those which interest us the most. Sir Toby, the rude, witty, boisterous roisterer, with his tame-man and butt, Sir Andrew Ague Cheek, who, after Slender, is the most admirable nunny that ever was drawn, along with the pompous steward and the versatile clown, form a group of choice spirits, who put gravity to flight whenever they appear. The romantic personages are in this instance subordinate to the others—still in their parts there occur passages of most sweet melody, as where the Duke demands the aid of music to soothe his passion—and where Viola shadows forth her love in the lines beginning

"She never told her love."

Here, as in almost every example where we meet with lyric poetry, we see that our rhymed verse was far yet from having attained its highest finish. It is impossible, in so many instances, to attribute its deficiencies to carelessness, real or affected, on the part of the writer.

The language in this piece is very peculiar. It abounds in cant terms, foreign words, expressions of the day, and proverbial phrases of which it is often difficult to see the sense; and this does not only occur in the part of the clown, who invariably employs a style less intelligible than that of the others.

We see here, as elsewhere, his knowledge of marine life—frequent mythological allusions. He alludes to the *Puritans*, who must then have been rising to influence. His rhymed passages are like jewels enchased in the rest—those of them which end an act or scene are often the deposits of his deepest, grandest thoughts. The scene of the steward reading the letter is one of the most highly comic. The letter reminds us of Elizabeth's addition to Raleigh's couplet. *Wise women* often spoken of—not exactly the modern "*femmes sages*" of our French neighbours.

His language is innately and fundamentally metaphorical, and it is astonishing how he moulds it, so as with the smallest possible number of words, to bring out the greatest possible quantity of thought. The scene on which the denouement turns, too much resembles that of the two Dromirs. Viola represented as he represents many of his women—courting instead of being courted. This was not so offensive to taste in his times. In some of the higher passages we discover a little inflatedness.

An action of battery in Illyria!!!

'TIME STILL MOVES ON.'

Time still moves on, with noiseless pace,
And we are loiterers by the way;
Few win and many lose the race,
For which they struggle day by day:
And even when the goal is gained
How seldom worth the toil it seems?
How lightly valued when obtained,
The prize that flattering Hope esteems!

Submissive to the winds of chance,
We toss on Life's inconsistent sea:
This billow may our bark advance,
And that may leave it on the lee:
This coast, which rises fair to view,
May thick be set with rocky mail,
And that which beetles o'er the blue,
Be safest for the shattered sail.

The cloud that, like a little hand,
Slow lingers when the morning shines,
Expands its volume o'er the land,
Dark as a forest-sea of pines;
While that which casts a vapory screen
Before the azure realm of day,
Rolls upward from the lowland scene,
And from the mountain tops away.

Oh, fond deceit! to think the flight
Of time will lead to pleasures strange,
And ever bring some new delight,
To minds that strive and sigh for change.
Within ourselves the secret lies,
Let seasons vary as they will,
Our hearts would murmur, though our skies
Were bright as those of Eden still!

PARK BENJAMIN.

—Knickerbocker.

SCRAPS FROM MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK.

NIGHT IN LONDON.

Night is generally my time for walking. In the summer I often leave home in the morning, and roam about fields and lanes all day, or even escape for days or weeks together, but saving in the country I seldom go out until after dark, though, Heaven be thanked, I love its light and feel the cheerfulness it sheds upon the earth, as much as any creature living.

I have fallen insensibly into this habit, both because it favours my infirmity, and because it affords me greater opportunity of speculating on the characters and occupations of those who fill the streets. The glare and hurry of broad noon are not adapted to idle pursuits like mine; a glimpse of passing faces caught by the light of a street lamp or a shop window is often better for my purpose

than their full revelation in the daylight; and if I must add the truth, night is kinder in this respect than day; which too often destroys an air-built castle in the moment of its completion, without the smallest ceremony or remorse.

