

Oh for the life dreamed under drowsy boughs
 By old Silenus and his careless crew!
 With happy satyrs clamoring his approach
 To happier fauns, who, hearing, off will flee
 To prop the tipsy god, what time he nods
 Upon his dripping, purple-stained car,
 Half holding, in one lazy-dropping hand,
 The leash of long-stemmed flowers wherewith he guides,
 At slumber-footed pace, the flexile, sleek,
 Indolent leopards, happiest of all!

Nearer the kind earth better, nearest best!
 To snuff the savory steam of upturned soil;
 To sally with the low-browed drove at dawn,
 Gurgling or jubilantly trumpeting,
 To where the sweet night-fallen acorns hide
 Under the lush, cool grasses, drenched with dew!
 I know the down-faced posture; now I feel
 The low, four-footed firmness. Let me go!
 The glaring lights are lost in grateful gloom!
 And now I scent the rain-washed herbage; now
 The welcome shine of slumberous pools appears —
 Ah! . . .

Wendell P. Stafford.

A PLEA FOR HUMOR.

SOME half dozen years have passed since Mr. Andrew Lang, startled for once out of his customary light-heartedness, asked himself, and his readers, and the ghost of Charles Dickens — all three powerless to answer — whether the dismal seriousness of the present day was going to last forever; or whether, when the great wave of earnestness had rippled over our heads, we would pluck up heart to be merry and, if needs be, foolish once again. Not that mirth and folly are in any degree synonymous, as of old; for the merry fool, too scarce, alas, even in the times when Jacke of Dover hunted for him in the highways, has since then grown to be rarer than a phoenix. He has carried his cap and bells, and jests and laughter, elsewhere, and has left us to the mercies of the

serious fool, who is by no means so seductive a companion. If the Cocquecigrues are in possession of the land, and if they are tenants exceedingly hard to evict, it is because of the connivance and encouragement they receive from those to whom we innocently turn for help: from the poets, and novelists, and men of letters, whose plain duty it is to brighten and make glad our days.

"It is obvious," sighs Mr. Birrell dejectedly, "that many people appear to like a drab-colored world, hung around with dusky shreds of philosophy;" but it is more obvious still that, whether they like it or not, the drapings grow a trifle dingier every year, and that no one seems to have the courage to tack up something gay. What is much worse, even those bits of wanton color which have

rested generations of weary eyes are being rapidly obscured by sombre and intricate scroll-work, warranted only to fatigue. The great masterpieces of humor, which have kept men young by laughter, are being tried in the courts of an orthodox morality, and found lamentably wanting; or else, by way of giving them another chance, they are being subjected to the *peine forte et dure* of modern analysis, and are revealing hideous and melancholy meanings in the process. I have always believed that Hudibras owes its chilly treatment at the hands of critics — with the single and most genial exception of Sainte-Beuve — to the absolute impossibility of twisting it into something serious. Strive as we may, we cannot put a new construction on those vigorous old jokes, and to be simply and barefacedly amusing is no longer considered a sufficient *raison d'être*. It is the most significant token of our ever-increasing "sense of moral responsibility in literature" that we should be always trying to graft our own conscientious purposes upon those authors who, happily for themselves, lived and died before virtue, colliding desperately with cakes and ale, had imposed such depressing obligations.

"Don Quixote," says Mr. Shorthouse with unctuous gravity, "will come in time to be recognized as one of the saddest books ever written;" and, if the critics keep on expounding it much longer, I truly fear it will. It may be urged that Cervantes himself was low enough to think it exceedingly funny; but then one advantage of our new and keener insight into literature is to prove to us how indifferently great authors understood their own masterpieces. Shakespeare, we are told, knew comparatively little about Hamlet, and he is to be congratulated on his limitations. Defoe would hardly recognize Robinson Crusoe as "a picture of civilization," having innocently supposed it to be quite the reverse; and he would be as amazed as

