



***JOHN
TIMBS***

***ANECDOTES
ABOUT
AUTHORS,
AND ARTISTS***



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Anecdotes about Authors, and Artists

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BOOKS AND AUTHORS.

THE FINDING OF JOHN EVELYN'S MS. DIARY AT WOTTON.

FAMILIES OF LITERARY MEN.

THE BLUE-STOCKING CLUB.

DR. JOHNSON AND HANNAH MORE.

MISS MITFORD'S FAREWELL TO THREE MILE CROSS.

SMOLLETT'S "HUGH STRAP."

COLLINS'S POEMS.

CAPTAIN MORRIS'S SONGS.

LITERARY DINNERS.

POPULARITY OF THE PICKWICK PAPERS.

SWIFT'S DISAPPOINTMENT

LEIGH HUNT AND THOMAS CARLYLE.

COWPER'S POEMS.

HEARNE'S LOVE OF ALE.

SHERIDAN'S WIT.

SMOLLETT'S HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

MAGNA CHARTA RECOVERED.

FOX AND GIBBON.

DR. JOHNSON'S PRIDE.

LORD BYRON'S "CORSAIR."

BOOKSELLERS IN LITTLE BRITAIN.

RECONCILING THE FATHERS.

DR. PARR AND SIR JAMES MACKINTOSH.

SIR JAMES MACKINTOSH'S HUMOUR.

WRITINGS OF LOPE DE VEGA.

POPULARITY OF LOPE DE VEGA.
SWIFT'S LOVES.
COLERIDGE'S "WATCHMAN."
IRELAND'S SHAKSPEARE FORGERIES.
HOOLE, THE TRANSLATOR OF TASSO. THE GHOST PUZZLED.
LORD BYRON'S VANITY.
LORD BYRON'S APOLOGY.
FINE FLOURISHES.
MATHEMATICAL SAILORS.
LEWIS'S "MONK."
THOMSON'S RECITATIONS.
GOLDSMITH'S "SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER."
SILENCE NOT ALWAYS WISDOM.
DR. CHALMERS IN LONDON.
ROMILLY AND BROUGHAM.
PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONISTS.
DEATH OF SIR CHARLES BELL.
CLASSIC PUN.
POETRY OF THE SEA.
"FELON LITERATURE."
"THE LITERARY GENTLEMAN.
DEATH BED REVELATIONS.
STAMMERING WIT.
ORIGIN OF BOTTLED ALE.
BAD'S THE BEST.
LUDICROUS ESTIMATE OF MR. CANNING.
THE AUTHORSHIP OF "WAVERLEY."
QUID PRO QUO.
HOPE'S "ANASTASIUS."

SMART REPARTEE.
COLTON'S "LACON."
BUNYAN'S COPY OF "THE BOOK OF MARTYRS."
LITERARY LOCALITIES.
CREED OF LORD BOLINGBROKE.
BUNYAN'S PREACHING.
HONE'S "EVERY-DAY BOOK."
BUNYAN'S ESCAPES.
DROLLERY SPONTANEOUS.
ORIGIN OF COWPER'S "JOHN GILPIN."
HARD FATE OF AUTHORS.
JAMES SMITH, ONE OF THE AUTHORS OF "REJECTED ADDRESSES."
CONTEMPORARY COPYRIGHTS.
MISS BURNEY'S "EVELINA."
EPITAPH ON CHARLES LAMB.
"TOM CRINGLE'S LOG."
CHANCES FOR THE DRAMA.
FULLER'S MEMORY.
LORD HERVEY'S WIT.
ANACREONTIC INVITATION, BY MOORE.
THE POETS IN A PUZZLE.
SALE OF MAGAZINES.
MRS. SOUTHEY.
DEVOTION TO SCIENCE.
DISADVANTAGEOUS CORRECTION.
PATRONAGE OF LITERATURE.
DR. JOHNSON'S WIGS.
SHERIDAN'S "PIZARRO."
DR. JOHNSON IN LONDON.

