

AN

**EIGHTEENPENNY DESCANT**

ON THE

**Penny Postage.**

**SECOND EDITION.**

MDCCCXLI.

01.18.

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# Descant

ON

## The Penny Postage.

“ You find not the apostrophes, and so miss the accent ; let ME supervise  
the canzonet.”—HOLOFERNES. L. L. L.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON

JOHN BOHN 17 HENRIETTA STREET COVENT GARDEN.

MDCCCXLI.



*DEDICATED*

*To the discerning few whose patronage permits the author*

*to embellish his title-page with those*

*enchancing words*

*SECOND EDITION.*

## THIS NEW POSTAGE-LAW

Is one of the greatest of all modern abominations and that is saying a good deal for it. In other days a letter from a friend used to cost us something but if he who wrote it deserved the name he could always contrive to make it worth paying for. For my part I ever held it to be the cheapest commodity I dealt in. It did not come too often. Time enough had elapsed since we last heard from him to supply our correspondent with such an accession of new thought and circumstance as naturally prompted him to write again. The infrequency of the occurrence was sufficient to give him a relish for the employment when it came yet not such as to put his hand out and by making composition laborious beget a distaste for it. He was not tied down to the events of the last week however barren it might



be but had before him 'large abundance' from which he might easily pick out subjects that were entertaining.

My own fate happens to be peculiarly unfortunate for this confounded law so burdens me with writing to people I care not a fig about that my old and chosen correspondents cannot do better than measure my esteem for themselves by the rareness of the occasions on which I express it.\* Should there be any who never hear from me at all they will take it as the strongest possible proof of my affection. I only ask of them in return not to mention the circumstance as it might create jealous feelings on the part of those who still endure from me occasionally the unfriendly infliction of a letter.

\* 'My best and dearest friend,

I have barely time to scribble a few lines, so as not to miss the post, for here as every where, there are charitable people, who taking for granted that you have no business of your own, would save you from the pain of vacancy by employing you in theirs.' S. T. COLERIDGE TO JOSIAH WADE. COTTLE'S RECOLLECTIONS VOL. II. P. 133.



The egotism so agreeable in letters would often be far more pleasing in other compositions than the sham humility which makes a writer avoid using the personal pronoun. Plain William Hutton asks very sensibly 'If I speak *of* myself, why not *from* myself?' and the author of 'Guesses at Truth' does not make a bad one when he opines 'it is pleasant to be reminded now and then that we are reading the words of a man, not the words of a book.' After this premonition 'tis to be hoped that no cruel critic will be for poking my *I*'s out.\*

The judicious person who holds this paper in his hand or does me the honor to peruse it as it

\* Events so improbable sometimes come to pass that it may be just as well not to relate them since nobody is likely to be found who will believe that they ever happened. A certain individual actually travelled all through this Treatise without discovering one clever passage. The soul of Sam Pepys must have passed into him who read *Hudibras* twice over without finding any wit in it! If I were to point out to my worthy friend half the neat things that I have stolen from other people instead of being amazed at *my* dulness he would be lost in wonder at seeing it so totally eclipsed by his own.



lies before him upon his library table probably knows full well that many things conspired to give a charm to our correspondence formerly which it has lost of late. I shall take especial care not to touch upon them all as the respect in which I hold my reader's understanding inclines me to leave him something to imagine as well as myself. I shall also take for granted that this sound mind for which I have given him credit is lodged *in corpore sano*. He will therefore find here none of those commas colons and semicolons which people supplied with good sense can hardly ever stand in need of unless they happen to be labouring under the asthma. Whoever has the audacity to print his thoughts is bound to do his best to express them clearly. This has been my aim. And I doubt not that my sense (such as it is) will have the advantage of a more graceful utterance from the reader's being left to take breath where he pleases than could have been secured for it by the perpetual intrusion of finger-posts.

In the coinage of our own brain we may fairly

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ask leave not only to run on but to *stop* after our own fashion. In a quotation the author's mode should be followed as it is very likely there may be something characteristic in it. Thus if Thomson himself had not told us he was 'more fat than bard beseems' we might have guessed from the punctuation of the SEASONS that he was rather pursy. Take the first half dozen lines as they are pointed in his own editions—

Come, gentle Spring, æthereal mildness, come,  
And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud,  
While music wakes around, veil'd in a shower  
Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend.  
O Hertford, fitted, or to shine in courts,  
With unaffected grace; or walk the plain, &c.