we are to learn from Mr. Frederick Harrison that his book contains "more psychology, more political economy, and more anthropology than are to be found in many elaborate treatises on these especial subjects," — blighting words which I would not even venture to quote if I thought that any boy would chance to read them, and so have one of the pleasures of his young life destroyed. As for Don Quixote, which its author persisted in regarding with such misplaced levity, it has passed through many bewildering vicissitudes. It has figured bravely as a satire on the Duke of Lerma, on Charles V., on Philip II., on Ignatius Loyola, — Cervantes was the most devout of Catholics, — and on the Inquisition, which, fortunately, did not think so. In fact, there is little or nothing which it has not meant in its time; and now, having attained that deep spiritual inwardness which we have been recently told is lacking in poor Goldsmith, we are requested by Mr. Shorthouse to refrain from all brutal laughter, but with a shadowy smile and a profound seriousness to attune ourselves to the proper state of receptivity. Old-fashioned, coarse-minded people may perhaps ask, "But if we are not to laugh at Don Quixote, at whom are we, please, to laugh?" — a question which I, for one, would hardly dare to answer. Only, after reading the following curious sentence, extracted from a lately published volume of criticism, I confess to finding myself in a state of mental perplexity, utterly alien to mirth. "How much happier," its author sternly reminds us, "was poor Don Quixote in his energetic career, in his earnest redress of wrong, and in his ultimate triumph over self than he could have been in the gnawing reproach and spiritual stigma which a yielding to weakness never failingly entails!" Beyond this point it would be hard to go. Were these things really spoken of the "ingenious gentleman" of La Mancha, or

of John Howard, or George Peabody, or perhaps Elizabeth Fry, — or is there no longer such a thing as a recognized absurdity in the world?

Another gloomy indication of the departure of humor from our midst is the tendency of philosophical writers to prove by analysis that, if they are not familiar with the thing itself, they at least know of what it should consist. Mr. Shorthouse's depressing views about Don Quixote are merely introduced as illustrating a very scholarly and comfortable paper on the subtle qualities of mirth. No one could deal more gracefully and less humorously with his topic than does Mr. Shorthouse, and we are compelled to pause every now and then and reassure ourselves as to the subject matter of his eloquence. Professor Everett has more recently and more cheerfully defined for us the Philosophy of the Comic, in a way which, if it does not add to our gayety, cannot be accused of plunging us deliberately into gloom. He thinks, indeed, — and small wonder, — that there is "a genuine difficulty in distinguishing between the comic and the tragic," and that what we need is some formula which shall accurately interpret the precise qualities of each; and he is disposed to illustrate his theory by dwelling on the tragic side of Falstaff, which is, of all injuries, the grimmest and hardest to forgive. Falstaff is now the forlorn hope of those who love to laugh, and when he is taken away from us, as soon, alas! he will be, and sleeps with Don Quixote in the "dull cold marble" of an orthodox sobriety, how shall we make merry our souls? Mr. George Radford, who enriched the first volume of *Obiter Dicta* with such a loving study of the fat-witted old knight, tells us reassuringly that by laughter man is distinguished from the beasts, though the cares and sorrows of life have all but deprived him of this elevating grace, and degraded him into a brutal solemnity. Then comes along a rare genius

like Falstaff, who restores the power of laughter, and transforms the stolid brute once more into a man, and who accordingly has the highest claim to our grateful and affectionate regard. That there are those who persist in looking upon him as a selfish and worthless fellow is, from Mr. Radford's point of view, a sorrowful instance of human thanklessness and perversity. But this I take to be the enamored and exaggerated language of a too faithful partisan. Morally speaking, Falstaff has not a leg to stand upon, and there *is* a tragic element lurking always amid the fun. But, seen in the broad sunlight of his transcendent humor, this shadow is as the half-pennyworth of bread to his own noble ocean of sack, and why should we be forever trying to force it into prominence? When Charlotte Brontë advised her friend, Ellen Nussey, to read none of Shakespeare's comedies, she was not beguiled for a moment into regarding them as serious and melancholy lessons of life; but with uncompromising directness put them down as mere improper plays, the amusing qualities of which were insufficient to excuse their coarseness, and which were manifestly unfit for the "gentle Ellen's" eyes.