REGALITY OF GENIUS.
FIELDING'S "TOM JONES."
VOLTAIRE AND FERNEY.
CLEAN HANDS.
MODERATE FLATTERY.
EVERY-DAY LIFE OF JAMES SMITH.
FRENCH-ENGLISH JEU-DE-MOT.
RELICS OF IZAAK WALTON.
PRAISE OF ALE.
DANGEROUS FOOLS.
BULWER'S POMPEIAN DRAWING-ROOM.
STERNE'S SERMONS.
"TOM HILL."
TYCHO BRAHE'S NOSE.
FOOTE'S WOODEN LEG.
RIVAL REMEMBRANCE.
WHO WROTE "JUNIUS'S LETTERS"?
LITERARY COFFEE-HOUSES IN THE LAST CENTURY.
LORD BYRON AND "MY GRANDMOTHER'S REVIEW."
WALPOLE'S WAY TO WIN THEM.
DR. JOHNSON'S CRITICISMS.
GIBBON'S HOUSE, AT LAUSANNE.
ORIGIN OF "BOZ." (DICKENS.)
BOSWELL'S "LIFE OF JOHNSON."
PATRONAGE OF AUTHORS.
LEARNING FRENCH.
JOHNSON'S CLUB-ROOM.
DR. CHALMERS'S INDUSTRY.
LATEST OF DR. JOHNSON'S CONTEMPORARIES.

A SNAIL DINNER.

CURRAN'S IMAGINATION.

COWLEY AT CHERTSEY.

A PRETTY COMPLIMENT.

THOMAS DAY, AND HIS MODEL WIFE.

WASHINGTON IRVING AND WILKIE, IN THE ALHAMBRA.

BOLINGBROKE AT BATTERSEA.

RELICS OF MILTON.

WRITING UP THE "TIMES" NEWSPAPER.

RELICS OF THE BOAR'S HEAD TAVERN, EASTCHEAP.

ORIGIN OF "THE EDINBURGH REVIEW."

CLEVER STATESMEN.

THE FIRST MAGAZINE.

MRS. TRIMMER.

BOSWELL'S BEAR-LEADING.

LORD ELIBANK AND DR. JOHNSON

RELICS OF DR. JOHNSON AT LICHFIELD.

COLERIDGE A SOLDIER.

COBBETT'S BOYHOOD.

COLERIDGE AN UNITARIAN PREACHER.

FONTENELLE'S INSENSIBILITY.

PAINS AND TOILS OF AUTHORSHIP.

JOE MILLER AT COURT.

COLLINS' INSANITY.

MOORE'S EPIGRAM ON ABBOTT.

NEGROES AT HOME.

A STRING OF JERROLD'S JOKES.

CONCEITED ALARMS OF DENNIS.

A COMPOSITION WITH CONSCIENCE.

SALE, THE TRANSLATOR OF THE KORAN.
THE LATTER DAYS OF LOVELACE.
PAYMENT IN KIND.
CHATTERTON'S PROFIT AND LOSS RECKONING.
LOCKE'S REBUKE OF THE CARD-PLAYING LORDS.
HAYDN AND THE SHIP CAPTAIN.
HAYDN'S DIPLOMA PIECE AT OXFORD.
ORIGIN OF THE BEGGAR'S OPERA.
THE TWO SHERIDANS.
KILLING NO MURDER.
SENSITIVENESS TO CRITICISM.
BUTLER AND BUCKINGHAM.
THE MERMAID CLUB.
PORSON'S MEMORY.
WYCHERLEY'S WOOING.
A CAROUSE AT BOILEAU'S.
THOMSON'S INDOLENCE.
A LEARNED YOUNG LADY.
A HARD HIT AT POPE.
DRYDEN DRUBBED.
ROGERS AND "JUNIUS."
ALFIERI'S HAIR.
SMOLLETT'S HARD FORTUNES.
JERROLD'S REBUKE TO A RUDE INTRUDER.
AN ODD PRESENT TO SHENSTONE.
WALLER, THE COURTIER-POET.
ART AND ARTISTS.
TITIAN AND CHARLES V.
CHILDHOOD OF BENJAMIN WEST.

GUIDO'S TIME.

CHARACTER OF GAINSBOROUGH.

BENEFIT OF RIVALRY.

BACKHUYSEN.

GEORGE MORLAND.

DISINTERESTEDNESS OF ENGLISH PAINTERS.

