

The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction eBook

The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction

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THE MIRROR OF LITERATURE, AMUSEMENT, AND INSTRUCTION.

Vol. 20, No. 584. (Supplement to Vol. 20)

* * * * *

THE

MIRROR

OF

Literature, amusement,

AND

Instruction:

CONTAINING

Original essays;

*Historical narratives; biographical memoirs; sketches of society;
topographical descriptions; novels and tales; anecdotes;*



SELECT EXTRACTS

FROM

New and expensive works;

Poetry, original and selected;

The spirit of the public journals;

Discoveries in the arts and sciences;

Useful domestic hints;

&C. &C. &C.

Vol. XX.

London:

1832

* * * * *

PREFACE.

The completion of the Twentieth Volume of this Miscellany presents us with another cause for self-gratulation, and thankful acknowledgement to the reading public. This continued and unimpaired success amidst a myriad of new-born aspirants, is the best proof of our maintenance of public esteem; and so long as our efforts are guided by the same singleness of purpose that first directed them we shall hope for a continuance of such favour. A multitude of contemporaries "whet each other;" "thinking nurseth thinking;" and, in like manner, reading nurseth reading, and awakens a spirit of inquiry, untiring and exhaustless, among all concerned in pursuit and wholesome gratification.

In a retrospect of the hundreds of competitors who have started for the prize of public patronage since our outset, we shall not, perhaps, be accused of vanity in placing to our own account the first appropriation of such means as may have contributed to the partial success of our contemporaries. We owe them nothing but good will; for we rather regard things poetically than politically, and we are anxious to inform and amuse the reader—not to perplex, by constantly reminding him of his uncheery lot in life.

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Ten years' establishment in periodical literature may give us a sort of patriarchal feeling towards others; for, with one exception *the mirror* is the oldest weekly journal of the metropolis. In this comparatively long career, our best energies have been directed to the progressive improvement of each department of the work. The plan of embellishment, which may be said to have originated with *the mirror*, has been extended and improved, until few subjects are incapable of successful illustration in its pages; due regard being paid to nicety of execution, as well as attractive design. So much for the present, state of our "representative system."

The selection of materials for each sheet of *the mirror* has been regulated by a desire to extend useful information, and to cultivate healthful indications of public taste. In a journal, like the present, mainly devoted to the accumulation of facts, errors and misstatements are inevitable; but, our own diligence, aided by sharp-sighted Correspondents, has, from time to time, guided us to accuracy in most cases, and directed fruitful inquiry upon matters of no ordinary interest or character. Scientific information, really made popular, and of ready, practical utility, has uniformly found admission in our pages; and, above all, subjects of natural history have received especial attention, in graphic illustrations—which part of our plan has been adopted by every cheap journal of the last four years; or, from the first pictorial description of the Zoological Gardens, before the publication of the catalogue by the Society; while it is a source of gratification to know that within the above period, natural history, from being almost confined to public museums and private cabinets, has become the most popular study and amusement of the present day.

Upon the continued cheapness of our little work, we do not intend to touch, more than by reference to the enlargement of the letter-press as commenced with the present volume. The alteration has, we believe, received general approbation; and, either with regard to the extent of the letter-press, or the condensed character of its subject-matter, we have still the satisfaction of knowing *the mirror* to continue, as it has often been characterized by contemporaries, "the cheapest publication of the day." Its other merits we are content to leave to the discernment of each reader.

Our future volume will be conducted upon the plan of its predecessors, with such improvements as time and occasion may suggest. To one point, economy of space, we promise our best consideration; though we may not succeed in rivalling Mr. Newberry, who, the good humoured Geoffrey Crayon tells us, was the first that ever filled his mind with the idea of a good and great man. He published all the picture books of his day; and, out of his abundant love for children, he charged "nothing for either paper or print, and only a half-penny for the binding." [1] Rest unto his soul, say we.

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This lengthened, but we hope not ill-timed reference to our whole course of Twenty Volumes has left us but little occasion to speak of the present portion, individually; although we trust this reference would be somewhat supererogatory, from the unusual number of Illustrations, and a copious Index to the main subjects, of the volume.

To conclude. We thank all Correspondents for their contributions, and invite their cordial co-operation with our ensuing efforts. So now "*plaudite! valete!*"

December 26, 1832.

[Footnote 1: Bracebridge Hall, vol. i.]

* * * * *

[Illustration]

* * * * *

NOTICES

OF

Washington Irving, Esq.

And his works.

