

LETTER XIX.

ANALYSIS OF DANTE'S INFERNO CONTINUED.

University Club.

DEAR SIR,

WE are now arrived at the fourth circle, under the guard of Plutus, where we are to behold the prodigal and avaricious suffering punishment, and from thence, under Virgil's guidance, we shall descend with him and Dante into the fifth, the condemned abode of the passionate and choleric. On our first entrance we hear Plutus thundering forth these Hebrew words, "Papé Satan, papé Satan aleppe!" words upon which I extract the following note from M. Artaud. "Mr. Lanci, interpreter of Oriental languages in the Vatican, has thus interpreted these Hebrew words: 'Splendi aspetto di Satana, splendi aspetto di Satana primaio,' which he thus explains according to a more correct Italian phrase, 'Ti mostra Satanasso, ti mostra nella maestà di tuoi splendori; principe Satanasso,' which means,

according to my interpretation, that Plutus invites Lucifer to rise from the bottom and centre of hell, in order to terrify Dante, who, a living man, presumes to brave and set at defiance the laws of his infernal kingdom." Virgil calling Plutus, thou wolf accursed, bids him be silent, nor presume to dispute their passage onward.

" By highest sanction to the depths of Hell we dive
 There from above, where Michel's sword dealt out
 Vengeance so hot unto the adulterous crew.
 As drop revers'd the sails big-bellied by the wind,
 When crashing topples down the shivered mast,
 So cowering fell to earth that sanguinary beast."

I have adopted a word here from high authority, no less than from that of Shakespeare. You will excuse me for giving you the whole of the beautiful passage from the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, from which I have borrowed it.

" Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,
 And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
 Marking the embarked traders on the flood ;
 When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
 And grow *big-bellied* with the wanton wind."

But to proceed with Dante.

" Thus to the fourth succeeding circle we descended down,
 Our course pursuing through these realms of woe,
 Which in their entrails concentrate an universe of crime.
 O justice of God ! what new unheard-of pangs
 Here by thy vengeance dread accumulate I saw ?
 Ah ! why such visitation on our hapless race's crimes.
 As bursts the breaker on Charybdis' rock
 Contending with the back re-eddying surge,
 So in their dance of torment clash'd the souls accurst.
 Here more than elsewhere saw I the condemn'd
 From sides opposing roll with travail sore
 Enormous weights and howling 'neath their load.
 Rudely against each other as they met, they shock'd,
 And then recoiling back, the one to th' other cried,
 Why dost thou thine hold fast, and wherefore thine let slip ?"

You will observe here that the prodigals, as during life, are appropriately represented letting fall their burden (their riches), and the miserly and avaricious clutching it fast; and you will also remark the words of terrible mockery launched forth against each other by the victims of the two contrasted vices. But to proceed with the text.

" Thus in eternal revolution back and fro'
 That dark blind circle they incessant ran,
 Nor ceased their ignominious ditty to chant forth.

And as the half of their sad circle each had reached,
 Back they returned the conflict to renew ;
 And I my heart who felt with pity bleeding at the sight.
 Master of mine, I said, I pray thee now to me reveal
 What folks are these, and whether churchmen all
 These on our left hand who the tonsure bear ?”

Virgil replies that these whom he enquires of were all churchmen, whom he sees with shaven crowns, and that they were in life equally shorn of sense, Popes and Cardinals, who ran into the excesses of unbounded avarice, or wasted the gifts of fortune without rule or measure. Dante then asks him if he cannot recognize any among them. Vain thought! replies his guide; the vile and grovelling life they led on earth hath so soiled and deformed them, that no trace of their features remains. To everlasting they will shock together in this rude clash, and the two parties will rise at the last day from their sepulchre, the one with fists together clenched, and the other with their shaven crowns.

“ Both of the glorious kingdom disinherited they are,
 By the ill giving and th’ ill keeping back,
 And to this scuffle doom’d, how grievous! need is none to say.”

We now come to a poetical portrait of fortune, on which Ginguené observes, “No poet has on this subject surpassed Dante, perhaps not even Horace in his fine ode, ‘O Diva gratum quæ regis Antium,’ than which ancient poetry has produced nothing more beautiful on this theme. Dante has here profited by an idea of the ancient philosophy adopted by Christianity, that of a secondary intelligence appointed to preside over each of the celestial spheres, and has in a manner raised up again the goddess Fortune, and invested her with a second youth in placing one of these inferior intelligences to preside over the affairs of the world. This, though one of those passages of Dante which is rarely quoted, is one which those who have once vanquished the difficulties of this sublime but unequal author, and acquired a taste for his *severe* beauties, often read over again.” *Hist. Litt. d’Italie, vol. II. p. 58 & 9.* I now resume my translated extracts.