THE DOUBLE CHIN.

SYMPATHY AND CALCULATION.

RUSKIN'S "MODERN PAINTERS."

RUBENS'S "CHAPEAU DE PAILLE."

A PROMPT REMEDY.

WILKIE'S SIMPLICITY.

THE GRAVE OF LAWRENCE.

"IT WILL NEVER DO."

LOST CHANCE OF A NATIONAL GALLERY.

REYNOLDS'S PORTRAIT OF LORD HEATHFIELD.

THE ELGIN MARBLES

HENRY HOWARD, R.A.

ORIGINALS OF HOGARTH'S MARRIAGE A-LA-MODE.

HOMAGE TO ART.

"COLUMBUS AND THE EGG" ANTICIPATED.

THE RIVAL OF RAPHAEL.

TURNER'S MASTERPIECE.

INTENSE EFFECT.

REYNOLDS AND HAYDN.

HAYDON'S FIRST SIGHT OF THE ELGIN MARBLES.

PAINTERS IN SOCIETY.

ANACHRONISMS IN PAINTING.

MOVING EARS.

RUSSELL, THE CRAYON PAINTER.
WILKIE'S MISTAKEN ANALOGY.
DEATH OF GAINSBOROUGH.
FANATICISM THE DESTROYER OF ART.
THE THORNHILL MIRACLE.
THE PICTURES AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE.
FOUNDATION OF THE HISTORICAL SCHOOL OF PAINTING IN ENGLAND.
THE CAT RAPHAEL.
SMALL CONVERSATION.
CHANGING HATS.
SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE'S BOYHOOD.
HARLOW'S TRIAL OF QUEEN KATHERINE.
DEATH OF CORREGGIO.
A LUCKY PURCHASE.
COPLEY'S "DEATH OF LORD CHATHAM"
THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON'S CORREGGIO.
GIOTTO AND THE PIGS.
HOW WILKIE BECAME A PAINTER.
CIMABUE AND GIOTTO.
MICHAEL ANGELO IN BOYHOOD AND OLD AGE.
HOGARTH'S "MARCH TO FINCHLEY."
STORY OF A MINIATURE.
SITTING FOR A HUSBAND.
ARTISTIC TEXT.
GENEROSITY OF CANOVA.
HOGARTH'S VANITY.
THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL AND THE ROYAL ACADEMY.
M'ARDELL'S PRINTS.
UNFORTUNATE ACCURACY.

IMMORTALITY OF PAINTING.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S "PUCK."

RAPHAEL'S CARTOON OF THE MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS.

JARVIS SPENCER.

A DRAPERY PAINTER.

"STRANGE" ADVENTURE.

ORIGIN OF THE BEEF-STEAK CLUB.

WILKIE'S EARLY LIFE.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S DINNERS.

FINDING A PAINTER.

REYNOLDS'S AND LAWRENCE'S PORTRAITS.

ZOFFANI'S GRATITUDE.

PATRONAGE OF ART.

DANGEROUS RETORT.

THE VENETIAN SCHOOL.

REYNOLDS'S "NATIVITY."

HOLLOWAY AND "THE CARTOONS."

TITIAN'S PAINTING.

CATLIN'S PICTURES.

MARTIN'S "DELUGE."

SIR JOSHUA'S GOODNATURE.

THOMAS SYDNEY COOPER "THE ENGLISH PAUL POTTER."

VERRIO AND CHARLES II.

HOGARTH'S PICTURES AT VAUXHALL GARDENS.

RUBENS AND THE LION.

NARROW ESCAPE.

GAINSBOROUGH.

HAYDON AT SCHOOL.

RUBENS'S DAY.

