

## WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

WE sometimes meet in a stage coach in New England an erect muscular man, with fresh complexion and a smooth hat, whose nervous speech instantly betrays the English traveller;— a man nowise cautious to conceal his name or that of his native country, or his very slight esteem for the persons and the country that surround him. When Mr. Bull rides in an American coach, he speaks quick and strong, he is very ready to confess his ignorance of everything about him, persons, manners, customs, politics, geography. He wonders that the Americans should build with wood, whilst all this stone is lying in the roadside, and is astonished to learn that a wooden house may last a hundred years; nor will he remember the fact as many minutes after it has been told him; he wonders they do not make elder-wine and cherry-bounce, since here are cherries, and every mile is crammed with elder bushes. He has never seen a good horse in America, nor a good coach, nor a good inn. Here is very good earth and water, and plenty of them,—that he is free to allow,— to all others gifts of nature or man, his eyes are sealed by the inexorable demand for the precise conveniences to which he is accustomed in England. Add to this proud blindness the better quality of great downrightness in speaking the truth, and the love of fair play, on all occasions, and, moreover, the peculiarity which is alleged of the Englishman, that his virtues do not come out until he quarrels. Transfer these traits to a very elegant and accomplished mind, and we shall have no bad picture of Walter Savage Landor, who may stand as a favorable impersonation of the genius of his countrymen at the present day. A sharp dogmatic man with a great deal of knowledge, a great deal of worth, and a great deal of pride, with a profound contempt for all that he does not understand, a master of all elegant learning and capable of the utmost delicacy of sentiment, and yet prone to indulge a sort of ostentation of coarse imagery and language. His partialities and dislikes are by no means calculable, but are often whimsical and amusing; yet they are quite sincere, and, like those of Johnson and Coleridge, are easily separable from the man.

What he says of Wordsworth, is true of himself, that he delights to throw a clod of dirt on the table, and cry, "Gentlemen, there is a better man than all of you." Bolivar, Mina, and General Jackson will never be greater soldiers than Napoleon and Alexander, let Mr. Landor think as he will; nor will he persuade us to burn Plato and Xenophon, out of our admiration of Bishop Patrick, or "Lucas on Happiness," or "Lucas on Holiness," or even Barrow's Sermons. Yet a man may love a paradox, without losing either his wit or his honesty. A less pardonable eccentricity is the cold and gratuitous obtrusion of licentious images, not so much the suggestion of merriment as of bitterness. Montaigne assigns as a reason for his license of speech, that he is tired of seeing his Essays on the work-tables of ladies, and he is determined they shall for the future put them out of sight. In Mr. Landor's coarseness there is a certain air of defiance; and the rude word seems sometimes to arise from a disgust at niceness and over-refinement. Before a well-dressed company he plunges his fingers in a sess-pool, as if to expose the whiteness of his hands and the jewels of his ring. Afterward, he washes them in water, he washes them in wine; but you are never secure from his freaks. A sort of Earl Peterborough in literature, his eccentricity is too decided not to have diminished his greatness. He has capital enough to have furnished the brain of fifty stock authors, yet has written no good book.

But we have spoken all our discontent. Possibly his writings are open to harsher censure; but we love the man from sympathy, as well as for reasons to be assigned; and have no wish, if we were able, to put an argument in the mouth of his critics. Now for twenty years we have still found the "Imaginary Conversations" a sure resource in solitude, and it seems to us as original in its form as in its matter. Nay, when we remember his rich and ample page, wherein we are always sure to find free and sustained thought, a keen and precise understanding, an affluent and ready memory familiar with all chosen books, an industrious observation in every department of life, an experience to which nothing has occurred in vain, honor for every just and generous sentiment, and a scourge like that of the Furies for every oppressor, whether public or private, we

feel how dignified is this perpetual Censor in his curule chair, and we wish to thank a benefactor of the reading world.

