

with his short face, if he had seen such a deed of courtesy, would have smiled a sweet smile to the doer of that gentleman-like action, and have made him a low bow from under his great periwig, and have gone home and written a pretty paper about him.

I am sure Dick Steele would have hailed him, were he dandy or mechanic, and asked him to a tavern to share a bottle, or perhaps half a dozen. Mind, I do not set down the five last flasks to Dick's score for virtue, and look upon them as works of the most questionable supererogation.

Steele, as a literary benefactor to the world's charity, must rank very high, indeed, not merely from his givings, which were abundant, but because his endowments are prodigiously increased in value since he bequeathed them, as the revenues of the lands, bequeathed to our Foundling Hospital at London, by honest Captain Coram, its founder, are immensely enhanced by the houses since built upon them. Steele was the founder of sentimental writing in English, and how the land has been since occupied, and what hundreds of us have laid out gardens and built up tenements on Steele's ground! Before his time, readers or hearers were never called upon to cry except at a tragedy, and compassion was not expected to express itself otherwise than in blank verse, or for personages much lower in rank than a dethroned monarch, or a widowed or a jilted empress. He stepped off the high-heeled cothurnus, and came down into common life; he held out his great hearty arms, and embraced us all; he had a bow for all women; a kiss for all children; a shake of the hand for all men, high or low; he showed us Heaven's sun shining every day on quiet homes; not gilded palace roofs only, or court processions, or heroic warriors fighting for princesses and pitched battles. He took away comedy from behind the fine

lady's alcove, or the screen where the libertine was watching her. He ended all that wretched business of wives jeering at their husbands, of rakes laughing wives, and husbands too, to scorn. That miserable, rouged, tawdry, sparkling, hollow-hearted comedy of the Restoration fled before him, and, like the wicked spirit in the fairy-books, shrank, as Steele let the daylight in, and shrieked, and shuddered, and vanished. The stage of humorists has been common life ever since Steele's and Addison's time; the joys and griefs, the aversions and sympathies, the laughter and tears of nature.

And here, coming off the stage, and throwing aside the motley habit, or satiric disguise, in which he had before entertained you, mingling with the world, and wearing the same coat as his neighbor, the humorist's service became straightway immensely more available; his means of doing good infinitely multiplied; his success, and the esteem in which he was held, proportionately increased. It requires an effort, of which all minds are not capable, to understand "Don Quixote;" children and common people still read "Gulliver" for the story merely. Many more persons are sickened by "Jonathan Wild" than can comprehend the satire of it. Each of the great men who wrote those books was speaking from behind the satiric mask I anon mentioned. Its distortions appal many simple spectators; its settled sneer or laugh is unintelligible to thousands, who have not the wit to interpret the meaning of the vizored satirist preaching from within. Many a man was at fault about Jonathan Wild's greatness, who could feel and relish Allworthy's goodness in "Tom Jones," and Doctor Harrison's in "Amelia," and dear Parson Adams, and Joseph Andrews. We love to read; we may grow ever so old, but we love to read of them

still — of love and beauty, of frankness, and bravery, and generosity. We hate hypocrites and cowards; we long to defend oppressed innocence, and to soothe and succor gentle women and children. We are glad when vice is foiled and rascals punished; we lend a foot to kick Blifil down stairs; and as we attend the brave bridegroom to his wedding on the happy marriage day, we ask the groom's-man's privilege to salute the blushing cheek of Sophia. A lax morality in many a vital point I own in Fielding, but a great hearty sympathy and benevolence; a great kindness for the poor; a great gentleness and pity for the unfortunate; a great love for the pure and good; these are among the contributions to the charity of the world with which this erring but noble creature endowed it.

As for Goldsmith, if the youngest and most unlettered person here has not been happy with the family at Wakefield; has not rejoiced when Olivia returned, and been thankful for her forgiveness and restoration; has not laughed with delighted good humor over Moses's gross of green spectacles; has not loved with all his heart the good vicar, and that kind spirit which created these charming figures, and devised the beneficent fiction which speaks to us so tenderly — what call is there for me to speak? In this place, and on this occasion, remembering these men, I claim from you your sympathy for the good they have done, and for the sweet charity which they have bestowed on the world.

When humor joins with rhythm and music, and appears in song, its influence is irresistible, its charities are countless, it stirs the feelings to love, peace, friendship, as scarce any moral agent can. The songs of Béranger are hymns of love and tenderness; I have seen great whiskered Frenchmen warbling the "Bonne Vieille," the "Soldats, au pas, au