DILIGENCE OF RUBENS.
HAYDON'S "JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON."
VAN DE VELDE AND BACKHUYSEN.
A PAINTER'S HAIR-DRESSING.
A MIS-MATCHED PORTRAIT.
VAST PAINTED WINDOW.
CLAUDE'S "LIBRO DI VERITA."
THE OLDEST PICTURE IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY.
EXPERIMENTAL COLOURING.
STOTHARD'S FRIEZE.
JOHN MARTIN ON GLASS PAINTING.
"SITTING FOR THE HAND."
HAYDON AND FUSELI.
RICHARD WILSON.
THE BRIDGEWATER GALLERY.
THE LOST PORTRAIT OF PRINCE CHARLES, BY VELASQUEZ.
HAYDON'S "MOCK ELECTION."
PORTRAITS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.
A PAINTER OF THE DEAD.
COPLEY'S PORTRAITS.
"BONAPARTE REVIEWING THE CONSULAR GUARD."
LAWRENCE'S PORTRAIT OF CURRAN.
OPIE AND NORTHCOTE.
ORIGIN OF KIT-KAT PICTURES.
COPLEY'S LARGE PICTURE.
SIR ROBERT KERR PORTER'S PANORAMA.
ZOFFANI AND GEORGE III.
THE TRUE FORNARINA.
HOGARTH AND BISHOP HOADLY.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S PALETTE.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS' BENEVOLENCE.

A TRIUMPH OF PAINTING.

MORLAND AT KENSAL-GREEN.

ORIGIN OF THE TAPESTRY IN THE OLD HOUSE OF LORDS.

MELANCHOLY OF PAINTERS.

THE CHANDOS PORTRAIT OF SHAKSPEARE.

COSTUME OF REYNOLDS'S PORTRAITS.

SIGN PAINTERS IN THEIR PRIME.

A BRIBE REPENTED.

PRACTICAL JOKES OF SWARTZ.

AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO FRANKNESS.

BY
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ANECDOTES

ABOUT

BOOKS

AND

AUTHORS.

PART I.

Footnote

[Table of Contents](#)

THIS collection of anecdotes, illustrative sketches, and *memorabilia* generally, relating to the ever fresh and interesting subject of BOOKS AND AUTHORS, is not presented as complete, nor even as containing all the choice material of its kind. The field from which one may gather is so wide and fertile, that any collection warranting such a claim would far exceed the compass of many volumes, much less of this little book. It has been sought to offer, in an acceptable and convenient form, some of the more remarkable or interesting literary facts or incidents with which one individual, in a somewhat extended reading, has been struck; some of the passages which he has admired; some of the anecdotes and jests that have amused him and may amuse others; some of the reminiscences that it has most pleased him to dwell upon. For no very great portion of the contents of this volume, is the claim to originality of subject-matter advanced. The collection, however, is submitted with some confidence that it may be found as interesting, as accurate, and as much guided by good taste, as it has been endeavoured to make it.

BOOKS AND AUTHORS.

[Table of Contents](#)

CURIOUS FACTS AND CHARACTERISTIC SKETCHES.

THE FINDING OF JOHN EVELYN'S MS. DIARY AT WOTTON.

[Table of Contents](#)

THE MS. Diary, or "Kalendarium," of the celebrated John Evelyn lay among the family papers at Wotton, in Surrey, from the period of his death, in 1706, until their rare interest and value were discovered in the following singular manner.

The library at Wotton is rich in curious books, with notes in John Evelyn's handwriting, as well as papers on various subjects, and transcripts of letters by the philosopher, who appears never to have employed an amanuensis. The arrangement of these treasures was, many years since, entrusted to the late Mr. Upcott, of the London Institution, who made a complete catalogue of the collection.

One afternoon, as Lady Evelyn and a female companion were seated in one of the fine old apartments of Wotton, making feather tippets, her ladyship pleasantly observed to Mr. Upcott, "You may think this feather-work a strange way of passing time: it is, however, my hobby; and I dare say you, too, Mr. Upcott, have *your hobby*." The librarian replied that his favourite pursuit was the collection of the autographs of eminent persons. Lady Evelyn remarked, that in all probability the MSS. of "*Sylva*" Evelyn would afford Mr. Upcott some amusement. His reply may be well imagined. The bell was rung, and a servant desired to bring the papers from a lumber-room of the old mansion; and from one of the baskets so produced was brought to light the manuscript Diary of John Evelyn—one of the most finished specimens of autobiography in the whole compass of English literature.

The publication of the Diary, with a selection of familiar letters, and private correspondence, was entrusted to Mr. William Bray, F.S.A.; and the last sheets of the MS., with a dedication to Lady Evelyn, were actually in the hands of the

printer at the hour of her death. The work appeared in 1818; and a volume of Miscellaneous Papers, by Evelyn, was subsequently published, under Mr. Upcott's editorial superintendence.