“And now my son these shadows learn, how vain
 These slippery goods committed unto Fortune’s hands,
 For which man’s race with such contentious brawl strives on.

Alas! not all the gold that glitters 'neath the moon,
 Or ever glittered, can these wearied souls
 One pang allay, or grant one momentary pause.
 Tell me the nature of this Fortune, master, then I cried,
 That now thou touchest on, and why within her clutch
 She grasps all blessings thus the world doth prize?
 Then he to me in answer, O ye creatures blind,
 How dark an ignorance the light within ye clouds?
 Now will I from my lips to all of ye unseal the truth.
 He whose omniscience over all transcendant reigns,
 The heavens creating, powers directing gave,
 That from each part reflecting to each part might shine
 Beneath their guidance, light, distributed to all.
 So he those ministering intelligences fix'd
 Over these world-bedazzling splendors to preside.
 From time to time these transitory goods to pass
 From nation unto nation, and from race to race,
 Beyond all power of human wisdom to withstand.
 The rod of empire sways this nation, and the other falls,
 As willeth she who o'er their destinies controls,
 Couched like the coiled serpent 'neath the grass.
 Vain all your wisdom her decrees to thwart,
 The eventful train she lays, decides, fulfills,
 As other servants of their God, her heavenly charge.
 Truce, intermittence, none her permutations know,
 To change incessant by necessity constrain'd,
 She shifts the transitory prize from hand to hand.
 Such is this spirit who so rail'd at is by those
 Who when accusing her their thanks perchance demands,
 Wrong whether they at random in their blindness praise or blame.

Blest midst the blest, she hears nor heeds them aught,
 But 'mongst the other primal creatures smiling sits,
 Turns her revolving sphere and in beatitude exults."

French translation by M. Terrasson.

" Celui dont la sagesse embrasse l'univers,
 Fit les cieux et regla leur mouvements divers.
 Chaque soleil docile à la voix qui l'appelle
 Reçoit et réfléchit sa lumière immortelle.
 Une divinité, du trône des grandeurs
 Veille sur le destin des terrestres splendeurs.
 Elle échappe aux regards de la prudence humaine
 Vend son appui fragile ou prodigue sa haine.
 Aux peuples entraînés par ses rapides lois,
 Tient le sceptre du monde et régné sur les rois.
 L'empire qui succombe et celui qui s'élève
 Reçoivent de ses mains ou le fer ou le glaive.
 Sa volonté se cache, ainsi glisse en rampant
 Enseveli sous l'herbe un flexible serpent.
 Des vains projets de l'homme elle a marqué la chute ;
 Elle sait tout prévoir, juge, ordonne, exécute.
 Comme les purs esprits, êtres mystérieux,
 Invisibles moteurs des globes radieux,
 Ses revolutions n'ont jamais d'intervalle
 De la nécessité la puissance fatale
 Fille antique du sort s'empresse à ses côtés.
 Quelquefois du récit de nos calamités
 Arrive à son oreille une plainte importune.
 Souvent l'ingratitude accusa la fortune.

Toujours inaccessible à ses folles clameurs
 Rayonnante d'éclat dans les célestes chœurs,
 Heureuse elle poursuit sa paisible victoire,
 Et fait tourner sa sphère ou reside sa gloire."

" On let us now to depths of deeper woe,
 The stars begin to wane that o'er us glow'd
 When first I moved, and not to linger warn."

Stepping across a pool which receives the waters of a boiling spring, and following the course of a river of inky blackness, they reach a marsh named Styx, situated at the base of a rampart of lowering rocks. They are now in the fifth circle. As I before remarked, it demands a sagacity above mine to explain how we are transported sometimes from one circle to another. Here they behold immersed in a miry pool, the choleric, all naked, and with deep indignation expressed in their countenances, buffeting each other with their hands, feet and breasts, and tearing one another with their teeth in rivalry of rage. While Dante stands surveying this scene, Virgil begs him to mark the bubbles which rise to the surface of the lake: these, he tells him, proceed from the sighs of condemned souls at the bottom.

" Glued in their miry bed they thus bewailing mourn,
 Sad in the sweet and sun-lit world we were,
 O'erboiling with the fumes that our fell rage exhal'd.
 So in this inky pool we still are saddening on,
 These sounds they gurgle forth within their throats,
 Words none articulate these miserable can shape."