* * * * *

Washington Irving was born, in the State of New York, in the year 1782, and is, consequently, in his fifty-first year. His early life cannot better be told than in his own graceful language, prefixed to the most celebrated of his writings as "the author's account of himself."

"I was always fond of visiting new scenes, and observing strange characters and manners. Even when a mere child I began my travels, and made many tours of discovery into foreign parts and unknown regions of my native city, to the frequent alarm of my parents, and the emolument of the town-crier. As I grew into boyhood I extended the range of my observations. My holiday afternoons were spent in rambles about the surrounding country. I made myself familiar with all its places famous in history or fable. I knew every spot where a murder or robbery had been committed, or a ghost seen. I visited the neighbouring villages, and added greatly to my stock of knowledge, by noting their habits and customs, and conversing with their sages and great men. I even journeyed one long summer's day to the summit of the most distant hill, from

whence I stretched my eye over many a mile of terra incognita, and was astonished to find how vast a globe I inhabited.

“This rambling propensity strengthened with my years. Books of voyages and travels became my passion, and in devouring their contents, I neglected the regular exercises of the school. How wistfully would I wander about the pier heads in fine weather, and watch the parting ships bound to distant climes; with what longing eyes would I gaze after their lessening sails; and waft myself in imagination to the ends of the earth.

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“Farther reading and thinking, though they brought this vague inclination into more reasonable bounds, only served to make it more decided. I visited various parts of my own country; and had I been merely influenced by a love of fine scenery, I should have felt little desire to seek elsewhere its gratification; for on no country have the charms of nature been more prodigally lavished. Her mighty lakes, like oceans of liquid silver; her mountains, with their bright aerial tints; her valleys, teeming with wild fertility; her tremendous cataracts, thundering in their solitudes; her boundless plains, waving with spontaneous verdure; her broad, deep rivers, rolling in solemn silence to the ocean; her trackless forests, where vegetation puts forth all its magnificence; her skies, kindling with the magic of summer clouds and glorious sunshine:—no, never need an American look beyond his own country for the sublime and beautiful of natural scenery.”[2]

[Footnote 2: Sketch Book, vol. i.]

Mr. Irving began his career, as an author, in periodical literature. His first work was a humorous journal, entitled “Salmagundi, or the Whim-Whams and Opinions of Launcelot Langstaff, Esq. and Others,” originally published in numbers in New York, where it met with a very flattering reception. The date of the first paper is Saturday, January 24, 1827.

Salmagundi has been several times reprinted in this country; and it may be acceptable to know, that the cheapest, if not the most elegant, edition may be purchased for twenty-pence. It would be difficult to explain the merits of Salmagundi to the reader, as they are of the most varied character; but, it may be remarked generally, that a vein of quaint humour and human kindness pervades these early papers, which will bring the reader and writer to the best possible terms.

This lively miscellany was followed by a humorous History of New York, with the somewhat droll *nom* of Dedrick Knickerbocker as its author. It possesses considerable merit, with a nice perception of the ludicrous; but, on its first appearance, this recommendation was generally overlooked, whether from the local interest of the subject, or the want of due judgment in its readers, it is difficult to determine.

About this period Mr. Irvine’s name was heard in England, almost for the first time; his only claims to public notice resting entirely on Salmagundi, and the History of New York. He was indebted for his introduction to the acquaintance of European readers, to a young fellow-countryman of high attainments, who alludes to the above works and their author in the following terms:—“Mr. Irving has shown much talent and great humour in his Salmagundi and Knickerbocker, and they are exceedingly pleasant books, especially to one who understands the local allusions.”

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A few years subsequent to the publication of *Knickerbocker*, Mr. Irving visited England, or the “land of wonders,” as he facetiously terms our favoured isle. During his stay, he wrote a series of papers, illustrative of English manners, which were chiefly printed in America. These papers were afterwards published in a collected form, in England, under the title of “*The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*” and dedicated to Sir Walter Scott, “in testimony of the admiration and affection of the author.” In the advertisement to the *Sketch-Book*, Mr. Irving thus modestly refers to its origin:

“The author is aware of the austerity with which the writings of his countrymen have hitherto been treated by British critics: he is conscious too, that much of the contents of his papers can be interesting only in the eyes of American readers. It was not his intention, therefore, to have them reprinted in this country. He has, however, observed several of them from time to time inserted in periodical works of merit, and has understood that it was probable they would be republished in a collective form. He has been induced, therefore, to revise and bring them forward himself, that they may at least come correctly before the public. Should they be deemed of sufficient importance to attract the attention of critics, he solicits for them that courtesy and candour which a stranger has some right to claim, who presents himself at the threshold of a hospitable nation.”

