

quaintance, with whom he had long argued, but that the youth would go to Rome, and see for himself how Christianity was carried on at the fountain-head. The good man naturally concluded if the lad did go there and saw how the priests in reality conducted themselves, all chance of his salvation would be gone. He met him, therefore, on his return from the Eternal City, with a dismal countenance. 'I fear, my son, you come back as great a heretic as you went; is it not so, alas?'

'Nay, father,' replied the young man; 'I am now a firm believer in your faith. For, since I have seen its own ministers and especial advocates are, notwithstanding their abominable acts against it, unable to shake it, it must needs indeed have truth for its foundation.'

We must confess that it is only by an argument of this kind that we can quite account for the national belief in our 'commercial purity;' though the consciousness that England owes her chief greatness to commerce, may incline her to accord a somewhat blind admiration to her 'practical men of business,' and to exaggerate the talents necessary for the support of that particular rôle. We use that word advisedly, for there is scarcely any other profession which has more of the Artificial about it, or which derives more aid from costume, decoration, lacker. The very silence which reigns supreme in its temples, the solemnity which belongs to the priests and ministers of the Ledger, are themselves as 'stagey' as any of the 'slow music, lights half down,' of the melodrama and quite as unnecessary to the real performance of the work in hand.

A business-man may be a 'villain,' but there is, it seems, one comfort (which Hamlet lacked), that he may not 'smile and smile' like an honest man. As for laughter in any business establishment—such a sacrilege would be considered tantamount to an outbreak of bankruptcy! And yet, we suppose, humorous things do incidentally occur in the course of business transactions, as they do in that of the law, physic, and even divinity itself. The idea may be fanciful, but we cannot help imagining that this endeavour to set up Gravity in the place of Wisdom, has something sympathetic with the recent wholesale substitutions of Honest Seeming for Honesty.

Surely, if any other Profession had broken down so utterly—and where it was thought to be strongest—as the mercantile has done within the last ten years, it would have become by this time a laughing-stock to the British public.

In the book before us,* which professes to chronicle the principal trading frauds and failures between 1848 and 1858—and not including the Commercial Crisis at both ends of that interval—the most memorable phenomenon is not the perpetration of the crimes, but the general complicity of the Commercial World with the perpetrators; the low standard of morals avowed by the cheatees as well as the cheaters; and the selfishness, deepening sometimes into actual fraud, which appears to animate the best of 'houses.'

The slavish worship which seems to have been paid by the fortunate members of the railway world, for instance to their ex-monarch, is almost

* *Facts, Failures, and Frauds.* By D. Morier Evans. London: Groomb and Sons. 1859.