

AN ANACHRONISM, OR MISSING ONE'S COACH.

KIND and credulous reader, and I wish for no other, be it known to you that I am one of those who dip into antiquarian lore, and that I am moreover like some of the same tribe, fond of long and solitary rambles on foot, in quest of the wrecks and relics of things forgotten, or forgotten by all but the family of the "Dryasdusts." Nor ought I to conceal the fact that I am (when a day's march has failed to bring me in the way of the monuments of remote ages) much given to the indulgence of splendid philosophico-poetical speculations concerning the future; thus borrowing from the time to come, entertainment for the time present, in place of that which should

have been furnished me by the times that are past. Many a road-side "St. George and the Dragon," or "Robin Hood," where I have found shelter for the night, has witnessed the cheap felicity I have created for myself amid these Janus-like meditations.

During several sultry days of last August, or, if you please, of some other August, I had risen at the earliest dawn, and had held on my pilgrim path until sunset, carefully tracking the course of the Pict's wall, from the shores of Solway Firth, eastward. Toward the close of the last of these days, all my musings upon the past, as well as every bright and fair dream

respecting the future, had been dispelled, or had lost its wonted charm over my imagination, partly by the now overpowering sensations of bodily fatigue and mental exhaustion, and partly by the obtrusion, on every side, of objects utterly at variance with sentiment and speculation of whatever sort, and whether retrospective or anticipative ; and which forbade any thing to be thought of but the bustling interests of the generation extant. Who, I ask, can be poetical, or who sublimely philosophical, within ten miles of Newcastle-upon-Tyne ?

Yet let me not be thought to disparage the town and neighbourhood whence incalculable chaldrons of comfort, cookery, and gas-illumination are emanating every day, and are blessing all our eastern shores ! This radiating, if not radiant coal mart, I entered about five o'clock in the afternoon—limping, hungry, thirsty, grimed with dust, and shorn of all sentimentality ; and notwithstanding the horror I have—an instinctive horror, not to be reasoned with—of large commercial and manufacturing towns, I was now so thoroughly broken down in spirit and so foot-sore too, that I quietly resigned myself to the thought of spending the night at the best inn which would deign to receive a dusty pedestrian, with a wallet on his back. Thus purposing, I made a discreet choice among the caravanseries of Newcastle, lowering my pride to the dimensions of a fourth-rate hotel ; and there, by assuming some airs of importance, I actually so far secured the good opinion and services of waiters, boots, and chambermaid, as to get myself renovated, in the course of two hours, and found myself a new man, or rather my own self again ; that is to say, neither very *new*, nor very old ; but now—shaved, dressed, cooled, rested, dined, and enlivened moreover by a sober pint of execrable sherry. In a word, by seven o'clock, I was beginning to readmit, and to dally with swarms of “fine ideas,” which came crowding upon my rather fevered sensorium.

In this mood I felt it to be out of the question to remain, as a prudent man could have done, where I was, in a dusky, smoke-stained coffee-room ; and in the very heart of a Babylon, like Newcastle. Although, therefore, any man in my case, would have thought he had had foot-work enough for the day, I rushed forth ; yet intend-

ing nothing else but to occupy the bed I had engaged ; and meaning only to muse away the twilight hour by the river's side, if I could find free space there, for a time. It happened, however, that, in limping across the market-place, on my way to the quays, I was almost run over by the impetuous “Edinburgh and Leeds Mercury,” which, at the moment, swung round the corner with its reeking four. It stopped—and I stopped—and, scarcely thinking what I meant, I accosted the guard as he reached the pavement, with the laconic question—“Room outside ?” to which I received the not more wordy answer—

“For one, sir.”

“When do you start ?”

“In ten minutes, at the fullest.”

“Keep a place for me in front, then.”

The comparison that rushed upon my mind, at first sight of the “Mercury,” between a stifling chamber in a murky inn, for the night, and the splendours of heaven, and the glories of the ensuing dawn—never better enjoyed than on the outside of a night-coach, during the summer months—this instantaneous comparison, carried away all my plans, and actually seemed to dispel my bodily sensations of fatigue. I hurried back to the den within which I had thought to have gasped till morning, paid my reckoning—lavished gratuities upon waiters, boots, and chambermaid ; snatched up my knapsack, and with the precipitation of a man who has scaled the walls of his prison, and in listening for pursuit, hobbled toward the great “Commercial,” whence I was to start. I found that the fresh cattle had not yet come out. I caught the guard by the sleeve, and telling him that I should be on the road, set forward, as if to realize the unexpected pleasure of my escape from Newcastle ; or as if to exclude any possible disappointment, although, with this view, it would have been far more wise, as the event proved, to have occupied my seat on the coach, and to have endured the smutty atmosphere of the town a few minutes longer. But the suggestions of vulgar prudence contemned, I made my way, with a hurried, hobbling step through the descending streets, and over the bridge that strides the deep-dyed waters of the Tyne, thence ascending the steep opposite hill on the Durham road, from the brow of which a prospect wide (and fair, if not fouled with smoke) stretches east and west.

