



NOTES FROM THE POCKET-BOOK
OF A LATE OPIUM-EATER.

WALKING STEWART.

MR. STEWART the traveller, commonly called "Walking Stewart," was a man of very extraordinary genius. He has generally been treated by those who have spoken of him in print as a madman. But this is a mistake; and must have been founded chiefly on the titles of his books. He was a man of fervid mind and of sublime aspirations; but he was no madman; or, if he was, then I say that it is so far desirable to be a madman. In 1798 or 1799, when I must have been about thirteen years old, Walking Stewart was in Bath—where my family at that time resided. He frequented the pump-room, and I believe all public places—walking up and down, and dispersing his philosophic opinions to the right and the left, like a Grecian philosopher. The first time I saw him was at a concert in the Upper Rooms; he was pointed out to me by one of my party as a very eccentric man who had

walked over the habitable globe. I remember that Madame Mara was at that moment singing; and Walking Stewart, who was a true lover of music (as I afterwards came to know), was hanging upon her notes like a bee upon a jessamine flower. His countenance was striking, and expressed the union of benignity with philosophic habits of thought. In such health had his pedestrian exercises preserved him, connected with his abstemious mode of living, that though he must at that time have been considerably above forty, he did not look older than twenty-eight; at least the face which remained upon my recollection for some years was that of a young man. Nearly ten years afterwards I became acquainted with him. During the interval I had picked up one of his works in Bristol—viz., his *Travels to Discover the Source of Moral Motion*, the second volume of which is entitled *The Apocalypse of Nature*. I had been greatly impressed by the sound and original views which in the first volume he had taken of the national characters throughout Europe. In particular he was the first, and so far as I know the only writer, who had noticed the profound error of ascribing a phlegmatic character to the English nation. "English phlegm" is the constant expression of authors when contrasting the English with the French. Now the truth is, that, beyond that of all other nations, it has a substratum of profound passion; and, if we are to recur to the old doctrine of temperaments, the English character must be classed not under the *phlegmatic* but under the *melancholic* temperament; and the French under the *sanguine*. The character of a nation may be judged of in this particular by examining its idiomatic language. The French, in whom the lower forms of passion are constantly bubbling up from the shallow and superficial character of their feelings, have appropriated all the phrases

of passion to the service of trivial and ordinary life; and hence they have no language of passion for the service of poetry or of occasions really demanding it; for it has been already enfeebled by continual association with cases of an unimpassioned order. But a character of deeper passion has a perpetual standard in itself, by which as by an instinct it tries all cases, and rejects the language of passion as disproportionate and ludicrous where it is not fully justified. "Ah Heavens!" or "Oh my God!" are exclamations with us so exclusively reserved for cases of profound interest,—that on hearing a woman even (*i.e.*, a person of the sex most easily excited) utter such words, we look around expecting to see her child in some situation of danger. But, in France, "Ciel!" and "Oh mon Dieu!" are uttered by every woman if a mouse does but run across the floor. The ignorant and the thoughtless, however, will continue to class the English character under the phlegmatic temperament, whilst the philosopher will perceive that it is the exact polar antithesis to a phlegmatic character. In this conclusion, though otherwise expressed and illustrated, Walking Stewart's view of the English character will be found to terminate; and his opinion is especially valuable—first and chiefly, because he was a philosopher; secondly, because his acquaintance with man civilised and uncivilised, under all national distinctions, was absolutely unrivalled. Meantime, this and others of his opinions were expressed in language that if literally construed would often appear insane or absurd. The truth is, his long intercourse with foreign nations had given something of a hybrid tincture to his diction; in some of his works, for instance, he uses the French word *hélas!* uniformly for the English *alas!* and apparently with no consciousness of his mistake. He had also this singularity

