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Book Review of Anna Brownell (Murphy)
Jameson's *The Beauties of the Court of Charles the
Second*

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Charles II. The stern dominion of a sour and superstitious bigotry had just passed away; the disgusting hypocrisy which had disguised all vice under the mask of religion and virtue had been exposed; and the disclosure had awakened a doubt, even in the minds of the wise and good, whether unbounded license was not more tolerable than the enormities practised in those hiding-places of crime, into which the severe discipline of the Protectorate had driven it. The public eye might impose some restraint; but when the indulgence of harmless mirth and the enjoyment of innocent amusement were unsafe, except in private, who could tell what unseen abominations might be perpetrated in recesses which the world was not permitted to look into.

Nothing is more true, than that the appetite for pleasure grows by indulgence, and that, pushed to the verge of what is lawful, it is too apt to pass into criminal excess. But *innocent* pleasures men *will* have. What security that they will be content with these? None but the influence of public sentiment, constraining them to respect the almost viewless boundary that divides the extreme of lawful indulgence from the beginnings of licentiousness. The exercise of this influence is a duty society owes to itself; but to exert it, we must bear to look upon the scenes where its authority should be felt. If we fastidiously turn away, and refuse to the young, the gay, the sanguine and the thoughtless, the benefit of that aggregate judgment concerning right and wrong, which we distinguish by the name of "public sentiment," we incur more risk of becoming "partakers of the sins of others," than we should by looking on with that complacent smile of benevolent sympathy, which its objects would not willingly exchange for the frown of merited disapprobation. In this smile and this frown are the sanctions for that "regulated indulgence" which a wise and good man has pronounced to be "the best security against excess."

When Charles on his accession avowed a disposition to claim for himself, and to allow to others the unbounded license which his foreign habits had rendered necessary to him, it was of course, that multitudes should eagerly avail themselves of the privilege. It was not wonderful that even the virtuous should acquiesce in this new scheme of things, instead of endeavoring to apply correctives which they had just seen so much abused.

The consequence was, that during that most flagitious reign, the mind was left to put forth all its wild unpruned luxuriance. Human nature displayed itself in all the forms of all of its varieties, each in the most extreme dimensions. Vice walked abroad in naked deformity; and orgies, such as the sun had never before been permitted to look on, were perpetrated in the face of day.

But if the "poor virtues of the age lacked countenance," how conspicuous was that virtue, which still resolutely resisted all the allurements with which fashion invests pleasure, and in the midst of a corrupt generation, preserved its purity inviolate. God has never left himself without a witness. There were, even in that day, men devoted to all their duties to him, to their fellows, and to themselves, and their light did but shine the brighter for the darkness that surrounded it. The pacific policy of a monarch, who is now known to have been the pensioner of the natural enemy of his

For the Southern Literary Messenger.

THE BEAUTIES of the Court of Charles the Second; a series of Memoirs, Biographical and Critical, illustrating the Diaries of Pepys, Evelyn, Clarendon, and other contemporary writers. By Mrs. Jameson, authoress of "The Loves of the Poets," "Lives of Female Sovereigns," "Visits and Sketches at Home and Abroad," &c. &c. Philadelphia: E. L. Cary & A. Hart. pp. 304. 8vo.

Few portions of history are more replete with characters illustrating the good and evil of human nature, in both extremes, than that of the reign and court of

country, afforded few opportunities to acquire fame in the service of the crown. It was chiefly in private life that virtue had to seek that honorable distinction which it naturally covets. That distinction the character of the age rendered more conspicuous and honorable, and it was therefore the more eagerly sought.

We are not particularly anxious about this theory, but it helps us to understand, not only how it was that the pure and muddy waters mingled without blending, but how it happened that the *unexampled* excellence of an Ormond and an Ossory were found side by side with the unheard of depravity of a Buckingham and a Rochester.

Of the private as well as public history of the courtiers of Charles II, we have the most authentic records, and they are full of amusement and instruction. It has been lamented that they have been, for the most part, transmitted to us through channels which must soil the reader's mind, and endanger an injury more than commensurate to the value of the information. We have reason to rejoice therefore, that we are at length permitted to receive them through the refining filter of a female mind, from which they are transmitted pure and "bright as diamond spark."

