

# THE COLUMBIA SPY.

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## Selections.

### Nil Nisi Bonum.

BY W. M. THACKERAY.

Almost the last words which Sir Walter spoke to Lockhart, his biographer, were "Be a good man, my dear!" and with the last flicker of the breath on his dying lips, he sighed a farewell to his family and passed away blessing them.

Two men, famous, admired, beloved, have just left us, the Goldsmith and the Gibbon of our time. Ere a few weeks are over, many a critic's pen will be at work, reviewing their lives and passing judgment on their works. This is no review or history, or criticism; only a word in testimony of respect and regard from a man of letters, who owes to his own professional labor the honor of becoming acquainted with those two eminent literary men.

One was the first ambassador whom the New World of Letters sent to the Old. He was born amidst wild the republic, the *pater patriæ* had laid his hand on the child's head. He bore Washington's name; he came among us bringing the kindest sympathy, the most ardent, smiling good-will.

His new country (which some people might be disposed to regard rather superciliously) could send us, as he showed in his own person, a gentleman, who, though himself born in no very high sphere, was most finished, polished, easy, witty, quiet, and, socially equal of the most refined Europeans.

Irving had such a small house and such narrow rooms, because there was a great number of persons to occupy them. He could only afford to keep one old horse (which, lazy and aged as it was, managed once or twice to run away with the careless old horseman). He could only afford to give plain sherry to that amiable British paragon-monger from New York, who saw the worthy patriarch asleep over his latest, blameless cup, and fetched the public into his private chamber to look at him.

Baltimore and Washington,\* and remarked how in every place he was honored and welcomed. Every large city has its "Irving House." The country takes pride in the fame of its men of letters. The gate of his own charming little domain on the beautiful Hudson River was forever swinging before visitors who came to him. He abet out no one. I had seen many pictures of his house, and read descriptions of it; in both of which it was treated with a not unusual American exaggeration. It was but a pretty little cabin of a place; the gentleman of the press, who took notes of the place while his kind old host was sleeping, might have visited the whole house in a couple of minutes.

And how came it that this house was so small, when Mr. Irving's books were sold by hundreds of thousands, nay millions, when his profits were known to be large, and the habits of life of the good old bachelor were notoriously modest and simple? He loved once in his life. The lady he loved died; and he, whom all the world loved, never sought to replace her. I can't say how much the thought of that fidelity has touched me. Does not the very cheerfulness of his after-life, add to the pathos of that untold story? To grieve always was not his nature; or, when he had his sorrow, to bring all the world in to console with him and bemoan it. Deep and quiet he lays the love of his heart, and buries it; and the grass and flowers grow over the sacred ground in due time.

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"Be a good man, my dear." One can't but think of these last words of the veteran Chief of Letters, who had tasted and tested the value of worldly success, admiration, prosperity. Was Irving not good, and, of his works, was not his life the best part? In his family gentle, generous, good-humored, affectionate, self-denying; in society, a delightful example of complete gentlemanhood; quite unspoiled by prosperity; never obsequious to the great (or, worse still, to base and mean, as some public men are forced to be in his and other countries); eager to acknowledge every contemporary merit; always kind and affable with the young members of his calling; in his professional bargains and mercantile dealings delicately honest and grateful; one of the most charming masters of our lighter language; the constant friend to us and our nation; to men of letters doubly dear, not for his wit and genius merely, but as an exemplar of goodness, probity and pure life. I don't know what sort of testimonial will be raised to him in his own country, where generous and enthusiastic acknowledgment of American merit is never wanting; but Irving was in our service as well as theirs; and as they have placed a stone at Greenwhich younger in memory of that gallant young Bellot, who shared the perils and fate of some of our Arctic seamen, I would like to have some memorial raised by English writers and friends of affectionate remembrance of the dear and good Washington Irving.

