

## BREAKFASTS WITH SAMUEL ROGERS.

## No. VIII.

MRS. NORTON was not only one of the most beautiful women of her time, but one of the most accomplished and fascinating. Lady Blessington, though not so beautiful, was still a very attractive person, and aspired to fill in London society a position similar to that formerly occupied in Paris by the literary ladies who, on certain days every week, kept open house for all the literary, artistic, scientific, and intellectual celebrities of the day. This position she filled with much approval, and with as much success as the difference in social manners between the upper classes in London and Paris would allow. Mr. Macaulay, who had not then published his *History of England*, was known as the most potent critic and brilliant essayist in the ranks of literature, as it then flourished. He also enjoyed considerable reputation as a poet, which he did not, however, deserve; but was socially known as a brilliant conversationalist, unrivalled by any contemporary, the Rev. Sidney Smith alone excepted.

Such was the company, of which I was privileged to make one, that assembled one morning at the breakfast-table of Mr. Rogers, to partake of "the

feast of reason and the flow of soul " that oftener accompany a refection of tea and coffee, brown bread and fresh butter, together with strawberries or other fruit in the morning, than in the evening as adjuncts to the fish, venison, and game, and the claret, Burgundy, and champagne, of what is thought to be the superior repast. At least, such was the opinion of Mr. Rogers; and that was the reason why he usually preferred to bring his friends together at breakfast rather than at dinner.

Every one of the company had written and published verses, or—as no doubt every one of them thought—poetry (which is often a very different thing), and the conversation turned upon poetic art as distinguished from poetic genius. There was a general agreement in the opinion that the rhymes of the English language were comparatively few, and that they had been all so frequently used as to be well-nigh worn out. Their constant repetitions, familiar to all readers and writers, were cited and dwelt upon, as were also the wild attempts of some poets, from the days of Butler, the author of *Hudibras*, to those of Byron, the author of *Don Juan*, to manufacture new and unexpected compound rhymes.

"I greatly appreciate," said Mrs. Norton, "the desperate ingenuity of Samuel Butler's rhymes in *Hudibras*—one more especially, where he says of the ranting and canting preachers of the con-

venticle, at the time of the Commonwealth, when England was overrun with rabid 'saints'—that the

Pulpit drum ecclesiastic  
Was beat with fist, instead of a stick."

This, she thought, was excelled, if not in daring, most certainly in elaborate complication, by the very clever rhyme of Lord Byron,

Tell me, ye lords of ladies intellectual,  
Now tell me truly, have they not hen-peck'd you all?

"Nothing could be better of its kind," said Mr. Macaulay. "But the aid of such rhymes is only available for the comic versifiers. The least attempt of any serious poet to indulge in such eccentricities would be fatal alike to his verses and his reputation."

"True poets, who write in English," I ventured to remark, "have no real need of rhyme. Blank verse is quite sufficient for poetry of the highest order. Some of the most magnificent passages in Shakespeare and Milton are in blank verse. Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, and Lucretius, and all the poets of classical antiquity, were ignorant of rhyme, and English poetry of the highest class would be none the poorer if rhyme were unknown."

"I grant you," said Mr. Macaulay. "But poetry of a class only inferior to the highest—the lyrical and ballad poetry in which English literature is so rich—would be deprived of its

principal charm if rhyme were abolished. A song, a hymn, or a ballad, would, to my mind, lose one of its principal attractions if the ear were not tickled and the memory were not aided by the musical jingle of the rhymes."

"But still," said Lady Blessington, "you must allow that our rhymes are worn sadly threadbare by constant repetition; and that many excellent and highly poetical words, which poets would like to use, if they were available for the purpose, are without rhymes altogether. There is, for instance, no rhyme for 'silver,' though there are many for gold. Neither are there any to 'buxom,' 'lovely,' 'urgent,' 'kingdom,' 'picture,' 'portrait,' 'music,' 'noble,' 'orange,' 'herald,' and many others that I cannot now remember, or for disyllabic and trisyllabic words generally. For some other words in common use among poets and rhymers, the rhymes are exceedingly few, and, when they are employed, break upon the ear with all the monotony of a hurdy-gurdy or a barrel-organ."

"It has often struck me," said Mrs. Norton, "that English poets might, if consonances failed them—as they often do—produce very pleasing effects in their verse, by means of assonances. The old ballad-writers—partly from design, perhaps, but probably oftener from laziness—contented themselves with assonances when consonances were troublesome to find. In one of the

most beautiful songs ever written—at least, I think so—the old Scotch song, ‘There’s nae luck about the house,’ which is often erroneously attributed to Robert Burns, there is a stanza, of which the music, to my ear, is unexceptionable, in which there is an assonance which is so pleasing as entirely to atone for the imperfect rhyme :

And shall I see his face again,  
 And shall I hear him *speak*?  
 I’m downright dizzy wi’ the thought;  
 In troth I’m like to *greet*.”

“The lines are very beautiful,” said Lady Blessington.

“I think,” said Mr. Macaulay, “that the old ballad-singers and ballad-writers would have been glad to have found good rhymes, had they been able to do so; but that they did not always care to take the trouble to be correct. And very often their carelessness did not signify. I remember two cases in the fine ballad of the ‘Gaberlunzie Man,’ to be found in *Percy’s Reliques*,

The night was cauld, the carle was *wat*,  
 My daughter’s shoulders he ’gan to *clap*.

where the assonance of ‘wat’ and ‘clap’ was sufficient to satisfy the ear of the author, and of the reader, too.

‘And oh!’ quoth she, ‘an’ I were as *white*  
 As ever the snow lay on the *dike*,

where he was as easily pleased.”

“We must take these old ballads as we find them,” said Mr. Rogers, “with all their roughness and imperfections; but we should be very wrong to imitate them in their defects. And, if we did, we might not, perhaps, be able to imitate them in their beauties. Either let us have perfect blank verse or perfect rhyme.”

