

1835

To Contributors, Correspondents, &c.: From the
Author of the 'Note to Blackstone's Commentaries':
Extract of a Letter from the Reviewer of Messrs.
Adams' and Everett's Orations

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Repository Citation

Tucker, N. Beverley, "To Contributors, Correspondents, &c.: From the Author of the 'Note to Blackstone's Commentaries': Extract of a Letter from the Reviewer of Messrs. Adams' and Everett's Orations" (1835). *Faculty Publications*. 1291.
<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/1291>

To Contributors, Correspondents, &c.

We thank our correspondent C. W. L. for pointing out the resemblance between the little epigram entitled "*The Mistake Corrected*," in our last, and the "*Surprise*," in Little's poems, which he quotes. The resemblance is certainly strong, and it is quite probable that the former if not borrowed was at least suggested by the latter. We cannot agree however, that it is a "plagiarism," in the proper sense of that term; for we know too well the personal and literary character of the gentleman who presented us with the trifle referred to, to suspect him for a moment of so paltry a proceeding. We rather conclude therefore, that its resemblance to Moore's bagatelle, is either the result of casual coincidence,—or more probably, perhaps, of an accidental mistake of the product of memory for that of fancy; a kind of mistake which those who have read much are very liable to make.

We assure our correspondent B. R. B. that we have carefully compared the lines published in our last with his manuscript, and find them to correspond *verbatim*. He wrongs us much if he thinks we would do him wilful injustice; and if one word has been substituted for another in the lines referred to, so as to change their sense, he must ascribe it to himself. We hope with this explanation he will excuse us from inserting his letter at full length.

There is a great deal of feeling in many of the communications sent to the publisher by T. H. C., M. D.; but to our poor taste, there is not much *poetry*. We question whether the Doctor will not find the lancet and pill box of more profit in that warm region to which he has emigrated, than the offerings of his prolific muse. The poetical manufacture depends more upon the *quality* than the *quantity* of its fabrics, for success.

We have received the following communication since the publication of our last number, from "*Fra Diavolo*," (*Horresco referens!*) which, as it is brief, we spread before our readers. His sneers at our "literary morality" and "critical acumen," we receive with great composure. Perhaps indeed, our vanity might be wounded if we had a title only of what seems to belong to the writer himself; but as our pretensions are very humble, we care not a farthing whether they are disputed or not. His request not to publish his poetry, (except on his own terms) shall be complied with; and should we consign his impure effusions to the flames, as he also desires, the world will have little or no cause to regret it. So long as we can secure the rich contributions received from other quarters, we shall console ourselves with the loss of "*Fra's*" favors, and even endeavor to survive his unprovoked resentment. To "give the devil his

due," however, we shall continue to lament the downward flight of our correspondent's muse; and uninitiated as we profess to be in the sublime mysteries of the school to which he belongs, we shall even be so perverse as to prefer the "modest mien and plain attire" of mediocrity, to the more, flashy but less useful adornments of brilliant but misguided genius. One word in justification of ourselves. We did not admit the "Doom" into our columns without reluctance; a reluctance which nothing would have overcome but the conviction that a useful moral might be deduced from the fate of the "Lover Friend," who figures as the hero of the story. As to the "Passage of the Beresina," whether it be "balderdash" or not, is matter of taste and opinion. One thing is certain; it is from the pen of a highly accomplished scholar.

Mr. White,—I have just seen your sixth number of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and shall decline having my contribution published on condition of any improvement of the poetry by your most chaste and wise editor. The admission of such balderdash as the "Doom" and "The Passage of the Beresina," is quite enough evidence of his literary morality and good taste. I require no further token of it; least of all in my own case, where I am to be martyred at the shrine of such critical acumen—God save the mark! Put the manuscript into the fire, and oblige yours,
FRA DIAVOLO.

March 25, 1835.

From the author of the "Note to Blackstone's Commentaries."

You judge rightly that I have no call to answer my censor. I have no pride of authorship in the affair. I wished to awaken the public mind, and he has aided me, for which he has my thanks. I have no controversy with him. He argues against opinions I have not advanced, and, in his last paragraph, comes in aid of that I had endeavored to maintain. By his own showing a quasi war exists among ourselves, under circumstances which render any nearer approach to peace impossible. We have the alternative of "a war-like peace, or a peace-like war," and he wisely prefers the former. He predicates this decision on the only principle for which I contended, viz: the effect of a continuing necessity. I only suggested the possibility of such a case. He finds it existing in fact. It doubtless might exist in various ways. Destruction is the precise object of savage warfare. With us, it is the means to an end. With savages, it is the end itself. Had he seen, as I have, a few individuals of once powerful tribes, escaped from massacre, and saved from utter extinction only by finding shelter among the whites, he would not have to learn that *bellum ad internecionem* is not unknown among savages.

