

From The Quarterly Review.

NONSENSE AS A FINE ART.\*

WHAT is sense? What is nonsense? Sense is the recognition, adjustment, and maintenance of the proper and fitting relations of the affairs of ordinary life. It is a constitutional tact, a keeping touch with all around it, rather than a conscious and deliberate action of the intellect. It almost seems the mental outcome and expression of our five senses; and perhaps it is for this reason, as well as because the sense of the individual always aims at keeping itself on the average level of his fellows, that we usually talk of sense as common sense. If we call it good sense, it is to remind ourselves that there is a right and a wrong in this as in everything human. But it is not bad sense, but nonsense, which is the proper contrary of sense. In contradiction to the relations and harmonies of life, nonsense sets itself to discover and bring forward the incongruities of all things within and without us. Pope couples nonsense with dulness; yet long before Pope, the thing, if not the name, nonsense had been recognized as of infinite worth. Cowper and Hogarth shared in the humors of the Nonsense Club; and now the name has been made classical by the writer whose books of nonsense are enumerated at the head of this article. For while sense is, and must remain essentially prosaic and commonplace, nonsense has proved not to be an equally prosaic and commonplace negative of sense, not a mere putting forward of incongruities and absurdities, but the bringing out a new and deeper harmony of life in and through its contradictions. Nonsense, in fact, in this use of the word, has shown itself to be a true work of the imagination, a child of genius, and its writing one of the fine arts.

This discomfiture of sense by nonsense, this bringing confusion into order by set-

ting things upside down, bringing them into all sorts of unnatural, impossible, and absurd, but not painful or dangerous, combinations, is a source of universal delight; and the laughter which it gives rise to is, as Aristotle says, the expression of our surprise at seeing things so out of place, yet not threatening danger. And the range of this delight extends from the poorest practical joke to the creations of the greatest dramatic poets. Nonsense, being what it is, may be further described as the flower and fruit of wit and humor, when these have reached the final stage of their growth to perfection. But how shall we hope to define wit and humor, and to distinguish one from the other? We may repeat the arguments or rest on the authority of Aristotle, Ben Jonson, Hobbes, Coleridge, and a host of minor philosophers, and we may produce our proofs and illustrations from Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Rabelais, or Cervantes; but, after all, we only find ourselves in the predicament of the Court of Chancery in Lord Eldon's days, as Sir George Rose described it in his law song of that time:—

Mr. Parker made matters darker,  
Which were dark enough without:  
Mr. Cook quoted his book,  
And the Chancellor said, "I doubt."

We too, like the chancellor, can only say "We doubt," if we are asked what is the real distinction between wit and humor. At best we can perhaps say, as St. Augustine, said when asked "What is time?"—"I know when you do not ask me." We all of us use the words with a feeling that they are not synonymous, but with a feeling also that they have hitherto defied all the attempts to reduce them to exact analysis, even when the task was undertaken by such a master of metaphysical investigation as Coleridge; and that only at extreme points is it perhaps possible to distinguish and define. We sometimes use the name of wit merely to describe some clear statement in well-chosen words, or some collocation of conflicting thoughts and arguments, which are brought together not to promote laughter, but to elucidate the subject under discussion. And, on the other hand, we often

\* 1. *A Book of Nonsense*. By Edward Lear. London, 1846. Twenty-sixth edition, 1888.

2. *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets*. By Edward Lear. London, 1871. New edition, 1888.

3. *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, etc.* By Edward Lear. London, 1872. New edition, 1888.

4. *Laughable Lyrics, a Fourth Book of Nonsense, Poems, Songs, Botany, Music, etc.* By Edward Lear. London, 1877. New edition, 1888.



accord the title of humor to any genial expression of sentiments not specially characterized by fun. Of wit, in its more usual and proper sense, the pun, which merely brings words into laughable apposition, is the lowest form, while of the higher kinds the epigram, bringing incongruous thoughts and images together in terse and balanced phrases, is at once an instance and the summary. And then the ridiculous position and aspect into which men, and the affairs of men, are thus brought, gives opportunity for the expression of that intellectual contempt and scorn which so usually forms a characteristic part of what we call wit, that it has been held by some great authorities to be the very wit itself. Humor shows no such scorn, for it feels none. It looks with kindly and playful forgiveness on all those frailties, incongruities, and absurd contradictions of mortal life, which wit sternly condemns with the harsh severity of an overweening pride of superiority. A comparison between Butler's "Hudibras" and the "Don Quixote" of Cervantes (which Dr. Johnson has already made with another motive than ours) brings into clear contrast the difference between wit and humor, when we thus take them where they stand widest apart. We doubt whether Butler is now so highly appreciated as in the days of Dr. Johnson; or even as he was fifty or sixty years ago, when Coleridge in his "Aids to Reflection in the Building up of a Manly Character," recommends the study of "Hudibras" as a help to the formation of sound religious convictions. But while we grant with Johnson "that if inexhaustible wit could give perpetual pleasure, no eye would leave half read the work of Butler," how utterly cold, heartless, dreary, does Butler's work remain! It is all wit, wit as it is in its glacial period, where granite may exist with the ice, but no trace of life is to be found; and not even the master hand of Hogarth can enable us to feel that Hudibras and his rascal crew are real men and women. The contrast is complete when we turn to the work of Cervantes. Here all is sunshine, warmth, and genial life. Not only the noble-hearted knight who has lost his wits, and the friendly squire

who is no less absurd than his master in the possession of what that master has lost, — not only these, so good in their absurdity, but the rascally innkeeper, the galley-slaves, and all the personages, good and bad, who fill the stage in motley succession, are so genial, so human, that the reader feels relationship with them all, and is ready to say with the Roman dramatist: "I am a man; such kinship is nothing strange to me."

We have not quoted any of the "sententious distichs" of Butler, for they are known far and wide to those who have never looked into "Hudibras," and who, if they did so, would be agreeably surprised to find the poem as "full of quotations" as did the man who went to see "Hamlet" acted, when he had never read the play. But from "Don Quixote" we will give one quotation, which may be called nonsense, while it is a true instance of the deep and genial pathos of humor which pervades the whole book: —

"I do not understand that," replied Sancho. "I only know that while I am asleep I feel neither fear nor hope, nor trouble nor glory. Good betide him who invented sleep, the cloak that covers up all a man's thoughts, the food that satisfies hunger, the water that drives away thirst, the fire that warms the cold, the cold that tempers the heat; and, in a word, the current money with which all things are bought, the scales and weight which even the shepherd shares with the king, and the simple with the sage."

"What nonsense!" says common sense. "How could a man invent sleep?" If we reply, "How could Macbeth murder sleep?" perhaps common sense might mutter with George III., "Shakespeare! Shakespeare! horrid stupid stuff; but we must not say so." But we grant that it is nonsense; and yet we say that in those nonsensical words of poor blundering Sancho lie all the meaning, all the depth of human life and pathos, though not the poetical beauty, which we have in Shakespeare's own description of sleep: —

The innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second  
course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast.



Such a contrast as we have here drawn between Butler and Cervantes may give a practical illustration, though not a scientific definition, of the difference between wit and humor, at their extreme points of opposition. But we do not pretend that it helps us to distinguish their currents where they mingle at a hundred points. We will not undertake to say whether Sydney Smith was a wit or a humorist, or in what proportions he was both. Was it wit or humor to say, on the question of paving St. Paul's Churchyard with wood, "If the dean and chapter would lay their heads together the thing would be done?" The polished, epigrammatic terseness, the clearly suggested though unuttered thought that these dignitaries were block-heads, the intellectual scorn, the covert play on words which in themselves form merely a commonplace observation — all these show true wit. All are the proper marks of wit. Yet they are not the less bathed in an atmosphere of genuine humor. The witty canon was himself one of the chapter which he mocked, and his scorn included himself in his genial play. So, too, are wit and humor inextricably mingled in his reply to the friend who asked him if it was true that he had been sitting to Landseer for his portrait: "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?"\* Here are all the marks of wit, as we have just enumerated them; but they become no less marks of humor, as they all fuse themselves into the funny, humorous image of the portly divine sitting up like one of Landseer's dogs, and "quoting Scripture like a very learned clerk." Again, in what class shall we put that *tour de force* when to the challenge to find rhymes to "cassowary" and "Timbuctoo" the impromptu reply was made: "When I was in Africa, I one day heard a native singing to a hymn-tune, —

If I were a cassowary,  
In the plains of Timbuctoo,  
I'd eat up a missionary,  
Hat, and bands, and hymn-book, too.

