

THE SAIL.

A CLOUDLESS sky, a sun that brightly shone
 On rippling waves, a wind that swiftly bore
 As on some seabird's pinions we had flown,
 Our little vessel from the sandy shore,
 So quietly, that as we sailed before
 The wind, all motionless we seemed to be,
 As if with outstretched wing we hovered o'er
 The water, like high sailing hawk we see
 So poised, we know not if the clouds do move, or he.

So glided from our view the rapid scene
 Of sandy beach, of scattered town and hill,
 With many a barren spot or pleasant green,
 Where one might lie and dream, and rocks so still
 And lonely, that their presence seemed to fill
 The air with knowledge, that they there did lie,
 Sleeping in such repose, it seemed, that till
 That moment they had never felt the eye
 So full upon them look of the allseeing sky.

Now whether from the rocks and hills and sea,
 Their spirit were concentrated in our own,
 Or ours diffused o'er all things seemed to be
 Their spirit breathing with a deeper tone,
 Reflecting back the light that on them shone;
 Or if in closest sympathy there dwelt
 One soul pervading all, may not be known;
 But as these scenes into our souls did melt,
 We seemed like silent rocks, and they like things that felt.

Our winged vessel parted the still sea,
 And we fled onwards still in central space,
 And there was certain heaven wherever we
 Were running Time-like our unmoving race;
 And those dim sails which unstrained eyes could trace
 Around the horizon's edge, seemed not so blest
 As ours, which, by the universal grace,
 Had privilege at the heart of heaven to rest;
 For so those circling ships and clouds and sun confessed.

THE COMIC.

It is a nail of pain and pleasure, said Plato, which fastens the body to the mind. The way of life is a line between the regions of tragedy and comedy. I find few books so entertaining as the wistful human history written out in the faces of any collection of men at church or court-house. The silent assembly thus talks very loud. The sailor carries on his face the tan of tropic suns, and the record of rough weather; the old farmer testifies of stone walls, rough woodlots, the meadows and the new barn. The doctor's head is a fragrant gallipot of virtues. The carpenter still measures feet and inches with his eye, and the licensed landlord mixes liquors in motionless pantomime. What good bargains glimmer on the merchant's aspect. And if beauty, softness, and faith, in female forms, have their own influence, vices even, in slight degree, are thought to improve the expression. Malice and scorn add to beauty. You shall see eyes set too near, and limited faces, faces of one marked and invariable character. How the busy fancy inquires into their biography and relations! They pique, but must tire. Compared with universal faces, countenances of a general human type, which pique less, they look less safe. In such groups the observer does not think of heroes and sages. In the silentest meeting, the eye reads the plain prose of life, timidity, caution, appetite, ignorance, old houses, musty savors, stationary, retrograde faculties pattering round (to use the country phrase) in paltry routines from January to December.

These are the precincts of comedy and farce. And a taste for fun is all but universal in our species, which is the only joker in nature. The rocks, the plants, the beasts, the birds, neither do anything ridiculous, nor betray a perception of anything absurd done in their presence. And as the lower nature does not jest, neither does the highest. The Reason pronounces its omniscient yea and nay, but meddles never with degrees or fractions, and it is in comparing fractions with essential integers or wholes, that laughter begins.

Aristotle's definition of the ridiculous is, "what is out