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Book Review of The Pickwick Papers

N. Beverley Tucker

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THE PICKWICK PAPERS.

Jules Dumas and other men vociferous abutitler.

It may be remembered that some few months ago, we presented to the public a critical notice of the Histories of Mr. Tulnimbule and Oliver Twist, by Boz, together with certain other tales and sketches by the hands of imitators, to whom the aforesaid Boz is "as a god." Wherein their style delighted us, wrote itself. In performing that dissertation, we could not disguise the loathing with which we approached the offensive subject, and thought ourselves fairly entitled to the thanks of the public for the performance of the unpleasant duty.

And here let us say a word to vindicate our craft from a common but unjust imputation. We are aware that many persons suppose that we have more pleasure in blaming than applauding, and that we indulge in a wayward spleen in seeking out subjects of critical censure. If this were so, it would indeed be a wayward taste, for it could only be indulged at our own expense. We must do violence to ourselves, either by repressing pathetically portrayed, the objects of our compassion; or, by blaming than applauding, and that we indulge in a when our soul is stung with resentment and disdain, our taste, for it could only be indulged at our own expense.

"The recollection of this passage has had the effect of increasing the power, which the miseries are thus pathetically portrayed, the objects of our compassion; but we owe it to ourselves to add, that it has made us more sensitive towards the unfortunate Mr. Dickens. Such it is the true name of our author; that of Boz having been assumed to suit the taste of his customers. Here again we are reminded of the nymphs of Covent Garden, metamorphosed from plain Sally or Jenny, into Clarinda, or Sylvie, or Myrtilla. In short, the parallel between the kept author and the prostitute of the other sex, runs on all fours; and a benevolent mind will seldom be frightened by the thought of either, in solitary wretchedness, mourning over the wreck of bated charms and bashed powers. But it is only in this situation that our indignant disgust can give place to kinder feelings. When the woman of the town presuming to join by her presence the pure atmosphere of female virtue; when she comes down from her proper place in the galleries, and flaunts her tardy finery in the front rows of the boxes—we are impatient to see her thrust out and punished. Now if, on such an occasion, the authority of the bundle should be denied, and his person assaulted with obscene missiles and obscene words by the rest of the frail sisterhood, it would present a case not altogether unlike our own. As soon as we learned that Mr. D. belong'd to the fraternity of kept authors, we saw that we must make the assault on the whole corps. It was of course, that all who live by the corrupt taste which we rebuked, should be as zealous in its defence, as the Ephesian craftsmen of old, when the honor of their goddess was assailed. The idol, at whose altar they minister, is not indeed the blush queen of the silver bow. A grinning Monas must certainly preside over the shrine, where such priests of
finite. But we forget that we had undertaken to explain how we came to give our attention to the Pickwick papers.

The same writer from whom we have already quoted, says: "It is rather late in the day to speak of the author of the Pickwick papers as 'a Merry Andrew and as a Jack Pudding to a drunken club,' and the reviewer should have read more than one or two detached tales, before pronouncing a condemnation so sweeping against a writer who, in his peculiar walk, has never been approached."

Another writer (or the same writer in another paper of the same city) writes thus: "The sweeping condemnation of the author of the Pickwick papers, shows, either that the editor had not read these delightful drolleries, or that he is lamentably insensible to the charms of humor. No man, we venture to pronounce, with a proper perception of the ludicrous, can read the volumes published under the title of the Pickwick papers, without appreciating the comic talent of the writer. Almost every page presents some try stroke of satire—some genuine touch of fun, at which the gratest may smile; and though there is necessarily a strain of exaggeration, for the purpose of heightening effect, the development of character, and the pictures of manners, show that the author is a close and careful observer. What, for example, can be better than the trial of Birk dol, Pickwick—what truer picture, slightly enlivened through his peculiar walk, has never been seen.

With, for example, can be better than the trial of Birk dol or Pickwick—what truer picture, slightly enlivened through his peculiar walk, has never been seen. Hence it is, that if the city where he has established his purpose to be proud of himself as having given undue pleasure to a work which we, professedly, had placed among the standard literature of the language, and, that we might correct it, and has seized on that afforded by the publication of two tales, put forward in such a way as to show that they were read of the author's works but the two tales under review, and that we did not hesitate to affirm that we might have done so, and we freely admit that we meant to do it. That we did not, was not for want of our own good will, but because of a blunder of our compositor. To correct this error, and to show what we did mean, we re-publish two paragraphs of our former article, and with them two others which were omitted, as we have said, by oversight of the compositor. The reader will see that the two latter are necessary to the sense and effect of the former; and we hardly doubt that, if the compositor had really read the article, they would have dealt us a deadly blow through this gap in our armor.