about him—that he was everlastingly metaphysicising against metaphysics. To me, who was buried in metaphysical reveries from my earliest days, this was not likely to be an attraction; any more than the vicious structure of his diction was likely to please my scholar-like taste. All grounds of disgust, however, gave way before my sense of his powerful merits; and, as I have said, I sought his acquaintance. Coming up to London from Oxford about 1807 or 1808 I made inquiries about him; and found that he usually read the papers at a coffee-room in Piccadilly; understanding that he was poor, it struck me that he might not wish to receive visits at his lodgings, and therefore I sought him at the coffee-room. Here I took the liberty of introducing myself to him. He received me courteously, and invited me to his rooms—which at that time were in Sherrard Street, Golden Square—a street already memorable to me. I was much struck with the eloquence of his conversation; and afterwards I found that Mr. Wordsworth, himself the most eloquent of men in conversation, had been equally struck when he had met him at Paris between the years 1790 and 1792, during the early storms of the French Revolution. In Sherrard Street I visited him repeatedly, and took notes of the conversations I had with him on various subjects. These I must have somewhere or other; and I wish I could introduce them here, as they would interest the reader. Occasionally in these conversations, as in his books, he introduced a few notices of his private history; in particular I remember his telling me that in the East Indies he had been a prisoner of Hyder's; that he had escaped with some difficulty; and that in the service of one of the native princes as secretary or interpreter, he had accumulated a small fortune. This must have been too small, I fear, at

that time to allow him even a philosopher's comforts; for some part of it, invested in the French funds, had been confiscated. I was grieved to see a man of so much ability, of gentlemanly manners, and refined habits, and with the infirmity of deafness, suffering under such obvious privations; and I once took the liberty, on a fit occasion presenting itself, of requesting that he would allow me to send him some books which he had been casually regretting that he did not possess; for I was at that time in the heyday of my worldly prosperity. This offer, however, he declined with firmness and dignity, though not unkindly. And I now mention it, because I have seen him charged in print with a selfish regard to his own pecuniary interest. On the contrary, he appeared to me a very liberal and generous man; and I well remember that, whilst he refused to accept of anything from me, he compelled me to receive as presents all the books which he published during my acquaintance with him; two of these corrected with his own hand—viz., the *Lyre of Apollo* and the *Sophiometer*, I have lately found amongst other books left in London; and others he forwarded to me in Westmoreland. In 1809 I saw him often; in the spring of that year I happened to be in London; and Mr. Wordsworth's tract on the Convention of Cintra being at that time in the printer's hands, I superintended the publication of it; and at Mr. Wordsworth's request, I added a long note on Spanish affairs, which is printed in the Appendix. The opinions I expressed in this note on the Spanish character, at that time much calumniated, on the retreat to Corunna, then fresh in the public mind, above all, the contempt I expressed for the superstition in respect to the French military prowess which was then universal and at its height, and which gave way in fact only to the campaigns of 1814 and 1815, fell in, as it

happened, with Mr. Stewart's political creed in those points where at that time it met with most opposition. In 1812 it was, I think, that I saw him for the last time; and by the way, on the day of my parting with him, had an amusing proof in my own experience of that sort of ubiquity ascribed to him by a witty writer in the London Magazine: I met him and shook hands with him under Somerset House, telling him that I should leave town that evening for Westmoreland. Thence I went by the very shortest road (i.e., through Moor Street, Soho—for I am learned in many quarters of London) towards a point which necessarily led me through Tottenham Court Road; I stopped nowhere, and walked fast; yet so it was that in Tottenham Court Road I was not overtaken by (*that* was comprehensible), but overtook Walking Stewart. Certainly, as the above writer alleges, there must have been three Walking Stewarts in London. He seemed no ways surprised at this himself, but explained to me that somewhere or other in the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road there was a little theatre, at which there was dancing and occasionally good singing, between which and a neighbouring coffee-house he sometimes divided his evenings. Singing, it seems, he could hear in spite of his deafness. In this street I took my final leave of him; it turned out such; and anticipating at the time that it would be so, I looked after his white hat at the moment it was disappearing, and exclaimed—"Farewell, thou half-crazy and most eloquent man! I shall never see thy face again." I did not intend, at that moment, to visit London again for some years; as it happened, I was there for a short time in 1814; and then I heard to my great satisfaction that Walking Stewart had recovered a considerable sum (about £14,000 I believe) from the East India Company; and from the abstract given in the London

