

A LETTER, &c.

Laurel Lodge.
Oct. 31, 1831.

REVEREND SIR,

It is now, I believe, upwards of twenty-years, since you kindly undertook the useful task of making the public acquainted with the symptoms or characteristics of the dreadful disease called the BIBLIOMANIA. With the symptoms of the disease, you also furnished them with the means of its cure. But, strange to say, the very opposite to the effect predicted took place. The mania increased in fury. Its ravages spread far and wide, and its victims were numerous. Men seemed to judge by “the rule of contrary.” They hunted hole and corner for *black letter*, and *large paper*, and *uncut*, copies of the several works they were in search of; and, with the palpable evidence of astounding facts before their eyes, they rushed infatuatedly forward to embrace the very causes of self-destruction. Such heart-rending cases of *felo-de-se* had never been before recorded.

Things are strangely altered of late: and passions and tastes have taken a very opposite tone. Objects, which formerly rivetted attention, and begat attachment, are now considered almost as those of horror and alarm. In short, FEAR is the order of the day. To those very natural and long-established fears of bailiffs and tax-gatherers, must now be added the fear of *Reform*, of *Cholera*, and of Books.

I am induced to trouble you with a few remarks upon this melancholy but highly interesting subject, in consequence of a visit recently paid to a friend in town; whom, in the “good old times” of Bibliomania, I used to accompany to book-sales:—from whom I learned to “hit my bird” with unerring dexterity, and, in consequence, to store my larder with a profusion of game. In other words, to make my book-purchases with discrimination, and to enrich my shelves with a due sprinkling of choice copies. I staid with my friend during the three latter months of “the season,” as it is called; and when I returned to my solitary rural residence, and cast an eager look over those “precious gems,” which, in former times, seemed to sparkle with unrivalled lustre, somehow or other they appeared to fall flat and dead upon my notice. Ill-humour, vexation, and wrath at the capriciousness of public taste, all united to make me retreat precipitately from my *book-room*—

for it aspires not to the dignified appellation of a “LIBRARY.” However, after a few short, heavy breathings, I returned to my once favourite haunt of retirement. I carried with me all my former kind and warm-hearted feelings towards those objects of silent but eloquent instruction; and throwing myself into my walnut-tree curiously-carved armed chair, read to myself a sharp lecture on the absurdity of yielding to the very feelings which I had deprecated. I then seemed to breathe freely again: and signing a tacit contract with my beloved, resolved that nothing in future should ever cause me to bate one jot of my attachment towards my Dugdales and my Hearnese.

It is true—living in a village as I do—there is little inducement from without to cause my book-passion to increase in ardour. The Squire has not the smallest notion of the value of large margins or rough edges: and when I took down the *Fructus Temporum*, printed by *Machlinia*, as the *ne plus ultra* of my book-gems, he declared that he had “never seen anything, in the shape of a book, half so frightful in his life!”* The

* The Squire may be forgiven for this *brusquerie* in passing judgment. It *is*, typographically speaking, a “frightful” book. A good deal of puzzle belongs to the identifying of the Chronicle printed in the *Abbey of St. Alban*, and of that printed by *Machlinia*. See these books fully described in the *Bibl. Spenceriana*, vol. IV. 369-73; 393. CATO PARVUS.

Clergyman, in all *other* respects a most exemplary character, has no idea of the worth of my octodecimo black regiment of Latimer, Fox, and Drant;* but obstinately adheres to his Barrow, Tillotson, and Atterbury. I pity, from my heart, such a circumscribed range of taste: and giving up the Squire as incorrigible, hope yet to teach the Vicar better things.

I confess that one of the principal motives for troubling you with this epistolary address, is, the excessive astonishment and chagrin which I experienced at the sale of the *Autograph Novels* of the renowned AUTHOR of WAVERLEY. What, Sir, is it come to *this*? Are the fire and spirit and emulation of our young nobility and gentry quite extinct? Is the love of legendary lore wholly defunct? Are the gewgaws of jewellery, the tawdryness of furniture, the trickery of horse dealing, the brittleness of Dresden and Sèvres ware, and “such-like,” to form paramount objects of purchase and speculation, by those,

* Copious and curious specimens of the pulpit eloquence of Latimer, Fox, and Drant, will be found in the *Library Companion*, p. 66-81; to which add, as there adduced, specimens from a contemporary of the name of EDGEWORTH. When I quote from the *Library Companion*, I wish it to be understood that I quote from the first, or as some booksellers call it, the *Breeches Edition* of 1824. The *second* is however the more valuable. Will posterity ever be made acquainted with the mystery belonging to this *small-clothes* designation? C. P.

