

ORIGINAL.

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III. MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

We do not at present recollect any of his comic pieces in which the personages are more numerous, the action more varied, or the humour more abundant. It may with all justice be termed a huge mine, out of which an inferior writer might draw materials for several pieces. We say this relatively as to the quantity, not as to any fault in the arrangement of these materials. Of this piece we may say, what can be said of so few, that none of the characters can be termed *secondary*, none of them can be exactly said to play an inferior part. Still, since a piece must have a hero, we are bound to accord this place to that strange personage who here makes his debut, and who afterwards, in more than one piece, continues without sameness or declension, to awaken peals of irresistible merriment. Falstaff is the apex of Shakspeare's humorous creations, just as Hamlet is the apogee of his tragical characters. There may be a dispute as to which of the two styles is essentially the most remarkable, there may even be a question as to which of the two he surpasses in; but as to this there can be no doubt, that the above-mentioned characters are the ne plus ultra in either. We willingly postpone what we might say of Falstaff and his motley crew until we shall meet him in later productions—for we shrink from the effort of throwing together all that might be said of him and them. Shallow and Slender, too, appear afterwards, and with not a whit less effect than here. Shakspeare, an exception to most laws, is in these instances an exception to what may be almost termed a law in literature. *Cervantes* and *Le Sage* made shipwreck of their former reputation, in the essays which they made to continue out their creations, and to invest them again with the same interest that they excited on their first appearance. It would seem that great difficulty attends the resumption of a plan once terminated, and that the energy which went towards its first conception and execution can rarely be awakened anew. Shakspeare was probably influenced by the same motive to revive his first conceptions, viz. by the success which attended their original form—and in his case, they re-appear with all the freshness, all the vigour of a first draught.

This is without exception the most domestic comedy which Shakspeare has given us. All the characters and incidents are strictly *bourgeois*, a term which we willingly borrow from German criticism. We recollect no other at present which does not in some feature of personage stand out from the domestic comedy. Here, unless we except the decorative passage as to *HERNE* the hunter, every point falls within the circle of common bourgeois life. Hence it is the piece from which we may derive the most direct notices as to old English manners. From it alone might be collected more information as to this subject, than is contained in all the history of England by *Hume*. The language harmonises most accurately with the action. There is more *prose* here than in any other of his pieces. The only personages who use verse are "ancient Pistol," Fenton, and Anne Page—the other characters *only* fall into it, in the masque in the fifth act. With such precision is every personage drawn, that each might give his name to a class—and indeed most of our later dramatists who have depicted individuals of the same classes, have, almost without exception, borrowed largely, though perhaps unavoidably, from this piece. Shallow has become the name for the pompous, ignorant and vain-glorious justice of the peace, a character which has produced descendants even down to our own days. Slender is, and as long as our literature endures will continue to be, the type and title of the ninny and the country squire—he is much more comprehensive than Tony Lumpkin—he too is far from being extinct even in the nineteenth century. The Pages and the Fords are the personifications of the opulent burgher, a class which had begun to rise to consequence about a couple of centuries before, and which has continued ever since to increase in wealth and influence in the country. Falstaff and his knavish associates, are the representatives of a class, of which England, by her opulence, has perhaps produced more specimens than any other country—which, under the names of bully, sharper, or swindler, has ever preyed on the vitals of the country, and which has not unfrequently united rank, talents and personal accomplishments with their most discreditable occupation. We lament to say that the species is far from being extinct. It has changed its garb and favour, no doubt. In the sixteenth and seventh centuries, it seems to have affected the rough bearing, the mustachoes, the rapier, and the oaths of the solado—in the nineteenth it pretends to the quiet and polished manners of the modern fine gentleman. The *Host*, from Chaucer downwards, has been a favourite dramatic character. We have him here in all his officious bustling civility, in the double position which he has always held, half inferior—half superior—a mixture of vulgar familiarity and as vulgar obsequiousness—constantly meddling, counselling, or playing practical jokes upon the other personages. In short, the same *Host* that we find along the whole series of our drama, is here drawn with more strength and precision than in any other instance which we remember. Mrs. Quickly, the universal go-between, in her ignorance, selfishness, love of gossip, and manner of murdering the King's English, is the type and model on which have been formed the *Slipslops*, the *Winifred Jenkines*, and half the waiting-women of our modern drama and romance. It would be an interesting task to trace the remarkable influence of this single piece upon these two branches of our literature—but we want the erudition required for such a task.