Perhaps a restive leader, flinging over the traces, or a lagging passenger, had delayed the Mercury so much beyond the "ten minutes" allowed me by the guard. In fact, when I reached the summit of the hill, I listened in vain for either the rattling wheels, or the bugle. In that luckless—or, shall I say lucky—moment, I descried, a little to the left, a rising ground, whence the course of the river might advantageously be seen. At the risque (almost the certainty) of losing my place, I darted toward this eminence; and finding, when I reached it, a tempting seat, upon the gnarled roots of a decayed oak, I sat down; yes, I sat; and as my sceptical reader will tell me, nodded and slept. This explanation of what follows I am, however, resolved not to admit; and yet even if this were granted, it would be not the less certain that I looked around me, as I sat with as clear a consciousness of plain reality, as I had had a while before in taking my steak at the Swan. There may, perhaps, be those who will insult me by insinuating that, worn out as I confess myself to have been, I had fallen sound asleep in my box in the coffee-room, with the last half-glass of the "execrable sherry" before me; and that the whole affair of the "Mercury" is no better than a midsummer night's dream. I shall not condescend to argue the point with any such objectors, too wise already in their own conceits; but shall go on in all simplicity to relate how that, seated in the aforesaid natural arm chair, I looked around and looked beneath, and looked in vain for the roofs, and chimneys, and spires of the dingy Newcastle—for the most entangled quays, for the spouting furnaces, for the glowing fire-heaps, at the pits' mouths, in the distance; or, in a word, for any one object indicative of recent times, or of the busy wonders of the metropolis of soot; and all which had a moment before lain outstretched before me.

In the stead of any such familiar appearances, noting the current time, the August of 1837 (or some other August of modern date,) there was, indeed, the same glowing sky, and the same general outline of country; the same winding river, yet winding in a somewhat different track, and seen only at points among overgrowing tufts of trees. But instead of the vast town and its accompaniments, I gazed upon a wild solitude; or if not a solitude, which in truth it was not, yet such comparatively.

The ground about me was a rugged forest, crossed by rude paths, yet down the hill side, and in the flats beneath, I descried many small enclosures, each containing a hovel or cabin, and within which there were the indications of thrift and comfort. The distance toward the north and west was dark with wide-stretching forests, the more sullen in their aspect, as they now lay in gloomy shade, immediately beneath the dazzling expanse, whence the sun had but just sunk away.

But now—mark it, reader—what was the most surprising in this instantaneous shifting of the scene, was that I looked upon it as coolly as if it had not been surprising at all; as if it were just what I had expected, and had actually beheld a hundred times. Never in my life have I seemed more myself, more wide awake, or more calmly and familiarly conversant with things about me. I was conscious of no excitement, no poetic elevation, no wonderment, no exaggerated impressions; there was no fantastic mixing up of chimeras with ordinary realities; all within and all without was sober truth. I, who had the same afternoon entered the Swan covered with dust—I, who had a few minutes before engaged my place to Leeds, and was listening for the coach—the same real and veracious I, now stood gazing upon a scene utterly changed in aspect and objects.

In turning about, I perceived at a little distance an uncouth being—shall I call him peasant or savage—who was dragging his weary steps homeward—if, indeed, he might have a home, other than the hollow of a tree. His hatless head was matted with a mop of caroty hair, brushing his broad and naked shoulders, and almost concealing a florid Scythian-like visage, marked with the hopeless sullenness and mindless wildness, with which cruel bondage deforms the human countenance. A torn woollen jerkin, of the coarsest texture, left uncovered his shaggy bosom and brawny arms. The man, and this startled me more than even his strange appearance, passed me so near as almost to brush me with his tatters, and yet seemed no more to notice me than as if I had been a disembodied spirit. I accosted him with the question—"What place is this?" He started at the sound of my voice, but looked in an opposite direction, as if he had heard himself called from a distance, and seeing no one, went on.

Yet this question had no sooner ca-

aped my lips, than the answer to it, like the most familiarly known fact, came to my recollection. Where am I? where should I be, after having crossed Tina's flood—where but on the brow of Gaetshefed; yes, Gaetshefed (Gateshead), and close at hand must be the sacred Girvum (Janoro), and the cloistered retreat of the learned and venerable historian of the British and Saxon Church!

I looked around, and although, to satisfy the strict demands of topography, I should have had some little way to go, and far enough to forfeit all chance of being taken up by the "Mercury;" yet, so it was, or so it seemed, that I descried, half hid by a clump of oaks, a pile of buildings, seemingly fresh from the mason's hand, regular in form, but of no great extent or elevation. The main structure was surrounded by a low, scalloped wall of uncemented stones, through which there was access by a narrow gateway, into a court-yard or rough area, variously occupied with sheds and lumber. Behind the building, however, I saw a much loftier wall, apparently enclosing a garden.

The edifice itself—the monastery, for such, in fact, I found it to be—presented, in its general appearance, the combined characteristics of a church, a fortress, a prison, a seignorial mansion, and a farm-house—at least there was a something proper to each of these styles of building, discernible in this sanctuary of piety, whose inmates, while in the main devoting their lives to the business of piety, maintained their ground amid lawless hordes, as well by the aid of substantial defences, as by the awe of religion. Meantime, in submitting to personal incarceration (as the spider keeps himself snug within the leaf he has coiled), exercised lordly and lucrative jurisdiction over the surrounding country, and in attestation of the vulgar realities that resulted from this influence, could show stowage room enough for provender, and live-stock of all descriptions.