Mr. Irving’s solicitations were not made in vain, as the rapid sale of several editions must have convinced him; while every journalist in the empire hailed the work as the most beautiful specimen of Transatlantic talent which had been recognised in this country.

The two volumes of the *Sketch-Book* appeared at different periods; and, at the conclusion of the second, we find the following apologetic postscript: “The author is conscious of the numerous faults and imperfections of his work; and, well aware how little he is disciplined and accomplished in the arts of authorship. His deficiencies are also increased by a diffidence arising from his peculiar situation. He finds himself writing in a strange land, and appearing before a public, which he has been accustomed, from childhood, to regard with the highest feelings of awe and reverence. He is full of solicitude to secure their approbation, yet finds that very solicitude continually embarrassing his powers, and depriving him of that ease and confidence which are necessary to successful exertion. Still the kindness with which he is treated encourages him to go on, hoping that, in time, he may acquire a steadier footing; and thus he proceeds, half venturing, half shrinking, surprised at his own good fortune, and wondering at his own temerity.”

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The success of the Sketch-Book was followed by the almost equal fortune of "Bracebridge Hall, or the Humorists;" a series of scenes of Old English life, as displayed in one of those venerable halls, that rise, here and there, in a British landscape, as monuments of the hospitality of our ancestors, and better times. In the autobiographical chapter of this work, the writer thus pleasantly refers to his previous success, as "a matter of marvel, that a man, from the wilds of America, should express himself in tolerable English. I was looked upon as something new and strange in literature,—a kind of demi-savage, with a leather in his hand, instead of his head; and there was a curiosity to hear what such a being had to say about civilized society." In referring the circumstances under which he writes his second work on English manners, he says: "Having been born and brought up in a new country, yet educated from infancy in the literature of an old one, my mind was filled with historical and poetical associations, connected with places, and manners, and customs of Europe; but which could rarely be applied to those of my own country. To a mind thus peculiarly prepared, the most ordinary objects and scenes, on arriving in Europe, are full of strange matter, and interesting novelty. England is as classic ground to an American, as Italy is to an Englishman; and Old London teems with as much historical association as mighty Rome." There is, also, great amiability in the concluding paragraph:—"I have always had an opinion, that much good might be done by keeping mankind in good humour with one another. I may be wrong in my philosophy; but I shall continue to practise it until convinced of its fallacy. When I discover the world to be all that it has been represented by sneering cynics and whining poets, I will turn to and abuse it also; in the meanwhile, worthy reader, I hope you will not think lightly of me, because I cannot believe this to be so very bad a world as it is represented."

Soon after the publication of Bracebridge Hall, Mr. Irving left this country, where he had passed two years with literary and pecuniary advantage. He quitted England with a pathetic farewell; declaring that if, as he is accused, he views it with a partial eye, he shall never forget that it is his "fatherland." On the consanguinity of England and America too, and the cultivation of good feeling between them, he thus touchingly expresses himself in Bracebridge Hall: "We ask nothing from abroad that we cannot reciprocate. But with respect to England, we have a warm feeling of the heart, the glow of consanguinity that still lingers in our blood. Interest apart, past differences forgotten, we extend the hand of old relationship. We merely ask, do not estrange us from you, do not destroy the ancient tie of blood, do not let scoffers and slanderers drive a kindred nation from your side. We would fain be friends, do not compel us to be enemies." There is a manly affection in these sentiments which is truly admirable.

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Mr. Irving's works, with the exception of his early efforts,[3] had been the result of his love of travel: indeed, he describes himself as a traveller who has "surveyed most of the terrestrial angles of the globe." In similar vein, he next produced two volumes of "Tales of a Traveller," narrating legends of the continent, with masterly sketches of the scenery of the respective countries; the incidents of the Tales being fraught with points of grotesque humour, and abounding with pathos and poetic feeling.

[Footnote 3: Among Mr. Irving's early effusions are Lines written on the Falls of the River Pasaic which are not printed in the author's works, but will be found in *The Mirror*, vol. ii. p. 452.]