pas;" with tears rolling down their moustachios. At a Burns's festival I have seen Scotchmen singing Burns while the drops twinkled on their furrowed cheeks; while each rough hand was flung out to grasp its neighbor's; while early scenes and sacred recollections, and dear and delightful memories of the past came rushing back at the sound of the familiar words and music, and the softened heart was full of love, and friendship, and home. Humor! if tears are the alms of gentle spirits, and may be counted, as sure they may, among the sweetest of life's charities,— of that kindly sensibility, and sweet sudden emotion, which exhibits itself at the eyes, I know no such provocative as humor. It is an irresistible sympathizer; it surprises you into compassion: you are laughing and disarmed, and suddenly forced into tears. I heard a humorous balladist not long since, a minstrel with wool on his head, and an ultra-Ethiopian complexion, who performed a negro ballad that I confess moistened these spectacles in the most unexpected manner. They have gazed at dozens of tragedy queens, dying on the stage, and expiring in appropriate blank verse, and I never wanted to wipe them. They have looked up, with deep respect be it said, at many scores of clergymen in pulpits, and without being dimmed; and behold a vagabond with a corked face and a banjo sings a little song, strikes a wild note which sets the whole heart thrilling with happy pity. Humor! humor is the mistress of tears; she knows the way to the *fons lachrymarum*, strikes in dry and rugged places with her enchanting wand, and bids the fountain gush and sparkle. She has refreshed myriads more from her natural springs, than ever tragedy has watered from her pompous old urn.

Popular humor, and especially modern popular humor, and the writers, its exponents, are always kind and chival-

rous, taking the side of the weak against the strong. In our plays, and books, and entertainments for the lower classes in England, I scarce remember a story or theatrical piece in which a wicked aristocrat is not bepummelled by a dashing young champion of the people. There was a book which had an immense popularity in England, and I believe has been greatly read here, in which the mysteries of the Court of London were said to be unveiled by a gentleman who, I suspect, knows about as much about the Court of London as he does of that of Pekin. Years ago I treated myself to sixpennyworth of this performance at a railway station, and found poor dear George IV, our late most religious and gracious king, occupied in the most flagitious designs against the tradesmen's families in his metropolitan city. A couple of years after I took sixpennyworth more of the same delectable history: George IV was still at work, still ruining the peace of tradesmen's families; he had been at it for two whole years, and a bookseller at the Brighton station told me that this book was by many many times the most popular of all periodical tales then published, because, says he, "it lashes the aristocracy!" Not long since I went to two penny theatres in London; immense eager crowds of people thronged the buildings, and the vast masses thrilled and vibrated with the emotion produced by the piece represented on the stage and burst into applause or laughter such as many a polite actor would sigh for in vain. In both these pieces there was a wicked Lord kicked out of the window — there is always a wicked Lord kicked out of the window. First piece: — "Domestic drama — Thrilling interest! — Weaver's family in distress! — Fanny gives away her bread to little Jacky, and starves! — Enter wicked Lord: tempts Fanny with offer of Diamond Necklace, Champagne Sup-

pers, and Coach to ride in! — Enter sturdy Blacksmith. — Scuffle between Blacksmith and Aristocratic minion: exit wicked Lord out of the window." Fanny, of course, becomes Mrs. Blacksmith.

The second piece was a nautical drama, also of thrilling interest, consisting chiefly of hornpipes, and acts of most tremendous oppression on the part of certain Earls and Magistrates towards the people. Two wicked Lords were in this piece the atrocious scoundrels: one Aristocrat, a deep-dyed villain, in short duck trousers and Berlin cotton gloves; while the other minion of wealth enjoyed an eyeglass with a blue ribbon, and whisked about the stage with a penny cane. Having made away with Fanny Forester's lover, Tom Bowling, by means of a press-gang, they meet her all alone on a common and subject her to the most opprobrious language and behavior: "Release me, villains!" says Fanny, pulling a brace of pistols out of her pockets and crossing them over her breast so as to cover wicked Lord to the right, wicked Lord to the left; and they might have remained in that position ever so much longer (for the aristocratic rascals had pistols too), had not Tom Bowling returned from sea at the very nick of time, armed with a great marlinespike, with which — whack! whack! down goes wicked Lord No. 1 — wicked Lord No. 2. Fanny rushes into Tom's arms with an hysterical shriek, and I dare say they marry and are very happy ever after. Popular fun is always kind: it is the champion of the humble against the great. In all popular parables it is Little Jack that conquers and the Giant that topples down. I think our popular authors are rather hard upon the great folks. Well, well! their lordships have all the money, and can afford to be laughed at.

In our days, in England, the importance of the humorous

preacher has prodigiously increased; his audiences are enormous; every week or month his happy congregations flock to him; they never tire of such sermons. I believe my friend Mr. "Punch" is as popular to-day as he has been any day since his birth; I believe that Mr. Dickens's readers are even more numerous than they have ever been since his unrivalled pen commenced to delight the world with its humor. We have among us other literary parties; we have "Punch," as I have said, preaching from his booth; we have a Jerrold party very numerous, and faithful to that acute thinker and distinguished wit; and we have also — it must be said, and it is still to be hoped — a "Vanity Fair" party, the author of which work has lately been described by the London "Times" newspaper as a writer of considerable parts, but a dreary misanthrope, who sees no good anywhere, who sees the sky above him green, I think, instead of blue, and only miserable sinners round about him. So we are; so is every writer and every reader I ever heard of; so was every being who ever trod this earth, save One. I cannot help telling the truth as I view it, and describing what I see. To describe it otherwise than it seems to me would be falsehood in that calling in which it has pleased heaven to place me; treason to that conscience which says that men are weak; that truth must be told; that fault must be owned; that pardon must be prayed for; and that love reigns supreme over all.

