

For the Pearl.
COLLINS.

The poet Collins affords a melancholy example of the neglect which sometimes weighs down men of genius, and of the many sorrows to which their avocations prepare the way. The "man of the world" may sneer at the term genius, and at the sorrows and the avocations of the poet by profession;—but he should recollect that his god, the money bag, is not the god to whom all others are bound to bow, and that a world made up solely of the grabbers, would indeed be a world of grubs. Further, he should recollect, before he becomes rooted in his complacent contempt of intellectuality, that all the great lights of past ages—the demigods to whom even he yields willing homage, because time has hallowed their names—that they were disciples in the ideal school, and spent laborious days in imagining, and pouring forth, excellencies, and beauties, and peculiarities, unconnected with spinning jennies, or steam engines, or even interest tables. And was this sacrifice, of ease and riches, all vain? Yes, if the tints, and music, and fragrance of nature are vain,—because we might have corn and oil without them. If the rose is superfluous, and the dewy heath, and the balmy grove;—if the crimson, and the azure, and the gold, and the exquisite forms which embellish the firmament are vain,—if the many tinted greens of earth, and the rainbow hues of its multitudinous flowers are vain,—if the emerald, and the snow, and the ever-varying curves of ocean are vain,—if every thing which soothes and humanizes, and feeds with nectar, and makes philanthropic and pious, the self-love-divested soul, are vain,—then are the avocations of the poet and philosopher vain also. But the sneerer does not act up to his contempt. He despises the devotee, of art or nature, who has not amassed worldly wealth,—but he makes use of his own riches—except indeed he be a mere gambler—to accumulate the delights which the fools have created, and which he directly acknowledges to be the refiners of society.

Collins was born at Chichester, in December 1729. His father was a tradesman, reduced by misfortune or improvidence, and under many obligations to a brother-in-law, a Colonel Martin. This uncle of the poet deserves a place among the honorable, whose names are held in remembrance, for, by his liberality, the education was given, and the early aspirations were soothed, to which the world of letters owes so much, in the productions of the author of the *Ode to Evening*. Collins composed his *Eclogues* in Winchester school, and varied the scenes of the class-room, with his fancies of Arcadia, and of the Arabian desert, and the Georgian forest. Too early he learned to despise that tact, a little of which is so eminently useful, of gathering together, in sunshine, the comforts necessary for a "rainy day." Thus, he makes his camel driver, Hassan, exclaim, when he finds himself afar from the friends and scenes of his city home, out on the lone desert:

"Sad was the hour, and luckless was the day,
When first from Shiraz walls I bent my way!
Curs'd be the gold and silver which persuade
Weak men to follow far fatiguing trade!
The lily peace outshines the silver store,
And life is dearer than the golden ore."

Here, however, Hassan was wrong, as men generally are when they run to extreme opinions. The gold and silver, although often productive of evil, should not be denounced, and "far fatiguing trade" lures the strong, and the good, and lures them with generally good results, frequently, although it sometimes lures the "weak" to their own destruction.

At Winchester Collins was placed at the head of the list of candidates for New College. This is one contradiction, of the absurd and mischievous notion, that dull school boys, make smart men. They sometimes do, no doubt, as an exception; but the rule is, necessarily, from the nature of things, the other way. No vacancy occurred at New College, and Collins was removed, by the liberality of his uncle, to Queen's College. In 1742 he published his *Eclogues*. His habits and personal appearance, in 1742, are thus described by a cotemporary:

"He was passionately fond of music, good natured and affable, warm in his friendship, and, as long as I knew him, very temperate in his eating and drinking. He was of a moderate stature, of a light and clear complexion, with grey eyes so very weak at times as hardly to bear a candle in the room, and often raise within him apprehensions of blindness."

After some time spent in college life, and some disappointments as regarded preferments, Collins went to London. He there entered on a foolishly gay life, and complaints of his uncle's agent made him use energetic exertions to relieve himself from the pecuniary obligations to which he was so long beholden. He wrote several miscellaneous works, and published his *Odes*. The sale of the latter was so wretched, that the deeply mortified and cruelly disappointed poet, collected the unsold numbers, and burnt them. This appears to have had a dreadful effect on his mind; he became by slow, and almost imperceptible degrees—but not imperceptible to himself—insane; and to this shock has the malady been attributed. In 1748 he wrote an ode on the death of Thomson, author of the *Seasons*.