Mr. Landor is one of the foremost of that small class who make good in the nineteenth-century the claims of pure literature. In these busy days of avarice and ambition, when there is so little disposition to profound thought, or to any but the most superficial intellectual entertainments, a faithful scholar receiving from past ages the treasures of wit, and enlarging them by his own love, is a friend and consoler of mankind. When we pronounce the names of Homer and Æschylus, — Horace, Ovid, and Plutarch, — Erasmus, Scaliger, and Montaigne, — Ben Jonson and Isaak Walton, — Dryden and Pope, — we pass at once out of trivial associations, and enter into a region of the purest pleasure accessible to human nature. We have quitted all beneath the moon, and entered that crystal sphere in which everything in the world of matter reappears, but transfigured and immortal. Literature is the effort of man to indemnify himself for the wrongs of his condition. The existence of the poorest play-wright and the humblest scrivener is a good omen. A charm attaches to the most inferior names which have in any manner got themselves enrolled in the registers of the House of Fame, even as porters and grooms in the courts, to Creech and Fenton, Theobald and Dennis, Aubrey and Spence. From the moment of entering a library and opening a desired book, we cease to be citizens, creditors, debtors, housekeepers, and men of care and fear. What boundless leisure! what original jurisdiction! the old constellations have set, new and brighter have arisen; an elysian light tinges all objects.

“ In the afternoon we came unto a land  
In which it seemed always afternoon.”

And this sweet asylum of an intellectual life must appear to have the sanction of nature, as long as so many men are born with so decided an aptitude for reading and writing. Let us thankfully allow every faculty and art which opens new scope to a life so confined as ours. There are vast spaces in a thought; a slave, to whom the religious sentiment is opened, has a freedom which makes

his master's freedom a slavery. Let us not be so illiberal with our schemes for the renovation of society and nature, as to disesteem or deny the literary spirit. Certainly there are heights in nature which command this; there are many more which this commands. It is vain to call it a luxury, and as saints and reformers are apt to do, decry it as a species of day-dreaming. What else are sanctities, and reforms, and all other things? Whatever can make for itself an element, means, organs, servants, and the most profound and permanent existence in the hearts and heads of millions of men, must have a reason for its being. Its excellency is reason and vindication enough. If rhyme rejoices us, there should be rhyme, as much as if fire cheers us, we should bring wood and coals. Each kind of excellence takes place for its hour, and excludes everything else. Do not brag of your actions, as if they were better than Homer's verses or Raphael's pictures. Raphael and Homer feel that action is pitiful beside their enchantments. They could act too, if the stake was worthy of them; but now all that is good in the universe urges them to their task. Whoever writes for the love of truth and beauty, and not with ulterior ends, belongs to this sacred class, and among these, few men of the present age, have a better claim to be numbered than Mr. Landor. Wherever genius or taste has existed, wherever freedom and justice are threatened, which he values as the element in which genius may work, his interest is sure to be commanded. His love of beauty is passionate, and betrays itself in all petulant and contemptuous expressions.

But beyond his delight in genius, and his love of individual and civil liberty, Mr. Landor has a perception that is much more rare, the appreciation of character. This is the more remarkable considered with his intense national-ity, to which we have already alluded. He is buttoned in English broadcloth to the chin. He hates the Austrians, the Italians, the French, the Scotch, and the Irish. He has the common prejudices of the English landholder; values his pedigree, his acres, and the syllables of his name; loves all his advantages, is not insensible to the beauty of his watchseal, or the Turk's head on his umbrella; yet with all this miscellaneous pride, there is a noble nature within him, which instructs him that he is so

rich that he can well spare all his trappings, and, leaving to others the painting of circumstance, aspire to the office of delineating character. He draws his own portrait in the costume of a village schoolmaster, and a sailor, and serenely enjoys the victory of nature over fortune. Not only the elaborated story of Normanby, but the whimsical selection of his heads prove this taste. He draws with evident pleasure the portrait of a man, who never said anything right, and never did anything wrong. But in the character of Pericles, he has found full play for beauty and greatness of behavior, where the circumstances are in harmony with the man. These portraits, though mere sketches, must be valued as attempts in the very highest kind of narrative, which not only has very few examples to exhibit of any success, but very few competitors in the attempt. The word Character is in all mouths; it is a force which we all feel; yet who has analyzed it? What is the nature of that subtle, and majestic principle which attaches us to a few persons, not so much by personal as by the most spiritual ties? What is the quality of the persons who, without being public men, or literary men, or rich men, or active men, or (in the popular sense) religious men, have a certain salutary omnipresence in all our life's history, almost giving their own quality to the atmosphere and the landscape? A moral force, yet wholly unmindful of creed and catechism, intellectual, but scornful of books, it works directly and without means, and though it may be resisted at any time, yet resistance to it is a suicide. For the person who stands in this lofty relation to his fellow men is always the impersonation to them of their conscience. It is a sufficient proof of the extreme delicacy of this element, evanescent before any but the most sympathetic vision, that it has so seldom been employed in the drama and in novels. Mr. Landor, almost alone among living English writers, has indicated his perception of it.