Surely these verses would read better if none but the full point were used in them?\* There

\* The writer who so constructs his sentences as to render other stops unnecessary will find that he saves more ink than labour by the process. The chief merit of these interpunctions may be learnt from the following merry looking passage which occurs in an Essay on Pointing by one who was as grave as a judge when he wrote it. The Essay was prefixed by Sir James Burrow to his Reports of Cases determined in the Court of King's Bench.



would be many a rugged passage left in the Seasons even if it were supervised upon my plan and all needless stops expunged and rased. But long residence in the smooth South had greatly refined the ear of the sweet-souled poet when he composed the Castle of Indolence. The only edition of that mellifluous poem published in his lifetime contains two stanzas which have been omitted ever since. In one of them there is a line which for fulness of meaning yields to few in our language. The author contrasting the broken slumbers of the losel with the sound repose enjoyed by the toiling swain says of the latter-

At one deep draught of sleep he takes the night!

Who but a MALLET (he was Thomson's executor)

'And if a writer find himself a little hard-bound now and then, and not easily delivered of his meaning, he will the better conceive how serviceable it must be to his reader to furnish him with any clew to guide him through the mazy labyrinth.' This lets the cat out of the bag! It confirms a notion I have long entertained that good writers have no more need of such helps than good swimmers have of corks and if we who are worthless *sink a little the sooner* for want of them what does it matter?

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or some such wooden-headed fellow could have knocked out a stanza containing such a line as that?\*

Nothing in the world could be more enchanting than the sprightly quarterly epistles or thereabouts which we used to get from a favorite correspondent.† They abounded in heart-easing quips and quirks that often made us laugh till tears of joy have trickled from our eyes fast as the periods from his fluent quill. But the four-farthing missives which are now

Hurled to and fro with jaculation dire

are bald pointless and unmirthful and we yawn over them as unavoidably as we should if we were merely *reading* a sermon by some fashionable grinder of feeble divinity.

\* They who cannot refer to the original will find these stanzas in a work which began a century ago and may go on for a century to come. GENT. MAG. FEB. 1841. P. 147.

† Every one knows that Horace gives us leave to complain if they come seldomer-

Sic raro scribis, ut *toto non quater anno*  
Membranam poscas! SAT. III. LIB. 2.



It is a consuming vexation that the more angelic sex to which the three greatest personages in England belong will henceforth be deprived of all reasonable excuse for *crossing*. The practice to be sure was at times sufficiently tormenting but there were occasions when it had its advantages for it often veiled from the furtive glance of a friend or a sister who happened to be looking over one's shoulder some sweet passage that was meant for our own particular eye. I myself might be enduring to this very hour what is sarcastically called 'single blessedness' but for a word that Mrs. —— (she was not Mrs. —— then) dropt in the secure shade of a crossed letter. It emboldened me to make a proposal to whose acceptance I owe nine tenths of the happiness of my life.

So much for plain matters of fact. But there may be occult causes of this falling off in the charm of friendly correspondence well worth investigating and I do not despair of some Scotch profundist or other giving us by and by a dissertation not much exceeding five hundred



pages quarto in which they will all be bolted to the bran. Meantime while that work is getting ready one may lawfully venture to hint that writing so often when there is nothing to write about may have something to do with it. Then again the consciousness that our composesures will cost our correspondent nothing keeps down the remorse we might otherwise feel at sending him what is nothing worth and helps to lull us into fat stupidity.

There is another reflection connected with this which lends us a hand in our downward progress when we have once commenced it. I suppose most un-eminent men feel rather sheepish at seeing their own portrait hung up at their own home in a costly frame albeit they were coaxed into this bit of harmless vanity 'by the importunity of friends?' Depend upon it a bashful author like myself feels much the same when he discovers that there is not a more precious calf-skin in his library than that in which his own thoughts are swaddled. Now I do believe some sensation of the sort steals upon



us at the thought of paying the postage of our own enditures and that this introverted compliment is one prime cause of their unwonted dulness. I have made a bargain with a dear friend of mine never to exchange post-paid letters any more and the compact has thrown a sprightliness into our correspondence that would do your heart good if 'twere consistent with our modesty to let you look over it.

