REVIEW

Of St. Leon: A Tale of the sixteenth Century. By William Godwin, In 4 vols. 12mo.

TO perpetuate life, and procure that degree of opulence which will multiply the comforts of exiſtence, are ſtrong and natural deſires. Hence it was long the aim of men of ſcience and philoſophy to diſcover the means of obviating the dreaded evils of poverty, and of checking the approach of age and the ravages of death. The philoſopher's ſtone, and the elixir of life, were the curious objects of real or pretended ſearch; and the inveſtigators of thoſe ſecrets held out to the world the probable proſpect of their ultimate diſcovery.

That a writer ſo romantic in his ideas as Mr. Godwin ſhould make theſe deluſions the found ation of a romance, is not a matter of aſtoniſhment. They are calculated to call forth the powers of invention and genius; t ey furniſh opportunities for acuteneſs and novelty of remark; and they tend to diſplay the human mind in intereſting points of view.

Of the tale which gave riſe to theſe reflections, Reginald de St. Leon is the hero. Being the deſcendant of an ancient and honorable French family, to which had belonged ſome renowned warriors, he was early inſpired with military ambition. He joined the army of Francis I. in an expedition to Italy, and diſtinguiſhed himſelf at the ſiege and in the battle of Pavia. He afterwards entered into ſcenes of gaiety and diſſipation, and became a voluptuary and a gameſter. In the midſt of the career of pleaſure which he purſued at Paris, he was captivated with the powerful attractions of Marguerite de Damville; gave her his hand; and, at the peremptory deſire of her father, relinquiſhed his vicious indulgences for the joys of rural retirement. Many years did he paſs in the enjoyment of domeſtic felicity, in the ſociety of an eſtimable wife and of amiable children. But, being induced to reviſit Paris, with a view to the improvement of his ſon, he relapſed into the habit of gaming, and was ſoon deprived of almoſt the whole of his property. A keen ſenſe of his folly, and a regret for his loſſes, reduced him to a ſtate of phrenſy, from which he was with difficulty reſcued by the continued and judicious attentions of Marguerite, who conducted him, while he was ſtill inſane, into one of the Swiſs cantons. As he could not eaſily reconcile himſelf to poverty and obſcurity, it was the taſk of his wife while he was ſlowly recovering his intellects, to inculcate the expediency of acquieſcence and content. A part of the reaſoning aſcribed to her we will quote, as it is marked with good ſenſe.

'Let us at length diſmiſs artificial taſtes, and idle and viſionary purſuits that do not flow in a direct line from any of the genuine principles of our nature! Here we are ſurrounded with ſources of happineſs. Here we may live in true patriarchal ſimplicity. What is chivalry, what is military proweſs and glory? Believe me, they are the paſſions of a mind depraved, that with ambitious refinement ſeeks to be wiſe beyond the dictates of ſentiment or reaſon! There is no happineſs ſo ſolid, or ſo perfect, as that which diſdains theſe refinements.'

'How cumbrous is magnificence? The moderate man is the only free. He who reduces all beneath him to a ſtate of ſervitude, becomes himſelf the ſlave of his eſtabliſhment, and of all his domeſtics. To diminiſh the caſes in which the aſſiſtance of others is felt abſolutely neceſſary, is the only genuine road to independence.'

