

BOOK XVIII.

PIERRE, AS A JUVENILE AUTHOR, RECONSIDERED.

I.

Inasmuch as by various indirect intimations much more than ordinary natural genius has been imputed to Pierre, it may have seemed an inconsistency, that only the merest magazine papers should have been thus far the sole productions of his mind. Nor need it be added, that, in the soberest earnest, those papers contained nothing uncommon; indeed--entirely now to drop all irony, if hitherto any thing like that has been indulged in--those fugitive things of Master Pierre's were the veriest common-place.

It is true, as I long before said, that Nature at Saddle Meadows had very early been as a benediction to Pierre;--had blown her wind-clarion to him from the blue hills, and murmured melodious secrecies to him by her streams and her woods. But while nature thus very early and very abundantly feeds us, she is very late in tutoring us as to the proper methodization of our diet. Or,--to change the metaphor,--there are immense quarries of fine marble; but how to get it out; how to chisel it; how to construct any temple? Youth must wholly quit, then, the quarry, for awhile; and not only go forth, and get tools to use in the quarry, but must go and thoroughly study architecture. Now the

quarry-discoverer is long before the stone-cutter; and the stone-cutter is long before the architect; and the architect is long before the temple; for the temple is the crown of the world.

Yes; Pierre was not only very unarchitectural at that time, but Pierre was very young, indeed, at that time. And it is often to be observed, that as in digging for precious metals in the mines, much earthy rubbish has first to be troublesomely handled and thrown out; so, in digging in one's soul for the fine gold of genius, much dullness and common-place is first brought to light. Happy would it be, if the man possessed in himself some receptacle for his own rubbish of this sort: but he is like the occupant of a dwelling, whose refuse can not be clapped into his own cellar, but must be deposited in the street before his own door, for the public functionaries to take care of. No common-place is ever effectually got rid of, except by essentially emptying one's self of it into a book; for once trapped in a book, then the book can be put into the fire, and all will be well. But they are not always put into the fire; and this accounts for the vast majority of miserable books over those of positive merit. Nor will any thoroughly sincere man, who is an author, ever be rash in precisely defining the period, when he has completely ridded himself of his rubbish, and come to the latent gold in his mine. It holds true, in every case, that the wiser a man is, the more misgivings he has on certain points.

It is well enough known, that the best productions of the best human intellects, are generally regarded by those intellects as mere immature

freshman exercises, wholly worthless in themselves, except as initiatives for entering the great University of God after death. Certain it is, that if any inferences can be drawn from observations of the familiar lives of men of the greatest mark, their finest things, those which become the foolish glory of the world, are not only very poor and inconsiderable to themselves, but often positively distasteful; they would rather not have the book in the room. In minds comparatively inferior as compared with the above, these surmising considerations so sadden and unfit, that they become careless of what they write; go to their desks with discontent, and only remain there--victims to headache, and pain in the back--by the hard constraint of some social necessity. Equally paltry and despicable to them, are the works thus composed; born of unwillingness and the bill of the baker; the rickety offspring of a parent, careless of life herself, and reckless of the germ-life she contains. Let not the short-sighted world for a moment imagine, that any vanity lurks in such minds; only hired to appear on the stage, not voluntarily claiming the public attention; their utmost life-redness and glow is but rouge, washed off in private with bitterest tears; their laugh only rings because it is hollow; and the answering laugh is no laughter to them.

There is nothing so slipperily alluring as sadness; we become sad in the first place by having nothing stirring to do; we continue in it, because we have found a snug sofa at last. Even so, it may possibly be, that arrived at this quiet retrospective little episode in the career of my hero--this shallowly expansive embayed Tappan Zee of my otherwise

deep-heady Hudson--I too begin to loungingly expand, and wax harmlessly sad and sentimental.

