On the Cockney School of Poetry. Vol. II

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Our talk shall be (a theme we never tire on)

Of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron,

(Our England’s Dante)—Wordsworth—HUNT, and KEATS,

The Muses’ son of promise; and of what feats

He yet may do.

CORNELIUS WEBB.

In our last paper we made an attempt to give a general outline of Mr Hunt’squalifications, both as a poet and as a founder of a sect. We alluded, among other weak points in his writing, to the indecent and immoral tendency of his poem Rimini, and shall now proceed to state, at somewhat greater length, what those circumstances are which induced us to select that production for the object of our unmitigated indignation. It is not our intension to enter into any general argument respecting the propriety of making incest the subject of poetry. The awful interest excited by the contemplation of passions abandoned to the extreme of infamy, has tempted many illustrious poets to indulge themselves in such unhallowed themes. But they themselves were at all times aware, that in so doing they have done wrong; and we know of no great poem, turning on such a subject, which does not contain within it some marks of the contrition of the author. All men, who have any souls and any hearts, must be of the same opinion with us in this matter; and after all the volumes that have been written on either side of the controversy, we know of no words which express the real truth of the case better than those of Sir T.

Brown:

“Of sins heteroclital, and such as want name or precedent, there is oftimes a sin their histories. We desire no records of such enormities; sins should be accounted new, that so they may be esteemed monstrous. They omit of monstrosity as they as from their rarity; for men count it venial to err with their forefathers and foolishly conceive they divide a sin in its society. The pens of men may sufficiently expatiate without these singularities of villany; for without increase the hatred of vice in some, so do they enlarge the theory of wickedness in all. And this is one thing that make latter ages worse than were the former; for the vicious example of ages past poison the curiosity of these present, affording a hint of sin unto seduceable spirits, and soliciting those unto the imitation of them, whose heads were never so perversely principled as to invent them. In things of this nature silence commendeth history; ’tis the venial part of things lost, wherein there must never rise a Pancirollus, nor remain any register but that of hell.”

In the preface to his poem, Mr Hunt has made an apology for the nature of his subject, and pleaded the example of many illustrious predecessors. He quotes the Greek tragedians (of whom, in another part of the same preface, he confesses his total ignorance)*, and makes allusions to the example of Racine, and some of our own older dramatists. He might also have enumerated the two best dramatists that have appeared within our own recollection, Schiller andAlfieri, and, the first of all living poets, Lord Byron. Each of these great men has composed a poem of which the interest turns upon some incestuous passion; but we will venture to assert, what we think there could be no difficulty in proving, that not one of them has handled his subject in such a manner as might entitle Mr Leigh Hunt to shelter himself under the shade of his authority.

In the Œdipus Tyrannus of Sophocles, we are presented with the most fearful tragedy of domestic horror which it ever entered into the human fancy to conceive. But it is a spectacle of pure horror, and unpolluted with guilt, for the mother and the son have both sinned in ignorance. The object of Sophocles was to represent not the incest but the punishment—not the weakness or the vice of man, but the unavoidable revenge of an offended Deity. Œdipus and Jocasta are as virtuous in our eyes as if their incest had never been. We pity, but we do not hate, them; and in the other play, wherein the subsequent life of Œdipus is represented, we learn to regard his character not merely without disgust, but with emotions of tenderness, love, and reverence. The object of the poet is sufficiently manifest from the whole conduct of the piece, in which every thing that could assist our fancy, in bringing before us the details of guilt, is most studiously avoided, and in which there occur perpetual allusions to the old denunciations of Apollo and the curse of Pelops.*

In the Hippolytus of Euripides, the expression is throughout not of horror but of pity. The love is that not of a mother, but of a youthful step-dame; love too, unpartaken, unrequited, and unenjoyed. Phædra is polluted by incestuous thoughts, not because her passions are irregulated, but because she has fallen under the wrath of Diana. The young and beautiful Hippolytus dies a martyr to his purity, and we sympathize indeed with the feeling of the poet, who prophecies that *his* tomb shall be the resort of virgins and the scene of prayers.

