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1837

# Wandering Thoughts

Lucian Minor

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## Repository Citation

Minor, Lucian, "Wandering Thoughts" (1837). *Faculty Publications*. 1315.  
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## WANDERING THOUGHTS.

It was a fine Sunday forenoon. The last bell of the village Church had given its final toll: the congregation were in their pews, composing their faces and (some of them) their minds, to devout attention: the beaux were brushing their whiskers, and the belles adjusting their curls and sniles, for the most death-doing effect: the Sunday-scholars sat upon the front benches of the gallery, their whisperings and titterings not quite audible enough yet, to attract the forbidding nod of the teacher, who sat by as the censor of their conduct: the organ and choir had gone through the strains preliminary to the service: and the minister was just rising, one hand upon the pulpit, and the other passing his white handkerchief reverentially over his lips, ere he let them be the portals of Sacred Truth.

"Now"—thought I, seated at an angle of the gallery, whence nearly the whole scene was visible—"now I am resolved, that my mind shall not run wild, as it commonly does at meeting. My attention shall not waver, for a single minute." So, bracing every muscle of my face and body, I followed the preacher steadily through his opening prayer, and caught every word and note of the succeeding hymn. Nay, I marked the text; and ran over the probable aspects under which the good man would consider it, while he was *hemming!* by way of prelude to his exordium. This fixed my attention through the first page of the sermon: but there, alas! away flew my thoughts; and led me a wilder chase, surely, than ever wight was led by elf or bogle. They were seduced by something—I hardly know what—either uttered from the pulpit, or presented to my eyes. Every body knows the speed of thought: that is, every one knows that its speed cannot be known, or estimated: therefore no one will be surprised if mine had traversed a thousand realms, in that barely conceivable fraction of Eternity, somewhere elegantly called 'less than no time.' Minister and sermon vanished altogether. I was busy with what I, and all the world besides, had been, were, and would be, doing: aye, and had *not* been, were not, and never would be doing. The actual and the fabled past—the possible, but still more the impossible future,—flitted before me. I heard conversations among the dead, and the absent—saw them—talked with them. Presently my mind ran upon supernatural agencies, assisting man to see and hear things from which he is parted by walls, or by seas; or even by the grave, or by the mysterious boundaries that divide matter and spirit. Hence the transition was natural, to *Chrysal*, and *Le Diable Boiteux*,\* and those visions of Mirza, Will Honeycomb, and others, so authentically chronicled in *The Spectator*. Scarcely had these occurred to me, when my mental phantasmagoria assumed a form and method, as unlike its previous irregularity, as ten thousand many-colored beads rolling confusedly over the floor, are to a tasteful reticulation of them, assorted, and strung by the hand of Beauty upon silken threads: or as the types of a printer in that chaotic state called *pi*, to the prettiest verses ever indited by love-sick swain to his ladye-love, printed by those very types on a sheet of "Ames' best gilt-edged:"

\*The work of Le Sage, commonly called "The Devil on Two Sticks."

or as the harshest discords, to the same elements of sound, modulated by the genius of Handel and the lips of a land-Siren into harmony that

"floats upon the wings  
Of Silence, through the empty vaulted night,  
At every fall smoothing the Raven-down  
Of Darkness, till it smiles."

Recollecting the many instances in which other people's thoughts have been made visible—"How curious it would be," thought I, "if what is now passing in the hundreds of heads before me, could but be exposed to my view!" Instantly, a Being, whom at a glance I knew to be super-human, stood beside me. She had not the deformity, or the arch, mischievous look, of Le Sage's witty demon; or the ethereal make of the Gold-Spirit, that detailed to Johnstone the no less wonderful than true "Adventures of a Guinea." A Sylph she certainly was: but of the German stock, as I saw by her rather unsylphlike form,—her sturdy shoulders, and broad, substantial face. Her eyes (likewise characteristic of Germany) were so penetrating, that they could pierce the most solid substances, and discern things invisible by the best microscope—nay, even non-entities, material or immaterial. This was manifest from the ineffable intensity of her gaze, as she would now bend it on some tangible object near her, and now, like Mad Mathesis in the *Dunciad*, to pure space lift her ecstasie stare. Her dress, and appearance in other respects, were those usual to Sylphs: save that in her right hand she held a wand, and in her left what seemed a human skull, not ghastly and terrible, with grinning teeth and cross-bones, like an unmannerly *memento mori*; but scraped smooth, and its surface neatly laid off into thirty or forty compartments, by black lines.

Without waiting (as the well known usage of ghosts is) for me to accost her, my aerial visitant said, that she had seen my wish, to know what the congregation were thinking of; and had come to gratify it.

"I am," said she, "the Spirit of PHRENOLOGY. The human mind, including those affections vulgarly supposed to dwell in the heart,—resides in the skull: and there every faculty, every affection, has its appropriate seat. See, here are the Intellectual Powers, clustered about the forehead: in the centre, dwell the Moral Feelings: and behind, are the Sensual Affections. Now, by observing how the organs whereby these several traits work, have affected the contiguous parts of the cranium,—I, and my favored votaries, can tell precisely the character, and sometimes even the history, of man or woman. By looking at any of the five hundred heads before us, I can plainly see what is passing within. I have never yet gifted any mortal with that power: you shall be the first to receive it. Take this glass, and look through it at any of the heads below."