In fact, humor would at all times have been the poorest excuse to offer to Miss Brontë for any form of moral dereliction, for it was the one quality she lacked herself, and failed to tolerate in others. Sam Weller was apparently as obnoxious to her as was Falstaff, for she would not even consent to meet Dickens, when she was being lionized in London society, — a degree of abstemiousness on her part which it is disheartening to contemplate. It does not seem too much to say that every shortcoming in Charlotte Brontë's admirable work, every limitation of her splendid genius, arose primarily from her want of humor. Her severities of judgment — and who more severe than she? — were due to the same melancholy cause; for

humor is the kindest thing alive. Compare the harshness with which she handles her hapless curates, and the comparative crudity of her treatment, with the surpassing lightness of Miss Austen's touch as she rounds and completes her immortal clerical portraits. Miss Brontë tells us, in one of her letters, that she regarded *all* curates as "highly uninteresting, narrow, and unattractive specimens of the coarser sex," just as she found *all* the Belgian school-girls "cold, selfish, animal, and inferior." But to Miss Austen's keen and friendly eye the narrowest of clergymen was not wholly uninteresting, the most inferior of school-girls not without some claim to our consideration; even the coarseness of the male sex was far from vexing her maidenly serenity, probably because she was unacquainted with the Rochester type. Mr. Elton is certainly narrow, Mary Bennet extremely inferior; but their authoress only laughs at them softly, with a quiet tolerance and a good-natured sense of amusement at their follies. It was little wonder that Charlotte Brontë, who had at all times the courage of her convictions, could not and would not read Jane Austen's novels. "They have not got story enough for me," she boldly affirmed. "I don't want my blood curdled, but I like to have it stirred. Miss Austen strikes me as milk-and-watery, and, to say truth, as dull." Of course she did! How was a woman, whose ideas of after-dinner conversation are embodied in the amazing language of Baroness Ingram and her titled friends, to appreciate the delicious, sleepy small talk, in *Sense* and *Sensibility*, about the respective heights of the respective grandchildren? It is to Miss Brontë's abiding lack of humor that we owe such stately caricatures as Blanche Ingram, and all the high-born, ill-bred company who gather in Thornfield Hall, like a group fresh from Madame Tussaud's ingenious workshop, and against whose waxen unreality Jane

Eyre and Rochester, alive to their very finger-tips, contrast like twin sparks of fire. It was her lack of humor, too, which beguiled her into asserting that the forty "wicked, sophistical, and immoral French novels" which found their way down to lonely Haworth gave her "a thorough idea of France and Paris," — alas, poor misjudged France! — and which made her think Thackeray very nearly as wicked, sophistical, and immoral as the French novels. Even her dislike for children was probably due to the same irremediable misfortune; for the humors of children are the only redeeming points amid their general naughtiness and vexing misbehavior. Mr. Swinburne, guiltless himself of any jocose tendencies, has made the unique discovery that Charlotte Brontë strongly resembles Cervantes, and that Paul Emanuel is a modern counterpart of Don Quixote; and well it is for our poet that the irascible little professor never heard him hint at such a similarity. Surely, to use one of Mr. Swinburne's own incomparable expressions, the parallel is no better than a "subsimious absurdity."

On the other hand, we are told that Miss Austen owed her lively sense of humor to her habit of dissociating the follies of mankind from any rigid standard of right and wrong; which means, I suppose, that she never dreamed she had a mission. Nowadays, indeed, no writer is without one. We cannot even read a paper upon gypsies and not become aware that its author is deeply imbued with a sense of his personal responsibility for these agreeable rascals, whom he insists upon our taking seriously, — as if we wanted to have anything to do with them on such terms! "Since the time of Carlyle," says Mr. Bagehot, "earnestness has been a favorite virtue in literature;" but Carlyle, though sharing largely in that profound melancholy which he declared to be the basis of every English soul, and though he was

unfortunate enough to think Pickwick sad trash, had nevertheless a grim and eloquent humor of his own. With him, at least, earnestness never degenerated into dullness; and while dullness may be, as he unhesitatingly affirmed, the first requisite for a great and free people, yet a too heavy percentage of this valuable quality is fatal to the sprightly grace of literature. "In our times," said an old Scotchwoman, "there's fully mony modern principles," and the first of these seems to be the substitution of a serious and critical discernment for the light-hearted sympathy of former days. Our grandfathers cried a little and laughed a good deal over their books, without the smallest sense of anxiety or responsibility in the matter; but we are called on repeatedly to face problems which we would rather let alone, to dive dismally into motives, to trace subtle connections, to analyze uncomfortable sensations, and to exercise in all cases a discreet and conscientious severity, when what we really want and need is half an hour's amusement. There is no stronger proof of the great change that has swept over mankind than the sight of a nation which used to chuckle over Tom Jones now absorbing countless editions of Robert Elsmere. What is droller still is that the people who read Robert Elsmere would think it wrong to enjoy Tom Jones, and that the people who enjoyed Tom Jones would have thought it wrong to read Robert Elsmere; and that the people who, wishing to be on the safe side of virtue, think it wrong to read either, are scorned greatly as lacking true moral discrimination.