Wotton House, though situate in the angle of two valleys, is actually on part of Leith Hill, the rise from thence being very gradual. Evelyn's "Diary" contains a pen-and-ink sketch of the mansion as it appeared in 1653.

FAMILIES OF LITERARY MEN.

[Table of Contents](#)

A *Quarterly* Reviewer, in discussing an objection to the Copyright Bill of Mr. Sergeant Talfourd, which was taken by Sir Edward Sugden, gives some curious particulars of the progeny of literary men. "We are not," says the writer, "going to speculate about the causes of the fact; but a fact it is, that men distinguished for extraordinary intellectual power of any sort rarely leave more than a very brief line of progeny behind them. Men of genius have scarcely ever done so; men of imaginative genius, we might say, almost never. With the one exception of the noble Surrey, we cannot, at this moment, point out a representative in the male line, even so far down as the third generation, of any English poet; and we believe the case is the same in France. The blood of beings of that order can seldom be traced far down, even in the female line. With the exception of Surrey and Spenser, we are not aware of any great English author of at all remote date, from whose body any living person claims to be descended. There is no real English poet prior

to the middle of the eighteenth century; and we believe no great author of any sort, except Clarendon and Shaftesbury, of whose blood we have any inheritance amongst us. Chaucer's only son died childless; Shakspeare's line expired in his daughter's only daughter. None of the other dramatists of that age left any progeny; nor Raleigh, nor Bacon, nor Cowley, nor Butler. The grand-daughter of Milton was the last of his blood. Newton, Locke, Pope, Swift, Arbuthnot, Hume, Gibbon, Cowper, Gray, Walpole, Cavendish (and we might greatly extend the list), never married. Neither Bolingbroke, nor Addison, nor Warburton, nor Johnson, nor Burke, transmitted their blood. One of the arguments against a *perpetuity* in literary property is, that it would be founding another *noblesse*. Neither jealous aristocracy nor envious Jacobinism need be under such alarm. When a human race has produced its 'bright, consummate flower' in this kind, it seems commonly to be near its end."

THE BLUE-STOCKING CLUB.

[Table of Contents](#)

TOWARDS the close of the last century, there met at Mrs. Montague's a literary assembly, called "The Blue-Stocking Club," in consequence of one of the most admired of the members, Mr. Benjamin Stillingfleet, always wearing *blue stockings*. The appellation soon became general as a name for pedantic or ridiculous literary ladies. Hannah More wrote a volume in verse, entitled *The Bas Bleu: or Conversation*. It proceeds on the mistake of a foreigner, who, hearing of the

Blue-Stocking Club, translated it literally *Bas Bleu*. Johnson styled this poem “a great performance.” The following couplets have been quoted, and remembered, as terse and pointed:—

“In men this blunder still you find,
All think their little set mankind.”

“Small habits well pursued betimes,
May reach the dignity of crimes.”

DR. JOHNSON AND HANNAH MORE.

[Table of Contents](#)

WHEN Hannah More came to London in 1773, or 1774, she was domesticated with Garrick, and was received with favour by Johnson, Reynolds, and Burke. Her sister has thus described her first interview with Johnson:—

“We have paid another visit to Miss Reynolds; she had sent to engage Dr. Percy, (‘Percy’s Collection,’ now you know him), quite a sprightly modern, instead of a rusty antique, as I expected: he was no sooner gone than the most amiable and obliging of women, Miss Reynolds, ordered the coach to take us to Dr. Johnson’s very own house: yes, Abyssinian Johnson! Dictionary Johnson! Ramblers, Idlers, and Irene Johnson! Can you picture to yourselves the palpitation of our hearts as we approached his mansion? The conversation turned upon a new work of his just going to the press (the ‘Tour to the Hebrides’), and his old friend Richardson. Mrs. Williams, the blind poet, who lives with him, was introduced to us. She is engaging in her