Our plan is attended with this further advantage—that every time we exchange letters by sacrificing a penny apiece we make the revenue a present of twopence. Find me if you can a brace of modern patriots who have once in their lives done the state such a service as that! On the contrary a universal *scaliness* has overspread the land and numberless individuals heretofore not stingy are now to be seen weighing their little packets with most solicitous forehead as though they feared the Treasury would topple down if laden with superponderant penny of theirs.

Should any of the worthies who stile *themselves*

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liberal\* (a very suspicious mode of christening) have clamoured for Rowland Hill's plan they cannot with any decency refuse to follow mine now that his has so egregiously failed. It can excite no surprize that that project did not originate in any of their noddles for it is one which may have sprung from a benevolent mind having no by-ends to serve. But if the official men to whom it was presented could not foresee its failure in a fiscal point of view they must have been a set of rare blockheads. If they had brains enough to perceive this and yet adopted the measure for the sake of their own popularity suffer me to recal the offensive epithet and to wish that justice could be done them as a pack of lashworthy knaves.

This wish will appear the more reasonable when we consider the grossness with which these maladroit operatives conducted the whole

\* Montaigne seems to squint at some sect of this sort in the last page of his Essays where they are thus characterized—'I have ever among us observed supercelestial opinions and subterranean manners to be of singular accord.'



affair. Having first of all beplastered their Sovereign they encouraged all her subjects to treat her with rude familiarity. They then employed an officer of her own at every post-town in England so to maul our beloved Queen that she is said to have twitted them with a line from one of Nat Lee's tragedies-

The gods look pale to see us look so red!

Gentle dulness ever loves a joke but it must be its own joke and this taunt of her Majesty's so galled them that they immediately set about blackening Her whom they began with beplastering. Fie upon such four-footed manners!

Now that right royal mandate is gone forth-

Chase from all my bounds

Each thing impure and noxious!

and we no longer find a socialist

Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve,

we may hope that this unchivalrous and butcherly usage of the first Lady in the world will be knockt o'the head in its turn. Who knows but the new premier may be graced with the *feelings* as well as the outside deport of a

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gentleman? I will venture to tell him that by turning his attention to this piece of minor morals he will do much to win the favour of his Liege and his right-hearted fellow subjects who have with indignation and shame

SEEN HER DISFIGURED MORE THAN SHOULD BEFAL  
SPIRIT OF HAPPY SORT.

I have nothing vindictive about me. It would gratify me but little to see those who are so righteously exiled from court cut off from all employment out of doors. But there is no fear of this for where their own interest is concerned they have never been wanting in the understrapping virtue of discretion. In imitation of the Eastern princes who learn some handicraft in case a reverse of fortune should befall them these gentry who have long been the chief adorners of our walls have taken care to qualify themselves for earning their bread (and I wish they may get it) as *bill-stickers*.\*

\* The Melbourne ministry have been called a godless crew. But the godless never pray and these men went out of office lamenting that their prayers for a propitious harvest had not been listened to.



We are perpetually hearing projects extolled on account of the benefit THE PUBLIC will derive from them. Can any body inform me who that same public is for whom so much concern is felt and whose convenience is the standard by which every thing must be adjusted?\* A clever writer has told us that 'the world' sometimes means 'all the rascals in it.' Would he had favored us with as compact a definition of the other strange congregation! One might have thought that in legislating for the public the comfort of all the individuals and classes who make up the public would have been consulted and cared for. But that is a mistake. We so continually see the feelings of individuals and the happiness of whole classes quite forgotten in such proceedings that it is clear the term in question must ask for

\* Even the ten commandments are to bend to it. There is something awful in the concluding words of a report on a great railway in the west opened on the first *Monday* in September 1840 and upon which a thousand men were at work *the day before*- 'The views of the directors are to combine, as far as possible, the observance of the Sabbath with a due provision for the public necessity!'



a different interpretation. When I call to mind at whose dictation and by means of what sort of confederacies many remorseless measures have been carried of late years I am half inclined to think that 'the public' sometimes means 'all the blackguards in the land.'

