

‘under the burthen of recollected depravity! Well may you brood over your painful reflections! Guilt is the seed which folly is perpetually scattering from her idle hand, and she seldom fails to reap in repentance an abundant crop of perturbation and of anguish. But perhaps I mistake,’ added he, turning his eye towards the fragment which still lay on the table, ‘this despondence is not the anxiety of repentance for past offences, but the consequence of regret that *they are past*.—What, *writing* to the abandoned and vicious object of your depraved attachment!’

How such a supposition entered his mind; I presume not to judge. Lewson would perhaps have said it was the effect of that cynical severity which constantly led him to put the worst construction on every thing. Fanaticus would have lifted up his eyes, perchance, and exclaimed that the devil had put the malicious thought into his head. Gaylove, it is probable, would have snapped his fingers, and said, he was a little cracked in the pericranium; Proverbius might have talked about the old woman and the oven; and Gravely might, very likely, have supposed, that some word had caught his eye which bore some analogy to his fuscation. For my part, I told him with the coolest indifference, he might read what I had written.

He cast his eye over the fragment.—‘Bombast!’ said he, ‘absurdity!—Ridiculous prostitution of time and thought! if the rayings of madness may be dignified with an appellation; which ought to be held sacred to the calm ratiocinations of learning and judgment, I can wonder at no licentious irregularity of passion,’ muttered he, ‘no gross barbarity of taste, no unbridled wantonness of practice in him who prostitutes the awful deposit of time in blotting paper, which might have been better employed by the grocer or the butter man, with such absurd and wanton tales of vanity and enthusiasm!’

The once darling passions of boyish infatuation rushed back upon my mind; and my philosophy yielded.

‘Yes, Sir,’ said I briskly, ‘these Gothic legends were among the dearest literary pleasures of my earlier youth; and I do not know that those years of fleeting happiness were marked with any enormous blemishes.’

‘No!’ said he, ‘you were then imbibing the poisons from these romantic extravagancies, and you had last night a specimen of the influence they have had upon your mind.’

‘I started as he spoke thus: I laid my hand as if by instinct on my heart—it vibrated with a long forgotten transport.—

Perhaps he hath spoken truly, whispered the little flutterer, as it reminded me what had really been my conduct at the time alluded to. Is not this glow of secret satisfaction a proof of the assertion? Yes—yes—these romantic legends may have had their influences, though so opposite to what this cynic suspects. Thus was my philosophy for a moment overthrown by an idle and random conjecture.

Mordant remarked how I was startled at his words, and had perhaps observed that they awakened reflection. He cast at me what the physiognomist would perhaps have called an intelligent glance. I conceived that he deemed my conduct a confirmation of his suspicions; and I felt myself confused and abashed.

THE ENTHUSIAST.

I was presently relieved from my embarrassment by the appearance of young Melville, a youth whose zealous attachment to the muses, and whose fervency of disposition, are esteemed the leading traits of his character: and who, according to Lewson, has, on these accounts, been as much loved by the moral votaries of generosity and sensibility, and hated by the children of dissipation, avarice, and worldly prudence, as any one could possibly expect who knows no bounds to the ardour of his attachment, and grants no mercy to the sordid qualities so opposite to his nature.

Melville seized the fragment, and read it with avidity. His eyes sparkled, and his spirits appeared ‘on the tiptoe of expectation.’ When he had got to the end, ‘Where is the remaining part,’ exclaimed he eagerly.—‘There is more,’ returned I, ‘it was never designed but as a fragment.’ ‘Fragment!’ exclaimed he, ‘Fragment!—Do you deal out such compositions in fragments?—the fellow ought to be massacred who tantalizes one with specimens of such delightful tales, and then refuses to gratify the expectations he has roused. I shall never forgive Miss Aikin for breaking off her delightful tale of Sir Bertrand in so abrupt a manner.’

‘What you relish this delightful kind of fictions, do you, Sir?’ said Mordant with a sneer.

‘Relish them!’ adds he, ‘what man of sense, of spirit, of feeling, can help admiring them? Who but the selfish, sordid monk—the surly cynic—the cold blooded child of apathy can read without delight these enchanting pictures of Gothic manners and Gothic superstitions? How sordid, how frivolous, how vain, how futile have mankind become, since these