“But perfect blank verse,” said Mr. Macaulay, “is not satisfactory to the English ear, unless it be decasyllabic, as it often is in Shakespeare, Milton, and other great writers. Lyrical measures, without rhymes, are extremely disappointing. They lead the reader to expect what he does not receive, and impress him involuntarily with the feeling that, after all, prose would be far preferable to verse that aspires to be verse, but is verse in name only. Take, for instance, one of the poems of Henry Kirke White, entitled, ‘The Early Primrose,’ in which there is a string of such stanzas as the following:

Mild offspring of a dark and sullen sire,  
Whose modest form so delicately pure  
Was nursed in whirling storms  
And cradled in the winds.

Here the English is perfect as well as the rhythm and cadence of the verse; but the whole effect is tantalising. We long for something that eludes our grasp; and the bud of poesy falls from the stalk

without having opened into the flower that was expected."

"I quite agree with you," said Mrs. Norton. "In the lyrical form of poetry, rhyme is imperative, but in the narrative form, especially when the narrative is serious, it might be dispensed with. I am heretic enough to think that the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and the *Lady of the Lake*, beautiful as they are as they stand, are not altogether improved by the lyrical style and the dancing measure in which they are written, and that they have a tendency to pall on the ear by their monotony."

"There is one form of blank verse," said Mr. Macaulay, "a very ancient form, which, I must own, has a certain charm for my ear, although it is not in the decasyllabic metre. I mean that in which the excellent old poem of *Piers Ploughman* is written. Have you, Mr. Rogers, a copy of *Piers Ploughman* in your library? No doubt you have; and I should be obliged if you could let me have a sight of it."

Mr. Rogers rang the bell, and his valet, Payne, his constant attendant, who acted as his librarian, answered the summons. The book was brought immediately, and Mr. Macaulay, preparatory to turning over the leaves, fixed his attention on the very first page.

"Here, at the opening of the poem," he said,

“I find a specimen of the verse to which I wish to direct attention :

In a somer season,  
When soft was the sunne,  
I shoop me into shroudes.

A little further on I find another specimen :

Unholy of werkes  
Went wide into the world  
Wonders to hear.

And again :

Patriarchs and prophets,  
And preachers of God's wordes.

In all these passages you will notice the music of the alliterations. In the first it is the letter *s* which does duty, in the second *w*, in the third *p*. These alliterations—three at least, and sometimes five in a single couplet—are imperative in the construction of the verse, and serve to supply that titillation to the ear which the taste of that day considered essential, in the absence of rhyme. The general effect seems to me to be pleasing.”

“I very much doubt,” said Lady Blessington, “whether such a structure of verse, pleasant as it is, would be acceptable to modern ears, and whether it would not be voted tedious and monotonous.”

“Alliteration, in a moderate degree,” said Mrs. Norton, “lends a peculiar charm to poetry, and serves to impress upon the memory any fine pas-



sage in which it may occur. The line in *Childe Harold*, where Byron, describing the battle of Waterloo, and the death of the Duke of Brunswick, says of the ill-fated hero that he

Rushed into the field, and foremost fighting fell,

has always seemed to me to be productive of the finest possible effect."

In this opinion we all agreed. It was also conceded that the judicious use of alliteration added a charm to any otherwise fine passage in which it might occur. But no one was able to suggest a remedy for the poverty of the English language in rhymes, except in the compound rhymes, which are only permissible in mock heroics or in comic verse. In these the utmost limit of combination is allowed, as in the *Ingoldsby Legends*, which were then in the first flush of their early popularity, and afforded many excellent examples of the abounding capabilities of the vernacular English in this respect. The conversation afterwards turned upon the availability of the hexameter as a variation upon the comparative monotony of the old heroic ten-syllabic metre. But the hexameter met with but slight favour. The two ladies and Mr. Rogers were strongly opposed to it, and Mr. Macaulay had little or nothing to say in its favour.

"What," he asked, "can be more inconsistent

with the genius of English prosody than the following, among hundreds of others that might be cited at random, from Southey's *Vision of Judgment*?

Toll, toll, through the silence of evening!

'Tis a deep, dull sound, that is heavy and mournful at all times;

For it tells of mortality always. But heavier this day  
Fell on the conscious ear its deeper and mournfuller import."

"To my ear," said Mr. Rogers, "this is utterly discordant, and even painful. 'Evening' and 'import,' at the conclusion of the lines, are all very well, and are pronounced as they ought to be; but 'all times' and 'this day'—with a strong emphasis on 'this' and a slight one on 'day'—if they are pronounced according to the rhythmical necessities of the structure of the verse, seem to me to be utterly alien and inimical to the spirit of English poetry."

"To me, also," said Mrs. Norton, "the true hexameter of the English—if the word can be properly applied to what is not a hexameter—is the old ballad metre of fourteen syllables in a line, instead of twelve. The fourteen syllables are usually printed, for the convenience of the compositor, in two lines—one of eight and one of six—as in the fine old ballad of *Chevy Chase*, which

Sir Philip Sidney declared to stir his heart as with the sound of a trumpet :

The child shall rue that is unborn, the hunting of that day."

"I should like to know," observed Lady Blessington, "if any finer specimen of English versification has ever been given to the world than the ancient ballad of the *Nut Brown Maid*, which is written in that ancient metre. If there has been, I must own that I have never met with it or heard of it. Indeed, I doubt if, as mere versification, the English language can produce its equal in any poem of the same extent."

Mr. Macaulay at first thought he could cite some poems of the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries which might match it, but afterwards confessed that he was in error, and that the *Nut Brown Maid* was unique both for rhyme and rhythm. He held that it was vastly superior in every respect to the attempt of Matthew Prior in the eighteenth century to introduce it to a newer generation in a more classical garb. Not, he said, that Prior's poem would not have given pleasure to most readers, and even to many severe critics, if it had been first in the field, or if it had stood alone. But all comparison with the original, he thought, was fatal to the claim of its imitator.