Thus nations sink, by darling schemes deprest,  
When vengeance listens to the fool's request!\*

Let the sovereign people be thankful for a morsel of truth. It reaches them but seldom. This pluripersonal despot is just as faithfully served by its press-gang as any other absolute tyrant by a more courtly band of sycophants.

In this new law which is not so merciless as some that might be pointed out the comfort of a great number of persons has been entirely disregarded. The simple *indifference* to the contents of his bag which is imputed to the POSTMAN in

\* If all the books were collected together that are the better for having something in them which has been said by Dr. Johnson they would make a large library. Here is a hint that may rouse our slumbering bibliomaniacs and set them a hunting upon a wiser scent than they followed aforetime.



the most delightful of satiric poems must ere now be hardened into downright hatred for all the contributors to it. And no one can be surprised if it should be. I declare that I can never hear his once delightful rap-rap without subblushing lest he should put into my hands a letter which has been brought five hundred miles for a penny. In general I am not 'servile to skiey influences' but when the first of May happens to be wet 'tis the most melancholy day in the year with me for I cannot imagine a more doleful spectacle than that which is presented by a parcel of draggle-tail kings and queens over their dear little royal ankles in mud. It will be said perhaps that this sympathy arises from my being a lover of monarchy (if I abhorred it I would hold my tongue while under its protection\*) but *who* is not moved at the sight of fallen gentility? here's a Queen's messenger sunk to

\* It shows but a caitiff-courage to bellow for a republic in England. Let a hero panting to exhibit bravery of that sort repair to America and bawl for a king.

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the condition of a common porter with this difference only that he is engaged from morn to noon from noon to dewy eve in delivering carriage-paid packages without being allowed to make any charge for portorage.

It was formerly pleasant for people like myself (I am out of trade) when we were out of silver to feel pretty sure of getting a supply on the arrival of the postman. But talk to him about *change of a sovereign* now and the man would turn deadly pale and fancy that you were trying to draw him into a plot for dethroning her Majesty! He no longer

Whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch,

but wanders about all day long as heavy-hearted as he is light-pocketed. His loyalty to his Royal Mistress forbids all murmuring against the first estate of the realm but as for the other two feeling that what they have done for him is bringing him to death's door who can wonder if at last words interwove with sighs find out their way and he exclaim with Mercutio



A plague o' both your Houses !\*

We shall be told that the general use of ENVELOPES which has been brought about by the new regulation is one of its advantages inasmuch as it wonderfully increases the difficulty a rogue must have in discovering what letters are worth filching for the sake of their contents. But what is that to you and me and ten thousand more of us who never received a bank note by the post in our lives and never sent one? We were gravely assured that the bill was intended

\* Having occasion to travel by the mail lately I was quite astounded at hearing the old fare demanded. It is strange that this grievance never roused the indignation of the late House of Commons blest as it was with an Inspector of Nuisances who loved dirty work so well that he did it for nothing. Alas!

Abiit, excessit, evasit!

If he ever come back again let him not lavish his precious breath upon beggarly trifles but save it for that monstrous solecism in political economy which at a time when letters are conveyed for next to nothing permits the travelling expenses of *those who write them* to be as great as ever! 'Ah! if Joseph could but make one of his long speeches now!' SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL, LAST SCENE.

¶\*



for the special benefit of the humbler orders. But that is of a piece with the humbug which gives the title of 'public-spirited undertakings' to those furious enterprizes that have brought the curse of David upon us\* and having enlarged our madhouses bid fair to crowd our blind asylums. Who can deny that the real object of these public-spirited measures is to put money in the pockets of those pious godfathers who have bestowed this good name upon them? Such rank hypocrisy sickens me as the handling poor Yorick's skull did Hamlet. Pah! my gorge rises at it.

\* ——— Make them like unto a wheel! Ps. lxxxiii. 13. It should not be supposed (though I dare say it will be) that he who is not pleased with the moral consequences of some modern inventions must be insensible to the ingenuity of the contrivers. Not that they are so very original after all as we are apt to imagine. The sailing chariot of Stevinus which belonged to Prince Maurice and which Peireskius walked five hundred miles to see would carry people thirty German miles in a few minutes. I am somewhat of that worthy gentleman's opinion who said of it 'If I was a prince I would generously recompense the scientific head which brought forth such contrivances, but I would as peremptorily forbid the use of them.' L.O.T.S. II. 3.



