

LITERARY MISCELLANY.

THE DAYS THAT ARE GONE.

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"For at least a thousand years the whole country seemed in a long and sunny dream. * * * Every man had his little plot, or could enclose it for a small annual acknowledgment, and the rural race lived on with little exertion and no care. [—William Howitt, in Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine.]

Who is it that mourns for the days that are gone,
When a Noble could do as he liked with his own?
When his serfs, with their burdens well filled on their
backs,
Never dared to complain of the weight of a tax?
When his word was a statute, his nod was a law,
And for aught but his "order" he cared not a straw?
When each had his dungeon and rocks for the poor,
And a gibbet to hang a refractory boor?

They were days when a man with a Thought in his
pate,
Was a man that was born for the popular hate;
And if 'twere a thought that was good for his kind,
The man was too vile to be unconfined;
The days when obedience in right or in wrong,
Was always the sermon and always the song;
When the People, like cattle, were pounded or driven,
And to scourge them was thought a king's license from
Heaven.

They were days when the Sword settled questions of
right,
And falsehood was first to monopolize might;
When the fighter of battles was always adored,
And the greater the tyrant the dearer the lord;
When the King who by myriads could number his slain,
Was considered by far the most worthy to reign;
When the fate of the multitude hung on his breath—
A god in his life and a saint in his death.

They were days when the headsman was always pre-
pared—
The block ever ready—the axe ever bared;
When a corpse on the gibbet aye swung to and fro,
And the fire at the stake never smouldered too low,
When famine and age made a woman a witch,
To be roasted alive, or be drowned in a ditch;
When difference of creed was the vilest of crime,
And martyrs were burned half a score at a time.

They were days when the gallows stood black in the
way,
The larger the town the more plentiful they;
When Law never dreamed it was good to relent,
Or thought it less wisdom to kill than prevent;
When Justice herself, taking Law for her guide,
Was never appeased till a victim had died;
And the stealer of sheep and the slayer of men,
Were strung up together again and again.

They were days when the Crowd had no freedom of
speech,
And reading and writing were out of its reach;
When Ignorance, solid and dense was its doom,
And bigotry swathed it from cradle to tomb;
When the Few thought, the Many mere workers for
them,
To use them, and when they had used, to condemn;
And the Many, poor fools, thought the treatment their
due,
And crawled in the dust at the feet of the Few.

No—the Present, though clouds o'er her countenance
roll,
Has a light in her eyes and a hope in her soul.
And we are too wise, like the Bigots to mourn,
For the darkness of days that shall never return.
Worn out and extinct, may their history serve
As a beacon to warn us when e'er we swerve;
To shun the Oppression, the Folly and Crime,
That blacken the page of the Record of Time.

Their chivalry lightened the gloom, it is true,
And Honour and Loyalty dwelt with the Few;
But small was the light, and of little avail,
Compared with the blaze of our Press and our *Revi*,
Success to that blaze! May it shine over all,
Till Ignorance learn with what grace she may fall,
And fly from the world with the sorrow she wrought,
And leave it to Virtue and Freedom of Thought.

[From Chambers' Edinburgh Journal, July 6, 1843.]

SNEEZING.

Among the many enchanting tales of the "Arabian Nights," in which our youthful fancy of old luxuriated, we remember there was one of a certain humpbacked school-master, who gives the history of his unfortunate deformity. Among the various valuable precepts which he inculcated, those of politeness seem to have held a chief place; and when he sneezed, we are told the scholars were taught to clap their hands, and exclaim "Long live our noble master!" One day the dominie and his pupils were walking in the country: the day was sultry, and they were all glad when at last they fell in with a well. But, if we remember aright, the bucket was at the

bottom, and the worthy dominie resolved to descend and bring it up full. Having filled the bucket with the 'crystal treasure,' the master gave the word, and the youths forthwith commenced hauling him up again. When near the top, as ill luck would have it, their preceptor sneezed! Simultaneously the boys let go, and, clapping their hands, vociferated the accustomed 'Long live our noble master!' while the luckless dominie, bucket and all, went rattling down to the bottom again—breaking at once his back and many of his prejudices in favour of etiquette.