manners, her conversation lively and entertaining. Miss Reynolds told the Doctor of all our rapturous exclamations on the road. He shook his scientific head at Hannah, and said she was 'a silly thing.' When our visit was ended, he called for his hat, as it rained, to attend us down a very long entry to our coach, and not Rasselas could have acquitted himself more *en cavalier*. I forgot to mention, that not finding Johnson in his little parlour when we came in, Hannah seated herself in his great chair hoping to catch a little ray of his genius: when he heard it, he laughed heartily, and told her it was a chair on which he never sat. He said it reminded him of Boswell and himself when they stopped a night, as they imagined, where the weird sisters appeared to Macbeth. The idea so worked on their enthusiasm, that it quite deprived them of rest. However, they learned the next morning, to their mortification, that they had been deceived, and were quite in another part of the country."

MISS MITFORD'S FAREWELL TO THREE MILE CROSS.

[Table of Contents](#)

WHEN Miss Mitford left her rustic cottage at Three Mile Cross, and removed to Reading, (the Belford Regis of her novel), she penned the following beautiful picture of its homely joys:—

"Farewell, then, my beloved village! the long, straggling street, gay and bright on this sunny, windy April morning, full of all implements of dirt and mire, men, women,

children, cows, horses, wagons, carts, pigs, dogs, geese, and chickens—busy, merry, stirring little world, farewell! Farewell to the winding, up-hill road, with its clouds of dust, as horsemen and carriages ascend the gentle eminence, its borders of turf, and its primrosy hedges! Farewell to the breezy common, with its islands of cottages and cottage-gardens; its oaken avenues, populous with rooks; its clear waters fringed with gorse, where lambs are straying; its cricket-ground where children already linger, anticipating their summer revelry; its pretty boundary of field and woodland, and distant farms; and latest and best of its ornaments, the dear and pleasant mansion where dwelt the neighbours, the friends of friends; farewell to ye all! Ye will easily dispense with me, but what I shall do without you, I cannot imagine. Mine own dear village, farewell!”

SMOLLETT’S “HUGH STRAP.”

[Table of Contents](#)

IN the year 1809 was interred, in the churchyard of St. Martin’s-in-the Fields, the body of one Hew Hewson, who died at the age of 85. He was the original of Hugh Strap, in Smollett’s *Roderick Random*. Upwards of forty years he kept a hair-dresser’s shop in St. Martin’s parish; the walls were hung round with Latin quotations, and he would frequently point out to his customers and acquaintances the several scenes in *Roderick Random* pertaining to himself, which had their origin, not in Smollett’s inventive fancy, but in truth and reality. The meeting in a barber’s shop at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the subsequent mistake at the inn, their arrival

together in London, and the assistance they experienced from Strap's friend, are all facts. The barber left behind an annotated copy of *Roderick Random*, showing how far we are indebted to the genius of the author, and to what extent the incidents are founded in reality.

COLLINS'S POEMS.

[Table of Contents](#)

MR. JOHN RAGSDALE, of Richmond, in Surrey, who was the intimate friend of Collins, states that some of his Odes were written while on a visit at his, Mr. Ragsdale's house. The poet, however, had such a poor opinion of his own productions, that after showing them to Mr. Ragsdale, he would snatch them from him, and throw them into the fire; and in this way, it is believed, many of Collins's finest pieces were destroyed. Such of his Odes as were published, on his own account in 1746, were not popular; and, disappointed at the slowness of the sale, the poet burnt the remaining copies with his own hands.

CAPTAIN MORRIS'S SONGS.

[Table of Contents](#)

ALAS! poor Morris—writes one—we knew him well. Who that has once read or heard his songs, can forget their rich and graceful imagery; the fertile fancy, the touching sentiment, and the “soul reviving” melody, which characterize every line of these delightful lyrics? Well do we remember, too, his “old buff waistcoat,” his courteous

manner, and his gentlemanly pleasantry, long after this Nestor of song had retired to enjoy the delights of rural life, despite the prayer of his racy verse:

“In town let me live, then, in town let me die;
For in truth I can’t relish the country, not I.
If one must have a villa in summer to dwell,
Oh! give me the sweet, shady side of Pall Mall.”

Captain Morris was born about the middle of the last century, and outlived the majority of the *bon vivant* society which he gladdened with his genius, and lit up with his brilliant humour.