What lover ever read the history of Grammont without lamenting that it was impossible to impart any portion of his delight to his mistress. The difficulty is now removed; and Mrs. Jameson deserves the thanks of her sex, for having rendered accessible to them, not only a theme of most amusing gossip, but one of the most instructive and edifying chapters in the history of man. We especially recommend this work to their perusal. The witty Hamilton and the gay Grammont will still perhaps be most read by the men, but even they will derive advantage from looking, through the chaste eyes of a virtuous female, on the same scenes and the same characters exhibited by this profligate pair.

Of the manner in which this work is executed, nothing need be said to those familiar with the writings of Mrs. Jameson. It is every way worthy of her well merited reputation. We extract a few passages, which may serve as examples of the work. But they are not selected for any particular merit, but merely to illustrate the foregoing remarks. They are most attractive pictures of virtues, the exact opposite of the vices which characterized the age; and we are not sure that they do not as widely differ from the average standard of the human character.

What can be more captivating than this account of *La belle Hamilton*.

"She was then just arrived at that age when the budding girl expands into the woman: her figure was tall, rather full, but elegantly formed; and, to borrow Lord Herbert's beautiful expression, 'varied itself into every grace that can belong either to rest or motion.' She had the finest neck and the loveliest hand and arm in the world: her forehead was fair and open; her hair dark and luxuriant, always arranged with the most exquisite taste, but with an air of natural and picturesque simplicity, which meaner beauties in vain essayed to copy; her complexion, at a time when the use of paint was universal, owed nothing to art; her eyes were not large, but sparkling and full of expression; her mouth, though not a little haughtiness is implied in the curve of the under lip, was charming, and the contour of her face perfect.

"The soul which heaven had lodged in this fair person was worthy of its shrine. In those days, the very golden age of folly and affectation, the beauties, by prescriptive right, might be divided into two factions, whom I shall call the *languishers* and the *sparklers*; the languishers were those who, being dull by nature, or at least not bright, affected an extreme softness—languished and lolled—sighed and sighed—lisp'd or drawled out their words—half shut their eyes—and moved as if 'they were not born to carry their own weight.' The sparklers were those who, upon the strength of bright eyes and some natural vivacity and impertinence, set up for female wits: in conversation they attempted to dazzle by such sallies as would now be scarcely tolerated from the most abandoned of their sex; they were gay, airy, fluttering, fantastical, and talkative—they dealt in bon mots and repartees—they threw their glances right and left, *a tort et a travers*—and piqued themselves upon taking hearts by a *coup-de-main*. Miss Hamilton belonged to neither of these classes: though lively by nature, she had felt perhaps the necessity of maintaining a reserve of manner which should keep presumptuous fops at a distance. She wore her feminine dignity as an advanced guard—her wit as a body of reserve. She did not speak much, but what she said was to the purpose, just what the occasion demanded and no more. *Pièce à toute outrance*, whenever she was called upon to stand on the defensive, she was less possessed with the idea of her own merit than might have been supposed; and, far from thinking her consequence increased by the number of her lovers, she was singularly fastidious with regard to the qualifications of those whom she admitted upon the list of aspirants."

In the family of Ormond we have a galaxy of excellence. The following extracts make us balance the truth of history and our experience of real life. Whom do we know like old Ormond and his wife? Whom like his noble son and his charming countess?

Take the character of the Duchess from the lips of an enemy.

"When the Duke of Ormond withdrew to France, in 1655, he found himself obliged to leave his wife and family behind; and soon afterwards Cromwell caused the Earl of Ossory to be arrested upon no specific charge and committed to the Tower. His mother waited upon the protector to remonstrate, and to solicit his enlargement, pleading the quiet and inoffensive life which she led with her children in London. Cromwell told her plainly, that he had more reason to fear her than any body else. She replied with dignity and spirit, and in the presence of a numerous drawing-room, that 'she desired no favor at his hands, but merely justice to her innocent son;'—and that 'she thought it strange that she, who had never been concerned in a plot in her life, nor opened her mouth against his person and government, should be represented as so terrible a person.' 'No, madam!' replied Cromwell, 'that is not the case; but your worth has gained you so great an influence over all the commanders of our party, and we know so well your power over your own party, that it is in your ladyship's breast to act what you please.'"