Is the said Mrs. Quickly to be looked upon as one of the moveable personages, and to be identified with her of the Boars-head in East-cheap? We think the identity complete, and the whole may be viewed as a prologue, a perystyle to those others in which the same personages re-appear. Fenton, the easy, elegant gentleman, is the most slightly sketched of all the characters. Still we find no difficulty in realising him—he is from first to last a romantic personage, as is indicated by his always employing blank verse, and has no connection with the humorous portion of the piece, his only tie with it being his love for Anne Page. This last, from the little we see of her, is a model of feminine naiveté, under which lurks a good deal of concealed archness. The burlesque personages, Evans and Dr. Caius, are drawn in his broadest style—the *Welchman* seems to have been to his drama, what the *Irishman* or *Scotchman* is to the modern. Whether it was that Shakspeare was little acquainted with the characteristics of their country, or that he entertained a contemptuous opinion of their inhabitants, we know not, but he has scarcely condescended to notice them. While he has minutely sketched the *Welchman* on several occasions, he has but once, and that cursorily, touched upon the *Irishman*, and his only *Scotchman*, *Captain Jamy*, is very carelessly depicted—the only thing characteristic about him being the peculiarities of his dialect, which are greatly caricatured. Long after Shakspeare's days, the character of their northern neighbours seems to have been very imperfectly understood by the English. At least, in the various sketches they have given us of them, we discover little but a strong national prejudice discovered by a vulgar and unskilful travesty of their accent and most obvious peculiarities. Evans and Caius are in a great degree characters of *manner*—the humour in them proceeds less from the thing than the form—it results principally from their mistakes in grammar, and odd double meanings. Still there is a *fonds* of pedantry in the former which is vastly amusing—and altogether the contrast between absurdity and good sense in him, is of the most diverting sort. We recognise him also in the parsons and pedagogues of our modern drama. In Caius the sly Frenchman is perfectly delineated. Such a character supposes a very considerable knowledge of French on the part of our author. We nowhere discover in Shakspeare a religious tendency, or any marks of respect for churchmen. In the few instances in which he has drawn them, as in "*Love's Labour Lost*," and "*As You Like it*," it is in a comic point of view that he regards them—the *Sir* with which he prefaces their names is nothing more than the *don*, or *dom*, or *mess*, or *messer*, with which they have been honoured in different countries. Nothing could be more simple than the main action of the piece—but it is diversified with such a variety of subordinate incident, that the whole has an air of complexity. We would almost make this an objection to it—for instance, what necessity was there for the incident of the Germans who run away with mine Host's horses? There is also some lyric decoration sprinkled throughout it. The passages of this nature are like the rest of his lyric pieces, sweet and natural, but not in his best style. We feel strongly inclined to think that the carelessness that distinguishes almost all of them was assumed—probably he regarded it as essential to their nature. In the jargon which he puts into the mouth of ancient Pistol, does he not make a side hit at the *euphuism* of the period? But more on this hereafter. Does not Fenton descend from his true and romantic character when he makes a confidant of the *Host*—perhaps however this may be considered as savouring of the age. The *Host* seems to have been a general counsellor. Marriage, throughout the comedy, seems to have been looked on as a very slight matter. The modern comedy has continued this view of the matter, though circumstances have changed. There is a strong tincture of indecency in this piece.

For the Pearl.

STANZAS.

O loved one lost! of late I strayed
Among those dear old haunts of ours,
In Spring's delightful smiles arrayed,
And bright with wild and fragrant flowers.
I stood beside the same clear stream—
I sat beneath the same old tree—
And dreamed again that lingering dream
That caught its first deep spell from thee.
But ah! those haunts seemed far less fair,
Those flowers less light around me flung—
Than when thine own bright form was there,
And Love his first glad descant sung.

Those haunts of thee—of all bereft
But Memory's faint but faithful ray—
Those dear old haunts I slowly left,
And turn'd not without tears away.
I feel not off the grief which then
With that last parting moment came—
Yet sometimes in the haunts of men
I start if I but hear thy name.
I dwell not where my kindred dwelt—
I wander o'er the earth alone—
But that deep love that first I felt
Is still as at the first thine own!

May, 1810.

ANON.

THE YANKEE ENGINEER.

BY CALEB CLAIMBAKE.