As for the other writer, whose departure many friends, some few most dearly loved relatives, and multitudes of admiring readers deplore, our republic has already decreed his status, and he must have known that he had earned this post-humous honor. He is not a poet and man of letters merely, but citizen, statesman, a great British worthy. Almost from the first moment, when he appears among boys, among college students, among men, he is marked, and takes rank as a great Englishman. He takes his seat there; he speaks, when so minded, without party anger or intrigue, but with a hearty faith and a sort of heroic enthusiasm for his cause. Still he is poet and philosopher even more than orator. That he may have leisure and means to pursue his darling studies he absents himself for a while, and accepts a richly remunerated post in the East. As learned a man may live in a cottage or a college common-room; but it always seemed to me that ample means and recognized rank were Macaulay's us of right. Years ago there was a wretched outcry raised because Mr. Macaulay dated a letter from Windsor Castle.

At Washington, Mr. Irving came to a lecture given by the writer, Mr. Phillips and General Pierce, the President and the President elect, were so kind enough to attend together. Two Kings of England smiling at one rose," says Irving, looking up with his good-humored smile.

the book—of that book and of what counted less piles of other! In this little paper let us keep to the text of *nil nisi bonum*. One paper I have read regarding Lord Macaulay says "he had no heart." Why, a man's books may not always speak the truth, but they speak his mind in spite of himself; and it seems to me this man's heart is beating through every page he penned. He is always in a storm of revolt and indignation against wrong, craft and tyranny. How he cheers heroic resistance; how he backs and applauds freedom struggling for its own; how he hates scoundrels ever so victorious and successful; how he recognizes genius, though selfish villains possess it! The critic who says Macaulay had no heart might say that Johnson had none; and two men more generous, and more loving, and more hating, and more partial, and more noble, do not live in our history.

The writer who said that Lord Macaulay had no heart could not know him. Press writers should read a man well, and all over, and again; and hesitate at least, before they speak of those *aidia*. Those who know Lord Macaulay know how admirably tender, and generous, and affectionate he was. It was not his business to bring his family before the theatre foot-lights, and call for bouquets from the gallery as he wept over them.

If any young man of letters reads this little sermon—and to him indeed it is addressed—I would say to him "Bear Scott's words in your mind, and 'be good my dear.'" Here are two literary men gone to their account, and, *laus Deo*, as far as we know, it is fair, and open, and clean. Here is need of apologies for shortcomings, or explanations of vices which would have been virtues but for unavoidable, etc. Here are two examples of men most differently gifted; each pursuing his calling; each speaking his truth as God bade him; each honest in his life; just and irreproachable in his dealings; dear to his friends, honored by his country; beloved at his friends. It has been the fortunate lot of both to give unaccountable happiness and delight to the world, which thanks them with an immense kindness, respect and affection. It may not be our chance, brother scribe, to be endowed with such merit, or rewarded with such fame. But the rewards of these men are rewards paid to his *service*. We may not win the *baton* or epaulettes; but God give us strength to guard the honor of the flag.

### A Terrible Day.

My friend, Harry Saxon, is the most bashful of men, and he stutters; under the influence of excitement, he can hardly speak. Afflicted by a sense of shame, he would faint and be dead and buried. To such a man life may be a daily struggle. My friend also is liable to misfortunes; so that, with a light heart and a great capacity for enjoyment, he is usually as miserable as any Manichæan could desire. I seldom meet him but he has some dire calamity to communicate to me. And, as if by fatality, it is of a kind to redder the cheeks of a bashful man. I might tell you many extraordinary adventures that have befallen him. This was his last:

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the train insensibly slackened speed, and suddenly stopped. On perceiving this alarming fact, Mr. Saxon pulled on the straps with tremendous vigor, a second or so, and then looked out of the window with a face outwardly as composed as any ordinary traveler with no burden on his mind and with clothing on his legs, may wear.—What the feelings of a bashful man so placed must have been, I need not tell you. Analysis, if we wished to defend him before a jury of prudes, might be justifiable; but you will not require it. Mr. Saxon's heart gave a bound. There was a lady addressing the guard, who pointed down in the direction of Mr. Saxon's head, and led her swiftly on. Mr. Saxon made a final effort to array himself in one or the other pair, gave it despairingly up, and thought it best to block the window and look extremely uninviting! He could not believe that his fortune could be so cruel as to send this lady straight to him at a time when, without wishing to be uncorrect, he profoundly devoted her to Jericho. He was forgetful of his experience. Some men have a great hoard of experience, and only see it by the lurid light of new distresses. Now, Mr. Saxon should, no doubt, have spoken and warned the lady off. He stuttered, I have told you. He did speak, but he was unintelligible. The guard wrenched at the door. Mr. Saxon had just time to hide his nether failings under a railway rug, which he had providentially with him, when the door opened, and the lady became his companion. The train whistled blithely, and off they went.

