

Mr. BENTLEY,
THE
RURAL PHILOSOPHER:
A TALE.
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

Sic parvis componere magna solebam VIRG.



L O N D O N:

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Mr. BENTLEY.

CHAP. I.

MR. *Selwin*, to whose care the young gentlemen were committed, was a merchant of extensive connections, and a man of fair reputation: he had known Mr. *Bentley* in the former part of his life, and had a particular regard for him and Mr. *Fairfield*. He considered the care of their children a strong mark of confidence and friendship; and determined to acquit himself of the charge, with all the attention he was able.

In the letters he received from the country, great weight was laid upon the correctness of the young people's dispositions, and he was taught likewise, that they conceived a very little restraint would be sufficient, as the strictness of their education had already instructed them to beware of the snares of the world. Their behaviour confirmed every favourable character given in the letters, and satisfied Mr. *Sekein* it did not proceed merely from the prejudice of the parents.

As their stay was to be confined to a few months, they were to be indulged in every innocent gratification of their curiosity; and it was trusted, their own good sense and discretion might be depended on, for their choice of proper engagements for that time.

Fairfield employed the first opportunity after his arrival, in writing to his dear *Betsy*; and as correspondencies of this cast

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run pretty much in the same stile, we shall only lay before our readers his first epistle, and the young lady's answer.

“ Little does my dear and tenderly respected Miss *Bentley* conceive, how constantly she lives in my thoughts, and how impossible it is for any distance to divide her faithful *Edward* from the memory of her many graces.

I have many acknowledgments to make, my charming *Betsy*, for this privilege of committing my heart to paper, and of testifying, again and again, the ardor and sincerity of my passion, in characters that may confront me with the basest apostacy, if ever I should cease to love you, even for a moment. My whole delight, in this croud of flattery and artful creatures, is, to dwell constantly on the raptures of past scenes, and to anticipate the happy hour, when we shall meet again, never to be separated more.

The people in this city talk to me of its curiosities, its customs, its fashions, its politeness, its gaiety, and much more; and cannot account for my insensibility to every thing about me, because they know not that I am in love, and that the object of my affection is Miss *Bentley*. They amuse me, as they think, by hurrying me from one busy scene to another; but I have no pleasure, but such as immediately proceeds from contemplating the perfections of Miss *Bentley*. What a cruel kindness is that they practise towards me! And how false are the notions of this polished people! When I retire to my closet to enjoy the most pleasing reveries, to follow you in idea from one little domestic duty to another; to conceive you are now walking in the flower-garden, now are seated in the grove, now are ranging through the woods, and blessing other eyes with your presence; when these sweet imaginations possess me, with every best felicity I am capable of enjoying, they call me to company, to ceremony,

ceremony, and to noise; and would persuade me, that reflection is melancholy, and that solitude is dulness. Mistaken, false taught men! I fear, that, to love them as I ought, it is necessary I view them at a distance.

You can have no idea, my *Betsy*, of the strange love of dissipation that reigns here in every bosom. The ladies are generally handsome, but I think your papa gave a faithful picture of their follies. They dress strangely, they talk strangely, they act strangely. There is a confident effrontery in polite life, and a barbarous formality among people in the middle station, that would equally excite your pity and admiration. They endeavour to persuade the world, that their sex is incapable of friendship, and all their intimacies are methodical and distant, cold and formal. Cruel, and insensible, sweet creatures! they deprive society of its most valuable blessing; by dedicating their time to their

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dress, and barbarously neglecting themselves.

Can you believe, that they encourage every insipidity of address from the man ? That they are satisfied with professions without truth, delicacy without sense, and politeness without a meaning ? Can you conceive, that their conversation is altogether confined to trifles, that their education is without wisdom; their examples without prudence, and their conduct without consistency ?

There may be many advantages attending what is called an accomplished education, but I shall be ever happy to think, that those most dear to me, were cultivated at a distance from the croud. I congratulate myself a thousand times a day, that our souls are suited for obscurity ; that we shall be permitted to hide our heads together in the shades, and taste sweet peace ; and calmly pass forward to eternity.

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You are sensible, my dear *Betsy*, that I love you for the artless beauties of your person, that I love you for the goodness of your heart, and the graces of your intelligent mind; but above all, I love you for a superiority to city sense, and an ignorance of city manners. If I can prevail upon your brother, I believe, before the month expires, I shall be happy in your company; but if I must endure a more tedious absence, pray give me as much of your company as possible, by writing to me, as often as you are able. I can by no means reconcile myself to this strange people, and heartily repent our expedition; but as my friend seems particularly delighted with every thing about him, I fear a few weeks must elapse, before I can assure you in person, how much I am your faithful and affectionate

E. FAIRFIELD.

CHAP.