I think you will be of opinion with me their punishment is sufficiently horrible. Proceeding onwards they reach the base of a lofty tower, still being the fifth circle, a further account of which we shall find in the succeeding Canto.

En attendant, I beg leave to subscribe myself,
 my Dear Sir, &c. &c.

To Trelawney Tomkinson, Esq.

Land's End, Cornwall.

LETTER XX.

ON THE GLUTTED STATE OF OUR LITERARY MARKET.

Athenæum Club.

DEAR SIR,

As I was reading the other evening that very interesting work Southey's Cowper, though I must confess with my almost veneration for Cowper, I regretted to find so much of the two first volumes occupied with those melancholy letters which present the humiliating picture of such a mind as his in a diseased state, I was struck with the following note. Webbe says in his discourse of English poetry, (1586). "Among the innumerable sorts of English books and infinite fardles of printed pamphlets, wherewith this country is pestered, all shops stuffed, and every study furnished, the greatest part I think in any one kind, are such as are either mere poetical or which tend in some respect to poetry." If you substitute novels for poetry, how well does this remark apply to the present day.

If there were innumerable sorts of books then, our reading-tables are now groaning beneath such a weight that I ask myself where are readers to be found for so many writers? As Byron exclaims "I want a hero," in his jocular vein, so may many a writer, I want a reader, in a most lugubrious one. My Lord Noodle indeed may find Doodles to read his last new aristocratic novel, for this is light reading, light enough Heaven knows, but who is to wade through the mass of *heavy superfluity* that is now afloat? For instance, is there a library unfurnished with Boswell's Johnson? Was it not superfluous then in Mr. Croker to raise up again from their graves Bozzy and his hero? I had hoped that both their ghosts had been laid at rest by this time for ever, 'Requiescant in pace.' What library is so poor again as not to have many histories of England? Superfluous then I divine it may prove in Lord Mahon to have compiled for us another, and more especially after that most lamentable failure of Sir James Macintosh's in Lardner's Cyclopædia, which has by this time perhaps sent many of us back to the graceful

Hume and the honest and impartial Rapin. Superfluous again *may* be Alison's History of the French Revolution, the fifth volume of which containing eight hundred and twenty-two pages has just made its appearance—how many more may be in embryo Heaven knows! Now for my own part, as I am not a very *helluo librorum*, I am vastly well content with that classical history of Mignets, in three volumes. The size of it does not alarm me; and besides I always feel grateful to an author who spares the labour of his reader by condensing his matter. It is a proof to me that he has encountered some little labour himself—nay that he has employed twice as much time upon his work, by comprehending in four hundred pages the same quantity of matter as loosely flows from the pen of some wordy author, who fills up eight hundred.

With respect to what I fancy to be the insufficient number of readers to writers, I can upon my own personal knowledge state one. By the desire of the author I laid a pamphlet of his on the table of a certain Club-house. It was I think just a month after that I had the curio-

sity to disentomb it from a pile of its brethren— from the overwhelming load of Parsonic pamphlets on the Hampden controversy—political pamphlets, agricultural pamphlets, pamphlets on rail-roads, mines—upon every thing in short above or under ground—and how do you suppose I found my friend's pamphlet? Why without a single leaf cut open: and I presume that the leaves of some others that were opened, were so by the authors themselves, and perhaps others that were thumbed and dog-eared, were likewise solely indebted to the writer for that distinction. Now really I think it is but charitable, to mention this little anecdote, for the warning of those who seem compelled to write ' spite of their stars,' for those who have not a spark of original genius in them, let them cudgel their brains to doomsday, for the mere copyists, compilers, abridgers, and the whole ' sic vos non vobis' tribe of literary filches and plagiarists.

I would also beg leave to remind the literary world that in addition to our own literature, we have now the annual influx from America, to which country we are indebted by the way to

one of certainly the best reviews of the day, and I fear it will find fewer rivals among us than a certain *Hermaphrodite* production, a tale of fiction I suppose we must call it with its *tinkling* title, with which we have just been favoured by one of the litterateurs of that same country.