We would not willingly have our veracity suspected, and we cannot venture to vindicate it by giving extracts at once extravagant and dull, preposterous yet ludicrous. We feel therefore that it becomes us to apologize for the given frivolities of the Review, and he can hardly doubt that, if the compositor had really read the article, they would have dealt us a deadly blow through this gap in our armor.

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The Pickwickians.

The first toy of light which illumines the gloom, and converts into a dazzling brilliancy that obscurity in which the earlier history of the public career of the immortal Pickwick would appear to be involved, is derived from the perusal of the following entry in the Transactions of the Pickwick Club, which the editor of these papers feels the highest pleasure in laying before his readers, on a proof of the careful attention, indefatigable industry, and nice discrimination, with which his search among the multitudinous documents committed to his hands has been conducted.


"That this Association has heart heart, with feelings of mingled satisfaction, and unqualified approbation, the paper communicated by Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G. C. M. P. C., entitled "Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with some observations on the Theory of Titchmarsh," that this Association hereby returns its warmest thanks to the said Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G. C. M. P. C. for the same.

"That while this Association in deep sincerity of the advantages which must accrue to the cause of science, from the production to which they have just adverted, notice them from the unwarranted researches of Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G. C. M. P. C. in Horncastle, Highgate, Finsbury, and Camberwell; they cannot but extend a lively sense of the beneficial benefit which must inevitably result from carrying the speculations of that learned man into a wider field, from extending his travels, and consequently engaging his powers of observation, to the advancement of knowledge, and the diffusion of learning.

"That with the view, first mentioned, this Association has taken into its serious consideration a proposal, emanating from the aforementioned Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G. C. M. P. C. and three other Pickwickians, hereunder named, for forming a new branch of United Pickwickians, under the title of The Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club.

"That said proposal has received the sanction and approval of this Association.

"That the Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club, is therefore hereby constituted; and that Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G. C. M. P. C., Tracy Tupman, Esq., M. P. C., and Augustus Snobgrass, Esq., M. P. C., and Nathaniel Winkle, Esq., M. P. C., are hereby nominated and appointed in the said capacity; and that they be requested to forward, from time to time, authentic accounts of their journeys and investigations; of their observations; and of the advice, together with all tales and papers, to which local society or associations may give rise, to the Pickwick Club, stationed in London.

Now the reader is to understand that this Samuel Pickwick, G. C. M. P. C., is a wealthy elderly gentleman, of great benevolence, modesty, candour, liberality, and good sense. This, it must be observed, is not said ironically, but in sober seriousness; and one among the many reproaches cast against us by his admirers is, that we want that soundness which should enable us to appreciate and sympathize with the "amiable Pickwick."

The first instance that we have of the good sense and amiable qualities of this modest gentleman, is found in a vain-glory speech which he makes on the adoption of the foregoing resolutions, and a bullying scene that follows, in which he offers wantons insult to a fellow member, provokes a retort, demands an apology, and accepts of one which is but a repetition of the affront.

Now we presume we shall be told, that in this there is a design to show up certain disgraceful scenes which sometimes occur in graver deliberative bodies. To this we have no objection; but we cannot award any high praise to a writer, who, when he wishes to expose any particular folly, fails to provide himself with a proper character for the purpose. He certainly cannot be said to draw from nature, who charges all sorts of follies on all sorts of persons, and in giving vent to any idea that comes into his head, cares not through what mouth he utters it. We took notice that one of the apologists of Boz and censors of ourselves, has taken occasion to say that Boz could have written Tristram Shandy, but that Sterne could not have written this work. We verify below this last. We do not think that Sterne could have made uncle Toby play the bally and braggart.

To illustrate what we mean by this, take the following, in addition to the Parliamentary scene, which is too long for insertion. We are at a Christmas frolic, and the company are just assembled.

"You mean to dance?" said Walpole.