whose purses are usually well lined with pistoles? In what an age of effeminacy among men, and of utter nonchalance and apathy among women, do we now live! At the sale in question, scarcely “Three Gentlemen of Verona” were present. Mr. Evans eyed his auditory with evident marks of surprise and discomfort. He expected to have found—with the Campbells and Moors, the Galts, Bulwers, and Wards, of the day—half-a-score of Roxburghers, with the élite of the Athenæum, and even a due sprinkling of the fashionable *Bas Bleu*. He found no such thing. One or two authors, and a brace of M.P.’s only were present. The rest were booksellers; of whom Mr. Thorpe, as usual, occupied a good portion of the foreground: and, to his credit it must be added, became the largest bibliopolistic purchaser on the occasion.

Conticuère omnes intentique ora tenebant,

as Mr. Evans commenced his “prologue to the swelling act.” It was evident, however, that an under current was running pretty strongly against the audible tide of speech: at times, even “vox faucibus hæsit.” Still it was a good earnest harangue—well timed—and to those, who did not remember the “oratio parainetica” preceding the *sub hastâ* sale of the Valdarfer Boccaccio and the

vellum Livy of Sweynheim and Pannartz,* the effort was creditable and effective. But oh! Sir, what language can express the surprise of both auctioneer and company, when the *Monastery*, the first article in the sale, produced only the sum of £18. 18s. † Where were ye, ye pains-taking, fiddle-faddling, indefatigable collectors of Franks—ye threaders of autographic scraps—ye *Album-ites*, “et hoc genus omne?”—where were ye “in that

* See a very full and particular description of the sales of these celebrated volumes in the *Ninth Day of the Bibliographical Decameron*, vol. 111. pp. 62-117. A sequel, of some interest, belongs to the narrative there disclosed. Earl Spencer, in the year 1819, at the sale of the library of the Marquis of Blandford, (now Duke of Marlborough,) who had purchased the Boccaccio at the Duke of Roxburgh's sale for £2260., became possessed of that treasure for less than half the sum. The vellum Livy of 1469, which the late Sir M. Sykes, Bart. purchased at the sale of Mr. Edward's library in 1815, for £903, was purchased by Messrs. Payne and Foss, at the sale of Sir Mark's library in 1824, for £472. 10s., and sold by them to the late Mr. Dent for 500 guineas. At the sale of Mr. Dent's library in 1827, this book, for the *third* time, was disposed of by public auction, by Mr. Evans, to Messrs. Payne and Foss, for £262. 10s. It is now—and long may it there continue—in the very fine library of the Rt. Hon. Thos. Grenville. Could its first English possessor have survived the intelligence, that his DARLING LIVY would one day droop its wings so low?

† The lots, with their respective prices, were as follows:—
 1. *The Monastery*, perfect, £18. 18s: 2. *Guy Mannering*, wanting a leaf at the end of vol. 2, £27. 10s: 3. *Old Mortality*, perfect, £33: 4. *The Antiquary*, perfect, £42: 5. *Rob Roy*, perfect, £50: 6. *Pevevil of the Peak*, perfect, £42: 7.

hour?" One would have thought that the original drafts of those master-pieces of human wit, eloquence, and passion—struck-off by the great KNOWN UNKNOWN—would have attracted crowds of competitors within the arena of Mr. Evans's auction-room: that scarcely breathing-space, much less standing-room, would have been afforded: and that Scotland herself would have furnished champions to carry off the richer prizes at the point of the claymore!

I own, that I was bewildered with the scene before me. I was, indeed, sorrow-stricken—chop-fallen—and evidently depressed. My friend perceived it. He essayed to sooth and to cheer me: but melancholy, as black and deep as any depicted by Bright or Burton,* had taken entire possession of me. I slunk quietly behind one of the square pillars, at right and left of the rostrum, and resolved to be a mute, but not unwatchful spectator of all around me. "What" (said I to myself,) "not *one* specimen for Bodley—for the British—for the London—for the Royal—for the Advocates—for Dublin?"† Then again for *indi-*

Waverley, imperfect, £18: 8. *The Abbot*, imperfect, £14: 9. *Ivanhoe*, imperfect, £12: 10. *The Pirate*, imperfect, £12: 11. *Fortunes of Nigel*, imperfect, £16. 16s. 12. *Kenilworth*, imperfect, £17: 13. *Bride of Lammermoor*, only 61 pages, £14. 14s.

