William Hazlitt

1778 - 1830 - United Kingdom

"On the Love of the Country" [1]

I do not know that any one has ever explained satisfactorily the true source of our attachment to natural objects, or of that soothing emotion which the sight of the country hardly ever fails to infuse into the mind. Some persons have ascribed this feeling to the natural beauty of the objects themselves, others to the freedom from care, the silence and tranquillity which scenes of retirement afford -- others to the healthy and innocent employments of a country life--others to the simplicity of country manners -- and others to different causes; but none to the right one. All these causes may, I believe, have a share in producing this feeling; but there is another more general principle, which has been left untouched, and which I shall here explain, endeavoring to be as little sentimental as the subject will admit.

Rousseau, in his Confessions, (the most valuable of all his works,) relates, that when he took possession of his room at Annecy, at the house of his beloved mistress and friend, he found that he could see "a little spot of green" from his window, which endeared his situation the more to him, because, he says, it was the first time he had had this object constantly before him since he left Boissy, the place where he was at school when a child. Some such feeling as that here described will be found lurking at the bottom of all our attachments of this sort. Were it not for the recollections habitually associated with them, natural objects could not interest the mind in the manner they do. No doubt, the sky is beautiful; the clouds sail majestically along its bosom; the sun is cheering; there is something exquisitely graceful in the manner in which a plant or tree puts forth its branches; the motion with which they bend and tremble in the evening breeze is soft and lovely; there is music in the babbling of a brook; the view from the top of a mountain is full of grandeur; nor can we behold the ocean with indifference. Or, as the Minstrel sweetly sings --

> "Oh, how can'st thou renounce the boundless store
> Of charms which Nature to her votary yields!
> The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
> The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;
> All that the genial ray of morning gilds,

And all the echoes to the song of even,
All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,
And all the dread magnificence of heaven,
Oh how cant's thou renounce, the hope to be
forgiven!"

It is not, however, the beautiful and magnificent alone that we admire in Nature; the most insignificant and rudest objects are often found connected with the strongest emotions; we become attached to the most common and familiar images as to the face of a friend whom we have long known, and from whom we have received many benefits. It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes its attention; with change of place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends, it is because they have surrounded us in almost all situations in joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain; because they have been one chief source and nourishment of our feelings and part of our being, that we love them as we do ourselves.

There is, generally speaking, the same foundation for our love of Nature as for all our habitual attachments, namely, association of ideas. But this is not all. That which distinguishes this attachment from others is the transferable nature our feelings with respect to physical objects; the associations connected with any one object extending to the whole class. My having been attached to any particular person does not make me feel the same attachment to the next person that I may chance to meet; but, if I have once associated strong feelings of delight with the objects of natural scenery, the tie becomes indissoluble, and I shall ever after feel the same attachment to other objects of the same sort. I remember when I was abroad, the trees, and grass, and wet leaves, rustling in the walks of the Thuilleries, seemed to be as much English, to be as much the same trees and grass, that I had always been used to, as the sun shining over my head was the same sun which I saw in England; the faces only were foreign to me. Whence comes this difference? It arises from our always imperceptibly connecting the idea of the individual with man, and only the idea of the class with natural objects. In the one case, the external appearance or physical structure is the least thing to be attended to; in the other, it is every thing. The springs that move the human form, and make it friendly or adverse to me, lie hid within it. There is an infinity of motives, passions, and ideas, contained in that narrow compass, of which I know nothing, and in which I have no share. Each individual is a world to himself, governed by a thousand contradictory and wayward impulses. I can, therefore, make no inference from one individual to another; nor can my habitual sentiments, with respect to any individual extend beyond himself to others. But it is otherwise with respect to Nature.

There is neither hypocrisy, caprice, nor mental reservation in her favours. Our intercourse with her is not liable to accident or change, interruption or disappointment. She smiles on us still the same. Thus, to give an obvious instance, if I have once enjoyed the cool shade of a tree, and been lulled into a deep repose by the sound of a brook running at its feet, I am sure that wherever I can find a tree and a brook, I can enjoy the same pleasure again. Hence, when I imagine these objects, I can easily form a mystic personification of the friendly power that inhabits them, Dryad or Naiad, offering its cool fountain or its tempting shade. Hence the origin of that Grecian mythology. All objects of the same kind being the same, not only in their appearance, but in their practical uses, we habitually confound them together under the same general idea; and, whatever fondness we may have conceived of one, is immediately placed to the common account. The most opposite kinds of remote trains of feeling gradually go to enrich the same sentiments; and in our love of Nature, there is all the force of individual attachment, combined with the most airy abstraction. It is this circumstance which gives that refinement, expansion, and wild interest to feelings of this sort, when strongly excited, which every one must have experienced who is a true lover of Nature. The sight of the setting sun does not affect me too much from the beauty of the object itself, from the glory kindled through the glowing skies, the rich broken columns of light or the dying streaks of day, as that it indistinctly recalls to me numberless thoughts and feelings with which, through many a year and season, I have watched his bright descent in the warm summer evenings, or beheld him struggling to cast a "farewel sweet" through the thick clouds of winter. I love to see the trees first covered with leaves in the spring, the primroses peeping out from some sheltered bank, and the innocent lambs running races on the soft green turf; because, at that birth-time of Nature, I have always felt sweet hopes and happy wishes -- which have not been fulfilled! The dry reeds rustling on the side of a stream, -- the woods swept by the loud blast, -- the dark massy foliage of autumn, -- the grey trunks and naked branches of the trees in winter, -- the sequestered copse and wide extended heath, -- the warm sunny showers, and December snows, -- have all charms for me; there is no object, however trifling or rude, that has not, in some mood or other found the way to my heart; and I might say, in the words of the poet,

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears"

Thus Nature is a kind of universal home, and every object it presents to us an old acquaintance with unaltered looks.

"-----Nature did ne'er betray
The heart that lov'd her, but through all the years

Of this our life, it is her privilege
To lead from joy to joy."

For there is that consent and mutual harmony among all her works, one undivided spirit pervading them throughout, that, if we have once knit ourselves in hearty fellowship to any of them, they will never afterwards appear as strangers to us, but, which ever way we turn, we shall find a secret power to have gone out before us, moulding them into such shapes as fancy loves, informing them with life and sympathy, bidding them put on their festive looks and gayest attire at our approach, and to pour all their sweets and choicest treasures at our feet. For him, then, who has well acquainted himself with Nature's works, she wears always one face, and speaks the same well-known language, striking on the heart, amidst unquiet thoughts and the tumult of the world, like the music of one's native tongue heard in some far-off country.

We do not connect the same feelings with the works of art as with those of Nature, because we refer them to man, and associate with them the separate interests and passions which we know belong to those who are the authors or possessors of them. Nevertheless, there are some such objects, as a cottage, or a village church, which excite in us the same sensations as the sight of Nature, and which are, indeed, almost always include in descriptions of natural scenery.

"Or from the mountain's sides
View wilds and swelling floods,
And hamlets brown, and dim-discover'd spires,
And hear their simple bell."

Which is in part, no doubt, because they are surrounded with natural objects, and, in a populous country, inseparable from them; and also because the human interest they excite relates to manners and feelings which are simple, common, such as all can enter into and which, therefore, always produce a pleasing effect upon the mind.

NOTES:

1 Hazlitt's "On the Love of the Country" was first published in the The Examiner, Nov. 27, 1814 and can be found reproduced in Selected Essays as edited by Geoffrey Keynes (London: Nonsuch Press, 1930).

"On Living to One's Self"

"Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,
Or by the lazy Scheldt or wandering Po."

I was never in a better place or humour than I am at present for writing on this subject. I have a partridge getting ready for my supper, my fire is blazing on the hearth, the air is mild for the season of the year, I have but a slight fit of indigestion to-day (the only thing that makes me abhor myself), I have three hours good before me, and therefore I will attempt it. It is as well to do it at once as to have it to do for a week to come.

