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*Edwin Hall.*

ART. I.—*The School: its objects, relations and uses. With a sketch of the education most needed in the United States, the present state of Common Schools, the best means of improving them, and the consequent duties of parents, trustees, inspectors, &c.* By Alonzo Potter, D. D.. Professor of Moral Philosophy in Union College. New York: Harpers. 1842.

THE world is full of good theories and excellent proverbs; and were the sentiments that are universally acknowledged to be just, and which have descended from age to age with the approbation of each, to be condensed in one mass, we should have a volume which the book of inspiration alone would excel. But if this record should appear in the shape of a mercantile account-book, with the practices of men entered on the page which contains their principles, we should in striking the balance, discover a fearful preponderance of the obligations over the credits.

To take a single caption of this imaginary ledger, what maxim is more common-place and threadbare than that the mind is the better part of man, and that the cultivation of its faculties is a higher and nobler object than any that relates to the body alone? Yet when we look at men in society, or catch their conversation, or observe the occupa-

- ART. II.—1. *Brief Notes of several Religious Lectures, with a few occasional Tracts.* London: Samuel Holdsworth, Amen Corner, Paternoster Row. 1837. Svo. pp. 166.
2. *Biographical, Literary, and Philosophical Essays:* Contributed to the Eclectic Review. By John Foster, author of *Essays on "Decision of Character, Popular Ignorance, and Christian Morals."* With an Index of the principal subjects, prepared for this edition. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1844. 12mo. pp. 419.
3. *Miscellaneous Essays on Christian Morals, Experimental and Practical, originally delivered as Lectures at Broadmead Chapel, Bristol.* By John Foster. D. Appleton & Co. New York. 1844. 18mo.

*James W. Alexander*

THERE are certain names which, like those of ancient sages, can stand alone; as not asking the appendage of honorary titles. Such a name is that of John Foster. The judgment of the soundest scholars and theologians at once classes it with those of Hall and Chalmers: and it is no small cause of satisfaction to one of our sister churches, that of this triad two should have been Baptists. But genius knows no sect. All the endowments of Oxford or Cambridge, all the wealth of Durham, could not make a Vice-Chancellor or a prelate a great man; and great as have been some men, many men, within the pale of the Anglican Establishment, it has had no one to show in our age, who, for literary influence on mankind, could even be named in connexion with "the first three." Yet never were three men of learning, piety and genius, more unlike. If we place Chalmers very far above the others, in respect to power over his fellow-men, we find the reason of this, not in any superiority of intellectual vigour, of learning, or of taste, but simply in the greatness of his sympathy with the progress of the common mind; his profound and tender interest in the particular acts and universal happiness of the men about him; and the courage with which he has dared, on politico-economical and ecclesiastical subjects, to avow principles not discovered by the mass of mankind, and not only to avow them, but to act them out. In the very proportion in which a great commander excels a great historian, do we consider Chalmers to excel the recluse philosopher and the meditative divine, however great the latter be. His philosophy,—for he is a

philosopher—is every day becoming history ; for it teaches by example. It becomes actual. It will live in the territorial system of charity, and in the Free Church of Scotland. He has as certainly left his mark upon the age as did Napoleon on the pass of the Simplon. But as books to be pondered and admired, we cannot place any writings of Chalmers as high as one or two of Foster and Hall.

The very secluded life of Mr. Foster has caused him to be known to the public almost entirely by his books, which have been few. His ‘*Essays*’ burst upon the world without a word of premonition, establishing for him a place among authors which has not been raised by any later production of his pen. Few single essays in any language have been more noted than that on ‘*Decision of Character.*’ Men speak of it just as they speak of some one great work of Angelo, Raphael, or Leonardo da Vinci. Hall’s *Sermon on ‘Modern Infidelity’* has a like distinction. Yet we regard the essay on ‘*a Man’s writing Memoirs of Himself,*’ as approaching very closely the merit of the other. It would however be presumptuous folly for us to write in reviewal of Foster, after the well-known article of Robert Hall, in the *Eclectic*. If it did not savour of self-complacency, we should take pains to show how exactly we accord with the great reviewer, even in his censure of his friend. But if we were to cite from the ‘*Essays,*’ we could only make the same extracts, for the most startling passages are all in that review ; and in regard to style, though we might amplify, we could not emulate, the judgment. Here it is.

“Mr. F.’s work is rather an example of the power of genius than a specimen of finished composition : it lies open in many points to the censure of those minor critics who, by the observation of a few technical rules, may easily avoid its faults without reaching one of its beauties. The author has paid too little attention to the construction of his sentences. They are for the most part too long, sometimes involved in perplexity, and often loaded with redundances. They have too much of the looseness of an harangue and too little of the compact elegance of regular composition. An occasional obscurity pervades some parts of the work. The mind of the writer seems at times to struggle with conceptions too mighty for his grasp, and to present confused masses, rather than distinct delineations of thought. This, however, is to be imputed to the originality, not the weakness of his powers. The scale on which he thinks is so vast, and the excursions of his imagination are so extended, that they frequently carry him into the most unbeaten track, and among objects where a ray of light glances in an angle only, without diffusing itself over the whole. On ordinary topics his conceptions are luminous in the highest degree. He places the idea which he wishes to present in

such a flood of light, that it is not merely visible itself, but it seems to illumine all around it. He paints metaphysics, and has the happy art of arraying what in other hands would appear cold and comfortless abstractions, in the warmest colours of fancy. Without the least affectation of frivolous ornaments, without quitting his argument in pursuit of imagery, his imagination becomes the perfect handmaid of his reason, ready at every moment to spread her canvass and present her pencil. But what pleases us most, and affords us the highest satisfaction, is to find such talents enlisted on the side of true Christianity; nor can we help indulging a benevolent triumph at the accession of powers to the cause of evangelical piety, which its most distinguished opponents would be proud to possess."

