

North-West Company bought out the American traders. For a description of the treachery and incapacity by which this great enterprise was defeated we must again refer to the book itself.

Of Mr. Irving's labours in this work the extracts we have given will enable the reader to judge. Out of materials not very favourable to his purpose he has succeeded in weaving a connected and exciting narrative. Great art has been employed, though none appears. The simplicity of the style accords well with the whole history; and although a striking effect has been produced, no striving after it is at any time apparent. A more finished and exquisite narrative we never read; the events recorded are in themselves of intense interest, and the scenes in which they occurred equal any the world contains for beauty and magnificence. Need we, after such an enumeration, state, that our critical labours have seldom brought us so much pleasure as that derived from the perusal of *ASTORIA*.
J. A. R.

ART. III.

Thoughts in the Cloister and the Crowd. Wix, New Bridge Street, Blackfriars. 1835. 12mo. pp. 111.

THERE are two kinds of wisdom: in the one, every age in which science flourishes surpasses, or ought to surpass, its predecessors; of the other, there is nearly an equal amount in all ages. The first is the wisdom which depends upon long chains of reasoning, a comprehensive survey of the whole of a great subject at once, or complicated and subtle processes of metaphysical analysis: this is properly philosophy: the other is that acquired by experience of life, and a good use of the opportunities possessed by all who have mingled much with the world, or who have a large share of human nature in their own breasts. This unsystematic wisdom, drawn by acute minds in all periods of history from their personal experience, is properly termed the wisdom of ages; and every lettered age has left a portion of it upon record. It is nowhere more genuine than in the old fabulists, Æsop and others. The speeches in Thucydides are among the most remarkable specimens of it. Aristotle and Quintilian have worked up rich stores of it into their systematic writings; nor ought Horace's Satires, and especially his Epistles, to be forgotten. But the form in which this kind of wisdom most naturally embodies itself is that of aphorisms; and such, from the Proverbs of Solomon to our own day, is the shape it has oftenest assumed.

Some persons, who cannot be satisfied unless they have the forms of accurate knowledge as well as the substance, object to aphorisms because they are unsystematic. These objectors forget that to be unsystematic is of the essence of all truths which rest on specific experiment. A systematic treatise is the most natural form for delivering truths which grow out of one another; but truths, each of which rests upon its own independent evidence, may, we venture to think, be exhibited in the same unconnected state in which they were discovered. Philosophy may afterwards trace the connection among these truths, detect the more general principles of which they are manifestations, and so systematize the whole. But we need not wait till this is done before we record them and act upon them. On the contrary, these detached truths are at once the materials and the tests of philosophy itself; since philosophy is not called in to prove them, but may very justly be required to account for them.

A more valid objection to aphorisms, as far as it goes, is, that they are very seldom exactly true; but then this, unfortunately, is an objection to all human knowledge. A proverb or an apophthegm — any proposition epigrammatically expressed — almost always goes more or less beyond the strict truth: the fact which it states is stated in a more unqualified manner than the truth warrants. But, when logicians have done their best to correct the proposition by just modifications and limitations, is the case much mended? Very little. Every really existing Thing is a compound of such innumerable properties, and has such an infinity of relations with all other things in the universe, that almost every law to which it appears to us to be subject is liable to be set aside, or frustrated, either by some other law of the same object or by the laws of some other object which interferes with it: and as no one can possibly foresee or grasp all these contingencies, much less express them in such an imperfect language as that of words, no one need flatter himself that he can lay down propositions sufficiently specific to be available for practice, which he may afterwards apply mechanically without any exercise of thought. It is given to no human being to stereotype a set of truths, and walk safely by their guidance with his mind's eye closed. Let us envelop our proposition with what exceptions and qualifications we may, fresh exceptions will turn up, and fresh qualifications be found necessary, the moment any one attempts to act upon it. Not aphorisms, therefore, alone, but all general propositions whatever, require to be taken with a large allowance for inaccuracy; and, we may venture to add, this allowance is much more likely to be made when, the proposition being avowedly presented without any

limitations, every one must see that he is left to make the limitations for himself.

