

INTRODUCTION.

“Happy is the wooing that is not long a-doing.”—OLD PROVERB.

The startling facts disclosed in the following pages, will, no doubt, in these days of never-ceasing wonders, take the public by surprise. The *cacoethes scribendi*, or “rage for book-making,” one of the distinguishing characteristics of the present generation, has drawn into the field a host of authors, royal, noble, and plebeian, and the consequence has been a perfect deluge of Biographies, Memoirs, Travels, &c., of every variety; the most popular among which of late years, being perhaps “The Memoirs of George the Fourth,” and those of “Harriet Wilson,” while, on subjects connected with science, Dr. Lardner’s “History, Description, &c. of the Steam Engine;” and Lady Wilton’s highly interesting work on the “Darning of Stockings,” and other uses of the needle, may be selected as the productions of writers of real moral worth, and possessing great scientific acquirements. Following, truly at a humble distance, in the rear of this colossal phalanx of worth and talent, the off-

spring of the fertile literary womb of the present century, and animated, we may indulgently assume, by the same innate and honest love of fame, and desire of benefiting posterity, Mr. Elliot launches his frail bark on the stormy waters of public opinion. That pecuniary consideration has no influence with him, would be a needless want of candour to deny; but, here again, he is only following the examples of some of our most distinguished literati, who have, no doubt, not a little excited the surprise of that small class of society coming under the denomination of "Observers," to see men priding themselves on their finished education, and *soi-disant* great' acquirements, so entirely swayed by the love of, what on paper they invariably designated as, "filthy lucre." Again, how many politicians, even of late years, can we not call to mind, who having attained some eminence in the state, the consequence of popularity earned by the talented vindication and promotion of great public principles, melt at the touch of treasury gold, and who gradually bury their own self-esteem beneath the tinfoil gilding of a title. In political literature, the universal venality of one portion of the press may be said to have passed into a proverb, and the real history of the sudden desertion of one of its most important members from the popular cause, and *afterwards* the lingering illness and ultimate death of

the most talented of its editors, which, contrary to the usual practice of this journal, was passed over in contemptuous silence, will one day, no doubt, form a curious page in some Biography or Memoir.

Unlike another, and, unfortunately, but too large a class of fashionable authors, Mr. Elliot has not "shown up" any person to make his little pamphlet tell, or even, to him of more consequence, sell; although, in so doing, he might not have the advantage of intimate personal friendship, as they may have had with *their* illustrious victims.* Unfortunately, Mr. Elliot has certain unprovided bairns to care for, and being in himself another remarkable instance of the growing popular disrespect for "vested rights" and "venerable institutions;" an inn-keeper, one of the modern school of Licensed Victuallers, (indeed, the race of honest bonifaces may now be said to be extinct) having usurped his ancient office, "Othello's occupation's gone," and like many other personages out of place, he has taken to his pen to aid

* A recent instance of the fine discriminating delicacy of sentiment on the part of a well known political and literary character, will no doubt be fresh in the memory of the public. This was evinced in the exposure of the peculiar failings of a deceased noble friend on the prosecution of a man, whom on his trial, a learned judge highly esteemed for his "pure moral character," and entire freedom from toadying to the prejudices of the titled class into which he has obtained an entrance,—did not hesitate to designate as a "worthy servant who had performed great and valuable services to his noble master."

his pocket. His tale, like his predilections, smacks not of the present,—both alike belong to the good old times, when “George the Third was king.” Indeed, it is a singular, but no less incontrovertible fact, that the peculiar marriages treated of in these memoirs, in the reigns of the two first Georges, so frequent in England, and afterwards upon their being declared by law illegal here, so common on one noted spot within the Scotch borders, *originated, flourished, and still exist under the Hanoverian dynasty*; and retired postmasters on the line to Gretna could not adopt a more appropriate crest, than the White Horse of Hanover. Before we allude further to these marriages in England, and more particularly to those celebrated by the notorious “Fleet Parsons,” we will offer certain reflections which are naturally suggested, on a careful consideration of the motives which caused their suppression in England in 1753, by the government of that day, and the apparent indifference to them in Scotland by every government since. It is quite apparent, from the speeches of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, the originator of the so called “Marriage Act in Churches,” passed in 1753, by which these clandestine marriages were entirely suppressed in England, that a principal, if not the leading motive of the government, was to

