

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.

Nos. 1 to 52,
From 28th June, 1821, to 20th June, 1822.

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 écrivant variez vos discours.
On lit peu ces auteurs nés pour nous ennuyer,
Quitoujours sur un ton semblent psalmodier. BOILEAU.

PRINTED BY JAMES LANE, IN MONTREAL.
Published in Montreal, and to be had of the proprietor,
SAMUEL H. WILCOCKE, at Burlington, Vermont.

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1822.

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Title: The Scribbler 1821-08-09 Volume 1, Issue 18

Date of first publication: 1821

Author: Samuel Hull Wilcocke (1766-1833) (Editor)

Date first posted: Feb. 18, 2019

Date last updated: Feb. 18, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190232

This eBook was produced by: Marcia Brooks, David T. Jones, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

THE SCRIBBLER.

MONTREAL.

THURSDAY, 25th OCTOBER, 1821.

No. XVIII.

*Ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis
Offendor maculis.*—HORACE.

Where many beauties shine, small faults are hid.

Of our old dramatic writers Ben Johnson has, by a kind of prescriptive right, derived from the suffrages of his contemporaries, obtained the place next after Shakespeare. I am inclined very much to doubt his title to so honourable a station, and can not but consider him as much inferior to Beaumont and Fletcher, and to Massinger. According to my own opinion therefore he can only claim rank as a fourth rate, and I have my doubts even whether some writers of his own age may not be found to dispute that station with him.

Of the dramatists just mentioned Philip Massinger always appeared to me to be entitled to the place next after Shakespeare; undoubtedly one of far inferior dignity, but still the nearest approaching to the proud elevation upon which Shakespeare's inimitable genius has fixed his fame. Hence, surprised that Massinger's works had not been found worthy of greater circulation than the unsatisfactory and barren editions of Coxeter and Mason could give them, it was a pleasing occupation of a considerable degree of leisure I enjoyed about fifteen years ago to minute a variety of observations, illustrations, and criticisms that offered themselves upon his plays as edited by J. Monk Mason in 1765; and when, in 1808, Gifford's edition of my favourite dramatic poet appeared, it was a gratification to observe that many of the same emendations and criticisms had likewise occurred to that able commentator. A sufficiency of original observations that have escaped Gifford, however, remain to induce me to publish them for the amusement, if not the instruction, of the admirers of the English drama considered in a literary point of view.

To begin with the EMPEROR OF THE EAST, a play, which was the parent of Lee's Theodosius or the Force of Love, and which is one eminently adapted for scenic representation and histrionic talent.

The main spring upon which its plot hinges is the jealousy entertained by Theodosius of his new raised empress Eudocia, and a very early opening of it occurs in the scene in the first act in which Athenais (afterwards Eudocia) presents her petition and relates her story to Pulcheria. In reciting her father's dying words

The greatness thou art born to, unto which
Thy brothers shall be proud to pay their service—

she is interrupted by Paulinus, who had first introduced her, and who adds,

And all men else who honour beauty.

This is particularly remarked by Theodosius, who is a concealed spectator, and upon his simple interjection here, “Umph,” is built a considerable part of that speech in scene 5 of Act IV. in which he recalls to mind every circumstance of suspicion.

—Must I read,
Writ in the table of my memory,
To warrant my suspicion, how Paulinus
(Though ever thought a man averse to women)
First gave her entertainment, made her way
For audience to my sister?—*Then I did
Myself observe how he was ravish’d with
The gracious^[A] delivery of her story;
Which was, I grant, the bait that first took me too.*

^[A] Massinger very generally makes dactyls of such words as *gracious*, *virtuous*, *partial*, etc. So does sometimes Shakespeare.

The brightest Heaven of invention. Prol. to Henry V.

It is one of Massinger’s peculiar characteristics that scarcely an incident, a speech, or even a single interjection, as in this instance, occurs, which, however apparently trifling or unnecessary at the time, does not conduce to some circumstances connected with the development of his plot. Theodosius’s jealousy is a good comment upon Shakespeare’s text.

—Trifles light as air.
Are to the jealous, confirmation strong,
As proofs of holy writ.

If I were to notice all the beauties as they occur my task would only end with the last scene of the last act, yet I can not pass the following terse union of truth and forcible expression, in the first scene;

—Long delays,
More terrible to miserable suitors
Than quick denials.

In Scene 2, Pulcheria to Theodosius,

You may *intend* these royal exercises:

intend here is applied in the sense in which it is used by Bacon, *to pay regard or attention to*.

In the speech of the master of the manners,

—How low a new stamp’d courtier
May *vail* to a country gentleman.

And again,

He must start up t’embrace them, *vail* thus low;

To vail is to lower, in token of submission, and here means to bow the head, to bow: in the *Maid of Honour* it is used in its strictly appropriate sense.

Bid them *vail* their ensigns.

So in the first part of Henry VI.

Now the time is come
That France must *vail* her lofty plumed crest,
And let her head fall into England's lap.

In Scene 1 of Act II. a sentiment is put into the mouth of Theodosius apparently very misplaced,

Shall I become a votary to Hymen
Before my youth hath sacrificed to Venus?

He had but very lately ejaculated,

From foul lust Heaven guard me——

and is represented by Massinger as equally chaste and religious.

When Pulcheria counsels him to

Weigh with due providence with whom alliance (marriage)
May be most useful for the preservation
Or increase of your empire:

he replies

——I approve not
Such composition for our *moral* ends,
In what is in itself divine, nay more,
Decreed in Heaven.

Here for *moral*, I read *mortal*. I do not perceive the sense of the passage as it stands at present: though *moral* is, in one sense, opposed to *divine*, as reason is to revelation, yet there is no antithesis here, unless *moral* can be supposed to stand for *political* (and no one will believe that politics have any thing to do with morality,) and I think *mortal*, i. e. *worldly*, forms the best antithesis to *divine*.