These merits make Mr. Landor's position in the republic of letters one of great mark and dignity. He exercises with a grandeur of spirit the office of writer, and carries it with an air of old and unquestionable nobility. We do not recollect an example of more complete independence in literary history. He has no clanship, no friendships,

that warp him. He was one of the first to pronounce Wordsworth the great poet of the age, yet he discriminates his faults with the greater freedom. He loves Pindar, Æschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes, Demosthenes, Virgil, yet with open eyes. His position is by no means the highest in literature; he is not a poet or a philosopher. He is a man full of thoughts, but not, like Coleridge, a man of ideas. Only from a mind conversant with the First Philosophy can definitions be expected. Coleridge has contributed many valuable ones to modern literature. Mr. Landor's definitions are only enumerations of particulars; the generic law is not seized. But as it is not from the highest Alps or Andes, but from less elevated summits, that the most attractive landscape is commanded, so is Mr. Landor the most useful and agreeable of critics. He has commented on a wide variety of writers, with a closeness and an extent of view, which has enhanced the value of those authors to his readers. His Dialogue on the Epicurean philosophy is a theory of the genius of Epicurus. The Dialogue between Barrow and Newton is the best of all criticisms on the Essays of Bacon. His picture of Demosthenes in three several Dialogues is new and adequate. He has illustrated the genius of Homer, Æschylus, Pindar, Euripides, Thucydides. Then he has examined before he expatiated, and the minuteness of his verbal criticism gives a confidence in his fidelity, when he speaks the language of meditation or of passion. His acquaintance with the English tongue is unsurpassed. He "hates false words, and seeks with care, difficulty, and moroseness, those that fit the thing." He knows the value of his own words. "They are not," he says, "written on slate." He never stoops to explanation, nor uses seven words where one will do. He is a master of condensation and suppression, and that in no vulgar way. He knows the wide difference between compression and an obscure elliptical style. The dense writer has yet ample room and choice of phrase, and even a gamesome mood often between his valid words. There is no inadequacy or disagreeable contraction in his sentence, any more than in a human face, where in a square space of a few inches is found room for every possible variety of expression.

Yet it is not as an artist, that Mr. Landor commends

himself to us. He is not epic or dramatic, he has not the high, overpowering method, by which the master gives unity and integrity to a work of many parts. He is too wilful, and never abandons himself to his genius. His books are a strange mixture of politics, etymology, allegory, sentiment, and personal history, and what skill of transition he may possess is superficial, not spiritual. His merit must rest at last, not on the spirit of the dialogue, or the symmetry of any of his historical portraits, but on the value of his sentences. Many of these will secure their own immortality in English literature; and this, rightly considered, is no mean merit. These are not plants and animals, but the genetical atoms, of which both are composed. All our great debt to the oriental world is of this kind, not utensils and statues of the precious metal, but bullion and gold dust. Of many of Mr. Landor's sentences we are fain to remember what was said of those of Socrates, that they are cubes, which will stand firm, place them how or where you will.

We will enrich our pages with a few paragraphs, which we hastily select from such of Mr. Landor's volumes as lie on our table.

"The great man is he who hath nothing to fear and nothing to hope from another. It is he, who while he demonstrates the iniquity of the laws, and is able to correct them, obeys them peaceably. It is he who looks on the ambitious, both as weak and fraudulent. It is he who hath no disposition or occasion for any kind of deceit, no reason for being or for appearing different from what he is. It is he who can call together the most select company when it pleases him. . . . Him I would call the powerful man who controls the storms of his mind, and turns to good account the worst accidents of his fortune. The great man, I was going on to show thee, is somewhat more. He must be able to do this, and he must have that intellect which puts into motion the intellect of others."