"Of course I do," replied Mr. Pickwick. "Don't you see I am dressed for the purpose?" and Mr. Pickwick called attention to his spangled silk stockings, and neatly tied pumps.

"You in silk stockings!" exclaimed Mr. Tupman facetiously.

"And why not, sir,—why not?" said Mr. Pickwick, turning warmly upon blue.

"Oh, of course there is no reason why you shouldn't wear them," responded Mr. Tupman.

"I imagine not, sir,—I imagine not," said Mr. Pickwick, in a very peremptory tone.
Mr. Tupman had contemplated a laugh, but he found it was a serious matter; so he looked grave, and said they were a pretty pretty pattern.

"I hope they are," said Mr. Pickwick, fixing his eyes upon his friend. "You see nothing extraordinary in these stockings, or stockings, I trust, sir?"

"Certainly not—ah, certainly not," replied Mr. Tupman. He walked away; and Mr. Pickwick's countenance resumed its customary benign expression.

Now Mr. Tupman is the most inoffensive of beings, and Mr. Pickwick's particular friend and colleague. Again, see his conduct to his other particular friend and colleague, the harmless, unassuming Winkle, who has presumed to say he could shoot, and had got a full in the attempt.

"Are you here?" inquired Mr. Benjamin Allen, with great anxiety.

"So much," said Mr. Winkle, rubbing his back very hard.

"I wish you'd let me bless you," said Mr. Benjamin with great respect.

"No, thank you," replied Mr. Winkle heartily.

"I really think you had better," said Allen.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Winkle; "I'll rather not."

"What do you think, Mr. Pickwick?" inquired Bob Sawyer. Mr. Pickwick was excited and indignant. He beckoned to Mr. Weller, and said in a stern voice, "Take his shotgun off." "No; but really I had scarcely begun," remonstrated Mr. Winkle.

"Take his shotgun off," repeated Mr. Pickwick firmly.

The command was not to be resisted. Mr. Winkle allowed Sam to obey it in silence.

"Lift him up," said Mr. Pickwick. Sam assisted him to rise. Mr. Pickwick retired a few paces apart from the bystanders; and, beckoning his friend to approach, fixed a searching look upon him, and uttered in a low but distinct and emphatic tone, these remarkable words:

"You're a hambler, sir."

"A what!" said Mr. Winkle, starting.

"A hambler, sir. I'll speak plainer, if you wish it. An importun, sir."

With these words, Mr. Pickwick turned slowly on his heel, and rejoined his friends.

Now these boshes are stuck on upon a character of great benevolence, and of much active benevolence. Why this is done, the reader must conjecture. Not, surely, because it is in nature.

So much for the amiable part of Mr. Pickwick's character. As to his intelligence, the reader is prepared, by the introductory passage which we have inserted, to understand all that is said about him as ironical. Yet the writer is perfectly in earnest. Mr. Pickwick is not only represented as making himself universally acceptable to men of sense, but he is frequently made to say things that none but a man of sense—of good and right sense—could say. Yet he often utters them under circumstances in which a man of sense would have been silent, and they are accompanied with all sorts of absurdities of action, and diversified by all sorts of absurdities in speech and writing. Take the following peg into his note book on the subject of the 'Towns of Stroud, Rochester, Bexley, and Chatham.'

"The principal productions of these towns," says Mr. Pickwick, "appear to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, officers, and duck-yard men. The commodities chiefly exposed for sale in the public streets, are, marine stores, hard-bake, apples, flax-fish and oysters. The streets present a lively and animated appearance, occasioned chiefly by the curiosity of the military. It is truly delightful to a philosophic mind, to see these gallant men, staggering along under the influence of an overflow, both of animal and ardent spirits; more especially when we remember that the following is about, and jesting with them, afforded a cheap and innocent amusement for the very population of the town. Nothing (save Mr. Pickwick) can exceed their good humor. It was but the day before my arrival, that one of them had been most grossly insulted in the house of a publican. This bar-oval had positively refused to draw him any more bitter; in return for which, he had (nearly in playfulness) drawn his bayonet, and wounded the girl in the shoulders. And yet this fine fellow was the very first to go down to the house next morning, and express his readiness to overlook the matter, and forget what had occurred!"