If the writing on this subject is no easy task, the thing itself is a harder one. It asks a troublesome effort to insure the admiration of others: it is still greater one to be satisfied with one's own thoughts. As I look from the window at the wide bare heath before me, and through the misty moonlight air see the woods that wave over the top of Winterslow,

"While Heav'n's chancel-vault is blind with sleet,"

my mind takes its flight through too long a series of years,[1] supported only by the patience of thought and secret yearnings after truth and good, for me to be at a loss to understand the feeling I intend to write about; but I do not know that this will enable me to convey it more agreeably to the reader.

Lady Grandison,[2] in a letter to Miss Harriet Byron, assures her that "her brother Sir Charles lived to himself:" and Lady L. soon after (for Richardson was never tired of a good thing) repeats the same observation; to which Miss Byron frequently returns in her answers to both sisters - "For you know Sir Charles lives to himself," till at length it passes into a proverb among the fair correspondents. This is not, however, an example of what I understand by living to one's self, for Sir Charles Grandison was indeed always thinking of himself; but by this phrase I mean never thinking at all about one's-self, any more than if there was no such person in existence. The character I speak of is as little of an egotist as possible: Richardson's great favourite was as much of one as possible. Some satirical critic has represented him in Elysium "bowing over the faded hand of Lady Grandison" (Miss Byron that was) - he ought to have been represented bowing over his own hand, for he never admired any one but himself, and was the God of his own idolatry. - Neither do I call it living to one's-self to retire into a desert (like the saints and martyrs of old) to be devoured by wild beasts, nor

to descend into a cave to be considered as a hermit, nor to get the top of a pillar or rock to do fanatic penance and be seen of all men. What I mean by living to one's-self is living in the world, as in it, not of it: it is as if no one knew there was such a person, and you wished no one to know it: it is to be a silent spectator of the mighty scene of things, not an object of attention or curiosity in it; to take a thoughtful, anxious interest in what is passing in the world, but not to feel the slightest inclination to make or meddle with it. It is such a life as a pure spirit might be supposed to lead, such an interest as it might take in the affairs of men, calm, contemplative, passive, distant, touched with pity for their sorrows, smiling at their follies without bitterness, sharing their affections, but not troubled by their passions, not seeking their notice, nor once dreamt of by them. He who lives wisely to himself and to his own heart, looks at the busy world through the loop-holes of retreat, and does not want to mingle in the fray. "He hears the tumult, and is still." He is not able to mend it. He sees enough in the universe to interest him without putting himself forward to try what he can do to fix the eyes of the universe upon him. Vain the attempt! He reads the clouds, he looks at the stars, he watches the return of the seasons, the falling leaves of autumn, the perfumed breath of spring, starts with delight at the note of the thrush in a copse near him, sits by the fire, listens to the moaning of the wind, pores upon a book, or discourses the freezing hours away, or melts down hours to minutes in pleasing thought. All this while he is taken up with other things, forgetting himself. He relishes an author's style without thinking of turning author. He is fond of looking at a print from an old picture in the room, without teasing himself to copy it. He does not fret himself to death with trying to be what he is not, or do what he cannot. He hardly knows what he is capable of, and is not in the least concerned whether he shall ever make a figure in the world. He feels the truth of the lines -

> "The man whose eye is ever on himself,
> Doth look one, the least of nature's works;
> One who might move the wise man to that scorn
> Which wisdom holds unlawful ever" -

he looks out of himself at the wide extended prospect of nature, and takes an interest beyond his narrow pretensions in general humanity. He is free as air, and independent as the wind. Woe be to him when he first begins to think what others say of him. While a man is contented with himself and his own resources, all is well. When he undertakes to play a part on the stage, and to persuade the world to think more about him than they do about themselves, he is got into a track where he will find nothing but briars and thorns, vexation and disappointment. I can speak a little to this point. For many years of my life I did nothing but think. I had nothing else to do but solve some knotty point, or dip in some abstruse author, or look at the sky or wander by the pebbled sea-side [3] -

"To see the children sporting on the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

I cared for nothing, I wanted nothing. I took my time to consider whatever occurred to me, and was in no hurry to give a sophistical answer to a question - there was no printer's devil waiting for me.[4] I used to write a page or two perhaps in half a year; and remember laughing heartily at the celebrated experimentalist Nicholson,[5] who told me that in twenty years he had written as much as would make three hundred octavo volumes. If I was not a great author, I could read with ever fresh delight, "never ending, still beginning," and had no occasion to write a criticism when I had done. If I could not paint like Claude, I could admire "the witchery of the soft blue sky" as I walked out, and was satisfied with the pleasure it gave me. If I was dull, it gave me little concern: if I was lively, I indulged my spirits. I wished well to the world, and believed as favourable of it as I could. I was like a stranger in a foreign land, at which I looked with wonder, curiosity, and delight, without expecting to be an object of attention in return. I had no relations to the state, no duty to perform, no ties to bind me to others: I had neither friend nor mistress, wife nor child.[6] I lived in a world of contemplation, and not of action.

This sort of dreaming existence is the best. He who quits it to go in search of realities, generally barters repose for repeated disappointments and vain regrets. His time, thoughts, and feelings are no longer at his own disposal. From that instant he does not survey the objects of nature as they are in themselves, but looks asquint at them to see whether he cannot make them the instruments of his ambition, interest, or pleasure; for a candid, undesigning, undisguised simplicity of character, his views become jaundiced, sinister, and double: he takes no farther interest in the great changes of the world but as he has a paltry share in producing them: instead of opening his senses, his understanding, and his heart to the resplendent fabric of the universe, he holds a crooked mirror before his face, in which he may admire his own person and pretensions, and just glance his eye aside to see whether others are not admiring him too. He no more exists in the impression which "the fair variety of things" makes upon him, softened and subdued by habitual contemplation, but in the feverish sense of his own upstart self-importance. By aiming to fix, he is become the slave of opinion. He is a tool, a part of a machine that never stands still, and is sick and giddy with the ceaseless notion. He has no satisfaction but in the reflection of his own image in the public gaze - but in the repetition of his own name in the public ear. He himself is mixed up with, and spoils everything. I wonder Buonaparte was not tired of the N.N.'s stuck all over the Louvre and throughout France. Goldsmith [7] (as we all know) when in Holland went out into a balcony with some handsome Englishwomen, and on their being applauded by the spectators, turned round and said peevishly -

"There are places where I also am admired." He could not give the craving appetite of an author's vanity one day's respite. I have seen a celebrated talker of our own time turn pale and go out of the room when a showy-looking girl has come into it, who for a moment divided the attention of his hearers. - Infinite are the mortications of the bare attempt to emerge from obscurity; numberless the failures; and greater and more galling still the vicissitudes and tormenting accompaniments of success-

---"Whose top to climb
Is certain falling, or so slippery, that
The fear's as bad as falling."[8]

"Would to God," exclaimed Oliver Cromwell, when he was at any time thwarted by the Parliament, "that I had remained by my woodside to tend a flock of sheep, rather than have been thrust on such a government as this!" When Buonaparte got into his carriage to proceed on his Russian expedition, carelessly twirling his glove, and singing the air - "Malbrook to the war is going" - he did not think of the tumble he has got since, the shock of which no one could have stood but himself. We see and hear chiefly of the favourites of Fortune and the Muse, of great generals, of first rate actors, of celebrated poets. These are at the head; we are struck with the glittering eminence on which they stand, and long to set out on the same tempting career, - not thinking how many discontented half-pay lieutenants are in vain seeking promotion all their lives, and obliged to put up with "the insolence of office, and the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes;" how many half-starved strolling players are doomed to penury and tattered robes in country places, dreaming to the last of a London engagement; how many wretched daubers shiver and shake in the ague-fit of alternate hopes and fears, waste and pine away in the atrophy of genius, or else turn drawing-masters, picture-cleaners, or newspaper-critics;[9] how many hapless poets have sighed out their souls to the Muse in vain, without ever getting their effusions farther known than the Poet's Corner of a country newspaper, and looked and looked with grudging, wistful eyes at the envious horizon that bounded their provincial fame! - Suppose an actor, for instance, "after the heart-aches and the thousand natural pangs that flesh is heir to," does get at the top of his profession, he can no longer bear a rival near the throne; to be second or only equal to another, is to be nothing: he starts at the prospect of a successor, and retains the mimic sceptre with a convulsive grasp: perhaps as he is about to seize the first place which he has long had in his eye, an unsuspected competitor steps in before him, and carries off the prize, leaving him to commence his irksome toil again. He is in a state of alarm at every appearance or rumour of the appearance of a new actor: "a mouse that takes up its lodging in a cat's ear"[10] has a mansion of peace to him: he dreads every hint of an objection, and least

of all, can forgive praise mingled with censure: to doubt is to insult; to discriminate is to degrade: he dare hardly look into a criticism unless some one has tasted it for him, to see that there is no offence in it: if he does not draw crowded houses every night, he can neither eat nor sleep; or if all these terrible inflictions are removed, and he can "eat his meal in peace," he then becomes surfeited with applause and dissatisfied with his profession: he wants to be something else, to be distinguished as an author, a collector, a classical scholar, a man of sense and information, and weighs every word he utters, and half retracts it before he utters it, lest if he were to make the smallest slip of the tongue, it should get buzzed abroad that Mr. --- was only clever as an actor! If ever there was a man who did not derive more pain than pleasure from his vanity that man, says Rousseau, was no other than a fool. A country gentleman near Taunton spent his whole life in making some hundreds of wretched copies of second-rate pictures,[11] which were bought up at his death by a neighbouring Baronet, to whom

