

In 'Bracebridge Hall' Irving again introduces us to the scenes and characters already made familiar in the Christmas papers, and in addition he brings before us some new character-sketches. The most important of these are Lady Lillycraft and General Harbottle, but although described with many touches of native humour, they are far inferior creations to the Squire or Master Simon. Much more original is Ready-Money Jack Tibbets, who plays a prominent part throughout the Bracebridge Hall papers, and who may be set down as a fairly representative specimen of the English yeoman. The sketches of the village worthies are admirable; the apothecary who was the village wise man full of sententious remarks, who "observed, with great solemnity and emphasis that 'man is a compound of wisdom and folly;' upon which Master Simon, who had hold of my arm, pressed very hard upon it and whispered in my ear, 'That's a devilish shrewd remark!' The village politician, who 'had a confounded trick of talking, and was apt to bother one about the national debt, and such nonsense,' the tailor and the worthies who kept the village inn, all these and many more testify to that extraordinary perception, amounting almost to intuition which Irving possessed of the oddities and excellencies of English character. Not only in his essays and sketches, but also in the tales with which they are so plentifully interspersed, Irving's English characters are in inception, conventional, but he presents them with a naturalness, and invests them with a freshness, that make them actual living creatures, and not mere puppets. In this respect he reminds us of a worker in a different field of art, David Wilkie,* whose subjects are conventional, but in treatment exquisitely natural. Such pictures as 'The Rent Day,' or 'The Blind Fiddler,' are conceived

and worked out in exactly the same spirit, as that which inspires Washington Irving's charming delineations of rustic life. That the painter and the writer should both have treated Spanish subjects, as well as English, may be looked upon as a mere coincidence, but as here too they display the same delicate fancy combined with truth and accuracy, the very coincidence serves to draw the parallel between them closer. The style of writing which Lamb and Washington Irving adopted has found few disciples in our day. We have a number of brilliant essayists, whose achievements have made the nineteenth century perhaps the greatest prose era in our literature;—but they are philosophical, critical and didactic; their self-imposed mission is to teach, not to amuse, whereas the primary object of Lamb and Irving was to afford their readers matter for innocent enjoyment. There is, however, one writer, himself a countryman of Irving, upon whom the mantle of Charles Lamb seems to have fallen. Oliver Wendell Holmes, without in any instance sacrificing his originality, follows closely the method of the elder essayists, and although he is the most remarkable, he is by no means the only proof we possess, that it is among American writers we now chiefly find that quaint and delicate humour, which the discussion of the sterner realities and larger issues of life seems for the time to have banished from England.

Irving's fame does not, however, rest solely on his charms as an essayist; as a story-teller he is unrivalled. The practice of telling a story simply for the sake of the story, and not as a vehicle for the discussion of human character, has of late been well nigh abandoned. The rôle of *raconteur* seems for the present to be played out, in spite of the vehement assertions of a living novelist that it has been the one aim of his life to assume it. The truth is, that the novel can never be used simply to tell a story; the essence

* It may be interesting to note that Wilkie and Irving were intimate personal friends.