

And who is that grave, middle-aged gentleman next him, who would look the very type of a nineteenth century butler, were it not for those prying eyes which seem fitted for more curious work than counting the spoons? It is William Camden, the second master of Westminster school.

"Oh, a second-rate pedagogue, that is all." No it is not—he is one of the best informed antiquarians, that England boasts or ever will boast; a bottomless well of historical facts, an animated museum of rare and curious knowledge.

We ought to know that face,—frank and fearless, somewhat tanned with exposure, but not so tanned as to hide the blue veins which bespeak gentle blood. His exquisite taste, his lordly bearing and his courteous address might commend him to the heart of a queen. And before now they have—for it is none other than noble Walter Raleigh.

Sitting next him is a younger man, about twenty-two, but reckless living has already played havoc with his constitution and his intellectual face is prematurely old. Many a time has gay Beaumont, the playwright, stumbled over him carried up the corkscrew of a staircase which leads to his modest chambers in the Temple.

There is also one who has shaken off the cares of state to enjoy an hour's relaxation. Do you recognize that well rounded, florid countenance, that smiling mouth, those bright but penetrating eyes—that rich blue velvet doublet slashed with crimson satin, that broad collar of rich curious lace, those delicate fingers hooked with rings from which flash diamonds of ray serene? That is surely Bacon—you are right.

But while we have been making our observations a gruff good-natured voice has again and again summoned mine hostess—a fat smiling body—to re-fill the tankard. Who is that portly-like individual that occupies literally fills the enormous arm-chair at the head of the table? He is John Bullism incarnate. You cannot look at that peck-scurved face, broad and red as the sun in a fog, without thinking of a wine-vault and a cattle show.

Many a shilling has that huge living receptacle for sweet wines put into the pocket of my Lord Essex or whoever now holds the monopoly. Many a well fed ox has given of his best to build up that enormous carcass. See the human monster, as, shaking himself like a lion at the mouth of his den, he gulps down another brimming goblet of Canary, and then lay down the laws of verse making and play writing.

A joke reaches him from the other end of the table, and lo! he roars till the dishes on the wall ring like sleigh-bells. Something penetrates the thick hide of his sensibility, and lo! another roar which reminds one of Ossian's battle scenes.

Who is the Goliath that bullies everybody, bears down everybody,—yet offends nobody? Is it Shakespeare? Surely no one else has a right to swat the sceptre so imperiously. No, that quiet little man in black is Shakespeare, and this intellectual rowdy is rare Ben Jonson the self-elected President of the august Republic of Letters.

You see the man's biography written on his broad expanse of countenance. Bricklayer, Netherlands trooper, playwright—everything but poet and courtier—are written there legibly enough. It is no hard task for fancy to picture Ben climbing a ladder, with a load of bricks; or almost breaking the back of a clumsy Flanders mare, or drilling an awkward squad of trembling actors in his last new play.

All this seems natural enough. But wait till a few more cups of Dame Quickly's sack have mellowed the brain which caps that mountain of flesh, and you will discover that there is more than is indicated in the face. The wind which lashes the ocean to fury can also woo soft low notes from the Eolian wire. The lightning that cleaves the oak in twain can adorn the calm sky at eventide with glittering scintillations. In Ben Jonson's brutality there is a vein of beauty which glories will himself at once marvels at and admires.

As we watch the rapid play of that proud watchful face we feel that the following lines are very characteristic of the man who wrote them:

Leave me! there's something come into my thought  
That must and shall be sung high and aloft  
Safe from the wolf's black jaw, and the dull ass's hoof.

That is Jonson's own—it is worthy of him; fully in keeping with his blunt egotistical bearing towards everybody. But do not these sweet lines surprise one?

Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,  
Now the sun is laid to sleep;  
Seated in thy silver chair  
State in wonted manner keep.  
Hesperus entreaths thy light  
Goddess excellently bright.

Earth, let not the envious shade  
Dare itself to interpose;  
Cythia's shining orb was made  
Heaven so clear when day did close.  
Bless us, then, with wished night  
Goddess excellently bright.

Lay thy bow of pearl apart  
And thy crystal gleaming quiver;  
Give unto the flying hart  
Space to breathe the bow short sever,  
Thou that mak'st a day of night  
Goddess excellently bright.