\* This, which we take to be the true story, is no way discredited by Landseer's statement to Mr. Frith, that he (Landseer) did not ask Sydney Smith to sit to him, and consequently did not receive the supposed refusal.

The distinction in question is, however, of the less practical importance to us here, because, as we have said, we are treating, not of wit or humor, but of that ripe outcome of either or both which we call nonsense; nonsense as a work of art. Except for bringing in an occasional sidelight we shall confine ourselves to English nonsense; and still further limit ourselves to tracing the outlines of a few of the many great and perennial branches of that mighty secular tree, without being able to take much heed of the countless leaves and blossoms to which it gives fresh life year by year. Even so, we shall have to divide our subject into as many heads as those in the repertory of Hamlet's players, or in a sermon preached before the Long Parliament at Westminster. There is the nonsense of the story-teller, of the moralist and even the theologian, and of the dramatist; there is the nonsense of poetry, of satire, of parody, of caricature, of the comic journal; there is nonsense with a "tendency," as the Germans say; and there is nonsense "pure and absolute," such as Mr. Lear tells us has been his aim throughout his books.

First, then, of the story. We do not here speak of the great nonsense romances of Pulci, Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Sterne, and the creator of the "Arabian Nights;" but of the stories which somehow and somewhere took root and grew before the earliest Aryan or Indo-Germanic migration begun, which have travelled into every land, and have found their way into every nursery, and are everywhere with us in their old or in new forms. Some people find themselves wiser and better, or at least more self-respected, by calling these stories "solar myths;" we are content to talk with our children of Puss in Boots, Tom Thumb, or Jack the Giant-killer, who still keep their rightful places among the new and not unworthy aspirants, introduced to us by Mrs. Ewing or Mr. Kingsley, Mr. Lear or Lewis Carroll. All these stories are in their own way works of art — of the fine art of nonsense. But one of them has been raised to the rank of a masterpiece by the creating hand of a great poet. We mean the "Nonnes Preestes Tale" of Chaucer.



Let us then examine critically this masterpiece in the art.

Charles Lamb's landlord found "much indifferent spelling in Chaucer," and Artemus Ward says of him: "Mr. C. had talent, but he could not spell; he is the worst speller I ever knew." And it is more by the antiquated spelling than by the obsolete words or grammatical forms of Chaucer that so many are deterred from the enjoyment of his exuberant fun and humor, as well as fine poetry. A lady once told us that she knew "Morte d'Arthur," by reading it in Caxton's original black letter;\* but we doubt whether many persons could be found who have even read it in the Southey-Upcott reprint with the old spelling in modern type. And, notwithstanding a recent attempt to prove the contrary by the publication of an edition of Shakespeare with the old spelling of the quartos and folios, we venture to say that even his plays would have remained a sealed book to almost all of us, if his editors had till now retained that spelling, instead of substituting that of their own day. And as to Chaucer, let any one who has hitherto been so deterred, look into Mr. Cowden Clarke's admirable "Riches of Chaucer," and the scales will fall from his eyes. Dryden modernized Chaucer in another fashion. It is bad work enough, yet not so bad (for how could it be?) as when he helped Davenant to re-write Shakespeare's "Tempest."

The "Nun's Priest's Tale" was probably an old and familiar nursery story. Its concluding incident forms the substance of the little fable, "Dou Coc et dou Werpil," in the "Book of Fables" which the Anglo-Norman poetess Marie de France, writing in the thirteenth century, tells us "was turned by Ysopez from Greek into Latin, by King Henry (one MS. reads Alured, *i.e.*, Alfred), who loved it well, into English, and by herself from English into French."† Chaucer tells us how Chaunteclere the cock dreamed that he saw a beast of a color "between white and red," who would have made arrest upon his body; but having been persuaded by Pertelote the hen to disregard the warning was actually seized by a fox, and hardly escaped with life. But what a cock and hen they are! They are not the mere talking fowls of Pilpay, Æsop, or Gay; they are not creatures of undistinguishable

form like the Quangle-Wangle, the Dong, or the Snark; nor impossible couples like the Owl and the Pussy Cat, or the Walrus and the Carpenter. They are an actual cock and hen, in the yard of an actual widow, though, as the poet's manner is, the actual is always raised to its ideal perfection, so that we say of the whole picture what the poet himself says of Chaunteclere's crowing — "It might not be amended." And then Chaucer endows the cock and hen with all the characteristics of a true gentleman and matronly dame, according to his own ideals of both. The human qualities are not merely added mechanically to those of the fowls, as in the ordinary fables, but so interfused into them that the whole becomes a new creation, in which each is a real part of the other. And thus that incongruousness in which the humor consists is raised to its highest pitch, so that it too "cannot be amended." Chaunteclere, perfect in his plumage and his crowing, who sits among his hens on their perch, or leads them into the yard to find the grains of corn, speaks familiarly of his shirt, as his wife does of his beard; and his talk is that of a courteous and learned Christian gentleman, while Dame Pertelote is, in like manner, an ideal matron: —

Courteous she was, discreet, and debonair,  
And compenable, and bare herself so fair,  
Sithen the day that she was seven night old,  
That truely she hath the heart in hold  
Of Chaunteclere, locken in every lith:  
He loved her so that well was him therewith.  
But such a joy it was to hear them sing,  
When that the brighté sun began to spring,  
In sweet accord — "My love is far in land."

When Chaunteclere, waking in a fright,  
tells his dream to Dame Pertelote, as they sit at roost on their perch, she banters him with mock indignation: —

How dursten you for shame say to your love  
That anything might maken you afeard!  
Have ye no manné's heart, and have a beard?

For that the indignation is banter, the poet indicates by his characteristic way of sly allusion, when he makes her declare, —

For certes, what so any woman saith,  
We all desiren, if it mighté be,  
To have a husband hardy, wise, and free;

where she hints that if she had really thought her husband a coward, she would have made the best of the matter, as a good wife is bound to do. Then looking at the matter from a homely standpoint not less natural now than it was five hun-

\* It is sad to think that the one perfect copy of this, the original edition of our old national epic, went to America after the recent sale of the Osterley Library.

† *Poésies de Marie de France*, par B. de Roquefort, ii. 240, 401.



dred years ago, she sets the dream down to indigestion, and prescribes a domestic dose of medicine which —

Though in this town be no apothecary —  
she can and will herself prepare from the proper herbs in the yard. And lastly, her husband being a learned man, she quotes Cato's advice not to care for dreams. Chaunteclere does not gainsay the wisdom of Cato, but tells Dame Pertelote that there are greater authorities on the other side. Of these he cites a number, sacred and profane; relates appropriate narratives which he has read in some of these; but finally declares that when he looks at the beauty of his wife's face he feels no fear, but defies the dream and its warning. But he defies the medicines too: —

For they be venemous, I wot it well:  
I them defy: I love them never a deal.

And then, while he cannot refrain from covertly relieving his feelings by the Latin quotation, —

In principio  
Mulier est hominis confusio,

he hastens to add with the courtesy and gallantry of the gentleman he is, —

Madam, the sentence of this Latin is,  
Woman is manné's joy, and manné's bliss.

The courage, with which his wife's beauty inspired him, nearly cost him his life. The "beast of a color betwixt white and red" did "make an arrest upon his body." The shrieks of Dame Pertelote brought what Mrs. Quickly calls "a rescue or two." Men and women, dogs and hogs, cow and calf, join in the pursuit; and as "out of the hive came the swarm of bees," the fox might have had the worst of it, if Chaunteclere had not meanwhile delivered himself by his own wit. Here we must leave this delightful piece of nonsense.

