

From Blackwood's Magazine.

CELESTINA.

"When I was in Italy, some years ago, I knew a young Englishman who was in the habit of seeking places to reside in, little frequented by his countrymen. He was a lover of solitude and study, and addicted to reverie; and much of his life was a gentle and shimmering dream that glided to the music of romantic traditions. At the time I must now refer to, he had selected as his abode one of the deserted palaces of the Venetian nobility on the banks of the Brenta. But he had no acquaintance with the owners to interrupt his solitude, for he had hired it from the steward to whom their affairs were entrusted. It had attracted his fancy, though it was much out of order, from having a gallery of pictures, chiefly portraits, still remaining, and in good preservation. There was also a large neglected garden, with a terrace, along the river, and in its shady overgrown walks the Englishman sat or wandered for many hours of the day. But he also spent much time in the picture-gallery, conversing with the grave old senators, saturating his mind with the colours of Tintoretto, and Paolo Veronese, and contemplating, like a modern Paris, the goddesses of Titian's pencil. But there was one picture which gradually won his very heart. It was a portrait by Giorgione, of a young Venetian lady; and the old servant of the house called her La Celestina. She had the full and luxurious Venetian form; but, unlike any of the other female portraits, there was a profusion of rather light brown hair flowing down her back, as one sees in some of the early Italian pictures of the Virgin, and the sunny stream fell from a wreath of bay leaves. Her dress was of dark green silk. An antique bust of an old man was represented on a table before her, and her right hand and raised forefinger seemed to indicate that both she and the spectator on whom her divine eyes were fixed, must listen to some expected oracle from the marble lips. She might have served as a lovely symbol of the fresh present world listening to the fixed and Sibylline past. Her eyes were large and dark, but not lustrous; they seemed rather heavy, with an inward thoughtful melancholy, as if there was something in her situation or character more solemn than her years or circumstances could have led us to expect. There was, however, no tradition of her story, except that she was a daughter of the family which still possessed the palace and the picture, and that she had died in early life.

"Before this figure the young Englishman would remain for an hour or two at a time, endeavouring to shape out for himself some distinct view of her being and story. This was idle work, as it led him to no definite and lasting creation, but it occupied him for the time as well as anything else that he was likely to have done. By and by his fancy so gained upon him that he had the chamber next to that part of the gallery where the picture was, arranged as his bed-room, that so he might be near his incorporeal mistress even during the hours of sleep. One night, soon after this change had been made, while he was lying in bed, and musing of Celestina, he thought he heard a noise in the gallery consecrated to her, low voices, and a light step. He felt, I believe, may cherish, some dash of superstitious fear in his character, and he did not rise to examine into the matter. The next night was that of the full moon, and again he heard the same sound; and again, for the third time, on the night following. Then it ceased, and for some days he was in much perplexity. The gallery, by day-light, presented no appearance of change. He brooded over the remembrance, whether founded in fact or imagination, till it struck him that, perhaps, there was a connexion between the sounds and the age of the moon when they were heard, and that, if so, they might possibly return at the next corresponding period. He grew thin and nervous with anxiety, and resolved, at all hazards, to endeavour to clear up the secret. The night before the full moon came, and with it the sounds—the light whispers murmured and sang along the high walls and ceilings, and the steps flitted like fairies from end to end of the galleries. But even now he could not resolve to part with the tremulous pleasure of the mystery. The following night, that of the full moon, he felt worn-out, fretted, and desperate. Again the sounds were heard, the doors opened and closed, the steps throbbed in his heart, the indistinguishable words flew on, till he caught, in a low but clear tone, the name of Celestina. He seized a sword and stepped silently to a door near him, which opened into the gallery, and was in deep shadow. Unclasping it slowly, he looked down the long room, and there, opposite the place of the well-known picture, stood, in the bright moonlight, Celestina herself upon the floor. The right hand was raised like that on the canvass, as if to listen, and the eyes were looking earnestly into the depth of gloom which hid the Englishman. He let fall his sword, let go the door, which closed before him, and when he had again courage to open it, the gallery was empty, and the still clear light fell only on a vacant surface.