No writer of reputation was ever less smitten with the rage of authorship, than Foster. He even speaks himself, of his "miserable slowness in any sort of composition." And though we are far from thinking, with a lively French writer, that a good hand-writing ensures a good style, we we cannot help suspecting that our author's pen moved tardily over the paper. His works have appeared at long intervals. The largest of them, the *Essay on the 'Evils of Popular Ignorance,'* with all the marks of his original mind, bears manifest tokens of a disgust for the petty details of correction. Let us beware of indulging the same turn. He could afford to be great without minute finishing. His poor lame imitators, (for even Foster has been imitated) halted after him in a gait of which every step was premeditated. What acrid scorn would have distilled from his lips, if he could have learned that they sought by elaborate care to produce fac-similes of his rude magnificence! Every period of his bears signs of what painters call the 'first intention;' that indescribable *abandon* of manner, which discriminates the rudest original from the most finished copy. "Foster," said Hall, "is a lumbering wagon of gold." The matchless ease of Hall himself was the result of labour. Of his simplest sentences, we may say in terms borrowed by Madame de Sevigné, *Ma questo facile è quanto difficile.* But no man reads Foster, without knowing, as he goes along, that his great author tramples indignantly on all the arts of sentence-balancing in which we little critics are apt to glory. Many have had the roughnesses of Foster without his solidity, as many have had the melody of Hall, without his logic or his eloquence.

Even our favourite writers may mislead us: and the most striking are sometimes the most dangerous. If Gibbon, as in his latter volumes, is more French than English, the reader goes off rabid with Gallomania of style. If Car-

lyle says a good thing, here and there, amidst the paroxysms of a style and dialect of which he is the inventor, there are a hundred youth who seem to themselves to write with power, because they do not write English. If Coleridge, steeped in German lore, vents a Teutonic idiom, his unwise admirers, though scarce out of their 'Lesebuch,' obtund our ears with the reiteration of their 'antinomies,' 'stand-points,' and 'aesthetics.' What a pity that our authors will not learn of Southey, whose prose is always as simple as his verse is sometimes fantastic. "Crowd your ideas as you will," says he to William Taylor, who was German-mad, "but let us have them in English—plain, perspicuous English—such as mere English readers can understand. Ours is a beautiful language. I can tolerate a Germanism for family sake; but he who uses a Latin or a French phrase, when a pure old English word does as well, ought to be hung, drawn and quartered, for high treason against his mother tongue." Harsh judgment, it may be, but true, even though ourselves should smart for it: against Foster it bears no edge. His very thoughts are of sturdy English growth. Never, for a sentence even, does he fall into a tune. See his remarks on Blair, below. His paragraphs swell and grow and burst like a luxuriant tree. There is no formula for his thoughts; there is no recipe for rounding off the corners of his phrase. Our readers know that as men who strut in walking sometimes find it difficult to get out of this pace; so in writing, authors assume a measured, rhythmical flow of diction, and find it hard, even when the subject demands it, to come down to the pedestrian style. Even Voltaire, simple as his structure of sentence always is, has a mannerism: so has Macaulay. The reader comes to look for a certain pungent apodosis. It is the characteristic charm of Goethe, that nothing ever leads you to expect any particular bringing up of the period, or antithesis of the thought. In Hall the exquisite art conceals the plan of the period: in Foster, there is no approach to such a plan. As a specimen, germane to our topic, take some parts of his 'Observations on Mr. Hall's character as a Preacher,' which we place among his greatest productions:

"In the most admired of his sermons, and invariably in all his preaching, there was one excellence, of a moral kind, in which few eloquent preachers have ever equalled, and none ever did or will surpass him. It was so remarkable and obvious, that the reader (if having been also a hearer of Mr. Hall) will have gone before me

when I name—oblivion of self. The preacher appeared wholly absorbed in his subject, given up to its possession, as the single actuating principle and impulse of the mental achievement which he was as if unconsciously performing: *as if* unconsciously; for it is impossible it could be literally so; yet his absorption was so evident, there was so clear an absence of every betraying sign of vanity, as to leave no doubt that reflection on himself, the tacit thought, 'It is I that am displaying this excellence of speech,' was the faintest action of his mind. His auditory were sure that it was as in relation to his subject, and not to himself, that he regarded the feelings with which they might hear him.

"What a contrast to divers showy and admired orators, whom the reader will remember to have seen in the pulpit and elsewhere! For who has not witnessed, perhaps more times than a few, a pulpit exhibition, which unwittingly told that the speaker was to be himself as prominent, at the least, as his sacred theme? Who has not observed the glimmer of a self-complacent smile, partly reflected, as it were, on his visage, from the plausible visages confronting him, and partly lighted from within, by the blandishment of a still warmer admirer? Who has not seen him swelling with a tone and air of conscious importance in some specially *fine* passage; prolonging it, holding it up, spreading out another and yet another scarlet fold, with at last a temporary stop to survey the assembly, as challenging their tributary looks of admiration, radiating on himself, or interchanging among sympathetic individuals of the congregation? Such a preacher might have done well to become a hearer for a while; if indeed capable of receiving any corrective instruction from an example of his reverse; for there have been instances of preachers actually spoiling themselves still worse in consequence of hearing some of Mr. Hall's eloquent effusions; assuming beyond their previous sufficiency of graces a vociferous declamation, a forced look of force, and a tumour of verbiage, from unaccountable failure to perceive, or to make a right use of the perception, that his sometimes impetuous delivery, ardent aspect, and occasionally magnificent diction were all purely spontaneous from the strong excitement of the subject.

"Under that excitement, when it was the greatest, he did unconsciously acquire a corresponding elation of attitude and expression; would turn, though not with frequent change, towards the different parts of the assembly, and as almost his only peculiarity of action, would make one step back from his position (which, however, was instantly resumed) at the last word of a climax; an action which inevitably suggested the idea of the recoil of heavy ordnance. I mention so inconsiderable a circumstance, because I think it has somewhere lately been noticed with a hinted imputation of vanity. But to the feeling of his constant hearers, the cool and hypercritical equally with the rest, it was merely one of those effects which emotion always produces in the exterior in one mode or another, and was accidentally become associated with the rising of his excitement to its highest pitch, just at the sentence which decisively clenched an argument, or gave the last strongest emphasis to an enforcement. This action never occurred but when there *was* a special emphasis in what he said."

