ENGLAND SUBSISTS BY MIRACLE

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BY

FELTHAM BURGHLEY.

"Pardon what I have spoke;
For 'tis a studied, not a present thought,
By duty ruminated."

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA, Act 2, Sc. 2.

LONDON:
JAMES BLACKWOOD, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1869.

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"THIS land of such dear souls—this dear, dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world,
Is now leased out (I die pronouncing it)
Like to a tenement, or pelting farm:
England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots, and rotten parchment bonds;
That England, that was wont to conquer others,
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself:
O, would the scandal vanish with my life,
How happy then were my ensuing death!"

RICHARD 2. Act 2, Sc. 1.

"Sed mihi sit Stygios ante intravisse Penates,
Telia quam videam ferientes pacta Latinos."

SILIUS ITALICUS.

PREFACE.

The reader may, perhaps, feel some surprise to see so small a book upon so great a matter, when the tendency of the day runs in a quite contrary direction, and loves to dedicate marvellously large volumes to subjects of surprising littleness. The ancients had less respect for a big book. Æsop's Fables endue beasts and birds with a discourse of Spartan brevity, and evolve the moral in sentences as curt as soldiers' compliments. Phædrus, who Latinized them, hardly runs to 80 pages, with all the help of a Delphin paraphrase and *variorum* notes. The characters of Theophrastus are all given in a few leaves. Pindar, whom no man can charge with sterility, has not left a twentieth part of what would go to make up the first work of a modern poet; but if you would boil down fifty modern poets by a sort of culinary process to get stock, and even throw in a Laureate or two for the flavour of the bay leaf, it may be heresy to say it, but probably you would find there was less essential poetry in the fifty-two moderns than in the one old lyric. Time, says Lord Bacon—but what he meant by it does not appear—is of the nature of a stream, and conveys to us what is light and blown up, but drowns the weightier and more solid things. Perhaps he meant that the big books of antiquity, such as the six thousand volumes of Diomedes' *De Re Grammaticâ*, had gone to the bottom, whilst the light books, inflated or blown up with pure spirit, had risen at once to the surface, and would there float to the latest posterity; this is

either what Lord Bacon intended, or precisely what he did not intend; in the latter case it is all the better commentary. Be this as it may, a thought—if you have a thought—is easily conveyed in a page or two. Arguments are useless, and proofs a vanity of the spirit. If a man can see your meaning, he does not want proofs; and if he cannot see it, either by your fault or his own, your arguments will not manufacture an eye for him. Pythagoras, when the acute and loquacious pressed him with arguments, could never be prevailed upon to enter the controversy, but simply said yes or no, which was final. The public certainly stands in the place of Pythagoras to all who enter the arena of literature. I have tried to show that some small books are great works, hoping to obviate a possible prejudice to the size of the present one. In the smallest book there is great room to be very foolish, but in a large one there is a certainty of being so. In this conviction I await from the public a Pythagorean answer.

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