From the Icelandic Edda, we take another old nonsense story and poem — "The Lay of Thrym" — which we may properly call English, for it is a legend of our English ancestors, which must have been often sung or told at English firesides, while Woden and his sons were still the gods of England. Thor had lost his hammer; the shrewd and mischief-loving Loki, whose business it is to get the gods out of scrapes into which he delights to see them falling, learns that the giant-lord Thrym has stolen the hammer and buried it eight miles deep, and will only give it back if the goddess Freya becomes his wife. But "wroth was Freya

and snorted with rage, and the hall of the gods shook" when Thor went to her bower, and "this was the first word that he spake: 'Take thy bridal veil, Freya, we two must drive to Giantland.'" She refused, and "at once all the gods went into council and all the goddesses into parley." The giants would soon be dwelling in the land of the gods, if Thor did not get back his hammer. He yielded to the political necessity, though he feared that the gods would call him a lewd fellow; and "then they wrapped him in the bride's veil, and gave him the great Brising necklace, and let the keys rattle down his girdle and the woman's coats fall about his knees, and fastened the broad stones [brooches] at his breast, and wound the hood neatly about his head. Then spoke Loki, Laufey's son: 'I will follow thee as bridesmaid; we two will drive to Giantland.'" They soon got there in Thor's car drawn by goats. Thrym called his brother giants to the bridal feast, Thor ate for his share "a whole ox, eight salmon, and the dainties cooked for the ladies, and drank three casks of mead;" and when Thrym declared that he had never seen a bride eat and drink like this, "the quick-witted bridesmaid sitting by found ready answer to the giant's speech: 'Freya has not eaten for eight days, so eager was she to be in Giantland.'" Thrym was satisfied by this and by a like explanation, when Thrym, having raised the bride's veil for a kiss, was startled by her hideous eyes; his sister or mother demanded the bride's red rings for the bridal fee, and Thrym called for the hammer wherewith to "hallow their hands in wedlock;" and Thor no sooner felt the hammer in his hands than he slew with it the giants, and gave hammer-strokes instead of red rings to the sister.\*

An instance of the employment of nonsense in the service of morals and religion might seem to be promised us in the name, the plan, the purpose, and the opening lines of "The Ship of Fools," † the old

\* Corpus Poeticum Boreale, i. 175.

† The German original, by Sebastian Brandt, was published in 1494; translations and imitations speedily followed in Latin, English, French, and Dutch; it was preached from the pulpit; its popularity was great through the following century. The fundamental idea is that of the shipping off the fools, that is the vicious, the immoral, and the irreligious, of every rank and kind; and it is a stern and searching denunciation of the whole state of national demoralization which was then preparing the way for the Reformation. The old English version by Alexander Barclay is a free adaptation of the original to the then state of England. An excellent reprint of this version, with facsimiles of the quaint and curious woodcuts of the original German, was published in 1874, with a critical introduction by T. H. Jamieson.



English version of which describes the desired assembling and shipping off of the fools of England. And some humorous passages we might quote; but invaluable as the whole book is both to the philologist and to the student of the social and religious life of England immediately before the Reformation, for our present use the bulk would not equal the sample. We look for "quips and cranks and wanton wiles," we find a long and grave discourse or sermon.

Yet the Reformers were not wanting in the love of nonsense. The wit of Erasmus is well known. Of Luther's intense love of fun the readers of this review will remember a proof, given in its pages three or four years ago, in that astonishing declaration of his, the purport of which was that a Christian man might lawfully hear or tell a story of the grossest kind, if he did so from pure love of fun and not to excite vicious passions. And Latimer, in his comparison of Satan with "the rest" of the bishops, and the declaration that the former was the bishop for his money, gives us one of the finest specimens extant of what we here call the nonsense of theology:—

And now I would ask a strange question—who is the most diligentest bishop and prelate in all England, that passeth all the rest in doing his office? I can tell, for I know him, who it is: I know him well. But now I think I see you listening and hearkening that I should name him. There is one that passeth all the other, and is the most diligent prelate and preacher in all England. And will ye know who it is? I will tell you: it is the devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all other; he is never out of his diocese; he is never from his cure, ye shall never find him unoccupied; he is ever in his parish; he keepeth residence at all times; ye shall never find him out of the way, call for him when you will he is ever at home; the diligentest preacher in all the realm; he is ever at his plough: no lording, nor loitering can hinder him; he is ever applying his business, ye shall never find him idle, I warrant you.

In the mediæval mystery-plays the devil with his sword of lath was a common butt for ridicule; and the name and contents of Ben Jonson's play, "The Devil is an Ass," show how the tradition was carried on. And Coleridge and Southey in recent times revived the profane banter in their "Devil's Thoughts."

The poem, indeed, claims to have a moral purpose; but, as Lamb reminded Southey when he regretted the want of "a sounder religious feeling" in Lamb's "Elia," there was no one who more ha-

bitually made fun of the devil than did he (Southey) with all his orthodoxy: "You have flattered him in prose; you have chanted him in goodly odes. You have been his jester; volunteer laureate, and self-elected court poet to Beelzebub."\* Grimmer is the humor of Burns's "Address to the Devil;" but there is true, not mere comic, pathos in the concluding stanza, which Carlyle has compared with the like regret of Sterne's Uncle Toby:—

But fare ye weel, auld Nickie-ben!  
O wad ye tak' a thought, an' men!  
Ye aiblins might, I dinna ken,  
Still hae a stake:  
I'm wae to think upo' yon den  
Ev'n for your sake.

Another Scotchman, the Rev. Zachary Boyd, in the seventeenth century, may be said to have applied the art of nonsense-writing to make a metrical paraphrase of the Bible, for the edification of his readers or hearers. His soliloquy of Jonah in the whale's belly anticipates the objection of modern sceptics that in the original text there is no connection between the soliloquy and the supposed occasion of it; for in the paraphrase it thus begins:—

What house is this? Here's neither coal nor candle!  
Where I nothing but guts of fishes handle!  
I and my table are both here within,  
Where day ne'er dawn'd, where sun did never shine.  
The like of this on earth man never saw,  
A living man within a monster's maw!  
Bury'd under mountains which are high and steep!  
Plunged under waters hundred fathoms deep!  
Not so was Noah in his house of tree,  
For through a window he the light did see:  
He sailed above the highest waves; a wonder,  
I and my boat are all the waters under.

In this poem, too, we have the longest Alexandrine on record:—

Was not Pharaoh a great *rascal*?  
Who would not let the Children of Israel go  
into the wilderness, with their wives and  
their sons, and their daughters, and their  
flocks and their herds, for forty days and  
nights, to celebrate the *Paschal*?

This certainly comes up to Pope's definition of the Alexandrine—

Which, like a wounded snake, drags its slow  
length along.

\* Letters of Charles Lamb, edited by Talfourd, ii. 117. The best verses of "The Devil's Thoughts" are by Coleridge. Southey's enjoyment of nonsense-writing is shown more fully in "The Doctor," a book which, like his earlier "Omniana," is full of curious, though somewhat ponderous learning, as well as fun. "It walked the town awhile, now seldom pored on."



A suspicion that there was some love of fun with this reverend gentleman's desire to edify, may arise in our minds; and a like suspicion may be excited by the Cornish parson, who, when he had read the words as to the camel going through the needle's eye, told his village flock: "You will not understand this: but it is as if I were to say, it is harder than for a coo to climb up an elany [elm] tree, and ca'ävy [calve] in a maggoty pie's [magpie's] nest." We remember Charles Buller, himself a Cornish man, telling this story some sixty years ago, his eyes, as usual, sparkling with fun.

Greece led the way in nonsense, no less than in poetry, sculpture, painting, architecture, philosophy, history, and science; and if we had not limited ourselves to the consideration of English nonsense, we must here have entered on a discourse on Aristophanes. But the limitation is no disadvantage, for we need not fear to add the name of Aristophanes to those of the Greek dramatists with which Ben Jonson so proudly brings the name of Shakespeare into comparison. Shakespeare in nonsense, as in everything else, is our greatest artist. True to nature, true to art, Shakespeare embodies nonsense, as he embodies history, philosophy, poetry, in life and action, giving to it, as to each of these, its proper place and proportions. Yet such is his appreciation and love of fun for its own sake, that besides all the humors of his many individual and subordinate characters, he has four, if not five, plays — "Love's Labor's Lost," "Merry Wives of Windsor," "Taming of the Shrew," "Comedy of Errors," and perhaps "Midsummer Night's Dream" — of which the motive is nonsense; and three, if not four others — the two parts of "Henry IV.," "Twelfth Night," and "Midsummer Night's Dream," if we exclude this last from our former list, in which nonsense holds well its own, by the side of the serious part of each of these dramas.

It was, we think, rather a moral bias than critical insight which led an undoubtedly great authority to say that Falstaff is an embodiment of wit and not of humor. There is bad humor as well as good, in more senses than one; and the fascination which that wicked, selfish, heartless old man exercises over all of us now, no less than over his victims in the plays, can only be explained by the steadily flowing geniality of temper and disposition which certainly characterizes Falstaff, and which we must call humor, in however bad a

man we find it. Is there, for instance, any definition of humor which would exclude the scene between Falstaff and the chief justice? What is "Boy, tell him I'm deaf;" and "He that will caper with me for a thousand marks, let him lend me the money, and have at him;" or the advice to the chief justice's servant whom Falstaff pretends to take for a beggar?