The main building, oblong in its general figure, rose to the height of two stories, or I should rather say, a storey and a half; for the position of the upper windows or loops, seemed to indicate that the lofty apartments, or halls of the ground floor, were surmounted by dwarf chambers, or low cloisters next the roof. A circular tower sustained each corner of the western front of the building; and

these towers were curiously annulated by bold projections in the brick-work, or rings, at even intervals from the bases to the summits of the towers. In fact, any one whose head was steady, might have climbed the towers, using the belts as steps. The sides of the building were sustained and adorned by pilasters, each of which, for chapter, displayed a several sculpture, and each vying with its neighbour in absurdity.

On the southern side of the building, and close to the tower, at that angle, there was a lofty massive oaken door, with narrow panels, and broad styles, and doubly secured by heavy bars, fastening within. This door seemed to be devoted to rare occasions, for the grass grew rank about the threshold. In advance a few feet of the other, or northern tower, stood insulated, a wreathed, slender column, surmounted by a saint—I mean the image or effigy of one; and I dare say of St. Cuthbert the founder. A flight of narrow stone steps, jutting from the wall between the two towers, and secured by a slender rail, led to an open or balconied hall, or antechamber, fronted by a screen, which rested on fantastic pillars or posts. From beneath, and where I stood, one might discern the narrow apertures in the inner walls of this hall, by which light and air, in parsimonious quantities, were admitted to the apartments beyond.

I approached the sacred precincts with no ordinary curiosity; and, unbidden, passed the wicket of the outer enclosure, within which I found a various assemblage of persons, and more bustle and clatter of tongues than one would expect to see and hear in so holy a place. Several groups occupied the area in front of the monastery; some were ascending and descending the flight of steps, and as many as it could fairly hold, were to be seen in the balcony, or hall, or open corridor already mentioned. These persons, some secular, some religious, far from exhibiting the demure abstraction which one thinks of as proper to a house of piety, were engaged in eager, and some of them in jocose chat, or gossip, of which the subjects were evidently not peculiarly nice or select. Excellent jests, to judge by the bursts of laughter with which they were greeted, enlivened these colloquies; and a burly monk, whose smooth cheeks bespoke a sunshine felicity within, from whatever sources derived, actually made the echoes ring from the

walls of the monastery, by the peals of his mirth, while listening to a story told by a lean, raw-boned laic, who seemed to be a traveller.

At the foot of the stone steps, with one foot raised, and in attitude of impatient detention, stood a younger brother of the house, whose flowing tunic was submissively held at the lappet, by a serf, or villain, who seemed to be urging some claims of justice upon a dull ear, or reviving the recollections of a faithless memory. In the hall above, were some personages of higher rank, apparently both religious and secular—the officers of the house—and two or three franklins, whose bearing in converse with the brethren, though submissive, was not abject ; and by the by, I could but notice that the fine stuffs and nice trim of some of these mortified persons, exhibited as well more solicitude as more cost, than was discernible in the dress of the best attired laic of the party. Apt commentary, thought I, upon the monastic aphorism of St. Gregory—“*Quid est habitus monachi, nisi des, pectus mundi?*” And here again I was reminded of another rule of the same holy father—“*Ne mulieres in monasterio tuo deinceps qualibet occasione permittas ascendere*”—for, looking upward to near the summit of one of the before-mentioned towers, I espied, at an opening where there were placed several large rural flower-pots, a very pretty lass, whose flaxen hair reflected the fading glories of the western sky, and who was busily employed aspersing the plants they contained, with a bundle of rushes. Tell it not at Rome!

Amid these comers and goers, and merry gossips, I stood, or glided, hither and thither, unnoticed ; or rather it seemed as if not one of these eyes had the faculty to fix itself upon my corporeal substance ; or as if, between my existence and theirs, the link of corporeal communication had slipped away. While, from the area below, I stood peering into the dim recesses of the hall above, desirous of ascending, and yet fearing to do so, I perceived a narrow door in the farthest corner, slowly open, and presently there appeared at the head of the steps, a portly yet infirm figure—a reverend monk, reverend in truth—reverend by the majesty of intelligence and personal qualities. He firmly grasped the rail of the balustrade, in preparing to descend the steps, and stood a few minutes to conclude a parley with an importunate

brother, who had followed him, as it seemed, from the door of his cell, and who was tormenting him with some impertinent gossip. Having courteously and yet briskly shaken off this *musquito*, the monk worked his way, sliding down the steps, and easing his stiffened limbs by force of his yet powerful arm. When he reached the ground, he evidently made no little effort to edge himself through the crowd, at such a rate as should discourage any who might essay to hold him by the sleeve.

He made his way, unassailed, athwart the court, and toward the eastern end of the monastery, where entrance was had to the garden. Instinctively I pressed on to follow and accost him.

Never in my days have I happened to meet an old friend on the road, or at the corner of a street, with a more natural, easy, and undoubting impression of familiar recognition—never have I seized any one's hand and said, “Ah! how d'ye do? how are they at home?”—never have I looked into a well-known and smiling face, with a feeling more assured, than that with which, while fixing my eye upon the visage before me, I exclaimed, “the venerable Bede!”