Who would look for such beauty from such a quarter. Hamson found honey in the lion's carcass, but the discovery could not have astonished him more. Attend to these verses:

Which of you would not in a war  
Attempt the price of any scar  
To keep your own states even?  
But here, which of you is that he  
Would not himself the weapon be,  
To ruin Jove and heaven?

That is Jonsonian enough. Is this?

What change is here? I not more  
Desire to leave the earth before,  
Than I have now to stay;  
My silver feet, like roots, are wreathed,  
Into the ground, my wings are sheathed,  
And I can not away.

Of all there seems a second birth;  
It is become a heaven on earth,  
And Jove is present here,  
I feel the godhead; nor will doubt  
But he can fill the place throughout,  
Whose power is everywhere.

There is in these lines a delicacy worthy of Cowper. It is hard to conceive how a nature essentially gross and rude as Jonson's could have had a particle of the gentleness which lives and moves and has its being in them. Only when we remember that grains of gold can be crushed out of the hard white quartz can we in any wise account for the anomaly.

It is not often that a bird bulky and dull as an owl can warble with the sweetness of a canary, but Nature does sometimes indulge in such a freak. It was so with Jonson. In him we find the playfulness of the sparrow combined with the surliness and obstinacy of the bull-dog, brute force with winning sweetness.

What chiefly strikes us in the study of Jonson is his thoroughness. In nothing is he superficial or half-hearted. There is a loftiness in his scorn which makes us tremble; a profundity in his learning which makes us ashamed of our smattering of knowledge; a penetration in his glance from which the coziest brocade or the toughest armor is no screen; an intensity in his hate which must have made his least sensitive opponent quail; a richness in his melody which would have raised a smile on the hard cheeks of an Egyptian Sphinx.

Jonson was honest to the core. We do not find in his voluminous writings, or in any of the anecdotes which his friends or his enemies have handed down to us a particle of insincerity—a trace of a mean, shuffling, truckling disposition.

He spoke the truth always, if he did not speak it in love. He once expressed a desire to enter the church—imagine the monster in a surplice—for he wished to preach once before the king and tell him all his misdeeds. And if he had had the opportunity he would verily have done it.

He was a stranger to fear or flattery. His tongue and his pen, rough as the one was, and hard as the other always had been, were consecrated to truth. He spoke bluntly, but never falsely; he wrote in letters of fire, he never dipped his pen in the perfumed ink of flattery. It is not strange that such a man should be hated as heartily, if not as nobly, as he has been honored.

The honest words which he scattered broadcast, like the dragon's teeth which Cadmus sowed, sprang up armed men. Meanness, falsity, pride, all the cardinal vices, pursued him all his life with mortal hatred. That we may do full justice to his character, it is necessary to bring it into comparison or contrast with another in some respects similar, and developed by similar influences. Dryden, like Jonson, was a poet and a writer for the stage. Both succeeded in the difficult ascent to courtly recognition and favor. Both claimed to dictate from the proud eminence which they attained to humble toilers with the pen. Both were men of vast and accurate learning. In their declining days both were exposed to the temptation to pander to the vices of the age. Both turned from Protestantism to Catholicism. But we cannot trace the analogy any further. Dryden, brilliant, energetic, exhaustless, was insincere—shameless in his insincerity. To insure a momentary success, he would descend to the basest passions of the mob.

Dryden did not scruple to sully the sacred mantle of the bard with the foulness of the gutter, or light any unholy sacrifice with the torch which the Muses had kindled. As we peruse his poems—such of them as we can peruse without polluting ourselves—we exclaim now and again—"What genius! what strength! what keenness! and what badness! The might is allied to wickedness; Samson, blind and bound, is grinding corn for the uncircumcised Philistines. Might so employed deserves us rather to weep than to admire. Poor Dryden!"

But it is impossible to pity Jonson. He never sold himself to the vulgar and licentious host; he never sold his birthright of honesty for an nobleness for a mass of postage, as Dryden did. And, though the critic may pick out hundreds of faulty lines, it is impossible to find one which casts discredit on Ben's sterling and manly character.

