

faces of our hydra-headed literature are only as the passing clouds which obscure for a moment the face of the sun.

Men may obtain also in the pages of the magazine or newspaper that training which is almost indispensable, according to modern views, to becoming a successful writer. We say according to modern views, because we cannot help remembering that Milton's first production was the Hymn on the morning of Christ's nativity, and that the famous essay on that great poet was one of the first attempts of Macaulay. These were not ordinary men however, and whether indispensable or not, practice in writing is always useful, and it is much pleasanter to obtain it where it costs one little, than to publish a book and find it fail—fail utterly and stamp one with the mark of an unsuccessful writer. If a paper be sent to the editor of a magazine and be rejected, a person's sensitiveness is quieted by the knowledge that he alone is aware of the failure, and pride is consoled by the reflection that his individual judgment alone has found one wanting.

But, although we cannot question the great importance of so-easily found outlets to literary expression in regard to average writers and the world generally, and must acknowledge that many a valuable thought and happy phrase, the production of men who may never be again heard from, are thus preserved, still there are other aspects in which the literature of the present may be viewed. Who can confidently deny that many a poem which might have opened the gates of fame to its writer, has been consigned to the flames in disgust after an adverse opinion from some adle-headed editor? Tom Hood's "Song of the Shirt" went begging for some time. Keats is supposed to have received a mortal blow from savage criticisms in the *Quarterly Review*.

That unity is strength is a truism; and in our opinion it holds good in literature as elsewhere. View the numberless short pieces, trifles thrown off on every possible occasion, in which our modern poets indulge; call up the tales and essays innumerable of our prose writers. Each little verse, if it be worthy of its author contains some happy thought, or line, is prompted by warmth of feeling or by a moment's inspiration; each essay must draw forth something of the mental strength of its writer. All very well in the present hour or day; each of these efforts adds to fame, to wealth perhaps, to self-confidence, if writers ever want self-confidence; but unless they be of such power as to go down to posterity by their own innate worth, as Campbell's fiery ballads, or Macaulay's Essays, who will read them fifty years hence? Certainly in all times have there been dabbles in literature who wrote short verses, and nothing but short verses, and even the greater poets of old have sometimes relaxed, but still for every short piece from Virgil, Dante, Spenser or Milton, we can show twenty from Byron, or Longfellow, or Tennyson; and with the inducements which modern writers have, we believe, that had any of these great poets of former times lived in our whirling nineteenth century, they would have frittered away their strength in such ephemeral productions, as living men with their genius now do. Of course there are other causes why these ancient names tower over those of modern writers; they had that advantage over our contemporaries which a painter well prepared for work, has over one chalking pictures on an old barn-door: they had *clean canvases*, and their readers had less reason and a freer imagination than we have, and therefore received impressions more readily.

The great feature of the age not only in literature but in everything, is the readiness with which ability finds vent. Children whose youth gives evidence of a particular bias, are

generally not only allowed but encouraged to choose that business or profession for which they have a desire. Even the traditional wish of the obstinate Scotch farmer to see his son wag his paw in a pulpit has given way somewhat before the influence of the age, and a clever son is permitted to wag his paw where he pleases. David Wilkie would surely have been a minister if he had been his own great-grandfather, so to speak; but now genius of whatever kind is usually able to shape its own course. We say genius of *whatever kind* because we believe that genius is merely supeninent ability in some particular line.

Samuel Johnson we think, said that genius was great general ability turned by accident in some special direction; and Craik, in his "History of English Literature" repeats and endorses the definition. Now this remark, if true, may mean that even after the faculties of a man of genius have been directed towards some particular object, he may yet remain in possession of general ability; or it may infer that once exclusively devoted to that object he can be only a fool in reference to any other matter. If the first view be correct, how comes it that Shakespeare was not a good actor, that Oliver Goldsmith was plucked at college, and was such a failure all through life? Why did Blackstone become so famous as a lawyer and yet write epics which are a byword and a scoff? Why did Hogg lose as a sheep farmer all the money he made as a poet? And finally how was it that Wellington, of such military genius, was declared by the *sax populi* to be so bad a statesman that he was compelled to barricade his house against an infuriated mob. Again, if the second supposition be the true one, we can cite against it the names of Cæsar, general, historian, statesman; of Milton, poet, debator, statesman; of Bonaparte, of Sheridan, of a host of others. Nearly every prominent man in Grecian history was at once orator, statesman and soldier. In all the instances we have given, however, one trait of character predominates over the others; and this is where the genius of the man lies; but, if Johnson's definition were true, the possessor of genius would be equally great in everything he attempted. Other facts militating against such a view are to be found in the peculiarities of literary genius. The great soldier, the great statesman, scientist, philosopher, seem to us to differ entirely in character from great literary men. The faculties which make a successful writer seem to be altogether apart from the remainder of his character. Pope's name comes down to us in the halo of poetical fame; and when we look back through the years, and trace his earthly career through its windings, we see a peevish invalid, half pitied, half despised, by those with whom he is in close contact; a little caricature of a human being, squabbling like a spoila child with the sharp-tongued Mary Wortley Montague; full of petty animosity and useless chicanery. A youthful poacher marries a woman half as old again as himself, goes to London becomes a second-class actor, then a manager; and were the, half dozen greatest men whom this world produced placed side by side, this man would stand amongst them,—Shakespeare; whom his age regarded so little, that we have no certain record of his life or death; the authorship of his plays disputed even. A Goldsmith becomes a proverb for child-dishness, "talks like a parrot." Burns gives so little evidence of the poet in his home life, that his eldest son afterwards declares that he did not know his father had ever written anything, until he learned the truth from strangers.

And the rewards of the literary man are as uncertain and as varied as his productions; and often in this life he gets as little notice as they do, although if there be merit in man or work, he has little chance now-a-days of missing the mark so completely as some now famous names did during their life.