The following descriptions of the Earl and Countess of Ossory are delightful.

"At this time, the Earl of Ossory was about four and twenty; he was tall, well made, and handsome; with an open expressive countenance, and fine teeth and hair; he rode, fenced, and danced remarkably well; played on the lute and the guitar; spoke French eloquently, and Italian fluently; was a good historian; and seems to have had a taste for light and elegant literature, for Sir Robert Southwell represents him as so well read in poetry and romance, that 'in a gallery full of pictures and hangings, he could tell the stories of all that were there described.' These however were the

more superficial graces which enabled him to please in the drawing-room, and to these he added all the rare and noble qualities which can distinguish a man in the cabinet and in the field. He was wise in council, quick and decided in action, as brave in battle as an Amadis of Gaul—gallant ‘beyond the fiction of romance’—humane, courteous, affable, temperate, generous to profusion, and open almost to a fault. ‘In a word,’ says the historian, ‘his virtue was unspotted in the centre of a luxurious court; his integrity unblemished amid all the vices of the times; his honor untainted through the course of his whole life;’ and it is most worthy of remark, that in those days, when the spirits of men were heated with party rage; when profligate pens were wielded by profligate and obscure individuals, and satire ‘unbated and envenomed,’ was levelled at whatever was noble, or beautiful, or good in the land; not a single expression can any where be traced to contradict or invalidate this universal testimony. ‘No writer,’ (I quote again from history,) ‘ever appeared then or since, so regardless of truth and of his own character, as to venture one stroke of censure on that of the Earl of Ossory.’”

“‘She was, indeed,’ adds the grave historian of the family, ‘an admirable economist; always cheerful, and never known to be out of humor, so that they lived together in the most perfect harmony imaginable. Lord Ossory never found any place or company more agreeable than he found at home; and when he returned thither from court, they constantly met with open arms, with kind embraces, and the most moving expressions of mutual tenderness.’”

“‘But this picture, bright and beautiful as it is, had its shades. In this world of ours, ‘where but to think, is to be full of sorrow,’ Lady Ossory was so far most happy, that though she suffered *through* those she loved, (as all must do who embark their happiness in their affections,) she never suffered by them: but she lost several of her numerous family at an early age; and the frequent absence of Lord Ossory, whilst engaged in the highest civil and military employments, must have doomed her to many widowed hours. The reckless valor too, with which he exposed his life, and which was such as even to call down a rebuke from his brave father, must have filled the gentle bosom of his wife with a thousand fond anxieties: yet might not those partings and meetings, those alternations of hope and fear, those trembling terrors for his safety, those rapturous tears which greeted his return, have assisted to keep freshly alive, through a long series of years, all the romance of early passion? And was not this much? Did Lady Ossory buy too dearly the proud happiness of belonging to that man, upon whom the eyes of all Europe were fixed to gaze and to admire; who from every new triumph brought her home a faith and love unchanged—deposing his honors at her feet, and his cares in her gentle arms? Let the woman who reads this question, answer it to her own heart.”

The following anecdote, with the appended note, illustrates a point of character on which we always dwell with delight, though it is not often found associated with prudence and wisdom.

“In 1671 occurred that extraordinary attempt on the life of the Duke of Ormond by the ruffian Blood, of notorious memory; it is supposed at the instigation of Buckingham. There was, in fact, something so audacious and so theatrical in the idea of hanging the duke upon the gallows at Tyburn, that it could only have originated with that ‘Fanfaron de crimes.’ Such, at least, was the general opinion at the time. A few days after this event, Lord Ossory meeting the Duke of Buckingham in the king’s chamber, the color flushed to his temples with passion, and his eyes sparkled with such ire, that the duke took refuge behind the king’s chair. ‘My lord,’ said Ossory, stepping up to him, ‘I know well that you are at the bottom of this late attempt of Blood’s upon my father, and therefore I

give you fair warning, if my father comes to a violent end by sword or pistol,—if he dies by the hand of a ruffian, or the more secret way of poison, I shall not be at a loss to know the first author of it; I shall consider you as the assassin; I shall treat you as such, and I shall pistol you, though you stood beside the king’s chair; and I tell it you in his majesty’s presence, that you may be sure I shall keep my word.’ So saying, he turned upon his heel, leaving the duke so completely overawed, that he had not even spirit to utter a denial.”*

We will conclude by adding the character of a lady (the wife of Hyde Earl of Rochester,) of whom it is praise enough to say, that she was beautiful, rich, noble and powerful, and chose to love her husband, nurse her children, and live in obscurity.

