

## THE IMPRESSIONS OF A NOTICING EYE.

## CHARACTERS IN BACKS.

THE THOUGHTFUL

BACK



“WILL you introduce me to that lady? I like her back.” Many years ago, in Scotland, this was asked of a hostess one night, when the evening circle were scattered about a drawing-room, and the man who spoke had not yet seen the lady’s face. An introduction followed—a friendship—a marriage. No doubt he was a most discriminating man, and knew that there is a character in backs.

For that matter, our character comes out all over us, willing or unwilling, and even in our handwriting. Lavater, who was so wondrous wise in the looks of humankind, said that from a single finger we ought to be able to guess a whole individual; perhaps we ought, but we seldom do, except in noticing the difference between the finger of refinement and a nutmeg-grater like the fore-finger of the faithful Peggotty. But the back—ah! there is the whole individual, an easy study—the whole of him, his figure and walk, his shoulders moulded by the habits of his life, the carriage of the head, the wearing of the clothing. Face to face we see the man as he desires to be seen by us; but behind his back we take him by surprise, and catch sight of his character.

Follow the thoughtful man, as he wanders through the streets, seeing nothing. He has polished his hat and tightened his umbrella to the last degree, not because he cared for the polish and the tightness, but because his mind was elsewhere while he risked brushing the nap off the hat and splitting the umbrella. While he walks, his head and shoulders bend; one knows that his eyes seek the ground, just as one sees his feet linger upon it. In this manner it must have been that Macaulay walked in his famous night wanderings, when he traversed the London streets and saw nothing—a contrast to those other night walks of Charles Dickens, who trod the same streets, and saw everything, with head characteristically held back and slightly to one side—an energetic observer, rather than a deep thinker.

Very different from what we may call the refined and intellectual back, is the back of the broad and vulgar figure who struts past us as if he owned the street, or, at least, the foot-walk, where he takes up half the

space between his striding feet and his self-assertive umbrella. His glory is not in his mind or heart—but in his pocket. He would be always conscious of his purse, even if he had not his hand bulging out the pocket where it lives—of course, one knows by his back that the pocket *is* bulging with the proud possession of a fat purse, and the knowledge of the banking account, and of all he might, could, would and should do in the world. He holds the impecunious crowd in contempt, like the dust that he kicks before him. He has a habit of sticking up for his rights; even his collar sticks up, and his hair, to correspond with his inner self, is bristling up, but that does not matter, for he can afford to wear a crooked hat. He thinks he can buy anything—from a picture, of which he knows nothing, to an elector, who knows nothing of him. At the front he might take us in—a hearty-looking glad-to-see-you sort of man. But look at his back; he struts like a barn-door cock—and the cock is a more estimable biped.

The purse-proud man will never hand money out of that pocket for charity, unless he is pretty sure that there shall be a printed list of subscribers. Not so the wealthy man who has a heart above gold. Look at

THE PURSE-PROUD.



him—a back view—as he stands at a public meeting, called together at some time of calamity or need. He is sure to be there. If the hall is overcrowded, you can see him standing, never complaining of the lack of seats; he is there for the comfort of others; he forgets his own. He is a large-hearted man; and everything

about him is large. The big hands are only waiting behind him to give freely. The broad back can bear a goodly share of others' burdens. The coat sits loosely, but not more loosely than fortune sits upon

and his head goes down. He is the dried and shrivelled leaf that bends towards itself, and curls to diminished size, before it mingles with the dust of a vanished summer.

But we must not grow melancholy, though we can never see a smile at the back. Who is this individual that comes shuffling by, knocking his knees, and dragging his shoes, and losing his property from sheer inability to remember that he has got it? There is an old saying, a significant one, to describe a man of weak character—that he has "no backbone in him." We are afraid there is not much backbone in the man who walks as if not quite sure where he is going to, who drops his letters, and never cares to straighten his shoulders. Follow him, and note how his hat points backward; and you know from the angles to which he has set his hat and his whiskers that, seen front-face, his aspect is (to use the mildest word) not wise, and that, as a fashion-book once said, "the mouth is worn slightly open." Still, he is a good-natured fellow, and by some instinct we read on his back that he has an ambition to be amusing. One is perfectly certain that the man with such a back sings comic songs; equally certain that he never knows when people cease to laugh at the song and begin to laugh at himself. One is glad for his own sake that there is some mirth in the possessor of those whisker-points and that hat set backward; but it is weak spirit, of the Micawber order, and soon dissolves in tears. The poor fellow would not be half bad, but he has "no backbone," and a sprightly, good-natured mollusc has a poor time of it up on the land among the vertebrate animals.



him—he would slip it off for another's need. His grey locks are unshorn; closeness of any kind is not in his nature; and his head bends to give plenty of time and plenty of thought to all whom he could benefit. Such a man as this was once told that he had been giving to a rogue; and the answer was, "If he was a rogue, that was his own look-out—not mine." In one sense, very true!