——“through long ages maids shall come,

And cut their hoarded tresses on thy grave,

Before their wedding. They shall give to thee

The fruit of all their grief. The tender thoughts

Of virgins shall be thine. Nor shall the love

Of Phædra for thy beauty be unsung.”‡

The Mirra of Alfieri is a play never intended for representation; it is a pure imitation of Greek simplicity and pathos,—a heart-rending picture of madness and despair,—a long ode of agony. There is no willingness in the guilty love of the daughter, and no spot of sin pollutes the lofty spirit of Ciniro. We look upon Mirra, not as a sinner, but a sacrifice. We perceive that

———“the forge of destiny, and wrath

Of Deities offended, have condemned

Her innocent to everlasting tears.”

The same circumstance of palliation, which we have already mentioned in regard to the Œdipus, might also be alleged in defence of the Braut von Messina. That noble tragedy is like Mirra, a strict imitation of the Greek model, in both, the fable is carried on by means of as few actors as we find in Æschylus; in both, we hear the solemn choral songs of old men and virgins; and in both, the object of the poet’s art is to shew that the stain of unhallowed passion must ever have its origin in a curse, and be blotted out in the blood of some fearful expiation. Who does not remember the woeful cry of Isabella?

“O! when shall that old curse dissolve away,

Which sits with weight of misery on our house.”

The daring spirit of Byron has twice ventured to tread upon the same awful ground. He has represented, both in Manfred and in Parasina, the mutual love of conscious incest. In the first, indeed, we gather only from mysterious hints, that the inexplicable being before us has had his heart torn asunder by the

agonies of an unlawful passion for his sister. But we feel not for him the same sympathy which makes us partakers in the thoughts and actions of ordinary men. We perceive that he holds strange converse with spirits and demons, and we do not wonder that he should be the victim of an unearthly flame. Besides, before his guilt is revealed to us, his punishment, like that of Cain, has been greater than he could bear. We see in him a weary wasted hater of the world, and of himself;—Let us hear his own words

“Daughter of Air! I tell thee, since that hour—

But words are breath—look on me in my sleep.

Or watch my watchings;—Come and sit by me!

My solitude is solitude no more,

But peopled with the furies;—I have gnash’d

My teeth in darkness till returning morn,

Then cursed myself till sunset;—I have pray’d

For madness as a blessing—’tis denied me.

I have affronted death—but in the war

Of elements the waters shrunk from me.

And fatal things passed harmless—the cold hand

Of an all-pitiless demon held me back,

Back by a single hair which would not break.

In phantasy, imagination, all

The affluence of my soul—which one day was

A Crœsus in creation—I plunged deep.

But like an ebbing wave, it dash’d me back

Into the gulph of my unfathom’d thought.

I plunged amidst mankind. Forgetfulness

I sought in all save where ’tis to be found,

And that I have to learn—my sciences.

My long pursued and super-human art,

Is mortal here—I dwell in my despair—

And live—and live for ever.”

The frail partner of his guilt has already died, not of violence but of grief; and when she appears, we see in her, not the sinful woman, but the judged and pardoned spirit. He who derives a single stain of impurity from Manfred, must come to its perusal with a soul which is not worthy of being clean.

To none of these poems, however, does the subject of Rimini bear so great a resemblance as to Parasina, and it is this very circumstance of likeness which brings before us in the strongest colours the difference between the incest ofLeigh Hunt and the incest of Byron. In Parasina, we are scarcely permitted to have a single glance at the guilt before our attention is rivetted upon the punishment. We have scarcely had time to condemn, within our own hearts, the sinning, though injured son, when—

“For a departing being’s soul

The death-hymn peals and the hollow bells knoll;

He is near his mortal goal;

Kneeling at the Friar’s knee.

Sad to hear—and piteous to see—

Kneeling on the bare cold ground.

