

THE

214

PRINCETON MAGAZINE.

EDITED BY

WILLIAM C. ALEXANDER.

VOL. I.

PRINTED BY JOHN T. ROBINSON.

1850.

THE
PRINCETON MAGAZINE.

WORDSWORTH.

The recent death of Wordsworth affords an irresistible invitation to say something about his poetry. So long has he been before the public, that for some years past men have sat in judgment on him with almost the coolness which we ascribe to posterity. It is hard to say whether he has suffered most from his enemies or his friends. His excesses, simplicities, and almost hoaxes, such as Peter Bell, the Idiot Boy, and those Lyrical Ballads in which he did a violence to nature, and brought the Muse not only into the highway but into the very mire, together with his drowsy, dreamy, long-winded homilies in measured prose, have been embalmed and worshipped by a certain class of his admirers. This has done him more harm than Jeffrey's insulting sneers and unrighteous garbling, or than all the laughter exploded against the Lake School.

That Wordsworth will assume his place among the classic poets of England cannot be doubted for a moment. That he will occupy the same level with Shakspeare and Milton, it would be ridiculous to predict. Great contemporaries and rivals, not excepting his bitter lordly satirist, have recorded later judgments, which ought to hush the petty snarlings of

THE COMPLAINT.

A FRAGMENT FROM THE NOTE BOOK OF A YOUNG PHILOSOPHER.

I am thoroughly disgusted with the unphilosophical character of every thing around me. After labouring for many years to raise myself above the unideal, sensuous, and tasteless vulgar, I am constantly pulled down from my hard-earned elevation, by the want of sympathy in those with whom I am compelled to come in contact. If I venture into mixed society, I hear even educated well-bred people talk of the weather and of politics, precisely as their parents did, without the least regard to the intervening march of mind, or the revolutionary changes wrought by the conquests of the new philosophy. If I go to church, instead of large generalizations, thorough analysis, and an idealising ratiocination, I hear the old story about faith and repentance, justification and adoption. My attempts to remedy the evil only make me ridiculous or odious in the eyes of those who cannot understand me. When I ask my tailor why his bill is drawn up so empirically, or charge my butcher with being a follower of Locke, on account of some expressions which he uses, they both laugh in my face. If I stop a neighbour in the street to inquire what his mode of thought is, he looks as if he actually thought me silly.

Connected with this is a deplorable æsthetical deficiency. I was lately invited by a highly esteemed friend to look at his new pig-stye, and on going out, could hardly credit my own eyes when I found there was not a trace of Gothic! Giving directions for a wood-shed in my father's yard, I stated distinctly to the workman that I wished it to express the idea of indefinite duration, and the fellow actually made it without ends. But the truth is these vexations pervade all society. The very advertisements and sign-boards are disgusting from their want of keeping with the better spirit of the age. You may read whole columns without meeting

with the slightest indication of improvement on the old modes of thought and forms of speech.

What alarms me most is that the schools for children threaten to perpetuate the evil. Instead of a scientific analysis and classification of the elements, the child is taught that ridiculous old A B C. I asked a little girl, whom I met the other day, what was the relation of articulate sound to thought, and she actually could not tell me. Only think too, of the multiplication table being still taught to the children in the middle of the nineteenth century. Newton's Principia, or even one of the big French Algebras, might be tolerated; but old fashioned Arithmetic is too much. I should not be much surprised to find that these pretended teachers still use copy-books, and make the child begin with strokes and pot-hooks, instead of setting out from the elementary idea of form, and its significant relation to sound, and then developing from this a theory of scientific graphics.

I am sick even of the faces that I see around me, so prosaic, so empirical, so inexpressive of the inner life, the Reason, the Idea. On the other hand, if I allow my own intellectual and moral self-consciousness to shine through my features and my countenance, the vulgar herd, by which I am encompassed, laugh at me and charge me with conceit and affectation.

THE NIGHT VOICE.

I heard a gentle voice by night,
My slumber softly breaking,
Methought the moon shone doubly bright
As when I was thus awaking.

What gentle voice is this, I said,
Sure 'tis not of a stranger;