As for the back of the rogue himself, it is of infinite variety. If there were only one sort, we might all make what soldiers would call a reconnaissance to the rear, and detect and outwit him; but his name is Legion. There is the sharp dealer of the business world, who is remarkably spruce at the back: and the adventurer of society, who can bow like the first gentleman in Europe; and ten thousand more varieties, from the welsher on the turf up to the gentleman who ought to be a baronet, and who has lived for the last thirty years upon that statement, and upon charitably collecting for the savages of Borrioboola. He could straighten his body if he liked, but his mind is fixed in curves of cunning. He and his principles are as crooked as wriggling eels; he can press others to his will too, as he presses his cane to a curve like himself.

His spare form is not the thin bent back of the student. The back of a book-worm is another kind of bend—a curve to be respected. Nor is it the stoop of old age. And this reminds us that the back is an index of age as well as of character. The small child stands, a square, upright, sturdy atom of humanity. The man grows straight to his full height; then his shadow broadens; then his shoulders come forward,



But there is such a thing as having too much backbone; and that is rather worse than having too little. When a man has too much backbone, his heart is not, as people say, "in the right place;" sometimes there

is no room in him for a heart at all. Now, there are some men in whom force of character is carried into the extreme, and becomes hardness and habitual severity. They are the ogres of the real world, and their homes are dens. A severe back is a pleasanter sight to see than a severe face. One does not care to be round at the other side. It is not what we would call the just and righteously indignant back, which is straight and noble, a fine thing and a venerable. It is the bulldog - shouldered back that denotes the domestic ogre. His bald head shines; one knows that in the front the veins are bursting. His moustache has been twisted to sharpness by angry fingers.



His hands are clenched or pushing mightily against his hard-set knee; he could strike, but he has too much pride for violence, and his orders are harder than blows. The huge muscles of his back are to him what the big sinews and heavy make are to a bull-dog. He has a habit of getting his arm crookedly bent to his knee in self-restrained wrath, and it reminds us of the bulldog's crooked legs. Oddly enough, in the pictures of "David Copperfield," that the exact and observant

author approved, the tyrant schoolmaster Creakle invariably got into this position, with the crooked arm weighing heavily on the knee, and the other hand



clenched. Great is the rejoicing at the sight of this severe back, for the luckless folks who have been obliged to look upon the other side of him! There are, indeed, many backs that are more gladly seen than the corresponding faces. The back of the bore is a goodly sight; while, on the other hand, when good-bye is grievous, how much precious regard is wasted on the dear, characteristic, well-known back, that never knows what loving looks went after it!

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### AT THE CONCERT.

I SAW her one night at "The Garden,"  
 'Twas during the Patti *furore*;  
 She had trod on, but sued for my pardon,  
 The glove I had dropped on the floor;  
 And so stately she looked, and so queenly,  
 My heart with her beauty was won,  
 And a blank fell on all, as serenely  
 She rose when the music was done.

Ah me! though I'm twenty years older,  
 And fortune has used me but ill,  
 And the world looks both sadder and colder,  
 I think and I dream of her still.  
 And in faith I am true to her only,  
 From the many I keep her apart;  
 And I look on her face when I'm lonely,  
 In the innermost core of my heart.

Though forgotten the Greek and the Latin  
 I muttered in times that are gone,  
 I remember her dress was of satin  
 The colour a delicate fawn;

I remember, to-day, as completely  
 Each trifle my lady did wear,  
 E'en the rose that was blushing so sweetly,  
 Half-hid in her glory of hair.

Ah! Time shall be powerless to laven  
 Her life with the ills that we know,  
 For her locks shall be dark as the raven  
 When mine are as white as the snow,  
 And her face shall be young in its beauty  
 When mine shall be wrinkled with care—  
 With the manifold burdens that Duty  
 Has set for the wisest to bear.

And her words, though so long ago spoken  
 As freshly shall breathe their surprise;  
 And the spell still remain all unbroken  
 That flashed from her beautiful eyes.  
 And thus, in my joy and my sadness,  
 Unchanged, as the years ebb and flow,  
 I shall see her, arrayed in her gladness,  
 As I saw her that night long ago.

MATTHIAS BARR.