Magazine of the Memoir by his relation I have since learned that he applied this money most wisely to the purchase of an annuity, and that he "persisted in living" too long for the peace of an annuity office. So fare all companies East and West, and all annuity offices, that stand opposed in interest to philosophers! In 1814, however, to my great regret, I did not see him; for I was then taking a great deal of opium, and never could contrive to issue to the light of day soon enough for a morning call upon a philosopher of such early hours; and in the evening I concluded he would be generally abroad, from what he had formerly communicated to me of his own habits. It seems, however, that he afterwards held *conversations* at his own rooms; and did not stir out to theatres quite so much. From a brother of mine, who at one time occupied rooms in the same house with him, I learned that in other respects he did not deviate in his prosperity from the philosophic tenor of his former life. He abated nothing of his peripatetic exercises; and repaired duly in the morning, as he had done in former years, to St. James's Park,—where he sate in contemplative ease amongst the cows, inhaling their balmy breath and pursuing his philosophic reveries. He had also purchased an organ, or more than one, with which he solaced his solitude and beguiled himself of uneasy thoughts, if he ever had any.

The works of Walking Stewart must be read with some indulgence; the titles are generally too lofty and pretending and somewhat extravagant; the composition is lax and unprecise, as I have before said; and the doctrines are occasionally very bold, incautiously stated, and too hardy and high-toned for the nervous effeminacy of many modern moralists. But Walking Stewart was a man who thought nobly of human nature; he wrote therefore at times in the

spirit and with the indignation of an ancient prophet against the oppressors and destroyers of the time. In particular I remember that in one or more of the pamphlets which I received from him at Grasmere he expressed himself in such terms on the subject of Tyrannicide (distinguishing the cases in which it was and was not lawful) as seemed to Mr. Wordsworth and myself every way worthy of a philosopher; but, from the way in which that subject was treated in the House of Commons, where it was at that time occasionally introduced, it was plain that his doctrine was not fitted for the luxuries and relaxed morals of the age. Like all men who think nobly of human nature, Walking Stewart thought of it hopefully. In some respects his hopes were wisely grounded; in others they rested too much upon certain metaphysical speculations which are untenable, and which satisfied himself only because his researches in that track had been purely self-originated and self-disciplined. He relied upon his own native strength of mind; but in questions, which the wisdom and philosophy of every age building successively upon each other have not been able to settle, no mind however strong is entitled to build wholly upon itself. In many things he shocked the religious sense—especially as it exists in unphilosophic minds: he held a sort of rude and unscientific Spinosism; and he expressed it coarsely and in the way most likely to give offence. And indeed there can be no stronger proof of the utter obscurity in which his works have slumbered than that they should all have escaped prosecution. He also allowed himself to look too lightly and indulgently on the afflicting spectacle of female prostitution as it exists in London and in all great cities. This was the only point on which I was disposed to quarrel with him; for I could not but view it as a greater reproach to

human nature than the slave-trade, or any sight of wretchedness that the sun looks down upon. I often told him so; and that I was at a loss to guess how a philosopher could allow himself to view it simply as part of the equipage of civil life, and as reasonably making part of the establishment and furniture of a great city as police-offices, lamp-lighting, or newspapers. Waiving, however, this one instance of something like compliance with the brutal spirit of the world, on all other subjects he was eminently unworldly, childlike, simple-minded, and upright. He would flatter no man; even when addressing nations, it is almost laughable to see how invariably he prefaces his counsels with such plain truths uttered in a manner so offensive as must have defeated his purpose if it had otherwise any chance of being accomplished. For instance, in addressing America, he begins thus: "People of America! since your separation from the mother-country, your moral character has degenerated in the energy of thought and sense; produced by the absence of your association and intercourse with British officers and merchants; you have no moral discernment to distinguish between the protective power of England and the destructive power of France." And his letter to the Irish nation opens in this agreeable and conciliatory manner:—"People of Ireland! I address you as a true philosopher of nature, foreseeing the perpetual misery your irreflective character and total absence of moral discernment are preparing for," etc. The second sentence begins thus:—"You are sacrilegiously arresting the arm of your parent kingdom fighting the cause of man and nature, when the triumph of the fiend of French police terror would be your own instant extirpation." And the letter closes thus:—"I see but one awful alternative—that Ireland will be a perpetual moral volcano, threatening the destruction