If aphorisms were less likely than systems to have truth in them, it would be difficult to account for the fact that almost all books of aphorisms, which have ever acquired a reputation, have retained it; and, we apprehend, have generally deserved to retain it; while, how wofully the reverse is the case with systems of philosophy no student is ignorant. One reason for this difference may be, that books of aphorisms are seldom written but by persons of genius. There are, indeed, to be found books like Mr. Colton's 'Lacon'—centos of trite truisms and trite falsisms pinched into epigrams. But, on the whole, he who draws his thoughts (as Coleridge says) from a cistern, and not from a spring, will generally be more sparing of them than to give ten ideas in a page instead of ten pages to an idea. And where there is originality in aphorisms there is generally truth, or a bold approach to some truth which really lies beneath. A scientific system is often spun out of a few original assumptions, without any intercourse with nature at all; but he who has generalized copiously and variously from actual experience, must have thrown aside so many of his first observations as he went on, that the residuum can hardly be altogether worthless.

Of books of aphorisms, written by men of genius, the 'Pensées' of Pascal is, perhaps, the least valuable in comparison with its reputation; but even this, in so far as it is aphoristic, is acute and profound: it fails, where it is perverted by the author's *systematic* views on religion. La Rochefoucault, again, has been inveighed against as a 'libeller of human nature,' &c., merely from not understanding his drift. His 'Maxims' are a series of delineations, by a most penetrating observer, of the workings of habitual selfishness in the human breast; and they are true to the letter, of all thoroughly selfish persons, and of all persons whatever in proportion as they are selfish. A man of a warmer sympathy with mankind would, indeed, have enunciated his propositions in less sweeping terms; not that there was any fear of leading the world into the mistake that there was neither virtue nor feeling in it; but because a generous spirit could not have borne to chain itself down to the contemplation of littleness and meanness, unless for the express purpose of showing to others against what degrading influences, and in what an ungenial atmosphere it was possible to maintain elevation of feeling and nobleness of conduct. The error of La Rochefoucault has been avoided by Chamfort, the more high-minded and more philosophic La Rochefoucault of the eighteenth century. In his posthumous

work, the 'Pensées, Maximes, Caractères, et Anecdotes' (a book which, to its other merits, adds that of being one of the best collections of *bons mots* in existence), he lays open the basest parts of vulgar human nature, with as keen an instrument and as unshrinking a hand as his precursor; but not with that cool indifference of manner, like a man who is only thinking of saying clever things; he does it with the concentrated bitterness of one whose own life has been made valueless to him by having his lot cast among these basenesses, and whose sole consolation is in the thought that human nature is not the wretched thing it appears, and that, in better circumstances, it will produce better things. Nor does he ever leave his reader, for long together, without being reminded, that he is speaking, not of what might be, but of what now is.

Much might here be said of Burke, whose *γνώμαι* are the best, if not the only valuable, part of his writings; of Goethe, and Bacon, the greatest masters, perhaps, of aphoristic wisdom upon record. But we must abridge. Let us turn rather to the fact that our own age and nation have given birth to some not contemptible productions of the same kind*, and that one of these lies before us, some specimens of which will be interesting to our readers.

* Among the best of them is a book in two small volumes, intituled 'Guesses at Truth, by Two Brothers,' one of the brothers being understood to be the Rev. Julius Hare. The book is strongly religious, and in its views of religion there is much that seems to us questionable, but much also that is admirable, while it abounds with thoughts which could have proceeded from no ordinary mind. 'The Statesman,' by Mr. Henry Taylor, the author of 'Philip Van Artevelde,' may also be classed among books of aphorisms. Accident alone prevented us from reviewing this work immediately on its appearance; and although it will have lost somewhat of the gloss of novelty before we can now fulfil our intention, it contains so many just and profound observations applicable to all times, and so many important criticisms and suggestions peculiarly deserving the attention of practical reformers at the present time, that we shall return to it at the very earliest opportunity. The unpublished writings of Mr. Coleridge must contain much valuable matter of an aphoristic kind. The two volumes published by his nephew, as specimens of his 'Table-talk,' excited our expectations highly, and disappointed them utterly. It is the first thoroughly bad book which ever appeared under Mr. Coleridge's name. In the whole two volumes there are not more than two or three thoughts above common-place, and many which are greatly below it: he dogmatizes with the most unbounded confidence on subjects which it is evident that he never took the trouble to study; and his blunders are not only such as would have been impossible with the most ordinary knowledge of what had previously been thought and written, but are often such as, if they had come from any but one of the subtlest intellects of this or of any age, would have appeared conclusive proofs of positive obtuseness of understanding. It is pitiable to find a man of Mr. Coleridge's genius uttering on population, taxes, and many other topics, stuff which was barely pardonable in any thinking person forty years ago, and which is now below the average knowledge and intellect of the commonest hacks of the press. The two volumes of 'Letters and Recollections,' published by Moxon, are much better. The 'Literary Remains,' which are now in course of publication, we have not yet seen.