Now, what has been hitherto presented in reference to Pierre, concerning rubbish, as in some cases the unavoidable first-fruits of genius, is in no wise contradicted by the fact, that the first published works of many meritorious authors have given mature token of genius; for we do not know how many they previously published to the flames; or privately published in their own brains, and suppressed there as quickly. And in the inferior instances of an immediate literary success, in very young writers, it will be almost invariably observable, that for that instant success they were chiefly indebted to some rich and peculiar experience in life, embodied in a book, which because, for that cause, containing original matter, the author himself, forsooth, is to be considered original; in this way, many very original books, being the product of very unoriginal minds. Indeed, man has only to be but a little circumspect, and away flies the last rag of his vanity. The world is forever babbling of originality; but there never yet was an original man, in the sense intended by the world; the first man himself--who according to the Rabbins was also the first author--not being an original; the only original author being God. Had Milton's been the lot of Caspar Hauser, Milton would have been vacant as he. For though the naked soul of man doth assuredly contain one latent element of intellectual productiveness; yet never was there a child born solely from one parent; the visible world of experience being that procreative thing which impregnates the muses; self-reciprocally efficient

hermaphrodites being but a fable.

There is infinite nonsense in the world on all of these matters; hence blame me not if I contribute my mite. It is impossible to talk or to write without apparently throwing oneself helplessly open; the Invulnerable Knight wears his visor down. Still, it is pleasant to chat; for it passes the time ere we go to our beds; and speech is farther incited, when like strolling improvisadores of Italy, we are paid for our breath. And we are only too thankful when the gapes of the audience dismiss us with the few ducats we earn.

II.

It may have been already inferred, that the pecuniary plans of Pierre touching his independent means of support in the city were based upon his presumed literary capabilities. For what else could he do? He knew no profession, no trade. Glad now perhaps might he have been, if Fate had made him a blacksmith, and not a gentleman, a Glendinning, and a genius. But here he would have been unpardonably rash, had he not already, in some degree, actually tested the fact, in his own personal experience, that it is not altogether impossible for a magazine contributor to Juvenile American literature to receive a few pence in exchange for his ditties. Such cases stand upon imperishable record, and it were both folly and ingratitude to disown them.

But since the fine social position and noble patrimony of Pierre, had thus far rendered it altogether unnecessary for him to earn the least farthing of his own in the world, whether by hand or by brain; it may seem desirable to explain a little here as we go. We shall do so, but always including, the preamble.

Sometimes every possible maxim or thought seems an old one; yet it is among the elder of the things in that unaugmentable stock, that never mind what one's situation may be, however prosperous and happy, he will still be impatient of it; he will still reach out of himself, and beyond every present condition. So, while many a poor be-inked galley-slave, toiling with the heavy oar of a quill, to gain something wherewithal to stave off the cravings of nature; and in his hours of morbid self-reproach, regarding his paltry wages, at all events, as an unavoidable disgrace to him; while this galley-slave of letters would have leaped with delight--reckless of the feeble seams of his pantaloons--at the most distant prospect of inheriting the broad farms of Saddle Meadows, lord of an all-sufficing income, and forever exempt from wearing on his hands those treacherous plague-spots of indigence--videlicet, blots from the inkstand;--Pierre himself, the undoubted and actual possessor of the things only longingly and hopelessly imagined by the other; the then top of Pierre's worldly ambition, was the being able to boast that he had written such matters as publishers would pay something for in the way of a mere business transaction, which they thought would prove profitable. Yet altogether weak and silly as this may seem in Pierre, let us preambillically

examine a little further, and see if it be so indeed.