“It is perhaps the highest eulogium that could be pronounced on the character and conduct of his fair, gentle-looking, and really amiable wife, that while her husband was treading the steep and tortuous paths of court diplomacy, rising to rank and honors, and filling the highest offices in the state, we do not even hear of her, except in her domestic relations. In the recent publication of the Clarendon papers, Lady Rochester is seldom mentioned; but from the manner in which she is alluded to, we may infer, without danger of being mistaken, that she was the excellent and submissive wife of an impatient and despotic husband; that she lived in the utmost harmony with her children and her relatives; that she frequented the court but little.

“It should seem that her days flowed along in one even course of unpretending duties and blameless pleasures: duties such as her sex and station prescribe, pleasures such as her rank and fortune permitted,—interrupted and clouded by such cares and infirmities as are the common lot of mortality. This description of Lady Rochester may appear a little insipid after the piquante adventures of a Cleveland and a Chesterfield, and others of her more brilliant and interesting contemporaries; yet there is in its repose and innocence something that not only refreshes, but sweetens the imagination: as in a garden where peonies, and pinks, and carnations, and tall lilies,

‘And canker blooms, with full as deep a dye,
As the perfumed tincture of the roses,’

flaunt to the eye and allure the sense, should we suddenly find a jasmine, trailing its light tendrils and luxuriant foliage round a lordly elm, with what delight should we appropriate its starry, unsullied blossoms, and place them in our bosom!”

* I believe no writer has remarked the singular coincidence between the characters and fortunes of the Duke of Ormond, and his ancestor, the Earl of Ormond, of Elizabeth’s time. Both were brave, popular, enthusiastically loyal, and inflexibly honest; both were accomplished courtiers, and lived to experience the ingratitude and injustice of the princes they had served; both experienced many changes of fortune, and lived to an extreme old age, so as to behold their heirs in the third generation. Both were opposed to the reigning favorites, for the enmity of the Duke of Ormond and Buckingham was at least equal to that of the Earl of Ormond and Lord Leicester. As Buckingham was believed to have instigated Blood in his attempt on the Duke of Ormond, so Leicester was known to have attempted the assassination of Ormond, by means of a hired cut-throat, who was afterwards, like Blood, forgiven and rewarded. The following anecdote is very characteristic:—The Earl of Ormond coming one day to court, met Lord Leicester in the antechamber: after the usual salutations, “My lord,” said Leicester, insolently, “I dreamed of you last night!” “Indeed!” replied Ormond, “what could your lordship dream of me?” “I dreamed that I gave you a box on the ear.” “Dreams are interpreted by contraries,” replied the high spirited Irishman, and instantly lent him a cuff on the ear, which made the favorite stagger; for this he was committed to the tower by Elizabeth.

CALAVAR; or The Knight of the Conquest: a Romance of Mexico. Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard. 1834.