“With a mind so constituted and governed, he was less given than many other men of genius have been to those visionary modes of thought; those musings exempt from all regulation; that impatience of aspiration to reach the vast and remote; that fascination of the mysterious, captivating by the very circumstance of eluding; that fearful adventuring on the dark, the unknown, the awful; ‘those thoughts that wandered through eternity,’ which have often been at once the luxury and the pain of imaginative and highly endowed spirits, discontented with their assigned lot in this tenebrious world. No doubt, in his case, piety would have interfered to restrain such impatience of curiosity, or audacity of ambitious thinking, or indignant strife against the confines of our present allotment, as would have risen to a spirit of insubordination to the Divine appointment. And possibly there were times when this interference was required; but still the structure of his faculties, and the manner of employing them to which it determined him, contributed much to exempt him from that passion to go beyond the mortal sphere which would irreligiously murmur at the limitation. His acquiescence did not seem at least to cost him a strong effort of repression.

“This distinction of his intellectual character was obvious in his preaching. He was eminently successful on subjects of an elevated order, which he would expand and illustrate in a manner which sustained them to the high level of their dignity. This carried him near some point of the border of that awful darkness which encompasses, on all sides, our little glimmering field of knowledge; and then it might be seen how aware he was of his approach, how cautiously, or shall I say instinctively, he was held aloof, how sure not to abandon the ground of evidence, by a hazardous incursion of conjecture or imagination into the unknown. He would indicate how near, and in what direction, lay the shaded frontier; but dared not, did not seem even tempted, to invade its ‘majesty of darkness.’

“This procedure, in whatever proportion owing to his intellectual temperament or to the ascendancy of religion, will be pronounced wise for a *general* practice. If, however, he could have allowed himself in some degree of exception, it would have been gratifying to a portion of his hearers. There are certain mysterious phenomena in the moral economy of our world, which compel, and will not release, the attention of a thoughtful mind, especially if of a gloomy constitutional tendency. Wherever it turns, it still encounters their portentous aspect; often feels arrested and fixed by them as under some potent spell; making an effort, still renewed and still unavailing, to escape from the appalling presence of the vision. Now it was conceived, that a strenuous deliberate exertion of a power of thought like his, after he had been so deeply conversant with important and difficult speculations, might perhaps have contributed something to alleviate this oppression. Not, of course, that it should be dreamed that his, or any still stronger human intelligence, should be able to penetrate with light the black clouds which overshadow our system. But it was imagined possible for such force of reason to impart somewhat of an extenuating quality to the *medium* through which they are beheld, and through which they might then be beheld with a less painful and total prostration of spirit. It might have been an invaluable service, it was thought, if his whole strength and re-

sources had been applied to display comprehensively the nature, the extent, the solidity of the ground on which faith may rest with a firm confidence in the goodness of the sovereign Governor, notwithstanding all the strange and awful phenomena of our economy.

“ This disinclination to adventure into the twilight of speculation was shown in respect to subjects of less formidable mystery, of solemn indeed but rather attractive than overawing character. For instance, the mode, the condition of that conscious existence after death, of which, as a fact, he was so zealous an assertor against the dreary dogma which consigns the soul to insensibility in the separate state: if indeed it *be* any existent state of any intelligence when all we know of its attributes is abolished. It would have been gratifying, and might have been beneficial for serious impression, to see some gleams of his vigorous thought thrown upon the border of that scene of our destiny, so obscure, but at the same time so near, and of transcendent interest; to see the reserved and scattered intimations of the sacred oracles brought into combination, and attempted to be reduced to something approaching to the form of a theory; to see how far any conjectural imaginations could be accompanied by reasons from analogy, and any other principle of probability; with a citation, perhaps, of certain of the least arbitrary and fanciful of the visions of other inquisitive speculators, commented on as he would have commented. But he did not appear to partake of the intense curiosity with which the inquiries and poetical musings of some pious men have been carried into the subject. He seemed, beyond what might have been expected in relation to a matter which lies across the whole breadth of our prospects, and so closely at hand, content to let it remain a *terra incognita* till the hour that puts an end to conjecture. It will be understood that this is mentioned, not with any meaning of animadversion, but as exemplifying that peculiarity of his mental character by which he appeared disinclined to pursue any inquiries beyond the point where substantial evidence fails. The regret of some of his hearers was, that he should not oftener be willing to exert his whole strength to try whether that point be really fixed where it appears and is assumed to be. They would have been gratified to see him undertaking sometimes the discussion of subjects which they would have deprecated any attempt upon by men of ordinary ability. While so superior a mental engine, if I may be allowed the expression, was in their hands, they wished they could *make the most* of its powers.”

While, in the long stretches of time between his published works, Mr. Foster was musing along the green roads and lanes about Bristol, or collecting and collating his remarkable series of engravings, he was gathering his mental stores to come forth with extraordinary concentration when he uttered any thing through the press. The subjects which he chose were not always new; the language was not strange; his strength was to him no excuse for oddity and affectation: but he treated his point as if no one had ever treated it before. In this remark we do not include all the articles for the *Eclectic Review*. Like other



reviewers, he sometimes wrote, we suspect, because it was expected of him, or because he would pass the time, or because the press was waiting; consequently a few of these pieces are like the effusions of other mortals. But when he laid himself out to handle a subject he did it gigantically. His very smile was annihilating; as the ghost of David Hume might witness, if that sceptical spirit could have cognizance of the satiric essay in the volume first named by us above. An example of this novel way of dealing with a hackneyed subject occurs to us in his Missionary Sermon, before the Baptist Society, at Bristol, in 1818. It has all his faults, some of them most obtrusively, but all his greatness. No one who reads it fails to wonder at the grandeur which clothes a topic now familiar to every Christian child. What strikes the reader is nothing in the way of diction and imagery, nor any mock-philosophy trying to get behind or under fundamental truth, but the sublimity of the massive truth itself. He sees painted before him the horrors of a warfare, compared with which the campaigns of Cæsar, Attila and Timour were only chess-play. He trembles at the unveiling of a grand but neglected foe—the old serpent—the devil. He traces up to this arch-murderer the demoniac worship, caste, and superstition of the ancient East. The resources of this hoary, multiform, colossal idolatry, are displayed before him with such accumulative force, and such alarming indications of their endless variety, that he stands aghast. And then, when he feels, as he never felt before, the awful hazard of the struggle, he is caused by the same wand of genius to behold an antagonist power in the gospel, such as ensures victory, and leaves him inexcusable for neglect and delay. Few passages are so insulated as to serve for quotations; the unbroken connexion and long-drawn march of the thought is characteristic of the author: we venture, nevertheless, to annex a paragraph or two, on a topic which is as seasonable now as it was five and twenty years ago.