Yet, many readers of the present generation may ask, “Who was Captain Morris?” He was born of good family, in the celebrated year 1745, and appears to have inherited a taste for literary composition; for his father composed the popular song of *Kitty Crowder*.

For more than half a century, Captain Morris moved in the first circles. He was the “sun of the table” at Carlton House, as well as at Norfolk House; and attaching himself politically, as well as convivially, to his dinner companions, he composed the celebrated ballads of “Billy’s too young to drive us,” and “Billy Pitt and the Farmer,” which continued long in fashion, as brilliant satires upon the ascendant politics of their day. His humorous ridicule of the Tories was, however, but ill repaid by the Whigs upon their accession to office; at least, if we may trust the beautiful ode of “The Old Whig Poet to his Old Buff Waistcoat.” We are not aware of this piece being included in any edition of the “Songs.” It bears date “G. R., August 1, 1815;” six years subsequent to

which we saw it among the papers of the late Alexander Stephens.

Captain Morris's "Songs" were very popular. In 1830, we possessed a copy of the 24th edition; we remember one of the ditties to have been "sung by the Prince of Wales to a certain lady," to the air of "There's a difference between a beggar and a queen." Morris's finest Anacreontic, is the song *Ad Poculum*, for which he received the gold cup of the Harmonic Society:

"Come thou soul-reviving cup!
Try thy healing art;
Stir the fancy's visions up,
And warm my wasted heart.
Touch with freshening tints of bliss
Memory's fading dream;
Give me, while thy lip I kiss,
The heaven that's in thy stream."

Of the famous Beefsteak Club, (at first limited to twenty-four members, but increased to twenty-five, to admit the Prince of Wales,) Captain Morris was the laureat; of this "Jovial System" he was the intellectual centre. In the year 1831, he bade adieu to the club, in some spirited stanzas, though penned at "an age far beyond mortal lot." In 1835, he was permitted to revisit the club, when they presented him with a large silver bowl, appropriately inscribed.

It would not be difficult to string together gems from the Captain's Lyrics. In "The Toper's Apology", one of his most sparkling songs, occurs this brilliant version of Addison's comparison of wits with flying fish:—

“My Muse, too, when her wings are dry,
No frolic flight will take;
But round a bowl she’ll dip and fly,
Like swallows round a lake.
Then, if the nymph will have her share
Before she’ll bless her swain,
Why that I think’s a reason fair
To fill my glass again.”

Many years since, Captain Morris retired to a villa at Brockham, near the foot of Box Hill, in Surrey. This property, it is said, was presented to him by his old friend, the Duke of Norfolk. Here the Captain “drank the pure pleasures of the rural life” long after many a bright light of his own time had flickered out, and become almost forgotten; even “the sweet, shady side of Pall Mall” had almost disappeared, and with it the princely house whereat he was wont to shine. He died July 11, 1835, in his ninety-third year, of internal inflammation of only four days.

Morris presented a rare combination of mirth and prudence, such as human conduct seldom offers for our imitation. He retained his *gaieté de cœur* to the last; so that, with equal truth and spirit, he remonstrated:

“When life charms my heart, must I kindly be told,
I’m too gay and too happy for one that’s so old.”

Captain Morris left his autobiography to his family; but it has not been published.

LITERARY DINNERS.

[Table of Contents](#)

INCREDIBLE as it may appear, it is sometimes stated very confidently, that English authors and actors who give dinners, are treated with greater indulgence by certain critics than those who do not. But, it has never been said that any critical journal in England, with the slightest pretensions to respectability, was in the habit of levying black mail in this Rob Roy fashion, upon writers or articles of any kind. Yet it is alleged, on high authority, that many of the French critical journals are or were principally supported from such a source. For example, there is a current anecdote to the effect that when the celebrated singer Nourrit died, the editor of one of the musical reviews waited on his successor, Duprez, and, with a profusion of compliments and apologies, intimated to him that Nourrit had invariably allowed 2000 francs a year to the review. Duprez, taken rather aback, expressed his readiness to allow half that sum. "*Bien, monsieur,*" said the editor, with a shrug, "*mais, parole d'honneur, j'y perds mille francs.*"

POPULARITY OF THE PICKWICK PAPERS.