And I had no sooner so spoken, than the old man, turning himself a little about, and depressing the hood which muffled his ears with his middle finger, (a characteristic action) gave me a look of reciprocal recognition, and glanced a “how d'ye do” at me. And now, strange as it may seem, it is a fact that this interchanged greeting, as if Bede and I had been old friends, excited in me no more surprise than I had just before felt when the blackened roofs of Newcastle gave place to the forest tufts, and wildness of another age.

I quickened my step ; the monk slackened his, and I was soon at his side. He placed his hand, for he had the advantage of me in stature, upon my shoulder, and in easy and (may I say so?) in *wonted* chat, we entered the monastery garden together. It was a well-laboured enclosure, of ample dimensions, and seemed to be stocked with whatever a comfortable kitchen demands in the vegetable kind. We gained a bench, at the extreme corner of the garden, overhung by a gourd, and seating ourselves, enjoyed the still scene, dimly revealed by the glowing sky.

In endeavouring, as I have since done, again and again, to recover the

earlier portion of the conversation which ensued, I have always felt as if a page, or a half page, of memory's record had just there been torn out; so that, although every syllable of our after discourse remains indelibly fixed in my recollection, its initial part has utterly disappeared. It must suffice then to say that, at the point where I come again into perfect possession of my consciousness, the venerable monk and I were conferring, in an easy manner, upon various points connected with his age, or with mine, and both of us having a clear understanding, and perfect recollection of the fact, that, at this same moment, he was actually living in the eighth century, and I as truly in the nineteenth; nor did this trifling difference of a thousand years or more—this *break*, as geologists would call it—this *fault* in the strata of time—trouble or perplex either of us a whit; any more than two friends are molested by the circumstance of their happening to encounter each other just as they arrive from opposite hemispheres.

“A world of things,” said I, “we might talk of, which I might relate, and you be not displeased to listen to, concerning what has happened in merry Anglo-land, these last thousand years. And a world of things, too, you might describe to me, connected with *your* age, which History, capricious, niggard as she is, has not chosen to inform us of. And I promise you that this sort of information, for which just now there is an eager demand among my contemporaries, I could bring to a good market—nay, make my fortune of it, well worked up. But we must husband our time, choice moments as they are; for whatever leisure *you* may have at command, this evening I can hardly reckon upon five minutes, for, know you, I am expecting, every instant, to be taken up by the ‘Leeds Mercury.’”

“The Leeds Mercury!”

“Ah, I should have said Lhydes, and you would have understood me.”

“Understood you! Heaven forbid, What then, have the people of Eborascyre, so soundly reclaimed as they are from their idolatry, and fairly consigned to the bosom of the church, have they relapsed into paganism?—have they fallen away to the horrid worship of their Woden—their Mercury? And what is this taken up, which you say you are expecting; are you, then, on

the edge of apotheosis, or of arrest by the officers of justice?”

“Neither the one nor the other; and we may better employ our fitting moments than to enter upon an explanation of the phrases which I thoughtlessly let drop. In a word, be assured, that I am not just yet on my way either to the stars, or to a jail.”

“Let, then, this difficulty stand over till we meet again. Meantime, and as you say you are liable to be snatched away from me every moment, allow me, before we enter upon subjects more important, to ask, in a word—pardon an old man, and a secluded author, who has had little justice done him by his contemporaries—pardon me if I ask, what has become of the name and the writings of—of—the unworthy Bede?”

A flush, first of manly modesty, then of religious shame and self-condemnation, came upon the old man's clear complexion—a flush mounting to his temples, and suffusing his ample and smooth forehead with a crimson, such as the western sky was then glowing with, and with a dew too, such as was then settling upon earth, wiping his face with his sleeve, he went on before I could reply—

“Nay; I retract my unseemly question;—answer not a fool according to his folly—nil tam inglorium, quam gloriæ cupidum, deprehendi.”

“Very true,” I said, “but, in simple fact, if great men and great writers could only know, in their life-time, to what a mere speck their reputation would converge, as seen at the end of a thousand years (or even at the end of a hundred) upon the broad table of the public mind, I think the most naughty would receive a sufficient chastisement, so that they might very safely, nay, profitably, listen to all that might be told them of their estimation with posterity.”

“Speak then, if it be so, that what you have to say will furnish a scourge for my overweening vanity.”

“Know then that, in England and out of it, for a thousand years, or near it, you have been ordinarily designated as “the venerable Bede,” and have been styled the light and lamp of the English Church; the star of your times; the ornament of your country; and worthy, if any one is so, of immortal fame—‘so learned (I quote the very words of your panegyrists,) so learned that one might think you lived only for study; so pious, that one must believe you lived only for prayer.’”

“ Stop, stop—more than enough.”

“ Oh, I must go on, or I shall have given you the poison without the antidote.”

“ I listen.”

“ Hear it then—the works of the venerable Bede, or the best of them, have gone wherever sound learning has gone, and have taken their place in all our European libraries. Moreover, in modern times, they have been given to the world in several costly editions. Let me remember, they have been printed at ——”

“ Printed ?”

