

OUR TABLE.

"LOOK TO THE END! OR THE BENNETS ABROAD."

BY MRS. ELLIS.

THE idea of this work, as we learn from the preface, was impressed upon the talented authoress during a journey through Italy, and will be more satisfactorily explained in her own language than in ours:—

"I amused myself," she says, "by imagining a plain English family, emerging from the very centre of all that is contracted, common-place and familiar, in a London life of business, and looking for the first time upon a world stretching far beyond their own locality, and wholly unconnected with their personal interests. That the elder branches of such a family would be too much the creatures of habit to experience much enlargement of thought, from so wide an expansion of vision, was perfectly natural; and I therefore indulged myself with the agreeable addition to my imaginary party, of a young and perfectly unsophisticated mind, hitherto almost a blank as to outward impressions; yet capable, in no ordinary degree, of that deep sense of the beautiful, which I believe to be associated with all our highest and most refined enjoyments. With such a being, the silent companion of my thoughts, I looked upon the earth, the sky, the mountains and the sea, as they alternately glow and melt in all the varying tints of an Italian atmosphere; and with such a being—endeavouring as far as possible to make her feelings my own.—I contemplated those celebrated works of art, both of ancient and modern times, by which the idea of beauty as an abstract quality is transmitted from one generation to another."

To illustrate, in short, the influence of the beautiful, in refining and elevating the mind, and to depict the union and dependence on each other of the physically and morally beautiful—to *kalon kai to agathon*—is the principal design of Mrs. Ellis, and admirably does she fulfil it. The story itself is very simple, too simple perhaps, for the ordinary romance reader, but a constant interest is excited by the characters delineated, more truly pleasing than could be afforded by the most lavish accumulation of incident.

As may be surmised from the title of the tale, "the Bennets" are throughout the most conspicuous personages; the father, a plain, worthy London merchant, with a good share of English prejudice against foreign lands and foreign people, and a confirmed preference for "the useful" over "the beautiful;" the mother, a would-be invalid, full of fuss and whim; and the daughter, a being of sweet and gentle character, and of fine natural taste, the gradual development of which forms, as we have intimated, the leading idea of the story. The lover, Mr. Clarence Mowbray, (the tale, of course, would be incomplete without such a personage) is a very fair average character, a little flighty and romantic at times, but with good sense enough to prefer a wife in whose composition the *utile* is mingled, in fair proportion, with the *dulce*.

Several other characters are incidentally introduced and skilfully delineated. Such are Julia Wentworth—an intense worshipper of "the beautiful;" her pretty, petted, capricious sister, Flora, and the cold-hearted philosophic Sir Charles

Leigh. Among the best drawn characters in the book, however, are the Manchester manufacturer, George Walker, and his shadow, Mr. Phipson, whose whole aim in travelling is to get over the ground quicker than any one else has ever done before them, and who set to work to walk through the *Museo Borbonico* at Naples (it could be little else than mere walking) in one day, because the guide-books asserted that it required three to visit it properly.

In the descriptive portions of the work Mrs. Ellis is eminently successful, presenting pictures of the glowing scenery of Italy, at once vivid and accurate. Such is the following glimpse of Tivoli:

"I never could be fired of gazing upon that distant plain, seen as it is at intervals through this deep olive wood. I have sometimes thought the cold green foliage of these trees had some share in producing the wonderful effect you now behold. At the next turn of the road you will look down upon Hadrian's Villa. There—there it is. Now mark the gradual melting down of the rich green in those damp gardens—the cypress and the pine illuminated and glowing in tints of gold—mark the gradual melting down of all this into the intense and almost living blue of the distant plain, gradually shading off into a clear horizon, where colour becomes lost in light. It is this transparent atmosphere softening all things with a medium of its own, and yet revealing all, from the gold of the orange grove to the hoary crag of the ruined tower—from you white thread of silvery water, winding through the valley, to the gable of the goatherd's solitary habitation on the hills—it is this purple haze—this mist of beauty—this atmosphere of light, which the painter loves so much—and, may I not say, which haunts the memory of those who have once gazed upon it with the eyes of youth and love."

Contrast this with the crater of Vesuvius.

"We were now looking directly into the burning crater, our position on a precipice of rock being higher than the opening at the top of the cone of ashes, from which the volume of smoke and flame arises. Beneath us, at a great depth, and at the base of this cone, lay a black lake or floor of solid lava, having all the appearance of being very recently in a liquid state, slightly ribbed across the surface as water is sometimes seen, broken here and there into deep hot crevices, occasionally varied by the remains of small craters now extinct, and interspersed with beautiful incrustations of yellow sulphur of the most delicate and brilliant tints, varying from the palest primrose to the deepest brown and purple.

"Out of this dark lake, then, whose thick waves seemed to have flowed and heaved together until they settled down into one level mass, rose the present burning cone, black also, and huge, and terminating in an open roaring mouth, red-hot and sulphurous, and sending forth a volume of yellow smoke, with a sound like distant thunder. Around this red-hot mouth are the broken edges of the crust which forms the cone, and which being black and distinctly seen, give to the fire within a more furious aspect; while the jets of steam and red smoke add to the thundering detonations a hissing and angry sound, and thus render the whole scene more tremendous. The volumes of thick smoke, too, are tinged as they rise to a great extent with a lurid light from the fire below; but more frightful still were the showers of red-hot stones or lava, sent up to a great height, and then falling down upon the cratered cone with a crashing and yet hollow noise, as if the whole would fall in together. The sound for which I was least prepared, however, was a constant working or labouring within the crater, as of some vast machine, which seemed to shake the body of the mountain, and which found vent only in those thundering explosions which took place almost every moment."

All who would have the information of a book of travels with the interest and excitement of a novel, would do well to read this admirable work, and they would do better still to follow its excellent advice, and "Look to the End."