

tant corner I spied a work-basket, from which peeped out one of Jack's socks, with a much demoralized heel neatly repaired, and a needle and wool stuck in the toe, where was a darn on the way to completion. Certainly, Jack is a lucky fellow. Now, maidens all, don't run away with the idea that Old Mortality advocates elopements, nor sixteen-year-old marriages. Not at all, but he was filled with admiration at the bravery and skill of one of your sisterhood, who, having done a very wrong thing, is trying to atone for it by nobly taking up the inevitable crosses which such an escapade must entail, and he would recommend the clement "troublesome girl" as a model to all loving wives of husbands who are "very nice, but haven't a penny."

OLD MORTALITY.

## THE BIRTH OF FICTION.

### I.

The recollections of childhood have always something of an ideal, almost heavenly character. The individual who has not got at least one sunny remembrance of the sweet springtime of life deserves our commiseration. Were it possible for us to bear vividly in mind every incident of that untroubled period, the recollection would very probably prove to be our richest and most useful possession throughout life. But many checkered memories do, and must, vanish from the mind, and if a few still abide with us in after years, we may well possess our souls in peace.

The vision of the dear old homestead, with most of its familiar surroundings, may have vanished, like the unsubstantial imagery of a dream. Vanished, did I say? The old home can never quite vanish, although it may loom dim and indistinct through the vista of long years. The flowery vales to which our childish footsteps turned may be conjured up no more. They are gone, fading like a mirage of the plains. The dark abyss of forgetfulness and total obliteration may now yawn between us and that limpid stream by whose mossy banks we once wandered, free and happy as its babbling waters. Those friendly faces that smiled sympathetically at our boyish gambols may be recalled only by an effort, or, mayhap, have totally disappeared, like the bright stars we gaze upon for a moment and then see no more.

All these sacred remembrances may have gone from us, or admit of only partial recollection, leaving a void in our hearts, which the most delightful subsequent experiences will fail adequately to fill. Our souls, in losing them, were deprived of much soothing poetry; a loss always serious and seldom repairable. Those bright gleams of a time when "Heaven is about us in our childhood," are sweeter and more elevating than the "silvery phrase" of Sydney or the "golden songs" of Spencer. Such things, however, must happen in the natural course of life, more especially if that life be humdrum and prosy. Still, although forgetfulness succeeds memory as night follows day, and old familiar places and faces are doomed to be forgotten, enough will remain if we can yet vividly recall the family hearth, wherein, during the long evening of winter, the blazing logs of pine and tamarack shed aromatic tears over their own destruction, while they cast a ruddy glow on the faces and forms of those we held nearest and dearest—parents, brothers, sisters, friends—there gathered in an affectionate family circle.

Just such a vision is before my mind at the present moment. The warm hearth, the bright fire, and the equally bright faces circled around; all appear clear and distinct as in the reality. The general interest of the little assemblage is absorbed in something. Can we not guess in what it is centred? There, in the snugest corner of that cosy spot is the throne of the Village Story Teller, whose trained voice strikes on the ear the distant strains of an Eolian harp, swayed by an evening wind. His word-magic casts a spell over all; it takes the senses captive; it leads the imagination where it will, back through the mystical isles of mythology, by the glittering caves of Fairyland, or forward amid the eternal clash and clamour of the mechanical age. We all feel the influence of the true story teller, but we cannot account for it. Like the springing of the grasses after a shower, or the budding of the summer flowers, it surprises and charms by powers we can in nowise explain. Thus, although the origin of story-telling, or the birth of fiction, is confused by the mists of time, or hidden in the darkness of passed, unexplored ages; when we judge it

by its marvellous effects, we find ourselves unconsciously tracing out for it a descent from the heavens, like the palladium of ancient Troy.

The first rude essay in story telling must have been made long ages since, by some revered Shanachy, in the murky light of an Eastern camp fire, while man was still a nomad. Ever since, through all the countless vicissitudes that went to the making of universal history, and in spite of all the imitations to which public taste was subjected, the social art of story-telling, practiced in a thousand different ways, charmed every people and every class, for whose amusement it was called into use. Not another word need be said to express the general interest that appertains to this subject. If anything on our perishable earth deserves careful consideration it is certainly that wonderful power, which has, throughout the ages, toyed with the strongest passions of man, as if in ridicule of their weakness, and triumphant in the consciousness of its own irresistible strength.

Fiction may be broadly defined as highly coloured history, from which everything that is not interesting has been carefully eliminated. To attempt a more scientific explanation of the term would be to subvert the object of the series of papers on the subject, of which this is the initial number. I propose to write a popular sketch of the progress of fiction, and a broad definition will fully serve the purpose. The elucidation of dull matter is the great secret of successful fiction. The story-teller appeals to emotions which it is his duty to excite, so that if he fail to hold the interest of his listeners, his failure is complete. This is the fundamental principle that underlies the composition of fiction. Therefore, when we become acquainted with the fiction of a certain period or age, we know the prevailing intellectual taste of the time. Anything not in harmony with the spirit of an age, that is to say, with the leading idea, will be distasteful to that age, and will meet with condemnation, no matter how intrinsically good its innate qualities may be. Thus the history of successful story-telling or of fictitious narrative, rises at once to the highest importance, as it furnishes a certain and unerring guide to the popular taste of all ages.

Fiction is the immortality of inventive intellect. We find that at different times it has different characteristics, which vary with the intellectual, social and political conditions that prevail in the nation. It is then possible to divide the tales of a people into periods more or less strictly defined. There can be no sharp dividing line between the different epochs of the same national fiction, but the contrary holds good, when, as in the present cases, many different nations are to be brought under review. My second paper will therefore deal with a period complete in itself, while treating of the remarkable mythological fables, or stories, which were handed down to us by the ancients.

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## CHRISTIANITY AND MODERN SCIENCE.

### NO CONFLICT BETWEEN SCIENCE AND REVELATION.

It cannot be denied that there dwells in many sincere minds a lurking suspicion, amounting in some persons almost to a painful conviction, that antagonism exists between certain dogmas of revelation and the results of scientific investigation. Mr. Huxley, Dr. Draper, and other acknowledged leaders of modern thought have done their utmost to confirm these sinister impressions and to widen the breach between the teachers of religion and those of physical science. They will tell you that the study of nature leads us away from God and ultimately results in the denial of His existence. They maintain that there is and must be an irrespressible conflict between these two great branches of knowledge; that they cannot coexist, and that, in the long run, theology must surrender to her younger and more progressive rival.

They effect to believe that the champions of Christianity, conscious of the unequal conflict, view with alarm the rapid stride of the natural sciences, and do all in their power to discourage the study of them altogether. You will be told, dear reader, by this modern school of thought that the more you are attached to the teachings of Christian faith, the more will your judgment be warped, your intellect stunted, and the more you will be retarded in the pursuit of scientific investiga-