This little volume, entitled 'Thoughts in the Cloister and the Crowd,' is a work of extraordinary promise, if, as we have heard, and as there is some internal evidence, it is the production of a young man who has just left the university. All the indications of a thoughtful, and, on every matter to which it has yet turned its attention, really original mind are here. The 'Thoughts' are really thoughts: that is, they are drawn from things, and not from books or tradition; and this is no less evident in the author's failures than in his successes. Whether he shoots over the heads of his predecessors, or timidly throws out some small fragment of a truth which others before him have seen in all its plenitude, in either case it is because he speaks what he himself has felt or observed, and stops where that stops. We have spoken of failures; but these are far from numerous. The book contains one hundred and sixty-four maxims; among which are five or six decidedly false, or questionable, and fifty or sixty truths which have been as well or better said before. The remainder are a real addition to the world's stock of just thoughts happily expressed; and some of these may be ranked with the best things of the best satirists, while others give evidence of a soul far above that of any satirist—far too habitually intent upon its own ideal standard to bestow any other than an incidental notice upon the shortcomings of others.

We cannot better commence our quotations than with one which is in the very spirit of La Rochefoucault, and might be prefixed as a motto to every book containing novelties in thought:—

'Few will at first be pleased with those thoughts which are entirely new to them, and which, if true, they feel to be truths which they should never have discovered for themselves.

'Perhaps if the power of becoming beautiful were granted to the ugliest of mankind, he would only wish to be so changed, that when changed he might be considered a very handsome likeness of his former self.'—p. 110.

We quote those which follow, not as the best, but as being in a similar vein:—

'It is an error to suppose that no man understands his own character. Most persons know even their failings very well, only they persist in giving them names different from those usually assigned by the rest of the world; and they compensate for this mistake by naming, at first sight, with singular accuracy, these very same failings in others.'—p. 48.

'You cannot insure the gratitude of others for a favour conferred on them in the way which is most agreeable to yourself.'—p. 77.

'Some are contented to wear the mask of foolishness in order to carry

on their vicious schemes; and not a few are willing to shelter their folly behind the respectability of downright vice.'—p. 69.

'You may be forgiven for an injury which, when made known to the world, will render you alone the object of its ridicule.'—p. 99.

'The world will tolerate many vices, but not their diminutives.'—p. 62.

'Men love to contradict their general character. Thus a man is of a gloomy and suspicious temperament, is deemed by all morose, and ere long finds out the general opinion. He then suddenly deviates into some occasional acts of courtesy. Why? Not because he ought, not because his nature is changed; but because he dislikes being thoroughly understood. He will not be the thing whose behaviour on any occasion the most careless prophet can with certainty foretell'*.—p. 49.

The following is an observation of very great reach and importance:—

'It would often be as well to condemn a man unheard, as to condemn him upon the reasons which he openly avows for any course of action.'—p. 9.

The explanation of this is to be found in another maxim of our author:—

'The reasons which any man offers to you for his own conduct betray his opinion of *your* character.'—p. 75.

How true! how obvious! yet how seldom adverted to, and, we think, never written before. The reason which a man gives for his conduct is not that which he feels, but that which he thinks you are most likely to feel. It often requires less moral courage to do a noble action than to avow that it proceeds from a noble motive. They who act on higher motives than the multitude suffer their conduct to be imputed to their personal position, to their friends, to their humour, even to some object of personal advancement—to anything, in short, which will not involve a reproach to others for not doing the like. They would rather the mean should think them as mean as themselves than incur the odium of setting up to be better than their neighbours, or the danger of giving others any cause to infer that they despise them.