Now, my friend Harry Saxon tells me he considers it a curious thing that the lady, after a little while, began to regard him with something like astonishment. But the fact does not surprise me, who know him. Nervousness is part of bashfulness, and, affected by nervousness, we are apt, without knowing it, to grimace strangely. To speak metaphysically, and with enlightened obliquity, we think of ourselves to such an excess that we grow oblivious to our actions. I dare say you all understand.

The lady replied, "Sir, or 'Yes.'" He chronicles it exactly, but I forgot. "It is a—a—a—ha—ha—ha—are you going the whole way to t—t—t—town?" said Harry, grasping hold on to his rug with both hands. "No, sir," said the lady, haughtily, coldly and shortly. "What a blessing!" thought Harry, sinking back.

The lady opened a book. At the next station, Harry looked at her imploringly. She would not go. "Perhaps," thought Harry, "she's going on to the last station but one!" There he was sure the carriage would be filled.

He begged politely of her to tell him when she intended to quit the train. "Really," said the lady. "May I inquire, sir, why you are so anxious to know?" "Not at all," said Harry, speaking enigmatically as he looked.

The lady resumed her reading. An old gentleman, with two young ladies, now entered the carriage. Harry tightened and compressed the rug, and sat glaring at them. "At all events," thought Harry, "they can't make me move." This consolatory notion had hardly whispered its barren comfort to him, when a slight shock was felt. He saved himself from going into the old gentleman's arms. Happily, the ladies were too much alarmed to notice his discomposure.

"What's the matter?" said the old gentleman. "The train had come to a stand. 'Oh! what is it?' cried all the ladies. 'Stop a minute, my dears,' said the old gentleman. 'Don't be so alarmed. Perhaps one of us had better get out and speak to the guard.'" "Oh, papa, you shall not go!" exclaimed the young ladies; and the one who was alone exclaimed— "Perhaps we shall be safer out than in." The young ladies reiterated that their papa should not go. A common eye was directed to Harry, who sat, with a fiery face, trying to appear perfectly unconscious.

"Well, if I mayn't go," said the old gentleman, "perhaps this gentleman will?" Here was a direct appeal. Harry pretended not to hear. "Oh! it must be something dreadful!" cried the ladies.

"Will you oblige us, sir," said the solitary lady, "by getting out and speaking to the guard?" She addressed poor Harry. Mr. Saxon grimaced horribly. "I should be h—a—a—happy—" he began. "Just ask him if there's any apprehension of danger," thinking that he spoke in the assenting tone.

"I k—k—k—I k—k—k—can't!" says Harry. The ladies regarded him with wonder. All Harry's hopes were that they would get out and leave him. Danger, ruin, dreadful snafes; he was indifferent to; anything was better than his present torment.

"Can't speak, sir!" said the old gentleman. "Can't speak, sir!" said Harry. "No legs—oh! Dear me! the old gentleman observed. And yet the rug displayed a pair in outline. "Paralysis—lower limb—Dear me!"

Several persons were out of the train by this time. The old gentleman and all the ladies got out too. Word was passed that there was a general order to evacuate the carriages.

Harry heard the old gentleman say: "We mustn't leave that poor fellow. We must help him out." Mantrance, he was at his carpet-bag again. One clear minute to himself, and Harry would be a man. He cared not to risk his life for one clear minute to himself. Before a quarter of the time had expired, and while the garments dangled unfilled, the old gentleman opened the door, and informed Harry that he was prepared to help him out. There also stood the ladies, looking most charitably.