“ Ay, printed ; but waive the question concerning the meaning of this new-coined word—a word that has turned, and is turning the world upside down. Be satisfied, at present, to know that the learned, in all countries, have enjoyed facilities such as you never dreamed of, for making themselves acquainted with your writings, if only disposed to avail themselves of the opportunity.”

“ You mean to say, in plain words, that nearly all men in your modern Europe, moderately well taught, have read the ‘ *Historia Ecclesiastica*,’ and the ——”

“ Not quite so fast. To keep within bounds of truth, let us rather say that—taking the mass of well-informed and fairly learned men in Europe—as many as one in ten thousand might make the boast that they have just set eyes upon the cover of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* ; and then that of those who have actually seen the book, one in a hundred might pretend to have taken it from the shelf, blown the dust from the top, and read twenty pages of it. No doubt there might be found (as one may find men with six fingers on a hand, or six toes on a foot) who have perused the venerable Bede through and through.”

The old man sunk into a reverie, as I spoke, and seemed to be revolving deep thoughts. He muttered at length a *vanitas vanitatum* ; and turned his ear to me again. That I might the more congruously fall in with his meditations, I went on sagely to observe that—

“ Fame, never so bright and broad a blaze as it may be at the first, comes, at the end of a thousand years, and often long before that time, to a mere point, like the image of the glorious sun, after it has passed through a pin hole in a card. Nevertheless you should know that the venerable Bede—

“ the lamp of the English Church,” was, soon after his decease, canonised by the holy pontiff, and that his office is still kept by the Benedictines, on the 29th day of October ; by others on 27th day of May.”

I had hardly uttered the word *canonised*, when the old man started as if mortally pierced, and then fell into a sort of pallid trance, or horror—a rigour fixing every limb. I hardly knew by what means I at length brought him back to calm consciousness ; but even then he trembled, as one who had seen a spectre. To change the subject, and by the means of an easy transition, I went on :

“ And yet, let me tell you, that how small a portion soever of the light and warmth that is enjoyed by us moderns may fairly be attributed to the influence of the writings of the venerable Bede, it is quite true, and you ought to know it, that a very large amount of both—I mean of the light and warmth actually diffused among the people of England, in the nineteenth century—emanates, year after year, from the immediate neighbourhood of this very monastery. Yes, most true it is that the rich and the poor, the learned and the simple, daily and nightly rejoice in the radiance which is shed from this luminous district—ay, one might justly call this Gateshead, and its surrounding territory the lamp and hearth of England.”

“ Blessed St. Cuthbert,” exclaimed the good man, “ my father and good intercessor ; blessed St. Cuthbert, founder and patron of this house—be it so then—(and I am well content that it should be so)—be it so, that the labours of thy unworthy son have fallen almost fruitless to the ground, or have failed from the eyes of men ; yet has it not been the same with thine own : no ; for it seems that this sacred foundation, the cherished work of thy piety and wisdom, has not only braved the storms and revolutions of a thousand years, but has continued, from age to age, to send forth those who have enlightened all the land ! Immortal and thrice happy Saint Cuthbert !—I will henceforward be proud only of having known and followed thee !”

It grieved me to find that the old man had so far become the dupe of my *double entendre*, and was beguiled to utter an encomium of his patron so poorly borne out by facts. I had not, however, the heart to disabuse him by

telling him of the hundreds of thousands of chaldrons of "the best Wallsend," that every year drop down the Tyne.

"More of this," said he, "anon ; but now, in few words, tell me what has been the fate of our seven kingdoms?"

"To be melted into one—to be ravaged, and trodden in the dust, by host after host of foreign marauders, avenging the Britons, whom the Saxons drove from their homes ; then to be conquered again by a fierce despot, who would not leave a rush burning after sunset, any where between Gwaede and Michaelstowe, except in his own castles. Thenceforward, England has bowed to foreign dynasties."

"Alas, then ! no doubt, this fair island, which was taking a place of honour, at last, among the nations, has fallen, and lost all glory and all power !"

"This fair island, conquered four times over, distracted by civil broils, and by contests for the crown, shaken by mighty revolutions, this rent and convulsed island, is now acknowledged queen of the sea, and mistress too of a foreign empire, more extensive than those of Assyria, Macedonia, and Rome, piled one on the other."

"Ah, I seen then she has given birth to giants ; tell me the names of your modern Sesostris, Cyrus, Alexander, Cæsar, who, singly or in series, have vanquished the world?"

"I cannot ; we have had our mighty spirits, and might boast a name even now, which a thousand years will not blot from the page of history ; but in plain truth, England, sovereign as she is of many lands, has not seen a warrior prince on her throne these last five hundred years."

"Well, then, her polity must be of the most despotic kind, and such as leaves an uncontrolled power with the monarch."

"No democracy the sun has ever shone upon, has allowed more scope to personal liberty, or granted much more influence to the people, in limiting the sovereign authority. The royal prerogative, in England, is the prerogative of the lion in his cage, who looks to his keeper for every bone he gnaws, and who must rise, and show himself, and roar, whenever poked."

"Has one English king in ten died in his bed?"

"Not one in ten has died out of it ;

and one only has actually been trampled on by the populace."

"The kings of England then have been demi-gods, or archangels."