The absurd complications of "The Comedy of Errors" make no demand on us for moral approval or disapproval; they are pure nonsense, so extravagant in their laughableness that it is a relief to the mind, tired out with fun and madness, to welcome the appearance of the aged abbess, and to hear her, —

Oh, if thou be'st the same Ægeon, speak,  
And speak unto the same Æmilia.

The key to the play of "Midsummer Night's Dream" is its name; it is what it is called. The four lovers, at cross-purposes from the fickleness of one, and the arbitrariness of the father of another, go on a midsummer night into a wood near Athens. There they all fall asleep and dream of fairyland; and after a night spent between dreaming and waking they come back in the morning with their first loves and engagements restored, thanks, as they fancy, to some intervention of the fairies. So, when Bottom and his fellows had gone into the same wood to rehearse their play, the latter ran away frightened by the reappearance of Bottom from the bush into which he had retired, and in coming out of which he seems, in the dark, to have some monstrous form. And then Bottom remains, and goes to sleep, to dream also of fairyland, but in a way suggested to him by his own last words in which he defies his fellows "to make an ass of him." This is not our account of the matter, but that of Shakespeare himself, as he puts it into the mouth of Theseus, when he hears the lovers' story of themselves in the morning. Every detail of the play can be shown to be in accordance with this view of it;\* but for our purpose we would only speak of the fairy scenes which are the perfection of beauty in nonsense. Happy is the man — we say it with the authority of that inveterate playgoer, Charles Lamb — who has never seen the court of Oberon and Titania, except in his mind's eye. In the words of the writer referred to below, "All our illusion is broken when we see a great flesh-and-blood girl representing the fairy

\* For such an analysis of the play we may refer to an article in *Fraser's Magazine* for December, 1854.



queen, whose courtiers are "the cowslips tall," and whose guards leave her for "the third part of a minute," to "kill cankers in the musk-rose buds," or "war with rear-mice for their leathern wings:" or who —

The honey-bag steal from the bumble bees,  
And for night tapers crop their waxen thighs,  
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,  
And pluck the wings of painted butterflies,  
To fan the moonbeams from her sleeping eyes.

Any outward material representation of these things is simply an intolerable sham; while to him who beholds only with the mind's eye not only do they all present themselves in a harmonious picture, but even Bottom, with his ass-head in the midst of the tiny sprites who "hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes," excites no more disturbing sense of the monstrous and improbable than such an appearance would do in an actual dream. And every one has experienced that in a dream the most incongruous or impossible combinations excite no surprise. And then if Theseus and common sense insist that this fairy-land is nonsense, we only reply, that it is the nonsense of the most exquisite art.

We might fill page after page with the incongruous, topsy-turvy absurdities of Launce, the two Gobbos, Dogberry and Verges, the grave-diggers, and other such among the minor characters of Shakespeare; but we prefer to give our attention to what our readers will agree with us is the most perfect piece of nonsense which Shakespeare has given us, — the play of "Twelfth Night." The play has its serious elements, of persons and of situations. The modest sweetness of Viola and the dignified ladyhood of Olivia give these a high place among Shakespeare's many beautiful female creations. And here, as always, the poet is true to the laws of nature and of dramatic art, and nonsense appears in fitting subordination to the nobler and graver concerns of life. But within these limits we have all the wit and humor of pure, unalloyed nonsense, existing only for its own sake, and revelling, as Malvolio says, "without mitigation or remorse of voice." As often as Sir Toby, the clown, and Maria, and their butts, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Malvolio (all finely differenced from each other) come upon the scene, we have on all sides rattling volleys of wit and humor like the salutes on a royal birthday or jubilee; and we find ourselves in an atmosphere so exhilarating that, like boon companions over their

wine, we are ready to laugh before we rightly know what we are to laugh at. We can never know who and what were "Pigrogromitus and the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus," of whom the clown talked one night, and of whom we have only that meagre record of the poor foolish knight, who tells us that "he had no more wit than an ordinary man or a Christian." Yet the mere names give us a sense of pleasure, and make us believe that, as Sir Andrew says, they made a piece of "very gracious fooling." The fooling goes on, stage by stage, till it reaches its climax in the scene in which the clown, disguised as the curate Sir Topas, visits the chamber in which poor Malvolio is "laid in hideous darkness," where we pity him, though he deserves his treatment. The whole scene is a masterpiece of fun, and every word is a gem, like each of those pearls and rubies which drop from the mouth of the princess in the fairy-tale, as often as she opens her mouth. The clown soliloquizes as he puts on the gown which Maria brings him, "Well, I'll put it on, and I will dissemble myself in it; and I would I were the first that ever dissembled in such a gown." Then

The competitors enter.

*Sir Toby.* — Jove bless thee, master Parson.

*Clown.* — *Bonos dies*, Sir Toby: for as the old hermit of Prague, that never saw pen and ink, very wittily said to a niece of King Gorboduc, "That that is is;" so I, being master Parson, am master Parson, for what is "that" but that, and "is" but is?

The clown has a double edge to his philosophy and his logic; for while Malvolio is to hear the voice of Master Parson, Sir Toby knows that "that" is *not* "that," and "is" is *not* "is." The false minister announces himself with the accustomed benediction of the Church, and then to Malvolio's exclamation. "Sir Topas, good Sir Topas, go to my lady," he pronounces the exorcism: "Out, hyperbolical fiend! how vexest thou this man! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies?"

Then the dialogue proceeds: —

*Mal.* — Sir Topas, never was man thus wronged: good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad; they have laid me here in hideous darkness.

*Clown.* — Fie, thou dishonest Satan! I call thee by the most modest terms, for I am one of those gentle ones that will use the devil himself with courtesy: sayest thou that house is dark?

*Mal.* — As hell, Sir Topas.

*Clown.* — Why, it hath bay-windows trans-



parent as barricadoes, and the clear-stories towards the south-north are lustrous as ebony; and yet complainest thou of obstruction?

*Mal.* — I am not mad, Sir Topas; I say to you, this house is dark.

*Clown.* — Madman, thou errest. I say, there is no darkness but ignorance; in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog.

*Mal.* — I say, this house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell; and I say, there was never man thus abused. I am no more mad than you are: make the trial of it in any constant question.

The sham Sir Topas replies by asking "what he thinks of the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl;" and at last leaves him, with the warning that "he will not allow of his wits till he holds the opinion of Pythagoras, and fears to kill a woodcock lest he should dispossess the soul of his grandam." Then he carries on a conversation with himself and with Malvolio in his double character of clown and parson, not less full of witty and humorous banter, and at last ends with the artless question, put in his own proper person: "But tell me true, are you not mad indeed? Or do you but counterfeit?"

If there were no Shakespeare we should find no lack of good nonsense in the other Elizabethan dramatists; but the stars do not shine in midday sunlight, and the fun even of "The Alchemist" and "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" is coarse and ponderous by the side of that of "Twelfth Night."

In the days of Shakespeare the fool was still an actual personage in royal courts and noble households; nor is the race yet extinct. One of the last official fools of the English court was Archie Armstrong. Like other great men who have died on the anniversary of some great national institution with which their life had been bound up, and which they might be said to represent, Archie Armstrong died on the first of April (1646). But King Demos has still his jesters; and in our own time we may reckon Hood, the elder Matthews, Albert Smith, Corney Grain, and Grossmith, among the legitimate successors in England of Archie Armstrong.

Milton, grave and serious from his youth upwards, joined "L'Allegro" with "Il Penseroso," and thus calls on "heart-easing Mirth:" —

Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee  
Jest, and youthful Jollity,  
Quips and cranks and wanton wiles,  
Nods and becks and wreathed smiles,

Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,  
And love to live in dimple sleek;  
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,  
And Laughter holding both his sides;

which must have been laughter for its own sake, or such as a living man of letters and statesman means, when he says, "I think the day is lost in which a man does not have a good laugh." Wordsworth, not less severe than Milton, holds that man to be a favorite child of nature whose heart every hour runs wild; and records in verse that will not die his hearty sympathy with old Matthew, a man often "tired out with fun and madness," and how they sang together —

That half-mad thing of witty rhymes,  
About the crazy old church clock,  
And its bewildered chimes.