“If the Christian communities most liable to feelings of competition, were asked in what character they conceive themselves to stand the most prominently forward before the world, as practically verifying the exalted, beneficent, expansive spirit of their religion, it is not improbable they would say, it is as conspirers to extend heavenly light and liberty over the heathen world. But if so, how justly we may urge it upon them to beware of degrading this the most magnificent form in which their profession is displayed, by associating with it littlenesses which may make it almost ridiculous. Surely, in thus

going forth against the powers of darkness, they would not be found stickling and stipulating that the grand banner of the cause should be surmounted with some petty label of a particular denomination. Such mortals, had they been in the emigration from Egypt, would have been incessantly and jealously busy about the relative proximities of the tribes to the cloudy pillar. A shrewd irreligious looker-on, who cares for none of our sects, nor for this our common object, might indulge his malicious gayety in saying, All this bustling activity of consultation, and oratory, and subscription, and travelling, is to go to the account, as you will have it, of a fervent zeal for Christianity: what a large share of this costly trouble I should nevertheless be sure to save you, if I could just apply a quenching substance to so much of this pious heat as consists of sectarian ambition and rivalry.

“We cannot too strongly insist again, that a sense of dignity should spurn these inglorious competitions from the sections of the advanced camp against the grand enemy. *Here*, at all events, the parties should acknowledge the Truce of God. If they have, and must have, jealousies too sacred to be extinguished, let their indulgence be reserved for occasions and scenes in which they are not assuming the lofty attitude of a war against the gods. But the great matter, after all, is to be solemnly intent on the object itself, on the good to be done, compared with which, the denomination of the instrument will appear a circumstance vastly trivial. Let all the promoters of these good works be in this state of mind, and the modes in which the evil spirit in question might display itself will be things of imagination or of history. For then we shall never see a disposition to discountenance a design on account of its originating with an alien sect, rather than to favour it for its intrinsic excellence; nor an eager insisting on points of precedence; nor a systematic practice of representing the operations of our own sect at their highest amount of ability and effect, and those of another at their lowest: nor the studied silence of vexed jealousy, which is thinking all the while of what it cannot endure to name; nor that laboured exaggeration of our own magnitude and achievements which most plainly tells *what* that jealousy is thinking of; nor that manner of hearing of marked and opportune advantages occurring to undertakings of another sect which betrays that a story of disasters would have been more welcome; nor under-hand contrivances for assuming the envied merit of something accomplished and never boasted of by another sect; nor excitements to exertion expressly on the ground of invidious rivalry, rather than christian emulation; nor casual defects of courtesy interpreted wilfully into intentional hostility, just to give a colour of justice to actual hostility on our part, for which we were prepared, and but watching for a pretext; nor management and misrepresentation to trepan to our party auxiliary means which might have been intended for theirs.”

The volume which stands first in the title of our remarks, has not been reprinted, so far as we know, in America. It signally evinces the carelessness of the author, in regard to literary fame, that this book was extorted from him, and that it does not bear his name. Both the preface, however,

and the internal evidence, remove all doubt of its authorship; and one of the Essays we had previously read, through the favour of a personal friend of the writer. The articles are all short; but *ex pede Herculem*; no one would need more to show him that he had to do with a wonderful intellect. It is to be hoped that Mr. Appleton will give us this also.

The publication, to which we have given the second place, contains twenty Essays, selected from a collection of fifty-nine, originally printed in England, in two octavo volumes, under the editorial care of Dr. Price, the Editor of the Eclectic Review, in which they first appeared. "As compared with the re-published papers of some eminent reviewers," says Dr. Price, "they may be wanting in that *finish* which their personal superintendence has secured to their productions; but in all the higher and more permanent qualities of intellect, in their largeness of view, penetrating subtlety of thought, deep insight into human nature, and sympathy with the nobler and more lofty forms of spiritual existence, they will be found eminently worthy of the genius of their author, and subservient to his permanent repute." Besides other articles, the American selection contains notices of Chalmers, Horne Tooke, Fox, the Edgeworths, Lord Kames, Franklin, Beattie, Blair, and Hume. To say this is enough to awaken expectation. There is no man, of competent understanding, who can be indifferent to the judgment of a Foster on such minds as these. But what can we do as reviewers, unless it be to point the finger here and there, amidst a throng of attractions? Foster thus speaks of Chalmers's style. "On the merely literary character of his composition we shall content ourselves with a very few words. We cannot dissemble that we wish he would put his style under a strongly alterative discipline. No readers can be more sensible to its glow and richness of colouring, and its not unfrequent happy combinations of words; but there is no denying that it is guilty of a rhetorical march, a sonorous pomp, a 'showy sameness;' a want, therefore, of simplicity and flexibility; withal, a perverse and provoking grotesqueness, a frequent descent, strikingly incongruous with the prevailing elatedness of tone, to the lowest colloquialism, and altogether an unpardonable license of strange phraseology. The number of uncouth, and fantastic, and we may fairly say barbarous phrases, that might be transcribed, is most unconscionable. Such a style

needs a strong hand of reform; and the writer may be assured it contains life and soul enough to endure the most unrelenting process of correction, the most compulsory trials to change its form, without hazard of extinguishing its spirit." To the argument of the 'Astronomical Discourses,' the review accords the highest praise.

