

THE  
FOOL AND THE PHILOSOPHER.

A VISION.

It was a delightful evening in the middle of August: the sun, shorn of his beams and like a vast globe of fire, majestically descending, spread a warm and mellow lustre over the western sky; and, fringing with gold the edges of the wavy lines of purple clouds, which stretched athwart the azure concave, produced one of those rich effects, which defies the pencil of the artist, and captivates the mind with pleasing wonderment. All was calmness around; even the pendent birches on the craggy face of Ben Ain were moveless; not a breath of air stirred; and but for the gurgle of the mountain streams and the rush of a large cascade, close to the little inn of the Trosacks, at the window of which I was seated, the stillness would have been profound and most impressive. I had been perusing a few pages of *Pierce Plowman*; and had

just rested the book on my knee, to admire the magnificent scene which lay before me: every swelling knoll and abrupt crag on the huge back of Ben Venue, and all the feathery crest of the leafy garniture of the Trosacks brightly illuminated by the declining beam, softened off and lost in the deep purple shadows of the glens and hollows. As I gazed, the last segment of the solar disk sunk behind the mountain, blending the distance of the landscape in one deep mass of shade, but marking more strongly the grand outline of Ben Venue and his stupendous congeners; strikingly displaying the superior sublimity of scenery still bearing the impress of the finger of Nature over the proudest efforts of aspiring mortals. Full of the romantic;—the place, the hour, the monotonous sound of the neighbouring waterfall, and the universal stillness which prevailed, threw me into a reverie which, gradually settling into sleep, produced the following dream.

The scene upon which I had been gazing, and which had laid such hold upon my imagination as to continue present to my mind for some time after

I was asleep, suddenly disappeared, and changed to a valley of most singular aspect. Although of vast extent, yet it was enclosed, on every side, by stupendous mountains, the rugged and hoary summits of which seemed to pierce the sky. Within these, rose inferior hills of the most diversified forms and character; some rocky and naked; others clothed with verdure to their summits, or bearing on their sides ample forests, through which projected rocks with the richest garniture of brown and purple heath cushioning every shelf and crevice, and mixed with the most luxuriant and varied foliage. Between these hills, lay gardens and orchards rich with every description of fruit; and watered by streams which the eye traced on the sides of the mountains, dashing from precipice to precipice and forming chains of cascades, till, brawling along their channels in the valley and meandering in a thousand directions, they peacefully mingled their waters in a lake, which spread its ample mirror at the base of the mountains. As I looked upon the scene, it seemed continually changing. At one time, the valley resounded with the notes of the feathered choristers;



at another the growl of the storm redoubled its peals among the echoing rocks. Sometimes, embowered among the trees, appeared the village with its simple pointed spire;—whilst I gazed, it became a magnificent city with crowded streets, porticos, splendid palaces, and venerable fanes. Now a gaudy procession of princes and priests and knights and ladies would seem to issue from its gates; and sports and tournaments were held. I looked again, and anon a real battle raged beneath its walls. The opposing armies, the charges of the chivalry, the smoke, the retreat, the pursuit were all visible. I could even fancy I heard the clamour of the fray, the shouts of the victorious and the groans of the vanquished; when, suddenly, not a trace remained of the city, the processions, the combatants; all had passed away and given place to some other illusion. As I turned my eyes towards the lake, it would sometimes appear expanded to an ocean bearing on it navies. At one moment, the sun shining upon the white, swelling sail, the gallant ship danced gaily on the lightly rippled bosom of the deep; at another, the congregated clouds freighted

with storm, seemed to mingle with the waves, and pouring their fury upon the flexile element, the vessel struck upon a rock and split into a thousand pieces. The shrieks of the drowning mariners reached my ears; I saw them struggling with the waves and dashed to death upon the rocks, over which the boiling breakers roared: the sight was too horrific: I hid my face in my hands; and, when I removed them, lo! again the placid lake, reflecting the downward mountains, the hills and all their leafy tracery spread before my eyes.

Astonished and bewildered with what I had seen, I looked in vain for some one to solve the mystery; for although the valley seemed crowded with moving objects, apparently men and women occupied in every possible manner, yet, as I approached them they instantly vanished; like a picture in a Camera Obscura, all seemed natural and animated, yet nothing was tangible. "This is surely the Valley of Deception," exclaimed I, thinking audibly: "nothing is what it appears to be." "It is then a true picture of the world,"

whispered a voice behind me, "turn and see." I turned and beheld, on a little elevation, at the distance of twenty or thirty feet from me, two individuals seated at the base of a small pyramid: but the voice did not proceed from them, for it again uttered behind me, "advance and satisfy your doubts;" whilst at the same moment I was involuntarily impelled towards the pyramid. The two persons seated at its base were of the most opposite characters. One of them, from his motley garb, cap, ears and bells, appeared to be of that class of knaves, who were formerly the companions of kings and princes; and who enjoyed the sole privilege of speaking truth at court; the other seemed from his habit to be a disciple of Zeno, or to belong to that sect of philosophers, which the Greeks termed Stoics: both, however, were engaged in the same occupation,—blowing soap-bubbles. At the foot of a pedestal, on which the Fool rested his arm, lay a bishop's mitre, an open music-book, the palette of an artist, and a spear; the Philosopher rested his elbow upon an open volume, the title of which I perceived was "*Summum bonum Virtus*;" a scroll covered with logical



aphorisms lay at the base of the pedestal, and a celestial globe was behind it.