There are two or three facts given by his biographers which it may be worth our while to relate at greater length. One of these is the fatal duel. To do bare justice to Jonson some extenuating circumstances must be mentioned. In the first place, one would not expect a high sense of the value of human life in a hot-headed, passionate youth, who had served a campaign or two with the reckless troopers in Flanders.

Indeed, although in that age the laws against duelling were as severe as they could be, affairs of honor were of almost daily occurrence. Every one above the rank of a peasant and not engaged in trade carried a sword, and was more or less dexterous in its use. Then the bolsterous life of an actor, with its ceaseless rivalries and its provocations to jealousy, was not the most favorable discipline for a passionate, domineering disposition like Jonson's. And lastly, his antagonist in this instance had meanly tried to steal an advantage by using a sword some ten inches longer than Ben's, and had the latter fallen he would have been murdered—not killed in fair equal fight.

We may be sure that whatever merciful intentions Jonson took into the field evaporated the moment his antagonist unsheathed his sword. Ben spent some time in prison. He chanced to have as a companion in tribulation a Jesuit priest, who relieved the tedium of captivity by engaging his burly friend in religious controversy. The result of this was that Jonson embraced the Romish faith.

Here we have another illustration of his unshrinking honesty. It was not enough that he was in danger of hanging for the unfortunate issue of the duel, but he must also run the risk of being drawn and quartered as a Papist.

Jonson married. It is to be regretted that we have no particulars of the courtship. Did the lion modulate his roar to the mournful wooing of the tender dove? or did he frighten the poor woman into reciprocating his anything but tender passion? Did he absolutely command her to say yes. Ben himself owns that Mrs. Jonson, though honest, was a shrew. Perhaps that came afterwards; but this is only conjecture. We may well pity the poor woman who uttered the awful vow to "love, honor and obey" Ben.

Collier refers to the peril in which Jonson placed his nose and ears by his co-partnership with Chapman and Marston in the production of "Eastward Ho!" The hits at the needy adventurers who had followed King James from the other side of the border were, in truth, savage enough to imperil not only the noses and ears, but the very lives of the hardy satirists. Chapman and Marston were at once arrested. To the credit of Jonson, he demanded that he had as much right as they to go to jail, and to go he went.

It was currently reported that the three were to suffer the brutal mutilation referred to, but the court relented, and they were set at liberty. It is probable that Jonson would have escaped the punishment, for, as he afterwards discovered, his mother had mixed what she considered a luscious strong poison to mix in his drink," had the law insisted on increasing the natural hideousness of his visage.

An interval of five years elapsed between his release and the journey to Scotland to which Collier refers. It was a period of hard, honest work, of continuous and merited success. We say of hard work, for Jonson toiled like a galley-slave. "Thoughts of fire and words that burn" did not fly from his pen like sparks from the anvil; he had to sit patiently knocking flint and steel together, thankful if one spark came after many a hard blow. His poems always remind me of this tedious process. Take one, and see whether the notion is altogether fanciful:

"There is no life on earth but being in love!"

Here he gives a tap to see whether it is a flint he has, or a stone with no heart of fire in it. See how the bushy brows are bent, and the deep lines about the mouth grow deeper. Writing poetry is no joke. Now for a spark:

"There are no studies, no delights, no business,  
No intercourse, or trade of sense, or soul  
But what is love."

Three determined blows, but no spark comes. A cup of sack, and another attempt:

"I was the laziest creature,  
The most unprofitable sign of nothing."

There you have it:

"The most unprofitable sign of nothing,  
The veriest drone; and slept away my life  
Beyond the dormouse, till I was in love."

The spark did not last long enough to set the driest of tinder in a blaze. Try again, Ben:

"And now I can outwake the nightingale."

That is poetical; but stop, Jonson's flint and steel are coming together again:

"Outstretch a usurer and outwalk him too."

Lost labor, Ben. Another blow:

"Stalk like a ghost that haunted 'bout a treasure,  
And all that fancied treasure, it is love."

It is refreshing to see a man so doggedly persistent in his work, who shrinks from no amount of toil, and is undaunted by any number of failures. But even Jonson—as every earnest thinker—had moments of inspiration. Occasionally the hard flint sent out a shower of sparks—occasionally the harp seemed in sympathy with the patient harper's hand, and poured forth rich melody in a flood. Collier makes reference to Jonson's exquisite songs. Take these as specimens:

"Drink to me only with thine eyes  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss, but in the cup,  
I will not look for wine.  
The thirst that from the soul doth rise

Doth ask a drink divine,  
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine.