When this tale first met our youthful eye, little reflective though we were, sneezing we thought was an odd thing to make the subject of compliment. But the discoveries of our maturer years have sufficiently proved how very ignorant we must have been to come to any such conclusion. Jewish rabbi and Christian pope—Arab, novelist and classic author—the sands of Africa, even the savannas of the new world—all furnish proofs of the high importance attached to the sternutative functions. Records of this are found in all countries and in all times—except the antediluvian.

And this brings us at once into contest with the Jewish rabbis—those extraordinary fellows, who seem to have been better acquainted with Eden than ever were Adam and Eve—who know all the secrets of the Ark, and would beat Noah himself at an inventory of its furniture. Such extensive chronological attainments must be invaluable in searching out the origin of things; and we are glad we can derive the early history of sneezing from authorities so unimpeachable. As there is no mention in the Sacred Writings of illness among men until some time after the Flood, the rabbis declare that sickness was altogether unknown in the early world. How, then, it may be asked, did men die in those days? Why, they just sneezed, and expired. So say the rabbis. They tell us, moreover, that Jacob, disrelishing this speedy exit from life, earnestly desired that some warning should be given in order to prepare for the momentous change. This, say the rabbis, was the object for which he wrestled with the angel. His prayer was granted: he sneezed, and fell sick. The hitherto unheard-of circumstance of a man sneezing, and yet surviving, must, on the supposition of the rabbis, have made a great sensation among mankind: still more would the advent of disease—and thus associated, sneezing thenceforth ranked as one of the most important phenomena of the human system.

So much for tradition. But mythology also pays a like homage to this 'wind of the head.' Sneezing is said to have been the first act of the first man made by Prometheus. After giving the last finish to his work, Prometheus, we are told, cudgelled his brains as to how he was to impart to it life and motion. The difficulty, however, was found to be a poser: he needed celestial aid to accomplish his purpose. Accordingly, conducted by the goddess Minerva, he skimmed lightly through the regions of several planets, and at last approached the sun. This was the stuff he wanted. Concealed under the mantle of his divine guide, Prometheus neared the resplendent orb, and filled with its liquid fire a phial which he had brought for that purpose, hermetically sealed it, and forthwith regained earth sound in limb and overjoyed in spirit. Applying the flask to the nostrils of his statue, he opened it, and instantaneously the subtle sunbeams insinuated themselves with such power through the pores of the spongy bone that the image sneezed. Upon this impulse the living principle was diffused through the brain, the nerves, the arteries—and the image stood forth as good a man as its manufacturer. It is added that Prometheus, overjoyed at the success of his experiment, broke into words of benediction and of prayer for the preservation of the wondrous work of his hands; and that this first man, awakening into consciousness while the words were being spoken, ever afterwards remembered them; and on every instance of sternutation in himself or his descendants, imitated the example of his artificer!

It was thus that the poets of Greece and Rome endeavoured to account for the existence of the wide-spread custom of saluting any one who sneezed; but the monks of the middle ages have not been behind-hand with them in the attempt. According to their legends, in the days of St. Gregory the Great there reigned a deadly poison in the air of Italy, so that any one who sneezed or yawned instantly fell dead; and in consequence of the great mortality, the Pope ordained that on all occasions when a yawn or sneeze occurred, the bystander should repeat certain words of prayer, to avert danger from the luckless wight who had been seduced into so perilous an indulgence.

The custom was of long standing even in the days of Alexander the Great, whose preceptor Aristotle made it the subject of erudite remark. In all countries the spirit of the salutation was the same—from the terse 'Salve!' of the Romans, to the rather Irish Orientalism, 'May you live a thousand years, and never die!' and among the Greeks and Jews the very word was identical—'Live.' The Greeks have a capital story in one of their comedies of an old fellow called Proclus, who had a nose so very big that he could not blow it, as by no possibility could his hands reach to the end of his nasal protuberance; and to give posterity a still better idea of this formidable proboscis, the Greek dramatist adds, that when this Mr. Proclus sneezed, he could not even cry 'God help me!' as the nose was too far off for the ear to hear.

But far from being confined to classic ground and the realms of Asia, the practice existed even in the depths of barbarous Africa. Old accounts of Monomopata tes-

tify that whenever the king of that region sneezed, all those who were in the place of his residence, or even in the environs, were simultaneously apprised of it, either by signs, or certain forms of prayer made on his behalf, which instantly spread the intelligence from the palace to the city, and thence to the suburbs; so that nothing was heard around but devout wishes for the prince's health, and a kind of 'God save the king!' which every one was obliged to repeat aloud. More extraordinary still, this piece of etiquette was witnessed by the Spaniards among the natives of the new world. The author of the 'History of the Conquest of Florida,' informs us that the cacique of Guachoa having sneezed in the presence of Soto, all the Indians present immediately bowed low before their prince, venting aspirations that the sun would preserve him, enlighten him, and be always with him.

