

## THE HORRORS OF SENSIBILITY.

Having proposed to myself the task of laying before the world a disclosure of some few of those emotions, which circumstances have produced in my heart—a heart too exquisitely framed for the ordinary course of society I may be allowed, by way of prelude to so delicate a subject, to give a rough etching of myself in my present condition; for who would feel pleasure in listening to the gossiping voice of an egotist concealed behind a curtain, except, indeed, it were some sweet fascinating female voice, to which imagination might attach a form beautiful as Hebe; in which case, those of us who have been well schooled in the lessons of the heart, would wish the curtain to remain drawn for ever, and the voice to continue as it began, lest the disclosure should rob the “fancy’s sketch” of half—nay, perhaps more than half its lustre; and what voice, however melodious, would not lose its charm, if instead of being breathed, as we had fondly presumed, from the lips of a sylph, it were ushered on the ear, through the beard and leathern cheeks of an Hecate!

As my voice, *per se*, can have no claim to the power of fascination, imagination would not make itself busy in giving me a form unduly beautiful, were I to utter my sensations under a cautious disguise; and therefore I hold it good to draw the following picture of myself, that in the eyes of my readers, it may stand as a frontispiece and companion to what I may disclose, and that they may shake hands and congratulate me as an “old familiar face,” when I shall have laid bare my heart before them.

I am a bachelor “on the wrong side of forty,” as the phrase of the day hath it; and the cause of which will in due order be explained. I vegetate on a small patrimony amongst the northern hills of this kingdom—a patrimony which has descended in a regular course of succession; in short I am the fifth of the name who has died, (I say died, because the death of the heart, which is mine, is the most killing death of all) on this spot, that has almost become sacred to our name, by our long enjoyment.

My looking-glass and my memory must assist me in speaking of my outward man, both of which agents I have duly consulted, and find that a series of years, spent as I shall describe, have changed the open-featured, ingenuous, manly-faced boy, who, instead of walking on the earth, seems almost to walk in it, as if to bury himself, after having followed to the grave a long family of hopes that smiled around him at the onset of his life.

The circumstances which have produced this marvellous change of body, have in a great measure produced a certain eccentric temperament of the mind, which lays me open to the pity of some, and to the scorn of others, as “a thing that never was heard of, half merry, and half mad.” No wonder, therefore, that my society is confined to my own house—indeed, to my own bosom. I have been told that my house-keeper was, at the time of my birth, a chubby girl of fifteen, taken from a neighboring work-house by my mother, so that she has been my nurse in the earlier part of my life, and has now, for many years, been the only living thing entering my doors. I believe a word has not been exchanged by either of us for these two years past; and on that occasion she spoke first, because, in a fit of absence, I was about to lay a valuable family bible on the fire, instead of a log of wood, which she had placed ready for consumption; and she knew if the bible had been destroyed, she would have been suspected of purloining it.

Here I sit by days together at my fireside, and when the milder weather comes, I con over my old choice friend Izaak Walton, prepare my flies and hooks, and sometime cheered by the old man’s prattle, I while away an hour by the stream, chiefly with the same suc-

cess I have experienced in some of my earlier fishings in the deeper streams of the world. At other times, when my strength admits of it, I climb some eminence dear to the recollection of early days; but heart-sickness, and the pangs of the past fasten on me, and drive me from scenes and objects which were wont to awaken up all my enthusiasm and joy; and when I return to my home in these moods I never fail to cross the church-yard, and there I see flowers growing over the graves of “others of my line,” and in the dearth of my heart, almost envy the silent tenants who lie lapped in so sweet a slumber, coroneted by such wreaths as nature has scattered over their heads;—and nature is the best herald—the crest she raises, and the escutcheons she grants, are not like those which the like great ones purchase of the greater little ones of the earth.

Do I speak too unblushingly of myself, when I say that an excess of that divine particle of our nature—sensitiveness or sensibility—call it what you will, that so many covet, but so few can enjoy, has wrought the effects which I have described? Alas!—sensibility, overwrought sensibility, has been the source of all my affliction, the traces of which I must bear as a badge for the remainder of my days.

Poets have strung their rhymes in praise of sensibility, in hope that, like distant acquaintance, or a courtier on a gala-day, it might be won over by flattery, and they have gone down to their graves without effecting a nearer connection. I wish I could put my lips to their ears, and tell my story, and they would rise from their repose, and unsing what they had so zealously sung before.

The first instance I can remember of the inroads made on the current of my happiness, by the exquisite weakness of my nature, occurred at a very early period of my life. I was on a visit to an affectionate old aunt in the country, who had made my happiness the hobby-horse, on which she galloped with an incredible celerity: all her fondness was lavished on me, and I loved her as sincerely. She used to indulge me in everything, and I never lacked a constant supply of pocket-peace and toys for my childish gratification; and amongst other indulgence, of which she was always contriving a vast number, she used to tickle my palate with all sorts of good things; and thus she contrived to fill my mind with pleasure, and my belly with sugar-plums.

On a certain birth-day of mine, which happened during my visit, I heard my aunt order the cook to prepare for my dinner one of the finest turkeys she could find. I had several times before tasted and relished a turkey, without ever for a moment suspecting that my enjoyment had been purchased by the life-blood of the creature, and not at all considering whether or no, it was prepared with the same materials as a custard pudding would be, and certainly never connecting a thought of life or death with it. In the course of the morning of my birth-day, I strayed into the kitchen, and there I saw the cook struggling with, and tying together the legs of a large bird, and presently with a knife, which the unfeeling wench had been sharpening for the purpose, she almost severed the poor creature’s head from its body. The blood and my tears both started forth together, I screamed, and insisted on knowing why she treated the poor bird so cruelly, to which she coolly replied, she was killing and intended to roast the turkey for my dinner, according to the orders of my aunt. I had never heard of killing but once before, and that was when my aunt’s coachman, David, drove the carriage wheel over her favourite spaniel, and I could not, therefore, comprehend the destruction of another creature for the gratification of my palate; at least, I do not remember to have heard that poor Dash was served up at table, either for the gratification of me or any one else. In vain the unfeeling cook sought to pacify me, and