"All titulars else must be produced by others; a knight by a knight, a peer by a King, while a gentleman is self-existent."

"Critics talk most about the *visible* in sublimity. . . the Jupiter, the Neptune. Magnitude and power are sublime, but in the second degree, managed as they may be. Where the

heart is not shaken, the gods thunder and stride in vain. True sublimity is the perfection of the pathetic, which has other sources than pity; generosity, for instance, and self-devotion. When the generous and self-devoted man suffers, there comes Pity; the basis of the sublime is then above the water, and the poet, with or without the gods, can elevate it above the skies. Terror is but the relic of a childish feeling; pity is not given to children. So said he; I know not whether rightly, for the wisest differ on poetry, the knowledge of which, like other most important truths, seems to be reserved for a purer state of sensation and existence."

"O Cyrus, I have observed that the authors of good make men very bad as often as they talk much about them."

"The habit of haranguing is in itself pernicious; I have known even the conscientious and pious, the humane and liberal dried up by it into egoism and vanity, and have watched the mind, growing black and rancid in its own smoke."

#### GLORY.

"Glory is a light which shines from us on others, not from others on us."

"If thou lovest Glory, thou must trust her truth. She followeth him who doth not turn and gaze after her."

#### RICHARD I.

"Let me now tell my story . . . to confession another time. I sailed along the realms of my family; on the right was England, on the left was France; little else could I discover than sterile eminences and extensive shoals. They fled behind me; so pass away generations; so shift, and sink, and die away affections. In the wide ocean I was little of a monarch; old men guided me, boys instructed me; these taught me the names of my towns and harbors, those showed me the extent of my dominions; one cloud, that dissolved in one hour, half covered them.

"I debark on Sicily. I place my hand upon the throne of Tancred, and fix it. I sail again, and within a day or two I behold, as the sun is setting, the solitary majesty of Crete, mother of a religion, it is said, that lived two thousand years. Onward, and many specks bubble up along the blue Ægean; islands, every one of which, if the songs and stories of the pilots are true, is the monument of a greater man than I am. I leave them afar off . . . and for whom? O, abbot, to join creatures of less import than the sea-mews on their cliffs; men praying to be heard, and fearing to be understood, ambitious of

another's power in the midst of penitence, avaricious of another's wealth under vows of poverty, and jealous of another's glory in the service of their God. Is this Christianity? and is Saladin to be damned if he despises it?"

## DEMOSTHENES.

"While I remember what I have been, I never can be less. External power can affect those only who have none intrinsically. I have seen the day, Eubulides, when the most august of cities had but one voice within her walls; and when the stranger, on entering them, stopped at the silence of the gateway, and said, 'Demosthenes is speaking in the assembly of the people.'"

"There are few who form their opinions of greatness from the individual. Ovid says, 'the girl is the least part of herself.' Of himself, certainly, the man is."

"No men are so facetious as those whose minds are somewhat perverted. Truth enjoys good air and clear light, but no playground."

"I found that the principal means (of gratifying the universal desire of happiness) lay in the avoidance of those very things, which had hitherto been taken up as the instruments of enjoyment and content; such as military commands, political offices, clients, adventures in commerce, and extensive landed property."

"Abstinence from low pleasures is the only means of meriting or of obtaining the higher."

"Praise keeps good men good."

"The highest price we can pay for a thing is to ask for it."

"There is a gloom in deep love as in deep water; there is a silence in it which suspends the foot; and the folded arms, and the dejected head are the images it reflects. No voice shakes its surface; the Muses themselves approach it with a tardy and a timid step, and with a low and tremulous and melancholy song."

"Anaxagoras is the true, firm, constant friend of Pericles; the golden lamp that shines perpetually on the image I adore."

[The Letter of Pericles to Aspasia in reply to her request to be permitted to visit Xenocrates.]

"Do what your heart tells you; yes, Aspasia, do *all* it tells you. Remember how august it is. It contains the temple,

not only of Love, but of Conscience; and a whisper is heard from the extremity of one to the extremity of the other.

"Bend in pensiveness, even in sorrow, on the flowery bank of youth, whereunder runs the stream that passes irreversibly! let the garland drop into it, let the hand be refreshed by it—but—may the beautiful feet of Aspasia stand firm."

E.