A custom so singular and so universal could not fail to attract the notice of ancient writers, who have endeavoured to deduce its origin from natural religion. The head, they said, is the principal part of man: it is the fountain of the nerves, of all the sensations—it is the dwelling-place of the soul, that divine particle which thence, as from its throne, governs the whole mass—that hence a peculiar dignity always attached to it, and men in early times used to swear by their head as by something sacred—that they never dared to taste or touch any kind of brain—that they even avoided naming the word, usually expressing it by a periphrasis, such as 'white marrow.' From all this, it is added, it is not strange that their descendants should continue to reverence the brain, and attach importance to sneezing, which is its most visible manifestation.

As the ancients cannot now defend themselves, it would be ungenerous to make disparaging remarks on this theory of theirs; so we will rather pursue our theme, and find the sternutative function, in unholy wedlock with superstition, playing the part of an influential, but on the whole very harmless, familiar spirit. Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, all listened to its 'warning trump' as to the voice of a present deity; and there are on record endless instances in which a sneeze has determined an embarrassed heathen in his line of conduct. One day, for instance, Xenophon was haranguing his troops, and just as he was impetuously exhorting them to adopt a hazardous, but in his view indispensable resolution, a soldier sneezed: spontaneously, says the historian, the whole army adored the deity; and Xenophon, skilfully profiting by the incident, wound up by proposing a sacrifice to the 'saviour god' who had thus counselled them to adopt the salutary plans of their general. In Homer, likewise, when Penelope, harassed by the importunities of her suitors, is venting imprecations against them, and breathing wishes for the return of her Ulysses, her son Telemachus interrupts her with a sneeze so loud, that it shakes the whole house: Penelope gives way to transports of joy, and sees in this incident an assurance of the speedy return of her long-absent husband. Even the wondrous demon of Socrates, which the sage so often consulted in the exigencies of his eventful life, was neither sylph nor salamander, if we are to trust a passage in Plutarch—neither genii nor conscience—it was a sneeze!

It is true there is something rather anti-romantic in a sneeze: yet in olden times, when Venus was still queen of beauty and love, a gallant would often not have exchanged the sound of its rasping blast for the softest breathings of Zephyr, or the sweetest song of the nightingale. Indeed, in the ever-shifting world of love—of all others the brightest, yet most troubled—this omen was regarded as the weightiest and happiest of all. Parthenis, a young Greek girl, who has rather foolishly allowed herself to get head and ears in love with a youth, after many sore struggles, and long irresolutions, resolves to write an avowal of her passion to her dear Sarpedon. Let us follow her to her bower or her boudoir. There she sits, the loving, foolish creature! with as heavy and anxious a heart as ever belonged to a sweet girl of sixteen. The gentle murmurs of the Ægean come floating into the room; and as she looks up, the evening sunlight falls cheerily on her pale cheek as it quivers through the vine trellis. Her eye is brimming, and her heart flutters as she resumes her stylus; for now she is at the very crisis of her letter, and is avowing her passion with guileless ardour, when a light, rapid convulsion shakes the stylus from her grasp. She has sneezed! It is enough! Parthenis is once more all joy: for she knows that at the same instant Sarpedon is thinking of her with sentiments as loving as her own. The heathen divinities themselves seem to have sneezed when more than usually pleased, and inclined to be beneficent; and the poets used to say of persons remarkably beautiful, that 'the Loves had sneezed at their birth.' Cupid appears to have been especially fond of thus testifying his approbation, as we learn from the sweet little poem of Acme and Septimellus, from which the following lines are translated:—

Acme then her head reflecting,
Kissed her sweet youth's ebriate eyes,
With her rosy lips connecting
Looks that glistened with replies.
'Thus, my life, my Septimellus!
Serve we Love, our only master:
One warm, love-flood seems to thrill us,
Throbs it not in me the faster?
She said: and, as before,
Love on the left hand aptly sneezed—
The omen showed that he was pleased
To give his blessing.'