

November 12, 1853

My dear Father

Mr Charles Mackay in his History of English Literature has in a very amusing and instructive manner, described the various hallucinations which have from time to time affected the human race - such as the rage for Quackery the hunt after the Philosopher's Stone, the belief in Witches &c. But there is a delusion which exists even at the present day, and which is so obvious that I wonder extremely that he has not noticed it. I mean the popular belief that the *Æneid* of Virgil and the *Iliad* of Homer are serious poems. That these poems should have been known to the world for so many ages, without their true nature being discovered, is a most extraordinary fact, and serves to show the great importance of early impressions. For boys experiencing much trouble in learning these books, naturally look upon them as very serious affairs, and thus the idea is implanted in the mind.

Any one who reads the *Æneid* in the true spirit must be convinced that Virgil was a humorist of a very high order, a short summary of the first book will be sufficient to prove this.

At the opening of the poem, the Trojan fleet under Æneas is joyfully ploughing the ocean, in hopes of soon reaching the promised land. But Juno, looking down from her celestial abode, is complaining that though she is Queen of the gods she has not been able to sink the helpless wretches, and she determines - it is a pity she did not think of it before - to seek the assistance of Æolus King of the Winds. The swelling of this potentate is described in a very humorous manner. The winds are cumbering about, trying to get out, and shaking the mountain sides in the attempt. Æolus himself seated on a high throne glowers at his omphalos and refuses

their rage and very good reason he has, for if he did not, and if they once got loose they would sweep away all creation into nothingness. But the omnipotent Sea King, fearing this, had put on the top of them, a mountain - and a King. Jans now addresses his constitutional monarch - and a very strong constitution he must have, seeing that he is always sitting in a complication of dangers and says that he will, as a favor to her, annihilate the Trojan fleet. Odysseus replies, that his work is true to him for that he had attended his present office, by his influence, which had also procured him the honor of being invited to dinner by the gods. He strikes the rock with the butt end of his spear, and makes a hole therein, through which the winds rush in a mass. In two minutes the sky and the sea are mingled together. "The cry of men and the creaking of men ensues." Then Odysseus is ready to drop with cold, and begins to cry, saying that he wishes he were dead along with Hector. He most likely could have said more, only that a tremendous gust of wind drove his sails to tatters at that instant and I suppose obliged him to hold on "for the bare life." Then sees to be seen a comical sight, some of the ships were hanging on the highest tops of the waves, others went so low that the crews saw the sand at the bottom on the sea, these are spilt on rocks - which the Trojans call Ulcers - these are stuck on a sand bank where one of them is struck by a heavy sea with such force that the captain is perched out on his head before the very eyes of Odysseus. In fact, matters are in a very bad state with the Trojans, when Neptune, hearing the noise "causes his trident heard above the waters" and sees their shipwrecked condition. He immediately conjectures that his sister is at the bottom of the business and calling the Soot and West winds to him he addresses them thus - "Do you think that your family influence will protect you that you dare to mingle heaven and earth in this manner without my permission? You



shall say — But it is better now to compare the huddled masses. I will punish you another time, ye and tell you that he had better not meddle with my kingdom. Thus he spoke and quakes then he ead appeared the swollen sea; despite the hands and bring back the sun. At the same time the nymph Amphitrite and Triton, having made great exertions, got the ships off the rocks, and on the words of Egeon, she seems to have had some inkling of the truth —

He got himself with ready potent hands
And open the deep, and spread the moving sands
Then heaves them off the shoals, when he quakes
His finny couriers and in triumph rides
The waves beneath, and the sea subsides

The idea of Neptune pitchforking the ships off the bank is very good, and is only to be equalled by some other passages which I shall refer to in my next letter.

your affectionate son

James Doyle

J. Wright 8/7

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