"Most of them have given sufficient proof of their earthly origin, and at this moment the empire of England, in the height of her power, giving law to hundreds of millions of men—men of all complexions—this empire is swayed by a young and fair hand ; ay, and the heart that throbs at its wrist, beats, I do not doubt, as tranquilly as does any other heart that heaves a soft bosom, among the peerless beauties of her court."

"Well, then, I divine the enigma. You must owe this wide-stretched power, and this peace, to the universal supremacy of the church. Yes, so it must be, that the rightful and paternal authority of the successors of St. Peter has at length been bowed to by all nations ; and, therefore, it is that a child—a fair girl, may rule a hemisphere, because the eyes of all men are devoutly fixed upon the claims of St. Peter ; is it not so?"

"I must not conceal the truth ;—the chair of St. Peter is as much thought of by the people of England, or by the nations she governs, as is the cushion on which the king of Persia reposes his corpulence ; or if, in fact, it be reverently regarded by any, it is just by those whom she finds it the most difficult to manage. But I wish I could spare you this. Yet let me add that, in fact, the diffusion of sentiments of reason, justice, and benevolence, in modern times, does render many things practicable, in the business of government, which, centuries ago, could not have been attempted."

"Ah ! the bright idea that opens on my dim sight !—a vast empire tranquilly swayed—a fair and gentle maiden, the angel of order and symbol of goodness ! How potent, then, must have become those controlling sentiments of reason, justice, and benevolence, which you speak of ; none in your time trenches upon the rights of another. You know of no slavery ; you have no prisons ; no penal laws ; It is some hundred years since last the nations of Europe have confronted each other, sword in hand?"

"Alas ! it is little more than twenty years ago that some two hundred thousand men, English, Saxons, Germans, Frauks, met in a field of the Tungrian Belgium, where a sixth part

of them fattened the soil with their blood."

"I pray you, friend, find some themes of discourse less fraught with paradoxes than these you have touched ; for, although a propounder of riddles finds ready listeners among the young and curious, whose wits are keen, this sort of amusement is annoying to dull age."

"All I have told you is naked truth, but need I remind a man so sagacious, that the facts of one age, seen apart from their causes, and out of their connexion, are always riddles to the men of another age. But I change my course at your request, and an easy transition from our last topic leads me to mention a marvellous invention and improvement—mark the word *improvement*—of modern times. I mean a mode of abbreviating the work of slaughter on a battle field, or of killing men by hundreds at a time, instead of tens. Imagine, then, two opposing hosts, no longer, as heretofore, hurling sticks and stones at each other like boys at play, but vomiting death—pouring forth bolts and fire, more fatal than the lenient thunder and lightning of heaven ; yes, hurling hurricanes of sulphur and smoke, and hail-stones of lead and iron at each other, with a roar louder than a hundred cataracts, and sweeping down ranks of men, or thinning solid squadrons—think, I say, of heads and limbs flying in all directions, like the fruit and boughs of a tempest-torn orchard."

"And do the nations practise war at this rate ? Europe then has become a solitude ; and this is why an extended empire may be so easily governed, because, in fact, kings rule over herds of deer, not men—over forests and swamps and deserts, not populous provinces ; — confess the truth."

"The truth then is that, spite of our wars, dealing in death wholesale, population has so swollen in most of the European kingdoms, and especially in England, that the tide of life has burst its dikes and rolled itself over, as a vast deluge, upon newly discovered continents ; and the human inundation runs on, year after year, in a stream full and strong, from east to west ; just as once it flowed from north to south."

'New continents ? a word to satisfy my curiosity. How many ? Twenty ?'

"Two ; or you may call them one, just as we call the panniers swung on a mule's back two, or one."

"Of what sort ; and where ?"

"The one, a rugged waste of dark forests, bluff mountains, trackless swamps, icy deserts, blast-troubled lakes ; yet fertile enough in patches. The other, except in patches, fat, prolific, inexhaustible ; its bowels teeming with gold, silver, diamonds."

"Have these continents then fallen as inheritances to the nations of Europe ? and if so, to which among them ; but no doubt it is England that has snatched the realm of gold and diamonds :—Hence her extent of empire."

"Nay, it is England that has snatched the rugged prize, leaving her neighbours to impoverish and enslave themselves with mountains of wealth. England's sons, driven from her bosom, and seeking a home where they might find one, in an unenvied wilderness, are now rearing an empire as great as her own. Do you not know that it is not the precious metals themselves, but the inducements to acquire them, that enrich a people ?"

"I know it ; yet one is apt to be child enough to mistake gold for wealth. But where are these new worlds ?"

"Where *you* might well have guessed them to be ; when you told the ignorance of your times that this earth of ours is a ball, why did you not send some of your bold Saxon adventurers to seek what you might have been sure was somewhere to be found, another continent ?"

"Because the most simple and probable truth, advanced hypothetically, startles and shocks even those who have sagacity enough to descry it, while it horribly frightens and scandalizes the vulgar. Let us now call together the fraternity of this religious house, and, then, on some ridiculous evidence, I will assure them that the other side of the world is sprawled over by a red dragon, measuring five thousand miles from his snout to the tip of his tail ; all but one or two, I wager you, will swallow the fable with open mouths—the red dragon will go down with them as glib as an oyster. But let me show solid reason for believing that our western ocean washes the shores of another continent, and Bede, if not so happy as to be consigned to his cloister for life, with a keeper, would be condemned, and, likely enough, burnt as a sorcerer or heretic."