She then waved her wand; and I directed the eyeglass as she had bidden me.

Even I, who long have scarcely wondered at any thing, could not help being surprised at the spectacle which now presented itself. Every skull at which my glass pointed, became transparent: the tough, lining membrane disappeared: the convolutions of the brain, in its two hemispheres and their three lobes, pervaded by innumerable nerves, veins, ducts, and fibres, all swelling, sinking, vibrating and quivering,—were palpable to my view: and (by the magic of the wand and

the glass) all these workings, which, in reality, were the *processes of thought*, assumed a form as distinctly legible as what I am now writing.

Briefly thanking my instructress for having so much improved upon the plan of Asmodeus, who, to enlighten Don Cleofus, (as all readers of 'The Devil on Two Sticks' will remember) had to unroof all Madrid and interpret to him the thoughts and actions of its inhabitants,—I set about perusing the singular pages before me. It was marvellous, to see how few were thinking of what the preacher said. Except a schoolmaster, who was mousing after slips in grammar,—a controversial sectarian, busied in heresy-hunting, with design to exercise his skill in refutation,—critics of various calibre, detecting faults or discerning beauties, in tone, look, gesture, emphasis, or composition,—a young woman, whose attention was at least as much occupied by the minister's white teeth and nicely tied cravat, as by his words,—an old one, who found great edification in the drawl and twang wherewith he uttered some long, sonorous names,—and a dozen pious men, with two or three dozen pious women, who sincerely relished the bread and waters of Life,—none, of fully two hundred whose tablets of thought I read, attended to the sermon any more than I did. Each was pursuing some vagary of imagination, or some suggestion of memory.

A notable country dame was reckoning up how many pounds of butter she had made from two milch cows, in the past month: and her husband, arranging the course of a new post-and-rail fence.—A jockey was feasting his hopes on the profit he should make from a horse, which he had bought when poor, spavined, and broken down, at a very low price, but by physicking and feeding had apparently so improved, that he expected to sell him to a certain greenhorn for ten times cost, as a first-rate steed.—A small wit was laying a train of conversation, by which he might have an opportunity to let off a capital pun: and he almost laughed aloud, at the anticipated success of his pun-trap.—A slow genius, much given to rounded sentences and premeditated *impromptus*, was mourning over a lost opportunity of saying the best thing in the world, which had not occurred to him till it was entirely too late.—An old bachelor was musing on some infallible rules for governing wives, which he designed to impress upon certain married men of his acquaintance. He regretted his own single state, only because it gave him no opportunity of putting these rules in practice, and setting a pattern to all husbands, in the difficult art of *wife-ruling*.—A staid and tidy spinster, had her thoughts engrossed by some excellent hints on nursery discipline; which it was a pity that all matrons would not adopt.—A smart lad of seventeen, was meditating an essay upon female education.—An elderly gentleman was considering how much he could give his daughter, who was soon to be married; and the probable amount of her lover's fortune. Kindly and parental as the spirit of his reflections manifestly was, I could not but be struck with his unconcern about the mind, temper, habits, or morals, of his intended son-in-law.—“He is well to do in the world, makes a decent figure in society, and seems to be liked by his acquaintance,”—were the only thoughts at all relating to those important subjects. The mind of the lady-mother (who sat in the same pew) was ruffled, by one great objection to the match:—the young man's family. His father, in-

deed, was a genteel and wealthy merchant; but had one brother, a blacksmith, and another, a carpenter; whereas no nearer relation of the young lady's had been a mechanic, than two great uncles—a shoemaker and a tinker. Even these were dead, and the memory of their vulgar trades was nearly extinct; while the blacksmith and carpenter were living, in the neighborhood: she would have to assume their family name, associate with them, and call them “uncle!” Such a thought was intolerable: its odiousness could only be palliated, by recollecting a large fortune, which the bridegroom was to receive from his father. I glanced at the brains of the young couple. The reigning topic there, of course, was the happiness that awaited them. Charming castles-in-the-air they built. These I need not describe; as every body has built very similar ones, and knows their *appearance*, if not their material and durability. A pretty lass of sixteen, from contemplating the graceful wavings of a silken ‘zephyr’ that floated in spires a-down her shoulders, passed to the last evening's party, where she and her zephyr had glided, amid boundless admiration, through a dozen sets of cotillons. A dandy near her, with equal complacency, was gazing on the exquisite contour of his own boot. I saw several, both ladies and gentlemen, whose pensive, down-cast eyes would have led me to suppose them intent wholly upon devotion, had I not seen that their thoughts were bent upon some parts of their own dress. A still greater number had their minds fixed, with envy, admiration, or cavilling, on the dresses of those around them. Beaux and belles, or those who wished to be such, were engrossed with the idea of the figure they made in each other's eyes: and hopes of conquest, from the consciousness of beauty, wit, or wealth, floated through many a brain.