Now such enormities as are here spoken of, ought to be held up to abhorrence, and they who pallitate them should be treated with scorn and derision. But had the writer no better way of doing these things, than to make his sensible and benevolent hero an absurd and brutal fool? We may perhaps be told, in vindication of these absurdities, of the good sense and madness of Don Quixote. But Mr. P. is no madman. He does not even set his absurdities under the influence of any fixed idea. He is merely a man of plain good sense, and a gentleman, who is made to play the fool and the blackguard whenever it suits the coarse humor of the author to use him in these characters.

We cannot go so far as length into the analysis of this very natural character, the preposterous incongruity of which is exhibited in every page. To such a creature of the imagination, we find ourselves incapable of assigning any identity. Could we individualize him as a sensible gentleman, we should be continually disgusted with the instances of his egotism, insolence and folly. Could we set him before us distinctly as a brute and blockhead, we should find ourselves often asking how he comes by the sentiments of a gentleman and man of the world. As it is, he is a "marty martyr queer hotchpotch of inconsistent qualities, the life of which the Kingdom of Cockaigne itself (that vast menagerie of all the varieties of the human animal) cannot exhibit."

Of Mr. Pickwick's colleagues and companions, Mr. Tupman is an amiable old bachelor, very intent on marriage. Why he is not married is the puzzle, for he is quite as agreeable gentleman, and ready to marry any one who will have him. We presume this character is impertinent to him, in order to give zest to the most absurd love story that we remember ever to have read. But in this, as in everything else in these volumes, there is no exhibition of character except the extremes of unimaginable knavery and folly, illustrated by impossible incidents.

Mr. Snodgrass is a romantic gentleman and a poet; but why we are told this or anything else of his character, we are at a loss to conjecture, as Mr. S. comes up exactly to Farquhar's idea of a man who "says little, thinks less, and does—nothing at all." As we see no particular reason why this should be predicated of a poet, rather than of any body else, we cannot discover that Mr. Snodgrass's function in this work is any other than to be the recipient of one of those enphatic names, in which so much of Pickwickian wit consists.

We say "so much," because this is not the only source. There is nothing from which Mr. Dickens draws so largely as the ludicrous of situation. "This is one of the same nature with that practical wit commonly called horse-play, which consists in the dexterous removal
of a gentleman's chair as he is in the act of sitting down, and such like feats. If Mr. Dickens can exhibit a character with his heels in the air, he laughs and chuckles, and runs his hands, and thinks he has achieved a great chapter. Now Mr. Winkle, the third of Mr. Pickwick's colleagues, is the chosen subject for this sort of inactivity. He is in a fool, and of all imagi-
nable faults the most singular. He is put upon a full horse, and made to dismount that he may not be able to get up again. He is provided with a gun to shoot his friend Tupman by accident; (a capital joke!) He is set on rails to be laid sprawling on the ice. He is represented as the greatest coward in the world, and is made to go through the motions of a duel, and is on the point of being shot, because, having shut his eyes in very fear, he cannot perceive that the challenger in a man he had never seen. His adversity however, discover-
eys himself, and so poor Mr. Winkle comes with his life.

So much for the Pickwickians proper; the principal subjects of the work, through which these characters are kept on the stage without uttering one word of wit or sense, or even of absurdity. The only trait of character in any one of them (except Mr. Winkle's cowardice,) is the following, which, for the sake of nim-
der sitting up, the gentleman at least is not so far as to make much of the matter. The number of instances, recorded in the Transactions of the Society, in which that excellent man referred objects of charity to the houses of other mendicants, left-off garments, or pecuniary relief, is almost incredible. The country was scarcely completed when they

Of the adventures of these worthies, no abstract can be given, because they are made up of a succession of blunders and escapades, of which the following may be taken as a specimen. We select it because it is short, and because it is the first of them. Mr. Pickwick has just issued from his lodgings, and proceeding to a stand, calls for a cab.

"Cab!" said Mr. Pickwick.

"Here you are, sir," shouted a strange specimen of the human race, in a stockhill coat, and apron of the same, who, with a bench label and number round his neck, looked as if he were not among the collection of villains. This was the cabman.

"Here you are, sir. Now, then, fast cab!" and the first cab having been fetched from the public houses, where he had been smoking his first pipe, Mr. Pickwick and his party were drawn into the vehicle.

"Golden Cross," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Only a Bob's worth, Tommy," cried the driver, volubly, for the information of his friend the waterman, as the cab drove off.