of the world, if the education and instruction of thought and sense shall not be able to generate the faculty of moral discernment among a very numerous class of the population, who detest the civic calm as sailors the natural calm—and make civic rights on which they cannot reason a pretext for feuds which they delight in." As he spoke freely and boldly to others, so he spoke loftily of himself; at p. 313 of *The Harp of Apollo*, on making a comparison of himself with Socrates (in which he naturally gives the preference to himself), he styles *The Harp*, etc., "this unparalleled work of human energy." At p. 315, he calls it, "this stupendous work;" and lower down on the same page he says—"I was turned out of school at the age of fifteen for a dunce or blockhead, because I would not stuff into my memory all the nonsense of erudition and learning; and if future ages should discover the unparalleled energies of genius in this work, it will prove my most important doctrine—that the powers of the human mind must be developed in the education of thought and sense in the study of moral opinion, not arts and science." Again, at p. 225 of his *Sophiometer*, he says:—"The paramount thought that dwells in my mind incessantly is a question I put to myself—whether, in the event of my personal dissolution by death, I have communicated all the discoveries my unique mind possesses in the great master-science of man and nature." In the next page he determines that he *has*, with the exception of one truth—viz., "the latent energy, physical and moral, of human nature as existing in the British people." But here he was surely accusing himself without ground; for to my knowledge he has not failed in any one of his numerous works to insist upon this theme at least a billion of times. Another instance of his magnificent self-estimation is—that in the title-pages of several

of his works he announces himself as "John Stewart, the only man of nature* that ever appeared in the world."

By this time I am afraid the reader begins to suspect that he was crazy; and certainly, when I consider everything, he must have been crazy when the wind was at N.N.E.; for who but Walking Stewart ever dated his books by a computation drawn—not from the creation, not from the flood, not from Nabonassar, or *ab urbe condita*, not from the Hegira—but from themselves, from their own day of publication, as constituting the one great æra in the history of man by the side of which all other æras were frivolous and impertinent? Thus, in a work of his given to me in 1812, and probably published in that year, I find him incidentally recording of himself that he was at that time "arrived at the age of sixty-three, with a firm state of health acquired by temperance, and a peace of mind almost independent of the vices of mankind—because my knowledge of life has enabled me to place my happiness beyond the reach or contact of other men's follies and passions, by avoiding all family connexions and all ambitious pursuits of profit, fame, or power." On reading this passage I was anxious to ascertain its date; but this, on turning to the title-page, I found thus mysteriously expressed: "In the 7000th year of Astronomical History, and the first day of Intellectual Life or Moral World, from the æra of this work." Another slight indication of craziness appeared in a notion which obstinately haunted his mind that all the kings and rulers of the earth would confederate in every age

* In Bath he was surnamed "the Child of Nature;"—which arose from his contrasting on every occasion the existing man of our present experience with the ideal or Stewartian man that might be expected to emerge in some myriads of ages, to which latter man he gave the name of the Child of Nature.

against his works, and would hunt them out for extermination as keenly as Herod did the innocents in Bethlehem. On this consideration, fearing that they might be intercepted by the long arms of these wicked princes before they could reach that remote Stewartian man or his precursor to whom they were mainly addressed, he recommended to all those who might be impressed with a sense of their importance to bury a copy or copies of each work, properly secured from damp, etc., at a depth of seven or eight feet below the surface of the earth; and on their death-beds to communicate the knowledge of this fact to some confidential friends, who in their turn were to send down the tradition to some discreet persons of the next generation; and thus, if the truth was not to be dispersed for many ages, yet the knowledge that here and there the truth lay buried on this and that continent, in secret spots on Mount Caucasus—in the sands of Biledulgerid—and in hiding-places amongst the forests of America, and was to rise again in some distant age and to vegetate and fructify for the universal benefit of man—this knowledge at least was to be whispered down from generation to generation; and, in defiance of a myriad of kings crusading against him, Walking Stewart was to stretch out the influence of his writings through a long series of *λαμπάδηφοροι* to that child of nature whom he saw dimly through a vista of many centuries. If this were madness, it seemed to me a somewhat sublime madness; and I assured him of my co-operation against the kings, promising that I would bury "The Harp of Apollo" in my own orchard in Grasmere at the foot of Mount Fairfield; that I would bury "The Apocalypse of Nature" in one of the coves of Helvellyn, and several other places best known to myself. He accepted my offer with gratitude; but he then made known to me that he relied