The persons who thus discoursed upon the art of poetry, though they were all poets or versifiers,

were not poets of the first rank—not even Mr. Rogers himself, or the Honourable Mrs. Norton. They both stood high in the second rank, and might even lay claim to genius, and have their claims allowed, though not perhaps very enthusiastically. But Lady Blessington and Mr. Macaulay were not even of the second rank, though Mr. Macaulay was a versifier of the very first order. The only one of the three who afterwards added to the poetic fame which they had previously acquired was Mrs. Norton, who, under happier circumstances than those in which her lot was cast, might have more than justified the title of the English “Sappho,” which her admirers bestowed upon her.

The early life of this gifted woman was most unhappy. Lord Melbourne, who was himself one of the most agreeable as well as one of the most able men of his time, was fascinated more than he ought to have been by the conversation and society of Mrs. Norton, and passed in her company many hours, that, as Prime Minister, he ought to have devoted to the business of the nation. By this indiscretion—to give it no harsher name—which in other respects was perfectly innocent, he set the tongue of scandal in motion against himself and the lady, to such an extent as to lead his party opponents to imagine that they could damage him politically, and his administration along with him,

by working upon the jealous weakness of her not very clever husband, one of the police magistrates of the metropolis, who owed his appointment to Lord Melbourne.

They did so with such mischievous effect that they persuaded, or rather incited, him to commence an action against the Prime Minister for criminal conversation with his wife. The base and cowardly plot succeeded but too well, and all London rang for several months with the scandal it created. The ill-judged action ultimately came on for trial, and resulted—to the satisfaction of all impartial people—in the triumphant vindication of the lady's character. But in such unhappy cases, as in that of Cæsar's wife, two thousand years previously, the mere suspicion, and the whispered calumnies that are certain to be built upon even smaller foundations, left their traces in the popular mind. For many long years the "unco' guid and rigidly righteous," affected to believe, to use their own language, that with so much smoke there must have been more or less fire.

The husband and wife only met again once as long as they lived; and that was at the grave of one of their children, more than a quarter of a century afterwards. Lord Melbourne provided handsomely, through his sister, Lady Palmerston, for the woman to whom his well-meant but unlucky attentions had done such great social injury, and

settled upon her an annuity, sufficient in amount to maintain her in comfort, though not in splendour, and provide her with leisure to cultivate literature for the love she bore it, without being wholly dependent on the pecuniary rewards it might bring her. Her later years made amends, by the happiness they brought her, for the troubles she had endured in the first flush of her youth, her beauty, and her fame.

On her husband's death, she accepted the hand of the celebrated Sir William Stirling Maxwell, of Kier, the head of an illustrious Scottish family. He was known in Scotland as "Kier," a title of more than nobility in the estimation of all Perthshire. Sir William was not only a man of high rank, but was of the very highest eminence in literature. He had long known, admired, and esteemed Mrs. Norton. The marriage was one of mutual esteem and affection, as well as of worldly wisdom, and shed a halo of happy light over the autumnal years of a noble couple.

Lady Blessington was a general favourite in the male society of the metropolis; but was under a social cloud among the ladies, in consequence of her very peculiar and highly immoral relations with the handsome Count D'Orsay—"the glass of fashion and the mould of form." The Count was a man as fair to look upon as Antinous or Adonis must have been; but, as his life showed, as devoid

of all moral principle as Jupiter, or any other god or demi-god in the Greek and Roman mythology. Their *salon* at Gore House, Kensington, was for many years the resort of all that was eminent in the literature and social life of the time, at least on the male side of both.

The Count was the recognised arbiter of the fashions of the day, the dandy *par excellence*, the very Prince or Pope of tailors, who not only competed for his custom, but furnished him with clothes, "free gratis and for nothing," in order that they might be enabled to make it known that the supreme "elegant," the "beau," the "masher," the "dude" of the day was supplied from their establishments. And not only the tailors, but the hatters, the glovers, the shirt-makers, and the boot-makers, were proud to supply him on the same terms, never sending him any bills, or, if they did, making him understand that he would never be asked for the money.

It has been said of poets that, in their youth, they

Begin in gladness,  
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

So it might have been said of Lady Blessington and the Count D'Orsay. They began in gladness, and continued in gladness for a time; but the end was bankruptcy and ruin. They were compelled

to leave London in 1849 or 1850, and, taking refuge in Paris, found a protector for awhile in the Emperor Napoleon III., who, in the days of his exile in London, had been a constant guest at Gore House, where the brilliant and hospitable but shameless couple resided. They both died in Paris, in comparative, if not in actual poverty, and in complete neglect, the Countess eking out her scanty means by ill-paid contributions to second and third-rate newspapers in London, which the Count did his utmost to sell for her—not always successfully. If truth must be told, the Countess was not at the best of times a very clever writer, and such little talent as she once possessed had become weakened in the days of her adversity. The Emperor Napoleon did all he could for the couple ; for he was pre-eminently a grateful man, and never forgot, in the height of his power and glory, those whose friendship he had enjoyed in the days of his exile, when he was looked down upon by the highest society of London.

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## BREAKFASTS WITH SAMUEL ROGERS.

## No. IX.

It was in the summer of 1844, a few days after the interment in Westminster Abbey of Thomas Campbell, author of *The Pleasures of Hope*, and many other celebrated poems, that I received an invitation to breakfast with Mr. Rogers, to meet the Rev. Mr. Milman, the officiating clergyman on that solemn occasion. There were three other guests besides myself, the Rev. Alexander Dyce, well-known as a commentator on Shakspeare; Mr. Serjeant Talfourd, an eminent lawyer; Mr. Thomas Miller, originally a basket-maker, who had acquired considerable reputation as a poet and novelist, and as a hard-working man of letters.

Dr. Milman was at the time Rector of St. Margaret's, the little church that stands close to Westminster Abbey, and interferes greatly with the view of that noble cathedral. He was afterwards Dean of St. Paul's, and was known to fame as the author of the successful tragedy of *Fazio*, of many poetical volumes of no great merit, and of a *History of the Jews* and a *History of Christianity*, both of which still retain their reputation.