Now he would be a brave man who would undertake to defend the utterly indefensible literature of the past. Where it was most humorous it was also most coarse, wanton, and cruel; but, in banishing these objectionable qualities, we have effectually contrived to rid ourselves of the humor as well, and with it

we have lost one of the safest instincts of our souls. Any book which serves to lower the sum of human gayety is a moral delinquent; and instead of coddling it into universal notice, and growing owlish in its gloom, we should put it briskly aside in favor of brighter and pleasanter things. When Father Faber said that there was no greater help to a religious life than a keen sense of the ridiculous, he startled a number of pious people, yet what a luminous and cordial message it was to help us on our way! Mr. Birrell has recorded the extraordinary delight with which he came across some after-dinner sally of the Rev. Henry Martyn's; for the very thought of that ardent and fiery spirit relaxing into pleasantries over the nuts and wine made him appear like an actual fellow-being of our own. It is with the same feeling intensified, as I have already noted, that we read some of the letters of the early fathers, — those grave and hallowed figures seen through a mist of centuries, — and find them jesting at one another in the gayest and least sacerdotal manner imaginable. "Who could tell a story with more wit, who could joke so pleasantly?" sighs St. Gregory of Nazienzen of his friend St. Basil, remembering doubtless with a heavy heart the shafts of good-humored raillery that had brightened their lifelong intercourse. With what kindly and loving zest does Gregory, himself the most austere of men, mock at Basil's asceticism, — at those "sad and hungry banquets" of which he was invited to partake, those "ungardenlike gardens, void of pot-herbs," in which he was expected to dig! With what delightful alacrity does Basil vindicate his reputation for humor by making a most excellent joke in court, for the benefit of a brutal magistrate who fiercely threatened to tear out his liver. "Your intention is a benevolent one," said the saint, who had been for years a confirmed invalid. "Where it

is now located it has given me nothing but trouble." Surely, as we read such an anecdote as this, we share in the curious sensation experienced by little Tom Tulliver, when, by dint of Maggie's repeated questions, he began slowly to understand that the Romans had once been real men, who were happy enough to speak their own language without any previous introduction to the Eton grammar. In like manner, when we come to realize that the fathers of the primitive Church enjoyed their quips and cranks and jests as much as do Mr. Trollope's jolly deans or vicars, we feel we have at last grasped the secret of their identity, and we appreciate the force of Father Faber's appeal to the frank spirit of a wholesome mirth.

Perhaps one reason for the scanty tolerance that humor receives at the hands of the disaffected is because of the rather selfish way in which the initiated enjoy their fun; for there is always a secret irritation about a laugh in which we cannot join. Mr. George Saintsbury is plainly of this way of thinking, and, being blessed beyond his fellows with a love for all that is jovial, he speaks from out of the richness of his experience. "Those who have a sense of humor," he says, "instead of being quietly and humbly thankful, are perhaps a little too apt to celebrate their joy in the face of the afflicted ones who have it not; and the afflicted ones only follow a general law in protesting that it is a very worthless thing, if not a complete humbug." This spirit of exclusiveness on the one side and of irascibility on the other may be greatly deplored, but who is there among us, I wonder, wholly innocent of blame? Mr. Saintsbury himself confesses to a silent chuckle of delight when he thinks of the dimly veiled censoriousness with which Peacock's inimitable humor has been received by one half of the reading world. In other words, his enjoyment of the Rev. Drs. Folliott and Opimian

is sensibly increased by the reflection that a great many worthy people, even among his own acquaintances, are by some mysterious law of their being debarred from any share in his pleasure. Yet surely we need not be so niggardly in this matter. There is wit enough in those two reverend gentlemen to go all around the living earth, and leave plenty for generations now unborn. Each might say with Juliet, —

"The more I give to thee,

The more I have ; "

for wit is as infinite as love, and a deal more lasting in its qualities. When Peacock describes a country gentleman's range of ideas as "nearly commensurate with that of the great King Nebuchadnezzar when he was turned out to grass," he affords us a happy illustration of the eternal fitness of humor, for there can hardly come a time when such an apt comparison will fail to point its meaning.