Pierre was proud; and a proud man--proud with the sort of pride now meant--ever holds but lightly those things, however beneficent, which he did not for himself procure. Were such pride carried out to its legitimate end, the man would eat no bread, the seeds whereof he had not himself put into the soil, not entirely without humiliation, that even that seed must be borrowed from some previous planter. A proud man likes to feel himself in himself, and not by reflection in others. He likes to be not only his own Alpha and Omega, but to be distinctly all the intermediate gradations, and then to slope off on his own spine either way, into the endless impalpable ether. What a glory it was then to Pierre, when first in his two gentlemanly hands he jingled the wages of labor! Talk of drums and the fife; the echo of coin of one's own earning is more inspiring than all the trumpets of Sparta. How disdainfully now he eyed the sumptuousness of his hereditary halls--the hangings, and the pictures, and the bragging historic armorials and the banners of the Glendinning renown; confident, that if need should come, he would not be forced to turn resurrectionist, and dig up his grandfather's Indian-chief grave for the ancestral sword and shield, ignominiously to pawn them for a living! He could live on himself. Oh, twice-blessed now, in the feeling of practical capacity, was Pierre.

The mechanic, the day-laborer, has but one way to live; his body must provide for his body. But not only could Pierre in some sort, do that; he could do the other; and letting his body stay lazily at home, send

off his soul to labor, and his soul would come faithfully back and pay his body her wages. So, some unprofessional gentlemen of the aristocratic South, who happen to own slaves, give those slaves liberty to go and seek work, and every night return with their wages, which constitute those idle gentlemen's income. Both ambidexter and quadruple-armed is that man, who in a day-laborer's body, possesses a day-laboring soul. Yet let not such an one be over-confident. Our God is a jealous God; He wills not that any man should permanently possess the least shadow of His own self-sufficient attributes. Yoke the body to the soul, and put both to the plough, and the one or the other must in the end assuredly drop in the furrow. Keep, then, thy body effeminate for labor, and thy soul laboriously robust; or else thy soul effeminate for labor, and thy body laboriously robust. Elect! the two will not lastingly abide in one yoke. Thus over the most vigorous and soaring conceits, doth the cloud of Truth come stealing; thus doth the shot, even of a sixty-two-pounder pointed upward, light at last on the earth; for strive we how we may, we can not overshoot the earth's orbit, to receive the attractions of other planets; Earth's law of gravitation extends far beyond her own atmosphere.

In the operative opinion of this world, he who is already fully provided with what is necessary for him, that man shall have more; while he who is deplorably destitute of the same, he shall have taken away from him even that which he hath. Yet the world vows it is a very plain, downright matter-of-fact, plodding, humane sort of world. It is governed only by the simplest principles, and scorns all ambiguities, all

transcendentals, and all manner of juggling. Now some imaginatively heterodoxical men are often surprisingly twitted upon their willful inverting of all common-sense notions, their absurd and all-displacing transcendentals, which say three is four, and two and two make ten. But if the eminent Jugglarius himself ever advocated in mere words a doctrine one thousandth part so ridiculous and subversive of all practical sense, as that doctrine which the world actually and eternally practices, of giving unto him who already hath more than enough, still more of the superfluous article, and taking away from him who hath nothing at all, even that which he hath,--then is the truest book in the world a lie.

Wherefore we see that the so-called Transcendentalists are not the only people who deal in Transcendentals. On the contrary, we seem to see that the Utilitarians,--the every-day world's people themselves, far transcend those inferior Transcendentalists by their own incomprehensible worldly maxims. And--what is vastly more--with the one party, their Transcendentals are but theoretic and inactive, and therefore harmless; whereas with the other, they are actually clothed in living deeds.

The highly graveling doctrine and practice of the world, above cited, had in some small degree been manifested in the case of Pierre. He prospectively possessed the fee of several hundred farms scattered over part of two adjoining counties; and now the proprietor of that popular periodical, the Gazelle Magazine, sent him several additional dollars

for his sonnets. That proprietor (though in sooth, he never read the sonnets, but referred them to his professional adviser; and was so ignorant, that, for a long time previous to the periodical's actually being started, he insisted upon spelling the Gazelle with a g for the z, as thus: Gagelle; maintaining, that in the Gazelle connection, the z was a mere impostor, and that the g was soft; for he was a judge of softness, and could speak from experience); that proprietor was undoubtedly a Transcendentalist; for did he not act upon the Transcendental doctrine previously set forth?