An eminent lawyer's thoughts ran upon his successful defence, the day before, of a profligate woman, charged with murder. The result had confirmed what he had often before remarked of men—their proneness to judge of human conduct chiefly, if not solely, by the success which crowns it. During the trial, his wretched client had been regarded with frowns and scowls by every one, except a brother lawyer, who, either from humanity and justice, or to show his astuteness, had suggested some trivial point of defence to the advocate. But no sooner was she acquitted, than the fickle crowd surrounded her with cheers, and a hundred gratulating hands! “Her acquittal of this charge,” thought the lawyer, “has made them forget not only her still possible if not probable guilt in this instance, but the unapproachable infamy of her whole past life! Thus it is, that applauses have attended the successful employment of usurped authority by statesmen and generals, whom *failure* would have made to swing as criminals. Victory is never called to give an account of herself. Right or wrong, she is ever her own sufficient justification.” Another lawyer was thinking of an enemy he had lately made, by counselling him against a lawsuit, as one in which he could not possibly succeed; and by refusing to undertake its management, because it was plainly unjust. The litigant had gone in great wrath to another advocate, who, less discerning or less scrupulous, had promptly engaged to carry him through with flying colors. This latter gentleman was also in the congregation. Queen Mab must have been driving

over his fingers; for all his dreams were of fees. He was at this moment chuckling over an enormous one, recently extorted from a widowed mother, in some very plain affair (which, he persuaded her, was very complex and critical) respecting her deceased husband's estate. "Dead men's estates," said he to himself, "are our richest mines. I despise the sentimental cant about widows and orphans. They are the very clients who can best afford to pay fat fees; for all they have, they got for nothing—a mere windfall to them."

A physician's features were kindled with a fine glow, which, at first, I attributed to something said in the sermon; but on looking at his brain, I discovered that he was laying schemes of professional beneficence, and thinking of the indigent, whose sufferings he had gratuitously relieved. Every fibre in his organ of benevolence, thrilled with delight, as he quoted Dr. Boerhaave's trite, but noble saying, that "The poor were his best patients, for God himself stood paymaster for them." All the well paid triumphs of his skill among the rich and great—and they were many—filled a comparatively small space in his mind. Another Doctor was ruminating upon a decline into which a poor woman who lived near him was falling; and which, he had ascertained, proceeded partly from the want of necessaries and comforts, but still more from a wounded spirit,—the result of a drunken husband's brutality and degradation. The Doctor therefore resolved, secretly to supply her wants; and to try if the husband could not be reclaimed, by first creating a healthier social atmosphere around him—explaining, distinctly, the mischiefs wrought by strong drink—prevailing upon the moderate drinkers, whose example or invitations oftenest led him astray, to abstain entirely—reclaiming the less inveterately dissolute of his boon companions—and then by approaching him, with kind yet frank remonstrances, and persuading him to read Mr. S . . . . 's "Temperance Tales."—A third physician was exulting in a profitable job he had made for himself, by passing off a bronchial affection for pulmonary; and curing it, with great eclat, after a studiously protracted and expensive course of treatment.—A cancer-doctor, who differed from the last chiefly in having no diploma, was counting up his gains from an art he had, of irritating a trifling sore by the application of his nostrums, until every body took it for a cancer; and then gradually healing it, by some more simple means, which any old woman would have employed, but which he pretended to be of a secret composition, known only to himself. Sometimes his first nostrums overacted their part, and made a real cancer. Then, death inevitably ensued. But as these cases, even joined to those originally cancerous, in which he always failed, were less than half of all that he managed; and as he always contrived, when the result was fatal, to lay the blame upon some previous treatment of the patient, or upon the inherent malignity of the disease; he seemed to be wonderfully successful; and scarcely any one questioned his infallibility. A fifth Doctor was brooding over the encroachments of a neighboring physician upon his practice. The Congress-man, and several others with large families and estates, had gone over to the enemy.

A skilful mechanic, remarkable for his honesty—he was a tailor who never cabbaged—and even more remarkable as having a keen zest for literature,—but

who had the misfortune to have incurred the habit of frequent intoxication, from which all his good sense, and deep consciousness of disgrace, could not deliver him—was, for the thousandth time, in secret agony, bewailing the loathsome vice which he felt to be bowing down his soul to the dust; breathing imprecations upon his own childish imbecility, and upon the heartless companions who had so often tempted him astray; and resolving to make one more effort at emancipation from the chains of his habit, and from the fiendlike influences of the unprincipled or unthinking beings who called themselves his "friends."—One of these was then near him; and was at that moment triumphing in the recollection of having, three times in as many months, seduced him from resolutions of sobriety, most solemnly formed; and laying a plan to lead him again, the next day, into a week's debauch. Cicero, with all his vanity, never plumed himself more upon the most brilliant effort of his eloquence—Alexander upon his greatest victory—no, nor even any Chesnut street or Broadway dandy ever exulted more in the gloss and fitting of his tailor's *chef d'œuvre*,—than this magnanimous hero of the bar-room, in the achievements he remembered, and the achievements he planned. For my part, his poor victim seemed to me like a wretch, struggling for life in a deep and filthy abyss; up the steep, slippery sides of which, whenever he was near escaping,—the other, like some foul beast, fit inhabitant of such a place, seized and drew him back again.

