

**THE OLD ENGLISH
GENTLEMAN,
A POEM**

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The Old English Gentleman, a Poem by Mr. Polwhele

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MR. POLWHELE

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A
P O E M,

BY MR. POLWHELE.

Illum si proprio condidit horreo
Quidquid de Libycis verritur areis,
Gaudentem patrios findere fœculo
Agros, Attalicis conditionibus
Nunquam dimoveas, ut trabe Cypria
Myrtoum pavidus nauta fecet mare.

Hœc.

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M DCC XCVII.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE idea of a character now almost extinct in this island, gave rise to the following Poem; in which I conceived the design of exhibiting the manners of the last century in a country gentleman of family, as contradistinguished from those of borough-mongers, merchants and miners.

To this design, Cornwall appeared peculiarly favourable; as it not only furnished me with one or two primitive esquires, such as were formerly to be seen in almost every part of England, but with an abundant spawn of the latter description.

ON these principles, and with these views, I proceeded to the construction of the Poem. It would be needless to particularize the characters, and improper to anticipate the story, by which I have endeavoured to connect them; though I must observe, in regard to the manners of the representatives of the House of *Andarton*, that, if at all interesting, they must, at this point of time, produce their proper effect. So great a revolution in the little moralities of life, has lately taken place, that we are anxious to catch a few traits of the last age whilst yet they remain visible, and to preserve them, at least, as curiosities.

There are many, indeed, who will "cast a longing lingering look" on the hero of expiring chivalry—many, who, not yet able to accommodate themselves to the reigning opinions, will reverence even the prejudices of their forefathers, as connected with the

“ pietas et prisca fides.” But let it not be supposed that I am an advocate for prejudices ; though I prefer a SIR HUMPHREY to whom they adhere, to a SIR HARRY HAWTRAP, whose mind is equally disengaged from prejudice and principle.

In delineating or illustrating the different characters in the family of *Andarton*, I have introduced a variety of little domestic occurrences, and incidents of different sorts ; some of which may appear too trifling to deserve a place in the Poem. But it should be considered, that many trivialities (if I may so express myself), which, from our familiar acquaintance with them, seem too contemptible for notice, will wear a very different aspect hereafter, whilst they no longer exist in common life. If this poem should descend to posterity, they will then excite attention as curious minutia:—such as the present generation observing in the

household œconomy of their ancestors, would regard with pleasure, or such as a lover of classical antiquity would contemplate with the keenest delight in the private lives of the Greeks or the Romans. Those few glimpses of the domestic manners of the ancients, which we perceive in the writings of Aristophanes, or Plautus, or Aulus Gellius or Pliny, are so extremely pleasing, that we eagerly wish for additional light : we regret the want of such particularities as might afford us complete gratification on the subject.

With respect to those upstart gentlemen concerned in mining-adventures, or borough chicanery, they were not only necessary characters as contrasted with the principal personage, but seemed to rise naturally from the scene, amidst the views of Cornish manners and usages. Except the representatives of a few old families, the gentry of

Cornwall owe their dignity either to the borough or the mine. The nabob, indeed, residing in Cornwall,—hath nothing characteristically just in it: but his visit was transitory; his object, a borough. In these and other instances, I have attempted to mark the peculiarities of my native county; whilst I have been careful in avoiding all obscurities that might arise from local description, or allusions to particular transactions. I have drawn my sketch, not to present the people of Cornwall with a copy of which they best can judge, as being best acquainted with the original; but to exhibit the features of this people to the philosopher, wherever situated on the face of the globe.

To the machinery which I have thought proper to employ, the superstitions of Cornwall are, even at this moment, propitious. The guardian genii of ancient houses,