Now, the dollars derived from his ditties, these Pierre had always invested in cigars; so that the puffs which indirectly brought him his dollars were again returned, but as perfumed puffs; perfumed with the sweet leaf of Havanna. So that this highly-celebrated and world-renowned Pierre--the great author--whose likeness the world had never seen (for had he not repeatedly refused the world his likeness?), this famous poet, and philosopher, author of "The Tropical Summer: a Sonnet;" against whose very life several desperadoes were darkly plotting (for had not the biographers sworn they would have it!); this towering celebrity--there he would sit smoking, and smoking, mild and self-festooned as a vapory mountain. It was very involuntarily and satisfactorily reciprocal. His cigars were lighted in two ways: lighted by the sale of his sonnets, and lighted by the printed sonnets themselves.

For even at that early time in his authorial life, Pierre, however vain

of his fame, was not at all proud of his paper. Not only did he make allumettes of his sonnets when published, but was very careless about his discarded manuscripts; they were to be found lying all round the house; gave a great deal of trouble to the housemaids in sweeping; went for kindlings to the fires; and were forever flitting out of the windows, and under the door-sills, into the faces of people passing the manorial mansion. In this reckless, indifferent way of his, Pierre himself was a sort of publisher. It is true his more familiar admirers often earnestly remonstrated with him, against this irreverence to the primitive vestments of his immortal productions; saying, that whatever had once felt the nib of his mighty pen, was thenceforth sacred as the lips which had but once saluted the great toe of the Pope. But hardened as he was to these friendly censurings, Pierre never forbade that ardent appreciation of "The Tear," who, finding a small fragment of the original manuscript containing a dot (tear), over an i (eye), esteemed the significant event providential; and begged the distinguished favor of being permitted to have it for a brooch; and ousted a cameo-head of Homer, to replace it with the more invaluable gem. He became inconsolable, when being caught in a rain, the dot (tear) disappeared from over the i (eye); so that the strangeness and wonderfulness of the sonnet was still conspicuous; in that though the least fragment of it could weep in a drought, yet did it become all tearless in a shower.

But this indifferent and supercilious amateur--deaf to the admiration of the world; the enigmatically merry and renowned author of "The Tear;"

the pride of the Gazelle Magazine, on whose flaunting cover his name figured at the head of all contributors--(no small men either; for their lives had all been fraternally written by each other, and they had clubbed, and had their likenesses all taken by the aggregate job, and published on paper, all bought at one shop) this high-prestigious Pierre--whose future popularity and voluminousness had become so startlingly announced by what he had already written, that certain speculators came to the Meadows to survey its water-power, if any, with a view to start a paper-mill expressly for the great author, and so monopolize his stationery dealings;--this vast being,--spoken of with awe by all merely youthful aspirants for fame; this age-neutralizing Pierre;--before whom an old gentleman of sixty-five, formerly librarian to Congress, on being introduced to him at the Magazine publishers', devoutly took off his hat, and kept it so, and remained standing, though Pierre was socially seated with his hat on;--this wonderful, disdainful genius--but only life-amateur as yet--is now soon to appear in a far different guise. He shall now learn, and very bitterly learn, that though the world worship Mediocrity and Common Place, yet hath it fire and sword for all cotemporary Grandeur; that though it swears that it fiercely assails all Hypocrisy, yet hath it not always an ear for Earnestness.

And though this state of things, united with the ever multiplying freshets of new books, seems inevitably to point to a coming time, when the mass of humanity reduced to one level of dotage, authors shall be scarce as alchymists are to-day, and the printing-press be reckoned a

small invention:--yet even now, in the foretaste of this let us hug
ourselves, oh, my Aurelian! that though the age of authors be passing,
the hours of earnestness shall remain!