A fresh, full-faced young man, with lively eyes, was meditating plans of study. He chalked out a vast round of knowledge for acquisition; and determined to set about it 'tomorrow.' A restricted diet, and regular hours for exercise, and for each one of his dozen intended studies, were parts of the plan. I could not help admiring his constancy, when, by movements in several organs which conjointly do the office of what the vulgar call *memory*, I perceived that he had resolved exactly the same things (including the "tomorrow") every week, for five years past. As the punster might say, he was evidently a young man of *good resolution*.—There were several persons, who passed for great scholars,—now busied in conning over the names of different authors; by quoting which, they designed to maintain and extend their reputations for learning. And in those repositories of the brain, where they were commonly supposed to have laid up immense stores of knowledge, the fruit of extensive reading and profound reflection,—I found little more than what was contained in title pages and indexes: which these gentlemen got by rote, and oft times displayed to the wondering vulgar. One, in particular, who was accounted a universal genius, I found to have derived all his classical lore from a Dictionary of Quotations; his knowledge of Law, Medicine, and Theology, from similar works in each of those Sciences; and his ability to calculate Almanacs, (which had given him a great name as an astronomer and mathematician) from a set of very simple Tables in a book on Astronomy, which any one might use, who had passed through the course of "reading, writing, and cyphering," in an ordinary country school.

In some, on the contrary, of whom the world judged unfavorably, I was glad to discern traits quite opposite to those commonly ascribed to them. A grum, proud looking man, of dark bilious complexion, scowling

brow, and most ungracious carriage, proved, on examination, to have extraordinary benevolence. His mind was completely engrossed by plans for relieving the distressed, and by a delicious retrospect of innumerable past charities,—all studiously concealed from the public view, and, as far as possible, from every human eye or ear.—Another, whose quiet, cold aspect, and his never talking of Religion, because he deemed it a matter exclusively between him and his Maker, made most people regard him as an infidel—showed thoughts animated by the most fervent devotion. 'Tis true, he did not listen closely to the sermon: but he gave himself up to thanksgiving and prayer: Thanks, for unnumbered mercies; and prayer, that his gratitude for them might be increased—that his mind might be purified and enlightened, his belief guided aright, and his life made useful to mankind, and every way acceptable to Heaven. He breathed not a wish for health, riches, or any other mere earthly blessing; but only, that, if it should please God to visit him with any affliction, he might be enabled to bear it with fortitude and cheerful resignation.—I saw more than one instance of very worthy persons, who had taken umbrage at some imagined tokens of pride in each other,—some fancied slight, or undesigned offence—and were thus led to entertain mutual ill will,—which the slightest frankness in making an advance on either side, would effectually have dissipated.

Party politics ran high at that time. I directed my glass at the head of a dispassionate, honest man, who had incurred the suspicion and dislike of both sides, by refusing to join either. The imputation of double dealing—for each party suspected him of secretly courting the other—had given him serious pain: but being thoroughly convinced that his position, however disagreeable, was the true one for every man who wished well to the country, he had resolved to maintain it, at all hazards. He now communed with himself thus: "If there is a truth which no rational being can deny, it is, that no set of men, nor any system of human measures, is perfectly wise and honest. Yet each of these parties arrogates to itself and its measures such immaculateness and wisdom, that whoever questions either, is denounced, and spurned from political fellowship! If there is any other truth equally unquestionable, it is, that no large portion of such a people as ours, is utterly wicked or foolish, nor are their acts *all* worthy of condemnation. Yet here, every member of either party (forming nearly half of our people,) is required, on pain of similar excommunication, to denounce the other party and all its acts! Is bound, on his allegiance, to believe every leader on his own side an angel, and every one on the other side a demon! For there is no limit, short of this, when once it is assumed and conceded, that *party connexions*, and not *inherent merits* or *faults*, are to determine the allotment of praise or blame. It cannot be for the public good—it cannot be *RIGHT*—that principles so irreconcilable with truth and justice shall prevail! No! I see faults—many and grievous faults—on both sides; in men, and in measures. I will censure all that I see!—I discern much that is praiseworthy on both sides: there are men of talents and virtue on both—of whom, some are my personal friends and all have my respect. 'May my right hand forget her cunning, and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,'

if I do not cling to those virtuous friends, cherish that merited respect, and praise those laudable measures!—In *practice*, how works this vaunted system of party discipline? It arrays the two halves of society against each other—sets neighbors, friends, and even brothers at variance—causes angry paroxysms of contention, in which not only the good feelings of men are turned to bitterness, but their morals are often debauched, and a sure foundation laid in their profligacy, and blind devotion to party leaders, for the overthrow of their liberties!—In elections, it directs the voter's choice by considerations the most foreign and impertinent that can be conceived: makes him choose a sheriff, constable, or state legislator, not by his real fitness for the office in view, but by his wearing the badge of this or that party!—a criterion about as rational, as that adopted in Lilliput,—where appointments were regulated by the candidate's wearing *high-heeled* or *low-heeled* shoes, and breaking his eggs at the *little* or the *big* end!—Whoever goes to such an extreme of bigotry, as to let party ties govern his vote, will find himself served like Addison's good tory knight; who would stop at none but tory inns; and thus invariably met with the worst fare, and beds the most full of vermin, on all the road. For candidates, like Sir Roger's landlords, finding that a preference can be obtained at the cheap price of loyalty to a party, will not think of buying it with the more scarce and precious coin of integrity, knowledge, and skill in business." He went on to recapitulate, mentally, the measures which he thought especially good or bad, in each party; and concluded by a solemn resolve, that he *NEVER would* list under the banner, or adopt the distinctive name, of either; but (despite the proscription by both, which he saw to attend such a course) would make war upon what was evil, and uphold what was good, in both, so long as he preserved his Reason. As he took this vow, though his brain heaved with intense emotion, *his brow was calm and smooth as marble*; and his whole aspect wore the appearance only of cool yet earnest attention to the preacher.

