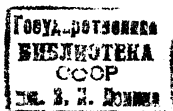


THE
MANUSCRIPT
OF
"DIEDRICH KNICKERBOCKER, JUN.

The reader I'll leave in the midst of silence, to contemplate those ideas which I have only sketched, and which every man must finish for himself.

DRYDEN.

NEW-YORK :—1824.



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THE AUTHOR.

Nothing tends so much to enlarge the mind as travelling, that is, making a visit to other towns, cities, or countries, besides those in which we were born and educated.—*Watts.*

I WAS sitting during a bright evening in August on one of those little rude benches which, scattered promiscuously upon the Battery, invite to rest the foot of the weary Rambler, and, like cloisters of repose, shelter him from the tumult and the gaze of an ambulating crowd.

The silver moon had, in concert with her family of stars, lighted up in a glow the rich vault of the heavens, and imparted to every terrestrial object the mild, mellow tints of a calm summer's evening. The soft fleecy clouds piled in the perspective towards the west, seemed like bright mountains of forest, imprint-

ing their dark outlines behind the sky of the Jersey, and heightened the blue of the atmosphere enriched by its firmament of stars. A refreshing breeze from the south was fanning away the sultriness of a heated sky; and inhaling its pure breath, crowds of citizens were beheld sauntering through the dim shades of the poplars, and enjoying with their bewitching fair ones and friends the unrivalled loveliness of the scenery. The notes of a well selected band echoed sweetly from the flag-staff along the silver-skirted shore; while to fill up their silence, the bold swell of the bugle and drum were heard in responsive measured cadences from the dim, distant islands.

Here and there, the flutter of a white sail was dimpling playfully in the breeze; and the shrill tone of command from some remote officer on duty, or the rolling dash of the oar, whispered back their sounds across the bright mimic hills of tremulous waters.

I had remained a long time, musing upon the richness of this scene, when approaching

through the poplars of the avenue before me, I caught the glimpse of a gentleman, whose slow, pacing step seemed to have avoided the hum of the crowd, for spots more congenial to the stillness of reflection. Advancing with a measured step to the arbour where I sat, he surveyed me with a keen eye of anxious curiosity, and, as if disappointed at my unwelcome appearance, stood musingly still, with his arm gently reclining against the tree. His person was lively, and about the middle size, and as if descended from the good-humoured race of the Hollanders, his shoulders were broad and heavy; and what his frame wanted in height was compensated by its bordering on the corpulent. His dress, consisting of a blue frock coat which reached to his knees, with the pantaloons of a traveller buttoned up their sides, exhibited beneath them a pair of dusty boots; while a broad-brimmed beaver shaded the thick raven locks of a highly expressive forehead. His small twinkling eyes sparkled with intelligence and humour; and to a cheek

dimpled by the broad, playful furrows of about thirty-five years, were added a mouth and chin that bespoke inward benevolence and contentment.

“Pray sir,” I demanded, “have I disturbed a retirement consecrated to your reflections, or have I intruded upon a spot where you are expecting some favourite friends?”

“Neither, sir,” he thoughtfully replied; “though this was in early life my customary resort, I would not deprive any person of the gratification which this pleasant retreat may afford. Averse to the bustle of the more frequented walks, I love to step aside into the shade of this retirement, to enjoy more freely from interruption the beauties of this prospect. But since accident has introduced me to the company of a gentleman, whose delicate urbanity so kindly recommends him to my regard, I should be happy to realize the pleasures of an acquaintance.”

After greeting each other with the cordiality of old friends, we sat down together and entered

into conversation. We insensibly adverted to the history of our adventures; and from the trifling incidents of boyhood, amused each other with the anecdotes and events that enliven the bulletin of the present day.

Delighted with the vivacity of my companion, I discovered he was a man who had been familiarly conversant with the world; and had spent much of his time in reading, or travelling through the various countries of America. From his conversation I inferred he had received a liberal education, and having no taste for the slavish pursuits of mercantile or professional business, had devoted his attention alone to the scenes and transactions of the world.

Enraptured by the marvellous, as well as captivated by the beautiful, you might see him at one time clambering up the rugged sides of some cloud-capt mountain; at others ransacking the valleys and villages that variegated his journey: sometimes watching the foaming cataract dashing from its craggy precipice—listen-

ing to the roaring torrent turning some mighty mill—catching the richly indented landscape from some towering eminence—or indulging in all the endearing enjoyments of domestic revelry. Though the most romantic of men, he could descant the most happily upon the various shades of human character, and from the polish of the courtier, he could descend to the coarse repulsive manners of the rustic, and make you realize the scenes his lively fancy depicted.

Disappointed early in matrimony, he had retired from the world to derive improvement from its errors, and amuse the dull vacancies of life by the endless varieties it presented. From some hints which he dropped, I was inclined to believe he was the only surviving son of some celebrated historian, who had left him the earnings of his prolific pen to gratify his rambling propensity.

“His father,” as he informed me, “died when he was a mere boy, at his residence beyond Corlaer’s Hook; and after bequeathing to

the Historical Society and others, legacies of his attachment, had left him independent of the world, and inspired by the same passion which influenced himself." "Though his parent," he observed, "had been immortalized for a history which stated nothing respecting his family, it was because subjects of more importance had prevented his biographer from recording an account of his son."