"How old is that horse, my friend," inquired Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his nose with the shilling he had reserved for the fare.

"Forty-two," replied the driver, eyeing him askant.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, laying his hand upon his note-book. This driver returned his former statement. Mr. Pickwick looked very hand at the man's face, but his features were immovable, so he noted down the fact fortuitously.

"And how long do you keep him out at a time?" asked Mr. Pickwick, searching for further information.

"Two or three weeks," replied the man.

"Weeks?" asked Mr. Pickwick in astonishment—and out came the note-book again.

"He lived at Pleasant Hill when he's at home," observed the driver, coolly; "but we seldom take him home, on account of his vanities."

"On account of his vanities?" reiterated the perplexed Mr. Pickwick.

"He always falls down, when he's out o' the cab," confided the driver, "but when he's in it, we bear him up very nicely, and takes him in very short, so as he can't carry full down, and we've got a pair o' peculiar large wheels on; so when he doesn't move, they run after him, and he must go on; he can't help it."

Mr. Pickwick entered every word of this statement in his note-book, with the view of communicating it to the club, as a singular instance of the treachery of his enemies, under trying circumstances. The entry was entirely completed when they reached the Golden Cross. Down jumped the driver, and out came Mr. Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and Mr. Winkle, who had been anxiously waiting the arrival of their illustrious leader, crowded so welcome him.

"Here's your fare," said Mr. Pickwick, holding out the shil-
Ing to the driver.

What was the armed man's astonishment, when that unac-
countable person threw the money on the pavement, and re-
called in figurative terms to be allowed the pleasure of light-
ing him (Mr. Pickwick,) for the amount?

"You are mad," said Mr. Snodgrass.

"Or drunk," said Mr. Winkle.

"Or both," said Mr. Tupman.

"Come on," said the cabdriver, spurring away like clock-
work. "Come on, all four on you."

"Here's a half dozen haycock carters.

"Go to work, Sam," and they crowded with great glee round the posty.

"What's the row, Sam?" inquired one gentleman in black calico sleeves.

"How!" replied the cabman; "what did you want my num-
ber for?"

"I didn't want your number," said the astonished Mr. Pick-
wick.

"What did you take it for, then?" inquired the cabman.

"I didn't take it," said Mr. Pickwick, indignantly.

"Would any body believe," continued the cabman, ap-
pelling to the creature; "would any body believe a man go about in a man's cab, not only taking his number, but every word he says into the bargain, (a right dashing upon me, Mr. Pickwick)—a man who"

"Did he, though?" inquired another cabman.

"Yes he did," replied the first; "and then after半个小时 to assault him, gets three witnesses here to prove it. But I'll give him, if I've six months for it. Come on," and the cabman dashed his hat upon the ground, with a rattick disregard of his own private property, and knocked Mr. Pickwick's spectacles off, and followed up the attack with a blow on Mr. Pickwick's nose, and another on Mr. Pickwick's chin, and a third in Mr. Snodgrass's eye, and a fourth, by way of variety, in Mr. Tup-
man's waistcoat, and then danced into the road, and then stuck again to the pavement, and finally dashed the whole temporary supply of breath out of Mr. Winkle's body, and all in half a dozen seconds.

"Where's an officer," said Mr. Snodgrass.

"Put you under a pump," suggested a hot plasma.

"You shall smart for this," cried Mr. Pickwick.

"Informers," shouted the crowd.

"Come on," cried the cabman, who had been sparring without ceasing the whole time.

The look had hitherto been passive spectators of the scene, but as the intelligent of the Pickwickians being informers was spread among them, they began to canvass with considerable vivacity the property of enforcing the heated partisans pretensions; and there is no saying what sets of personal aggression they might have committed, had not the affray been unexpectedly terminated by the interposition of a new com-

"What's the row, sir?" asked a rather tall young man, in a green coat, coming hastily from the coach-yard.

"Informers," shouted the crowd.

"We are not," roared Mr. Pickwick, in a voice which, to any unacquainted listener, carried conviction in a division with it.