Near him sat a thorough going partisan; one who read nothing but the "*Clarion of Freedom*," a newspaper, the confessed organ of his party: or, if he ever did look into the "*Star of Liberty*" on the other side, it was only 'to see what new lies its editor was telling—what new trick he was about to play.' His mind was now engaged in surveying the relative merits of the two sides. On his own, all seemed bright and *spotless*. "Were ever statesmen so pure, so able?" thought he—"Was ever eloquence so splendid, or reasoning so unanswerable? Was ever a party so palpably, so *indisputably* *RIGHT*, in all its aims, in all its acts, in all its members?"—On the opposite side, it was far otherwise. There, all was black. Folly, falsehood, corruption, profligacy of every hue and in every form, composed an assemblage without one redeeming virtue: a hideous monster, with which it became all good men and true patriots, to wage implacable war. Such were the ideas he had drawn from the "*Clarion of Freedom*."—It chanced, that not far off, and just beyond our neutral friend, sat as devoted a member of the opposite party: one, whose oracle was the "*Star of Liberty*," and who regarded the hostile paper as the repository of all that was vile. I found in his brain almost an *exact copy* of the thoughts which I had just read in that of his adver-

sary. The names only, were reversed. There was the same unqualified approbation of all upon his own side: the same indiscriminating anathema of all upon the other side. He held it the plainest dictate of reason, the first duty of man, the sternest injunction of patriotism,—to disbelieve every fact asserted in the “*Clavion of Freedom*,” to condemn all its doctrines and arguments; to denounce all the men it advocated: and, as implicitly, to confide in the “*Star of Liberty*.” Even facts and opinions he had himself once maintained,—arguments he had once held unanswerable,—he now repudiated, in obedience to the ‘*presto, change!*’ of his party leaders.—Each of these two partisans appeared utterly ignorant of the great mass of facts and reasonings, by which the other’s mind was influenced; or incapable of appreciating their truth or weight, because they had always been presented to him in such a light as to seem untrue, or in such a connexion as to shock his preconceived ideas. Each of them also, I could perceive, regarded the neutral who sat between them, with distrust and dislike. Each suspected him of attachment to the opposite party, and of standing aloof ostensibly from both, only to conciliate both; or with the view of joining that which should ultimately prove the stronger. “He is a trimmer”—thought they. I saw, that if he had chosen neutrality with any hope of securing his peace or strengthening his interest, he had made a wide mistake. He was exposed to the fire of both parties: he had effectually cut himself off from the sympathies, and incurred the fixed displeasure, of both. He was in the most uncomfortable of positions; unless the consciousness of rectitude, and the conviction that he had reason and justice on his side, could support and cheer him.

The times were prolific of such political aspirants, as the morbid state of public feeling which I have exemplified, might be expected to produce. The keeper of a tipping shop, who, partly by selling, and partly by giving away his liquors, had risen high in favor with the toppers around him;—a merchant, not much better, who had treated his customers till they ran largely in his debt, and through fear as well as through liking, were ready to give him their votes;—a deputy sheriff, who had been for three years courting popularity by the most loose-handed performance of his duties;—and an attorney who, finding that none would entrust him with practice, had “quitted the law,” and set up for a politician;—all these candidates for a seat in the Legislature were now subjected to my observation. Parties in that district were not very nearly balanced: one of them had a clear and decided preponderance. Our candidates therefore knew they must be of that side: and they were now considering how they might evince their loyalty most clearly, and turn it to the best account. They were all conning over the favorite doctrines of the ruling party,—studying the strongest words whereby to express their devotion to its chiefs,—and repeating to themselves the main test-words of orthodoxy,—so that (as a statesman of Lilliput would say) they might make it evident that ‘their shoe-heels were of the proper height,’ and that ‘they broke their eggs at the right end.’ I could not discover that one of them bestowed a thought on the extent of knowledge, the powers of mind, the habits of industry, or the skill in business, which he

ought to carry with him into such an office; or on the important measures of legislation which were needed for the public weal. All these things were immaterial, if they practised the arts of electioneering with sufficient diligence, and showed themselves right upon ‘the shoe-heel and egg questions.’