The conversation turned principally on the funeral of the poet, at which both Mr. Dyce and

myself had been present. The pall-bearers were among the most distinguished men of the time, for their rank, their talent, and their high literary and political position. They included Sir Robert Peel, Lord Brougham, Lord Campbell, the Duke of Argyll, the Earl of Strangford, and the Duke of Buccleuch, the last named the generous nobleman—noble in nature as well as in rank—who had offered, when a lad in his teens, to pay the debts of his illustrious namesake, Sir Walter Scott, when the great novelist had fallen upon evil days in the full flush of his fame and popularity. A long procession of authors, sculptors, artists, and other distinguished men, followed the coffin to the grave. Many Polish exiles were conspicuous among them. As Mr. Milman pronounced the affecting words of the burial service, "dust to dust, ashes to ashes," a Polish gentleman made his way through the ranks of the mourners, and, drawing a handful of earth from a little basket which he carried, exclaimed in a clear voice, "This is Polish earth for the tomb of the friend of Poland," and sprinkled it upon the coffin. This dramatic incident recalled to my memory, as it no doubt did to that of other spectators, Campbell's unwearied exertions in the cause of Poland, and the indignant lines in the *Pleasures of Hope* :

Hope for a season bade the world farewell,  
And Freedom shrieked when Kosciusko fell.

Mr. Rogers, reminded, perhaps, of a grievance by the presence at the breakfast-table of Mr. Milman, seemed to brood over an injustice that he thought had been done him with reference to the late poet. When Campbell, under the pressure of some pecuniary difficulty, complained of the scanty rewards of literature—and especially of poetry—Mr. Rogers was reported to have recommended him to endeavour to procure employment as a clerk! This was thought to be very unfeeling; but on this occasion Mr. Rogers explained to the whole company that he had been misunderstood, and that he had not meant any unkindness.

“I myself,” he said, “was a clerk in my early days, and never had to depend upon poetry for my bread; and I only suggested that in Mr. Campbell’s case, and in that of every other literary man, it would be much better if the writing of poetry were an amusement only, and not a business.”

“No doubt!” said Mr. Dyce. “But men of genius are not always the masters of their own youth, and cannot invariably choose their careers, or make choice of a profession, which requires means and time to qualify for it. You, for instance, Mr. Rogers, when a clerk, were clerk to your father, and qualified yourself under his auspices for partnership in, or succession to the management of, his prosperous Bank. Mr. Campbell has no such chances.”

“It is a large question,” said Dr. Milman. “The love of literature in a man of genius, rich or poor—especially if poor—is an all-absorbing passion, and shapes his life, regret it as we may. Literature has rewards more pleasant than those of money, pleasant though money undoubtedly is. If money were to be the ‘be-all and end-all’ of life, it would be better to be a rich cheesemonger or butcher than a poor author. But no high-spirited, intelligent, and ambitious youth is of this opinion, or shapes his life by it. Sensitive youths drift into poetry, as prosaic and adventurous youths drift into the army or the navy.”

“The more’s the pity,” replied Mr. Rogers, “as by drifting into poetry they too often drift into poverty and misery. I trust, however, you will all understand that the idle or the malevolent gossips did, and do me, gross injustice when they say that I recommended Campbell to accept a clerkship rather than continue to rely upon poetry. I never thought of doing so. I merely expressed a general wish that every man of genius, not born to wealth, should have a recognised trade or profession to rely upon for his daily bread.”

“A wish that all men would agree in,” said Mr. Dyce; “and that, after all, had no particular or exclusive reference to Mr. Campbell. He did not find the literature, which he adorned, utterly un-

profitable. He made money by his poetry, and by his literary labour generally, besides gaining a pension of three hundred pounds per annum on the Civil List, and the society of all the most eminent men of his time, which he could not have done as a cheesemonger or a butcher, however opulent he might have become in those pursuits."

"These are all truisms," said Mr. Rogers, somewhat sharply, as if annoyed. "What I complain of is that the world—the very ill-natured world—should have spread abroad the ridiculous story that I recommended Mr. Campbell, in his declining years, to apply for a clerkship."

"I think no one believes that you did so," said Dr. Milman, "or that you could have done so. Your sympathy with men of letters is well known, and has been proved too often, not by words only, but by generous deeds, for such a story to obtain credence."

"Falsehoods," replied Mr. Rogers, still with a tone of bitterness, "are not cripples. They run fast, and have more legs than a centipede. I saw it stated in print the other day that I depreciate Shakspeare, and think him to have been over-rated. I know of no other foundation for the libel than the fact that I once quoted the opinion expressed of him by Ben Jonson, his dearest friend and

greatest admirer. Though Ben Jonson called Shakspeare the 'Swan of Avon,'

Soul of the age,  
The applause, delight, and wonder of the stage,

and affirmed that

He was not for an age, but for all Time,

he did not hesitate to express the wish, in answer to one who boasted that Shakspeare had never blotted a line, 'Would to heaven that he had blotted a thousand.' Ben Jonson saw the spots on the glorious face of the sun of Shakspeare's genius, and was not accused of desecrating his memory because he did so. But because *I* quoted that very saying and approved of it, I have been accused of an act of treason against the majesty of the great poet. Surely my offence was no greater than that of Ben Jonson! If there were treason in the thought, it was treason that I shared with him who had said he loved Shakspeare with as much love as it was possible to feel on this side of idolatry."

"I think," remarked Dr. Milman, "that such apparently malevolent repetitions of a person's remarks are the results of careless ignorance or easy-going stupidity rather than of positive ill-nature or a wilful perversion of the truth."

"It is very curious," said Mr. Dyce, "how very few people can repeat correctly what they hear, and that nine people out of ten cannot

repeat a joke without missing the point or the spirit of it. And what a widely prevalent tendency there is to exaggeration, especially in numbers! If some people see a hundred of anything, they commonly represent the hundred as a thousand, and the thousand as ten thousand."

"Not alone in numbers," interposed Mr. Rogers, "but in everything. If I quoted Ben Jonson's remark in relation to Shakspeare once only, the rumour spreads that I quoted it *frequently*. And so the gossip passes from mouth to mouth with continual accretions. Perhaps I shall go down to posterity as an habitual reviler and depreciator of Shakspeare."

"Perhaps you won't go down to posterity at all," said Mr. Dyce, with affected cynicism.