"Sir," he exclaimed, "there is more benefit derivable from a single hour's travel amidst the world, than from a century devoted to the dull contemplation of books. Though reading has its uses, nothing can impart permanence to its value, but practical observation. It is the polar magnet of the traveller; for without it, research itself is but profitless fatigue. Amidst the conflicting opinions of the scholar, it is the star of demonstration that directs him to the truth. It is the soul of wisdom, which, if bereft of it, is but abstract theory, or inexperienced precept. I have read opinions which my experience has confuted: I have

pored over scenes in description, the false colouring of which my actual contemplation has belied; and I have examined the characters of men whom calumny has grossly traduced. Excuse me then, sir, if I prefer my own limbs to those of another man, and my own eyes and ears to the acutest that ever existed."

"Your observations," I replied, "may be just with regard to a great portion of the world; but surely there are numerous exceptions, to which they can by no means be applicable. Thousands who cannot travel, are privileged to be philosophers; and millions who have never toiled up a mountain, or practically scanned the inhabitants of the valleys, have known as much of the world as they who have sailed over oceans, and penetrated most deeply the recesses of the human character. Mankind, though differing in feature, language, and manners, are the same beings still, in whatever part of the globe you find them; and though there is a striking dissimilarity in their customs and habits of thinking, yet one may be

regarded as the miniature of all, as it regards their moral dispositions and character. Man can therefore be as well studied by remaining within the narrow precincts of home, as by wandering so far abroad to acquire the desired information."

"Nay, my good sir," retorted my companion, "you may find, I grant, a solitary few, of shrewd minds and attentive observation, who have, perchance, acquired a fund of general knowledge of the world, and of human nature in detail; yet it is but the chimney-side experience of their limited research, and the retailed opinions that may have been wantonly imposed upon them. Your infant child knows full as much of the world, from what he hears from you, sir, as the devotee of knowledge from the wisdom of other men. The mechanic who had never seen a house built, would never be employed in the erection of one; and you would not trust to the mere speculations of hearsay, if either your interests or happiness were at stake. The human mind is never so

strongly impressed as when the scenes and circumstances of real life are presented to its view. This accounts for the slight impression produced by works of mere description and fancy; but transport the reader to the very scenes and occurrences of which he has been reading, they burst upon him in a richer glow of interest and beauty, and he feels himself entirely in a new and different world."

I could not refrain from smiling at the enthusiasm of my companion, but perceived the vanity of reasoning against the torrent of his propensity. "What a benefit," I exclaimed, "would you confer upon the age by publishing the fruits of your experience, and contradicting errors which enslave so large a portion of the world! You might throw light upon the darkest mysteries, and chase away from society the foul prejudices which corrupt it."

"No sir," he quickly resumed, "you misunderstand me. I condemn not the perusal of books, nor any other mode of enlarging our stock of knowledge; but merely assert their

inferiority to that practical observation which unveils to us man as he is, independent of the flattery which adorns him. In a moral sense, indeed, he may be regarded the same throughout every climate and age, but it is this discovery that tends, as I remarked, to our improvement, which domestic seclusion is incapable of imparting. Why have so many thousands listened to the incredulous tales published by the pitiful stragglers through our country, who describe us as a wilderness of savages, rather than an enlightened and flourishing empire? Is it not because inexperienced amidst the world, they fancy with Rasselas, that its glory lies not beyond their own mountains, and the sun which illuminates them passes by the habitations of others? Only persuade men to travel and observe, and there is not a vagrant calumniator that will dare to contaminate the public ear. Truth would burst upon the mind in all its divine effulgence, and ignorance and prejudice disperse like mists before the sun. You requested me to publish. But I have no in-

clination to enter the arena of criticism, and expose myself to the censures and persecutions of the world. Numbers have given vent to opinions which have never been read, and who have been immortalised alone for their vanity and dulness. He who can expel a wrinkle from the brow of care, wipe the tear from the cheek of anguish, and light up a livelier joy in the desponding bosom, is worthier of immortality than the sagest philosophers, or even the princes and conquerors of empires. Inspired by this wish, I have recorded at my leisure the rambles and observations of the past; and were I persuaded they would beguile the lonely hours of a single fellow-being, I would not hesitate an instant in presenting them to the world.

“Sir,” I exclaimed, “were the world but half as sensible as myself of the value of your worth, that last observation would speedily be realized. But why”—

“Friend,” continued the unknown stranger, (rising suddenly from his seat, and drawing

carelessly from his pocket a rumpled manuscript of folded paper,) here is a collection of sketches, which, such as they are, you may publish as an experiment to the world. From our acquaintance this night, I have reason to believe there is one being, at least, who will do justice to my motives, and who may derive amusement from the scribblings of the unworthiest of pens. Should, however, your sanguine hopes be realized, and the community ratify the sentiment you have expressed, meet me on this very spot on —, and I promise—. But good night, dear sir, and if you indulge any regard for the immortal historian of New-York, fail not to remember among your friends his last and only surviving son,

“DIEDRICH KNICKERBOCKER, JUN.”

I seized with trembling veneration his preferred manuscript and hand, and while securing the former within the folds of my pocket, the descendant of the immortal historian had disappeared amongst the trees of the avenue.