Who reads an American book? was tauntingly asked some years since, by the *Edinburg or Quarterly Review*,—we do not recollect which,—nor is it important to know. For the present we will answer the question somewhat in the Hibernian or Yankee style, by a remark which is not exactly responsive; and that is, that if Sir Walter Scott himself were living, he would have the candor and honor to acknowledge that "Calavar" was vastly superior to some five or six of the last litter of his own great genius, and not very far behind the very best of those renowned performances which have thrown a classic glory over the bleak hills and barren moors of Scotland. But whether that would have been the award of Sir Walter or not, impartial critics on both sides of the Atlantic, and coming generations, if "Calavar" should escape the vortex of oblivion,—will undoubtedly render a judgment somewhat similar. It is certainly the very best American novel, excepting perhaps one or two of Mr. Cooper's, which we have ever read; that is, if boldness of design, vigor of thought, copiousness and power of language,—thrilling incident, and graphic and magnificent description, can constitute a good novel. For the first fifty or sixty pages, it is confessedly somewhat heavy; still the reader will perceive that a master spirit is at work, to whose guidance he confidently trusts. In a short time the whole interest of the narrative rushes upon him; he gazes in imagination upon the beautiful and Eden-like vallies of Mexico; he throbs with pain at the spectacle of slaughtered thousands of the brave aborigines, and he sympathises with the tender sorrows and heroic sufferings of the only female who figures in the story, and she too in the unwomanly garb of a page, destined to perform the somewhat curious, and certainly very unthankful office, of a *mental to her own lover*. Here we think the author has decidedly failed,—we mean in the invention and arrangement of his story. He is entirely too *unnatural even for romance*. There is too much improbable and miraculous agency in the various life-preserving expedients, and extraordinary rescues which are constantly occurring,—and which, although taken singly, do not surpass the strange events of actual life, shock us nevertheless by their perpetual succession, and impart to a tale founded upon historical truth, an air of oriental fiction which is not agreeable. The author, who is vastly superior to Cooper in dialogue, is, we fear, equally unqualified with that writer, to depict the female character in all its exquisite traits and attractive graces—else why not give us more than a mere glimpse at the daughter of Montezuma, (the beloved of the melancholy De Morla,) whose image we behold as in a "glass darkly," and whose wretched fate we regard with the less anguish, knowing so little as we do of the fair and unfortunate victim. Even Jacinto is a mysterious and shadowy, though lovely being, with whom we have not, and cannot well have much sympathy. Some few passages indeed, illustrate the *disguised princess* with great force,—and throughout there is an unaccountable anxiety felt towards her; but she is not sufficiently presented in the foreground of the picture, to awaken a positive and powerful interest in her behalf. Jacinto, alias Leila, is nevertheless a most delightful vision,—seen always under very unfavorable circum-

stances,—but when seen, winding around the heart of the reader in spite of himself,—a beautiful, modest, heroic boy,—and yet a girl,—the discovery of whose sex, though anticipated, does not beam upon the reader until towards the latter end of the story. By the way, there is something very strange and improbable in the idea, that this same sweet creature should have waited upon her own lover in the assumed character of page or servant, *and he, the lover, not to know it*. It is altogether too marvellous, and the author of "Calavar" ought not to have drawn such a heavy draft upon the reader's credulity. As to Don Amador de Lecste, he is in fact the hero of the story; instead of that demented melancholy uncle whose name gives the title to the romance, but whose agency in it is of very little importance, and whose wild and mournful aberration of mind attracts less of admiration than pity, sometimes mingled with a feeling allied to disgust. The character of Botello too, half knave and half conjurer, is, we think, somewhat of a failure; perhaps not altogether so, for he *relieves the mind from the contemplation of spectacles of blood and misery*,—and that of itself is a refreshment for which we ought to be thankful.

Notwithstanding these strictures, which impartial justice required, we still maintain the opinion that Calavar is the production of a man of great capacity. If he follows up this first effort by corresponding success in the region of historical romance, he will assuredly outstrip all his competitors on this side of the Atlantic. The history of the conquest of Mexico, affords an admirable field for the novelist; and in the faithful delineation of Cortez, the extraordinary spirit who directed the work of devastation and surmounted almost superhuman difficulties in his triumphant career,—we think that the author of "Calavar" has been wonderfully successful.

We forbear making quotations from the work, or entering into a more minute analysis of the story. Our chief object is to inform our readers that "Calavar" is an *American production, which will not shrink from competition with the very best European works of the same character*. Faults it has, and some of them obvious and censurable; but its display of intellectual power and its various beauties are so transcendent, that its blemishes are lost like specks upon the orb of day.

The description of the flight of the Spaniards over the dike of Tacuba, and of the horrors of the "Melancholy night," so called in history, is awfully sublime. In truth the whole work abounds in powerful delineation both of character and scenery, and it is with pride that we hail it as at once assuming and commanding a proud rank in the department of historical romance.