"Perhaps not," replied Mr. Rogers; "but if my name should happen to reach that uncertain destination, I trust I may be remembered, as Ben Jonson is, as a true lover of Shakspeare. But great as Shakspeare is, I don't think that our admiration should ever be allowed to degenerate into slavish adoration. We ought neither to make a god of him nor a fetish. And I ask you, Mr. Dyce, as a diligent student of his works and an industrious commentator upon them, whether you do not think that very many passages are unworthy of his genius. If Homer nods, does Shakspeare?"

“I grant all that,” replied Mr. Dyce. “Nay, more! I assert that many of the plays attributed to him were not written by him at all. And more even than that. Several of his plays were published surreptitiously, and without his consent, and never received his final corrections or any revision whatever. The faults and obscurities that are discernible even in the masterpieces of his genius were not due to him at all, but to ignorant and piratical booksellers, who gave them to the world without his authority, and traded upon his name; some, also, must be attributed to the shorthand writers who took down the dialogue as repeated by the actors on the stage. It is curious to reflect how indifferent Shakspeare was to his dramatic fame. He never seems to have cared for his plays at all, and to have looked at them, to use the slang of the artists of our days, as mere *pot-boilers*—compositions that brought him in money, and enabled him to pay his way, but in which he took no personal pride whatever.”

“His heart was in his two early poems, *Venus and Adonis* and the *Rape of Lucrece*,” said Dr. Milman; “the only two compositions, it should be observed, that were ever published by his authority and to which he appended his name. His sonnets, which some people admire so much, an admiration in which I do not share, were published surreptitiously, without his consent; and probably one half of



them were not written by him. Some of them are undoubtedly by Marlowe, and some by authors of far inferior ability. Shakspeare's name was popular at the time; there was no law of copyright, and booksellers did almost what they pleased with the names and works of celebrated men; and, what seems extraordinary in our day, the celebrated men made no complaint, most probably because there was no redress to be obtained for them if they had done so. The real law of copyright only dates from the eighth year of the reign of Queen Anne (1710), or nearly a century after Shakspeare's death."

"But authors in those early days, even in the absence of a well-defined law of copyright," said Mr. Miller, "received payment for their works; witness the receipt of John Milton for five pounds on account of *Paradise Lost*, now in the possession of our host, and which we have all seen."

"But that was two generations after the death of Shakspeare," said Mr. Dyce; "and it does not appear that Shakspeare ever received a shilling for the copyright of any of his works. Perhaps he received gratuities from the Earls of Southampton and Pembroke and the other rich young men about town, for whom it is supposed that he wrote many of the sonnets. That he also must have received considerable sums for the representation of his plays at the Globe Theatre, is evident from th

well-ascertained fact that he retired from theatrical business with a competent fortune, and lived the life for some years of a prosperous country gentleman."

As it has been asserted in my presence by an eminent literary man, within a month of the present writing, that Samuel Rogers systematically depreciated Shakspeare, and that he was above all things a cynic, I think it right, in justice to his memory, to repeat the conversation above recorded. Though it took place nearly forty years ago, I wrote down the heads of it in my note-book on the very day it occurred, and by reference to it I have refreshed my memory so as to be certain of its accuracy. Mr. Rogers doubtless said very pungent and apparently ill-natured things in his time; no professed wit, such as he was, can always, or indeed very often, refrain from shooting a barbed dart to raise a laugh, to strengthen an argument, or dispense with one; but there was no malevolence in the heart, though there might appear to be some on the tongue, of Samuel Rogers. To love literature and to excel in poetical composition were unfailing passports to his regard, his esteem, and, if necessary, to his purse.

One of the guests of the morning on which these conversations took place, and who bore his part in them, was a grateful recipient of his beneficence. Thomas Miller, who began life as a

journeyman basket-maker, working for small daily wages in the fens of Lincolnshire, excited the notice of his neighbours by his poetical genius (or it may have been only talent), and their praises of his compositions filled his mind with the desire to try his literary fortune in the larger sphere of London. He listened to the promptings of his ambition, came to the metropolis, launched his little skiff on the wide ocean of literary life, and by dint of hard work, indomitable perseverance, unflinching hope, and incessant struggles, managed to earn a modest subsistence. He speedily found that poetry failed to put money in his purse, and prudently resorted to prose. When prose in the shape of original work, principally fiction, just enabled him to live from day to day, he took refuge in the daily drudgery of reviewing in the *Literary Gazette*, then edited by William Jerdan, an agreeable companion and friend, but a very bad paymaster. He had not been long in London before he made the acquaintance of Mr. Rogers, and, after a period of more or less intimacy, received from that gentleman the good, though old, and, as it often happens, the unwelcome advice that he should cease to rely wholly upon literature for his daily bread. As poor Miller could not return to basket-making, except as an employer of other basket-makers, for which he had not sufficient or indeed any capital, and as, moreover, he had no love for any pursuits but those

of literature, he resolved, if he could manage it, to establish himself as a bookseller and publisher. Mr. Rogers, to whom he confided his wish, approved of it, and generously aided him to accomplish it by the advance, without security, of the money required for the purpose. The basket-maker carried on the business for a few years with but slight and decreasing success; and once informed me that he made more money by the sale of note-paper, of sealing-wax, of ink, and of red tape, than he had made by the sale of his own works or those of anybody else.

Mr. Rogers established another poet in the book-selling and publishing business, but with far greater success than attended his efforts in the case of the basket-maker. Mr. Edward Moxon, a clerk or shopman in the employ of Messrs. Longmans, who wrote, in his early manhood, a little book of sonnets that attracted the notice of Mr. Rogers, to whom they had been sent by the author with a modest letter, became, by the pecuniary aid and constant patronage of the "Bard of Memory," one of the most eminent publishers of his time. He was known to fame as "the poet's publisher," and issued the works not only of Mr. Rogers himself, but of Campbell, Wordsworth, Southey, Savage Landor, Coleridge, and many other poetical celebrities. He also published the works of Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Beaumont and Fletcher, Peele,

and other noted dramatists of the Elizabethan era.