Mr. Birrell is quite as selfish in his felicity as Mr. Saintsbury, and perfectly frank in acknowledging it. He dwells rapturously over certain well-loved pages of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, and then deliberately adds, "When an admirer of Miss Austen reads these familiar passages, the smile of satisfaction, betraying the deep inward peace they never fail to beget, widens, like 'a circle in the water,' as he remembers (and he is always careful to remember) how his dearest friend, who has been so successful in life, can no more read Miss Austen than he can read the *Moabitish Stone*." The same peculiarity is noticeable in the more ardent lovers of Charles Lamb. They seem to want him all to themselves, look askance upon any fellow-being who ventures to assert a modest preference for their idol, and brighten visibly when some ponderous critic declares the *Letters* to be sad stuff, and not worth half the exasperating nonsense talked about them. Yet Lamb flung his good things to the winds

with characteristic prodigality, little recking by whom or in what spirit they were received. How many witticisms, I wonder, were roared into the deaf ears of old Thomas Westwood, who heard them not, alas, but who laughed all the same, out of pure sociability, and with a pleasant sense that something funny had been said! And what of that ill-fated pun which Lamb, in a moment of deplorable abstraction, let fall at a funeral, to the surprise and consternation of the mourners? Surely a man who could joke at a funeral never meant his pleasantries to be hoarded up for the benefit of an initiated few, but would gladly see them the property of all living men; ay, and of all dead men, too, were such a distribution possible. "Damn the age! I will write for antiquity!" he exclaimed, with not unnatural heat, when The Gypsy's Malison was rejected by the ingenious editors of the Gem, on the ground that it would "shock all mothers;" and even this expression, uttered with pardonable irritation, manifests no solicitude for a narrow and esoteric audience.

"Wit is useful for everything, but sufficient for nothing," says Amiel, who probably felt he needed some excuse for burying so much of his Gallic sprightliness in Teutonic gloom; and dullness, it must be admitted, has the distinct advantage of being useful for everybody, and sufficient for nearly everybody as well. Nothing, we are told, is more rational than *ennui*; and Mr. Bagehot, contemplating the "grave files of speechless men" who have always represented the English land, exults more openly and energetically even than Carlyle in the saving dullness, the superb impenetrability, which stamps the Englishman, as it stamped the Roman, with the sign-manual of patient strength. Stupidity, he reminds us, is not folly, and moreover it often insures a valuable consistency. "'What I says is this here, as I was a-saying yesterday,' is the aver-

age Englishman's notion of historical eloquence and habitual discretion." But Mr. Bagehot could well afford to trifle thus coyly with dullness, because he knew it only theoretically and as a dispassionate observer. His own roof-tree is free from the blighting presence; his own pages are guiltless of the leaden touch. It has been well said that an ordinary mortal might live for a twelve-month like a gentleman on Hazlitt's ideas; but he might, if he were clever, shine all his life long with the reflected splendor of Mr. Bagehot's wit, and be thought to give forth a very respectable illumination. There is a telling quality in every stroke; a pitiless dexterity that drives the weapon, like a fairy's arrow, straight to some vital point. When we read that "of all pursuits ever invented by man for separating the faculty of argument from the capacity of belief, the art of debating is probably the most effective," we feel that an unwelcome statement has been expressed with Mephistophelian coolness; and remembering that these words were uttered before Mr. Gladstone had attained his parliamentary preëminence, we have but another proof of the imperishable accuracy of wit. Only say a clever thing, and mankind will go on forever furnishing living illustrations of its truth. It was Thurlow who originally remarked that "companies have neither bodies to kick nor souls to lose," and the jest fits in so aptly with our every-day humors and experiences that I have heard men attribute it casually to their friends, thinking perhaps that it must have been born in these times of giant corporations, of city railroads, and of trusts. What a gap between Queen Victoria and Queen Bess, what a thorough and far-reaching change in everything that goes to make up the life and habits of men; and yet Shakespeare's fine strokes of humor have become so fitted to our common speech that the very unconsciousness with which we apply them proves how they tally

with our modern emotions and opportunities. Lesser lights burn quite as steadily. Pope and Goldsmith reappear on the lips of people whose knowledge of the *Essay on Man* is of the very haziest character, and whose acquaintance with *She Stoops to Conquer* is confined exclusively to Mr. Abbey's graceful illustrations. Not very long ago I heard a bright school-girl, when reproached for wet feet or some such youthful indiscretion, excuse herself gayly on the plea that she was "bullying Nature;" and, knowing that the child was but modestly addicted to her books, I wondered how many of Dr. Holmes's trenchant sayings have become a heritage in our households, detached often from their original kinship, and seeming like the rightful property of every one who utters them. It is an amusing, barefaced, witless sort of robbery, yet surely not without its compensations; for it must be a pleasant thing to reflect in old age that the general murkiness of life has been lit up here and there by sparks struck from one's youthful fire, and that these sparks, though they wander occasionally masterless as will-o'-the-wisps, are destined never to go out.