A *great* book is a great evil, according to the Greek saying—*Many little* books appear to me a still greater one. When people rather than not write at all begin to write nonsense, what hope is there that the flood they pour upon us will ever be exhausted? Common-sense has indeed its limits, but nonsense is inexhaustible. The pen as well as the tongue of a fool are the nearest approach to perpetual motion; what wonder that they are so, since the putting them in movement, comes upon them so naturally and costs them so little labour and exertion? What think you pray of the Carlton Chronicle of Literature, Arts and Sciences? Of the boast of its Editor that his Journal is now attempting something which has never been attempted since the days of the Anti-Jacobin? *Is it?* I have not yet observed in its columns a rival to the Loves

of the Triangles, or the tale of the needy Knife Grinder—but in place of this a very gentle and courteous review upon the Miss Carolina and Wilhelmina Beauclerk's 'Tales of Fashion and Reality,'—that unrivalled twin progeny, in which I presume—for the Lord protect me from reading it!—so many of their ball partners are *booked* for life and rendered 'sacred to ridicule their whole lives long.' A rival race with the Carlton, we may expect will soon be run by the Library of the *Graces*, to be published on the first of July, in which we are threatened with an Ode to Count ———'s whiskers, from Lady Laura's Album. A most stinging piece of Satire it will be no doubt, worthy of the *Graces*, worthy of Lady Laura, worthy both of Count and whiskers.

Well I am delighted that we have the promise of wit from the Press, for I must say at present—

Altho' we have much wit
We're very shy of using it.

Wit is keen, bright, searching as a Toledo blade, and is the weapon of a Gentleman.

With what powerful effect did Pascal wield it in his celebrated *Lettres Provinciales*? How steadily it shone in the hands of Molière and of Boileau? Pope was a skilful fencer too at this weapon, and Sheridan in his *School for Scandal* and his *Critic*, and the contributors to the *Anti-Jacobin* and Matthias in that work of his which stands by itself, the *Pursuits of Literature*. But what wit have we had for the last twenty years? The *Rejected Addresses* was undoubtedly witty, very happily so—but it was a mere trifle—and the *Two-benny Post-bag* was witty, but still more of a trifle. Byron was witty enough in the *Mephistopheles* vein—but at the present time wit is so scarce a commodity, that if any writer gets hold of a scrap of it, borrowed or stolen, he uses it with such ‘d——ble iteration,’ that it becomes most lamentably thread-bare indeed ere he gets hold of another such scrap. Here is one field of literature then lying fallow. Whoever has seed to sow may reap a plentiful harvest—and food for his wit he will find in abundance, whoever will be at the pains to cast his eyes around him. Let him but ruminate on

our national character as exhibited in the present day in this age of Reform. Oh! what consistent and effectual reformers we have proved ourselves! We have reformed the House of Commons (it was indeed high time) but alas! the members we could *not* reform, though there are some of them that need it much. Consistent reformers, I say again—turn your eyes on all our institutions wedded as ever to the foulest jobbing and corruption. Look at a Society, as one instance, consisting of three thousand Fellows, ruled by an irresponsible oligarchy, with the entire disposal of £17,000. a year—£35,333. laid out for cages for wild beasts, in ten years! and yet amidst all this munificent expenditure for these animals' comfort, what frightful mortality takes place among them annually? There is but one king of the beasts surviving and he poor devil is sick. Look at the Law and a suit in Chancery, consistent reformers I say again.

But leaving public reform to politicians and public men, let the writer whom I invite to exercise his wit, glance at many other of the peculiarities of our character at the present day—

our John Bullism abroad where we are true patriots and Englishmen, clinging to all our habits, customs, manners or rather mannerisms and prejudices, in the teeth of ridicule, in spite of expense, inconvenience to others and to ourselves, with all the tenacity of thorough-bred Bull dogs—and let him contrast this nationality so out of place and season, with our mania at home, for every thing that is foreign, our patronage of French Counts, German Princes, German Barons, Italian singers and French Opera dancers—but the talents of the latter may indeed plead our excuse. Let him next glance at our incessant restlessness and love of loco-motion,—To-day we are at the Land's End, and at Johnny Groats' house to-morrow, or at least soon shall be, on the completion of the rail-roads which are now deforming the rural features of our beautiful country, and when the boiling cauldron and the smoking chimney shall transport us through the tainted air with the velocity of winged creatures. Perpetually as we are changing the scene now—in what a state of restlessness shall we be then? Is this a sign, and a proof

of happiness, which resides in a contented mind? Of happiness which Horace observes, “ Est Ulubris; animus si te non deficit æquus.” Let him next inquire why priding ourselves on our domestic comforts, we sacrifice domestic habits and domestic happiness at the shrine of pleasure—at the shrine of pleasure?—I correct myself—at the shrine of ambition—of that paltry ambition—of distinction earning, at the sacrifice of health, in the midnight circles of dissipation—in the *vulgar* world of fashion—vulgar, because it is a servile, and a trifling world, full of all the petty, base, selfish and contemptible passions of the vulgar. Let him ask these votaries of midnight gaiety, *beyond* a certain age, what is to them the great charm of these gaieties commencing at midnight. I will answer for them—the card of invitation so ostentatiously exhibited in the corner of the mirror over the mantle-piece, the triumph and exultation of saying the next day ‘ I was there,’ the triumph perhaps of boasting that the sun lighted me home—that this gaiety will be the death of me, that I shall die before my time a victim to the kindness of my friends.