The friendly assistance, delicately and liberally administered in the hour of need by Samuel Rogers to the illustrious Richard Brinsley Sheridan, is fully recorded in the life of the latter by Thomas Moore. That which was administered, though under less pressing circumstances, to Thomas Campbell, has found a sympathetic historian in Dr. William Beattie. Rogers, in spite of the baseless libel concerning Shakspeare, had not a particle of literary envy in his composition. His dislike to Lord Byron was not literary but personal, and is adequately explained and almost justified by the gross and unprovoked attacks which Byron directed against him.

Serjeant Talfourd was an orator, not celebrated for his power over crowds, but highly distinguished in the senate and the forum. He did not speak often in Parliament or at public meetings, but when he did he was listened to with pleasure and attention. The scenes of his triumphs were the law courts, and especially the Court of Common Pleas, where he was the leading practitioner. He was noted at the Bar and among the attorneys for his power over the minds of jurymen, and his winning ways of extorting a favourable verdict for the client who was fortunate enough to secure him for an advocate. He had room enough

in his heart both for law and literature, the law for his profit and his worldly advancement, and literature for the charm and consolation of his life. He was well known to and highly esteemed by the leading literary men of his time, and took a special interest in the law affecting artistic, musical, and literary copyright. He was largely instrumental in extending the previously allotted term of twenty-eight to forty-two years, and for seven years after the death of the artist, composer, or author. This measure put considerable and well-deserved profits into the pockets of the heirs of Sir Walter Scott, and was said at the time to have been specially devised and enacted for that purpose and for that only. This, however, was an error, which Serjeant Talfourd emphatically contradicted whenever it was hinted or asserted. It had incidentally that effect, which no one was churlish or ungrateful enough to grudge or lament, but was advocated in the interest of all men of letters, and of literature itself in its widest extent, and, if it erred at all, only erred on the side of undue restriction to so short a term as forty-two years. It ought to have been extended to the third generation of the benefactors of their country, and possibly will be so extended at a future time, when the rights of authors will be as strictly protected and will be thought of at least as much importance as the rights of landlords to their acres, or of butchers,

bakers, and tailors to be paid for their commodities, or those of lawyers and doctors to be paid for their time and talents.

Mr. Charles Dickens dedicated to Serjeant Talfourd *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, the early work by which his afterwards great fame was established, in grateful acknowledgment of the Serjeant's services to the cause of men of genius, in the enactment of the new law of copyright. "Many a fevered head," he said, "and palsied hand will gather new vigour in the hour of sickness and distress, from your excellent exertions; many a widowed mother and orphan child, who would otherwise reap nothing from the fame of departed genius, but its too frequent legacy of sorrow and suffering, will bear in their altered condition higher testimony to the value of your labours than the most lavish encomiums from lip or pen could ever afford."

Serjeant Talfourd was raised to the Bench in 1848, being then in his fifty-third year. This promotion had the natural consequence of removing him from the House of Commons. He was a singularly amiable man, of gentle, almost feminine character, of delicate health and fragile form. He possessed little or none of the staid and stern gravity popularly associated with the idea of a judge, and looked more like the poet that he undoubtedly was, than the busy lawyer or the magis-

trate. He died suddenly in the year 1854, under circumstances peculiarly sad and pathetic. After attending divine service on Sunday the 11th of March, in the Assize town of Stafford, apparently in his usual health, he took his seat on the bench on the following morning, and proceeded to address the Grand Jury on the state of the calendar. It contained a list of more than one hundred prisoners, an unusually large number of whom were charged with atrocious offences, many of which were to be directly traced to intemperance. He took occasion, in the course of his remarks, to comment on the growing estrangement in England between the upper and lower classes of society, and the want of interest and sympathy exhibited between the former and the latter, which he regarded as of evil augury for the future peace and prosperity of the country. While uttering these words, he became flushed and excited, his speech became thick and incoherent, and he suddenly fell forward with his face on the desk at which he was sitting. He was removed at once to his lodgings in the immediate vicinity of the court, but life was found to be extinct on his arrival. Thus perished a singularly able and estimable man, universally beloved by his contemporaries.

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## BREAKFASTS WITH SAMUEL ROGERS.

## No. X.

Mr. JOSEPH PARKES, formerly an attorney in Birmingham, was a well-known character in the political and social circles of London; Lady Morgan was an industrious author, a sometimes brilliant writer, and a general favourite in certain influential social and literary coteries; Mr. Bernal Osborne was a wit, a man about town, and a Member of Parliament; and the Rev. Hugh Hutton was a Unitarian clergyman, well known for the leading part he took in all the philanthropic and humanitarian movements of the time.

The conversation at the breakfast-table of Mr. Rogers, where I met these people, was, as might have been expected from the composition of the company, each member of which was a good talker, varied and interesting, and never flagged, or ran exclusively in a single channel, or became a monopoly in the mouth of a single person.

Mr. Parkes and Mr. Hutton were both Birmingham men, who had acted together on a great historical occasion many years previously, but had never subsequently chanced to meet in London society. In the year 1830, the agitation for a

reform of the Commons House of Parliament had attained a degree of violence previously unknown, in consequence, to a large extent, of the Paris Revolution of July in that year. Charles X. had been ignominiously hurled from the throne, and had taken refuge in the deserted palace of Holyrood in Edinburgh, and Louis Philippe reigned in his stead. Revolution was threatened in every European capital, and London was by no means unaffected by the general alarm and perturbation of men's minds. The prevalent excitement was greatly increased by the proposal of Mr. Attwood, a leading citizen and the most influential public character in Birmingham, to summon the people of that town, and of the midland and northern counties in general, to meet together to the number of 100,000 at least, and march, with guns, pikes, and other weapons, to London, to demand the Reform, which the Parliament, under the leadership of the great Duke of Wellington, obstinately withheld. As a preliminary to this threatened march, a public meeting of several thousand people had been held in Birmingham, at which Mr. Attwood had presided. The proceedings were opened by an impressive and very eloquent prayer, offered up to Almighty God, on behalf of the English people, by the Rev. Mr. Hutton, which had melted some of the audience to tears, and deeply affected Mr. Joseph Parkes, who was the real originator and mainspring of the demon-

stration. The proposed march on London never took place; but the mere possibility of it, and the evident earnestness of the men who were the leaders of the agitation, had its effect on the minds of the party chiefs in the metropolis, and caused them to reflect more seriously than they had previously done upon the dangers of unwise and protracted resistance to the people's demands. The conversation of Messrs. Parkes and Hutton, two of the principal actors in the scene, who now met for the first time after many years, turned naturally upon it.