Are destined never to go out! In its vitality lies the supreme excellence of humor. Whatever has "wit enough to keep it sweet" defies corruption and outlasts all time; but the wit must be of that outward and visible order which needs no introduction or demonstration at our hands. It is an old trick with dull novelists to describe their characters as being exceptionally brilliant people, and to trust that we will take their word for it, and ask no further proof. Every one remembers how Lord Beaconsfield would tell us that a cardinal could "sparkle with anecdote and blaze with repartee;" and how utterly destitute of sparkle or blaze were the specimens of his eminence's conversation with which we were subsequently favored. Those "lively dinners" in En-

dymion and Lothair, at which we were assured the brightest minds in England loved to gather, became mere Barmecide feasts when reported to us without a single amusing remark; such waifs and strays of conversation as reached our ears being of the dreariest and most fatuous description. It is not so with the real masters of their craft. Mr. Peacock does not stop to explain to us that Dr. Folliott is witty. The reverend gentleman opens his mouth and acquaints us with the fact himself. There is no need for George Eliot to expatiate on Mrs. Poyser's humor. Five minutes of that lady's society is amply sufficient for the revelation. We do not even hear Mr. Poyser and the rest of the family enlarging delightedly on the subject, as do all of Lawyer Putney's friends, in Mr. Howells's recent story, *Annie Kilburn*; and yet even the united testimony of *Hatboro'* fails to clear up our lingering doubts concerning Mr. Putney's wit. The dull people of that delightful town are really and truly and realistically dull. There is no mistaking them. The stamp of veracity is upon every brow. They pay morning calls, and we listen to their conversation with a dreamy impression that we have heard it all many times before, and that the ghosts of our own morning calls are revisiting us, not in the glimpses of the moon, but in Mr. Howells's airy and well-lit pages. That curious conviction that we have formerly passed through a precisely similar experience is strong upon us as we read, and it is the most emphatic testimony to the novelist's peculiar skill. But there is none of this instantaneous acquiescence in Mr. Putney's wit; for although he does make one very nice little joke, it is hardly enough to flavor all his conversation, which is for the most part rather unwholesome than humorous. The only way to elucidate him is to suppose that Mr. Howells, in sardonic mood, wishes to show us that if a man be discreet

enough to take to hard drinking in his youth, before his general emptiness is ascertained, his friends invariably credit him with a host of shining qualities, which we are given to understand lie balked and frustrated by his one unfortunate weakness. How many of us know these exceptionally brilliant lawyers, doctors, politicians, and journalists, who bear a charmed reputation, based exclusively upon their inebriety, and who take good care not to imperil it by too long a relapse into the mortifying self-revelations of soberness! And what wrong has been done to the honored name of humor by these pretentious rascals! We do not love Falstaff because he is drunk; we do not admire Becky Sharp because she is wicked. Drunkenness and wickedness are things easy of imitation; yet all the sack in Christendom could not beget us another Falstaff, — though Seithenyn ap Seithyn comes very near to the incomparable model, — and all the wickedness in the world could not fashion us a second Becky Sharp. There are too many dull toppers and stupid sinners among mankind to admit of any uncertainty on these points.

Bishop Burnet, in describing Lord Halifax, tells us, with thinly veiled disapprobation, that he was "a man of fine and ready wit, full of life, and very pleasant, but much turned to satire. His imagination was too hard for his judgment, and a severe jest took more with him than all arguments whatever." Yet this was the first statesman of his age, and one whose clear and tranquil vision penetrated so far beyond the turbulent, troubled times he lived in that men looked askance upon a power they but dimly understood. The sturdy "Trimmer," who would be bullied neither by king nor commons, who would "speak his mind and not be hanged as

