

THE
SCRIBBLER,

A SERIES OF WEEKLY ESSAYS PUBLISHED IN MONTREAL, I. C.
ON LITERARY, CRITICAL, SATIRICAL, MORAL, AND
LOCAL SUBJECTS :

INTERSPERSED WITH PIECES OF POETRY.

By LEWIS LUKE MACCULLOH, Esquire.

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FORMING
VOLUME I.

*Sunt bona, sunt quædam mediocria, sunt mala, plu. a,
Quæ legis.....* MARTIAL.

Voulez vous du public meriter les amours,
Sans cesse en ecrivant variez vos discours.
On lit peu ces auteurs nés pour nous ennuyer,
Quitoujours sur un ton semblent psalmodier. BOILEAU.

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.....
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THE SCRIBBLER.

MONTREAL.

THURSDAY, 16th AUGUST, 1821.

No. VIII.

———*Multum sanguinis, multum verecundiæ, nullum solitudinis in ore.*———PLINY.

With a suffusion of blushes, with much modesty, with much diffidence of speech.

It has been a matter often disputed whether, for the purposes of social life, and the advancement of a person's prosperity or happiness, impudence or modesty be the most desirable. The advocates for the former are generally such as, having been early thrown into the busy vortex of life, have been successful in buffeting the eddies and currents they had to encounter; such as, either from constitutional firmness of nerve, or perhaps from the confidence acquired by a liberal and polite education, have won their way to fame and consideration. But there is likewise another set of men who are claimed by impudence as her darling children; the brass of whose impenetrable fronts has been moulded in the crucibles of ignorance, hypocrisy, and vice. Impudence, strictly speaking, is confined to them; in the others it is modified into assurance. The former is displayed in prosperity by overbearing pride, by oppression of those who fall under their power, by dishonourable actions, and unblushing profligacy. The latter is seen by that readiness of speech, and easy freedom of action, by that promptness and decision of conduct and address, which distinguishes the well educated and experienced man, from the awkward recluse, or the ungainly clown.

In like manner as impudence has its gradations, from the blustering bully to the man of confident assurance; so has modesty its different degrees.—Diffidence is more often constitutional than otherwise, but sheepishness is invariably derived from deficiency of education.

Both impudence and assurance have numerous advocates amongst men of the world, and particularly those who have been successful in the attainment of riches; but modesty is supported by a silent sober train, who have neither resolution in themselves, nor sufficient influence with others, for pleading her cause effectually. Shall I, says the man of pleasure, carry along with me an ingredient that will embitter my cups, and render them nauseous or unpalatable? Will he, whose mind is bent upon views of ambition, upon rising to fame and honour, will he envelop himself in the folds of a veil that will trip up his feet at every turn? Will the devotee of wealth, the countinghouse-drudge, or the man, who, like a counterfeit dollar, is nailed to the counter, be restrained in his inordinate desire of accumulation by the fear of not being able to circumvent the unwary with adequate dexterity, which is probably the only species of diffidence to which souls sold to avarice can be subjected? These will not listen to the voice of the charmer. And yet it is true that, though modesty often restrain us in the pursuit of pleasure, will often hinder us from receiving that loud applause which we may have deserved, will, perhaps, prevent us from reaping some advantages which her rival snatches from destiny, it by no means follows that it will hinder

us from rising in the world. If I may be allowed the privilege which schoolmen take, of defining words according to the ideas they themselves entertain of them, I should be led to say that modesty in a man, is that secret check and restraint which he feels when he is about committing an immoral act, when he is upon the point of engaging in something in which he feels he will not succeed, or when he is applauded for what he is conscious he is not entirely deserving of. It is the secret universal censure which he passes on every thought, as well as deed that is not strictly conformable to his own ideas of propriety. Hence a man, though ever so modest, may acquire a freedom of air and readiness of expression; for genuine modesty is not like the trappings of pride, but is an ornament never to be put off. It is the friend and constant handmaid of virtue; attends us in the closet as well as in crowds; pries into our secret thoughts, and spies out all our ways. A man possessed of this will blush in secret at the recollection of any little indecorum, even years after the commission of it; for he will not more, nor even so much, regard the opinion which others may entertain of an action, than his own private censures. But as true modesty will always put us on examining our behaviour, so it ought to give us a confirmed and resolute air, when we do not feel ourselves amenable to our own conscience; for he that is conscious of no ill ought ever to be bold and courageous. Hence I say, a decent assurance is far from being incompatible with modesty, and in this sense, the confines of impudence and of modesty ought to, and often do, meet, and melt down into a diffident confidence, as the writers of the Elizabethan age would have expressed it, in their antithetical phraseology.

There is, however, also a false modesty, not unfrequently combined with the true, which will make us appear diffident, and act with restraint, even in things we are certain we are right in, or have it in our power to accomplish. Though this may, in some respects and in some cases, be said to be constitutional, it mostly arises from a ridiculous, or defective education. It is not incompatible with learning and genius, and in fact is too frequently found in conjunction with those qualifications, because recluseness and eccentricity are their early characteristics. It then becomes worse than diffidence, and is often allied to, or mistaken for the sheepishness of ignorance. When I see a man of this description browbeaten and derided by a pert insufficient coxcomb, whose only merit is to have had a brilliant but superficial education, I can not help lamenting the want of spirit of the one, and even admiring the impudence of the other: and perhaps the open triumphs which a set of men, ignorant and debauched, gain over others, who are ten times more learned and virtuous, merely by their matchless assurance, may give occasion to the frequent disputes whether impudence or modesty be the most to be preferred.