We confess that we turned with still more avidity to the third article, to find how John Foster would treat such a mind as Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The work reviewed is 'the Friend.' And we are not surprised to discover, that while due credit is given to the genius and learning of this extraordinary thinker, little tolerance is exhibited towards the eccentricity and the obscurity of this his favourite work. Mr. Foster takes occasion from a passage in which thought and attention are treated somewhat profoundly by Mr. Coleridge, to write as follows :

"Not to dwell on the arbitrary and rather tenebrious distinction between thought and attention, (which might be given as a fair specimen of the extent of the demand made on the reader's mind in a multitude of passages,) we cannot help saying, that this is a somewhat too reserved acknowledgement—that the 'Friend' has produced a volume, of which a considerable portion is hard to be understood, and some passages of which it may be doubted whether any one reader, after his very best efforts, has felt sure that he did so understand as to be able to put the meaning into other equivalent words of his own. We cannot but think that, in some still later re-perusal, the author himself will have perceived that not a few of his conceptions, taken as detached individual thoughts, are enounced with an obscurity of a somewhat different kind from that which may seem inevitably incident, in some degree, to the expression of thoughts of extreme abstraction. And sometimes the conjunctive principle among several thoughts that come in immediate succession is so unobvious, that the reader must repeatedly peruse, must analyze, we might almost say, must excruciate, a considerable portion of the composition, before he can feel any confidence that he is master of the connexion;—and at last he is so little sure of having a real hold of the whole combination, that he would not trust himself to state that particular part of the 'Friend's' opinions and sentiments to an intelligent inquirer. When he could perhaps give, in a very general form, the apparent result of a series of thoughts, he would be afraid to attempt assigning the steps by which his author had arrived at it.

"There can be no doubt that by such patient labour as the adopted mode of publication entirely forbade, the writer could have given, if we may so express it, more roundness and prominence to the logical fibres of his composition, and a more unequivocal substance to some of its more attenuated components; in short left nothing obscure but what was invincibly and necessarily so, from the profound abstraction and exquisite refinement of thought in which Mr. Coleridge would have extremely few equals in whatever age he had lived."

And again :

“ Another instantly apparent distinction of our author’s manner of thinking, is its extreme abstractedness. Considering that many of his subjects are not of that class which, by the necessity of their nature, *can* be discussed in no other than a metaphysical manner, he has avoided, in a wonderful and unequalled degree, all the superficial and obvious forms of thought which they might suggest. He always carries on his investigation at a depth, and sometimes at a most profound depth, below the uppermost and most accessible stratum; and is philosophically mining among its most recondite principles of the subject, while ordinary intellectual and literary workmen, many of them barely informed of the very existence of this Spirit of the Deep, are pleasing themselves and those they draw around them, with forming to pretty shapes or commodious uses, the materials of the surface. It may be added, with some little departure from the consistency of the metaphor, that if he endeavours to make his voice heard from this region beneath, it is apt to be listened to as a sound of dubious import, like that which fails to bring articulate words from the remote recess of a cavern, or the bottom of the deep shaft of a mine. However familiar the truths and facts to which his mind is directed, it constantly, and as if involuntarily, strikes, if we may so speak, into the invisible and the unknown of the subject: he is seeking the most retired and abstracted form in which any being can be acknowledged and realized as having an existence, or any truth can be put in a proposition. He turns all things into their ghosts, and summons us to walk with him in this region of shades—this strange world of disembodied truth and entities.

“ He repeatedly avows, that it is less his object to teach truth in its most special and practical form, and in its detailed application, than to bring up into view and certainty a number of grand general principles, to become the lights of judgment, on an endless variety of particular subjects. At least this was the proposed object of the earlier part, the first twenty or thirty numbers, of the intended series. These principles were to be brought into clearness and authority, partly by statement and argument in an abstract form, and partly by showing them advantageously in operation, as applied to the trial and decision of several interesting questions. But the abstruseness often unavoidable in the pure intellectual enunciation of a principle, prevails also in an uncommon degree, in the present work, through the practical illustrations—even when the matter of those illustrations consists of very familiar facts. The ideas employed to explain the mode of the relation between the facts and the principle, are sometimes of such extreme tenuity as to make a reader who is anxious to comprehend, but unaccustomed to abstraction, feel as if he were deficient by nearly one whole faculty, some power of intellectual sight or tact with which he perceives the author to be endowed,—for there is something that every where compels him to give the author credit for thinking with great acuteness, even when he is labouring in vain to refine his own conceptions into any state that can place him in real communication with the author’s mind. The surpassing subtlety of that mind is constantly descrying the most unobvious relations, and detecting the most veiled aspects of things, and pervading their substance in quest of whatever is most latent in

their nature. This extreme subtlety is the cause of more than one kind of difficulty to the reader. Its *necessary* consequence is that refinement of observation on which we have so prolixly remarked; but it has another consequence, the less or greater degree of which depended on the author's choice. He has suffered it continually to retard him in, or divert him from, the straightforward line of thought to his object. He enters on a train of argumentative observations to determine a given question. He advances one acute thought, and another, and another: but by this time he perceives among these which we may call the primary thoughts, so many secondaries—so many bearings, distinctions, and analogies—so many ideas starting sideways from the main line of thought—so many pointings towards subjects infinitely remote—that, in the attempt to seize and fix in words these secondary thoughts, he will often suspend for a good while the progress toward the intended point. Thus each thought that was to have been only *one* thought, and to have transmitted the reader's mind immediately forward to the next in order and in advance, becomes an exceedingly complex combination of thoughts, almost a dissertation in miniature: and thus our journey to the assigned point (if indeed we are carried so far, which is not always the case) becomes nothing less than a visit of curious inspection to every garden, manufactory, museum, and antiquity, situated near the road, throughout its whole length. Hence too it often happens, that the transitions are not a little perplexing. The transition directly from one primary thought, as we venture to call it, in the train to the next, might be very easy: we might see most perfectly how, in natural logic, the one was connected with the other, or led to it: but when we have to pass to this next principal thought in the train, from some divergent and remote accessory of the former principal idea, we feel that we have lost the due bearing of the preceding part of the train, by being brought in such an indirect way to the resumption of it."

"Of the properties which we have attempted, we sincerely acknowledge very inadequately, to discriminate and describe as characteristic of our author's mode of writing, the result is, that readers of ordinary, though tolerably cultivated faculties, feel a certain deficiency of the effective force which they believe such an extraordinary course of thinking ought to have on their minds. They feel, decisively, that they are under the tuition of a most uncommonly powerful and far-seeing spirit, that penetrates into the essences of things, and can also strongly define their forms and even their shadows—and that is quite in earnest to communicate, while they are equally in earnest to obtain, the most important principles which such a mind has deduced from a severe examination of a vast variety of facts and books. And yet there is some kind of haze in the medium through which this spirit transmits its light, or there is some vexatious dimness in the mental faculty of seeing: so that, looking back from the end of an essay, or of the volume, they really do not feel themselves in possession of any thing like the full value of as much ingenious, and sagacious, and richly-illustrated thinking as ever, probably, was contained in the same proportion of writing.

