

old. The Printing press has been in full operation during the best part of that period. No nation surpasses it in commercial activity, or during struggling with natural difficulties; but its literature is as yet only in its tottering infancy, and its authors, with one or two fair exceptions, a mere crowd of butterflies playing with the flowers that deck the lower slopes of Parnassus. Those who have been most successful are they who have thought and written as if they thought and wrote on English soil, imitating with generous and creditable enthusiasm the model authors of our language. No national literature yet exists on the American Continent. All that is creditable in authorship is English, or based on English models; and though the Red Cross has long ceased to float over the fair battlements of Independent America, the language of Shakespeare and Milton yet holds undivided sovereignty over the thoughts, hearts, and learning of every intellect in her wide dominion.

With us, as dependencies of the British Crown, literature is of course at a much lower ebb. We have none in fact, and till the unwearied struggles of industry and enterprise have smoothed down the rugged face of our country, and wealth and leisure are acquired by at least a numerous portion of our fellow-subjects, but little can be done toward giving our adopted home a place even in one of the lowest niches of the great temple of literary fame. That we could possess a distinctive literary character must for centuries be impossible. That our country could even contribute, in proportion to her resources and population, to the literature of the mighty Empire of which we boast to be an integral portion, is, under present circumstances, equally unlikely, and can only take place by slow degrees and gradual progress. A Colony is a peculiarly unpropitious spot for the development of learning or the arts. Its population, from the very nature of its constituent parts, is all bent on the engrossing task of advancing personal interest, or extending personal enterprise and industry. It is a land of struggles with the difficulties of climate, untamed nature, and limited resources. A "mute, inglorious Milton" may be found among its forests, but his soft voice will be drowned in the hum and bustle of active life. He may bud, but it will be only to wither; he may put forth blossoms, but it will be only to be frosted at once by the

sneer or laugh of those around, intent on far more matter of fact pursuits, and ready at once to wonder at or pity the unhappy wight devoted to what they cannot but deem a frivolous vocation, or an "unprofitable investment" of talent or industry.

A colonial author, should such a black swan appear on our waters, would have two evils to dread—two courses to adopt. He might at once attempt to devote his genius to the peculiar circumstances of the new country in which he found himself; to attempt to clothe in harmonious numbers her particular features, habits, or general attributes: in fact, to attempt to lay the foundation-stone of a national or colonial literature; or, in place of attempting to strike out any such "short-cut" to the Temple of Fame, to content himself with plodding along the beaten road over which the thousands of his country's authors had trodden before him, and on which hardly a space remained vacant for the new comer's step that bore not the impress of some former footstep. In other words, he would have to become an *English* author or *nothing*. In the first case, he would have to dread the chances of a signal and complete failure, rendered more conspicuous to his fellow-men by the fact of his having, as it were, called all eyes on him and his movements, by starting into a new path apart from the rest, raising himself on a distinct pedestal, to render his attitudes and general appearance more palpable to every one. In the second, he would have to fear the still more galling doom of utter and total oblivion, the misery of not even having his failure noticed. So completely would he risk having the gleam of his humble taper lost in the rich blaze of almost unearthly splendour that circled the shrine of his country's literature, that his name, should it even so far emerge from obscurity as to be mentioned, would be spoken of as that of some feeble imitator, some impudent filcher of the thoughts or expressions of a sterling writer, whose posthumous reputation was outraged by the glaring plagiarism of the audacious aspirant.

Imitation, plagiarism; ay, these are the two fatal words: there lie the Scylla and Charybdis of literary navigation; these the twin serpents that seek to strangle the struggling infant; these are the bugbears of the author; these are the stock scourges of the merciless critics.

Was it not one of the authors of the famed "Rejected Addresses" who proposed,