* Bright's treatise on Melancholy was first published, I believe, in 1586—Burton's, in 1621.

† I presume, for the sake of brevity, the adjunct of "Li-

vidual competitorship. Where was Mr. D. T. and Mr. A., and Mr. U.? All asleep—as well as far away? It should seem so; for the produce of the whole lots did not amount to quite a *fifth* of what was expected.*

“Excidat ille dies ævo, neu postera credant
 Sæcula!”

It will scarcely be believed, that the spirit evinced at the previous sale of the late Mr. Hamper’s *Manuscripts*,† should have become, as if struck by some benumbing talisman, paralised at this. The man, whose genius had supplied such abundant food for delightful recreation and in-

brary,” has been purposely left out in the above designations. There is, I fear, a sad state of torpor—a chilling indifference to the genuine book-feeling—possessing many of the guardians of the above several public repositories. How hesitatingly, and how rarely, are purchases made!

* The fact, as I understood it, was THIS. The proprietors of the MSS. were offered by the trustees of the Advocates’ Library, £1000. for the whole. This offer was not thought sufficiently liberal; and the proprietors stood out for another thousand. This contre-projet was not listened to for a moment: and the hammer of Mr. Evans was in consequence to decide the matter irrevocably. The MSS. came to town; and the result of the entire sale of those that were put up was, as is above stated. We know there are such things as “out-standing one’s market.” The general impression was, at the outset, that they would average £50. a lot.

† The sale of Mr. Hamper’s printed books and MSS. took place in 1831. There was a most interesting mélange: and the last day’s sale of MSS. and autographs, produced above £1100.

struction, for the last thirty-years, had the mortification to learn that the *autographic* taste of his vaunting Southern neighbours was a mere capricious impulse—a childish and fickle conceit—without intelligible motive or object. Giving my friend the slip, I stole sulkily away; resolving to bid adieu to book-sales and book-purchases, of every description, for *one* season. This unexpected result expedited my departure from town; and I found myself at *Laurel Lodge*, a thoughtful, disappointed inmate—when I had hoped to have entered it with alacrity and glee. At first, I was not only disconsolate, but absolutely peevish and irritable. As before intimated, I seemed to loathe my library. I even shunned society. I sought only my alcove and sweet-briar walks; but the blossoms had lost their hue and fragrance. The sky was never clear. The heavens were never blue. The throstle had learned the chatter of the jay. The nightingale was always in C flat.

Another consideration has somewhat damped my spirits, and helped to give the leaves of the beech and the oak (in my lower-meadow-walk) a premature “sere and yellow” tinge. Just before my departure from town, I made a few book-pilgrimages from one end of it to the other. Starting from the corner of Cornhill, where those most respectable brothers—the *Gemini* of the eastern hemisphere—reside, I leisurely strolled towards St. James’s Palace; calling, as my cus-

tom ever was, upon several bibliopoles in my way. To begin with my start. Time was, Sir, as you know full-well, and better than myself, when more than *one* British merchant would let his carriage drop down a few paces towards the London Tavern, (for the racket and roar of the four crossing roads, or streets, put the wheels of a gentleman's carriage in great jeopardy) and its inmate would step into the shop of Messrs. J. & A. Arch—and after a little pleasant interchange of literary gossip, take down—ay, and forthwith take *up*, and away with him, into his carriage—more than one portly folio, or wide-spreading quarto. I have known a whole row of a choicely coloured *Buffon*, in the former shape—and a whole series of the *Chronicles*, in the latter shape—disposed of in a trice, by a customer, who not only knew what he was about, but who loved, as regularly as the January dividends came in, to stand square and firm upon the credit side of the booksellers' ledger.* “How comes it,” quoth I, “gentlemen, that there is nothing now *stirring* in this way?—that over the gilded tops of these volumes there is a somewhat dense layer of dust? and that, across yonder set of Grævius and Gronovius, the spider hath been allowed to spin his subtle web?” The answer was prompt, and too well founded. “Bib-

* The late Mr. Rennie used to say—“I am upon good terms with all the booksellers, and there is one thing for which they *ought* to like me—I never go to a *Sale* for any thing that I can get at a *shop*.” M. R.