

THE SATURDAY READER.

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TRANSLATED FOR THE "SATURDAY READER" FROM
THE FRENCH OF PAUL FEVAL.

IN the sixteenth century many authors of note made their appearance—such as Moore, Sidney, Spenser, Hooker, Raleigh, Shakspeare. That vigorous thinker and eloquent critic, Hazlitt, says: "The age of Elizabeth was distinguished, beyond, perhaps, any other in our history, by a number of great men—famous in different ways—and whose names have come down to us with unblemished honours—men whom fame has eternised in her long and lasting scroll, and who, by their words and acts, were benefactors of their country, and ornaments of human nature;" and he adds—"Perhaps the genius of Great Britain never shone out fuller or brighter, or looked more like itself than at this period." In the seventeenth century, which opens with Bacon and closes with Newton, great advance in literature and intelligence show themselves. Dr. Harvey, Clarendon, Milton, Dryden, Locke, Defoe, Jeremy Taylor, and a host of others, have immortalized this period.

In passing to the eighteenth century, which opens with Addison and ends with Paley, books begin to increase in number and variety; but as regards strength and vigour they appear to yield to their predecessors. Steele, Swift, Pope, Goldsmith, Hume, Johnson, Gibbon, Adam Smith, stand out as shining lights in the literary firmament of this century.

In the nineteenth century books multiply beyond measure. It is estimated that about three thousand books and periodicals come out every year. The public must be perplexed how to choose their reading; and, what is worse, with such a flood, we are afraid the waters of the "old well-springs of English, pure and undefiled," are but rarely drunk. J. S. Mill says:—"Books of any solidity have almost gone by. Literature becomes more and more a mere reflection of current sentiments, and has almost entirely abandoned its mission as an enlightener and improver of them." Our present object and intent is to publish, at stated intervals, selections from some of the best authors, many of whom, probably, do not come within the scope of the majority of our readers.

Our first selection will be from Izaak Walton, who was born in 1593, and whose character as an author is known wherever English literature is cultivated. "The Complete Angler" will ever be a cherished book. Angling was Walton's chief recreation, and his favourite haunt was the River Lea. Of the old scenery and the old manners of a district, within ten miles of London, he has left the most delicious pictures—the reflection of nature in the heart of a good man. Walton was the biographer of Hooker, Donne, Wotton, and Herbert. He lived till the age of ninety; his business was a haberdasher in Fleet Street, and after his retirement therefrom he spent many years in the enjoyment of literary leisure, beloved and respected by the worthiest men of his time.

There is a simplicity and piety in the following, which is quite refreshing in these days.

CONTENTMENT AND CHEERFULNESS.

I will, as we walk in the cool shade of this sweet honeysuckle hedge, mention to you some of the thoughts and joys which have possessed my soul since we two met together. And these thoughts shall be told you, that you may also join with me in thankfulness to the Giver of every good and perfect gift for our happiness. And that our present happiness may appear to be the greater, and we the more thankful for it, I will beg you to consider with me how many do even at this very time lie under the torment of diseases that we are free from. And every misery I miss is a new mercy: and therefore let us be thankful. There have been, since we met, others that have met disasters of broken limbs; some have been blasted, others thunder-stricken; and we have been freed from these, and all those other miseries that threaten human nature: let us therefore rejoice and be thankful. Nay, which is a far greater mercy, we are freed from the insupportable burthen of an accusing tormenting conscience; a misery that none can bear: and therefore let us praise Him for His preventing grace, and say, every misery that I miss is a new mercy, nay, let me tell you, that there be many that have forty times our estate, that would give the greatest part of it to be healthful and cheerful like us. I have a rich neighbour who is always so busy that he has no leisure to laugh; the whole business of his life is to get money, and more money, that he may still get more and more money; he is still drudging on, and says that Solomon says:—"The diligent hand maketh rich, and it is true indeed: but he considers not that it is not in the power of riches to make a man happy; for it was wisely said by a man of great observation, "that there be as many miseries beyond riches as on this side them." And yet God deliver us from pinching poverty; and grant that, having a competency, we may be content and thankful. Let us not repine, or so much as think the gifts of God unequally dealt, if we see another abound with riches; when as God knows, the cares that are the keys that keep those riches, hang often so heavily at the rich man's girdle, that they clog him with weary days and restless nights, even when others sleep quietly. We see but the outside of the rich man's happiness; few consider him to be like the silkworm, that when she seems to play, is, at the very same time, spinning her own bowels, and consuming herself; and this many rich men do, loading themselves with corroding cares, to keep what they have, probably, unconsciously got. Let us, therefore, be thankful for health and a competence; and, above all, for a quiet conscience.