That constant pacing to and fro, that never-ending restlessness, that incessant tread of feet wearing the rough stones smooth and glossy—is it not a wonder how the dwellers in narrow ways can bear to bear it? Think of a sick man in such a place as Saint Martin's court, listening to the footsteps, and in the midst of pain and weariness obliged, despite himself, (as though it were a task he must perform) to detect the child's step from the man's, the slipshod beggar from the booted exquisite, the lounging from the busy, the dull heel of the sauntering outcast from the quick tread of an expectant pleasure-seeker—think of the hum and noise being always present to his senses, and of the stream of life that will not stop, pouring on, on, on, through all his restless dreams, as if he were condemned to lie dead, but conscious, in a noisy churchyard, and had no hope of rest for centuries to come.

Then the crowds for ever passing and repassing on the bridges (or those which are free of toil at least) where many stop on fine evenings, looking listlessly down upon the water, with some vague idea that by and by it runs between green banks which grow wider and wider, until at last it joins the broad vast sea—where some halt to rest from heavy loads, and think as they look over the parapet that to smoke and lounge away one's life, and lie sleeping in the sun upon a hot tarpaulin, in a dull, slow, sluggish barge, must be happiness unalloyed, and where some, and a very different class, pause with heavier loads than they, remembering to have heard or read in some old time that drowning was not a hard death, but of all means of suicide the easiest and best.

Covent Garden Market at sunrise, too, in the spring or summer, when the fragrance of sweet flowers is in the air, overpowering even the unwholesome steams of last night's debauchery, and driving the dusky thrush, whose cage has hung outside a garret window all night long, half mad with joy! Poor bird! the only neighbouring thing at all akin to the other little captives, some of whom, shrinking from the hot hands of drunken purchasers, lie drooping on the path already, while others, soddened by close contact, await the time when they shall be watered and freshened up to please more sober company, and make old clerks who pass them on their road to business, wonder what has filled their breasts with visions of the country.

MR. PICKWICK'S INTRODUCTION TO MASTER HUMPHREY.

I was in such a mood as this, sitting in my garden yesterday morning under the shade of a favourite tree, revelling in all the bloom and brightness about me, and feeling every sense of hope and enjoyment quickened by this most beautiful season of spring, when my meditations were interrupted by the unexpected appearance of my barber at the end of the walk, who I immediately saw was coming towards me with a hasty step that betokened something remarkable.

My barber is at all times a very brisk, bustling, active little man—for he is, as it were, chubby all over, without being stout or unwieldy—but yesterday his alacrity was so very uncommon that it quite took me by surprise. Nor could I fail to observe, when he came up to me, that his grey eyes were twinkling in a most extraordinary manner, that his little red nose was in an unusual glow, that every line in his round bright face was twisted and curved into an expression of pleased surprise, and that his whole countenance was radiant with glee. I was still more surprised to see my housekeeper, who usually preserves a very staid air, and stands somewhat upon her dignity, peeping round the hedge at the bottom of the walk, and exchanging nods and smiles with the barber, who twice or thrice looked over his shoulder for that purpose. I could conceive no announcement to which these appearances could be the prelude, unless it were that they had married each other that morning.

I was, consequently, a little disappointed when it only came out that there was a gentleman in the house who wished to speak with me.

"And who is it?" said I.

The barber, with his face screwed up still tighter than before, replied, that the gentleman would not send his name, but wished to see me. I pondered for a moment, wondering who this visitor might be, and I remarked that he embraced the opportunity of exchanging another nod with the housekeeper, who still lingered in the distance.

"Well!" said I, "bid the gentleman come here."

This seemed to be the consummation of the barber's hopes, for he turned sharp round, and actually ran away.

Now, my sight is not very good at a distance, and, therefore, when the gentleman first appeared in the walk, I was not quite clear whether he was a stranger to me or otherwise. He was an elderly gentleman, but came tripping along in the pleasantest manner conceivable, avoiding the garden roller and the border of the beds with inimitable dexterity, picking his way among the flower-pots, and smiling with unspeakable good humour. Before he was half-way up the walk he began to salute me; then I thought I knew him; but when he came towards me with his hat in his hand, the sun shining on his bald head, his bland face, his bright spectacles, his fawn-coloured tights, and his black gaiters—then my heart warmed, and I felt quite certain that it was Mr. Pickwick.