“Have you ever heard,” asked Mr. Parkes, “what became of the picture that Haydon undertook to paint, and actually commenced, of the great stand and the persons upon it, when you offered up your famous prayer? I know I sat to the artist several times for my portrait, and that I was instrumental in procuring subscriptions to the amount of several hundred pounds; near upon a thousand, if I remember rightly, to help him along during the progress of the work. Was it ever completed?”

“Never!” replied Mr. Hutton. “Every effort was made by his friends to procure him the money which he wanted, amounting to at least four times as much as he received. But all efforts, public and private, were equally fruitless; so, growing disheartened or disgusted, he laid the work aside

for several years, locked it up in a lumber-room, and thought no more about it."

"Does it still exist?"

"Perhaps it does; but not in its original state. Haydon told me himself that, requiring the canvas for other purposes, and despairing of any further encouragement for the original work, he had painted a classical subject upon it; Curtius leaping into the gulf, I think, he said. I expressed my regret that he should have made such a sacrifice; but he only laughed at me for my pains. 'Who knows,' he said, 'but what some picture-dealer or cleaner of the future—a keen politician, thinking more of the heroes of Birmingham than of the heroes of Rome—may get hold of the canvas, and, rubbing away the second coating of paint, may awaken the original heroes to a glorious resurrection—you, Parkes, Attwood, and the whole lot of you!'"

"All Haydon's pictures," said Mr. Osborne, "were on too large a scale for commercial success. Nobody could hang one of them in his gallery, unless he built one specially for the purpose. He was continually involved in pecuniary difficulties from this cause. A person who wants a lap-dog in the drawing-room, and is content to pay a good price for the little animal, will not accept a dromedary or an elephant as a gift."

"It is odd," said Mr. Rogers, "that Haydon,

with his love for great size, and his incapacity for understanding or appreciating physical littleness, should have died of a little man after all."

"How so?" asked Lady Morgan.

"Do you not remember," replied Mr. Rogers, "the melancholy death of poor Haydon, by his own hand, caused by his disgust at what he considered the degraded taste of the public that crowded to a room at the Pantheon, in Oxford Street, to see Tom Thumb, an ugly American dwarf, and paid a shilling for the privilege, when in the very next room in the same building they might have seen a noble picture by Haydon for the same money? A thousand people visited the dwarf for one that visited the painter's masterpiece. The dwarf grew rich, the artist scarcely knew where to get a crust for the needs of the passing day."

"It was a great misfortune for Haydon," I remarked, "that he had no idea of size or space in his works. I know one of the ablest literary men of the present day, who suffers from a similar affliction, keeps himself down in the world in consequence, and prevents himself from obtaining the profitable work on the press, which he so greatly needs, and which he can perform so well. He has a thorough mastery of certain subjects, and there is not a newspaper in London that would not employ him to write on those topics, and pay him his own terms for doing so, but for the

unfortunate fatality that he has no notion either of time or space. You ask him to write an article, say of two or three columns at the utmost, not because you would not gladly insert a larger quantity, but because the exigencies of the space at your command absolutely prohibit you from making use of more. He accepts the task, promises to comply with its conditions, and is grateful for the chance you have given him of earning a few honest guineas. You allow him three days to perform the task. To this he agrees also, and appears to be delighted. To your infinite annoyance he takes three weeks, instead of three days, for the stipulated work, and brings you a manuscript that would fill twenty columns of your journal, instead of the three to which you were compelled to limit him. What can be done with him? He demands payment for the larger quantity, which you do not require, and of which you cannot possibly make use, even if you had received it at the stipulated time. To prevent dispute and annoyance, you pay him what he asks, and resolve to employ him no more; a resolution which, for your own sake, you religiously adhere to. Haydon was a man of the same class."

"The story of Haydon," said Lady Morgan, "is a very sad one, which I had forgotten; but if his pictures were too large for the public to buy, they were not too large for the public to look at and

admire. Their very size ought to have been an attraction, But then, as the crossing-sweeper says in the Adelphi farce, the public is a *hass*; not an *ass*, mind you, but a *hass*, with a strong aspirate. It does not want to be instructed. It does not care for pictures, or poetry, or high art. It only wants to be amused. It prefers Punch and Judy to Hamlet or Macbeth, or a wax figure of a murderer at Madame Tussaud's to the Venus of Milo, or to the Apollo Belvidere. *Que voulez vous?*"

"Yes!" interposed Mr. Hutton. "And in olden times it preferred Barabbas to Jesus, and would do so again if it had the chance."

"Then," said Mr. Osborne, "you don't believe that the *vox populi* is the *vox dei*?"

"Decidedly not! Conscience is the voice of God; but the crowd of all countries is deficient in conscience, or it has none at all."

"Conscience," remarked Mr. Osborne, "is common to all of us, and, indeed, may be said to be universal; but then, unluckily, though it whispers to us inwardly, we do not always listen to it. Its voice is as the idle wind which we regard not."

"You have lately returned from the highlands of Scotland; have you not?" said Lady Morgan, addressing herself to me. "My niece was on a visit to one of the Hebrides last month, and speaks with intense admiration of the beautiful scenery,

and of the kind-hearted, simple people who inhabit the wild but lovely region. They are said to be of the same race and blood as my people—the people of Ireland; but I don't believe it."

"But they speak the same language—the Gaelic—and have been always held to be of the same stock," said Mr. Osborne. "What is the reason of your disbelief?"