I stood for some minutes contemplating both of these characters, who were not, in any degree, disconcerted by my approach. “There goes an Emperor,” said the Fool, as he threw off a bubble from the bulb of his pipe, and followed its course in the air with his large protruding eyes. “See how his splendid robe glitters in the sunbeam! Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, bright as the iridescent hues of the rainbow. Hah! the ambitious dog!—how he mounts above his fellows! Now he has topped the summit of his flight—there! there! his golden dream is over—his budding hopes are blasted—his pride for ever humbled—the bubble is burst; and not a trace remains. Hah, ha, ha!”—and he shook his head, jingling the sonorous ornaments of his cap; and, opening his capacious mouth, laughed long and loud. Another bubble less buoyant was thrown off as a Philosopher. “There he goes,” said the fool, “with a drop at his tail to demonstrate the effect of gravity:—see, he turns like a whirling

dervise!—he has, certainly, discovered the perpetual motion: happy soul! the world will now be blessed, and he will be immortal.—Alas! is it come to this? To fall in the moment of victory—to sink when the hand already grasps the prize—but so it is—gone like his precursor, and none knows whither.” Again he shouted with joy; and held his sides with laughter: and in this manner the knave apostrophized each bubble which he blew, well maintaining the credit of the ancient craft of which he seemed the worthy representative.

It was in vain to address such a being, and therefore I turned to the Philosopher, who at that instant had thrown off a bubble from the point of a quill, and was following its course, with a look of intense interest, as it floated upon the breeze, until it was lost to the sight. “Mortal!” said he as he turned towards me his complacent countenance, “Mortal! I already read your thoughts. Your laudable curiosity shall be satisfied:—sit down in peace, and listen to the voice of truth.” I sat down, and he thus continued—“Mortal! the



valley which lies before you is a typification of the world. Its mountains and rugged rocks represent the difficulties and obstacles which beset man in his journey; whilst they are also the true causes of the transitory felicity that he attains on earth; for what enjoyment does he possess when not acquired by fatigue and industry, which does not become insipid and distasteful? Ease and indolence and certain security soon pall upon the mind, which, restless, and never satiated with toil, rather than it will endure the torment of apathy, courts dangers and even finds a charm in Death. Say—without this allurements, would the patriot sacrifice himself for the interests of his country, for the phantom Fame? Would the hero seek the bubble Reputation in the cannon's mouth? Or the philosopher, spurning from him the enticements of Pleasure and heedless of the vicissitudes of life, waste the midnight oil and immerse himself in the solitary cell, merely to be assured of an immortal fame among all the sons of men? On the other hand, mortal! the hills, the vales, the forests, gardens, lakes, and streams which have charmed your sight, demonstrate the benevolence of Na-

ture, and show that amidst difficulties, horrors, changes, deceit, and wickedness, the world supplies the principles of harmony and proportion, and produces true felicity as the result of their conspiring order. Man alone is a paradox, and yet the whole race can be arranged under two classes, of which you behold us the representatives, the wise and the foolish; *this* prolific and teeming with myriads of every country and kindred; *that* inrolling a very scanty proportion only upon its list, but these the true intellectual nobility of the earth. Like this fool, so is the mass of mankind occupied with the veriest trifles; their projects as empty and as fragile as the bubbles which he commits to the air, blown only to be broken. They laugh at the idea of making man happy by reason; contented to believe that their senses and passions were bestowed only to be gratified, they are impatient of restraint and are convinced that the only road to happiness is to be found in following the dictates of Nature. Hapless, infatuated beings! who have brought disease into the world, and have yielded to Death the empire of mortality: and who too late discover

that it is difficult long to support pleasure, and that its invariable termination is satiety and disgust.

“It is the object of the wise, on the contrary, to employ the senses only as the inlets of knowledge, to cultivate the soil which Nature has planted with every material for the exercise of industry, and to rein the passions under the control of reason. On these grounds I have founded a system which I am about to propound to you; which will banish physical evils from the earth and confer immortality upon the human race. This pyramid is the emblem of my theory; its broad base founded upon a rock and its apex pointing to the heavens, it scorns the rage of the conflicting elements, and even defies the overwhelming power of Time.”

He paused: I raised my eyes to inquire the cause of the interruption, when to my astonishment I perceived a shadowy figure which I had not before observed, seated between my companions; grinning a ghastly look of contempt upon



the speaker, and in the act of touching both the sage and the fool with a dart tipped with fire, which he grasped in his fleshless hand. The eyeballs of the Fool seemed starting from their sockets—his face was turgid and purple, his breath gurgled for a second in his throat, and after a convulsive gasp, he fell a lifeless mass at the foot of the Destroyer. The Philosopher lay for a few minutes as in a faint, his jaw fallen, his features pale and shrunk, and his eye filmed; he fetched a deep sigh, and seemed to revive; then turning his languid eye upon me, the placidity of his countenance unaltered, in scarcely audible accents uttered these words—“Alas! fellow mortal, experience only can teach wisdom: it has convinced me that my system is a vain hypothesis: man is still under the dominion of Death: but, in yielding to the tyrant, I have the satisfaction of knowing that the change will enable me to solve the greatest of all secrets.” As he calmly yielded up his breath, the ground seemed shaken as if by an earthquake, and the pyramid crumbled into dust. Awe-struck and trembling, I expected to be involved in the general ruin, when the voice which I had before heard

again addressed me : “ Mortal ! such is the frailty of humanity—virtue alone can render life happy : but austerity is not virtue ; to trifle time away is to waste life—to endeavour to reduce life to exact rule and method is commonly a painful task, oft, also, a fruitless occupation. While we are reasoning concerning life, life is gone ; and Death, though perhaps they receive him differently, yet treats alike the Fool and the Philosopher.” \*

A. T. T.

\* Hume's Essays—The Stoic.