"Ain't you though, sir?" asked the young man appealing to Mr. Pickwick, and nothing his way through the crowd, by the irresistible process of showing the consequences of his component members.
My father, sir, was a coachman. A washer you was, and fat enough for any thing—uncommon fat, to be said. His mistress dies, and leaves him four hundred pound. Down he goes to the Commons, to see the lawyer, and draw the blues—worrying—smart—top boots on—monkey in his button-hole—breath brounchisible—green aliases—quite the gent. Goes through the archway, thinking how he should raise the money; up comes the tooter, touches his hat. License, sir, license? What's that? says my father. License, sir, says he. What license? says my father. Marriage license, says the tooter. Dashed my vessel, says my father. I never thought of that! I think you want one, sir, says the tooter. My father pulls up, and thinks a bit. "No," says he, "I don't, thank you. I'm a many sizes too large." Not a bit on it, sir, says the lawyer. Mr. Pickwick, says he, my master, has Savage, says my father. Mr. Pickwick, says the lawyer, is a mule, my master, has Savage. He knows nothing about parliaments, he is drawn from the life, for if so, then something yet unaccounted for, remains of the individual is quite incongruous to the part he is introduced, and sometimes unfortunately the picture of the individual is quite incongruous to the part he is intended to set. But many are mentioned but to be de-

The learned man, in a few hurried words, explained the real state of the case.

"Come along then," said he of the green coat, lugging Mr. Pickwick and his company along the whole way.

"Here, No. 91, take your fare, and take yourself off—repectable gentleman—know him well—wise of your own business—this way, to where your friend—he makes mistakes. I know no more mind accidents will happen in best regulated families—never may sit down upon your lock—pull him up—put that in his pipe—like the flamer—great read—a lady's arm, says the lawyer. My father was struck all of a sudden, and seemed to receive the monstrosities of absurdities from beneath each side of his old pinched up hat; and glimpses of his bare wrist might be observed between the tops of his gloves, and the cuff of his coat sleeves. His face was thin and haggard, but an indescribable air of jaunty impudence and perfect self-possession pervaded the whole man.

Now, how the vagabond here described, and who appears to be a stranger to the cabin, should have such sort of a place here, I am at a loss to conjecture. The reader will be yet more puzzled, whatever after reading what follows, he is told that this chattering biped not only passes with Messrs. Pickwick & Co. for a gentleman, but that a great part of the story is made up of his successful attempts to introduce himself, rag, and dirt, and all, into good society, in that character.

The only characters of any pith in the whole book, are Sam Weller and his father. The former is Mr. Pickwick's servant, the latter a mail-coach man. Sam is a knowing, knowing coxcomb, whose dialect sets off his queer sayings. He is really amusing in his way, and his more sense and more humor than all the rest put together. He figures chiefly in the second volume, and we cheerfully adjoin that that volume, as containing the record of his sayings and doings, is worth the money that it sells for. His father too is amusing in his way, and quite sagacious. But a queer story is to be told, and it happens to be convenient to lay it on him, and so he is made to go quite out of his character, and act the part of a machine. The story is told by Sam, in his best way, and we give it as illustrating his peculiar manner, and displaying the monstrous absurdities of the author.
"Delightful situations, this," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Delightful!" echoed Mr. Newmarch, "and the hard-headed man with the pippin fair; "there ain't, indeed, "one more," said the hard-headed man, "and the hard-headed man looked triumphant round, as if he had been very much contradicted by somebody, but had got the better of him at last.

Again—

Another game, with a similar result, was followed by a revote from the unlucky Miller; on which the 1st principals burnt into a state of high personal excitement which lasted until the conclusion of the game, when he retired into a corner, and remained perfectly mute for some ten minutes; at the end of which time, he emerged from his retreat, and offered Mr. Pickwick a pinch of snuff with the air of a man who has made up his mind to a Christian forgiveness of injuries sustained. The old lady hearing decidedly improved, and the unlucky Miller felt as much out of his element, as a dolphin in a rarity-box.

We agree with our friend Mr. Noah, that the author of this work is a writer of considerable power. In many tales which are dispersed through it, he displays this power in a very high degree. There is a moral horror in some of them of which none but a master is capable. We have no great taste for that sort of thing, and, whatever others may think, we should infinitely more delight in fun and merriment. But we are not of the number of those who believe that this effect can be heightened by exaggeration, or that any picture is the better for being overcharged. He who shoots above the mark may miss it so far as he falls below. The skill reu nea tougher is what we require from him who claims pre-eminence as a painter. This skill we must deny to Mr. Dickens, and we maintain that the great body of this work is made up of grimace and absurd caricature, and impossible incidents happening to beings that have no existence in nature.