prevent the commonalty* intermarrying into the aristocratic classes, (unless in the case of heiresses and of these to create a monopoly in their favor) which, in those days of profligacy and unbridled passion among the higher classes, was but too common to please the leaders of the titled order.

That the practice of celebrating these clandestine marriages, upon their suppression in London, was soon afterwards taken up as a lucrative profession in the north, appears evident from the period which Mr. Elliot mentions as the commencement of Mr. Paisley's ministry; for if this gentleman had exercised his calling sixty years at the time of his death in 1811, this would bring us to about the date of the passing of the Act.

In the writings of the numerous jurists and other authors of the latter part of the eighteenth century, this

* A Mr. Nugent, one of the leading opponents of this Act in the House of Commons at that day, observes,—“I may prophesy that if this Bill passes into a law, no commoner will ever marry a rich heiress, unless his father be a minister of state, nor will a peer's eldest son marry the daughter of a commoner unless she be a rich heiress.” A modern writer observes with justice, when alluding to this Bill:—“But the grand mischief that was pointed out, (*of course by its opponents*) was the aristocratic tendency of the whole measure. It was looked on by the opposition generally as initiated by, and brought in for, the especial benefit of the titled classes, enabling them to close their order, almost hermetically, against the approaches of any less privileged persons as woers of their children—a kind of new game law to prevent poaching on their preserves.

transfer of clandestine marriages from England to Scotland, is not even mentioned, much less animadverted upon, or the motives of the government for not taking measures for its suppression canvassed; and at this distance of time, it is quite impossible to arrive at any correct opinion on this matter.

The rebellion of 1745, and the expensive wars waged by George the II., in Germany, the consequences of his Hanoverian predilections and English antipathies, were continued by his grandson and successor, until the conflict with the whole of Europe, brought about by his mad tyranny to our American colonies, so entirely engrossed the attention of the government in these disgraceful epochs of English history, that we can but little wonder, that matters relating to our internal government, were passed over as only of inferior interest.

The passing of the Reform Bill, may be considered not only as a great political revolution, but as having laid the foundation of a great change in society, a change which bids fair to end in the utter subversion of the aristocracy. In the good old times, before the passing of this great measure, the church, and the different services of the state, were looked upon by the aristocracy as a sort of freehold provision for the younger and unprovided branches of their families; but since *that*, some sort of fitness for the military and civil

services of the state is now required ; and, consequently, we already find numbers of these drones preying upon society for a bare existence, as coach-drivers, horse-dealers, and even as bonnets to the hells of St. James's. These worthies can no longer afford to despise a marriage with plebeian blood, even the daughter of a butcher ; nor, provided an heiress is reckoned highly eligible, does the noble peer, who traces his descent from the conquest of the Norman bastard, hesitate to marry his son, the heir to his title, to the granddaughter of a wealthy cotton spinner. In this state of things, a rapid journey to Gretna, is to be looked upon as a most desirable speculation by the "*sans culotte*" class of the aristocracy, and we should not be surprised to see an Act of Parliament introduced by some wealthy and independent commoner, to prevent the rich damsels of the commonalty from falling into the hands of these vampires, by declaring such clandestine marriages illegal, at least as regards her Majesty's English subjects. Such an Act would, no doubt, now meet with the unanimous opposition of the Upper House of Parliament, a complete inversion of their proceedings and motives in 1753.