Had the benefit of the inopulent been the object in view it might have been compassed by letting off at a penny postage all who would consent to be enrolled as persons not worth a hundred a year. How many high-minded individuals would have scorned to avail themselves of their privilege though fully entitled to claim it! and with what infinite advantage to the state might a batch of hungry commissioners who now gain a livelihood by keeping up political heart-burnings have been turned over to this more innocent registration.

But I hate these ENVELOPES. They are another cause of the flatness of our present correspondence. If we purpose using one of them it is like sitting down to write an essay and not a letter. Instead of 'How can I contrive to squeeze all I have to say into three pages?' the question is 'How the deuce shall I manage to eke out four?' and we incontinently set to after the expansive fashion of Lord Bridgewater's legatees.\* As for

\* No one could think of withholding their wages from these worthy spinners when they took their work home



taking up a half sheet and folding it note-wise and placing my correspondent's name at the bottom along with my own I could never find in my heart to do that. 'Twas like giving oneself the airs of a member of parliament. This had been a piece of arrogance when the lower house was only so called with reference to the upper but when it became (for a time) so low *per se* would have implied more humility than I have any wish to lay claim to.

Some people make a practice of burning all their letters.\* This is passing strange. He must

but surely the subsequent profits should be paid over to the representatives of Archdeacon Paley whose single Treatise upon Natural Theology may be considered as the CAPITAL by means of which all the others have been manufactured.

\* C. L. having once burnt some whose loss he afterwards regretted determined thenceforward to burn all he should receive. This piece of fretful logic misbecame the gentle-hearted creature. S. S. with characteristic delicacy tells one of his correspondents that he has not 'a single letter from any human being in his possession.' He destroys them all 'upon principle.' Would that he had burnt his Plea for Chaptral Bodies whose massacre he is likely to have furthered by the beggarly principle upon which he stood up for them.



be an unlucky wight indeed who never gets one worth keeping and a mighty dull fellow who does not sometimes write one. The retiring Cowper somewhere expresses a wish that all the letters he had ever written might be committed to the flames. If his friends had not been better acquainted with their value than the dear ignorant himself we should have lost one of the most delightful portions of our literature. Perhaps he was not unconscious of their merit but his reverence for womankind made him unwilling to dethrone the ladies in an empire where they had so long reigned supreme. We never think of stuffing a good book into the fire although there may be ten thousand other copies of it existing. What folly then to burn a good letter (a little book) of which we possess the only copy in the world.

How interesting the old-fashioned missives look in after time with the direction still remaining as well as the postmark and all those mysterious scratches (amiable zigzaggery!) so ill exchanged for plain pothooks and hangers.



*Non solum in præsentia sed postero die jucundæ sunt.\** The very remembrance of the perplexity we had sometimes felt in making out an important word swallowed up by the wax was not unjoyous and the thought of the happy conjecture by which our sagacity at length put an end to the puzzle made our eyes sparkle proudly once more.

It was probably with a view to prevent the mischief which might happen from such ambiguities that the dear creatures who in every thing they do seem

Wisest, virtuosest, discreetest, best,

adopted the well known practice of reserving the most important part of their sweet epistolizings

\* Cicero must have shared right heartily in this feeling of mine or he would never have expressed it in such excellent Latin. Shenstone tells us that 'in dull weather when his spirits were apt to sink very low the best cordial he could think of was to read his friends' letters over and over again.' I am afraid 'twas their being crammed with compliments made the dose so palatable. Poor Shenstone loved puffing almost to disease and

Who pepper'd the highest was surest to please.



for the postscript which the charming fertility of their pen could at any time enable them to drive off to that remote corner of the sheet where seal never comes. I have often marvelled that in a prying age when so many secrets 'better hid' have been laid bare no one should have set his wits to work to find out the inventor of those short lines on the third page of a letter by which the calamity aforesaid may be averted. This would have been excellent employment for the industrious personage who took such pains to make the Man in the Iron Mask uninteresting by bringing us all acquainted with his name and whose rabid anxiety to prove the great Lord Clarendon a knave deserves to be held in lasting remembrance.