on my assistance for a still more important service—which was this: in the lapse of that vast number of ages which would probably intervene between the present period and the period at which his works would have reached their destination, he feared that the English language might itself have mouldered away. “No!” I said, “*that* was not probable; considering its extensive diffusion, and that it was now transplanted into all the continents of our planet, I would back the English language against any other on earth.” His own persuasion, however, was that the Latin was destined to survive all other languages; it was to be the eternal as well as the universal language; and his desire was that I would translate his works, or some part of them, into that language.* This I promised; and I seriously designed at some leisure hour to translate into Latin a selection of passages which should embody an abstract of his philosophy. This would have been doing a service to all those who might wish to see a digest of his peculiar opinions cleared from the perplexities of his peculiar diction, and brought into a narrow compass from

* I was not aware until the moment of writing this passage that Walking Stewart had publicly made this request three years after making it to myself: opening the Harp of Apollo, I have just now accidentally stumbled on the following passage, “This stupendous work is destined, I fear, to meet a worse fate than the Aloe, which as soon as it blossoms loses its stalk. This first blossom of reason is threatened with the loss of both its stalk and its soil; for, if the revolutionary tyrant should triumph, he would destroy all the English books and energies of thought. I conjure my readers to translate this work into Latin, and to bury it in the ground, communicating on their death-beds only its place of concealment to men of nature.”

From the title-page of this work, by the way, I learn that the “7000th year of Astronomical History” is taken from the Chinese tables, and coincides (as I had supposed) with the year 1812 of our computation.

the great number of volumes through which they are at present dispersed. However, like many another plan of mine, it went unexecuted.

On the whole, if Walking Stewart were at all crazy, he was so in a way which did not effect his natural genius and eloquence—but rather exalted them. The old maxim, indeed, that “Great wits to madness sure are near allied,” the maxim of Dryden and the popular maxim, I have heard disputed by Mr. Coleridge and Mr. Wordsworth, who maintained that mad people are the dullest and most wearisome of all people. As a body, I believe they are so. But I must dissent from the authority of Messrs. Coleridge and Wordsworth so far as to distinguish. Where madness is connected, as it often is, with some miserable derangement of the stomach, liver, etc., and attacks the principle of pleasurable life, which is manifestly seated in the central organs of the body (*i.e.*, in the stomach and the apparatus connected with it), there it cannot but lead to perpetual suffering and distraction of thought; and there the patient will be often tedious and incoherent. People who have not suffered from any great disturbance in those organs are little aware how indispensable to the process of thinking are the momentary influxes of pleasurable feeling from the regular goings on of life in its primary functions; in fact, until the pleasure is withdrawn or obscured, most people are not aware that they *have* any pleasure from the due action of the great central machinery of the system; proceeding in uninterrupted continuance, the pleasure as much escapes the consciousness as the act of respiration; a child, in the happiest state of its existence, does not *know* that it is happy. And generally whatsoever is the level state of the hourly feeling is never put down by the unthinking (*i.e.*, by 99 out of 100)

to the account of happiness; it is never put down with the positive sign, as equal to $+x$; but simply as $=0$. And men first become aware that it *was* a positive quantity, when they have lost it (*i.e.*, fallen into $-x$). Meantime the genial pleasure from the vital processes, though not represented to the consciousness, is *immanent* in every act—impulse—motion—word—and thought; and a philosopher sees that the idiots are in a state of pleasure, though they cannot see it themselves. Now I say that, where this principle of pleasure is not attached, madness is often little more than an enthusiasm highly exalted; the animal spirits are exuberant and in excess; and the madman becomes, if he be otherwise a man of ability and information, all the better as a companion. I have met with several such madmen; and I appeal to my brilliant friend, Professor W——, who is not a man to tolerate dulness in any quarter, and is himself the ideal of a delightful companion, whether he ever met a more amusing person than that madman, who took a post-chaise with us from —— to Carlisle, long years ago, when he and I were hastening with the speed of fugitive felons to catch the Edinburgh mail. His fancy and his extravagance, and his furious attacks on Sir Isaac Newton, like Plato's suppers, refreshed us not only for that day but whenever they recurred to us; and we were both grieved when we heard some time afterwards from a Cambridge man that he had met our clever friend in a stage-coach under the care of a brutal keeper. Such a madness, if any, was the madness of Walking Stewart; his health was perfect; his spirits as light and ebullient as the spirits of a bird in spring-time; and his mind unagitated by painful thoughts, and at peace with itself. Hence, if he was not an amusing companion, it was because the philosophic direction of his thoughts made him something more. Of