"Some Demon whisper'd, L---, have a taste!"

A little Wilson [12] in an obscure corner escaped the man of virtu, and was carried off by a Bristol picture-dealer for three guineas, while the muddled copies of the owner of the mansion (with the frames) fetched thirty, forty, sixty, a hundred ducats a piece. A friend of mine found a very fine Canaletti [13] in a state of strange disfigurement, with the upper part of the sky smeared over and fantastically variegated with English clouds; and on inquiring of person to whom it belonged whether something had not been done to it, received for answer "that a gentleman, a great artist in the neighbourhood, had retouched some parts of it." What infatuation! Yet this candidate for the honours of the pencil might probably have made a jovial fox-hunter or respectable justice of the peace if he could only have stuck to what nature and fortune intended him for. Miss --- can by no means be persuaded to quit the boards of the theatre at ---, a little country town in the West of England. Her salary has been abridged, her person ridiculed, her acting laughed at; nothing will serve - she is determined to be an actress, and scorns to return to her former business as a milliner. Shall I go on! An actor in the same company was visited by the apothecary of the place in an ague-fit, who on asking his landlady as to his way of life, was told that the poor gentleman was very quiet and gave little trouble, that he generally had a plate of mashed potatoes for his dinner, and lay in bed most of his time, repeating his part. A young couple, every way amiable and deserving, were to have been married, and a benefit-play was bespoke by the officers of the regiment quartered there, to defray the expense of a license and of the wedding-ring, but the profits of the night did not amount to the necessary sum, and they have, I fear, "virgined it e'er since!" Oh for the pencil of Hogarth or Wilkie [14] to give a view of the comic strength of the company at ---, drawn up in battle-array in the

Clandestine Marriage, with a coup d'oeil of the pit, boxes, and gallery, to cure for ever the love of the ideal, and the desire to shine and make holiday in the eyes of others, instead of retiring within ourselves and keeping our wishes and our thoughts at home! - Even in the common affairs of life, in love, friendship, and marriage, how little security have we when we trust our happiness in the hands of others! Most of the friends I have seen have turned out the bitterest enemies or cold, uncomfortable acquaintance. Old companions are like meats served up too often, that lose their relish and their wholesomeness. He who looks at beauty to admire, to adore it, who reads of its wondrous power in novels, in poems, or in plays, is not unwise: but let no man fall in love, for from that moment he is "the baby of a girl."[15] I like very well to repeat such lines as these in the play of Mirandola [16] –

---"With what a waving air she goes
Along the corridor! How like a fawn!
Yet statelier. Hark! No sound, however soft,
Nor gentlest echo telleth when she treads,
But every motion of her shape doth seem
Hallowed by silence" ---

But however beautiful the description, defend me from meeting with the original!

"The fly that sips treacle
Is lost in the sweets;
So he that tastes woman
Ruin meets."

The song is Gay's,[17] not mine, and a bitter-sweet it is. - How few out of the infinite number of those that marry and are given in marriage wed with those they would prefer to all the world! nay, how far the greater proportion are joined together by mere motives of convenience, accident, recommendation of friends, or indeed not unfrequently by the very fear of the event, by repugnance and a sort of fatal fascination! yet the tie is for life, not to be shaken off but with disgrace or death: a man no longer lives to himself, but is a body (as well as mind) chained to another, in spite of himself-

"Like life and death in disproportion met."

So Milton (perhaps from his own experience) makes Adam exclaim in the vehemence of his despair,

---"For either
He never shall find out fit mate, but such
As some misfortune brings him or mistake
Or whom he wishes most shall seldom gain
Through her perverseness, but shall see her gain'd
By a far worse; or if she love, withheld
By parents; or his happiest choice too late
Shall meet, already link'd and wedlock-bound
To a fell adversary, his hate and shame;
Which infinite calamity shall cause
To human life, and household peace confound."

If love at first sight were mutual, or to be conciliated by kind offices; if the fondest affection were not so often repaid and chilled by indifference and scorn; if so many lovers both before and since the madman in Don Quixote had not "worshipped a statue, hunted the wind, cried aloud in the desert;" if friendship were lasting; if merit were renown, and renown were health, riches, and long life; or if the homage of the world were paid to conscious worth and the true aspirations after excellence, instead of its gaudy signs and outward trappings; then indeed I might be of opinion that it is better to live to others than one's-self; but as the case stands, I incline to the negative side of the question.[18]

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me;
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bow'd
To its idolatries a patient knee -
Nor coin'd my cheek to smiles - nor cried aloud
In worship of an echo; in the crowd
They could not deem me one of such; I stood
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,
Had I not filled my mind which thus itself subdued.
I have not loved the world, nor the world me -
But let us part fair foes; I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be
Words which are things - hopes which will not
deceive,

And virtues which are merciful nor weave
Snares for the failing: I would also deem
O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve;
That two, or one, are almost what they seem -
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream."

Sweet verse embalms the spirit of sour misanthropy: but woe betide the ignoble prose-writer who should thus dare to compare notes with the world, or tax it roundly with imposture.[19]

If I had sufficient provocation to rail at the public, as Ben Jonson did at the audience in the Prologues to his plays, I think I should do it in good set terms, nearly as follows: -There is not a more mean, stupid, dastardly, pitiful, selfish, spiteful, envious, ungrateful animal than the Public. It is the greatest of cowards, for it is afraid of itself. From its unwieldy, overgrown dimensions, it dreads the least opposition to it, and shakes like isinglass at the touch of a finger. It starts at its own shadow, like the man in the Hartz mountains, and trembles at the mention of its own name. It has a lion's mouth, the heart of a hare, with ears erect and sleepless eyes. It stands "listening its fears." It is so in awe of its own opinion, that it never dares to form any, but catches up the first idle rumour, lest it should be behindhand in its judgement, and echoes it till it is deafened with the sound of its own voice. The idea of what the public will think prevents the public from ever thinking at all, and acts as a spell on the exercise of private judgement, so that in short the public ear is at the mercy of the first impudent pretender who chooses to fill it with noisy assertion, or false surmise, or secret whispers. What is said by one is heard by all; the supposition that a thing is known to all the world makes all the world believe it, and the hollow repetition of a vague report drowns the "still, small voice" of reason. We may believe or know that what is said is not true: but we know or fancy that others believe it - we dare not contradict or are too indolent to dispute with them, and therefore give up our internal, and as we thing, our solitary conviction to a sound without substance, without proof, and often without meaning. Nay more, we may believe and know not only that a thing is false, but that others believe and know it to be so, that they are quite as much in the secret of the imposture as we are, that they see the puppets at work, the nature of the machinery, and yet if any one has the art or power to get the management of it, he shall keep possession of the public ear by virtue of a cant phrase or nickname; and by dint of effrontery and perseverance make all the world believe and repeat what all the world know to be false. The ear is quicker than the judgement. We know that certain things are said; by that circumstance alone, we know that they produce a certain effect on the imagination of others, and we conform to their prejudices by mechanical sympathy, and for want of sufficient spirit to differ with them. So far then is public opinion from resting on a broad and solid