I was struck with the contrast between the views which two minds (both more than ordinarily enlightened), took, of the probable extent of human improvement, and the probable permanence of popular Government. One of them had small hopes, and no very strong wishes, on these subjects. He revolved the advances and retrogressions in society:—he thought of Nineveh—Egypt—Jerusalem—Tyre—Carthage—Greece—Rome—Venice—Florence;—of the Ages of Pericles and Augustus,—and then of the Gothic night which followed:—of France, and her vain spasms of freedom, ending in a full return of Bourbon despotism; of Holland and Switzerland, with their brief mockery of republican forms, and briefer enjoyment of actual republican Liberty;—of England, perpetually boasting of her freedom, yet presenting, with it, the strangest medley of oppression and corruption, and seeming ready, for half a century, to be shivered by the fearful elements that have been at work in her system. Finally, he thought of the United States: and here, despondence took possession of his mind. He saw the people so often duped—such a mass of ignorance in them, and so frightful an amount of depravity in their leaders and agents—the paths to preferment trodden so much more successfully by impudence, cunning, and contempt for principle, than by modest worth—such blind surrenders of individual opinion to party dictation, and such proneness to be infuriated by party bigotry;—all this, too, in the very childhood of our institutions;—that to his view, this vaunted “experiment” of ours was already at an end. Its failure was demonstrated. “It is idle,” thought he, “to hope that five-sixths of mankind will not always remain in darkness, and in slavery. How small a proportion of the earth is occupied by nations that can pretend to be called *civilized*! And of these, how few individuals are not sunk in ignorance! *Five sixths*,—did I say? I might have said, *ninety nine hundredths*. Then, as to slavery,—how much fewer nations are *free*, than are *civilized*! And among the pitiably few that enjoy the name of *FREE*, how large a number of persons does poverty, ignorance, vice, or some other allotment of their destiny, make *virtual* if not *actual* slaves!—Can the blind partisan, who shapes all his opinions by those of his newspaper editor, and casts his vote after the bidding or example of party file-leaders,—be deemed a *freeman*? Or the tippler,—who, with no opinions at all, votes as he is desired by the neighboring grog-seller, or for the candidate who gives him the most whiskey: *Is he a freeman?*—Human society, and the human intellect, are constantly revolving in cycles. In every country, after Freedom comes Anarchy; then Despotism; then Freedom again; and so on, forever. Despotism has the longest turn, except where Freedom is *mitigated* by a large infusion of monarchy, or aristocracy: *then*, she may be saved, for centuries, from perishing by her own excesses. Very similar are the fluctuations in literature and science.”—On the whole, I perceived that he was (to use the mildest epithet) a *conservative*,—averse to all reforms in society, especially

to those which aimed at liberalizing its institutions: and cherishing, almost unconsciously, in the recesses of his mind, a desire to see that 'infusion of monarchy or aristocracy,' which he thought necessary to restrain the 'excesses' of Freedom. I further discovered, that he had lately been defeated in a great political contest; and that he was much afflicted with *dyspepsia*.

Far different was the tenor of the other's reflections. His wishes were ardent, and his hopes earnest, that Mankind might advance, not indeed to perfection, but almost infinitely far towards it, in knowledge, and virtue; and upon those foundations, build an edifice of free government, which might last as long as Time. He looked back over History, as searchingly and intelligently as the *conservative* did: but while he saw much there to appal, he saw likewise much to cheer him. He acknowledged nearly the same *cycles* in mind and in government: but he remarked, that no *relapse* had gone back to so low a point of depression, as that, whence the preceding advance had begun; and that every onward bound which IMPROVEMENT took, had overgone her previous ones, so that on the whole, ground was gained. "Greece and Rome," thought he, "were at once freer and more intellectual than any people who had gone before them: This age is equally far superior to Greece and Rome. Written constitutions—representative government—well devised checks and balances—separate departments for the exercise of different functions—Jury Trial—the Art of Printing—a code of International Law, not generally *binding*, 'tis true, but *persuasively* operating to assuage the horrors of War, and to make intercourse more liberal and profitable in peace,—enlarged ideas of Commerce—Inventions and discoveries in Physical Science—Improvements in Machinery—to say nothing of Christianity, and the moral benefits it has brought in its train—all these create, in modern Times, an amount of Freedom, knowledge, and happiness, which Greece and Rome, or any former age, never knew. Nor, thanks to the Press—can things ever fall back quite to the condition, in which they were during the Middle Ages.—Undoubtedly, a great, a deplorable ignorance prevails. But that can be removed. Nearly all human beings are capable of instruction: and the DESIRE OF KNOWLEDGE is one of the most unfailing of human traits. Attempts to diffuse knowledge have never been properly made, without success. It is at this moment, spreading, surely and steadily, if not rapidly: and every moment, its course is quickened; for every mind that receives, immediately longs to impart it. At some propitious juncture,—from among the millions who are now enjoying its influences, there will arise some happy genius, to devise a plan which will leave no cottager without his *modicum* of intellectual pleasures; his needful share of moral principle and political knowledge, to guide his conduct as a man and a citizen. 'Tis only for a few of the master spirits of the time to *will* it, and that glorious consummation might even now come quickly to pass. Once have a stock of educated and virtuous *parents*, imbued with those rational ideas about the rearing up of youth, which are now beginning to be current,—and much may be done towards guarding their children from passion and vice."—It would be too long, to copy all of his reverie. In brief—he anticipated a nearly universal diffusion of knowledge and virtue, and by their means,

and upon them as a basis, the establishment of *rationaly free* political institutions. His delineation of his plans and of their results, was not more crude, vague, or unreasonable, than were the ideas of the Marquis of Worcester, 150 years ago, about the steam engine; or more shocking to the skeptical, *conservative* minds of this day, than those ideas were, to the "practical" plodders of the Marquis's time. At all events, he seemed to me far more worthy of envy and esteem than his neighbor: and I could not scan the noble, well balanced developments of all his faculties and feelings, without cordially agreeing with the poet, that the energies of elevated and generous Hope ever "burn the brightest in the purest heart;" and with a clever contemporary authoress,\* that they grow most vigorously in the strongest mind.