Such is the idol, the *gilded* calf, before which we prostrate ourselves and sacrifice our Household Gods; it is *almost* our religion, a religion like that of Juggernaut which exercises the most tyrant sway over the minds of its blind and besotted votaries.

The youth and beauty and perhaps alas! the innocence of mind that are sacrificed during the nightly rounds of a London season, form indeed too melancholy a subject for wit or satire—but the old bepainted Dowagers, the haggard veterans, the Canidias ‘making night hideous,’ the sexagenarian with false frontlet, like some mouldering ruin patched up with *new* bricks, still hovering about the scene of his departed joys, with cheeks furrowed deep by the engraving hand of time, wrinkled, as Juvenal sings, like the ape, still persecuting and pestering the young and the fair—why this *would* form a subject for some witty and satirical little poem, and it might be entitled, the faded *wall*-flowers. But if I go on in this strain, you will suspect that I entertain the presumption of undertaking the subject of our national character myself—no I leave it to

others; and perhaps the author of *England and the English*, though he has with much talent particularized many of our national features, might be induced to think that he has not yet exhausted the subject. Let us not leave it to such *Things* as land on our shores, whether Princes or Barons, to undertake a task, which we are so much better qualified to perform ourselves.

Believe me, Dear Sir, &c.

To Trelawney Tomkinson, Esq.
Land's End, Cornwall.

LETTER XXI.

MORAL AND SATIRICAL SKETCHES.

DEAR SIR,

YOU kindly invite me to commence a course of letters to you upon any subject which I may feel inclined to enter on. Were I to make choice of any single subject, I should thus be undertaking the task of writing an essay upon it. Now to such a task I feel myself quite incompetent; for to write an essay upon any subject, requires a thorough knowledge of all its bearings and details, which I cannot flatter myself with possessing. I know not how then I shall be able to fulfil your request, otherwise than by collecting together some discursive remarks which I have occasionally noted down on men and manners. These you may consider if you please as my moral and satirical sketches. Before I enter upon these sketches, you will not

deem it necessary, that I should preface them after the example of the author of the ‘*Maximes et pensées morales*,’ with my *descriptio personæ*. The egotism of Rochefoucauld is very amusing, who thus draws his own portrait: ‘*Je suis d’une taille médiocre, libre et bien proportionnée, j’ai le teint brun, mais assez uni, le front élevé, et d’une raisonnable grandeur; les yeux noirs, petits et enfoncés, et les sourcils noirs et épais, mais bien tournés. Je serais fort empêché de dire de quelle sorte j’ai le nez fait; car il n’est ni camus, ni aquilin, ni gros, ni pointu, au moins que je crois; tout ce que je sais c’est qu’il est plutôt grand que petit, et qu’il descend un peu trop bas. J’ai la bouche grande,*’ and so on. The whole thing is very prettily written and very entertaining. Had Shakspeare been a contemporary of his, one might almost have suspected Falstaff’s account of himself had been intended as a parody. ‘*My Lord I was born about three o’clock in the morning, with a white head and somewhat a round belly. For my voice I have lost it with singing and hollaing of anthems,*’ &c. If ever I set up as author,

instead of *writing* my own personal description, I shall leave that task to the matchless *pencil* of Fraser.

Before, however, I trouble you with my sketches, I would say a very few words on Satirists in general, and I beg to premise that Satire unless it be written in a manner calculated to reform mankind is often little better than a vain exhibition of wit and malice. Amongst Satirists to commence with Horace: he was playful and graceful in his Satire, touching rather upon foibles than on vices; and though rather a courtier and a man of the world than a moralist, still from his satires and epistles there are many moral lessons to be collected, while every word he has written shows him to have been a person of an amiable disposition and endowed with an uncommon share of the soundest good sense. Juvenal lashed the vices of his day with energetic eloquence and honest indignation, and some fine sentences of morality are likewise to be found in his poetry, unfortunately mixed with occasional passages of gross indecency, showing his lamentable want of a sense of propriety. Amongst