With the block before and the guards around;

And the headsman with his bare arm ready.

That the blow may be both swift and steady,

Feels if the axe be sharp and true—

Since he set its edge anew;

While the crowd in a speechless circle gather

To see the Son fall by the doom of the Father.”

The fatal guilt of the Princess is in like manner swallowed up in the dreary contemplation of her uncertain fate. We forbear to think of her as an adulteress, after we have heard that *horrid voice* which is sent up to heaven at the death of her paramour:

“Whatsoe’er its end below,

Her life began and closed in woe.”

Not only has Lord Byron avoided all the details of this unhallowed love, he has also contrived to mingle in the very incest which he condemns the idea of

retribution; and our horror for the sin of Hugo is diminished by our belief that it was brought about by some strange and super-human fatality, to revenge the ruin of Bianca. That gloom of righteous visitation which invests in the old Greek tragedies the fated house of Atreus, seems here to impend with some portion of its ancient horror over the line of Esté. We hear, in the language of Hugo, the voice of the same prophetic solemnity which announced to Agamemnon, in the very moment of his triumph, the approaching and inevitable darkness of his fate:

“The gather’d guilt of elder times

Shall reproduce Itself in crimes;

There is a day of vengeance still,

Linger it may—but come it will.”

That awful chorus does not, unless we he greatly mistaken, leave an impression of *destiny* upon the mind more powerful than that which rushed on the troubled spirit of Azo, when he heard the speech of Hugo in his hall of judgment.

“Thou gav’st, and may’st resume my breath,

A gift for which I thank thee not;

Nor are my mother’s wrongs forgot,

Her slighted love and ruined name,

Her offspring’s heritage of shame;

But she is in the grave, where he,

Her son, thy rival, soon shall be;

Her broken heart—my severed head—

Shall witness for thee from the dead,

How trusty and how tender were

Thy youthful love—paternal care.

“Albeit my birth and name be base,

And thy nobility of race

Disdained to deck a thing like me—

Yet in my lineaments they trace

Some features of my father’s face,

And in my spirit—all of thee.
From thee—this tamelessness of heart—
From thee—nay, wherefore dost thou start?
From thee in all their vigour came
My arm of strength, my soul of name—
Thou didst not give me life alone,
But all that made me were thine own.
See what thy guilty love hath done!
Repaid thee with too like a son!
I am no bastard in my soul,
For that, like thine, abhorred controul:
And for my breath, that hasty boon
Thou gav’st and wilt resume so soon;
I valued it no more than thou,
When rose thy casque above thy brow,
And we, all side by side, have striven,
And o’er the dead our coursers driven:
The past is nothing—and at last
The future can but be the past;
Yet would I that I then had died:
For though thou work’dst my mother’s ill,
And made my own thy destined bride,
I feel thou art my father still;
And, harsh as sounds thy hard decree,
’Tis not unjust, although from thee.
Begot in sin, to die in shame,
My life begun and ends the same:
As erred the sire, so erred the son,

And thou must punish both in one:

My crime seems worst to human view,

But God must judge between us two!”

In all these productions of immortal poets, we see the same desire to represent incest as a thing too awful to spring up of itself, without the interference of some revengeful power—the same careful avoidance of luxurious images—the same resolution to treat unhallowed love with the seriousness of a judge, who narrates only that he may condemn the guilty and warn the heedless. It was reserved for the happier genius of Leigh Hunt, to divest incest of its hereditary horror—to make a theme of unholy love the vehicle of trim and light-hearted descriptions, of courtly splendours and processions, *square lit towers*, *low-talking leaves*, and *cheeks like peaches on a tree*. What the Rape of the Lock is to the Iliad, that would Rimini be to Parasina. It would fain be the genteel comedy of incest.