"We will not set down much of the difficulty of comprehending so much complained of, to the *language*, so far as it is distinguishable from the thought; with the exception of here and there a scho-

lastic phrase, and a certain degree of peculiarity in the use of one or two terms—especially *reason*, which he uses in a sense in which he endeavours to explain and prove, that all men are in equally full possession of the faculty which it denominates. Excepting so far as a slight tinge of antiqueness indicates the influence of our older writers, especially Milton and Bacon, on the complexion of our author's language, it is of a construction original in the greatest possible degree. That it could not well be otherwise may easily be supposed, when premising, as we have done, the originality of the author's manner of thinking, we observe that the diction is in a most extraordinary degree conformed to the thought. It lies, if we may so speak, close to the mental surface, without all its irregularities, throughout. It is therefore perpetually varying, in perfect flexibility and obsequiousness to the ideas; and, without any rhetorical regulation of its changes, or apparent design, or consciousness in the writer, is in succession popular and scientific, familiar and magnificent, secular and theological, plain and poetical. It has none of the phrases or combinations of oratorical common-place: it has no settled and favourite appropriations of certain adjectives to certain substantives: its manner of expressing an idea once, gives the reader no guess how the same idea will be expressed when it comes modified by a different combination. The writer considers the whole congregation of words, constituting our language, as something so perfectly and independently his own, that he may make any kind of use of any part of it that his thinking requires. Almost every page, therefore, presents unusual combinations of words, that appear not so much made *for* thought as made *by* it, and often give, if we may so express it, the very colour as well as the substantial form, of the idea. There is no settled construction or cadence of the sentences; no two perhaps of the same length being constructed in the same manner. From the complexity and extended combination of the thought they are generally long, which the author something less than half-apologizes for, and therefore something more than half-defends."

The very great popularity which has been attained in America by both these writers, induces us to trespass on our readers with another long extract from a still later judgment of Foster on the same philosopher.

"For one thing it is quite obvious that Coleridge, after setting before his readers the theme, the *one* theme apparently, undertaken to be elucidated, could not, or would not, proceed in a straight forward course of explanation, argument, and appropriate illustration from fancy; keeping in sight before him a certain ultimate object; and placing marks, as it were, of the steps and stages of the progress. He takes up a topic which we much desire to see examined, a question which we should be glad to see disposed of, and begins with a good promise in preparatory observations, but after a short advance, the train of discussion appears to lose or abandon its direction; veers off arbitrarily, or at the call of accident; complicates what should be the immediate question with secondary, relative, or even quite foreign matters; arrests itself, perhaps, in a philological dissertation or a particular term that comes in the way; resumes, nominally, at an interval, the leading purpose; but with a ready

propensity to stray again into any collateral track, and thence into the next, and the next; till at last we come out as from an enchanted wood; hardly knowing whither, and certainly not knowing how to retrace the mazy course; having seen, it is true, divers remarkable objects, and glimpses to a distance on either hand; but not having obtained the one thing which we imagined we were conducted to pursue. When we have asked ourselves, Now what is the result, as to the purpose we started with in such excellent company? we could not tell.

“We have sometimes felt as if our instructor were playing the necromancer with us: causing shapes of intelligence to come before us as if ready to reveal the secrets we were inquiring about; but making them vanish when they were opening the semblance of a mouth; again bringing them or others, grave and bearded, or of more pleasant visage; and when they are getting into hopeful utterance, presto, they are gone. Or perchance, if sometimes permitted to say on, it may happen that they emit such an oracle that we are in danger of muttering, after a pause, ‘There needeth no ghost to tell us that.’

“Another too evident characteristic of his writing is what we may denominate an *arbitrary abstruseness*. No doubt, the extreme subtlety and abstraction of his speculation at one time, and its far reach at another,—the recondite principles and remote views in which he delighted to contemplate a subject—must necessarily and inevitably throw somewhat of a character of obscurity, indistinctness, shall we say *unreality*, over his intellectual creations, as looked upon by minds of but moderate perspicacity and discipline. But still, we think he might have forced them up, if we may so express it, into a more palpable form; might have presented them more in relief and nearer to the eye; so that their substances, figure, junctures, transitions, should have been more distinct, more *real* to the reader’s perception. Instead of being content to trace out and note the mental process just as he performed it *for himself*, in his own peculiar manner, and requiring to be understood on his own conditions (the *whole* of the accommodation and adaptation for understanding him being on the part and at the cost of the student, who was to be despised if he failed) he might at least have met the student half way, by working his thoughts into a cast more like the accustomed manner of shaping and expressing ideas among thinking men. When the reader thinks he has mastered the full meaning of a section or paragraph, he feels confident that the portion of thought *might* be put in a more perspicuous form, without injury to even a refinement in any part of its consistence; and that it would have been so in the hands of Hume, for example, or Stewart. But Coleridge seems resolute to carry on his process at the greatest distance from the neighbourhood of common thinking. Or if the plain nature of the subject compels him to perform it nearer at hand, he must, lest any thing should be vulgarly tangible, make every substance under operation fly off in gas.

“Not a little of the obscurity complained of may be owing to the strange dialect which he fabricated for himself, partly of his own invention, and partly from the German terminology; which never will or can be naturalized in English literature, whatever efforts are



making, or to be made, to deprave our language with it—an impossibility at which, as plain Englishmen, we sincerely rejoice. If the *greater part* of the philosophy, for which it was constructed as the vehicle, shall keep its distance too, so much the better. That inseparable vehicle itself will debar it (and Coleridge is a proof) from all chance of extensive acceptance.”

To the wish expressed in the last sentences we can add our loud Amen. If the later form of German metaphysics has done any thing for the American mind, beyond the results of inflation and obnubilation; if it has cleared any man's logic, or added to any man's ascertained principles, or settled any man's theology; these effects have been wrought beyond our sphere.