The two which follow are in a vein of thought somewhat similar:—

* Mr. Taylor, in his 'Statesman,' notes the same fact, and accounts for it differently; both explanations being correct. 'In our judgment of men, we are to beware of giving any great importance to occasional acts. By acts of occasional virtue, weak men endeavour to redeem themselves in their own estimation, vain men to exalt themselves in that of mankind. It may be observed that there are no men more worthless and selfish in the general tenor of their lives than some who from time to time perform feats of generosity. Sentimental selfishness will commonly vary its indulgences in this way, and vainglorious selfishness will break out with acts of munificence. But self-government and self-denial are not to be relied upon for any real strength, except in so far as they are found to be exercised in detail.'—*The Statesman*, p. 20.

'If you are very often deceived by those around you, you may be sure that you deserve to be deceived; and that, instead of railing at the general falseness of mankind, you have first to pronounce judgment on your own jealous tyranny, or on your own weak credulity. *Those only who can bear the truth will hear it.*'—p. 76.

And again:—

'We often err by contemplating an individual solely in his relation and behaviour to us, and generalizing from that with more rapidity than wisdom. We might as well argue that the moon has no rotation about her axis, because the same hemisphere is always presented to our view.'—p. 26.

There is nothing which persons oftener overlook, in judging of the characters of others, than that there are portions of those characters which possibly would never be shown to *them*. They think they know a person thoroughly, because they have seen and conversed with him under all varieties of circumstances. They *have* seen him under all circumstances, except that of their own absence.

The maxims we have hitherto quoted relate chiefly to our judgments of others; the following are to aid our self-judgment:—

'The world will find out that part of your character which concerns it: that which especially concerns yourself it will leave for you to discover.'—p. 4.

'We talk of early prejudices, of the prejudices of religion, of position, of education; but in truth we only mean the prejudices of others. . . . In a quarrel between two friends, if one of them, even the injured one, were, in the retirement of his chamber, to consider himself as the hired advocate of the other at the court of wronged friendship; and were to omit all the facts which told in his own favour, to exaggerate all that could possibly be said against himself, and to conjure up from his imagination a few circumstances of the same tendency, he might with little effort make a good case for his former friend. Let him be assured that, whatever the most skilful advocate could say, his poor friend really believes and feels; and then, instead of wondering at the insolence of such a traitor walking about in open day, he will pity his friend's delusion, have some gentle misgivings as to the exact propriety of his own conduct, and perhaps sue for an immediate reconciliation.'—p. 23.

The following is true, and ingeniously expressed:—

'It must be a very weary day to the youth when he first discovers that after all he will only become a man.'—p. 78.

The next is one which many will not understand, but which all who do understand will recognise the truth of: we have never met with it before:—

'We have some respect for one who, if he tramples on the feelings of others, tramples on his own with equal apparent indifference.'—p. 50.

We know not if the state of mind of the common herd, on subjects of speculation, was ever more happily characterized than in the following observation:—

‘The unfortunate Ladurlad did not desire the sleep that for ever fled his weary eyelids with more earnestness than most people seek *the deep slumber of a decided opinion.*’—p. 2.

It is, too truly, so: the motive which induces most people to wish for certainty is the uneasiness of doubt; that uneasiness removed, they turn on their pillow and go to sleep: as if truths were meant to be assented to, but not acted upon. We think the having attained a truth should be the signal for rousing oneself, and not for sleeping; unless it be a reason for renouncing your voyage that you have just acquired a compass to steer by. Nor is the fact of having arrived at a ‘decided opinion,’ even though it be a true one, any reason for not thinking more on the subject; otherwise the time will soon come when, instead of knowing the truth, you will only remember that you have known it, and continue believing it on your own authority: which is nearly as pernicious a form of taking upon trust as if you believed it on the authority of popes or councils.

The next, though stated too universally, is both ingenious and just:—

‘When your friend is suffering under great affliction, either be entirely silent, or offer none but the most common topics of consolation: for, in the first place, they are the best; and also from their commonness they are easily understood. Extreme grief will not pay attention to any new thing.’—p. 34.

The following is a genuinely poetical thought expressed in fine prose:—

‘The Pyramids!—what a lesson to those who desire a name in the world does the fate of these restless, brick-piling monarchs afford! Their names are not known, and the only hope for them is, that, by the labours of some cruelly-industrious antiquarian, they may at last become more *definite* objects of contempt.’—p. 22.

The following are not new, but they are truths which cannot be too often repeated:—

‘The business of the head is to form a good heart, and not merely to rule an evil one, as is generally imagined.’—p. 2.