But while we say this, we repeat that we have no quarrel with Mr. D., and admit that he has considerable powers. Our quarrel is not with him, but with (he must excuse the word) his keepers. It is his misfortune to possess a talent, the abuse of which renders him accountable to that class of readers by whom meretricious arts are preferred to modest grace. This is therefore his public. By this he is debauched and corrupted, and to this he prostitutes himself. We pity him, and we would, if it were possible, shame them. The more we admire him, the more we pity his degradation and reproach its authors, who, like the Philitenses in the temple, insult with their boisterous applause the gigantic powers tasked to make them sport.

The increase of works of this kind, marks the increasing importance of that class of readers which patronizes it. It is a symptom of that illusory and discontented prosperity, which, by multiplying the symbols of wealth, introduced among the patrician multitudes of the lower orders, it has produced, without taste, without education, and consequently prone to low amusements and degrading indulgences. When the prices of a book can be readily spared from the wagons of a journeyman tailor, or a merchant’s clerk, it is to be expected that books will be written expressly to please them, and the great number of such readers in the great spots of publication, will render their favorite authors the favorites of publishers.

The prevalence of this proponent taste curiously illustrates the nature of the empire of fashion. For, after all, fashion, like the press, has no authority of itself, but is only an instrument in the hands of those who wield it for their purpose. We are old enough to remember the change which took place in the fashions of dress in the latter part of the last century. It was but a fruit of the simultaneous political revolutions of that day. Up to that time the voluminous folds of rich brocade stiffened with gold, which enveloped the persons of the wealthy and high-born, served as a barrier to keep at a distance from the saloons of fashion, all those who were less endowed by the gods of fortune. None but the wealthy could afford to make themselves fit to be seen in those scenes which had determined to appropriate to itself.

When the day of Liberty and Equality arrived, a reaction in fashion took place exactly suited to the occasion. In its first revolution it went to the extreme of simplicity, and nothing but the invincible delicacy of nature could have prevented its extension. As it was, they came so near it, that our mistresses would blush to tell their daughters of the fashions of their youth. But the genius of that age of revolution had seized the scepter of fashion, and would suffer no expense in dress in which the daughter of the mechanic might vie with the daughter of the nabob. In short, in that day a lady might dress, for ten dollars, as well as fashion permitted any lady to dress.

Progressively a change of an opposite character has taken place. Dress is now hardly less expensive than before the French Revolution. But the change is not in the material, but in the fabric and the quantity consumed. The manufacturing interest is now lord of the ascendant; and they who now wield the scepter of fashion are clearly that return to the style of the year 1800, would be followed by the bitter ruin of all the workers of silk and cotton throughout the world.

Here is matter for curious and interesting speculation; and, pursuing the ideas suggested by it, the ingenious investigator of the connexion between causes and consequences, may be led to suspect some such relation between the influence of the “Trade’s Union,” and the prevalent corruption in the taste for light literature.

We learn, indeed, from the English papers, that the popularity of our author, in his own country, is not confined to the classes to which we have spoken. It seems that persons of rank and fortune delight to form themselves into Pickwick clubs, to wear the Pickwick button, and to be known by Pickwick designations. But it is nothing new to us that, in a government of orders, there must be a great vulgar as well as a little vulgar. It was a saying of Christiana, Queen of Sweden, the daughter of the great Gustavus, that “when noblemen and gentlemen turn coachmen and cooks, they do but correct the mistake of fortune, and show what nature intended them for.” The popularity of Mr. P. does not extend beyond the limits of his works, and long since shown, that the Tom and Jerry school includes many of the minions of fortune, but it does not show the merit either of his writings or their admirers.

All that they can do is to lend their gold to gold..."
the triumph of grinnings, obscenity, and buffonery, over taste, and wit, and sense and decency.