C H A P. II.

MISS *Bentley's* answer was as follows :

“ My papa, Master *Fairfield*, who has taught me always to contend for more than the semblance of delicacy, justifies me, in answering your very affectionate letter. And indeed, sir, I should be a very disengenuous, a very hypocritical girl, to deny that every kind notice you take of me by letter, gives me more pleasure than can be expressed in many words. My hand trembled, and my heart was uncommonly agitated on the receipt of this before me ; for I had a thousand apprehensions for your safety
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in so long a journey ; and my simple forebodings of something, like a possible forgetfulness of past constancy, kept me waking and weeping three whole nights, and I did not know what tidings of good or evil might be brought me. My papa has taken uncommon pains, uncommon pains, to console me ; but, sweet man ! he is always good, always kind, and ever tender ; he dissipates all my fears, and tells me I deserve to be happy. But, sir, you know my papa is a wise man, and thinks fearfully of the great city ; he rejoices with me that your stay in *London* is to be so short, for it more than half repents him, that he ever consented to your journey. However, he has great faith in yours and my brother's discretion, and waits your return with pleasure.

You will laugh at me for growing a strange fanciful girl ; but indeed I think the flower-garden greatly disordered since you left it, nor do my favourite Robins
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sing so sweetly, in my idea, as they were used to do; the hermitage is grown very dull, and the grotto very gloomy; I have got a sad habit of sighing, and love best to be alone.

To be sure it is very idle to indulge foolish superstitions; but I cannot help entertaining weak apprehensions at times, and in spite of all my papa's good humour-ed politeness, and affectionate assiduity, I cannot help being a little unhappy. I am more pleased with the tender love elegies of Mr. *Hammond*, and the plaintive numbers of Mr. *Shenstone*, than ever I was in my life, and I fear I am very faulty in rather neglecting my little pupils, for the benefit of retirement and reflection.

I think you say very well, that the people of *London* are strange, if they call solitude irksome; for indeed I take hardly any pleasure in society, equal to what
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I experience, when I walk through the poplar trees by moonlight, and think of my rural philosopher alone.

But pray, sir, did you expect I should approve of your severity on my sex? Do you know so little of your *Betsy*, as to conceive her fond of satyr? Indeed, indeed, sir, I will not think you justified in forming a precipitate judgment of the ladies in *London*; and beside I will suggest to you, that my papa, in all his comments, inclines strictly to good nature and candour; so, my dear *Edward*, you must not expect my approbation of so severe a censure on my sex, especially as you confess the men are so highly blameable in their conduct towards them. I thank you, and again I thank you, for expressing yourself so very tenderly and faithfully in my favour, and let me assure you, in return, it shall ever be the supreme pleasure of my life to convince you, how immediately

your

your happiness is connected with that of your affectionate

ELIZABETH BENTLEY.”

In this manner the two lovers constantly corresponded.

The young gentlemen had not been in *London* a month, before *Fairfield's* opinion of the city had altered considerably in its favour. He began to grow rather more reconciled to absence from his *Betsy*, and to the scenes about him; and with respect to *Bentley*, he was so charmed with the ways of town, and so reluctant to leave it so soon, as was expected by his father, that he spared no rhetoric with his friend, to prevail on him to petition for a discretionary indulgence; and as he had an unlimited influence over *Fairfield*, he very easily complied, and they both subscribed to the request, in a letter to the old gentleman,

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tleman, and obtained their suit, not without some hesitation on the part of Mr. *Bentley*. That thinking man trembled for possible consequences, yet great was his confidence in his son, and the plan of education he had pursued with him. He was sensible, however, the request came directly from that quarter, and though he could not think of a peremptory denial, he wished for a plea to recall him. At last, after some debate with himself, he resolved to write to Mr. *Se'win*, to watch them with more circumspection than before; and determined not to suffer them to stay in town at all events many months longer. In his letter to that gentleman he said, "I am very far from being easy, respecting the inquisitive disposition of my son. His morals are good, and his sense is strong; but the world is crafty, and there is little security in much wisdom. The credulous generosity of youth is against him. The confidence of security may betray him a thousand ways,

and if you love me, watch over him, give me the earliest intelligence of inclination to error, and I will bless you for it most heartily.”

CHAP.

C H A P. III.