Among the numerous evils which the pestilent diffusion of reading has brought upon us every man of taste must reckon the banishment of those SIGNS which formerly made each of our streets an agreeable picture gallery. We all remember the exclamation of the poet upon the revival of the arts in Italy-



The canvas glowed, *beyond e'n nature warm!*

I vow and protest that line has been brought to my mind *almost* as often by our street signs as by some which the benevolent hangmen of the Royal Academy are accustomed every year to suspend within doors. But now instead of being enlivened on a dull day by a sight of the Rising Sun or meeting with a Green Dragon or a Blue Boar so frequently sought for in vain at the Zoological Gardens we are doomed to the cheerless occupation of the moody prince and pore upon nothing as we walk along but 'words, words, words!'<sup>\*</sup> Nor this the worst. Artists have lost their best patrons and are left to the tender mercies of picture-dealers who may fairly be said to drink their wine out of the skulls of painters.

Formerly every shopkeeper had a sign swinging in front of his house in the manner we still see followed now and then at a country inn. It was a favorite amusement with the *Bloods* of the time to make a tour of the streets in the dead of the night for the purpose of unhooking these

<sup>\*</sup> HAMLET.



symbols and giving them a new distribution. Sometimes a sensitive haberdasher on coming down in the morning was petrified at the sight of a great Saracen's Head grinning at him over his own door! the proper indication of the light articles he really vended being transferred perchance to a wholesale ironmonger suddenly become a dealer in tape and bobbins. Many an apothecary on opening his shop has been saluted by a death's head and marrow bones brought from a distant undertaker's and placed in its new situation by these satirical rogues as a caution against taking doctors' stuff. The apothecary's sign which always had in the foreground a shopman pouring out of one bottle into another was lent to a neighbouring bookseller thus unwittingly made to disclose a principal mystery of his craft. This sarcasm would have little point now when those original works yclep'd Cabinet Cyclopædias &c. (under the safe guardianship of some *moral* philosopher) give such an accurate notion of the character of our general literature.\*

\* Don't let it be imagined that I am wanting in respect



The jumbles that will be caused by the general use of ENVELOPES which the new postage-law has created will be ten times more annoying than these without any of their advantages. Noodles (to give one example) will contrive to get hold of letters written to men of sense and swear they were addressed to themselves but that they have burnt the envelope. The latter part of the statement may be true enough and as it will often be impossible to disprove the rest of it history will be incurably falsified in numberless instances.

**Give the Devil his due** is a maxim that no honest man will think of disobeying. I have glanced already (pp. **K.\* P.**) at a few persons and

for those who have been rightly esteemed 'not the worst patrons of men of letters.' I really think that their own productions are among the most honest the booksellers deal in. Who can look at the three portly—stately—majestic tomes which the members of one family in the metropolis have given to the world without feeling that we are that part of Adam's posterity destined to see

Giants of mighty BONE and bold emprise?

The modesty of my publisher made him implore me to withdraw this note but inflexible justice bid it stand.



a few things known by titles they do not very well deserve. A multitude of others will occur to every body in a trice for the habit of calling things by their right names is gone quite out of fashion. However

As the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head,

let us be thankful to the adopter of this ugly scheme for having furnished us with a suitable epithet for the age we live in. The troublesome disguises which we wear are become so numerous that it may be doubted if any since the flood deserves better than our own to be called  
THE AGE OF ENVELOPES.\*

\* Where are all the Misters conjured to? They are as rarely to be met with as people who have not made the grand tour. 'What!' said a man to me the other day 'have you never been on the continent?' 'No!' said I 'but my tailor has with all his family.' Every one now is a gentleman when spoken of and an esquire when written to. This last honor is so lavishly bestowed-

Excess of bounty! it has fallen on *me*.

I only wish that those by whom I am hoisted into the 'squiralty upon the outside of a letter would carry their generosity a little further and let me find something within which may enable me to support the dignity.



'Tis  
a lucky thing  
for us that the covers  
we find so unappropriable were  
not shaped thus in POPE's time. His  
parsimonious turn would have led him to  
build pyramids and plant quincunxes upon  
them in the manner of George Wither and we  
should have lost those delicious epistles and  
satires wherewith our fathers were  
tickled but which we enjoy with  
a far greater relish because  
we spy not ourselves  
' hitching in the  
rhyme.'

