

**A VOLUME OF SMOKE IN
TWO PUFFS:
WITH STRAY WHIFFS
FROM THE SAME PIPE**

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A Volume of Smoke in Two Puffs: With Stray Whiffs from the Same Pipe by Henry Walker

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HENRY WALKER

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TWO PUFFS:
WITH STRAY WHIFFS
FROM THE SAME PIPE**

A VOLUME OF SMOKE,

In Two Puffs.

WITH STRAY WHIFFS

FROM THE SAME PIPE.

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LONDON:
ARTHUR HALL, VIRTUE, & CO.,
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1859.

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PREFACE.

THERE must be Poets, and there must be Prefaces. Perhaps, dear reader, you "don't see the necessity." No more do I; but so it is. It is difficult to discover the precise use of either; and the only reason I can assign for their existence is, that what must be, must. As for the Prefaces, they are prescribed by the unimpeachable canons of the art and mystery of book-making, though nobody ever thinks of reading them; and an author, now-a-days, may think himself lucky enough if he can get anybody to read his book, let alone the preface. As for the Poets, they occupy their appointed place in the scale of creation, in accordance, I suppose, with the inscrutable laws of nature; and fill one of those vacua, which she abhors, in the intellectual world, like flies in the animal, and nettles in the vegetable. I am afraid the Poets, the flies, and the nettles are none of them appreciated as they ought to be; but that is no fault of theirs.

There are certain persons, animals, and things whose evident vocation in life we can clearly appreciate. Aldermen were made to eat turtle, pretty girls to be kissed, horses to be ridden, foxes to be hunted, melons to be eaten, apricots to be preserved, but what on earth is the use of Poets, flies, and nettles? I leave the question to the natural Philosophers. All I mean to assert is, that Poets are Poets, flies are flies, and nettles are nettles, because they can't help it! It is their misfortune, not their fault. The one can no more change his nature than the others,—which is rather hard upon them, especially the Poets (I don't suppose it is very acutely felt by the others); for what is the estimation, by society at the present day, of an unfortunate individual afflicted with the monomania of rhyming? Generally, I believe, that he is a bore. The race who were once supposed to be under the protection of Apollo are now transferred to the influence of Diana, and voted lunatics—harmless perhaps, but decidedly bores. Who considers a poet either useful or ornamental? What man of business would give him a place in his counting-house? What manoeuvring mamma a place in her calculations? What Alderman a place at his table, or what Barnacle in office a place of any sort? Unless, indeed, there

happened to be a vacant gaugership, which, it is well known, is an employment peculiarly adapted for a man of genius and imagination,—as exemplified in the case of one Robert Burns, a departed rhymster, in whom we are all beginning to take a most affectionate interest, now he has been dead not much more than half a century. But that is quite the usual thing, and the usual fate of genius: he asks for bread when alive, and he gets a stone when dead! If he could only manage to dispense with living in the present, he might be sure of living in the future: if he does not presume to expect the appreciation of his own generation, he may be sure of the appreciation of posterity. But I do not exactly see what good posterity can do the departed. If we were Roman Catholics, posterity might subscribe, with its usual liberality, for masses for the Soul, instead of for monuments to the Man, and shorten the pangs of purgatory, if they could not prevent the pangs of earth. But we Protestants have not even that satisfaction; and I declare, I think there is no more melancholy mockery than the posthumous honours paid to the manes of men who have been miserably neglected all their lives.

But men of genius are by no means the only

beings who are never appreciated until they are dead; and Poetry, like Virtue, is its own reward—and very often its own only reward. Let us esteem it accordingly. The worst of it is, that, like murder, it “will out:” you can no more keep it to yourself than you can keep a chicken in its shell when it is fully hatched. It is a light that cannot be hid under a bushel—a rash that cannot be kept in; and the unfortunate patient is no more responsible for having the cacoëthes than he is for having the measles. The symptoms vary: in some cases the malady is acute but transitory; in others it is chronic and incurable; but in all it must have its course.

The only true believers in Poetry and Poets are those very young ladies, just emancipated from the thraldom of Minerva House, the dumb-bells of the drill sergeant, and the scales of the music-master—who look with enthusiastic admiration on the young gentlemen who write pretty lines to their pretty eyebrows in their pretty albums, and believe in the “flowing locks,” the “Byronic collar,” and the “eye in a fine frenzy rolling” of the Poet, with all their little hearts, God bless them! I think they also believe that the aforesaid young gentlemen live in the clouds, instead of in the sky-parlour—see