The painters are most *envious*, if they want
Good colours for preferment.

I can not make sense of this passage as it stands, nor offer any emendation that is satisfactory to myself. *Want* can only be used here in its sense, *Scottice*, to *lack*. If we read *unwise* for *envious* it may do. Or, more tamely, *devious*; i. e. “The painters are most devious for preferment (out of the track of preferment) if they lack good or flattering colours.”

She will have her *clenches*. MASON.

This I marked as a spurious word, but could not substitute another, till Gifford restored the old reading *elenchs*.

In expressing his rapture at the charms of Athenais, Theodosius asks,

——Are there none here
Have suits to prefer? On such a day as this
My bounty's without limit. O my dearest!
I will not hear thee speak, whatever in
Thy thoughts is apprehended, I grant freely;
Thou wouldst plead thy unworthiness; *be thyself*
(*The magazine of felicity*,) in thy lowness.
Our Eastern queens, at their full height, bow to thee;
And are, in their best trim, thy foils and shadows.

Thus Mason, Gifford reads,

——By thyself,
The magazine of felicity, in thy lowness
Our Eastern Queens, at their full height, bow to thee,——

I prefer the first reading, but would point the passage, which as Mason prints it is unintelligible, thus

——Be thyself
The magazine of felicity. In thy lowness
Our Eastern queens, at their full height, bow to thee,——

In his extacy, Theodosius, willing to grant all suits on such an auspicious day, perceives Athenais making a gesture as if intending to prefer one, in which he stops her. “As for thee, my dearest, I will not hear thee speak; every wish shall be freely granted.” He then goes on, interpreting her looks; “thou wouldst plead thy unworthiness. So far from that, thou shalt be thyself the magazine, or source, of felicity to others; i. e. let all who desire to succeed present their requests through thee.” Then, breaking out into a fresh admiration of her person, and following up the idea just started of her natural humility, he adds, “our Eastern queens, at their full height, are but foils and shadows, and bow to thee even in thy present low estate.”

In the last scene of Act III.

Pulcheria. It was *decorum* in the scene.

It was a necessary formality to keep up the illusion.

In Act IV, in the scene when Cleon announces the empiric to Paulinus, occurs

——The triumphs of an *Artsman*.

which is a word derived from the Dutch, *Arts*, a physician. The empiric referring to “old Galen, Hippocrates, or the later and more admired Paracelsus,” is an anachronism not so excusable as the introduction of the Romish rite of auricular confession as a ceremony of the early Greek church. Another anachronism, if it be true that we are indebted to Columbus for the fashionable disorder alluded to, is the surgeon’s observation;

For the gonorrhea, or, if you will hear its plainer phrase, the pox.

In Scene 5:

Theod. And by your painful watchings yield my sleeps
Both sound and sure——

should be *me*; or else *yield* should be converted into *make*.

It is I think a defect in the plot of this play that it is through the medium of Chrysapius, that Theodosius is induced to adopt the stratagem of personating a confessor in order to obtain a conviction of Eudocia’s guilt or innocence. It would come with a better grace through almost any other, for Chrysapius is not only represented throughout as particularly attached to the empress, but, when she is banished from the emperor’s presence, it is Chrysapius who says, “in the mean time I’ll dispose of you.” It looks therefore like a contrivance between them, and it takes much from the interest of the scene between Theodosius disguised and Eudocia, to suppose that the interview has been pre-concerted. Her soliloquy, previous to the entrance of Theodosius, it is true, appears intended to do away with that idea, but it is done clumsily.

Part of that soliloquy, as well as when she says in the scene with the pretended confessor

When I shall suddenly be insensible.
Of what the world speaks of me——

implies an expectation of immediate death, which does not seem to be warranted. She is nowhere sentenced to die: on the contrary, Theodosius bidding her see him no more, adds,

The sting of conscience ever gnawing on thee,
A long life be thy punishment.

These are, however, but very trifling defects in this excellent drama.

From the Emperor of the East, the transition of idea is easy to the personage who was lately Emperor of the West. The following lines appeared about five years ago in a London paper, as an imaginary apostrophe of Napoleon in contemplation of his death.

“Oh bury me deep in the boundless sea,
Let my heart have a limitless grave,
For my spirit in life was as fierce and free,
As the course of the tempest-wave.

And as far from the reach of mortal controul
Were the depths of my fathomless mind,
And the ebbs and flows of my single soul
Were tides to the rest of mankind.

Then my briny pall shall engirdle the world
As in life did the voice of my fame,
And each mutinous billow that’s skyward curl’d
Shall to fancy re-echo my name.

That name shall be storied in record sublime,
In the uttermost corners of earth,
And renown’d till the wreck of expiring time,
Be my glorified land of birth.

Yes, bury my heart in the boundless sea,
It would burst from a narrower tomb,
Should less than an Ocean its sepulchre be,
Or if wrapped in less horrible gloom.”

These lines were attributed at the time to Thomas Moore, but I am not aware that they have been ever published under his name.

L. L. M.

A course of Lectures on Natural Philosophy by Alexander Skakel, A. M. will begin the 7th of November, and be continued every Wednesday till 1st May. Terms 3 guineas the course, or 5s. a lecture.

Dr. Sleight’s annual course of Anatomical Lectures, commenced the 1st October, and will continue till May. Terms 10 guineas for the course.

Academy for drawing and painting by Mr. W. W. Andrews, at Madame Rouville’s, Place d’Armes, where the terms may be known.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Scribbler 1821-08-09 Volume 1, Issue 18* edited by Samuel Hull Wilcocke]