base, as the aggregate of thought and feeling in a community, that it is slight and shallow and variable to the last degree - the bubble of the moment; so that we may safely say the public is the dupe of public opinion, not its parent. The public is pusillanimous and cowardly, because it is weak. It knows itself to be a great duce, and that it has no opinions but upon suggestion. Yet it is unwilling to appear in leadingstrings, and would have it though that its decisions are as wise as they are weighty. It is hasty in taking up its favourites, more hasty in laying them aside, lest it should be deficient in sagacity in either case. It is generally divided into two strong parties, each of which will allow neither common sense nor common honesty to the other side. It reads the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews,20 and believes them both - or if there is a doubt malice turns the scale. Taylor and Hessey told me that they had sold nearly two editions of the Characters of Shakespear's Plays 21 in about three months, but that after the Quarterly Review of them came out, they never sold another copy. The public, enlightened as they are, must have known the meaning of that attack as well as those who made it. It was not ignorance then but cowardice, that led them to give up their own opinion. A crew of mischievous critics at Edinburgh having affixed the epithet of the Cockney School 22 to one or two writers born in the metropolis, all the people in London became afraid of looking into their works, lest they too should be convicted of cockneyism. Oh, brave public! This epithet proved too much for one of the writers in question, and stuck like a barbed arrow in his heart. Poor Keats! What was sport to the town was death to him. Young, sensitive, delicate, he was like

> "A bud bit by an envious worm,
> Ere he could spread his sweet leaves to the air
> Or dedicate his beauty to the sun" -[23]

and unable to endure the miscreant cry and idiot laugh, withdrew to sigh his last breath in foreign climes.[24] The public is as envious and ungrateful as it is ignorant, stupid, and pigeon-livered -

> "A huge-sized monster of ingratitudes."[25]

It reads, it admires, it extols only because it is the fashion, not from any love of the subject or the man. It cries you up or runs you down out of mere caprice and levity. If you have pleased it, it is jealous of its own involuntary acknowledgment of merit, and seizes the first opportunity, the first shabby pretext, to pick a quarrel with you, and be quits once more. Every petty caviller is erected into a judge, every tale-bearer is implicitly believed. Every little low paltry creature that gaped and wondered, only because others did so, is glad to find you (as he thinks) on a level with himself. An author is not then, after all, a being of another order. Public admiration is forced, and goes against

the grain. Public obloquy is cordial and sincere: every individual feels his won importance in it. They give you up bound hand and foot into the power of your accusers. To attempt to defend yourself is a high crime and misdemeanour, a contempt of court, an extreme piece of impertinence. Or if you prove every charge unfounded, they never think of retracing their error, or making you amends. It would be a compromise of their dignity; they consider themselves as the party injured, and resent your innocence as an imputation on their judgement. The celebrated Bub Doddington, when out of favour at court, said "he would not justify before his sovereign: it was for Majesty to be displeased, and for him to believe himself in the wrong!" The public are not quite so modest. People already begin to talk of the Scotch Novels as overrated. How then can common authors be supposed to keep their heads long above water? As a general rule, all those who live by the public starve, and are made a bye-word and a standing jest into the bargain. Posterity is no better (not a bit more enlightened or more liberal), except that you are no longer in their power, and that the voice of common fame saves them the trouble of deciding on your claims. The public now are the posterity of Milton and Shakespear. Our posterity will be the living public of a future generation. When a man is dead, they put money in his coffin, erect monuments to his memory, and celebrate the anniversary of his birthday in set speeches. Would they take any notice of him if he were living? No! -I was complaining of this to a Scotchman who had been attending a dinner and a subscription to raise a monument to Burns. He replied he would sooner subscribe twenty pounds to his monument than have given it him while living; so that if the poet were to come to life again, he would treat him just as he was treated in fact. This was an honest Scotchman. What he said, the rest would do.

Enough: my soul, turn from them, and let me try to regain the obscurity and quiet that I love, "far from the madding strife," in some sequestered corner of my own, or in some far-distant land! In the latter case, I might carry with me as a consolation the passage in Bolingbroke's Reflections on Exile,[26] in which he describes in glowing colours the resources which a man may always find within himself, and which the world cannot deprive him:-

"Believe me, the providence of God has established such an order in the world, that of all which belongs to us, the least valuable parts can alone fall under the will of others. Whatever is best is safest; lies out of the reach of human power; can neither be given nor taken away. Such is this great and beautiful work of nature, the world. Such is the mind of man, which contemplates and admires the world whereof it makes the noblest part. These are inseparably ours, and as long as we remain in one, we shall enjoy the other. Let us march therefore intrepidly wherever we are led by the course of human accidents. Wherever they lead us, on what coast soever we are thrown by them, we shall not find ourselves absolutely strangers. We shall feel the same revolution of seasons, and the same sun

and moon will guide the course of our year. The same azure vault, bespangled with stars, will be everywhere spread over our heads. There is no part of the world from whence we may not admire those planets which roll, like ours, if different orbits round the same central sun; from whence we may not discover an object sill more stupendous, that army of fixed stars hung up in the immense space of the universe, innumerable suns whose beams enlighten and cherish the unknown world which roll around them: and whilst I am ravished by such contemplations as these, whilst my soul is thus raised up to heaven, it imports me little what ground I tread upon."

NOTES:

1 Hazlitt would have been 43 years of age.

2 Sir Charles Grandison was Samuel Richardson's (1689-1761) third novel, Sir Charles is an ideal 18th century gentleman. Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded was his first work. Richardson, a printer by trade, brought out Pamela in 1740; it is represented to be the first English novel (Benet's, Reader's Encyclopedia; 3rd Ed.; (Harper & Row, 1987). Pamela was a maidservant who resists the seductive methods of her mistresses' son, she convinces him first to marry her; she then sets out to reform him. It seems that Richardson's novel was a publishing success, for, in 1748, he brings out a greater success, his masterpiece; Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady. It is the longest novel in the English language. Clarissa Harlowe, in defying her tyrannical family, refuses to marry their choice, Mr. Solmes, a man she despises. Instead, Clarissa runs off with Robert Lovelace, a person of whom the family disapproves. Soon Clarissa comes to believe that all Lovelace wants is her body, at any rate, she "retires to a solitary dwelling, and dies of grief and shame." (Before the novel ends, of course, the cruel Lovelace is killed in a duel.) Sir Charles Grandison was the counterpart of Clarissa Harlowe.

3 Reminds me of what Sir Isaac Newton (1642Ã„1727) said: "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

4 My reaction to this line is that maybe Hazlitt was a bit envious to the successful authors of the time, Wordsworth being one. A printer's devil would be the errand boy sent around to the author's house to pick up the written work, to be hurriedly brought back and laid up in print. Here, obviously, Hazlitt refers to the writer's curse: the publisher's deadline.

5 This must be William Nicholson (1753-1815), the waterworks engineer from Portsmouth who invented the hydrometer. In addition, among other things, he, with others, Nicholson constructed the first voltaic and discovered how through electrolysis water could be broken down into its constituent parts: oxygen and hydrogen, a most marvelous event. Nicholson compiled a dictionary in 1808, a Dictionary of Practical and Theoretical Chemistry.

6 Well, Hazlitt, did too, have a wife and child. He and Sarah Stoddart were married in 1808, and a son, who survived him, was born in 1811. Sarah's family owned property at Winterslow, and Hazlitt and his new wife moved into "one of her cottages" just after their marriage in 1808. In 1812, the Hazlitt family, financially in bad straights, moved up to London, Hazlitt having obtained a job (with the help of his friend Charles Lamb) as a reporter for the Morning Chronicle. In 1819, Hazlitt separated from his family and returned to reside at Winterslow. He did not occupy his wife's cottage, it having been rented by her brother, but rather he stayed at Winterslow Hut, an ancient inn (still there, Margo and I have been shown the room Hazlitt rented). This essay, written in 1821, was written at Winterslow Hut. In 1822, William and Sarah were divorced in Scotland (a country where divorces were not difficult, legally speaking, to obtain.