"The consequence to him of this event was a severe illness, and a friend and fellow-countryman was sent for from Venice to attend his sick-bed. This visitor gradually obtained an outline of the facts from the sufferer, and then applied to the old Italian servant, in order to arrive at a reasonable explanation. But he stoutly denied all knowledge of anything that could throw light upon the matter. Next day the friend found upon his table a

slip of paper, on which was written in a beautiful female hand, a request that he would present himself in the eastern-most arbour of the garden at the hour of the siesta. He of course did so, and found there a lady in a dark dress, and closely veiled. She said, in fine Italian, that she had begged to see him, in order to repair, if possible, the mischief which had been accidentally done. 'My father,' she continued, 'the owner of this palace, is of a proud but impoverished Venetian family. His son is an officer in an Austrian Regiment, which has been stationed for some years in Hungary; and I am the old man's only companion. He is, perhaps, a little peculiar and eccentric in his habits and character, and all his strongest feelings are directed towards the memory of his ancestors, whose abode is now occupied by your friend. Nothing but necessity would have induced him to let it to a stranger, and to reside in a small house in the neighbourhood which we now inhabit. He still perpetually recurs to the traditional stories of his family's former greatness; and it is a favourite point of belief with him that his daughter closely resembles the Celestina whose picture is in the gallery, and whose name she bears. Owing to this fancy, he is never satisfied unless he sees her dressed in imitation of the idolized portrait. But, as he no longer inhabits the house, and does not choose to present himself to its occupier in a light which he considers so unworthy, he could gratify his love for the pictures only by visiting them at night, at a time when the moon affords a light by which, imperfect as it is, his ancestors appear to him distinct and beautiful beings. Nor could he be long contented with this solitary pleasure, but insisted that I should accompany him. We have more than once entered a door from the gardens, and it was on the last of these occasions that I thought I heard a noise, and while I listened, the door at the end of the gallery was opened and then violently closed again. On this alarm we immediately escaped as we had entered, and the strange consequences to your friend have been to me a source of much regret. We heard of his illness from our old servant Antonio, the only person who knew of our nightly visits. To convince you that this is the whole secret, I have put on the dress I then wore, and you shall judge for yourself of my resemblance to the picture.'

"So saying, she threw aside her veil and mantle, and surprised the stranger with the view of her noble eyes, and of her youthful Italian beauty, clothed in the dress of rich green silk, which closely imitated that of the painted Celestina. Her hearer was amused by the mistake, and delighted by her explanation. He ventured to ask the lady, that when his sick friend should be a little recovered, she would complete her kindness by enabling him to judge for himself of the beautiful resemblance which had so misled him. She said, that she would willingly do so, and only regretted that, from her father's turn of character, it would be almost impossible to make him assent to any meeting with the present occupier of his ancient palace. She, therefore, said that it must be again a private interview, and might take place at the same spot on the third day following. Her new acquaintance was compelled to return to Venice, and so could not carry on the adventure in his own person. But the account which he gave to his friend soon restored the patient to strength and cheerfulness. Immediately after his companion's departure, he had the green and shady arbour prepared for the expected meeting. A collection of choice fruits, sweetmeats, and wits were set out in silver vessels on a marble table. The ghost-seer, dressed according to his own fancy in the garb of a Venetian cavalier of the old time, waited for his guest, who did not fail him. He thought her far more beautiful than the picture. They sat side by side, with the glowing feelings of southern and imaginative youth. She sang for him, and played on a guitar which he had taken care to place at hand; and he felt himself gifted with undreamt-of happiness. They met again more than once, and walked together along the gallery, where he could at leisure, compare her with Giorgione's Celestina, and give his own the deliberate preference. But he was at last dismayed by hearing from her, that she was designed by her father for a conventual life, in order to preserve the remnant of his fortune exclusively for his son. The Englishman's decision was soon taken. He, too, was of noble birth, and had wealth enough to make fortune in his wife unimportant. He gained the father's consent to their marriage, and she is now the mistress of an old English country-house. She looks on the portraits by Vandyke on its walls with as much pleasure as she ever derived from those of Titian, for she now tries to find in them a likeness to more than one young face that often rests upon her knee. Of this new generation, the eldest and the loveliest is called, like herself, Celestina.

cultivate a nearer acquaintance. Such men are hunters-after old editions, and scarce copies. They dote on bad paper, faded ink, and black letter; and will live on an "original edition" for a week. They value books as we do wine, for their age; and as the orientals do slaves, for their ugliness. But although these instances of proficiency in an art, more proper to dealers in books than to readers of them, are proofs of attention misdirected, and time misemployed, yet a general knowledge of the changes which time has wrought, in the form and materials of those implements of learning, is not only unobjectionable, but highly desirable.