Lord Tennyson we may claim as a lover of nonsense, on the evidence of his "Spinster's Sweet-arts." Gray, known best to us as the author of the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," could write the "Long Story;" and the melancholy Cowper, to whom we owe so much true poetry, and that not only which he himself wrote, but also what he taught others to write, will probably be always most remembered by his "John Gilpin." If we cannot give Dr. Johnson so high a place among poets as he probably himself aspired to, we may name him as one of our greatest men of letters; and Mr. Hill, quoting from Boswell, says of him, "He was the most humorous of men," "incomparable at buffoonery," full of "fun and convivial humor and love of nonsense." We may suspect that the gambols of that massive intellect may have been somewhat ungainly; but then, if we may apply the great man's own words without irreverence, we would quote again from Boswell: "Like a dog's walking on his hind legs, it is not well done, but you are surprised to find it done at all."

Of Butler's "Hudibras," and of the hard, cutting wit of this great satirist, we have already spoken. When we learn from him the bitter and scornful hatred in which some of the strong intellects of the Restoration confounded the cant of fanatical or sordid sectarianism with the Christian faith, which they understood no better than did Tacitus or Pliny, it is pleasant to think that England had in those same days a greater genius and a truer satirist than Butler, though one of whom it is unlikely that Butler ever heard the name. Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is in the best sense a satire, though it is a satire



of love and pity even more than of stern condemnation of sinners; and we may treat it as no way alien to our own subject, for a vein of marked though repressed humor runs through it all. Sometimes the humor comes to the surface, as in Faithful's trial, or the conjugal talk of Giant Despair and his wife.

In the trial scene, the unjust judge, the Lord Hate-Good, with his coarse rage against the prisoner, is the counterpart of the actual Judge Jeffreys; and the first witness, Mr. Envy, eager to testify even before they "give him his oath," and declaring, at the conclusion of his evidence, that he will be ready to give more if they want it, reminds us of the like method of Titus Oates. Both were, no doubt, drawn from the life, and from Bunyan's own experience.

Here, too, is the curtain conversation of Giant Despair and his wife: "Now Giant Despair had a wife, and her name was Diffidence. So when he was gone to bed he told his wife what he had done; to wit, that he had taken a couple of prisoners, and cast them into his dungeon for trespassing on his grounds. Then he asked her also, what he had best to do further to them. So she asked him what they were, whence they came, and whither they were bound; and he told her. Then she counselled him that when he arose in the morning he should beat them without any mercy." And the like conjugal talk, with the like deference of the Giant for his wife, goes on, night after night.\*

Pope wrote some good nonsense, in various styles, but all satirical, and all witty rather than humorous. His "Verses by a Gentleman of Quality" are nonsensical enough, but too slight for further notice. "The Dunciad" is too coarse and scurrilous. Theobald and Cibber and the starving writers in Grub Street were far from being so utterly bad as Pope makes them out; and if they had been so, it did not become the master of the rapier to resort to the bludgeon, nor the gentleman to the scavenger's shovel. The invective of "The Dunciad" "wants finish," to employ the words of one skilled in the art; and as we turn its pages, we find ourselves repeating the Somersetshire couplet, —

A harnet zat in a holler tree,  
A nasty spitevul toad wer' he.

\* This humorous intervention of Mrs. Diffidence is not in the first edition of the "Pilgrim's Progress," but was added in the second and following editions. It is one of many instances of Bunyan's careful revision of his work. See Mr. Offor's critical edition, printed for the Hanserd Knollys Society.

And what greater bathos can be found than that to which Pope sinks when he condescends to a verbal parody, and one of the vulgarest specimens of that meanest form of bad joke, on Denham's fine lines, —

O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream  
My great example, as it is my theme:

Though deep, yet clear; though gentle, yet  
not dull;

Strong without rage, without o'erflowing, full.

And this was he who could write that dignified invective on Addison, of which we may fitly quote the last lines against Pope himself: —

Who but must laugh if such a man there be,  
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?

But neither in the "Prologue to the Satires," from which we take the last lines, nor in the satires themselves, does Pope's wit rise into that kind of nonsense which we want here. It is rather to "The Rape of the Lock" that we turn for an example, for our purpose, of that satirical wit and fun. We call "The Rape of the Lock" satirical, because Pope himself says that its purpose is to laugh at "the little unguarded follies of the female sex," though the epithet seems almost too strong for a poem which does rather picture and laugh at, than condemn, those follies. It has a light and sparkling sprightliness, like that of the plays and verses of Congreve, which Thackeray delighted to describe. But those butterflies, or rather ephemeral gnats and mosquitoes, the beaux and rakes, the flirts and prudes, of those teacup days, are poor creatures after all: —

Let us not talk of them: look, and pass on.

Pope, "laughing in his easy chair," dispensed his moral praise or blame to the ladies and gentlemen, the authors and politicians, around him. Butler satirized the fanatics and hypocrites of his own age. Swift directed the scathing thunderbolts of his bitter and scornful hate against human nature itself; and the hardest, coldest intellect of the grown man may feel itself further chilled by the description of the Strulbrugs who never die, of the philosophers of Laputa, or the Yahoo set before us as our own image. And yet, by a strange irony of fate, "Gulliver's Travels" has become a favorite story-book for boys and even girls, and takes its place on their bookshelves with "Don Quixote" and the "Pilgrim's Progress." And this because Swift, like the writers of these, had the power of telling a story, and of clothing



with flesh and blood what must have else remained moral abstractions.

Sterne seems to require a place by himself. We have classed him with the writers of nonsense-romance, but he differs greatly from them all, and more so than they do from each other. He is a thorough humorist. He relies for his artistic effects on sentiment and feeling, not on contrasts of thoughts and words. His humorous art is of a high order, and perhaps not least so in his perpetual use of that shameful device by which (as Coleridge points out) he attracts his reader to garbage which would otherwise be merely disgusting, by presenting it at the hands of the childlike and guileless Uncle Toby, or the not less honestly minded Mr. Shandy and Trim.

Of parody there are two kinds. The one is the vulgar parody or travesty, of which Pope has given us an example, which we have already referred to, but purposely abstain from quoting. It takes some noble poem, and for its idea, thoughts, and images, substitutes the writer's own low and vulgar fancies, which he couples as far as possible with the words of the original which he thus outrages. Such parodies are like the practical jokes of the brainless youth, or still more brainless man, which have no fun in them, and only excite laughter in those who seek and find their amusement in that which gives offence and pain to others. And such parody gives pain not only to the travestied author, but, when he is beyond the reach of the parodist, to every thinking reader, who is so unfortunate as to know the parody, and cannot keep it out of memory. The other kind of parody is that in which the comic writer gives you real fun of his own, while clothing it in the style of some great author, but without any mere employment of his words, unless it be in so far as they are taken to express that style. No one enjoys Homer less if he reads the "Battle of the Frogs and Mice," or Swift's "Battle of the Books;" nor the mock epics of Tassoni and Boileau, or Pope's "Rape of the Lock," because he detests Scarron's "Virgile Travesti." Boileau justly says that he made a barber and his wife talk like Dido and Æneas, while Scarron made Dido and Æneas talk like fishwives and porters. In more recent times the "Rejected Addresses," and the imaginary reviews and criticisms of the "Biglow Papers," are among the happiest specimens of the better parody. Their wit is all good-humored, and probably no one of

the authors so burlesqued would have desired a greater revenge than that which Sir Walter Scott is said to have taken when a friend reading him the "Rejected Address of W. S." asked him whom it was by, and he answered, "It must be mine, but I did not think I had written anything so bad."