Surely never did such an idea enter into the head of any true poet, as that of opening a story like Rimini with a scene of gaiety. What sort of heart must that be, which could look forward to the perpetration of such fearful guilt, without feeling incapacitated for present jollity? And yet Mr Hunt has ushered in the fatal espousal of Francesca with all the glee and merriment of any ordinary wedding; and she, the poor victim of unhappy passion, is led to the altar of destruction trickt out, as if in mockery, with all the gawds and trappings that his laborious imagination could suggest. The reader feels the same disgust at this piece of ill-timed levity, with which one might listen to a merry tune played immediately before an execution. We have no sympathy with those who come to survey Mr Hunt’s “marriage in May weather.” We cannot enjoy the sunshine of his “sparkling day.” We turn away with contempt from his brilliant spectacle of

“Nodding neighbours greeting as they run,

And Pilgrims chanting in the morning sun.”

We shut our ears to his “callings, and clapping doors, and curs,” and cannot think of taking our seat, “with upward gaze,” to stare at his “heaved out tapestry.” What a contrast is the opening of Parasina! What a breathing of melancholy! What a foretaste of pity!

“It is the hour when from the boughs

The nightingale’s high note is heard;

It is the hour when lovers’ vows

Seem sweet in every whispered word

And gentle winds, and waters near

Make music to the lonely ear.

Each flower the dews have lightly wet,

And in the sky the stars are met,

And on the wave is deeper blue,

And on the leaf a browner hue,

And in the heaven that clear obscure,

So softly dark, and darkly pure,

Which follows the decline of day

As twilight melts beneath the moon away."

Mr Hunt seems, all through his poem, to imagine that he is writing a mere ordinary love-story, and this he is determined to do with all the lightness and grace, and *jauntiness* (to give him his own dear word), of which his muse is capable. Like all other novel writers, he is careful to give us proper description of the persons of his hero and heroine. He introduces to us Francesca, in a luxuriant paragraph which begins with

"Why need I tell of lovely lips and eyes,

A clipsome waist, and bosoms balmy rise,"

and takes occasion to make all judicious females fall in love with Paolo,

"So lightsomely dropt in his lordly back."

He describes the glittering pageant of the entrance of his hero with the enthusiasm of a city lady looking down at a dinner from the gallery at Guildhall. Let us listen for a moment to the Cockney rapture:

"The heralds next appear in vests attired

Of stiffening gold with radiant colours fired,

And then the poursuivants, who wait on these,

All dressed in painted richness to the knees."

And a little below:

"Their caps of velvet have a lightsome fit,

Each with a dancing feather sweeping it,

Tumbling its white against their short dark hair;

But what is of the most accomplished air
All wear memorials of their lady’s love,
A ribbon, or a scarf, or silken glove;
Some tied about their arm, some at the breast,
Some, with a drag, dangling from the cap’s crest.
A suitable attire the horses shew;
Their golden bits keep wrangling as they go;
The bridles glance about with gold and gems
And the rich housing-cloths, above the hems
Which comb along the ground with golden pegs,
Are half of net, to shew the hinder legs.
Some of the cloths themselves are golden threads,
With silk enwoven, azure, green, or red;
Some spotted on a ground of different hue,
As burning stars upon a cloth of blue,—
Or purple smearings with a velvet light
Rich from the glary yellow thickening bright,—
Or a spring green, powdered with April posies,—
Or flush vermilion, set with silver roses:
But all err wide and large, and with the wind
When it comes fresh, go sweeping out behind.
With various earnestness the crowd admire
Horsemen and horse, the motion and the attire.
Some watch, as they go by, the rider’s faces
Looking composure, and their knightly graces
The life, the carelessness, the sudden heed,
The body curving to the rearing steed;
The patting hand, that best persuades the check,

And makes the quarrel up with a proud neck;

The thigh broad pressed, the spanning palm upon it,

And the jerked feather swaling in the bonnet.

Others the horses and their pride explore

Their jauntiness behind and strength before.”