Let me tell you that Diogenes walked on a day, with his friend, to see a country fair; where he saw ribbons and looking-glasses, and nut-crackers, and fiddles, and hobby-horses, and many other gimcracks; and having observed them, and all the other finimbruns that make a complete country-fair, he said to his friend, "Lord, how many things are there in this world of which Diogenes hath no need!" And truly it is so, with very many who vex and toil themselves to get what they have no need of. Can any man charge God, that he hath not given him enough to make his life happy? No, doubtless; for nature is content with a little. And yet you shall hardly meet with a man that complains not of some want; though he, indeed, wants nothing but his will; it may be, nothing but the will of his poor neighbour, for not worshipping or not flattering him; and thus, when we might be happy and quiet, we create trouble to ourselves. I have heard

of a man who was angry with himself because he was no taller; and of a woman that broke her looking-glass because it would not show her face to be as young and handsome as her next neighbour's was. And I know another to whom God hath given health and plenty; but a wife that nature hath made peevish, and her husband's riches had made purse-proud; and must, because she was rich, and for no other virtue, sit in the highest pew in the church; which being denied her, she engaged her husband into a contention for it and at last into a law-suit with a dogged neighbour who was as rich as he, and had a wife as peevish and purse-proud as the other; and this law-suit begot higher oppositions, and actionable words, and more vexations and law-suits; for you must remember that both were rich, and must therefore have their will. Well! this wilful purse-proud law-suit lasted during the life of the first husband; after which his wife vexed and chid, and chid and vexed, till she also chid and vexed herself into her grave; and so the wealth of these poor rich people was curst into a punishment, because they wanted meek and thankful hearts: for these only can make us happy. I know a man that had health and riches; and several houses, all beautiful and ready furnished; and would often trouble himself and family to be removing from one house to another, and being asked by a friend why he removed so often from and house to another, replied, "It was to find content in some one of them." But his friend, knowing his temper, told him, if he would find content in any houses, he must leave himself behind him; for content will never dwell but in a meek and quiet soul. And this may appear if we read and consider what our Saviour says in St. Matthew's gospel; for he there says:—"Blessed be the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed be the true of heart, for they shall see God. Blessed be the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And, blessed be the meek, for they shall possess the earth." Not that the meek shall not also obtain mercy, and see God, and be comforted, and at last come to the kingdom of heaven; but in the meantime he, and he only, possesses the earth, as he goes towards that kingdom of heaven, by being humble and cheerful, and content with what his good God hath allotted him. He has no turbulent, repining vexatious thoughts that he deserves better; nor is vexed when he sees others possessed of more honour or more riches than his wise God has allotted for his share: but he possesses what he has with a meek and contented quietness, such a quietness as makes his very dreams pleasing, both to God and himself.

Let not the blessings we receive daily from God make us not value and praise Him, because they be common; let us not forget to praise Him for the innocent mirth and pleasure we have met with since we have met together. What would a blind man give to see the pleasant rivers, and meadows, and flowers, and fountains that we have met with since we have met together? I have been told, that if a man that was born blind could obtain or have his sight for but only one hour during his whole life, and should at the first opening of his eyes, fix his sight on the sun when it was in full glory, either at the rising or setting of it, he would be so transported and amazed, and would so admire the glory of it, that he would not willingly turn his eyes from that first ravishing object, to behold all the other various beauties this world could present to him. And this, and many other like blessings, we enjoy daily. And for most of them, because they be so common, most men forget to pay their praise, but let not us; because it is a sacrifice so pleasing to him that made that sun and us, and still protects us, and give us flowers, and