W I T H regard to Miss *Betsy*, the effect this disappointment had upon her susceptible heart, may be much more easily imagined than described. She was always inclined to indulge an apprehensive doubt, about possible consequences that might result from the journey; and this last appeal to her father confirmed all her fears in an instant. She had made some little preparation for their reception, and counted the days and the hours, and conceived they had taken leave of *London*, and were then upon the road, when the fatal petition reached her father. She flew with eagerness to the hermitage,

to gather the contents from Mr. *Bentley*; and as he read on, fixed her eyes stedfastly upon her father, and listened in full expectation of hearing the certain day of their arrival, and that she should prepare to receive them in a few hours. Her disappointment was inexpressibly great, and she burst into a violent agony of tears. O sir! O sir! she said, this is much, much more than I could possibly be prepared for, and my heart is melting at my eyes. Sure, sir, it cannot be, that Master *Fairfield* has joined my brother in this request? Is it so, sir? Then flinging her arms about her father's neck, and hiding her face in his bosom, O my papa, save me, save me from my fears—save me, save me from my fears, for I begin to think his last letters have abated of their warmth, and that another month may make your *Betsy* wretched enough of all conscience. She wept much, and affected the old gentleman not a little; he consoled her however as much as possible, assured her

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he had no doubt, but the motion was first made by her brother ; that *Fairfield* had complied through friendship, and did not doubt but his next letter would silence all her fears, respecting his infidelity ; and what a few weeks would restore their family to its former union and felicity. He suppressed his own objections, for fear of increasing her alarm, and the young lady waited impatiently for his next letter.

C H A P. IV.

THE young gentlemen, *Bentley* in particular, received the consent from his father with especial pleasure; he promised himself a glorious swing of indulgence, in the amusements of the town, for a month or two at least, and at the expiration of that term, did not fear of finding fresh excuse to delay their return. *Fairfield* was very far from the infatuation of *Bentley*, but still his prejudices against *London* were very much softened; and as they were both genteelly supplied with pocket-money, they had every opportunity of enjoying every thing the great city could furnish. They began to make material alterations in their dress, soon after

after their arrival; and complied in great degree with the fashion, without following it in the extreme. *Bentley*, in particular, objected to the plainness and awkward simplicity of their former habits, and talked now and then of taste and gentility, and consulted his taylor on all occasions.

We are sorry to confess, young *Bentley* soon began to furnish a melancholy proof of the insufficiency of the strictest education, to counteract the many seducements of the world. He soon formed a variety of acquaintances with gay young people of both sexes; and though it was some time before he could be persuaded to pursue vice, yet he very soon began to consider it with less abhorrence than he was taught to do. He conversed daily with young fellows of the most specious understandings, who valued themselves on what is called a liberal education; would talk freely of the prejudices of age, and the superstitious credulity of the crowd. They
would

in matters of material moment. My father, he would say, had ~~my~~ few advantages of education; and his views must be necessarily confined. It is true, a constitutional goodness of heart, leads him to sound morality, and an excellent propriety of conduct; but his faith is implicit, and without enquiry; and the propriety of it cannot be proved by reason. He was taught to stagger at the divine nature's being incarnate for the salvation of sinners; he could not reconcile the idea of a trinity in unity, or how an eternal existence could be extinguished on *Mount Calvary* for three days. He objected to the possibility of the sun's being darkened on that awful occasion, without a natural eclipse; nor could he conceive it possible, that all the divine ~~attitudes~~ ^{attributes} were equally inflexible; and that divine justice could no way be satisfied, but by an interposition of such severe mercy, as the sacrifice of the eternal son. His companions taught him the words, *priestcraft, ignorance, and superstition*; and he
soon

soon began to think as liberally as themselves. He read Dr. *Young's* sublime reasoning with *Lorenzo*, without yielding to his argument; and scepticism began to reign in his heart, and his father began to be forgotten. As *Fairfield* was at first particularly fond of retirement, *Bentley* had every opportunity of pursuing his curiosity alone, he sought the polite circles at every opportunity, was introduced to the tea-tables of fashionable people, and qualified himself in a few weeks for what is called good company.

CHAP.

C H A P. V.

HE was not however quite reconciled to his new opinions, he felt less peace than he was wont to do, and often attempted to stifle reflection, but in vain. The memory of past contentment haunted him like his shadow. A sense of the omnipresence of the Deity dwelt, at times, forcibly on his thoughts, and determined him to act like a wise man, before so awful a witness; but these resolutions were generally made at midnight, when darkness oppresses the mind with more awe, than it experiences in the blaze of day, and the examples and councils of his friends made these reflections visit him very rarely.