"Remembrance oft shall haunt the shore,
When Thomson in summer wreaths is drest,
And oft suspend the dashing oar,
To bid his gentle spirit rest."

This poetic prophecy has been well fulfilled. Oft has the wanderer on the Thames rested on his dripping oar, to think of Thomson's gentle spirit, which yet sanctifies the landscape, and inspires pastoral thoughts amid sweetly pastoral scenes. A century nearly has rolled by, since Collins wrote the above stanza, and the month just passed, gives a pleasing verification of the prediction. A writer in one of the periodicals which are peculiar to our age, thus babbles, lovingly, of Thomson and the Thames:

"But of all the reminiscences attached to Hammersmith, the most interesting is, that Thomson the poet once made it his dwelling-place, and composed part of his 'Seasons' there, in a tavern called the Dame Coffeehouse. Thomson, for the last twenty years of his life, was a constant haunter of the Thames; he lived, died, and was buried on the banks of his favourite river. It may be said, indeed, without any disparagement to the Thames, that it killed this sweet poet and amiable man; for he caught a severe cold upon the water, when sailing in an open boat from London to Kew, which, being neglected, proved fatal a short time afterwards."

Soon after the tribute paid to Thomson, Collins went to Flanders;—he returned, received, by his uncle's will, a legacy of £2000, gave up poetry, and attached himself almost solely to the study of the New Testament. His mental malady increased; but, doubtless, much of its force and fierceness was broken by the sublime companion which the sufferer had taken to his bosom. It had the power to calm and soothe him, when scarcely any thing else could check his melancholy aberrations. He died in 1756, aged 26 years. A monument was erected to his memory, in the Chichester Cathedral,—under whose walls the poet often sported in his days of boyhood, and where he was finally laid, apart from suffering and sorrow, to wait the second appearing of "the Resurrection and the Life" whose words had become his last earthly balm.

A better specimen of Collins' genius, and of the gentleness and tenderness which pervade his poetical character, need not be sought than his *Ode to Evening*. It is sweet and soothing, as the approach of that hour to which it is devoted. Poetry, and metre, and lyrical variety and melody, unite, without the jingle of rhyme to distract attention from its mellifluous flow,—"like eve's own solemn springs, her springs and dying gales." Thus, glides the melody, stanza after stanza, as a full brook, over a gently inclined grassy bed;—now, unbrokenly bright,—again, urged into sparkling circles by some reedy point,—and then gurgling and murmuring against the blue pebbles which border the boy-made shoal.

ODE TO EVENING.

If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song,
May hope, chaste Eve! to soothe thy modest ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,
Thy springs and dying gales;

O Nymph reserv'd! while now the bright-hair'd Sun,
Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,
With brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy bed;

Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-eye'd bat
With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises 'midst the twilight path,
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum;
Now teach me, maid compos'd!
To breathe some soften'd strain,

Whose numbers stealing thro' thy dark'ning vale
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
As musing slow I hail
Thy genial lov'd return.

For when thy folding-star arising shows
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp
The fragrant Hours and Elves,
Who slept in buds the day,

And many a nymph, who wreathes her brows with sedge,
And sheds the fresh'ning dew, and, lovelier still,
The pensive Pleasures sweet,
Prepare thy shadowy car.

Then let me rove some wild and heathy scene,
Or find some ruin 'midst its dreary dells,
Whose walls more awful nod
By thy religious gleams:

Of chill blust'ring winds or driving rain,
Prevent my willing feet, be mine the hat
That from the mountain's sides
Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim-discover'd spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw,
The gradual dusky veil.

While Spring shall pour his show'rs, as oft he wont,
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve!
While Summer loves to sport
Beneath thy ling'ring light;

While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves,
Or Winter, yelling through the troublous air,
Affrights thy shrieking train,
And rudely rends thy robes;

So long, regardful of thy quiet rule,
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, smiling Peace,
Thy gentlest influence own,
And love thy favourite name!

What a lovely and lively personification is here given, of Evening. The hour is represented as a Nymph, modest, reserved, composed, and meek. Her approach is heralded by the loveliest of stars:—the "tiny people" of fairy land, and the river nymphs, and lovelier still, the pensive pleasures, prepare her car; and her occupation is to draw, with dewy fingers, the dusky veil o'er mountains, floods, and hamlets brown.