"Because the Highlanders do not shoot their landlords, as they ought to do," replied Lady Morgan. "The Irish would not endure a hundredth part of the wrongs inflicted upon the poor Highlanders by the owners of the soil, without taking tithe of their lives. A poor Highlander cannot call his soul his own, and is scarcely allowed to have a right to his own body, or to an inch of earth to put his foot upon. The landlords think, because they own the land they own the people. My countrymen would soon teach them a different story. My niece tells me that a great Duke in the Western Isles, who owns every foot of ground in a tolerably large island, lately caused a notice to be affixed to the kirk door, to the effect that any tenant on the estate who paid less than thirty pounds of annual rent, who should *presume*—such was the very word he used—to drink, wine, whisky, rum, brandy, gin, beer, or any other fermented liquor, or give away to any of his guests any of the fermented liquors aforesaid, should be turned out of his farm at the



next term or quarter-day. Would an Irishman, do you think, endure any such tyranny?"

"Tyranny! Pooh!" said Mr. Osborne, with a look of triumph. "I don't call that tyranny at all. The Duke is a cannie Scotsman, and it is only his cannie and very Scotch way of raising the rent upon his tenantry. If they pay less than thirty pounds per annum, the Duke is inexorable, but if they pay thirty-one pounds or upwards, they may do as they like!"

"I have been in the island alluded to," said I, "and have seen the efforts made by the Duke to prohibit or, at all events to check, whisky-drinking among the people. He will not allow the only inn-keeper in the place to provide a drop of whisky to his guests, or a drop of whisky to be sold on the island if he can help it. Strolling down the only street of the small village which considers itself the capital of the island, I noticed in the window of a grocer's shop several large bottles labelled 'Hair Oil.' As the Highland lasses and the elder women did not appear to me to pay much if any attention to their abundant tresses, but left them very much to Nature—which, on its part, had done all that was necessary to make them beautiful and attractive—I had the curiosity to enter the shop and inquire whether I could not be supplied with two or three pennyworth of oil. The buxom dame behind the counter smiled roguishly as she answered, 'Aye,

aye, Sir,' and straightway poured it out in a wine-glass. It was whisky, and very good whisky, too—the real Talisker, or Mountain Dew. The Duke was none the wiser, and, as I should suppose, none the better or the worse for the libation I made."

"His conduct was none the less tyrannical," said Lady Morgan, "and could only be justified, if it could be justified at all, by the pleas put forward by the inquisitors of old, in vindication of their presumptuous meddlesomeness with the rights of conscience in matters of faith and doctrine. If it be my faith and my doctrine that it is a religious duty to drink a little whisky, shall an inquisitorial Duke prevent me, or torture me for my heresy? He would, if he could, I am sure."

"Ah! but you're a Radical, Lady Morgan, and haven't a proper respect for dukes," said Mr. Rogers. "By-the-bye, I have heard it said that you were the first woman who ever danced the waltz in England, and that you danced it with a Duke. Is it true?"

"Only partially true," replied Lady Morgan, who dearly loved to hear herself talk. "But I will tell you exactly how it happened. It was in the summer of 1812, I think, when I dined one day at the Duke of Devonshire's. After dinner, when the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room, the Marquis of Hartington, the next heir to the dukedom, offered to teach any lady present the new

dance, which he called the 'waltz,' and which none of the ladies had ever heard of. The Marquis had just returned from St. Petersburg, where he had been on a diplomatic mission of some kind, and had passed through Germany, and made some stay there on his way home. None of the ladies volunteering to take a lesson, he addressed himself to me, paying me a pretty compliment, and said: 'Miss Owenson [that was my name before I married Sir Charles Morgan], will you not allow me to show you the steps? The dance is very easy to learn, and is certain to be popular this season.' I agreed at once, without making any fuss about it. But we were met at the outset by a difficulty that threatened to be serious. There was no waltz music in the possession of the Duchess (perhaps there was none in England at that day), and the Marquis was scarcely enough of a musician to show any lady present the true time and measure of the waltz movement, or how to adapt any well-known melody, even at the risk of spoiling it, to the necessities of the new dance. But the difficulty was at length got over, after a fashion, and the Marquis gave me my lesson. He said I was an excellent pupil, and needed but little instruction."

"Was the dance approved of?" asked Mr. Hutton.

"Very much disapproved of," replied Lady Morgan. "All the gentlemen were dead against

it. The Duke of Devonshire said it was indecent, and declared that he would not like to see his wife, his daughter, his sister, or any woman that he respected, taking part in it. The ladies were not so positive, but, as I thought, looked favourably upon it. Byron's satirical poem, 'The Waltz,' which was published anonymously in the autumn of 1812, expressed the general opinion of the public on the subject. The waltz, in fact, was universally condemned, and universally popular."

"Because the ladies took it up," said Mr. Osborne. "The ladies can make anything they please popular. Witness the odious fashions which they every now and then adopt and maintain, in spite of abuse, in spite of ridicule, in spite of reason, in spite of everything, in fact, but their own dear selves, and their own dear will."

"'Twas ever so since Time began," said Mr. Rogers, "and ever will be so till Time shall be no more."

Lady Morgan, though a great talker, was not an idle gossip. Her talk was worth listening to. People who wanted to talk themselves, complained, however that she would not, if she could help it, give them a chance of putting in a word; and Lord Macaulay, himself a great talker, was particularly disinclined, for that reason, to make one of any company of which she formed a part. Lady Morgan was somewhat rudely and unnecessarily outspoken

in matters of religious belief, and often very indiscreetly, if not offensively, expressed opinions that in these days would not only have laid her open to the accusation of being a Positivist, or a Comtist, but which, in the less tolerant times in which she flourished, would have led people to designate her, point blank, as an Atheist, and consigned her to the stake, or the dungeons of the Inquisition.

Lady Morgan made no secret of her antipathy to Mr. Macaulay, and those who were acquainted intimately with both of them were careful to avoid bringing them together at their entertainments.

[NOTE.—It may be necessary to state that I have not relied wholly upon my memory for these records of the conversations of Mr. Rogers and his guests ; but that I have derived them, for the most part, from the notes which I made of them in my common-place book, on the evenings of the days in which they occurred.]