

*Anecdotes of a Mysterious Foreigner.*

WHATEVER may have been the business of a certain foreigner here, about whom the French have just made, or affected to make, a great bustle; there is something in his most untelegible history that is very entertaining; and there are accounts of transactions, which bound so nearly upon the marvellous, that it is impossible but they must excite the attention of this Athenian age. I imagine this gentleman, against whom no ill was ever alleged, and for whose genius and knowledge I have the most sincere respect, will not take umbrage at my observing, that the high title he assumes is not the right of lineage, or the gift of royal favour: what is his real name is perhaps one of those mysteries, which, at his death, will surprise the world, more than all the strange incidents of his life; but himself will not be averse, I think, to own this, by which he goes, is no more than a travelling title.

There seems something insulting in the term *un inconnu*, by which the French have spoke of him; and the terms we have borrowed from their language, of an *avanturier* and a *chevalier d'industrie*, always convey reproach: as they have been applied to this—I had almost said, nobleman—it is justice to declare, that in any ill sense they appear to be very foreign from his character. It is certain, that, like the persons generally understood by these denominations, he has supported himself always at a considerable expence, and in perfect independence, without any visible or known way of living; but let those who say this, always add, that he does not play; nor is there, perhaps, a person in the world, who can say he has enriched himself six-pence at his expence.

The country of this stranger is as perfectly unknown as his name: but concerning both, as also of his early life, busy conjecture has taken the place of knowledge; and, as it was equal what to invent, the perversene's of human nature, and, perhaps, envy in those, who took the charge of the invention, has led them to select passages less favourable, than would have been furnished by truth. Till more authentic materials shall be produced, it will be proper that the world suspend their curiosity; and charity requires not to believe some things which have no foundation.

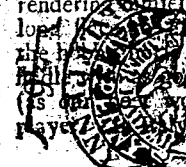
All we can with justice say is, This gentleman is to be considered as an unknown and inoffensive stranger; who has supplies for a large expence, the sources of which are not understood.

Many years ago he was in England, and since that time he has visited the several other European kingdoms; always keeping up the appearance of a man of fashion, and always living with credit.

The reader remembers Gil Blas's master, who spent his money without any body's understanding how he lived: 'tis applicable, in more respects than one, to this stranger; who like him has been examined also in dangerous times, but found innocent and respectable. But there is this difference, that the hero of our story seems to have his money concentrated, as chymists keep their powerful menstruums, not in its natural and bulky form; for no parts used to come loaded to his lodgings.

He had the address to find the reigning foible always of the place where he was going to reside, and on that he built the scheme of rendering himself agreeable. When he came

london he found musick was the reigning foible, and took the opportunity if he had been in a country, to call it) a native of the country; and there



he appeared a connoisseur in gems, antiques, and medals: in France, he was a fop; in Germany, a chymist.

By these arts he introduced himself in each of those countries; and to his high praise it must be owned, that to which ever of them, or to whatsoever else it may have been that he was bred, yet whichever he chose for the time, seemed to have been the only employment of his life. With regard to music, he not only played, but composed; and both in a high taste. Nay, his very ideas were accommodated to the art; and in those occurrences which had no relation to music, he found means to express himself in figurative terms deduced from this science. There could not be a more artful way of shewing his attention to the subject. I remember an incident which impressed it strongly on my memory: I had the honour to be at an assembly of Lady\*\*\*, who, to many other good and great accomplishments, added a taste for music, so delicate, that she was made a judge in the disputes of matters. This stranger was to be of the party; and toward evening he came in his usual free and polite manner; but with more hurry than was customary, and with his fingers stopped in his ears. I can conceive easily, that in moist men, this would have been a very ungraceful attitude; and, I am afraid, it would have been construed into an ungentle entrance; but he had a manner that made every thing agreeable. They had been emptying a cart load of itnes, just at the door, to mend the pavement: he threw himself into a chair, and, when the Lady asked what was the matter, he pointed to the place, and said, "I am stunned with a whole cart load of discords."

'Twas thus in all the rest: among the Germans, where he played chymistry, he was every inch a chymist: and he was, certainly in Paris, every inch a fop.

From Germany he carried into France the reputation of a high and sovereign alchymist; one who possessed the secret powder, and, in consequence, the universal medicine. The whisper ran, this stranger could make gold. The expence at which he lived seemed to confirm that account; but the minister at that time, to whom the matter had been whispered as important, smiling, answered, he would put it on a short time: He ordered an enquiry to be made, whence the remittances he received came; and told those, who had applied to him, that he would soon shew them what quarries they were which yielded this philosopher's stone. The means that great man took to explain the mystery, though very judicious, served only to increase it: whether the stranger had accounts of the enquiry, that was ordered, and found means to evade it, or by what other accidents, 'tis not known, but, the fact is, that in the space of two years, while he was thus watched, he lived as usual; paid for every thing in ready money; and yet no remittance came into the kingdom for him.

The thing was spoken of; and none now doubted, what at first had been treated as a chimera; he was understood to possess, with the other grand secret, a remedy for all diseases, and even for the infirmities in which man triumphs over the human fabric.

A certain duchess, who had been fourteen years a celebrated coquette, began to think the law, or feared she should see some of those marks, which the crow of age imprints upon the face or beauty. She sent to this stranger: Monsieur le Court, said she, what I shall say wants more apology, than I know how to make, but you are all politeness: they tell me you have that inestimable secret, worth more than all your gold, the medicine that will restore youth;—I don't know that I

want it yet; but time is time; and, perhaps Monsieur, what it can remedy, it will more easily prevent:—I would be early in my care:—Come, answer me:—Can I obtain it of you?—Let me have it, and name your own conditions.'

The stranger put on a mysterious air, and answered, 'Those who have these secrets do not chuse it should be known they have them.'—'I know it, Sir, replied the Lady,—but you may confide in me.'—In fine, she was prevailed upon: he brought next day a vial of four or five spoonfuls. He told her ten drops was enough to take at once, and that only at the new and full of the moon: that it was innocent: but if she wasted this, perhaps, it would not be easy to get a supply.

The Lady put it by in the secure place where she kept her rouge; and went out on a visit. Her woman happened that afternoon to be seized with the cholick. She looked over the house for a liqueur (in England we should say a dram) and finding this vial in so careful a state of preservation, she doubted not its excellence:—she smelt to it, 'twas fragrant, she tasted it, 'twas very pleasant; and she drank it all off.

The cholick vanished, and she sat down in great spirits to adjust her Lady's toilet.

At evening the Dutchess came in tired, limped to her chamber, and was calling for her things, when casting her eyes upon the woman; "Child, says she, who are you? "What do you want with me! How came you here!" The other only curtsy'd; and the Dutchess peevishly bad her go. She answered, "Your Grace is pleased to speak in an uncommon manner; I have the honour to be your Grace's woman, and wait to undress you."

"Heaven and earth, replied the Dutchess, you, my woman! why child, my woman is five and forty; you, I dare swear, have not yet seen sixteen!"

The mystery was never explained; all France rung with the miracle; but the stranger was gone; and the Dutchess is now as grey as other matrons of sixty-six; never having been able to obtain another bottle.

This is the story told, and thus it will be told in Paris many generations; all that appeared was thus; but whether the medicine had transformed the woman, or the stranger had removed her, and put a young one in her place, 'tis not mine to determine.

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