As, in the subject and passion of his Poem, Mr Hunt has the desire to compete with Lord Byron, so here, in the more airy and external parts of his composition, he would fain enter the lists with the Mighty Minstrel. But, of a truth, Leigh Hunt’s chivalrous rhymes are as unlike those of Walter Scott, as is the chivalry of a knighted cheesemonger to that of Archibald the Grim, or, if he would rather have it so, of Sir Philip Sydney. He draws his ideas of courtly splendour from the Lord Mayor’s coach, and he dreams of tournaments, after having seen the aldermen on horseback with their furred gowns and silk stockings. We are indeed altogether incapable of understanding many parts of his description, for a good glossary of the Cockney dialect is yet a desideratum in English literature, and it is only by a careful comparison of contexts that we can, in many passages, obtain any glimpse of meaning at all. What, for instance may be the English of *swaling?* what, being interpreted, signify *quoit-like steps?* what can exceed the affectation of such lines as these?

“The softening breeze came smoothing here and there,—

Boy-storied trees, and passion-plighted spots.—

The fervent sound

Of hoofs thick reckoning, and the wheels moist round.”

Was it really so, that Mr Hunt could find no nobler image to represent the quick yet regular motion of horses than that of an apprentice counting bank notes on his fingers’ ends.

But, in truth, we have no inclination to cut up with the small knives the poem of Rimini. Let us hasten to take one glance at the real business of the piece,—the incest of Paolo and Francesca. All the preparations for the actual sin are invented by our Poet “in his own fine free way.” The scene is in a little antique temple adorned by sculpture, and had Mr Hunt filled his freezes with funeral processions, or with the agonies of Orestes, or the despair of Œdipus, we might indeed have acknowledged that there was some propriety in his fancy. But as he has made of his temple a bagnio, so is its furniture conceived in the very spirit of the place.

“And on a line with this ran round-about,

A like relief, touched exquisitely out,

That shewed, in various scenes, the nymphs themselves

Some by the water side, on bowery shelves,

Leaning at will—some in the water, sporting

With sides half swelling forth, and looks of courting,—

Some in a flowery dell, hearing a swain

Play on his pipe till the hills ring again,—

Some tying up their long moist hair,—some sleeping

Under the trees, with fauns and satyrs peeping,—

Or, sidelong-eyed, pretending not to see

The latter, in the brakes come creepingly;

While their forgotten urns, lying about

In the green herbage, let the water out.

Never, be sure, before or since was seen

A summer-house so fine in such a nest of green.

We do not remember any thing in the whole of Hunt's writings worse, than the allusion in these verses to the well known song of the *Pitchers of Coleraine*.

How inferior is the conception of the *time* to that scene of moon-light mystery which we have already quoted from Parasina.

"One day,—'twas on a summer afternoon

When airs and gurgling brooks are best in tune,

And grasshoppers are loud, and day-work done,

And shades have heavy outlines in the sun,*—

The princess came to her accustomed bower

To get her, if she could, a soothing hour,

Trying, as she was used, to leave her cares

Without, and slumberously enjoy the airs

And the low-talking leaves, and that cool light

The vines let in, and all that hushing sight

Of closing wood seen thro’ the opening door,

And distant flash of waters tumbling o’er,

And smell of citron blooms, and fifty luxuries more.—”

But all this is nothing to the forebodings and presentiments, with which he skilfully represents the mind of Francesca as being filled, when she approaches in silence the scene of her infamy. The indecent attitudes of the nymphs on the cornice, can only be equalled by the blasphemous allusion to the history of our first parents, in depicting the thoughts of this incipient adulteress.

“She tried, as usual, for the trial’s sake,

For even that diminished her heart-ache;

And never yet, how ill soe’er at ease

Came she for nothing ’midst the flowers and trees.

Yet somehow or another, on that day,

She seem’d to feel too lightly borne away,—

Too much reliev’d,—too much inclined to draw

A careless joy from every thing she saw,

And looking round her with a new-born eye

As if some tree of knowledge had been nigh,

To taste of nature, primitive and free,

And bask at ease in her heart’s liberty.”