The doctrine of evolution may suggest that caricature, or the nonsense of the pencil, was unconsciously brought to light by the first rude attempts at figure drawing. We may half suspect some covert humor in the artists of the pompous forms which accompany the cuneiform letterpress of the Assyrian inscriptions. There can be no doubt that the Egyptians and the Etruscans knew what caricature was; and the walls of Pompeii have preserved some of its popular features. Christian art produced what was in truth, though in the most solemn and even awful form, a kind of caricature, in the triumphs, or so-called dances, of death, in the frescoes of the Campo Santo of Pisa, the paintings of the covered bridge of Lucerne, and the like representations with which the name of Holbein is usually coupled. The wood-engravings of "The Ship of Fools," of which we have already spoken, are fine specimens of the caricature in illustration of books which has ever since gone on in endless variety. Hogarth employed the genius and power of a great artist in the service of nonsense, caricaturing sometimes with a moral purpose, as in the "Marriage à la Mode;" sometimes for pure fun's sake, as in "The Election," or "The March to Finchley;" and Cruikshank has followed Hogarth with no feeble steps. The coarse though humorous caricatures of Gilray were succeeded by the more refined work of H. B. And now, for many years past, these and other kinds of social and political caricature have united and culminated in the pages of *Punch*, which in its first numbers modestly calls itself "the English Charivari," but which has long since far surpassed both that French comic paper and the German *Kladderadatsch*, and not less kept ahead of its English competitors. It may wane from time to time, but always to wax again. In nothing does it show the advance of the art of caricature more than in the production of some of its most comical effects by pretty — and not, as the old fashion was, by ugly — pictures. This is constantly seen in the large cartoons as well as in the lesser engravings. An excellent instance of this is the recent print of twelve handsome



young matrons in a jury-box, with, under it, the happy epigrammatic words, "A fair jury, and every one a home-ruler." The combination of thought, word, and drawing, is perfect. And what *Punch* has done in the refinement of caricature, it does still more completely as regards comic writing. We owe more to Charles Dickens than to any one else for the creation of a comic literature, in which the most humorous and laughable effects are produced, without any recourse either to the moral or the physical filth which a Fielding or a Smollett thought himself bound to rake into, or even to revel in. The nastiness has happily become repulsive to modern taste; and it is a relief to know that we can have all our fun without it. But if we owe this chiefly to Dickens, the editors of *Punch* deserve our praise and thanks for the thoroughness with which they have carried on the new tradition.

If the lake poets showed that they could at least recognize nonsense-writing as a fine art, their old school-fellow, Charles Lamb, living in London in the service of the kings of India who then reigned in Leadenhall Street, carried that art to its height. His familiar letters, and his "Essays of Elia" overflow with nonsense, or rather they are, "without overflowing, full;" for the perfect finish and completeness of the workmanship are always worthy of the choice materials employed. Never a thought or word too much, or too little. And Lamb's nonsense is pure and unalloyed, nonsense for its own sake, in which the most lynx-eyed German critic might be defied to find a "tendency," moral or immoral, to explain why the writer wrote. "Tendency," there is none. The fun is there in happy self-sufficiency, and this not the less because of the pathos which we cannot but think may be ever and anon felt to be present in the fun — reminding us of the heavy burden of a lifelong sorrow, which poor Lamb seemed unfitted to bear, but which he did bear in brave, uncomplaining silence. We think we shall but re-echo the opinion of Lamb's readers if we say that of all his fine nonsense the "Essay on Roast Pig" is the finest. With what learned accuracy does the author follow in his Chinese manuscript the progress of mankind through the seventy thousand years, called by Confucius "the cook's holiday," to the accidental discovery by the swineherd Ho-ti and his son, which led to their trial at Peking, "then an inconsiderable assize town," before a judge and jury proceeding

with all the forms of English law. The jury, "in the face of all the facts, and the clearest charge which judge had ever given, to the surprise of the whole court, townsfolk, strangers, reporters, and all present, without leaving the box, or in any manner of consultation whatever, brought in a simultaneous verdict of not guilty." We will not pursue the narrative, how the judge, "who was a shrewd fellow, winked at the manifest iniquity of the decision," nor follow the historical progress of events through subsequent ages. Nor will we dwell on the philosophical and sentimental reflections of the author, nor on the autobiographical memories of "my good old aunt," her plum cake and the beggar, and of student days at St. Omer. We do but remind the reader of these treasures of nonsense, though he can hardly have forgotten them.

Contemporary men of genius often fail to appreciate each other, and perhaps Canning knew no more of Lamb than is implied in a scornful invitation to him "to praise Lepaux," in chorus with Coleridge, Southey, and Lloyd. But Canning was a true lover and writer of nonsense. The promise of the Eton boy-editor of the *Microcosm*, when he commented on the nursery rhyme of "The Queen of Hearts" with learned gravity, was amply fulfilled in the pages of the "Anti-Jacobin," while he shared his honors with Frere and other young wits. And though we cannot say of the nonsense of the "Anti-Jacobin" that it was not written in a temper of exaggerated prejudice, political and social, yet time has happily purged all that dross away, and in the finest pieces has left us the pure gold for our enjoyment. There is for us no bitterness in the laugh in which we comprehend "The Needy Knife-grinder" and "The Friend of Humanity." Few of us know, and fewer care, about "The Robbers," and the "Cabal and Love," or "Stella"\* (great as their authors afterwards became), but every one delights in the play of "The Rovers," the notes to which have preserved those names like flies in amber, which is itself the maddest farrago of nonsense, with its total disregard of "the unities," classical or romantic, and in which, after "the ghost of PROLOGUE'S GRANDMOTHER by the father's side" has appeared to soft music, and sunk in a flash of lightning, a Roman legion, with eagle and battering-

\* For representation at the Court Theatre at Weimar, Goethe substituted a commonplace suicide for the "double arrangement" of his original "Stella," quizzed by the *Anti-Jacobin*.



ram, under Quintus Curtius and Marcus Curius Dentatus, King John's barons, and a knight-templar who had been disguised as an inn-waiter, Prussian and Austrian grenadiers returning from the Seven Years' War, a troubadour, a Polish conspirator, and a German student full of the doctrines of the recent French Revolution, gather in the inn at Weimar, for the rescue of the noble Count Rogero, confined for eleven years in the dungeon-vault of the neighboring mediæval abbey, clanking his chains to accompany the words in which he embodies the memories of happier days : —

There first for thee my passion grew,  
Sweet, sweet, Matilda Pottingen :  
Thou wast the daughter of my Tutor,  
Law Professor at the University of Gottingen ;  
-niversity of Gottingen ;  
-niversity of Gottingen.

Peacock, another contemporary of Lamb, and like him a servant of the East India Company, was a true humorist, though much of his writing is characterized by satirical purpose, and by that intellectual contempt which we have treated as one of the marks of wit rather than of humor. His caricatures of squires and parsons, poets, philosophers, political economists, and politicians are so extravagant, and his representations of Shelley, Southey, Coleridge, Byron, Irving, Brougham, Mill, and other men of his own day, so little like the originals, yet such funny lay figures, that if he did not write we may certainly now read, his descriptions of men and things as so much nonsense proper.\*

The late Mr. Edward Lear was the creator of a new and important kind of that nonsense for the honors of which the pen and the pencil contend ; and at the same time he fixed the name of nonsense to the art, while giving a kind of concreteness to the things named, by his books of non-

\* The readers of "Crotchet Castle" may be amused to know that the incident of Mr. MacQuedy proposing to read his paper after dinner is founded on fact, though it was not then followed by the production of the sermon. Peacock, the two Mills, and Strachey, were "assistants" in the examiner's office in the India House, and the writer of the present article remembers hearing at the time, that one morning Peacock came into Strachey's room, and said with humorous indignation : "I will never dine with Mill again : he invited me to dinner last night ; there were only political economists, Mushet and McCulloch (we forget the others), and after dinner Mushet took a paper out of his pocket, and began to read : 'In the infancy of society, when government was invented to save a percentage, say of three and a half per cent. —' on which McCulloch interrupted with, 'I'll say no such thing.' " We presume the latter economist objected not to the supposed origin of government, but to the amount of percentage ; but we remember no more.

sense, nonsense songs, nonsense botany, nonsense cookery, and so on.\* With the dreamy, sensitive temperament of the man of genius, and a complete disregard of material interests, he was in all things a conscientious lover of hard work — "whatsoever his hand found to do, he did it with his might." The beauty, truthfulness, and artistic finish of his oil pictures and water-color drawings, have established his claims as a landscape-painter of a high order ; he composed song music, some of which at least (for we fear that some has been lost, as he could not write down what he played) will live, married to the immortal verse of his friend, the great poet whose poems he was never weary of illustrating with his brush or pencil ; he illustrated books of natural history ; and the journals of his travels are graphic in every sense. But for all these things he is known to comparatively few, though the audience and the beholders may be select and fit. To men, women, and children everywhere, he is known as one of our great humorists ; for though his books of nonsense were made for children, grown men and women, if they have not quite lost in worldliness the hearts of children, delight in them no less than these, and return to them again and again with ever fresh pleasure. Even in New Mexico the English owners of a cattle ranche have for their trade-mark Mr. Lear's picture and posy of the "old man, who said, how shall I flee from this terrible cow?"