As we have mentioned old books, we may as well say a word or two on old titles. I dare say you have heard of the book entitled—"Crumbs of Comfort for Zion's Chickens." I have before me a few titles, indited in a similar strain. In the reign of Elizabeth, great attention was excited by a series of pamphlets, directed against the ecclesiastical measures of the time, by an author who was never discovered; but who wrote under the assumed name of Martin Mar-prelate. They called forth numerous replies; of which I shall quote three. The first is entitled,—*"An Almond for a Parrot; or an Alms for Martin Mar-prelate."* By Cuthbert Curry-knave." The next is a short specimen of a practice very prevalent in old books; in which it was often attempted to combine title, preface, and table of contents, all in one. It runs thus:—"Pasquill's Apology. In the first part whereof he renders a reason of his long silence; and gallops the field with the treatise on Reformation. Printed where I was; and where I shall be ready, by the help of God and my muse, to send you a May-game of Martinism." The last has no less than four titles, all strung together; thus,—*"Puppe with a Hatchet; alias, a Fig for my Godson; or Crack me this Nut; that is, a sound Box of the Ear for the idiot Martin, to hold his Peace. Written by one that dares call a dog, a dog. Imprinted by John Anoke: and to be sold at the sign of the Crab-Tree Cudgel, in Thwack-Coat Lane."*

It is impossible to read these titles, without being reminded of the quaint, but deservedly popular works of Bunyan; "in which there flourish" many gentlemen like Cuthbert Curryknave, but with much longer names;—such as "the trumpeter, Mr. Take-heed-what-ye-hear;"—"Mr. Penny-wise-and-pound-foolish;"—and "Mr. Gain-ye-the-hundred-and-lose-ye-the-shire."

I have a few more titles, which belong to the age of Cromwell; and have mostly a devotional character. The first is entitled,—*"A most delectable sweet-perfumed Nosegay, for God's Saints, to smell at."* The next is,—*"High-heeled-Shoes for Dwarfs in Holiness."* The third is,—*"Salvation's vantage ground; or a Leaping-Stand for Heavy Believers."* We then have one of a martial character; being entitled,—*"A Shot aimed at the Devil's Head-Quarters; through the tube of a Cannon of the Covenant;"* and then comes one of a more plaintive description:—"A Sigh of Sorrow for the Sinners of Zion; breathed in a Hole of the Wall in an Earthen Vessel, known among men by the name of Samuel Fish." A still sadder tone pervades the next:—"Seven-Sobs of a Sorrowful Soul for Sin; or Seven Penitential Psalms of the Princely Prophet David; whereunto also are annexed William Hamnis's Handful of Honeysuckles; and divers Godly and Pithy Ditties, now newly augmented." The next is a continued string of allegories; heaped in merciless profusion, one upon the other:—"A Reaping-Hook well tempered or the Stubborn Ears of the Coming Crop; or Biscuits baked in the Oven of Charity; carefully conserved for the Chickens of the Church, the Sparrows of the Spirit, and the Sweet Swallows of Salvation." You will perceive that the authors of those days, (who evidently thought there was a great deal "in a name,") resorted to every possible quarter for a taking title. In their search for quaintness, they did not disdain even to visit the kitchen; so that we have,—*"A pair of Bellows, to blow off the Dust cast upon John Fry;"*—"The Snuffers of Divine Love;"—and an author seems to have reached the acme of outre-ism, when he gives us the delectable title of,—*"The Spiritual Mustard-Pot; to make the Soul sneeze with Devotion."*

THE COLONIAL PEARL.

Is published every Friday Evening, at seventeen shillings and sixpence per annum, in all cases, one half to be paid in advance. It is forwarded by the earliest mails to subscribers residing out of Halifax but no paper will be sent to a distance without payment being made in advance. No subscription will be taken for a less term than six months, and no discontinuance permitted but at the regular period of six months from the date of subscription. All letters and communications must be post paid to insure attendance and addressed to Thomas Taylor, Pearl Office, Halifax, N. S.

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OLD BOOKS AND OLD TITLES.

BY NATHANIEL ROGERS, M. D.

Many persons who are deeply skilled in the history and other contingent circumstances of books, seem to have paid very little attention to their use. Those affected with bibliomania, form a tolerably large class. They will recite, for your edification, the intricate genealogy of a work of ancient extraction; pointing to some venerable folio as the ancestor, and to a crowd of spruce little duodecimos as the progeny; but they too often neglect to