7 This be, I imagine, Oliver Goldsmith (1731-1774), the author of the Vicar of Wakefield (1766).

8 Here Hazlitt quotes from Shakespeare, Cymberline (Act 3, Scene 3). Belarius begins these lines with "... the art of the Court, As hard to leave as to keep -- Whose top to climb ..."

9 Hazlitt was a student of the painting art and turned to the business of being a newspaper critic.

10 (Webster's Duchess of Malfy.) I have placed Hazlitt's original footnotes in parenthesis. Hazlitt, it should be noted was an expert when it came to Elizabethan writers; John Webster (1580?-1625?) was an Elizabethan dramatist.

11 Hazlitt, in his early and short career as a painter, went to Paris, in 1802, and, while there, made copies of first-rate pictures, Titians; he was enchanted by the light which the old masters managed to show in their works.

12 Here, doubtlessly, Hazlitt writes of Richard Wilson (1714-1782), a British landscape artist; Wilson anticipated Gainsborough (1727-1788) and Constable (1776-1837) when he left abandoned "strait-laced classicism for a lyrical freedom of style." [Chambers Biographical Dictionary; (Edinburgh, 1990).]

13 Here Hazlitt is likely referring to Canaletto (1697-1768), the Venetian painter.

14 As for Hogarth (1697-1764), I need say little; as for Wilkie, -- well, this would be Sir David Wilke (1785-1841); his early work, for which he was best known, are drawings much in the same vain as Hogarth. Wilkie's The Village Politicians (1806) earned him his reputation, and soon he took up residence in London, -- he was from Scotland. "His fame rests on such genre pictures as the Card Players, Village Festival, Reading the Will, &c.

15 Shakespeare, from Macbeth.

16 Pico Della Mirandola (1493-1494).

17 John Gay (1645-1732), an English poet.

18 (Shenstone and Gray were two men, one of whom pretended to live to himself, and the other really did so. Gray shrunk from the public gaze (he did not even like his portrait to be prefixed to his works) into his own thoughts and indolent musings; Shenstone affected privacy that he might be sought out by the world; the one courted retirement in order to enjoy leisure and repose, as the other coquetted with it merely to be interrupted with the importance of visitors and the flatteries of absent friends.) These two writers, to whom Hazlitt refers, are William Shenstone (1714-63) and Thomas Gray (1716-71). Gray was one of the greatest of English poets; he wrote, you will recall, the poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard."

19 Hazlitt, as one will soon realize upon reading him and about him, was a bitter man, both as to friendship and as to love. Few of Hazlitt's friends, if he ever he had any to begin with, hung in; Wordsworth and his circle avoided him; Charles Lamb, likely, was the only true friend that Hazlitt ever had, and even their relationship at times was strained. Beside his wife, and a certain Miss Walker, it is not likely that Hazlitt had much experience with love; and with these two he did not have much luck. As for his wife, Sarah: he divorced her in 1822. In was in August of 1820 (he wrote this essay in January of 1821) Hazlitt became infatuated with Miss Walker. She was a tailor's daughter whose mother kept a lodging-house in the Southhampton Buildings, a place in London, where, at the time, Hazlitt resided. Miss Walker might have teased Hazlitt somewhat at first, but really she was not interested and nothing came of it. Hazlitt became quite besotted, as his book, Liber Amoris (LONDON: The Hogarth Press, 1985), will show; by it (written in 1823) he discloses himself as a rather lovesick writer.

20 The Quarterly and Edinburgh Review were on opposite ends of the political spectrum: the Quarterly Review was for the establishment; the Edinburgh Review was for reform. The Edinburgh Review was set up, with Sydney Smith (1771Ã„1845) and others, in 1802, by the great law reformer, Henry Brougham (1778-1868). While Hazlitt wrote mainly for the London periodicals, the Champion and the Examiner (Leigh Hunt's magazine), he did contribute to others, including the Edinburgh Review. The Quarterly Review, at the time Hazlitt wrote this essay, 1821 had an

editor (1809-24) by the name of William Gifford (1756-1826) who was Hazlitt's Nemesis. Gifford, as a critic, "was unduly biased." (Chambers.) "The ferocity of Gifford was entirely due to the fact that he regarded Hazlitt as a sour Jacobinical fellow who was against the government. ... [Hazlitt] became one of the favourite marks of their [the fellows of the Quarterly and Blackwood magazines] goat-footed merriment. [In fact, Edinburgh Review became a pre-eminent journal and to be writing anything for it, turned out for any author to be a professional and social hall-mark.] Hazlitt, if Mr. Patmore is to be believed, was driven almost mad by these Yahoos; and it may be that the irregularities and coarse excesses of this period of his life may be in part attributed to an unhinging of the mind occasioned by repeated personal abuse." [Augustine Birrell, (1850-1933); William Hazlitt (1902); (LONDON: MacMillan, 1902).] Hazlitt, in fact, in 1818, brought on a libel suit against both the Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.

21 Characters of Shakespear's Plays was a book which Hazlitt brought out in 1817, and which, it would appear, was panned by Quarterly Review.

22 (Charles Lamb, John Keats, Leigh Hunt, and the Author. --- Ed.) This was a footnote placed by the editors of the George Bell and Son edition, 1910, of Table Talk.

23 Again Hazlitt quotes from Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet (Act 1, Scene 1).

24 Hazlitt would have just received news of the young poet's death. John Keats (1795-1821) was born in London, the son of a livery-stablekeeper. Keats studied medicine but abandoned it, devoting himself to poetry. He sailed from London for Italy in 1820, and died of consumption at Rome in February 1821. Keats was a student of Hazlitt, in 1818 he attended lectures which Hazlitt was giving at the Surrey Institution, London, -- On The English Poets. "I went last Tuesday, an hour too late, to Hazlitt's Lecture on Poetry, got there just as they were coming out, when all these pounced on me - Hazlitt, John Hunt ..., aye and more. ... Sunday I dined with Hazlitt and Haydon [the painter, Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846)]." [From a letter by Keats to one of his brothers, as quoted by P. P. Howe, The Life of William Hazlitt (1922); (Penguin Books, 1949) at p. 248.]

25 Shakespeare again, Ulysses speaks, "A great-siz'd monster of ingratitudes." (Troilus & Cressida, Act 3, Scene 3.)

26 Bolingbroke (1678-1751) was an English statesman who, upon the death of Queen Anne in 1714, and because he supported the House of Stewart, fell out of favour as George I came to the English throne. Bolingbroke fled to France and there wrote his Reflections on Exile.

"On Thought and Action" [1]

Those persons who are much accustomed to abstract contemplation are generally unfitted for active pursuits, and vice versa. I myself am sufficiently decided and dogmatical in my opinions, and yet in action I am as imbecile as a woman or a child. I cannot set about the most indifferent thing without twenty efforts, and had rather write one of these Essays than have to seal a letter. In trying to throw a hat or a book upon a table, I miss it; it just reaches the edge and falls back again, and instead of doing what I mean to perform, I do what I intend to avoid. Thought depends on the habitual exercise of the speculative faculties; action, on the determination of the will. The one assigns reasons for things, the other puts causes into act. Abraham Tucker relates of a friend of his, an old special pleader, that once coming out of his chambers in the Temple with him to take a walk, he hesitated at the bottom of the stairs which way to go -- proposed different directions, to Charing Cross, to St. Paul's -- found some objection to them all, and at last turned back for want of a casting motive to incline the scale. Tucker gives this as an instance of professional indecision, or of that temper of mind which having been long used to weigh the reasons for things with scrupulous exactness, could not come to any conclusion at all on the spur of the occasion, or without some grave distinction to justify its choice. Louvet in his Narrative tells us, that when several of the Brisotin party were collected at the house of Barbaroux (I think it was) ready to effect their escape from the power of Robespierre, one of them going to the window and finding a shower of rain coming on, seriously advised their stopping till the next morning, for that the emissaries of government would not think of coming in search of them in such bad weather. Some of them deliberated on this wise proposal, and were nearly taken. Such is the effeminacy of the speculative and philosophical temperament, compared with the promptness and vigour of the practical! It is on such unequal terms that the refined and romantic speculators on possible good and evil contend with their strong-nerved, remorseless adversaries, and we see the result. Reasoners in general are undecided, wavering, and sceptical, or yield at last to the weakest motive as most congenial to their feeble habit of soul.[2]