In the very amusing introduction to the volume entitled "More Nonsense," and published in 1872, Mr. Lear asserts his undivided claim to the authorship of all his nonsense books, and justifies this self-vindication by the ludicrous story of an elderly gentleman (we hope his portrait on the cover may not be so easily recognized as that of Mr. Lear himself), one of his fellow-passengers in the train from London to Guildford, who explained that there was no such person as Edward Lear ; but that children were indebted for all their amusement from the "Books of Nonsense" to a noble statesman whose name was Edward, while Lear was the anagram of earl. Mr. Lear could not resist the temptation of showing his name on his hat, his walking-stick, and several letters from his pocket, and so reducing his would-be ex-

\* The new edition of "Nonsense Songs and Stories" has a characteristic letter, in which Mr. Lear recounts his work from the time when, at the age of fifteen, he "began to draw, for bread and cheese, uncommon queer shop-sketches — selling them for prices varying from ninepence to four shillings."



tinguisher to silence. In noticing, among other odd fancies of his critics, the suggestion that his books and illustrations had a symbolical meaning, he says, "In no portion of these nonsense drawings have I ever allowed any caricature of any private or public person to appear, and throughout more care than might be supposed has been given to make the subjects incapable of misrepresentation — 'nonsense' pure and absolute has been my aim throughout." And again:—

Long years ago [written in 1871], in days when much of my time was passed in a country house, where children and mirth abounded, the lines beginning, "There was an old man of Tobago," were suggested to me by a valued friend, as a form of verse lending itself to limitless variety of rhymes and pictures; and henceforth the first "Book of Nonsense" was struck off with a pen, no assistance ever having been given me in any way, but that of uproarious delight and welcome at the appearance of every new absurdity.

Though Mr. Lear thus modestly puts from himself the merit of inventing the illustrated verse with which he has filled so many pages, none but a humorist could have poured out such a flood of laughable absurdities, and only an artist could have given with such a free hand all the grotesque forms in which he pretends to emulate the awkward scrawls of the school-boy on his slate. Not less laughable are the illustrations of "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," "The Duck and the Kangaroo," "The Travels of the Four Children," and so many more stories than we have space to enumerate. But in nothing does the humor of Mr. Lear's pen and pencil express itself more strikingly than in the two series of his nonsense botany. The botanical names are all epigrammatic. And *Barkia Howlaloudia*, like a snap-dragon of dog's heads; *Arthbroomia Rigida*, a sort of thistle; *Nasticreechia Krorluppia*, like a stem of catkins; the *Bassia Palealensis*, the *Shoebootia Utilis*, and all the rest, — are not mere grotesque distortions, but natural representations of dogs and caterpillars, hearth-brooms, bottles, and boots, severally combined into such lifelike imitations of actual flowers, that the botanist who would not wish to be able to add them to his herbarium must be as dry as his own *hortus siccus*. And admirable as are all the illustrations, the matter illustrated is still more admirable. Humor is a thing of genius, and of necessity original in each particular form which it takes. If we could call up him who left half-told — or indeed untold — the story of "Pi-

grogromitus and the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus," we should find no resemblance to that of the "Jumbles who went to sea in a sieve;" nor among the old men and young ladies throughout Lear's nonsense-books do we meet any counterparts of Shakespeare's hermit of Prague and the niece of King Gorboduc. Yet we almost venture to say that the "fooling" of the one is hardly less "gracious" than that of the other. In each creation some touch of art which escapes analysis makes the grotesquely impossible a living flesh-and-blood reality. Like Sir Thomas Browne, we quote the Latin father and say, *Credo quia impossibile est*. Tables, and chairs, and fire-irons, ducks and kangaroos, and a host of nondescript creatures, such as the quangle-wangle, the dong, and the yonghy bonghy bo, are endowed with human sentiment and moral life; and all their little hopes and fears and frailties are so natural in their absurdity, that the incongruity of thoughts and images is carried to the utmost height of humor. Such, for instance, are those little touches, where the friends of the Jumbles receive them back at the end of twenty years, saying:—

If we only live,  
We too will go to sea in a sieve,  
To the hills of the Chankly Bore:

or where the four little children who had gone out to see the world are welcomed back "by their admiring relatives, with joy tempered with contempt;" or where the coachman, evidently an old family servant, "perceives with pain" that the young people, the poker and tongs, the shovel and broom, in the carriage are quarrelling while he drives them out. "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," Mr. Lear's music for which has, we fear, been lost in the way we have mentioned, is one of the best of his nonsense songs. What can be funnier than the courtship in the "elegant pea-green boat," when

The Owl looked up to the stars above,  
And sang to a small guitar,  
"O lovely Pussy, O Pussy my love,  
What a beautiful Pussy you are,  
You are!  
You are!  
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

And then the wedding, after they had wandered for a year and a day in search of a ring, and the wedding feast, when —

They dined on mince, with slices of quince,  
Which they ate with a runcible spoon:  
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,  
They danced by the light of the moon,



The moon!  
The moon!

They danced by the light of the moon!

Mr. Lear was delighted when a friend observed to him that this couple were reviving the old law of Solon that the Athenian bride and bridegroom should eat a quince together at their wedding. But we may perhaps suspect that there was another rudder which steered the pea-green boat into that classical harbor.\*

But as Charles Lamb reaches the top of his nonsense in the "Essay on Roast Pig," so we think does Mr. Lear in his song of "The Courtship of the Yonghy Bonghy Bo." As some fruit is eaten with a special enjoyment, when just gathered in the very garden in which it has ripened, so this song must always come back with a special pleasure to those for whom the poet has sat down at the piano in his villa at San Remo, and sung with melancholy air the tragi-comic words with the plaintive music which he had himself composed for them. But whether we recall from memory, or picture in imagination, the terraced garden of Mr. Lear, filled with the rare plants he loved, the gentle lapping of the blue waves of the tideless Mediterranean just below, and the background of orange groves and olive woods, we can hardly avoid some perhaps fanciful association of these with the beginning of the song:—

On the Coast of Coromandel,  
Where the early pumpkins blow,  
In the middle of the woods,  
Lived the Yonghy Bonghy Bo.  
Two old chairs and half a candle—  
One old jug without a handle—  
These were all his worldly goods:  
In the middle of the woods,  
These were all the worldly goods  
Of the Yonghy Bonghy Bo,  
Of the Yonghy Bonghy Bo.

and again:—

Down the slippery slopes of Myrtle,  
Where the early pumpkins blow,  
To the calm and silent sea,  
Fled the Yonghy Bonghy Bo.

Between these two passages is the sad story of the hero's courtship:—

Once, among the Bong trees walking,  
Where the early pumpkins blow,  
To a little heap of stones,  
Came the Yonghy Bonghy Bo.  
There he heard a Lady talking  
To some milk-white Hens of Dorking,

\* "For rhymes the rudders are of verses,  
With which, like ships, they steer their courses."  
*Hudibras.*

"'Tis the Lady Jingly Jones!  
On that little heap of stones  
Sits the Lady Jingly Jones!"  
Said the Yonghy Bonghy Bo.

"Lady Jingly, Lady Jingly,  
Sitting where the pumpkins blow,  
Will you come and be my wife?"  
Said the Yonghy Bonghy Bo.  
"I am tired of living singly,  
On this coast so wild and shingly,  
I'm a-weary of my life."

Then comes the discovery that "his proposal comes too late." Lady Jingly has a husband in England (Handel Jones, Esquire, & Co.), who sends her the "fowls of Dorking:—

Lady Jingly answered sadly,  
And her tears began to flow,  
"Your proposal comes too late,  
Mr. Yonghy Bonghy Bo!  
"I would be your wife most gladly,"  
(Here she twirled her fingers madly,)  
"But in England I've a mate!  
Yes, you've asked me far too late,  
For in England I've a mate,  
Mr. Yonghy Bonghy Bo!  
Mr. Yonghy Bonghy Bo!"

He had offered to endow her with all his worldly goods, but she can only answer:—

Keep, O keep, your chairs and candle,  
And your jug without a handle:  
I can merely be your friend.

Mingling sympathy with firmness, she promises to give him three Dorkings, if Mr. Jones sends her any more, and then goes on:—

Though you're such a Hoddy Doddy,  
Yet I wish that I could modify  
the words I needs must say!  
Will you please to go away?  
That is all I have to say—  
Mr. Yonghy Bonghy Bo!  
Mr. Yonghy Bonghy Bo!