"Things go rather better with us

now-a-days ; the vulgar is still the vulgar ; but it has learned to be guided a little by those who know better than itself. Reason, in our times, has won so many triumphs in the eyes of the people, that she has gained credit enough with them to make them know their place."

"But how is it that these new continents of the western hemisphere are reached from our shores ? Are they joined by a tongue of land ?"

"They are reached as certainly, and one may say as easily, as Tyna's mouth is reached by the fisherman's boat that drops down with the ebb of tide. Each vessel is securely led on its way across the pathless ocean, and far remote from any land—a distance of two thousand five hundred miles, by —"

"By an angel ?"

"By—a needle !"

"Oh, oh, then the people of Europe, how can I doubt it, and not least the English, if they have not lapsed into paganism, have horribly addicted themselves to the black art. What you speak of is sheer magic ; a dealing with —"

"Well, say so if you please ; and, in truth, if we are speaking of the English, and most especially of the people of this northern part of the island, I hardly know how they could wash themselves entirely clean of such an imputation. If you were just now to visit almost any of the great towns north of the Humber, I fear you would think that, among this busy and curious race, all the arts are black ; and much you might see that is more amazing than any thing which magic has attempted or pretended."

"Good friend, my spirit fails me ; speak of things ordinary and intelligible. With all its strange doings, and dark dealings, is England wealthy ?"

"Beyond example—almost beyond calculation—what would you say if I were to tell you that her own sons have lent her a sum, out of their private pockets—out of their savings, so great that any one is laughed at as a fool, who talks of its ever being repaid—a sum large enough to have bought Europe—lands, houses, slaves, jewels, treasures, such as it was in your time, four times over ; and yet, this loan, that can never be paid, frets nobody—not the borrower—not the lender."

"Whence has flowed this deluge of

riches, if the western mountains of gold are in the keeping of others ?"

"I will tell you by a sample. We send our ships fourteen thousand miles for some pods of cotton : when we get them, we work them up into stuffs of various texture and dye. We return them whence they came—a fourteen thousand miles, and sell them to the very people who gathered the raw material, at so vile a price, that none can drive us from the market ; and yet it is out of the profits of this trade that we get rich as princes."

"At this rate then, and if it be so easy to cram your bags, you can have no poor left among you."

"No, if you will first except a few millions of paupers, maintained at the public cost, and a few millions more left to starve, or near it. Yet do not think us hard-hearted. We build palaces for our poor ; ay, it would turn the head of the mightiest of your Saxons to be made the master of an edifice, such as you may find scores of now-a-days, wherein our abjects find a refuge, and remain :—until they learn that houseless want is more tolerable than such entertainment."

"Who, then, grasps and enjoys the vast profits of your spinning, and weaving, and grinding ?"

"Be sure that the looms and the wheels do not get more than just so much oil as keeps them from catching fire ; and, unluckily, the weaver, and the spinner, and the grinder, have come to be looked upon, by our knowing folks, as nothing better than the cogs and cranks of the machinery, and, therefore, it is deemed a folly and a waste to pour into their hands or hearts, a drop more of the oil of gladness than what is absolutely necessary to keep them agoing."

"Why do you not make laws to enforce a more equitable division of profits ?"

"We mean to do so, when we find that statutes prohibitory of east winds, blights, and cold summers, take effect, and better the seasons."

"Here then are your governments, ruling, as you say, vast empires, as pleasantly as a dainty lass manages her well-bitted palfrey, and yet unable to secure the rights of nature, and a crust to the poor."

"Our governments, it is true, can do little ; nevertheless MAN, in modern times, has vastly extended his power over —"

"Over his passions and selfishness ?"

—over invisible beings and evil demons?"

"Over neither; but over nature."

"What then; you turn the course of the planets?"

"No; but yet we can bring them as near to the eye as if we could bend them some millions of miles from their spheres, or could ourselves walk the skies."

"Can you command the winds?"

"No; but we often outrun them—on land; and on the ocean, force a passage in the very teeth of a hurricane."

"Tell me plainly by what new-mastered giant force?"

"By the potency of a boiling kettle; you have the naked fact. Yes, and if you will be my companion this evening, I will show you, sitting athwart the bogs and moors of Cealclythe, a long caravan of people and merchandize—such a company as crawls across the deserts of Arabia; yes, sitting away, and leaving the western gales to lag behind; all, all, by the boiling of a kettle!"

"Friend, abuse not so largely my simplicity."

"Venerable man, trust me no more if I fail to make good what I have affirmed. I will give you proof anon. But take from me, meanwhile, the general rule, that whatever in your wonted musings in this monastery garden, you may have thought of as likely to come about, *that* has not come about; while whatever, had it been roundly mentioned to you, you would have scouted as grossly absurd and incredible (as you are now fain to reject my report) *this* has actually realized itself, and is now reckoned among the most familiar and ordinary of ordinary things."

"Is all this then the fruit of a new dispensation of miracles; or of the subjugation of etherial tribes to the will of man, or of the bestowment upon human nature of unthought of faculties?"