long as there was law in England," must have turned with infinite relief from the horrible medley of plots and counterplots, from the ugly images of Oates and Dangerfield, from the scaffolds of Stafford and Russell and Sidney, from the Bloody Circuit and the massacre of Glencoe, from the false smiles of princes and the howling arrogance of the mob, to any jest, however "severe," which would restore to him his cold and fastidious serenity, and keep his judgment and his good temper unimpaired. "Ridicule is the test of truth," said Hazlitt, and it is a test which Halifax remorselessly applied, and which would not be without its uses to the Trimmer of to-day, in whom this adjusting sense is lamentably lacking. For humor distorts nothing, and only false gods are laughed off their earthly pedestals. What monstrous absurdities and paradoxes have resisted whole batteries of serious arguments, and then crumbled swiftly into dust before the ringing death-knell of a laugh! What healthy exultation, what genial warmth, what loyal brotherhood of mirth, attends the friendly sound! Yet in labeling our life and literature, as the Danes labeled their Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, "Not for amusement merely," we have pushed one step further, and the legend too often stands, "Not for amusement at all." Life is no laughing matter, we are told, which is true; and, what is still more dismal to contemplate, books are no laughing matters, either. Only now and then some gay, defiant rebel, like Mr. Saintsbury, flaunts the old flag, hums a bar of Blue Bonnets over the Border, and ruffles the quiet waters of our souls by hinting that this age of Apollinaris and of lectures is at fault, and that it has produced nothing which can vie as literature with the products of the ages of wine and song.

Agnes Repplier.

THE TRAGIC MUSE.

IV.

PETER'S meeting with Nick was of the friendliest on both sides, involving a great many "dear fellows" and "old boys," and his salutation to the younger of the Miss Dormers consisted of the frankest "Delighted to see you, my dear Bid!" There was no kissing, but there was cousinship in the air, of a conscious, living kind, as Gabriel Nash no doubt quickly perceived, hovering for a moment outside the group. Biddy said nothing to Peter Sherringham, but there was no flatness in a silence which afforded such opportunities for a pretty smile. Nick introduced Gabriel Nash to his mother and to the other two as "a delightful old friend," whom he had just come across, and Sherringham acknowledged the act by saying to Mr. Nash, but as if rather less for his sake than for that of the presenter, "I have seen you very often before."

"Ah, recurrence — recurrence: we have n't yet, in the study of how to live, abolished that grossness, have we?" Mr. Nash genially inquired. "It's a poverty in the supernumeraries that we don't pass once for all, but come round and cross again, like a procession at the theatre. It's a shabby economy that ought to have been managed better. The right thing would be just *one* appearance, and the procession, regardless of expense, forever and forever different."

The company was occupied in placing itself at table, so that the only disengaged attention, for the moment, was Grace's, to whom, as her eyes rested on him, the young man addressed these last words with a smile. "Alas, it's a very shabby idea, is n't it? The world is n't got up regardless of expense!"

Grace looked quickly away from him,

and said to her brother, "Nick, Mr. Pinks is dead."

"Mr. Pinks?" asked Gabriel Nash, appearing to wonder where he should sit.

"The member for Harsh; and Julia wants you to stand," the girl went on.

"Mr. Pinks, the member for Harsh? What names, to be sure!" Gabriel mused, cheerfully, still unseated.

"Julia wants me? I'm much obliged to her!" observed Nicholas Dormer. "Nash, please sit by my mother, with Peter on her other side."

"My dear, it is n't Julia," Lady Agnes remarked, earnestly, to her son. "Every one wants you. Have n't you heard from your people? Did n't you know the seat was vacant?"

Nick was looking round the table, to see what was on it. "Upon my word, I don't remember. What else have you ordered, mother?"

"There's some *bœuf braisé*, my dear, and afterwards some galantine. Here is a dish of eggs with asparagus-tips."

"I advise you to go in for it, Nick," said Peter Sherringham, to whom the preparation in question was presented.

"Into the eggs with asparagus-tips? *Donnez m'en, s'il vous plaît*. My dear fellow, how can I stand? how can I sit? Where's the money to come from?"

"The money? Why, from Jul—" Grace began, but immediately caught her mother's eye.

"Poor Julia, how you do work her!" Nick exclaimed. "Nash, I recommend you the asparagus-tips. Mother, he's my best friend; do look after him."

"I have an impression I have breakfasted — I am not sure," Nash observed.

"With those beautiful ladies? Try again; you'll find out."

"The money can be managed; the