‘The noblest works, like the temple of Solomon, are brought to perfection in silence.’—p. 46.

This is especially true of ideas. A great idea always dawns upon the intellect by degrees, and is seen confusedly for a long period, during which the attempt to seize it and fix it in words would merely disturb the process by which the different rays of

light are gradually made to converge, until at last the truth flashes upon the mind's eye a completed image. But if there be one thing, more than another, which is brought to perfection in silence, it is, a fine character: for first, no one who talks much, has time, or is likely to have a taste, for solitary reflection; and next, it is impossible that those who habitually give out their most cherished feelings to all comers, can permanently maintain a tone of feeling much above what is prevalent among those by whom they are surrounded.

'There are some books which we at first reject, because we have neither felt, nor seen, nor thought, nor suffered enough to understand and appreciate them. Perhaps "The Excursion" is one of these.'—p. 69.

When our author has lived longer, he will be able to give still more pregnant instances than that of 'The Excursion.' His remark is true of all books, whether of poetry, philosophy, or fictitious narrative, the matter of which is drawn from the personal experiences of the finer natures or the profounder intellects.

There are occasional lapses in this volume, obviously the effect of inexperience. Thus the author has persuaded himself, Heaven knows how, that 'the love of being considered well-read is one of the most fatal of all the follies which subdue the present generation'—(p. 51); and thereupon he says, very truly and profitably, that what we are the better for is not what we have read, but what we have assimilated; and that 'those who are much engaged in acquiring knowledge, will not always have time for deep thought or intense feeling.'—(p. 49.) For our part, we are heartily glad to hear that there are some circles in which 'the love of being considered well-read' is still the besetting sin: we, unless to run through newspapers and Guides to Knowledge and magazines and novels is to be well read, have not happened to fall in with many such people. There are so few well-read persons in this generation (in this country we mean) that any charlatan who sets up for the character can get his pretensions admitted without question, no one having depth enough of his own to fathom another person's shallowness. We are, thanks to our Church and our Universities, a most unlearned nation. Those 'venerable institutions' have nearly rooted out learning from among us.

Besides these errors of inexperience, our author sometimes stops curiously short of some obvious inference from his own observations. Thus he notices, what has so often been noticed, the superiority of women over men in patient endurance, and dismisses the subject with an expression of idle wonder. The power of endurance in women is the faithful measure of how much they have to endure. If all dark-haired men were con-

demned by their organization to incessantly recurring physical suffering—and if, in addition to this, their very minutest act, and their very smallest enjoyment, required the consent, either express or tacit, of another, he on his part being under no reciprocity of that obligation—dark-haired men would soon be distinguished for the virtue of endurance: and doubtless it would, ere long, be regarded as one of their natural gifts, as the virtue appropriate to their kind; and their capacity of patience would be thought ample justification for giving them much to be patient of.

We take leave of 'Thoughts in the Cloister and the Crowd' with a feeling towards the author which we seldom entertain towards any of the young writers of this writing generation—namely, a full determination to read his next production, whatever it may be. A.

ART. IV.

FALLACIES ON POOR-LAWS.

AMONG the evils which originate in misgovernment are many which must long continue to exist after the cause which produced them has ceased to operate. One is, the feeling of distrust with which the best-intentioned efforts of even a responsible legislature will be received by the great body of the people. In this country the people have never been accustomed to identify themselves with the government. They have considered it (and hitherto with too much reason) as an enemy, ever on the watch to encroach upon their rights, and having an interest perfectly distinct from that of the nation. Hence it may be observed, that the journals most popular with the working-classes treat the British government as something quite as alien to England, Ireland, or Scotland, as the government of Louis Philippe, or that of the Emperor of Russia. If there be any difference, it is that the Emperor of Russia is spoken of with more respect than the British government, as the less dangerous enemy of the two. The people are in the condition of a flock of sheep long ravaged by wolves. Nothing is thought of but the means of escape; and the best friend of the flock is suspected to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. Or they may be compared to the frogs in the fable. They have discovered the inconveniences of being governed by King Stork; but having never experienced the benefit which would arise from the same power exercised by a government responsible to themselves, they would deprive it of the ability to do either good or harm, and their utmost aspirations do not rise beyond the prayer, 'Oh Jupiter, send us again King Log.'