To these Tales succeeded a work of greater importance in literature than either of Mr. Irving's previous undertakings. We allude to a History of the Life and Voyages of Columbus, in four vols. 8vo., which appeared in the year 1828. Mr. Irving, at the time this work was first suggested to him, in the winter of 1825-6, was at Bordeaux; and, being informed that a biography was about to appear at Madrid, containing many important and some new documents relative to Columbus, he set off for the Spanish capital, to undertake the translation of the work. Mr. Irving, however, meeting with numerous aids at Madrid, resolved on producing an original history, which he has presented to the public with extreme diffidence: "all that I can safely claim," he observes, "is, an earnest desire to state the truth, an absence from prejudices respecting the nations mentioned in my history, a strong interest in my subject, and a zeal to make up by assiduity for many deficiencies of which I am conscious." This work has been abridged by Mr. Irving to one of the volumes of the Family Library. As we have intimated to the reader, it is of higher pretensions than either of the author's previous writings: a clever critic refers to it as "a spirited and interesting work, in which every thing is as judiciously reasoned as it is beautifully and forcibly expressed," and as "much more grave in its character and laborious in its execution than any of his preceding ones." [4]

[Footnote 4: New Monthly Magazine.]

Mr. Irving's next production was "A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada," in which the author's knowledge of Spanish history is made to shine in detailing the chivalrous glories of the New World.

In the spring of the present year it appears that Mr. Irving touched "the golden shores of old romance," and published *Tales of the Alhambra*; the origin of which work is thus told by the author. A few years since, Mr. Wilkie, the distinguished R.A. and Mr. Irving were fellow travellers on the continent. In their rambles about some of the old cities of Spain, they were struck with scenes and incidents which reminded them of passages in the *Arabian Nights*. Mr. Wilkie urged his companion to write something that should

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illustrate those peculiarities, “something in the Haroun Alraschid style” that should have a dash of that Arabian spice which pervades everything in Spain. Mr. Irving set about his task with enthusiasm: his study was the spacious Alhambra itself, and the governor gave the author and his companion, permission to occupy his vacant apartments in the Moorish palace: Mr. Wilkie soon returned to England, leaving Mr. Irving at the Alhambra, where he remained “for several months, spell-bound in the old enchanted pile.” The result was two volumes of legends and traditions, which for interesting incident, and gracefulness of narrative, have few parallels in our romance-writing.[5] They are dedicated, in good taste, to the ingenious originator, Mr. Wilkie.

[Footnote 5: For Two Illustrations and Notice of this interesting work, See *Mirror*, vol. xix. p. 337 to 342; whence the above origin of the work has been quoted.]

In person, Mr. Irving is of middle height; and, according to a contemporary, of “modest deportment and easy attitude, with all the grace and dignity of an English gentleman.”[6] Another describes him as “a most amiable man, and great genius, but not lively in conversation.” His features have a pleasing regularity, and are lit up, at every corner, with that delightful humour which flows in a rich vein throughout his writings, and forms their most attractive charm.

[Footnote 6: Fraser’s Magazine.]

Having noticed Mr. Irving’s principal works, we have left but little occasion to speak of his general style. A contemporary has denominated him the “Goldsmith of the age;” and of Goldsmith we must remember that, in his epitaph, Dr. Johnson observes: “he left no species of writing untouched, and adorned all to which he applied himself”—a tribute which can scarcely be appropriately paid to any writer of our time. However, we know not any author that Mr. Irving so much resembles as Goldsmith: although no imitator, his style and language forcibly remind us of that easy flow so peculiar to the Citizen of the World. But, we have higher warrant for this parallel. “It seems probable,” observes a critical writer of considerable acumen, “that Mr. Irving might prove no contemptible rival to Goldsmith, whose turn of mind he very much inherits, and of whose style he particularly reminds us. Like him, too, Mr. Irving possesses the art of setting ludicrous perplexities in the most irresistible point of view, and we think equals him in the variety of humour.”[7]

[Footnote 7: Quarterly Review.—Such is the variety displayed in the Salmagundi; the papers were supposed to be the joint efforts of several literati.]

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To conclude, we find the literary character of Mr. Irving illustrated in a contemporary journal, with unusual spirit. "There never was a writer," observes the editor, "whose popularity was more matter of feeling, or more intimate than Washington Irving, perhaps, because he appeared at once to our simplest and kindest emotions. His affections were those of 'hearth and home;' the pictures he delighted to draw were those of natural loveliness, linked with human sympathies; and a too unusual thing with the writers of our time—he looked upon God's works, and 'saw that they were good.' * * * With him the wine of life is not always on the lees. An exquisite vein of poetry runs through every page,—and of poetry, his epithets who does not remember—the shark, glancing like a spectre through the blue seas." [8]

[Footnote 8: Literary Gazette.]

* * * * *

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