There is one quality of Foster's productions to which we have made no allusion, namely the wit in which they abound. Although it breaks out in all of them, as from an irrepresible fount, it appears with ease and abundance in the reviews. There are those—and Dr. Pusey is among the number—who carry asceticism so far as to condemn all use of ridicule; the reason for such exclusion being apparent; men ‘of such vinegar aspect’ (if we may quote Shakespeare) as to deny to argument the garb of raillery, even when it is its office to expose folly. There are articles in this volume from which such persons would do well to abstain. The alliance of reasoning and wit has often been pointed out. It is charmingly exemplified in the Review of the Life and Writings of Dr. Blair, by Professor Hill. Poor Dr. Blair! Full well do thousands of university-students remember the sullen hours passed over his sensible but formal lectures: and full well may they find themselves avenged on him, by these strictures. Mr. Foster admits, with justice, that excepting what relates to the origin of language, and a few similar points, Blair's Lectures will always maintain their ground. But upon the Sermons he lets fall his thong. And truly the greatest enemy of the Doctor could not but pity him under this infliction. The criticisms would not however detain us, were it not that they involve principles of more general application, which we would fain convey to the ears of many a smooth and delicate pulpit orator, who, with or without gown and band, emulates the perspicuity, the neatness, and the *limae labor* of Blair. Of these sermons Foster says:

“They possess some obvious merits, of which no reader can be insensible. The first is, perhaps, that they are not too long. It is

not impertinent to specify the first, because we can put it to the consciences of our readers, whether, in opening a volume of sermons, their first point of inspection relative to any one which they are inclined to choose for its text or title, is not to ascertain the length. The next recommendation of the Doctor's sermons, is a very suitable, though scarcely ever striking, introduction, which leads directly to the business, and opens into a very plain and lucid distribution of the subject. Another is a correct and perspicuous language; and it is to be added, that the ideas are almost always strictly pertinent to the subject. This, however, forms but a very small part of the applause which was bestowed on these sermons during the transient day of their fame. They were then considered by many as examples of true eloquence; a distinction never perhaps attributed, in any other instance, to performances marked by such palpable deficiencies and faults.

"In" the first place, with respect to the language, though the selection of words is proper enough, the arrangement of them in the sentence is often in the utmost degree stiff and artificial. It is hardly possible to depart further from any resemblance to what is called a living, or spoken style, which is the proper diction at all events for popular addresses, if not for all the departments of prose composition. Instead of the thought throwing itself into words, by a free, instantaneous, and almost unconscious action, and passing off in that easy form, it is pretty apparent there was a good deal of handicraft employed in getting ready proper cases and trusses, of various but carefully measured lengths and figures, to put the thoughts into, as they came out, in very slow succession, each of them cooled and stiffened to numbness in waiting so long to be dressed."\*

"In the second place, there is no texture in the composition. The sentences appear often like a series of little independent propositions, each satisfied with its own distinct meaning, and capable of being placed in a different part of the train, without injury to any mutual connexion, or ultimate purpose, of the thoughts. The ideas relate to the subject generally, without specifically relating to one another. They all, if we may so speak, gravitate to one centre, but have no mutual attraction among themselves. The mind must often dismiss *entirely* the idea in one sentence, in order to proceed to that in the next; instead of feeling that the second, though distinct, yet necessarily retains the first still in mind, and partly derives its force from it; and that they both contribute, in connexion with several more sentences, to form a grand complex scheme of thought, each of them producing a far greater effect, as a part of the combination, than it would have done as a little thought standing alone. The consequence of this defect is that the emphasis of the sentiment and the crisis or conclusion of the argument comes nowhere; since it cannot be in any single insulated thought, and there is not mutual dependence and co-operation enough to produce any combined result. Nothing is proved, nothing is enforced, nothing is taught, by a mere accumulation of self-evident propositions, most of which are necessarily

\* It is easy to infer from this, what Foster would have thought of such sermonizers as cite with admiration the preacher who "laboured in connexion with a literary friend two whole days on as many sentences."

trite, and some of which when they are so many, must be trivial. With a few exceptions, this appears to us to be the character of these sermons. The sermon, perhaps, most deserving to be excepted, is that 'On the Importance of Religious Knowledge to Mankind,' which exhibits a respectable degree of concatenation of thought, and deduction of argument. It would seem as if Dr. Blair had been a little aware of this defect, as there is an occasional appearance of remedial contrivance; he has sometimes inserted the logical signs *for* and *since*, when the connexion or dependence is really so very slight or unimportant that they might nearly as well be left out."

"A reflective reader will perceive his mind fixed in a wonderful sameness of feeling throughout a whole volume: it is hardly relieved a moment, by surprise, delight, or labour, and at length becomes very tiresome; perhaps a little analogous to the sensations of a Hindoo while fulfilling his vow, to remain in one certain posture for a month. A sedate formality of manner is invariably kept up through a thousand pages, without the smallest danger of ever luxuriating into a beautiful irregularity. We never find ourselves in the midst of any thing that reminds us of nature, except by that orderly stiffness which she forswears; or of freedom, except by being compelled to go in the measured paces of a dull procession. If we manfully persist in reading on, we at length feel a torpor invading our faculties, we become apprehensive that some wizard is about turning us into stones, and we can break the spell only by shutting the book. Having shut the book, we feel that we have acquired no definable addition to our ideas; we have little more than the consciousness of having passed along through a very regular series of sentences and unexceptionable propositions, much in the same manner as, perhaps, at another hour of the same day, we have the consciousness or remembrance of having just passed along by a very regular painted palisade, no one bar of which particularly fixed our attention, and the whole of which we shall soon forget that we have ever seen."

"A great many people of gayety, rank and fashion, have occasionally a feeling that a little easy quantity of religion would be a good thing; because it is too true, after all, that we cannot be staying in this world always, and when one goes out of it, why, there may be some hardish matters to settle in the other place. The prayer-book of a Sunday is a good deal to be sure toward making all safe, but then it is really so tiresome; for penance it is very well, but to say one likes it, one cannot for the life of one. If there were some tolerable religious thing that one could read now and then without trouble, and think it about half as pleasant as a game of cards, it would be comfortable. One should not be so frightened about what we must all come too some time. Now nothing could have been more to the purpose than these sermons; they were welcomed as the very thing. They were unquestionably about religion, and grave enough in all conscience; yet they were elegant; they were so easy to comprehend throughout, that the mind was never detained a moment to think; they were undefiled by methodism; they but little obtruded peculiar doctrinal notions; they applied very much to high life, and the author was evidently a gentleman;

the book could be discussed as a matter of taste, and its being seen in the parlour excited no surmise that any one in the house had been lately converted. Above all, it was most perfectly free from that disagreeable and mischievous property attributed to the eloquence of Pericles, that it 'left stings behind.'