"Do p—p—please shut the door," says Harry. "Come, sir!" said the old gentleman, "you must come out. Give me your hand." "I k—k—can't, I tell you," says Harry. "But I will help you, sir," said the old gentleman.

"I won't," says Harry. "You must be mad, sir—you must be stark mad," said the old gentleman. Pushed to extremity, Harry answered—"So I am."

"Then you must be dragged out, sir—dragged out by force—main force, sir, Guard!" shouted the old gentleman. The guard came up, but only to say it was a false alarm. The train had shaken off one of the carriages, and turned a few sheep into mutton. All was right now, and everybody was to step in.

Off they went once more. It is really cruel to dwell on Mr. Saxon's miseries, and the incidents which were perpetually aggravating them and driving him to frenzies of distraction. At one place, a lady entered who could not ride with her back to the engine. He was positively—being the only one facing it—asked to favor her by changing seats; and, gallant by nature, courteous, obliging, he had to stutter a downright refusal. But realize his position, and I think you will admit that, for a bashful man, Mr. Harry Saxon endured four hours of mortal misery that it would be hard to match. Excessive civilization, you see, has its troubles. It may seem rather unkind to leave him in the state I have left him in. I will justify this artistic stroke by assuring you that Mr. Saxon is, I have no doubt, whatever, at the moment I speak of you perfectly prepared to make his bow in most exquisite society.

### The Rescue.

FROM "FOOTFALLS ON THE BOUNDARY OF ANOTHER WORLD."

Mr. Robert Bruce, originally descended from some branch of the Scottish family of that name, was born, in humble circumstances, about the close of the last century, at Torbay, in the south of England, and there bred up to a sea-faring life.

When about thirty years of age, to wit, in the year 1838, he was first mate of a bark trading between Liverpool and St. Johns, New Brunswick. On one of her voyages bound westward, being then some five or six weeks out, and having neared the eastern portion of the banks of New Foundland, the captain and mate had been on deck at noon taking an observation of the sun; after which they both descended to calculate their day's work.

The cabin, a small one, was immediately at the stern of the vessel, and the short stairway descending to it ran athwart ship. Immediately opposite to this stairway, just beyond a small square landing, was the mate's state-room; and from that landing there were two doors, close to each other, the one opening into the cabin, the other fronting the stairway into the state-room. The desk in the state-room was in the forward part of it, close to the door; so that any one sitting at it and looking over his shoulder could see into the cabin.

The mate, absorbed in his calculations, which did not result as he had expected, varying considerably from the dead reckoning, had not noticed the captain's motions. When he had completed his calculations, he called out, without looking round, "I make our latitude and longitude so and so. Can that be right? How is yours?" Receiving no reply, he repeated his question, glancing over his shoulder and perceiving, as he thought, the captain busy writing on his slate. Still no answer. Thereupon he rose, and, as he fronted the cabin-door, the figure he had mistaken for the captain raised his head and disclosed to the astonished mate the features of an entire stranger.

chair, fronting the door, writing on your slate. Then he looked up full in my face; and if ever I saw a man plainly and distinctly in this world, I saw him."

"Him! Whom?" "God knows, sir; I don't. I saw a man, and a man I had never seen in my life before."

"You must be going crazy, Mr. Bruce. A stranger, and we nearly six weeks out!" "I know, sir; but then I saw him."

"I hope you've always found me willing to do what's reasonable." Bruce replied, changing color, "but if it's all the same to you, sir, I'd rather we should both go down together."

"The captain descended the stairs, and the mate followed him. Nobody in the cabin! They examined the state-rooms. Not a soul to be found."

"I'll tell you you had been dreaming?" "It is all very well to any so, sir; but if I didn't see that man writing on your slate, may I never see my home and family again!"

"Ah, writing on the slate! Then it should be there still." And the captain took it up. "By God!" he exclaimed, "here's something, sure enough! Is that your writing, Mr. Bruce?"