The style and matter of his essay both show an education which should have taught him that a supercilious tone should find no place in a controversy between an anonymous and an avowed author. He wears defensive armor. I am naked. Is it chivalrous; is it manly; is it fair, in a contest which should be conducted "as if a brother should a brother dare to gentle exercise and proof of arms," to thrust with "unbated point?" His point indeed is not envenomed, nor does he stab malignantly, but he should have touched my scutcheon with the reverse of his lance. To strike with the point, however gently, is a challenge to combat of *outrance*. I decline it.

Extract of a Letter from the Reviewer of Messrs. Adams' and Everett's Oration.

You say, "The most sublime events and the most heroic actions have generally found some poet or historian of sufficient qualifications to record them with dignity and effect." Granted, but what is *dignity*? Does it consist in that sort of declamation which is meant to "split the ears of the groundlings?" What is *effect*? Is it *stage effect*? Is it made up of "gun, drum, trumpet, blunderbuss and thunder," and images placed by the speaker's side to be apostrophized? The example that you give illustrates the maxim that "the language of eulogy is misapplied to transcendent greatness. It weakens and dictates the truth of history."

You say "even the most exalted truths which have ever dawned upon mankind,—the facts and doctrines of revelation,—have lost none of their grandeur in the simple narratives of

plain and unlettered men." Most true. The simplicity of the narrative is its excellence. But what should we say to a Gospel after the manner of Mr. Adams, or even of Mr. Everett?

Mr. White:—The legitimate aim of criticism is, as you yourself have more than once remarked, to point out the proper path towards excellence. A true critic effects this by gently and courteously exposing error, and lauding beauties where beauties are to be found. So far as I can judge, neither gentleness nor courtesy can be said to characterize the critique of your "Shepherdstown friend." The want of these qualities would certainly have induced me to pass over the letter in question, had it not received honorable notice from yourself. In the pamphlet war between Matthew Carey and the redoubtable Cobbett, the first apologizes for his own rudeness, by quoting the old proverb, "fight the devil with fire," or something to that amount. But this is bad philosophy; and in my brief answer, I will endeavor as much as possible to observe that courtesy which your correspondent has forgotten.

In the "Song of the Seasons" quaintness was aimed at, and aimed at only because I thought the subject called for it. One part of my object was to deplete the minute relations existing between the human heart and earth itself. Minuteness was necessary, and to be minute without quaintness, would render any piece dull and pointless analysis. With regard to obscurity, and the use of terms, I would ask your critic, if when he had "studied the song," obscurity did not disappear, and if the terms are not in keeping with the quaintness aimed at. Indeed, I would ask him, if the terms used are not just such as should have been used in any case. Beams are "amethystine." We will find an admirable application of the word in Keates' "Eve of St. Agnes;" and Mrs. Hemans sings very prettily of the drowsy "Bugle-Bee." By the way, let me in this last phrase, adopt the change recommended. The stanzas quoted is the second of the "Song."

"A white roe wandered where sweet herbs and tender grass were peeping;
His snowy head was poised in pride, his chainless heart was leaping:

The 'bumble-bee' had called the herd from icy solitude,—
And he had come at 'bumble' call—fleet centaur of the wood!"

A vast improvement in faith. The term "gauze wing," is as common as the rhymes *love* and *dove*. "Soughing blasts" are frequent in *Wyatt*, and more frequent in *Shakspeare*. An amethystine beam thrown on a red body produces a glittering gold, and thus the red breast of "poor robin" was metamorphosed into one of gold. So much for the criticism. As for the critic, he has most unequivocally proved himself, by these syllabic censures, to be one of the *anceps syllabarum* tribe. As such I wonder that you, who have so often expressed your contempt for the whole race, should have opened your columns to his communication. Is not his letter a specimen of "the carplings of illiberal and puerile criticism?" Is not the writer one of the "little great men in the world, who have the vanity to conceive that their taste and judgment, (if they have any) is the standard for all mankind, and who snap and bark like the curs which infest our streets and annoy the by-ways?" I have used your own words, and ask if they are not applicable.

The Song of the Seasons (though never so little deserving,) has received praise from a higher quarter than Shepherdstown. My home is not very far from that village—near enough to know the character of its people; and in truth, gentlemen of talent and distinction are there with whom I have ever held it an honor to be acquainted. But it is plain that the critique could not have been written by any one of them. If I had no other reason for thinking so, I would say, "because it is not in keeping with the good sense, accurate taste, and elevated candor which I know these to possess." As for their townsmen, I have never heard of any Longinus among them, whose praise would not be disgrace. If your "friend" thinks an answer to this necessary, let me hope that his name will accompany the communication; or if he is unwilling to annoy, with private concerns, the public "upon whom Larry Lyle has [already] inflicted the study of his song," his communication may be directed, not to yourself, but to his very humble servant,

LARRY LYLE.

Winchester, Va.