"With these recommendations, aided by the author's reputation as an elegant critic, and by his acquaintance with persons of the highest note, the book became fashionable; it was circulated that Lord Mansfield had read some of the sermons to their Majesties; peers and peeresses without number were cited, as having read and admired; till at last it was almost a mark of vulgarity not to have read them, and many a lie was told to escape this imputation, by persons who had not yet enjoyed the advantage. Grave elderly ministers of much severer religious views than Dr. Blair, were, in sincere benevolence, glad that a work had appeared, which gave a chance for religion to make itself heard among the dissipated and the great, to whom ordinary sermons, and less polished treatises of piety could never find access. Dainty young sprigs of theology, together with divers hopeful young men and maidens, were rejoiced to find that Christian truth could be attired in a much nicer garb than that in which it was exhibited in Beveridge, or in the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate.

"If the huzzas attending the triumphal entry of these sermons had not been quite so loud, the present silence concerning them might not have appeared quite so profound. And if there had been a little more vigour in the thought, and any thing like nature and ease in the language, they might have emerged again into a respectable and permanent share of public esteem. But, as the case stands, we think they are gone or going irrevocably to the vault of the Capulets. Such a deficiency of ratiocination, combined with such a total want of original conception, is in any book incompatible with its staying long in the land of the living. And, as to the style, also, of these performances, there were not wanting, even in the hey-day and riot of their popularity, some doctors, cunning in such matters, who thought the dead monotony of the expression symptomatic of a disease that must end fatally."

Shall we apologize for the length of these extracts? We will not: for it would be difficult, in our opinion, to extract from English criticism a series of remarks more exactly suited to amend the pulpit-effusions of the young preachers belonging to a certain class, not unknown to us, but not most abundant, we may add, in our own church. Of learning, of taste, of true elegance, of just elocution, we cannot have too much; but all these may, to a degree, co-exist with tameness, coldness, starchiness, false-point, cut-and-dried figures, and the smell of the lamp. We crave, and the American churches importunately crave, a sort of religious address which shall wake intellect and passion, and put academic criticism to sleep. The melodious roll of periods fails here. Let the afternoon slumbers of the genteel

congregation be broken by an occasional burst not set down in the rubric ; let some happy discord be introduced into the harmony ; and let the stream of rapid argument sometimes surge over the banks of the canal, in violation of homiletic canons. All this we need, if we would not see pulpit-discourse, once so mighty, shrink from the competition of secular eloquence. A certain simplicity and nature in our effective popular speakers is seen to be compatible with the exposition of great and even recondite principles. A politician may be simple without the vain attempt to make every word intelligible to the most ignorant and the most careless. So it ought to be in sermons, and the preacher greatly errs who binds himself to use the dialect of the nursery. "I will tell you" says Professor Wilson, "what is applicable on all occasions, both in poetry and prose : αἰεὶ ἀριστεῖν : always without reference to weak or common minds. If we give an entertainment, we do not set on the table pap and panada, just because a guest may be liable to indigestion: we rather send these dismal dainties to his chamber, and treat our heartier friends *opiparously*." This is understood by the orators who are forming the national mind, day by day, in the party-conflict. Sermon-making must catch the good qualities, at least, of the age, or become an affair of dilettante-criticism, the solace of apathy and fastidious ease. At the very moment when we write, the presidential canvass is arousing thousands in public assemblies. Orators of every variety of gifts, but all more remarkable for force than rule, are striking notes which reach the heart of our body politic. To one who after six days of excitement, at the public meetings or the hustings, comes on the seventh to the house of God, how great the contrast, if he listen only to the 'drowsy tinklings' of a perfect composition !

To our younger brethren, whose taste and manner are as yet happily unformed, or, at least, whose faults are not inveterate, we would earnestly recommend the study of masculine writers ; and among these we would certainly set in a conspicuous place the subject of these remarks. The perusal of his writings will have this collateral advantage, that he is a champion for evangelical religion, and a scourge of arrogant error and latitudinarian speculation. If he has given himself more to literature than might beseem a minister of the sanctuary ; if he has fallen far below Hall and Chalmers in the amount of his direct contribution to the doc-

trinal expounding of the scripture; if he has produced no one work which has for its object the development of vital Christianity; let us in justice remember, that he has arrayed himself boldly on the side of unpopular truths; that he has pleaded for the humblest manifestations of genuine faith and zeal; and that he has occasionally stricken such blows at the monster-errors of the age, as have caused them to writhe.

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ART. III.—*The Christian's Defence, containing a fair Statement and impartial Examination of the leading objections urged by Infidels, against the Antiquity, Credibility, and Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures: enriched with copious extracts from learned authors.* By James Smith. Two volumes in one. Cincinnati: Stereotyped and published by J. A. James. Pages, Vol. I. 312, Vol. II. 364.

*Archibald Alexander*

THE Great West is a land of exuberant productions, good and bad. Errors of every species spring up and flourish there, as luxuriantly as the plants which the fertile soil shoots forth in such vigour and abundance. But where poisons abound, there also Providence furnishes effectual antidotes. While men of strong but erratic minds arise, and exert all their talents to propagate errors of the most monstrous kinds, God in mercy to the church raises up other men, who clad in the panoply of truth are qualified to detect, and by sound reasoning and solid learning to refute the dangerous systems of infidelity and heresy, which, from time to time, the enemies of the truth promulgate.

We have been wont to consider the great valley of the Mississippi as a country too new, and too recently settled, to produce any literary works, requiring profound research and extensive erudition; but here we have a volume, or rather two volumes, extending to nearly seven hundred octavo pages, every one of which furnishes evidence of various and extensive reading; and much of it entirely out of the routine of the current literature of the country. Indeed our principal objection to the work before us, is, that it is encumbered with too much learning. The author has sometimes gone out of his way to gather up the fruits of