The incidents following this are all from Dante, but we shall endeavour to show, with some minuteness, how much the austere and simple Florentine has been obliged to the elegant rendering of the Cockney poet.

The bold genius of Dante never touched on ground more dangerous, than when he ventured to introduce into his poem the most dismal catastrophe which had ever befallen the family of his patron. Guido di Polento, Lord of Ravenna, the most generous friend of the Poet, had a lovely daughter, Francesca, who was betrothed in early years to Paolo Malatesta, a younger brother of the house of Rimini, and a perfect model of graceful chivalry; but afterwards compelled, by domestic tyranny, to become the wife of the elder brother of her lover, Lanciotto, a man savage in character, and deformed in person. The early flame, however, was not to be repressed, and the unfortunate sequel of their history is that which is so tenderly touched upon in the Inferno,

and so diluted and debased in the *Story of Rimini*.

In the course of his perambulation of hell, the poet feigns that he came to one scene of misery entirely set apart for those who had fallen the victims of unlawful love. Among these he observes Semiramis, Helen, and Cleopatra; Achilles, Paris, and Tristram. But while he is yet gazing with mingled fear and sorrow, on these melancholy shades, he perceives, at a distance, a pair of solitary ghosts, who seem to be devoured with a still severer anguish, and, in their altered forms, which seem, as he says, to be tossing about like strange in the wind, he recognizes, with a shudder of horror, the faded features of Francesca and her lover.

“Soon as the wind had in its sweeping brought

Them near to me, I cried, ‘ye wretched souls,

O! come and speak with us, deny not this,

As doves which plunge with open wings and firm

From Ether down into their joyful nest,

Obedient to the sudden call of love,

So came they gliding from that woful band

Where Dido is, swift through the sullen air,

Such was the strength of that impassionate cry.

Then she, ‘kind mortal, visitant of hell,

Could we, the inhabitants of these sad seats,

Have ought of power with the eternal king,

Prayers should we offer for thy gentle soul,

Which hath such pity on our matchless ills;

We will both hear and speak to thee of that

Which is thy pleasure, while the stormy wind,

Our master, is so hushed.

My native land

Is that by the sea-shore, where Po comes down

With all his turbulent train to seek repose

In ocean’s calmness.—Love, which ever finds

In noble spirits an easy prey, seized him;*
He loved that beauteous form which once was mine,
And ta’en from me unjustly. I loved him,
And love him still; Love wrought the death of both:
But Cain expects our murderer far beneath
In his deep gulph of fratricidal woe.’
So spake she. I stood listening all the while,
With countenance bent down. I could not bear
To look on that frail lady. But at length,
‘Alas!’ said I, ‘what sweet thoughts, what desires
Were those which brought them to these realms of grief?
Believe me, O! Francesca, I am sad
To tears when I behold thy spirit’s pain;
But tell me, in your season of sweet sighs,
O! when or how did you conceive these flames,
And give your souls up to unlawful love?’
Then she to me—‘there is no greater grief
Than is the memory of happy times,
In misery, as well thy guide† can say;
But if thou fain wouldst hear of the first rise
Of all this guilt, I will speak out to thee
As one that weeps and tells. We read one day
Of Launcelot, and how love mastered him;
We were alone, suspicious thoughts were none,—
And sundry times our eyes bent down, and cheeks
Were coloured in our reading. But one point,
One fatal point, it was which overcame:
’Twas when we read of the queen’s lovely smile

When first her true knight kissed her. Then my Paolo

(Whom God ne’er take from me, even here in hell),

He kiss’d my mouth, all trembling. Sweet that book,

And he that wrote it. But we read therein

That day no farther.’