But is this sort of literary anormalia, to have the effect of reversing the laws of taste, and repealing the canons of criticism? Are we in this, as in everything else, to bow to the decision of the nausea publius? And will it not be true in the end as it was in the beginning, (whatever revolutions may take place in the Republic of Letters) that the candidate for literary immortality should take as his maxim, *satis est nulli quidem plantare?* We trust so. We know that the appeal to posterity is always derived. From the nature of the case it must be so, and most especially when the taste of the age is deprived by any cause, and when he who writes to please it, is like to outrage his own reputation. But the hope to be remembered by posterity, to "blend our voices with the future visions" of those in whose veins our blood shall flow, and to embalm in memory the language of our country, is one too dear to be relinquished for the ephemera of an hour. Necessity may constrain the choice, but the generous spirit of true genius will submit with reluctance, will curse its patrons in bitterness of heart, and sighing, say "my poverty, but not my will consents."

It is our confidence in the correctness of these ideas that emboldens us to defy the authority of that which calls itself the public. We know that the periodical press relieved for the most part on the support of the very class of readers of which we have been speaking, and must be expected to take the part of a writer who is a favorite with its patrons. We are, therefore, not surprised to find laudatory notices of the writings of Boz prefixed to this publication, from the Examiner, the Morning Chronicle, the John Bull, the Tyrole Mercury, &c. &c.. But we must be allowed to say, that such notices from the Edinburgh or Quarterly Review would have surprised us. With these mostlerly critics we do not presume to rank ourselves; but we hope our ambition may be allowed to seek its honor from the same hands that delight to crown their labors with approbation; and we are satisfied to find our censure ratified by their silence. We would that we too could relaxe by silence. We should have escaped an unpleasant task.

Among those who aver their opposition to our views in regard to this kind of writing, we are sorry and surprised to find Mr. Noah. We were sorry because we hold his taste in high respect, and surprised because we had expected his approbation of our attempt to repel a lawless invasion of his peculiar province. Were we insensible to the polished wit and vary humor of this gentleman, we might be less indignant at the attempt to palm on the public the coarse counterfeits which we condemn. If he thinks that we have no taste for fun, we can hardly expect to find favor in his eyes. We beg leave to assure him that we enjoy a laugh as much as any one we know. But we cannot laugh at the word of command, and we cannot keep our visible faculties on the stretch through six or seven hundred pages of grinning buffonery. It is the same thing with the public, and with all the modes and forms of eloquence. Let the wit or the orator blow a trumpet before him, and proclaim his purpose to make us laugh or cry, and straightway our muscles assume an inexorable rigidity, and the fountain of our tears dries up.

But a ray of wit that lightens on a sordid subject; a flash of mirth that smiles through tears; or a tear, that flows unbidden from eyes that seem unmoored to shed them, command all our sympathy. The charm is in the audacity and the contrast. We can even dispense with the former, and bear to see a solemn cocozumbo shown up at some length. But *tangus pardeis; tangus pardeis* will never do.

We doubt not that these ideas are not new to Mr. Noah. We are sure he approves them, and are willing to abide his judgment of our censures, not of Mr. Dickens, but of Boz—not of the author, but the school. We have no great cities on this side of the Potomac, and therefore no males, civil or literary. Our slaves are not recognized as members either of the body politic, or the Republic of Letters. We stand on our defence against imported innovations. We fight pro oris et pactis, and if Mr. Noah does not approve our endeavor to repel all foreign invasions of our rights of property or taste, we are willing to stand condemned.

If Mr. Paulding could be expected to speak, we would propose another test. We have the highest respect for that gentleman. His liberality, candor and manly sense, are worthy of all praise, and his is that inoffensive mirth which

> *Gaze the widow's heart to ring*.

> *That the tear were in her eye.*

Now if he would answer *ex animo*, whether he is not conscious that the distempered appetite of his public has driven him into extravagancies which did violence to his own taste and judgment; and whether, in thinking of his reputation as the inheritance of his children, he does not look on these things with regret, we have no doubt that in that answer we should find our full vindication.

We are aware that we have no right to ask this question, and no reason to expect an answer. We are aware that the question itself implies a censure. But we beg leave to assure him it is very slight. We have no thought of placing his works in the same category with those of Mr. Dickens. The gentlemanly non de guerre of Lausenot Langstoff, Esq., and the vulgar designation of Boz, will express the difference between them.

But we expect that we expect no answer from him, and again refer ourselves to the arbitration of Mr. Noah. If he condemns we will stand condemned, and we will consent to abdicate our throne of criticism, and burn our sceptre. His be the fiat. *Necis abestur: Judex mundator!*