Seriously, however, it forms no part of the plan of this little work, to enter into the morality of the Gretna marriages, or the expediency of the government legis-

lation for their suppression, at least as regards the English. A statement of facts is all that is now offered to the public, leaving it to draw its own conclusions from them; indeed, now-a-days, the exposure of any defect in our jurisprudence, only requires to be made known, when it becomes immediately the object of a hundred proposed remedies, offered by as many different candidates for public notice. We may therefore say with justice, that whoever is the first to attract public attention to any defect in the institutions of his country, becomes in some measure its benefactor, and this position we now, with all due humility claim for Mr. Elliot, with those who may view the *Gretna Green Marriages*, celebrated by his predecessor and himself, in the light of a wen of immorality on our national institutions. And here let us deprecate too strict a censure upon the part, the force of circumstances has brought Mr. Elliot to play in the eventful drama of life, a part, which he was perhaps too blinded by early habit;—the prejudices in its favor, well known to exist in the district where he was born and reared,—and motives of pecuniary interest, to see in its proper light.

If we look among the ranks of the clergy of our own national church, how many could we not point out whose college education has only been used as a means for *promoting* their advancement by political intrigue,

instead of the propagation of those principles of true morality and charity with all men, so strictly enjoined them by the Divine Founder of that religion they profess to believe and minister in. The Fleet parsons of old were regularly ordained clergymen of the established church,* who had received every advantage our Universities could bestow, and yet the legislature was compelled to interfere to stop their practices, and we much fear that so little changed for the better are our parsons of the present day, that were the Act of 1753, repealed next session, a host of the same "genus" would instantly spring up, which, in point of numbers, would put their Fleet brethren in the shade, and perhaps not be a jot more particular in the exercise of their new privileges.

That great prejudice in favor of these off-hand marriages prevailed in those days to a great extent with the English public, as it still does in Mr. Elliott's districts, may be inferred as well from the fact of the Marriage Bill being made a party question by the opposition of that

* The following *impromptu*, of the Rev. Mr. Keith, D.D., whom we have before alluded to, communicated by Horace Walpole in a letter to George Montague, forms an amusing illustration of the *animus* of those reverend pillars of the church. "D—— the Bishops ! said he, so they will hinder my marrying, —well let 'em, but I'll be revenged : I'll buy two or three acres of *ground*, and by G— I'll underbury them all."

day, as from the numerous signed petitions presented against it, and the rich harvest reaped by the Fleet parsons, during the period between the passing of the Act and its coming into operation. During this interregnum, we find the notorious Dr. Keith, by whom these clandestine marriages were again brought into fashion, (after the suspension of the Rev. Adam Elliott,* by the Commissioners of Ecclesiastical Causes) and who was nick-named Archbishop of the Fleet Parsons, realizing a comfortable independence in a few months, often marrying, from eight in the morning till eight at night, no less than 120 in a day, and on the 24th of March, the last day of this to him "golden era," no less than 98 couple; and this in addition to the "practice" of his brother Fleet divines. The Gentleman's Magazine for 1753, in alluding to this sudden desertion of the state of single blessedness by so many of the fair sex at such an epoch, records this fact, with much pleasantry.

* This reverend gentleman was the Rector of St. James, Duke's Place, who, in right of certain privileges claimed by the Corporation of the City of London, pleaded exemption from the jurisdiction of his metropolitan, for this church, and in consequence we find by reference to the parish registers of this church of that date, now in the British Museum, that between the years 1664 and 1691, no less than 40,000 marriages were celebrated here. This was too good to be permitted to last by the bench of bishops, who having no share in this episcopal *el dorado*, caused the knowing rector to be suspended by the Ecclesiastical Court, but he had already realized a handsome fortune.

Mr. Elliott not having received the advantage of either an English or Scotch university education, his literary style cannot of course be expected to excel in the ranks of English composition ; we may, however, justly challenge him the merit of having studiously, and we believe successfully endeavored to avoid penning one line or word that can cause a moment's grief or uneasiness in any living human breast, a fault from which we fear too many of the polished writers of both the past and present times cannot claim exemption.