Some men are mere machines. They are put in a go-cart of business, and are harnessed to a profession -- yoked to Fortune's wheels. They plod on, and succeed. Their affairs conduct them, not they their affairs. All they have to do is to let things take their course, and not go out of the beaten road. A man may carry on the business of farming on the same spot and principle that his ancestors have done for many generations before him without any extraordinary share of capacity: the proof is, it is done every day, in every county and parish in the kingdom. All that is necessary is that he should not pretend to be wiser than his neighbours. If he has a grain more wit or penetration than they, if his vanity gets the start of his avarice only half a neck, if he has ever thought or read anything upon

the subject, it will most probably be the ruin of him. He will turn theoretical or experimental farmer, and no more need be said. Mr. Cobbett, who is a sufficiently shrewd and practical man, with an eye also to the main chance, had got some notions in his head (from Tull's Husbandry) about the method of sowing turnips, to which he would have sacrificed not only his estate at Botley, but his native county of Hampshire itself, sooner than give up an inch of his argument. 'Tut! will you baulk a man in the career of his humour?' Therefore, that a man may not be ruined by his humours, he should be too dull and phlegmatic to have any: he must have 'no figures nor no fantasies which busy thought draws in the brains of men.' The fact is, that the ingenuity or judgment of no one man is equal to that of the world at large, which is the fruit of the experience and ability of all mankind. Even where a man is right in a particular notion, he will be apt to overrate the importance of his discovery, to the detriment of his affairs. Action requires co-operation, but in general if you set your face against custom, people will set their faces against you. They cannot tell whether you are right or wrong, but they know that you are guilty of a pragmatical assumption of superiority over them which they do not like. There is no doubt that if a person two hundred years ago had foreseen and attempted to put in practice the most approved and successful methods of cultivation now in use, it would have been a death-blow to his credit and fortune. So that though the experiments and improvements of private individuals from time to time gradually go to enrich the public stock of information and reform the general practice, they are mostly the ruin of the person who makes them, because he takes a part for the whole, and lays more stress upon the single point in which he has found others in the wrong than on all the rest in which they are substantially and prescriptively in the right. The great requisite, it should appear, then, for the prosperous management of ordinary business is the want of imagination, or of any ideas but those of custom and interest on the narrowest scale; and as the affairs of the world are necessarily carried on by the common run of its inhabitants, it seems a wise dispensation of Providence that it should be so. If no one could rent a piece of glebe-land without a genius for mechanical inventions, or stand behind a counter without a large benevolence of soul, what would become of the commercial and agricultural interests of this great (and once flourishing) country? -- I would not be understood as saying that there is not what may be called a genius for business, an extraordinary capacity for affairs, quickness and comprehension united, an insight into character, an acquaintance with a number of particular circumstances, a variety of expedients, a tact for finding out what will do: I grant all this (in Liverpool and Manchester they would persuade you that your merchant and manufacturer is your only gentleman and scholar) -- but still, making every allowance for the difference between the liberal trader and the sneaking shopkeeper, I doubt whether the most surprising success is to be accounted for from any such unusual attainments, or whether a man's making half a million of

money is a proof of his capacity for thought in general. It is much oftener owing to views and wishes bounded but constantly directed to one particular object. To succeed, a man should aim only at success. The child of Fortune should resign himself into the hands of Fortune. A plotting head frequently overreaches itself: a mind confident of its resources and calculating powers enters on critical speculations, which in a game depending so much on chance and unforeseen events, and not entirely on intellectual skill, turn the odds greatly against any one in the long run. The rule of business is to take what you can get, and keep what you have got; or an eagerness in seizing every opportunity that offers for promoting your own interest, and a plodding, persevering industry in making the most of the advantages you have already obtained, are the most effectual as well as the safest ingredients in the composition of the mercantile character. The world is a book in which the Chapter of Accidents is none of the least considerable; or it is a machine that must be left, in a great measure, to turn itself. The most that a worldly-minded man can do is to stand at the receipt of custom, and be constantly on the lookout for windfalls. The true devotee in this way waits for the revelations of Fortune as the poet waits for the inspiration of the Muse, and does not rashly anticipate her favours. He must be neither capricious nor wilful. I have known people untrammelled in the ways of business, but with so intense an apprehension of their own interest, that they would grasp at the slightest possibility of gain as a certainty, and were led into as many mistakes by an overgriping, usurious disposition as they could have been by the most thoughtless extravagance. -- We hear a great outcry about the want of judgment in men of genius. It is not a want of judgment, but an excess of other things. They err knowingly, and are wilfully blind. The understanding is out of the question. The profound judgment which soberer people pique themselves upon is in truth a want of passion and imagination. Give them an interest in anything, a sudden fancy, a bait for their favourite foible, and who so besotted as they? Stir their feelings, and farewell to their prudence! The understanding operates as a motive to action only in the silence of the passions. I have heard people of a sanguine temperament reproached with betting according to their wishes, instead of their opinion who should win; and I have seen those who reproached them do the very same thing the instant their own vanity or prejudices are concerned. The most mechanical people, once thrown off their balance, are the most extravagant and fantastical. What passion is there so unmeaning and irrational as avarice itself? The Dutch went mad for tulips, and ---- ---- for love! To return to what was said a little way back, a question might be started, whether as thought relates to the whole circumference of things and interests, and business is confined to a very small part of them, viz. to a knowledge of a man's own affairs and the making of his own fortune, whether a talent for the latter will not generally exist in proportion to the narrowness and grossness of his ideas, nothing drawing his attention out of his own sphere, or giving him an interest except in those things which he can

realise and bring home to himself in the most undoubted shape? To the man of business all the world is a fable but the Stock Exchange: to the money-getter nothing has a real existence that he cannot convert into a tangible feeling, that he does not recognise as property, that he cannot 'measure with a two-foot rule or count upon ten fingers.' The want of thought, of imagination, drives the practical man upon immediate realities: to the poet or philosopher all is real and interesting that is true or possible, that can reach in its consequences to others, or be made a subject of curious speculation to himself!

But is it right, then, to judge of action by the quantity of thought implied in it, any more than it would be to condemn a life of contemplation for being inactive? Or has not everything a source and principle of its own, to which we should refer it, and not to the principles of other things? He who succeeds in any pursuit in which others fail may be presumed to have qualities of some sort or other which they are without. If he has not brilliant wit, he may have solid sense; if he has not subtlety of understanding, he may have energy and firmness of purpose; if he has only a few advantages, he may have modesty and prudence to make the most of what he possesses. Propriety is one great matter in the conduct of life; which, though, like a graceful carriage of the body, it is neither definable nor striking at first sight, is the result of finely balanced feelings, and lends a secret strength and charm to the whole character.

> -- Quicquid agit, quoquo vestigia vertit,
> Componit furtim, subsequiturque decor.