Leaving the decision of this question to the judgment of my readers, I will only add in illustration of this subject, the delineation of two opposite characters.

Charicles, although he is much indebted to nature for a good understanding, has received from art that polish and finishing without which the finest gem appears rough and the truest painting at best not disagreeable. By mixing much in fashionable society his air and manners are easy and elegant, and by keeping good company, and by travelling much, his knowledge of the world is above his years. Yet he has acquired the first without any mixture of pride, and neither expects precedency in company, nor declines a place of honour when offered; his knowledge of the world has been attained without endangering his virtue, and he is too well grounded in his principles to be seduced by example, and too modest to partake in licentiousness. See him surrounded by a circle of the wild and gay, and he is ever unconcerned and free; he will not indeed roar out indecent jokes to oblige the company; or good-naturedly drink every health at the expense of his constitution. Yet, though he is an enemy to vice, he is a friend to mirth; and will join in every laugh that is consistent with propriety: when that is impossible he is silent, and neither obtrudes remonstrance, nor disgusts by cynic reproof. How different from this is the character of Timanthes. When he addresses you, it is in a manner so uncouth and forbidding that

you are in pain, and pity his rusticity. He will sit for hours without speaking and entertain himself and the company with biting his nails, or drawing figures with the wine spilt upon the table. If he is obliged to give an answer to an indifferent question, he does it with such diffidence and stupid hesitation, as would induce you to take him almost for an idiot. With all these blemishes Timanthes is accounted a modest, sensible, good-natured fellow; and why? He never contradicts, but assents to whatever is said, though at the expense of truth, and perhaps his better judgment. Ask any of his friends why Timanthes was drunk last night? and he will tell you the man was so *modest* he could not refuse his glass. Why he was seen going into a brothel? why really he was so pressed and rallied that he was *ashamed* not to go. Why he is pale and sick from the effects of smoking tobacco, which his constitution never could bear? truly he is too good-natured not to do as others do. In short the modesty of Charicles has virtue and self-confidence for its basis, and that of Timanthes is spurious, and springs from sheepishness, and infirmity of purpose. The modesty of the one improves by daily converse and an increased knowledge of men and manners; that of the other is daily rubbing off, and will leave at length exposed and visible those flaws in his disposition which will in the end deprive him of his present reputation and render him despicable in the eyes of his companions.

I have in this essay treated only of modesty as applied to the male sex. On female modesty, that transparent enfolding garment, through the magic medium of which, all the mental qualities and corporeal beauties of woman, appear with tenfold lustre; that most seductive of all female charms, that most amiable of all female virtues! I shall take a future opportunity of enlarging. In the interim as the ladies might otherwise think I have quite omitted to consult their taste in this number, their congenial tender and sensitive minds will sympathise in the following

BALLAD.

'Twas on a cliff whose rocky brow
Baffled the briny wave,
Whose cultured heights their verdant store
To many tenants gave;

A mother, led by rustic cares,
Had wander'd with her child,
Unwean'd the babe, and on the grass
He frolick'd and he smiled.

With what delight the mother glow'd
To mark the infant's joy,
How oft would pause amidst her toil,
To contemplate her boy.

Yet soon, by other cares estranged
Her thoughts the child forsook;
Careless he wanton'd on the ground,
Nor caught the mother's look.

Cropt was each flower that caught his eye,
Till scrambling o'er the green,
He gain'd the cliff's unsheltered edge,
And pleased, survey'd the scene.

'Twas now the mother from her toil
Turn'd to behold her child——
The urchin gone—her cheeks were flush'd,
Her wandering eye was wild.

She saw him on the cliff's rude brink,
Now, careless, peeping o'er
He turn'd, and to his mother smiled,
Then gambol'd as before.

Sunk was her voice—'twas vain to try—
'Twas vain the brink to brave—
Oh! Nature! it was thine alone
To prompt the means to save.

She tore the 'kerchief from her breast,
And laid her bosom bare,
He saw delighted, left the brink,
And crept to banquet there.

The action of this little poem was suggested by a fragment of Leonidas Alex. 29. II. 196, which in Bland's Greek Anthology is thus versified in English.

"Her infant, playing on the verge of fate,
When but an instant's space had been too late,
And pointed crags had claim'd his forfeit breath,
The mother saw; she laid her bosom bare;
Her child sprang forward the known bliss to share;
And that which nourish'd life, now saved from death."

I have been pleased to find that it is contemplation to erect a Theatre in Montreal by subscription, and warmly recommending the idea, hope that no time will be lost, and that before a twelve month passes, the rational and instructive amusements of the stage will be presented in a more stately and permanent form to the inhabitants of Montreal than has hitherto been the case. On this subject I notice the Circus, which is just again opened, which though considerably inferior in intellectual entertainment, is nevertheless a species of recreation deserving of encouragement. Space will not for the present permit me to enlarge, which I mean to do when I can find opportunity, upon the ridiculous presentment made by the Grand Jury of the Quarter Sessions at Quebec on the 16th day of last month, against the performance of the Circus there; which I the more regret as in general, Grand Juries are the organs of the soundest and best feelings of the country.

Rational amusement blended with instruction is a desideratum in every society, and especially here where the openings for intellectual gratification are so scarce. Few modes are more popular than public lectures. Amongst those that stand foremost in this place in utility and attraction are DR. SLEIGH'S on the animal economy. He is, I believe, about commencing upon craniology, a branch, which though bordering perhaps on the regions of fancy, gives large opportunities for scientific research and amusing illustration. I recommend his lectures to my readers of both sexes.

L. L. M.

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

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Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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