"I sent thee once a rosy wreath,  
Not so much honoring thee,  
As giving it a hope that there  
It could not withered be.  
But thou thereon didst only breathe,  
And sent it back to me;  
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,  
Not of itself, but thee."

"See the chariot at hand here of love,  
Wherewith my lady rideth!  
Each that draws is a swan or a dove,  
And we... the car love guideth.  
As she goes all hearts do duty  
Unto her beauty;  
And enamored do wish, so they might  
But enjoy such a sight,  
That they still were to run by her side  
Through swords, through seas, whither she  
would ride.

"Do but look on her eyes, they do light  
All that love's world composeth!  
Do but look on her, she is bright  
As love's star when it riseth!  
Do but mark, her forehead's smoother  
Than waves that soothe her!  
And from her arched brows such a grace  
Sheds itself through the face  
As alone there triumphs to the life  
All the gain, all the good of the elements'  
strife.

"Have you seen but a bright lily grow  
Before rude hands have touched it?  
Have you marked but the fall of the snow  
Before the soil hath smothered it?  
Have you felt the fur of the beaver,  
Or awan's down ever?  
Or have smelled of the bud of the briar,  
Or the 'nard in the fire?  
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?  
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!"

FORCE IN LITERATURE.

A curious paper might be written on the singular errors made by men of high reputation in their critical judgments. Something of the kind was lately done in one of the magazines. Instances of such blunders abound since people first began to cultivate the art. When, for example, we read the critical sentences of the last century we are amazed at the inconceivable blindness which they seem to imply. Goldsmith, to take a case at random, was undoubtedly a man of fine taste; he tells us, *a propos* of Waller's ode on the death of Cromwell, that our poetry was not then "quite harmonized, so that this, which would now be looked upon as a slovenly sort of versification, was in the times in which it was written almost a prodigy of harmony." In the same place, after praising the harmony of the *Rape of the Lock*, he observes that the irregular measure at the opening of the *Allegro* and *Penseroso* "hurts our English ear." We can only wonder at the singular taste which induced our grandfathers to fancy that "harmony," of all things, was their strong point, and that Pope's mechanical monotony was to the exquisite versification of Spenser and Milton as Greek sculpture to the work of some self-taught Indian carver. The same incapacity for perceiving what to us appear almost self-evident truths is as obvious in a wider kind of criticism. When Voltaire called Shakespeare "a drunken savage," it was a mere outbreak of spleen; but Voltaire in his sober moods, and he is followed in this by Horace Walpole, speaks still more contemptuously of one of the two or three men who can be put beside Shakespeare. He marvels at the dulness of people who can admire anything so "stupidly extravagant and barbarous" as the *Divina Commedia*. These monstrous misunderstandings are to be explained by the natural incapacity of the subjects of one literary dynasty for judging of those of another. But the judgments of contemporaries on each other are not much more trustworthy. The long-continued contempt for Bunyan and Defoe was merely an expression of the ordinary feeling of the cultivated classes towards anything which was identified with Grub Street; but it is curious to observe the incapacity of such a man as Johnson to understand Gray or Sterne, and the contempt which Walpole expressed for Johnson and Goldsmith, whilst he sincerely believed the poems of Mason were destined to immortality. Nor, again, can we flatter ourselves that this narrow vision was characteristic only of a school which has now decayed. We may find blunders at least equally palpable in the opinions expressed by the great poets at the beginning of this century. Such, for example, is the apparently sincere conviction of Byron that Rogers and Moore were the truest poets among his contemporaries; that Pope was the first of all English, if not of all existing, poets; and that Wordsworth was nothing but a namby-pamby dabbler. The school of Wordsworth and Southey altered judgments at least equally hasty in the opposite direction. Many old instances of the degree in which prejudice can blind a man of genuine taste are to be found in the writings of their disciple, De Quincey. To mention no other, he speaks of "Mr. Goethe," as an immortal and second-rate author, who owes his reputation chiefly to the fact of his long life and his position at the Court of Weimar. With which we may compare Charles Lamb's decided prefer-