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As the arguments for religion were weakened, the restriction of moral conduct began to fail. From Deism to absolute infidelity is a short step, and he soon found it convenient to adopt the latter creed. He would talk confidently of dropping into the dark, in extreme old age, when the organs were all decayed, and the body laboured under every disqualification : and argue that the wisdom of providence, which makes nothing in vain, had never implanted passions in the human breast, if they were not to be indulged ; by which means he acquired a strange talent for self deception, and grew negligent about the employments of time, and the consequences of eternity.

He was sitting one evening in a box at a coffee-house, talking to one of his most intimate acquaintances, in the character of a man altogether studious to convince himself of the propriety of error : and as he

he took pains to be overheard, in hopes of being callèd upon to maintain a dispute with some weak adversary : a young gentleman, of a very modest appearance and engaging address, begged leave, very politely and submissively, to be permitted to answer some objections which he had started very rashly. *Bentley* was not so far gone, as to be quite superior to conviction, and as he rather wished to be fully satisfied of his doubts, than confirmed in his fears, listened to the stranger's discourse with strict attention ; he was, however, predetermind to allow little weight to any thing that should make against his own prepossessions ; and therefore, though he suffered the other to proceed without interruption, yet when he had finished, he returned to his charge ; allowed of very few of his adversary's positions, and objected to the deductions he drew from them. He was, however, uncommonly pleased with the modest sedateness of the speaker, felt an uncommon prejudice in his favour, and

requested to be ranked among the foremost of his friends. The young gentleman; on the other hand, pitied the false positiveness of *Bentley*, perceived he had betrayed much good sense, by suffering himself to be led beyond his depth, and resolved, at all events, to serve him with better advice, if it lay in his power. He therefore readily consented to cultivate a future good understanding, and at parting expressed himself to this purpose :

“ I am a young man, sir, as well as yourself, and the little advantage of years in my scale, gives me no authority to dictate : but believe me, sir, if you value wisdom, if you value yourself, you will consult a never-failing monitor within you, and own, that your present principles are wrong : you will else very soon find this world to be indeed a *blank*, and the future much worse than a *fable*. I will furnish you with my address, when I am settled in
town,

town, but till then, you will always hear of me at this coffee-house."

This gentleman appeared something more than twenty, but carried the gravity of fifty. He spoke like a man who knew the value of speech, and employed his talent, like one who thought constantly independently of the thoughts of others. He had a title to much fame, for the correctness and elegant forcibility of his argument, but he despised so mean a consideration. He spoke as he acted in the presence of the Searcher of hearts, and cared little for the erroneous opinions of his creatures. He appeared to have undergone some severe trouble, looked pale and sickly, and was rather spiritless and thoughtful; but exerted himself, where he conceived it to be proper, with great energy and skill.

Bentley had never met with so capable an opponent before; he went home, and retired to his closet, and called a council

of his heart, and began to be staggered not a little. It is possible, said he, when I consider I cannot account for any thing my senses witness to; it is possible that things may exist, to which my senses cannot witness. Perhaps, it is possible this body may have an immortal soul within it, capable of existing in a separate state to all eternity; else it is odd the heathen world should think so, guided by the mere light of nature. Perhaps too, as I have somewhere read respecting the argument for *chance*, there may be an hell by chance; and if so, should I be taken sick this night, and should the physician give me over to-morrow, how would my casuistry sustain me? As it is, I confess, I do not like solitude, and when enveloped in midnight darkness, often think of supernatural appearances. Perhaps, as Mr. *Pope* says, ‘Man was not made to question;’ for surely, if he was, it is strange he never should be satisfied. I must think more seriously

seriously of these things, for at present I am hopeless of all light beyond the grave, and dissatisfied with every thing on this side that gloomy scene. He was violently agitated in this state of doubt and perplexity, when some of his companions calling upon him at that instant, summoned him to fulfill an engagement at the play-house. They remarked the gloom upon his countenance, and very soon laughed him into the same latitude of principles, they had involved him in before.

The air of gaiety universally displayed at the theatre, contributed to relieve him from the anguish of his reflections; he very soon forgot every temporal inclination to the right, and gave into all their follies with cheerfulness and alacrity. Mr. *Gar- rick* that night performed the character of *Ranger*, and recommended the joys of a rakish life so strongly, that *Bentley* determined on some act of gallantry in his way home.