I look back at the good which of late years the kind English humorists have done; and if you are pleased to rank the present speaker among that class, I own to an honest pride at thinking what benefits society has derived from men of our calling. That "Song of the Shirt" which "Punch" first published, and the noble, the suffering, the melancholy, the tender Hood sang, may surely rank as a great act of charity

to the world, and call from it its thanks and regard for its teacher and benefactor. That astonishing poem, which you all of you know, of the "Bridge of Sighs,"—who can read it without tenderness, without reverence to heaven, charity to man, and thanks to the beneficent genius which sang for us nobly?

I never saw the writer but once; but shall always be glad to think that some words of mine, printed in a periodical of that day, and in praise of these amazing verses (which, strange to say, appeared almost unnoticed at first in the magazine in which Mr. Hood published them)—I am proud, I say, to think that some words of appreciation of mine reached him on his death-bed, and pleased and soothed him in that hour of manful resignation and pain.

As for the charities of Mr. Dickens, multiplied kindnesses which he has conferred upon us all; upon our children; upon people educated and uneducated; upon the myriads here and at home, who speak our common tongue; have not you, have not I, all of us reason to be thankful to this kind friend, who soothed and charmed so many hours, brought pleasure and sweet laughter to so many homes; made such multitudes of children happy; endowed us with such a sweet store of gracious thoughts, fair fancies, soft sympathies, hearty enjoyments? There are creations of Mr. Dickens's which seem to me to rank as personal benefits; figures so delightful, that one feels happier and better for knowing them, as one does for being brought into the society of very good men and women. The atmosphere in which these people live is wholesome to breathe in; you feel that to be allowed to speak to them is a personal kindness; you come away better for your contact with them; your hands seem cleaner from having the privilege of shaking theirs. Was there ever a better charity sermon

preached in the world than Dickens's "Christmas Carol?" I believe it occasioned immense hospitality throughout England; was the means of lighting up hundreds of kind fires at Christmas-time; caused a wonderful outpouring of Christmas good feeling; of Christmas punch-brewing; an awful slaughter of Christmas turkeys, and roasting and basting of Christmas beef. As for this man's love of children, that amiable organ at the back of his honest head must be perfectly monstrous. All children ought to love him. I know two that do, and read his books ten times for once that they peruse the dismal preachments of their father. I know one who, when she is happy, reads "Nicholas Nickleby;" when she is unhappy, reads "Nicholas Nickleby;" when she is tired, reads "Nicholas Nickleby;" when she is in bed, reads "Nicholas Nickleby;" when she has nothing to do, reads "Nicholas Nickleby;" and when she has finished the book, reads "Nicholas Nickleby" over again. This candid young critic, at ten years of age, said, "I like Mr. Dickens's books much better than your books, Papa;" and frequently expressed her desire that the latter author should write a book like one of Mr. Dickens's books. Who can? Every man must say his own thoughts in his own voice, in his own way; lucky is he who has such a charming gift of nature as this, which brings all the children in the world trooping to him, and being fond of him.

I remember, when that famous "Nicholas Nickleby" came out, seeing a letter from a pedagogue in the north of England, which, dismal as it was, was immensely comical. "Mr. Dickens's ill-advised publication," wrote the poor schoolmaster, "has passed like a whirlwind over the schools of the North." He was a proprietor of a cheap school; Dotheboys Hall was a cheap school. There were many such establish-

ments in the northern counties. Parents were ashamed that never were ashamed before until the kind satirist laughed at them; relatives were frightened; scores of little scholars were taken away; poor schoolmasters had to shut their shops up; every pedagogue was voted a Squeers, and many suffered, no doubt unjustly; but afterwards schoolboys' backs were not so much caned; schoolboys' meat was less tough and more plentiful; and schoolboys' milk was not so sky-blue. What a kind light of benevolence it is that plays round Crummles and the Phenomenon, and all those poor theatre people in that charming book! What a humor! and what a good humor!

One might go on, though the task would be endless and needless, chronicling the names of kind folks with whom this kind genius has made us familiar. Who does not love the Marchioness and Mr. Richard Swiveller? Who does not sympathize, not only with Oliver Twist, but his admirable young friend the Artful Dodger? Who has not the inestimable advantage of possessing a Mrs. Nickleby in his own family? Who does not bless Sairey Gamp and wonder at Mrs. Harris. Who does not venerate the chief of that illustrious family who, being stricken by misfortune, wisely and greatly turned his attention to "coals," the accomplished, the Epicurean, the dirty, the delightful Micawber?

I may quarrel with Mr. Dickens's art a thousand and a thousand times, I delight and wonder at his genius; I recognize in it—I speak with awe and reverence—a commission from that Divine Beneficence whose blessed task we know it will one day be to wipe every tear from every eye. Thankfully I take my share of the feast of love and kindness which this gentle, and generous, and charitable soul has contributed to the happiness of the world. I take and enjoy my share, and say a Benediction for the meal.