

## HINTS TO AUTHORS.

## ON THE PATHETIC.

Laughter, whether long and loud, such as we see convulsing the ribs of a country squire when relating one of the achievements of his youth, or short and low like the giggle of a young maiden who does not know what else to do—laughter of all sorts and kinds, except perhaps the hysterical, “betrays the vacant mind.” But we go even farther than the poet, and boldly advance our belief that laughter is not only a proof of man’s intellectual emptiness, but of his depravity. People of a serious turn rarely proceed beyond a smile, and that more in sorrow than in gladness. How absurd to hear a bishop in the ecstasies of a guffaw! With what a just estimate of the iniquity of laughter has the seriousness of a judge past into a proverb! The hyena also is said to laugh, and the hyena is an animal of the most unchristian disposition. We might fairly enough argue from this that he who resembles the hyena in the attribute of laughter would also bite like a hyena—like a hyena would despise the commandments, and like a hyena would seldom go to church. But we waive the inference, though justified by many similar arguments we have lately seen.

It is our object on the present occasion to show the infamous and contemptible nature of liveliness in all its branches. In conversation we can pass over without much reprobation the attempts we see so pertinaciously made to set the table in a roar, for we uniformly perceive that a languid melancholy succeeds all their efforts, and that vivacity long continued produces a deliciously sombre feeling which is nearly akin to despair. In laughter such as this, the heart is sorrowful, and the soul is justly punished for the hypocritical hilariousness of the countenance. If these, then, are our sentiments about persons who assume to themselves the reputation of lively talkers, with what unmitigable contempt and hatred must we view the conduct of any human beings—if indeed the creatures are really human—who seriously meditate jocularity in print, who set forth their facetiousness in types, and affect to be witty, quaint, humorous, or jocose with pen and ink!—The thing is almost too horrible for belief; and yet we are forced to confess that the state of affairs is such as we have described it—that many Numbers of this very Magazine contain stories which almost force one to laugh whether or no—and that there seems a growing disrelish for those delicious tales of sentiment and sorrow which were the sweetest and purest delight of our younger days. But perhaps we blame the authors of our own time unjustly. It is not every one who can weep over a dead ass, though it seems easy for any one to laugh over a living one. The science of the Pathetic has never hitherto been studied as it ought. Its rules have never been defined. Aristotle, a person who lived before periodical literature had reached its present palmy state, and, therefore, had very few advantages for forming his taste or judgment, laid down certain rules touching the poetic—so also did a Roman gentleman of the name of Florace; but the inferiority of their labors is proved from the neglect into which their canons have fallen. Roscommon devoted his attention to the subject of Translation,

and Pope gave directions on the art of Criticism, but we are unacquainted with any treatise on the art and mystery of the Pathetic. For many hundred years our authors have gone on ignorant of the means by which the greatest triumphs of the tragic art have been achieved, trusting to accident for the calling forth of involuntary sighs, and unconscious of a power of creating sadness, which, we flatter ourselves, will no longer be denied to writers of the very humblest capacity.—After the perusal of this disquisition we will venture to say, that any one of his Majesty’s faithful subjects may “ope” whenever he pleases “the sacred source of sympathetic tears.” None after this will have to accuse the literature of England of being frivolous or amusing. Sighs and groans will resound from one end of the island to the other; and novels in three volumes, and romances in five, and even auto-biographies in one, will be the most tear-moving tragedies imaginable. After the intense study of many years we have reduced the whole science of the pathetic into certain rules, by a rigid adherence to which we will guarantee that any gentleman of moderate abilities will be enabled after six lessons—payment to be made in advance—to draw tears from the heart of a stone!

Pathos is distinguished from Bathos by the difference of its initial consonant. Its object is to excite grief, sympathy, compassion, tenderness, or regret. Another of its objects is to present the author before the eye of his reader as a man of the most tender and susceptible feelings, a creature of the most delicate sentiments, and, above all things, melancholy and gentlemanlike.

Our first rule therefore is—that the author shall, as a preliminary step (either in the preface or in the very first chapter,) give the public a sort of insight into his *own* character and appearance. It adds greatly to the pleasure we derive from any work to have an idea of the author. A chivalrous or heroic lamentation, which would be pathetic from an author of twenty-five, six feet high, with dark flowing ringlets, would be ridiculous coming from a little, fusty old fellow of fifty-seven, with his natural red locks replaced by a light brown wig. Now, though nature is capricious in these matters, and sometimes lodges a mighty soul in a very contemptible looking body, that is no reason why the author himself should be restricted in his choice of appearance. In print—if not in reality—it is possible for all men to be Apollos: and in pathetic composition it is highly necessary that the author either should have been in his youth, or remain at present—pre-eminently handsome. The second rule, therefore, we would lay down is—be handsome. The hero, you will understand, is generally considered an adumbration of yourself, and you are aware that nobody cares a single halfpenny for an ugly hero. If St. Leon and Cyril Thornton had been a couple of squab, Dutch-built, flat nosed, wide-mouthed, common-looking individuals, who the deuce would be interested in the slightest degree by the pathos of their unseemly scars? There is no pathos, we say again, in the most appalling misery which can befall an ill-favoured “mixture of earth’s mould.”

As it has been agreed upon by all philosophers that man is an imitative animal, and, according to