There are more ways than one in which the various faculties of the mind may unfold themselves. Neither words nor ideas reducible to words constitute the utmost limit of human capacity. Man is not a merely talking nor a merely reasoning animal. Let us then take him as he is, instead of 'curtailing him of nature's fair proportions' to suit our previous notions. Doubtless, there are great characters both in active and contemplative life. There have been heroes as well as sages, legislators and founders of religion, historians and able statesmen and generals, inventors of useful arts and instruments and explorers of undiscovered countries, as well as writers and readers of books. It will not do to set all these aside under any fastidious or pedantic distinction. Comparisons are odious, because they are impertinent, and lead only to the discovery of defects by making one thing the standard of another which has no relation to it. If, as some one proposed, we were to institute an inquiry, 'Which was the greatest man, Milton or Cromwell, Buonaparte or Rubens?' we should have all the authors and artists on one side, and all the military men and the whole diplomatic body on the other, who would set to work with all their might to pull in pieces the idol of the other party,

and the longer the dispute continued, the more would each grow dissatisfied with his favourite, though determined to allow no merit to any one else. The mind is not well competent to take in the full impression of more than one style of excellence or one extraordinary character at once; contradictory claims puzzle and stupefy it; and however admirable any individual may be in himself and unrivalled in his particular way, yet if we try him by others in a totally opposite class, that is, if we consider not what he was but what he was not, he will be found to be nothing. We do not reckon up the excellences on either side, for then these would satisfy the mind and put an end to the comparison: we have no way of exclusively setting up our favourite but by running down his supposed rival; and for the gorgeous hues of Rubens, the lofty conceptions of Milton, the deep policy and cautious daring of Cromwell, or the dazzling exploits and fatal ambition of the modern chieftain, the poet is transformed into a pedant, the artist sinks into a mechanic, the politician turns out no better than a knave, and the hero is exalted into a madman. It is as easy to get the start of our antagonist in argument by frivolous and vexatious objections to one side of the question as it is difficult to do full and heaped justice to the other. If I am asked which is the greatest of those who have been the greatest in different ways, I answer, the one that we happen to be thinking of at the time; for while that is the case, we can conceive of nothing higher. If there is a propensity in the vulgar to admire the achievements of personal prowess or instances of fortunate enterprise too much, it cannot be denied that those who have to weigh out and dispense the meed of fame in books have been too much disposed, by a natural bias, to confine all merit and talent to the productions of the pen, or at least to those works which, being artificial or abstract representations of things, are transmitted to posterity, and cried up as models in their kind. This, though unavoidable, is hardly just. Actions pass away and are forgotten, or are only discernible in their effects; conquerors, statesmen, and kings live but by their names stamped on the page of history. Hume says rightly that more people think about Virgil and Homer (and that continually) than ever trouble their heads about Caesar or Alexander. In fact, poets are a longer-lived race than heroes: they breathe more of the air of immortality. They survive more entire in their thoughts and acts. We have all that Virgil or Homer did, as much as if we had lived at the same time with them: we can hold their works in our hands, or lay them on our pillows, or put them to our lips. Scarcely a trace of what the others did is left upon the earth, so as to be visible to common eyes. The one, the dead authors, are living men, still breathing and moving in their writings. The others, the conquerors of the world, are but the ashes in an urn. The sympathy (so to speak) between thought and thought is more intimate and vital than that between thought and action. Thought is linked to thought as flame kindles into flame: the tribute of admiration to the manes of departed heroism is like burning incense in a marble monument. Words, ideas, feelings, with the progress of time harden into substances: things, bodies,

actions, moulder away, or melt into a sound, into thin air! -- Yet though the Schoolmen in the Middle Ages disputed more about the texts of Aristotle than the battle of Arbela, perhaps Alexander's Generals in his lifetime admired his pupil as much and liked him better. For not only a man's actions are effaced and vanish with him; his virtues and generous qualities die with him also: his intellect only is immortal and bequeathed unimpaired to posterity. Words are the only things that last for ever.

If, however, the empire of words and general knowledge is more durable in proportion as it is abstracted and attenuated, it is less immediate and dazzling: if authors are as good after they are dead as when they were living, while living they might as well be dead: and moreover with respect to actual ability, to write a book is not the only proof of taste, sense, or spirit, as pedants would have us suppose. To do anything well, to paint a picture, to fight a battle, to make a plough or a threshing-machine, requires, one would think, as much skill and judgment as to talk about or write a description of it when done. Words are universal, intelligible signs, but they are not the only real, existing things. Did not Julius Caesar show himself as much of a man in conducting his campaigns as in composing his Commentaries? Or was the Retreat of the Ten Thousand under Xenophon, or his work of that name, the most consummate performance? Or would not Lovelace, supposing him to have existed and to have conceived and executed all his fine stratagems on the spur of the occasion, have been as clever a fellow as Richardson, who invented them in cold blood? If to conceive and describe an heroic character is the height of a literary ambition, we can hardly make it out that to be and to do all that the wit of man can feign is nothing. To use means to ends; to set causes in motion; to wield the machine of society; to subject the wills of others to your own; to manage abler men than yourself by means of that which is stronger in them than their wisdom, viz. their weakness and their folly; to calculate the resistance of ignorance and prejudice to your designs, and by obviating, to turn them to account; to foresee a long, obscure, and complicated train of events, of chances and openings of success; to unwind the web of others' policy and weave your own out of it; to judge of the effects of things, not in the abstract, but with reference to all their bearings, ramifications, and impediments; to understand character thoroughly; to see latent talent or lurking treachery; to know mankind for what they are, and use them as they deserve; to have a purpose steadily in view, and to effect it after removing every obstacle; to master others and be true to yourself, asks power and knowledge, both nerves and brain.

Such is the sort of talent that may be shown and that has been possessed by the great leaders on the stage of the world. To accomplish great things argues, I imagine, great resolution: to design great things implies no common mind. Ambition is in some sort genius. Though I would rather wear out

my life in arguing a broad speculative question than in caballing for the election to a wardmote, or canvassing for votes in a rotten borough, yet I should think that the loftiest Epicurean philosopher might descend from his punctilio to identify himself with the support of a great principle, or to prop a falling state. This is what the legislators and founders of empire did of old; and the permanence of their institutions showed the depth of the principles from which they emanated. A tragic poem is not the worse for acting well: if it will not bear this test it savours of effeminacy. Well-digested schemes will stand the touchstone of experience. Great thoughts reduced to practice become great acts. Again, great acts grow out of great occasions, and great occasions spring from great principles, working changes in society, and tearing it up by the roots. But I still conceive that a genius for actions depends essentially on the strength of the will rather than on that of the understanding; that the long-headed calculation of causes and consequences arises from the energy of the first cause, which is the will setting others in motion and prepared to anticipate the results; that its sagacity is activity delighting in meeting difficulties and adventures more than half-way, and its wisdom courage not to shrink from danger, but to redouble its efforts with opposition. Its humanity, if it has much, is magnanimity to spare the vanquished, exulting in power but not prone to mischief, with good sense enough to be aware of the instability of fortune, and with some regard to reputation. What may serve as a criterion to try this question by is the following consideration, that we sometimes find as remarkable a deficiency of the speculative faculty coupled with great strength of will and consequent success in active life as we do a want of voluntary power and total incapacity for business frequently joined to the highest mental qualifications. In some cases it will happen that 'to be wise is to be obstinate.' If you are deaf to reason but stick to your own purposes, you will tire others out, and bring them over to your way of thinking. Self-will and blind prejudice are the best defence of actual power and exclusive advantages. The forehead of the late king was not remarkable for the character of intellect, but the lower part of his face was expressive of strong passions and fixed resolution. Charles Fox had an animated, intelligent eye, and brilliant, elastic forehead (with a nose indicating fine taste), but the lower features were weak, unsettled, fluctuating, and without purchase -- it was in them the Whigs were defeated. What a fine iron binding Buonaparte had round his face, as if it bad been cased in steel! What sensibility about the mouth! What watchful penetration in the eye! What a smooth, unruffled forehead! Mr. Pitt, with little sunken eyes, had a high, retreating forehead, and a nose expressing pride and aspiring self-opinion: it was on that (with submission) that he suspended the decisions of the House of Commons and dangled the Opposition as he pleased. Lord Castlereagh is a man rather deficient than redundant in words and topics. He is not (any more than St. Augustine was, in the opinion of La Fontaine) so great a wit as Rabelais, nor is he so great a philosopher as Aristotle; but he has that in him which is not to be trifled with. He has