He departs, crossing "the silent-roaring ocean," on the back of "a lively turtle."

With a sad primeval motion,  
Towards the sunset isles of Boshen.

And though we have not the least reason for suggesting that there might have been somewhere an actual Lady Jingly sitting among her milk-white hens of Dorking on a heap of stones, yet we cannot but have a feeling, that the good old bachelor-poet was putting something of his own life into the tragi-comedy of the "Yonghy Bonghy Bo," and so giving it a pathos and an interest which make us seem to feel a real sympathy with the absurd hero, "though he's such a Hoddy Doddy."



If Dr. Johnson is right in holding that variety is or should be a writer's chief merit, Mr. Lear must be given a high place in this respect. The variety of his nonsense, a variety of kinds, and not of mere individual forms, is wonderful.\* He went to India during the viceroyalty of his friend Lord Northbrook, and while making valuable additions to his works as a landscape-painter, he struck out an entirely new kind of nonsense, appropriate to his new abode, in the "Cumberbund" and the "Akond of Swat." In the one he jumbles together and totally misappropriates the common Hindustani names of men and things in daily life, and in the other burlesques the enquiries people were making as to a mysterious personage who had just shot across the field of Anglo-Indian politics. The verses beginning "How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!" in the new edition of "Nonsense Songs," are new in every sense. And, among his unpublished writings is an eclogue, in a still different kind of nonsense. It is too long for reproduction here; but we are able to give the hitherto unpublished conclusion of the history of Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos, of which the first part appeared in the volume entitled "Laughable Lyrics:" —

MR. AND MRS. DISCOBBOLOS, 2ND PART.

I.

Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos,  
Lived on the top of the wall,  
For twenty years, a month and a day,  
Till their hair had grown all pearly gray,  
And their teeth began to fall.  
They never were ill, or at all dejected,  
By all admired, and by some respected,  
Till Mrs. Discobbolos said,  
"O, W! X! Y! Z!  
It has just come into my head,  
We have no more room at all —  
Darling Mr. Discobbolos!

2.

"Look at our six fine boys!  
And our six sweet girls so fair!  
Upon this wall they all have been born,  
And not one of the twelve has happened to fall  
Through my maternal care!  
Surely they should not pass their lives  
Without any chance of husbands or wives!"  
And Mrs. Discobbolos said,  
"O, W! X! Y! Z!  
Did it never come into your head,  
That our lives must be lived elsewhere,  
Dearest Mr. Discobbolos?"

\* It is to be regretted that in the new and handsome edition of Mr. Lear's nonsense books this feature of them has been somewhat obscured by the sameness of a classified re-arrangement of the pieces

3.

"They have never been at a ball,  
Nor have ever seen a Bazaar!  
Nor have heard folks say in a tone all hearty  
'What loves of girls (at a garden party)  
Those Misses Discobbolos are!'  
Morning and night it drives me wild  
To think of the fate of each darling child!"  
But Mr. Discobbolos said,  
"O, W! X! Y! Z!  
What has come to your fiddledum head!  
What a runcible goose you are!  
Octopod Mrs. Discobbolos!"

4.

Suddenly Mr. Discobbolos  
Slid from the top of the wall;  
And beneath it he dug a dreadful trench,  
And filled it with dynamite, gunpowder  
gench,  
And aloud he began to call, —  
"Let the wild bee sing, and the blue bird  
hum!  
For the end of your lives has certainly come!"  
And Mrs. Discobbolos said,  
"O, W! X! Y! Z!  
We shall presently all be dead,  
On this ancient runcible wall,  
Terrible Mr. Discobbolos!"

5.

Pensively Mr. Discobbolos  
Sat with his back to the wall;  
He lighted a match, and fired the train,  
And the mortified mountain echoed again,  
To the sound of an awful fall!  
And all the Discobbolos family flew  
In thousands of bits to the sky so blue,  
And no one was left to have said,  
"O, W! X! Y! Z!  
Has it come into any one's head,  
That the end has happened to all  
Of the whole of the Clan Discobbo-  
los?"

Mr. Lear's letters were not like those of Lamb, elaborate literary compositions of fine-art nonsense. But they were always funny, and usually annotated with pen-and-ink sketches, relevant to the subject, either of his correspondent or himself. He was always pleased, as he has himself told us, to give any child a special specimen of his nonsense — a poem or a drawing, or both. We have before us a set of heraldic drawings of his tailless cat Foss, proper, couchant, passant, regardant, rampant, dansant, and "a untin'," sent to a little girl.

The good and kind old man is gone; he was content to go, he said. But he has left a rich fund of harmless gaiety to those boys and girls he loved so well, and in their name we lay this wreath upon his grave.

Here we must conclude, though we



have left out many and great names, and though we look towards the Border, the Irish Channel, and the Atlantic, with longing thoughts of Noctes Ambrosianæ, Charles O'Malley and Harry Lorrequer, Birdofreedom Sawin and Huckleberry Finn. But no man can live upon bonbons, though it may be well for him who, like Sydney Smith, always has a box of them on his chimneypiece.

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From Longman's Magazine.  
BARBARA.

PART I.

BARBARA was somewhat of a care to the elder girls of the academy. Many of them were rather seriously minded girls with ideals, who had a deep respect, not unmingled with awe, for life in general, and the intellectual life in particular, as, I suppose, it was only right that they should have. Their favorite teacher, Miss Miriam Faulkner, encouraged this tendency a good deal. She was a handsome, very clever woman, who had taken firsts all her life, and translated Euripides in her leisure hours, and quoted Plato and Marcus Aurelius a great deal, as if she were doing them a favor rather than otherwise. She said she had a twofold nature, on the one hand pining for the spontaneity and fulness of the old Greek civilization, on the other sternly impelling her to self-renunciation and asceticism. Perhaps it is not uncommon to have this kind of nature, but she seemed to think hers was unique, and talked first like a heathen, and then like a mediæval monk on the strength of it. It was the ascetic view of life, however, on which she insisted to her pupils, since she thought it the more suitable. She took an interest in humanity, which even embraced Barbara. She had a certain barely concealed contempt for the girl; still, as it was part of her programme in life (a clause in which she owned to being somewhat remiss) to suffer fools gladly, she promised, when she found that some of her favorite students were troubled by Barbara's apparent lack of ideals, to ask her to tea. Now ideals are excellent things; but it is not conducive to a peaceful existence for the people who are rich in them to be always distributing them like tracts. However, it is part of the price we pay for the higher life.

It was at a tea-party consisting of Miss Faulkner and half-a-dozen seriously minded girls that the resolution was come

to that Barbara should be asked to tea. They had fallen into the fatally easy but unprincipled habit of illustrating the higher life by the persons who didn't live it, and Barbara furnished a beautiful illustration.

"I can't feel, you know," said girl No. One, with an air of regretful candor, "as if she had any conception of the life here's being a preparation for the true work of life. I don't fancy she has realized the true work of life."

"Life isn't *only* frivolling, and supper-parties, and seeing your friends, and having a lovely time, *is* it now?" said No. Two. "Especially when one thinks about people who have no nice times. Why, it would almost be wrong to enjoy oneself if you didn't feel that it was somehow shrinking away from your responsibilities and your lot in life not to take all the nice times you could get when you can't help other people's not having them, and you wish they had."

There was a murmur of sympathy and a pause.

"I don't know," said No. Three, the only one of the six, apparently, who had any sense of humor. "I don't see why you all want Barbara to worry about things. What's the good? Nobody *does* anything. Besides, she's so young; and people's souls aren't all expected to wake at the same time."

"She does remind one of Undine," said No. Four, struck with this happy psychological observation, "or Galatea."

But Miriam shook her head. Galatea, being a classic, was evidently too good for Barbara.

"She's a nice child," said No. Three. "I dare say her soul would wake up if Miss Faulkner were to ask her to tea. Maybe it had better stop asleep," she added doubtfully.

"Ah, no," said Miriam pensively. "Pain is the soul's birthright."

"Yes," said No. Three, "souls give you neuralgia. I wish they didn't."

"I fear physical pain," said Miss Faulkner. "There is something of the Sybarite in my nature. Yet it seems trivial at the first contact with any supreme anguish."

She spoke as one who had experienced all kinds.

"Yes," said No. Three vaguely. "But it doesn't when you don't. It's all right. I'll be glad for Barbara's soul to wake up more if you all think it's necessary, but I do hope it won't give her neuralgia, or any awful mental agony, or make her cross