I peeped into the sconce of a young man whose chief reading had been in Novels. He was fancying himself mounted upon a proud charger, bearing down whole squadrons in a field of battle. His imagination depicted glistening bayonets, waving banners, booming cannon-balls, smoke, dust and blood; through all of which he was borne unhurt and victorious, till the enemy were driven out of the field. The scene then changed to a splendid parlor, where sat his "Ladye-love:" at whose feet, of course, he laid his laurels. Scarcely had I time to see that she received them with a gracious smile, when his thoughts transferred him suddenly to a vast and gorgeous Legislative Hall, crowded with statesmen and fair ladies. This august and brilliant assembly he held enchained for hours, by a strain of eloquence such as had never been heard there before, even from Randolph, or Clay, or Ames.—Curious to know who it was that indulged in these sublime cogitations, yet not knowing where to look for information,—I chanced to aim my glass at a worthy Tailor in the same pew. He was thinking of his cabbage-drawer, and of a good-for-nothing journeyman who had left it open the day before, by which means a rogue of a servant had been enabled to steal a whole week's plunder. I found that this journeyman was the warrior and orator.

I also saw the thoughts of a novel-reading young lady. She fancied herself the wife of a great General. A splendid coach, with four white horses—an immense apartment, decked for a ball, at which she was the presiding deity—chairs and ottomans, covered with sky-blue satin—chandeliers of imperial magnificence—music, ravishing enough to "take the prison'd soul, And lapit in Elysium"—obsequious colonels, and proud, envying ladies—were the images pictured on her brain.

Not a few were mentally passing judgment upon the characters of their acquaintance: and some, took occasion to exhibit their estimate of human nature in general. The kindly tempered and upright, I found, invariably leaned towards the favorable side, in these judgments. On the other hand, I saw Dr. Johnson's indignant saying completely verified, that "He who accuses all men of Knavery, convicts at least one:" for in whatever brain I read willing sneers at the folly, or assurance of the wickedness, of any large portion of mankind, I discovered also a lurking wish to take advantage of that folly, or to league with that wickedness.

But far the most generally absorbing themes of untold thought were Love, Courtship, and Matrimony. I

\* Characteristics of Women—"Portia."



never, before, fully believed in the universality of Love's dominion. "The court, the camp, the grove," I knew he ruled: but the *Church* I had supposed to be exempt from his sway. He seemed aware, however, that the ground was holy; and trod it with a softness, purity, and reverence, becoming the Sanctuary. I confine my narrative to a few of the rarest forms in which the agency of this all-conquering passion appeared to me. It seemed, like Caligula, to delight in showing its power by the strangest, as well as the most cruel caprices. *Equals* were never mutually smitten, except where both were but ordinary in mind, person, or character. The beautiful were commonly enamored of the ugly; the dwarfish, of the tall; the clever, of the simple; the meek, of the turbulent and fierce. I saw not a single woman of uncommon talents, who (if she loved at all) did not love a weak man.—I read a plausible solution of this phenomenon that day, in the brain of a philosophic and speculative, though rather conceited fellow, whose addresses had that very morning been utterly repelled by a lady of confessedly fine intellect—an intellect, as he fancied, *nearly equal*, and of temper, tastes, and sentiments exactly congenial, to his own. "It is all owing to their love of sway:" said he, pettishly. "They think a husband of inferior mind will always be submissive, dutiful, and admiring; will always look to his wife for orders, and even for ideas. Now, apart from the hatefulness of this unnatural inversion, they do not reflect that 'the greater the fool, the more stubborn the mule.' Besides,—how can they expect their talents to be duly appreciated, except by men of talents? Then, how far nobler a gratification it is, to enjoy the love and admiration of an equal or a superior, than of a dolt!"—In one respect, the *penchant* for inequality seemed not to prevail. The rich were not often in love with the poor; and in some honorable instances, the poor could not be captivated by the rich.—I was a good deal touched by the case of a young lady, whose affections had been engaged by a swain now gone to make the tour of Europe. His father, being averse to their union, had taken this means to prevent it. With his son, the stratagem succeeded: he forgot his vows, amid the whirl of travel and the varying glare of novelty: and the forsaken girl was at this moment dwelling, with a hidden anguish that threatened her life, upon the news of his intended marriage to a foreign woman. Instead of the execrations his falsehood deserved, she invoked Heaven's forgiveness and blessings upon him!—I was next attracted by the chagrin of a plain-sailing fellow, who in boyhood had been so struck with Dr. Fothergill's counsel to a wooer—"my advice to thee, friend, is, to *court in thine every day clothes*"—that he resolved to follow both its letter and spirit: believing, that he should thus at once fulfil the dictate of honesty, in showing himself to the mistress as he must daily appear to the wife; and avert the disappointment and bitterness which he supposed too apt to result from a married pair's beholding each other free from the disguises of courtship. Accordingly, he waited upon the lady of his choice, not only in his shabby working clothes, but in his work-day manners: nay, in the exuberance of his honesty, he even put on ill manners that were unnatural to him. He was discarded, of course; and I traced these reflections in his perturbed brain: "Let no one hereafter say 'Honesty is the best