a noble mask of a face (not well filled up in the expression, which is relaxed and dormant) with a fine person and manner. On the strength of these he hazards his speeches in the House. He has also a knowledge of mankind, and of the composition of the House. He takes a thrust which he cannot parry on his shield -- is 'all tranquillity and smiles' under a volley of abuse, sees when to pay a compliment to a wavering antagonist, soothes the melting mood of his hearers, or gets up a speech full of indignation, and knows how to bestow his attentions on that great public body, whether he wheedles or bullies, so as to bring it to compliance. With a long reach of undefined purposes (the result of a temper too indolent for thought, too violent for repose) he has equal perseverance and pliancy in bringing his objects to pass. I would rather be Lord Castlereagh, as far as a sense of power is concerned (principle is out of the question), than such a man as Mr. Canning, who is a mere fluent sophist, and never knows the limit of discretion, or the effect which will be produced by what he says, except as far as florid common-places may be depended on. Buonaparte is referred by Mr. Coleridge to the class of active rather than of intellectual characters; and Cowley has left an invidious but splendid eulogy on Oliver Cromwell, which sets out on much the same principle. 'What,' he says, 'can be more extraordinary than that a person of mean birth, no fortune, no eminent qualities of body, which have sometimes, or of mind, which have often, raised men to the highest dignities, should have the courage to attempt, and the happiness to succeed in, so improbable a design as the destruction of one of the most ancient and most solidly-founded monarchies upon the earth? That he should have the power or boldness to put his prince and master to an open and infamous death; to banish that numerous and strongly-allied family; to do all this under the name and wages of a Parliament; to trample upon them too as he pleased, and spurn them out of doors when he grow weary of them; to raise up a new and unheard-of monster out of their ashes; to stifle that in the very infancy, and set up himself above all things that ever were called sovereign in England; to oppress all his enemies by arms, and all his friends afterwards by artifice; to serve all parties patiently for a while, and to command them victoriously at last; to overrun each corner of the three nations, and overcome with equal facility both the riches of the south and the poverty of the north; to be feared and courted by all foreign princes, and adopted a brother to the Gods of the earth; to call together Parliaments with a word of his pen, and scatter them again with the breath of his mouth; to be humbly and daily petitioned that be would please to be hired, at the rate of two millions a year, to be the master of those who had hired him before to be their servant; to have the estates and lives of three kingdoms as much at his disposal as was the little inheritance of his father, and to be as noble and liberal in the spending of them; and lastly (for there is no end of all the particulars of his glory), to bequeath all this with one word to his posterity; to die with peace at home, and triumph abroad; to be buried among kings, and with more than regal solemnity; and to leave a name behind him, not

to be extinguished but with the whole world; which as it is now too little for his praises, so might have been too for his conquests, if the short line of his human life could have been stretched out to the extent of his immortal designs!'

Cromwell was a bad speaker and a worse writer. Milton wrote his despatches for him in elegant and erudite Latin; and the pen of the one, like the sword of the other, was 'sharp and sweet.' We have not that union in modern times of the heroic and literary character which was common among the ancients. Julius Caesar and Xenophon recorded their own acts with equal clearness of style and modesty of temper. The Duke of Wellington (worse off than Cromwell) is obliged to get Mr. Mudford to write the History of his Life. Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Socrates were distinguished for their military prowess among their contemporaries, though now only remembered for what they did in poetry and philosophy. Cicero and Demosthenes, the two greatest orators of antiquity, appear to have been cowards: nor does Horace seem to give a very favourable picture of his martial achievements. But in general there was not that division in the labours of the mind and body among the Greeks and Romans that has been introduced among us either by the progress of civilisation or by a greater slowness and inaptitude of parts. The French, for instance, appear to unite a number of accomplishments, the literary character and the man of the world, better than we do. Among us, a scholar is almost another name for a pedant or a clown: it is not so with them. Their philosophers and wits went into the world and mingled in the society of the fair. Of this there needs no other proof than the spirited print of most of the great names in French literature, to whom Moliére is reading a comedy in the presence of the celebrated Ninon de l'Enclos. D'Alembert, one of the first mathematicians of his age, was a wit, a man of gallantry and letters. With us a learned man is absorbed in himself and some particular study, and minds nothing else. There is something ascetic and impracticable in his very constitution, and he answers to the description of the Monk in Spenser -

> From every work he challenged essoin
> For contemplation's sake.

Perhaps the superior importance attached to the institutions of religion, as well as the more abstracted and visionary nature of its objects, has led (as a general result) to a wider separation between thought and action in modern times.

Ambition is of a higher and more heroic strain than avarice. Its objects are nobler, and the means by which it attains its ends less mechanical.

Better be lord of them that riches have,

Than riches have myself, and be their servile slave.

The incentive to ambition is the love of power; the spur to avarice is either the fear of poverty or a strong desire of self-indulgence. The amassers of fortunes seem divided into two opposite classes -- lean, penurious-looking mortals, or jolly fellows who are determined to get possession of, because they want to enjoy, the good things of the world. The one have famine and a workhouse always before their eyes; the others, in the fulness of their persons and the robustness of their constitutions, seem to bespeak the reversion of a landed estate, rich acres, fat beeves, a substantial mansion, costly clothing, a chine and curkey, choice wines, and all other good things consonant to the wants and full-fed desires of their bodies. Such men charm fortune by the sleekness of their aspects and the goodly rotundity of their honest faces, as the others scare away poverty by their wan, meagre looks. The last starve themselves into riches by care and carking; the first eat, drink, and sleep their way into the good things of this life. The greatest number of warm men in the city are good, jolly follows. Look at Sir William -----. Callipash and callipee are written in his face: he rolls about his unwieldy bulk in a sea of turtle-soup. How many haunches of venison does he carry on his back! He is larded with jobs and contracts: he is stuffed and swelled out with layers of bank-notes and invitations to dinner! His face hangs out a flag of defiance to mischance: the roguish twinkle in his eye with which he lures half the city and beats Alderman ----- hollow, is a smile reflected from heaps of unsunned gold! Nature and Fortune are not so much at variance as to differ about this fellow. To enjoy the good the Gods provide us is to deserve it. Nature meant him for a Knight, Alderman, and City Member; and Fortune laughed to see the goodly person and prospects of the man![3] I am not, from certain early prejudices, much to admire the ostentatious marks of wealth (there are persons enough to admire them without me) -- but I confess, there is something in the look of the old banking-houses in Lombard Street, the posterns covered with mud, the doors opening sullenly and silently, the absence of all pretence, the darkness and the gloom within, the gleaming of lamps in the day-time,

Like a faint shadow of uncertain light,

that almost realises the poetical conception of the cave of Mammon in Spenser, where dust and cobwebs concealed the roofs and pillars of solid gold, and lifts the mind quite off its ordinary hinges. The account of the manner in which the founder of Guy's Hospital accumulated his immense wealth has always to me something romantic in it, from the same force of contrast. He was a little shop-keeper, and out of his savings bought Bibles and purchased seamen's tickets in Queen Anne's wars, by which he left a fortune of two hundred thousand pounds. The story suggests the idea of a magician; nor is there anything in the Arabian Nights that looks more like a fiction.

NOTES:

1 Hazlitt's "On Thought and Action" is to be found in Table Talk, Essays on Men and Manners (1822).

2 [Original note.] When Buonaparte left the Chamber of Deputies to go and fight his last fatal battle, he advised them not to be debating the forms of Constitutions when the enemy was at their gates. Benjamin Constant thought otherwise. He wanted to play a game at cat's-cradle between the Republicans and Royalists, and lost his match. He did not care, so that he hampered a more efficient man than himself.

3 [Original note.] A thorough fitness for any end implies the means. Where there is a will, there is a way. A real passion, an entire devotion to any object, always succeeds. The strong sympathy with what we wish and imagine realises it, dissipates all obstacles, and removes all scruples. The disappointed lover may complain as much as he pleases. He was himself to blame. He was a half-witted, wishy-washy fellow. His love might be as great as he makes it out; but it was not his ruling passion. His fear, his pride, his vanity was greater. Let any one's whole soul be steeped in this passion; let him think and care for nothing else; let nothing divert, cool, or intimidate him; let the ideal feeling become an actual one and take possession of his whole faculties, looks, and manner; let the same voluptuous hopes and wishes govern his actions in the presence of his mistress that haunt his fancy in her absence, and I will answer for his success. But I will not answer for the success of 'a dish of skimmed milk' in such a case. -- I could always get to see a fine collection of pictures myself. The fact is, I was set upon it. Neither the surliness of porters nor the impertinence of footmen could keep me back. I had a portrait of Titian in my eye, and nothing could put me out in my determination. If that had not (as it were) been looking on me all the time I was battling my way, I should have been irritated or disconcerted, and gone away. But my liking to the end conquered my scruples or aversion to the means. I never understood the Scotch character but on these occasions. I would not take 'No' for an answer. If I had wanted a place under government or a writership to India, I could have got it from the same importunity, and on the same terms.