anecdotes and matters of fact he was not communicative: of all that he had seen in the vast compass of his travels he never availed himself in conversation. I do not remember at this moment that he ever once alluded to his own travels in his intercourse with me except for the purpose of weighing down by a statement grounded on his own great personal experience an opposite statement of many hasty and misjudging travellers which he thought injurious to human nature; the statement was this, that in all his countless rencontres with uncivilised tribes he had never met with any so ferocious and brutal as to attack an unarmed and defenceless man who was able to make them understand that he threw himself upon their hospitality and forbearance.

On the whole, Walking Stewart was a sublime visionary; he had seen and suffered much amongst men; yet not too much, or so as to dull the genial tone of his sympathy with the sufferings of others. His mind was a mirror of the sentient universe. The whole mighty vision that had fled before his eyes in this world,—the armies of Hyder Ali and his son with oriental and barbaric pageantry,—the civic grandeur of England—the great deserts of Asia and America,—the vast capitals of Europe,—London with its eternal agitations, the ceaseless ebb and flow of its "mighty heart,"—Paris shaken by the fierce torments of revolutionary convulsions, the silence of Lapland, and the solitary forests of Canada, with the swarming life of the torrid zone, together with innumerable recollections of individual joy and sorrow, that he had participated by sympathy—lay like a map beneath him, as if eternally co-present to his view; so that, in the contemplation of the prodigious whole, he had no leisure to separate the parts, or occupy his mind with details. Hence came the monotony which

the frivolous and the desultory would have found in his conversation. I, however, who am perhaps the person best qualified to speak of him, must pronounce him to have been a man of great genius: and, with reference to his conversation, of great eloquence. That these were not better known and acknowledged was owing to two disadvantages; one grounded in his imperfect education, the other in the peculiar structure of his mind. The first was this: like the late Mr. Shelley he had a fine vague enthusiasm and lofty aspirations in connection with human nature generally and its hopes; and like him he strove to give steadiness, a uniform direction, and an intelligible purpose to these feelings, by fitting to them a scheme of philosophical opinions. But unfortunately the philosophic system of both was so far from supporting their own views and the cravings of their own enthusiasm, that, as in some points it was baseless, incoherent, or unintelligible, so in others it tended to moral results, from which, if they had foreseen them, they would have been themselves the first to shrink, as contradictory to the very purposes in which their system had originated. Hence, in maintaining their own system they both found themselves painfully entangled at times with tenets pernicious and degrading to human nature. These were the inevitable consequences of the *πρωτον ψευδος* in their speculations; but were naturally charged upon them by those who looked carelessly into their books as opinions which not only for the sake of consistency they thought themselves bound to endure, but to which they gave the full weight of their sanction and patronage as to so many moving principles in their system. The other disadvantage under which Walking Stewart laboured was this: he was a man of genius, but not a man of talents; at least his genius was out of all proportion to

his talents, and wanted an organ as it were for manifesting itself; so that his most original thoughts were delivered in a crude state—imperfect, obscure, half developed, and not producible to a popular audience. He was aware of this himself; and, though he claims everywhere the faculty of profound intuition into human nature, yet with equal candour he accuses himself of asinine stupidity, dulness, and want of talent. He was a disproportioned intellect, and so far a monster; and he must be added to the long list of original-minded men who have been looked down upon with pity and contempt by commonplace men of talent, whose powers of mind—though a thousand times inferior—were yet more manageable, and ran in channels more suited to common uses and common understandings.

N. B.—About the year 1812 I remember seeing in many of the print-shops a whole-length sketch in water-colours of Walking Stewart in his customary dress and attitude. This, as the only memorial (I presume) in that shape of a man whose memory I love, I should be very glad to possess; and therefore I take the liberty of publicly requesting as a particular favour from any reader of this article, who may chance to remember such a sketch in any collection of prints offered for sale, that he would cause it to be sent to the editor of the London Magazine, who will pay for it.