It fell out that once upon a day, I embarked on board one of those smoky craft that ply daily between Burlington and Philadelphia. It furthermore fell out, that after having accomplished my business, I was returning, when lo! on reaching the city, before our boat could be fastened to the wharf, a young damsel, who was standing near the unguarded side of the boat, fell overboard. A sudden impulse, whether of chivalry or of madness, I know not which, animating my bosom, I leaped into the river, and with the assistance of a strong arm and a stronger rope, the one end of which was thrown towards me, the damsel was rescued. I saw no more than one thing, namely, that the maiden, despite the fright, was very comely and fair to look upon; after assuring myself of which, I made the best of my way for the shore, fearing that if I stayed I might be annoyed with thanks, and the admiring looks of all the little boys in the neighbourhood of the scene. By good fortune I escaped almost unnoticed but not unaccompanied. The grateful and earnest gaze of the rescued girl was with me still, and an angel in the shape of bright blue eyes appeared to accompany me where-soever I went. Yet though I made divers enquiries, and sought by every means to discover her residence, nevertheless I found it to be impossible, and was about to give up in despair, when by chance it happened that I was forced to take a journey into the interior of our state.

It was on the fourth of November that I found myself a passenger in the mail coach that plied between Duncan's Island and Millerstown. It was a cold drizzly morning when I started. The coach was a vehicle which was certainly not Troy-built, by a great deal, but was certainly better than the cattle which were to draw it along the road. They absolutely defied description. The taller of the two, whose age was somewhere in the neighbourhood of a quarter of a century, was a raw-boned animal, blind in one eye, and wearing a coat as rough and ragged as a sailor's flushing jacket. His companion in bondage was a little, short, plump brute, just released from his coltage, who had not assumed the gravity of age, and accordingly frisked and jumped in his traces to the great annoyance of his elder and more staid neighbour. The harness which bound him to the vehicle, was of that kind which requires careful handling, and no small degree of magnanimity on its own part to prevent it from falling into pieces. Yet, despite the bad appearance things presented, I was obliged to suffer it, for I could find no better conveyance.

I was not alone. Another individual was with me, on whose countenance, manners and habiliments, was written the word "Yankee!" He was a tall, spare man, with a piercing eye, and a restless set of features. His apparel, which was evidently the work of a country tailor, consisted of a coat, short-skirted, and garnished with flat round brass buttons; a vest, the capacious pockets of which were stuffed to repletion; and a pair of "Oh! no we never mention them's;" which being too short for the owner, were coaxed towards the feet by means of narrow leathern straps. His terminations downwards were cased in a pair of cowhide boots, while the upper extremity wore a thin mass of short-cut, much combed and well-sleeked hair, over which was the smallest kind of a small hat.

Discovering evidence in my companion's restlessness of his desire to speak, I leaned back in my seat and waited patiently till he should open the conversation. I did not wait long. Hitching himself onward, till his half disjointed frame was directly opposite to mine, he first looked out of the coach window, and then peered into my face.

"A dreadful nice country on our left," said he, "mister—mister—Oh! I've heard your name, but forgot it"—and he looked as though he expected us to reveal our patronymic.

"No matter about names," was my answer, "it is too champaign just here to please me."

"Tew shampain! oh! you're a tee-totaller, I reckon. Oh! yes! Well, I like a tee-totaller, though I take a leetle of the stuff myself. I wish I could dew without it, that's a fact. Perhaps you like the land jest afore you now?"

"No!" was my reply, "it is too rocky."

"Tew rocky! well, I admire to hear you talk, I dew," ejaculated my fellow passenger. "You're jest about as hard to please as my aunt Jerushy, and she was an awful crooked critter that's a fact. You never heard on her, I spose? She's of the Cummin's of our parts." I signified my ignorance of his aunt by a shake of the head, when he proceeded. "I'll jest up and tell all about it. We had an awful cross dog and his name was Jupiter, but we always called him Jupe. Well, one night somebody or other tried to get in our house that hadn't oughter, and Jupe kicked up an awful racket, and kept it up the hull night. The hull bilin on us couldn't get a wink of sleep. Next morning aunt Jerushy went out to him and she did give him the most all-fired lickin you ever did see. 'I'll larn you,' said she, 'to keep sich a noise the whole time, you pesky, troublesome critter. You make a noise for nothing agin—that's all,' and then she walked into him again like a thousand of brick. The dog kinder sorter understood her, for the next night he slept as sound as a rock, and in walked some tarnal ugly chap, and clapped his pickers and stealers on almost everything he could find. Next morning folks were up bright and airy, and there was a mess to be sure. Oh! how aunt did splutter. 'That good for nothin' lazy dog of oun,' said she, 'aint worth his keep, the lazy sleepy