"Neither the first, the second, nor the third hypothesis meets the case. Man, individually, or abstractedly, is nothing more, or more potent now, than he was in the days of Tubalcain. But he has learned to use his faculties in a better manner; or, shall I say, to attempt only what comes within the range of his powers; whereas, heretofore, men of intelligence have spurned what they knew, or might easily have known; while they spent their forces in the endeavour to know and to do,

what is inscrutable, or unavailing, or impracticable. I should, however, add that we moderns have owed much to what we must call accidents, or discoveries of such a kind that we much rather wonder at the dulness of our predecessors in not having seen what is so obvious, than admire our own wit in seeing it now. And, while we thank God, who has at length granted this or that boon to man, we tremble and are perplexed equally by the thought of that mysterious Providence, which so long hid from the eyes of men things they might as well have descried before the world was five centuries old."

"Thank God always, my son, for what he is pleased to afford us—unworthy of the least of his favours; nor question him ever concerning what he thinks fit to withhold. All such questioning ends in asking, why a worm should not have been a man—a man a seraph—a seraph a god; and thence we come to the enigma, why there should be any thing in the universe but God himself. Let us return to our discursive talk."

"Well, then, I just now saw you surrounded by franklins and lords of the soil; can they all write their names?"

"Scarcely one."

"What do they then when they are parties to a grant or covenant?"

"Use a stamp, and most of them carry such set in rings on their fingers, as ornaments."

"Those fingers then carry, in embryo, the principle or element of the greatest of all modern or ancient inventions—an invention which has already changed everything, as one may say, except the colours of the sky, and which is yet only beginning to show the extent of the powers it involves—nothing so simple in itself, if we think of it mechanically—nothing so wonderful in its energies, and yet the chief wonderment is—that it had not been thought of and practised centuries before. Comparing the two contrivances, one might have thought that the art of printing should have preceded the construction of a loom, by a thousand years."

"And what is this mystery, the art of printing?"

"An art which makes it so easy a thing to multiply books, that they have become the vilest of commodities, and thus reach the hands of

many who often cannot muster pence for a dinner."

"Then, no doubt all men of your times have become knowing?"

"Many more than have become wise; and yet the absolutely ignorant among us are many more in absolute number than the entire population of the heptarchy."

"Stop friend; before you relate any more wonders, please to give me the upshot of the matter; are you and your contemporaries of the nineteenth century, happier and better men than we of the eighth? or are you wiser to any good purpose?"

"Your question admits not of a round and categorical answer; but must be replied to disjunctively. I say, then, without a doubt, that many of my time are incomparably more knowing, and to better purpose, than were *any* of yours. Many also, I think I may say, among us, are better than any, saving a very few among you, and multitudes—thousands of the nineteenth century, are more firmly and ordinarily happy, than any but a small class of the eighth; and yet, nor can I cloak the fact—the wretched, the ignorant, and the vicious, are absolutely twenty times as many in my age as in yours."

"Where then is the gain of your astounding improvements?"

"Instead of attempting an answer to your question, I will merely put you in mind of the fact, which is a law of the human system, that, although nations may remain thousands of years in the same state of barbarism, or semi-barbarism, yet when once the development of reason actually commences, on it goes, and must go, whether the consequences be good or ill; nothing stops the process, which we must call *improvement*; nothing but the national overthrow or social destruction of the people among whom it is going on. The *cui bono* question, therefore, may be met by a *cui bono*, as to the inquiry itself. To what good purpose shall we ask concerning the ultimate benefit of the improvements which follow the development of mind, seeing that the process is in-

evitable, the yeast, once mixed in the lump, *will* work."

"Shall I look out for a host of Scandinavians, a northern besom, by whose aid your modern arts may be swept away, and mankind be restored to a happy ignorance?"

"You may do so, if you please. But beside that we are pretty well prepared to meet them on our shores, the remedy would not be efficacious—the arts have more than one sanctuary in the world. Sink the British islands in the sea—overrun or overturn Europe—the arts still live. The press too, of which I have spoken, immortalizes the philosophy, literature, and arts of modern nations."

"Is there room to hope, then, that such other improvements may yet take place, as will render your philosophy and your arts really beneficial to the mass of mankind; and such as shall secure a moderate portion of comfort and enjoyment to the many?"

"Yes, I think so—only let—— But what is this hubbub without?"

Before I could get a reply, the gate of the monastery garden burst open, and a dozen or more of the fraternity, pressing one over the other, and bawling in cracked voices, spread themselves over the garden. Missing their revered master from his place in the refectory, at the usual hour, and fearing that harm had come to him, all were in movement in quest of him. I started up, and hardly knowing how I might be handled among these scared good fellows, several of whom I saw had bludgeons in their hands, I looked wildly about me for some other exit than the garden gate. I rushed forward, I knew not whither, and reaching the wall, with a convulsed effort, scaled it; and instantly beheld, not the wild scene that had lately been before my eyes, but the high Durham road, shrouded in dust, through which I dimly descried, just beyond call, the Leeds Mercury, whisking away, and leaving me mulct of my fare, and in doubt whether to take the chances of the road, or to make my way back, and ashamed, to the Swan in Newcastle.