policy.' It has proved the worst, to me. Had I decked myself off in false colors,—practised airs and graces which Nature never gave me,—feigned a smooth, soft speech,—and assumed that courtous bearing which no *husband* long maintains,—my fate might have been very different. The boy in the story, who showed the bruised side of his melon, was a fool: and the author who made him succeed in spite of that folly, showed her ignorance of the world. No, no—honesty is *not* the best policy. As fraud is necessary to success in jockeyship, so are *disguises in courtship*."—He did not consider, that dress and manners being the usually received *signs of character*, it was natural that he should be judged by them. How could the lady know, that as he, while a lover, seemed far inferior to other lovers, he would not as a husband be proportionally inferior?—One of the most deeply smitten swains that I saw, was a reputed cynic—a perpetual sneerer at love and matrimony. Swift's "Receipt for Courtship" ("Two or three *dears*, and two or three *sweets*," &c.) had been always on his lips. But his time came at last: he was ensnared by the greatest coquette in the neighborhood; and I saw in his brain several very tolerable stanzas of an impassioned ode to her dimple.—A poor fellow not far off, was seriously thinking of suicide: and another was resolving to join the pending struggle in Texas, where, should he fall, he hoped "she" would hear of it, and pity him.

Some of the fair ones who caused all this trouble being present, I looked, to see how they were affected by the agonies of their lovers; not doubting, that compassion, sympathy, or perhaps even *gratitude* for such kind regards, would create at least a sort of involuntary return of affection. No such thing. In some, I perceived only a feeling of contempt or of hatred, towards their despairing swains: others sat, like Epicurean deities, wrapt in the serene light of Beauty, and absorbed in the contemplation of their own felicity; insensible alike to the prayers, the sufferings, and the sacrifices, of mortals. But though thus unkind or indifferent to those who were dying for them,—they, too, were not wholly exempt from the power of the universal conqueror. I might here disclose many curious discoveries I made; tending to throw much light on the obscure and interesting subject to which they relate. But it would be ungenerous—perhaps not honorable—to publish female weaknesses, which I learned only through female agency: the Sylph's confidence in me must not be violated: so I shall be silent.

Many other singular phenomena came under my notice; which I forbear mentioning, lest my readers be wearied with the length of my narration. At last my vision was terminated in a manner as whimsical as its commencement.

There was a surprising number of persons engaged in examining the elevations and depressions in the skulls of those around them, and thence inferring what qualities dwelt within. My glass enabled me to test the accuracy of these inferences. They were nearly as often right, as wrong: and in the former case, were generally aided by recourse to the countenance, or to the observer's previous knowledge of the observed. It is fair to confess, however, that I saw no case in which, when the bump-monger knew beforehand the existence of any particular quality, he failed to find a bump for



it. I was led hence to ponder upon the knack Philosophy has, of finding or making facts to confirm her theories, insomuch that every conceivable theory is sure to be amply supported by observation or experiment, or both; and was admiring the always happier adaptation of *artificial*, or *made* facts, than that of *præexisting* ones, to the purposes of Philosophy,—as a coat, made to order, fits better than one found ready made, in a slop-shop: when my Sylph fixed her keen gaze upon me, and reading my thoughts—“Ingrate!” said she, “are you disparaging my darling science?”—“How!” answered I: “No, fair Sylph, I was not thinking of it, at all. I appeal to the Great Searcher of Hearts”——“Searcher of *Heads*, sir, if you please. The heart is only a cellular muscle, with a congeries of veins and arteries, filled with nothing but blood.”—“I beg pardon, Madam—I appeal to the Great Searcher of *Heads*, that I was only making some general reflections about those people there, who seem to me to be cheating Physiognomy and History of their dues, by pretending to learn what *they* alone disclose, from the bumps on”——“Bumps!” roared the Sylph: “is it thus you nickname the developments of mind on the cranium? Is it thus you vilify the sublime science of PHRENOLOGY?”——“Phrenology, madam! Is *that* Phrenology? I thought Phrenology consisted in the use of this glass, aided by your wand and presence. Without such aid, I cannot believe that my good friends there can see the wonderful things which I have seen. What they are doing, should rather be called BUMP-OLO”——

Here the Sylph, in a rage, snatched the glass from my hand, waved her wand backwards, and vanished. Instantly, my vision was at an end. Skulls resumed their native thickness and opacity. I recollected my errand at church, and, with shame, my resolutions of attention; and listened closely to the remaining ‘Seventhly’ of the sermon.

When all the services were over, and the congregation dispersing, I met my pious and excellent friend, Mrs. B\*\*\*\*, in the church-entry. “Ah! Mr. T\*\*\*\*,” said she, “I begin to have hopes of you. I never beheld such unwinking attention as you paid to the sermon. Was it not in Mr. ——’s best style?”—I was not graceless enough to make any direct reply, or even to ask my friend how she had found time, from her own devotions, to watch mine: I could only make her a bow, and hurried away to my own room, in order to write down what I had seen, while it was fresh in my memory.

Whether the thoughts I had seemed so distinctly to read, were really passing in the minds of those who had been sitting before me,—or the Sylph’s wand and glass had created an illusion which cheated my sight,—I shall not take upon me to decide. I, however, do rather deem the former supposition the more probable, inasmuch as some of the persons in question, (who were of my acquaintance) are well known to entertain the opinions and sentiments which are here ascribed to them: and as the glass told the truth so far, methinks we are persuasively moved to credit its testimony altogether.

One other observation it is incumbent upon me to offer; and the reader may take it as that ingredient or appendage hereof, which no History, whether feigned, like some others, or veracious like this, should want;—namely, a