While the one poor ghost

Spake so, the other lifted up a voice

So full of misery and bewailing shrieks,

That I, with pity overcome, grew faint,

And fell down like a dead man at their feet.”‡

The moral purpose of the question, and the deep pathos of the reply, can stand in need of no comment. But Mr Hunt has shewn very little judgment in borrowing the tale so closely from Dante, and yet entirely omitting all those circumstances in the great Poet’s narrative, which render the introduction, as well as the description of that passionate scene, at once so natural and so impressive. We listen without offence to the pale miserable spectre, who is condemned to add to her own wretchedness by the intense exactness of her recollection. But we cannot pardon the same things in a poet who takes the story of Francesca from her mouth into his own, and gives us that as a gratuitous effusion of his imagination, which was originally an agonized dream of self-torturing memory.

—“Paolo, by degrees, gently embraced,

With one permitted arm, her lovely waist;

And both their cheeks, like peaches on a tree,

Leaned with a touch together thrillingly;

And o’er the book they hung, and nothing said,

And every lingering page grew longer as they read.

As thus they sat, and felt, with leaps of heart,

Their colour change, they came upon the part

Where fond Geneura, with her flame long nurst

Smiled upon Launcelot when he kissed her first:—

That touch, at last, through every fibre slid,

And Paolo turned, scarce knowing what he did,—

Only he felt he could no more dissemble,

And kissed her, mouth to mouth, all in a tremble.

Sad were those hearts, and sweet was that long kiss:

Sacred be love from sight, whate’er it is.

The world was all forgot—the struggle o’er—

Desperate the joy.—That day they read no more.”

Mr Hunt has indeed taken mighty pains to render Rimini a story not of incest, but of love. The original betrothing of Francesca to Paolo he has changed into her being espoused by him as the proxy of his brother. The harshness and ferocity of Lanciotto’s character, and the hideous deformity of his person, have both been removed, as if the poet were anxious to render it impossible for us to have the least sympathy, or compassion, or pardon, for the frailty of his heroine. In the true story of Rimini, both Paolo and Francesca were sacrificed by the murderous hand of the detecting and cruel Lanciotto. But here the dagger and the axe are laid aside, and we have, in their room, the point of honour and the thrusting of rapiers. Paolo dies not by the secret revenge of his brother, but by rushing voluntarily on the sword, wielded fairly against him; and the poet is at the pains to borrow a beautiful eulogy fromEllis’s Specimens, which he makes the survivor utter over the body of the slain. The personages are all amiable, the sins all voluntary, and the sufferings sentimental. Many a one reads Rimini as a pleasant romance, and closes it without having the least suspicion that he has been perusing a tale pregnant with all the horrors of most unpardonable guilt. John Ford is the only English poet who has treated of incest with the same openness and detail as Leigh Hunt, but how infinitely above that gentleman’s reach are his ideas of its punishment.

“There is a place

(List, daughter) in a black and hollow vault,

Where day is never seen; there shines no sun,

But flaming horror of consuming fires;

A lightless sulphur, chok’d with smoky fogs

Of an infected darkness; in this place

Dwell many thousand thousand sundry sorts

Of never-dying deaths; there is burning oil

Pour’d down the drunkard’s throat; the usurer

Is forced to sup whole draughts of molten gold;

There is the murderer for ever stabb’d,

Yet can he never die; there lies the wanton

On racks of burning steel, whilst in his soul

He feels the torment of his raging lust.

[Mercy! oh, mercy!]

There stand those wretched things,

Who have dreamed out whole years in lawless sheets

And secret will, cursing one another;

Then you will wish each kiss your brother gave

Had been a dagger’s point; then you shall hear

How he will cry, ‘Oh, would my wicked sister

Had first been damn’d when she did yield to lust.’”

The story of Rimini can indeed do no harm to any noble spirit. We never yet saw a lady lift it up, who did not immediately throw it down again in disgust. But the lofty spirits of the earth are not the only ones; and we confess, that we think that poet deserving of chastisement, who prostitutes his talents in a manner that is likely to corrupt milliners and apprentice-boys, no less than him who flies at noble game, and spreads his corruption among princes.

Z.