And with what a series of gentle pictures does the poet surround his favourite. The sun, like a conqueror, sits in his tent, above the Atlantic wave;—the pilgrim is aroused from his meditation, by the heedless flight of the beetle, who winds his horn in cadences suited to the deepening shadows;—and the star, whose rise marks the time for "folding" the flocks, moves in his paly circlet, and announces the hour of harmless revelry to the flower-pillowed Fays. The landscape is in accordance with these figures;—on fine twilight hours, the scene is, the wild sweet heath,—and the ruins of castle, or abbey, which, in its lonely dells, tell of the times of old; but on wet blustering eyes, the point is the cottage on the mountain side, whence—seated beneath its rain-sheltering roof, its open door admitting the soft richly-laden gusts—the wanderer looks abroad. He beholds, far below—harmless to him, only features of the subject landscape—wild swelling floods, and clustered hamlets, and spires half grove-hidden;—and hears, delighted—mixed with the music of the pattering rain, the fitful wind, and the murmuring torrents—the tinkling of the simple bell, which tells the swains that the hour of repose has arrived, and that the family scenes of cottage and farm house, may supercede the furrow and the hay field and the home stead.

Critics have found fault with Collins, on account of the number of his epithets: those descriptive words, applied to the names of things, which, in the most brief manner, gives attendant qualities and circumstances. Often, no doubt, epithets are expletive, and burthen a subject, both as regards sense and sound,—but is it so in the *Ode to Evening*? Which are the epithets there, that seem thrust in to fill up a line, and to remove which would add to the elegance and energy of the article? Which of them could be dispensed with, without a material injury to the sentence in which it appears? *Bright-hair'd*, in reference to the setting sun, gives at once the glory which surrounds his dazzling face. As expressive is the term, *wavy*, applied to the ocean, over which he sits. The *weak-eye'd* bat, imparts at once the peculiar character and habits of that creature of the dusk,—as does *short shrill shriek*, and *leathern wing*, give his voice and appearance. *Folding* is a sweet pastoral epithet applied to the evening star, as is *paly*, to the suppressed light of his sphere, in the pearly heavens. Of similar character, are, *pensive pleasures*,—*religious gleams*,—*dim-discovered spires*,—and *dewy fingers*,—and what could so well give to the imagination, the warm vapour which rises from the foliage after a summer shower, as the phrase, "thy *breathing tresses* Eve"?

A brief consideration, of the *Ode to Evening*, will suffice for the discovery of the distinction between the purely poetic, and the practically descriptive parts; and of the peculiar excellence of each part. The personification of Evening, and her attendants,—of the sun,—of the seasons,—and of Fancy, Friendship, Science, and Peace, are of the purely poetic kind. The picture of the bat, and beetle, and pilgrim, and of the mountain-hut scene, are of the poetically descriptive character. The first are purely ideal, helped by natural objects,—the latter are real existences, heightened by poetical associations.

In this *Ode* there are some fine examples of figures of Rhetoric, which enable us to present an object to the imagination, by naming the peculiarities which belong to it, or something to which it is supposed to bear a resemblance. Thus, the shepherd's pipe, made of reed or cane,—a somewhat straw or oaten production, and having vents, called stops,—gets the pastoral and descriptive designation, of "oaten stop,"—the place, and fancied appearance, of the clouds which surround the setting sun, give the gorgeous vapours under the terms, "western tent,"—the dull humming noise of the beetle is elevated by the title "sullen horn,"—the small, rather dim, sphere, of Vesper, is named "paly circlet," and the moist verdure sending forth fragrant exhalations, are called, "breathing tresses."

Beautiful all!—"Blessings on the Poets," they have enriched the world, often to their own detriment;—they should, at least, get the gratitude of those generations to which their productions are handed, as elder inspirations which are to exist for ever.

OLINTHUS.

The understanding may not be long able to withstand demonstrative evidence; but the heart which is guarded by prejudice and passion, is generally proof against argumentative reasoning; for no person will perceive truth when he is unwilling to find it.

Religion does not banish mirth, but only moderates and sets rules to it.—Herbert.