\* Swift hints at his friend's propensity in his 'Advice  
to the Grub Street Poets'-

Get all your verses printed fair,  
Then let them well be dried,  
And Curll must have a special care  
To leave the margin wide :  
Send them to *paper-sparing* Pope,  
And when he sits to write,  
No letter with an *envelope*  
Could give him more delight.

SWIFT'S WORKS, VOL. XIV. p. 213.



We are all aware with how much difficulty (owing to the extent of his correspondence) the life of many a great man who has flourished in our day has been comprized in two volumes octavo. There is no reason to fear a dearth of equally eminent characters for some time to come but the scribbliomania engendered by this new law will make it impossible to adhere any longer to such moderate limits. The man must have a heart of rock who can behold dry-eyed the prospect which thus opens upon that curious collection of sedentary animals called 'the reading public.' It may be feared we have now reached the point at which Goldsmith predicted in the year 1765 we should one day arrive-

When over-*wrote*, the general system feels  
Its motions stop, or frenzy fire the wheels.

The frenzy has been promoted by the melancholy cheapness of paper and by the provoking invention of steel pens which deny our authors the breathing-time they used to be refreshed with upon halting to mend their old ones. This operation was as useful in writing books as



snuffing the candle is in reading them. One process by giving a moment's consideration often saved us from perpetuating nonsense which we could not prevent rising in the mind and the other affords time for many a good thought to sink into it which would never get there but for such salutary pauses.

This remark throws light upon a point which I had no thought of illuminating when I made it. It helps to account for the general superiority of plebeian authors over those who have been genteely born. Our noble language would have one more classic if the Lord of Lanthony had come into the world with a wooden spoon in his mouth instead of a silver one. And who can say that a certain prolixious baronet who could so shove off his country as to write a book about 'England and the English' might not produce something that would be read seven years hence if he would but blow out his wax lights and get on by *dips*?

But to return to the subject of steel pens. No reader of any acuteness will suspect that this



DESCANT UPON THE PENNY POSTAGE was written with one of them.\* It is composed with too much method and too pressly and with too firm a persuasion that 'amplification is the spinning-wheel of the bathos' for such a surmise to be entertained for a moment. Believe me nothing half so tender ever dropt from a pen that was shaped by your Brummagem cutlers. Notwithstanding his strains

Drew *iron tears* down Pluto's cheek

Orpheus himself never dealt at their shop but whenever he dotted down a descant always did it by the help of a reed or a quill. If it be true that a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind I am at a loss to imagine how some of my scribbling coevals (better known to fame) subdue the natural yearnings by which I find myself constrained to patronize the *goose*.

\* That the author has not aimed at what musicians call 'figurative descant' will be seen by a glance at the top of these pages. The characters at the bottom are so arranged as not only to show (to those who understand them) the laws by which the composition is governed but also to point out any instance of their violation.



Should any of those officious brushers of gentlemen's clothes THE REVIEWERS be of opinion that I ought to leave off with that word I will admit its propriety and only take the liberty to lug in one more.

If ever coiner deserved hanging 'tis the bungler who coined that wretched term *pre-paid*. If a new word was wanting why would not *forepaid* do in which some regard to analogy would be shown? for it might rank with foretold fore-known and many more. Should the other uneuphonous compound ever get a footing in the language (which the gods forefend) it may easily be foreseen that our dear mother tongue will be lapsing into barbarism. Perhaps the learned Theban was shocked at continuing to call that *post-paid* which had been paid for beforehand? he fancied doubtless that the POST-MAN (poor fellow!) is so dubbed because he usually goes his rounds *after* the arrival of the mail. A few generous lashes at the whipping-post bestowed on this mangler of the Queen's English would convince the cockney philologer that post does



not always mean 'after or since' and make him presently cry out with cousin Dogberry Write me down an ass and unloose me!

It isn't the first time however that a bad measure and a vile term have sprung up together. Was not this the case when the Tories turned Conservatives?

F. A. P.

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A SINGLE ERRATUM

(somebody says) 'may knock out the brains of a whole passage.' I have just made a timely discovery of one that is sufficient to knock out the brains of a whole book for it makes me appear to treat lightly a brotherhood whom I hold in all due reverence and with whose members I shall be happy to exchange reciprocal compliments.

Page Z line 1 for *officious* read *official*.



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FOR

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