[Table of Contents](#)

MR. DAVY, who accompanied Colonel Cheney up the Euphrates, was for a time in the service of Mehemet Ali Pacha. "Pickwick" happening to reach Davy while he was at Damascus, he read a part of it to the Pacha, who was so

delighted with it, that Davy was, on one occasion, called up in the middle of the night to finish the reading of the chapter in which he and the Pacha had been interrupted. Mr. Davy read, in Egypt, upon another occasion, some passages from these unrivalled “Papers” to a blind Englishman, who was in such ecstasy with what he heard, that he exclaimed he was almost thankful he could not see he was in a foreign country; for that while he listened, he felt completely as though he were again in England.—*Lady Chatterton*.

SWIFT’S DISAPPOINTMENT

[Table of Contents](#)

“I remember when I was a little boy, (writes Swift in a letter to Bolingbroke,) I felt a great fish at the end of my line, which I drew up almost on the ground, but it dropt in, and the disappointment vexes me to this day; and I believe it was the type of all my future disappointments.”

“This little incident,” writes Percival, “perhaps gave the first wrong bias to a mind predisposed to such impressions; and by operating with so much strength and permanency, it might possibly lay the foundation of the Dean’s subsequent peevishness, passion, misanthropy, and final insanity.”

LEIGH HUNT AND THOMAS CARLYLE.

[Table of Contents](#)

THE following characteristic story of these two “intellectual gladiators” is related in “A New Spirit of the Age.”

Leigh Hunt and Carlyle were once present among a small party of equally well known men. It chanced that the conversation rested with these two, both first-rate talkers, and the others sat well pleased to listen. Leigh Hunt had said something about the islands of the Blest, or El Dorado, or the Millennium, and was flowing on in his bright and hopeful way, when Carlyle dropt some heavy tree-trunk across Hunt's pleasant stream, and banked it up with philosophical doubts and objections at every interval of the speaker's joyous progress. But the unmitigated Hunt never ceased his overflowing anticipations, nor the saturnine Carlyle his infinite demurs to those finite flourishings. The listeners laughed and applauded by turns; and had now fairly pitted them against each other, as the philosopher of Hopefulness and of the Unhopeful. The contest continued with all that ready wit and philosophy, that mixture of pleasantry and profundity, that extensive knowledge of books and character, with their ready application in argument or illustration, and that perfect ease and good-nature, which distinguish each of these men. The opponents were so well matched, that it was quite clear the contest would never come to an end. But the night was far advanced, and the party broke up. They all sallied forth; and leaving the close room, the candles and the arguments behind them, suddenly found themselves in presence of a most brilliant star-light night. They all looked up. "Now," thought Hunt, "Carlyle's done for!—he can have no answer to that!" "There!" shouted Hunt, "look up there! look at that glorious harmony, that sings with infinite voices an eternal song of hope in the soul of man." Carlyle looked up. They all

remained silent to hear what he would say. They began to think he was silenced at last—he was a mortal man. But out of that silence came a few low-toned words, in a broad Scotch accent. And who, on earth, could have anticipated what the voice said? “Eh! it’s a *sad* sight!”— Hunt sat down on a stone step. They all laughed—then looked very thoughtful. Had the finite measured itself with infinity, instead of surrendering itself up to the influence? Again they laughed—then bade each other good night, and betook themselves homeward with slow and serious pace. There might be some reason for sadness, too. That brilliant firmament probably contained infinite worlds, each full of struggling and suffering beings—of beings who had to die—for life in the stars implies that those bright worlds should also be full of graves; but all that life, like ours, knowing not whence it came, nor whither it goeth, and the brilliant Universe in its great Movement having, perhaps, no more certain knowledge of itself, nor of its ultimate destination, than hath one of the suffering specks that compose this small spot we inherit.

COWPER’S POEMS.

[Table of Contents](#)

JOHNSON, the publisher in St. Paul’s Churchyard, obtained the copyright of Cowper’s Poems, which proved a great source of profit to him, in the following manner:—One evening, a relation of Cowper’s called upon Johnson with a portion of the MS. poems, which he offered for publication, provided Johnson would publish them at his own risk, and