To theſe remarks ſhe properly adds,

'Though I love the ſight of the peaſants, I would not be a peaſant. I would have a larger ſtock of ideas, and a wider field of activity. I love the ſight of peaſants only for their acceſſories or by compariſon. They are comparatively more ſecure than any other large maſſes of men, and the ſcenes in the midſt of which they are placed are delightful to ſenſe. But I would not ſacrifice in prone oblivion the beſt characteriſtics of my nature. I put in my claim for refinements and luxuries; but they are the refinements and purifying of intellect, and the luxuries of uncoſtly, ſimple taſte. I wo ld incite the whole world, if I knew how to do it, to put in a ſimilar claim. I would improve my mind: I would enlarge my underſtanding; I would contribute to the inſtruction of all connected with me, and to the maſs of human knowledge. The pleaſures I would purſue and diſſeminate, though not dependent on a large property, are ſuch as could not be underſtood by the ruſtic and the ſavage.—Our ſon, bred in theſe fields indeed, will probably never become a *preux chevalier*, or figure in the roll of military heroes. But he may become ſomething happier and better. He may improve his mind, and cultivate his taſte. He may be the counſellor and protector of his ſiſters. He may be the ornament of the diſtrict in which he reſides. He may inſtitute in his adoptive country new defences for liberty, new ſyſtems of public benefit, and new improvements of life. There is no character more truly admirable than the patriot yeoman, who unites with the utmoſt ſimplicity of garb and manners an underſtanding fraught with information and ſentiment, and a heart burning with the love of mankind. Such were Fabricius and Regulus among the ancients, and ſuch was Tell, the founder of the Helvetic liberty. For my part, I am inclined to be thankful, that this unexpected reverſe in our circumſtances has made me acquainted with new pleaſures, and opened to my mind an invaluable leſſon. If you could but be prevailed on to enter into our pleaſures, to diſmiſs idle reproaches and pernicious propenſities, our happineſs would then be complete.'

A furious ſtorm having diffuſed calamity over the canton in which the ſtrangers reſided, and the jealouſy of the government having ordered their ſpeedy departure, they retired to Conſtance, where they were in danger of periſhing by famine. Brooding over the misfortunes of 'a family, intereſting, amiable, and virtuous, reduced to the loweſt ſtate of humiliation and diſtreſs,' St. Leon exclaims,

'They are moments like theſe, that harden the human heart, and fill us with inextinguiſhable hatred and contempt for our ſpecies. They tear off the trappings and decorations of poliſhed ſociety, and ſhow it in all its hideouſneſs. The wanton eye of pampered pride pleaſes itſelf with the ſpectacle of cities and palaces, the ſtately column and the ſwelling arch. It obſerves at hand the buſy ſcene, where all are occupied in the various purſuits of pleaſure or indu try, and admires the concert; the wide-ſpreading confederacy, by means of which each after his mode is unconſciouſly promoting the objects of others. Cheated by the outſide of things, we denominate this a vaſt combination for general benefit. The poor and the famiſhed man contemplates the ſcene with other thoughts. Unbribed to admire and applaud, he ſees in it a confederacy of hoſtility and general oppreſſion. He ſees every man purſuing his ſelfiſh ends, regardleſs of the wants of others. He ſees himſelf contemptuouſly driven from the circle, where the reſt of his fellow-citizens are buſily and profitably engaged. He lives in the midſt of a crowd, without one friend to intereſt himſelf in his welfare. He lives in the midſt of plenty, from the participation of which he is driven by brutal menaces and violence. No man who has not been placed in his ſituation can imagine the ſenſations with which, overwhelmed as he is with domeſtic ruin and deſpair, he beholds the riot, the prodigality, the ideot oſtentation, the ſenſeleſs expence, with which he is ſurrounded on every ſide.'

Having ventured to return to the territory from which he had been baniſhed, St. Leon procured a ſmall ſum by the ſale of his remaining property, and then fixed his reſidence on the banks of the lake of Conſtance. The more important part of his hiſtory at length opens to our view. A ſtranger preſented himſelf, and, after various conferences, prevailed upon St. Leon to enter into an extraordinary agreement. Having declared himſelf to be in poſſeſſion of wonderful ſecrets, he engaged to impart them, on condition that no other perſon ſhould be gratified with the communication. The ſecrets were thoſe which we mentioned in our introductory obſervations. Having found himſelf unhappy in the uſe of them, the unknown adventurer courted death as a refuge from woe; and, having diſcloſed the two *arcana*, expired.

Great was the joy which St. Leon felt at his new and ſurpriſing acquiſitions. He thus ſpeaks of his feelings on the great occaſion:

"Happy, happy, happy man!" exclaimed I in the midſt of my wanderings and reveries. "Wealth! thy power is unbounded and inconceivable. All men bow down to thee; the moſt ſtubborn will is by thee rendered pliant as wax; all obſtacles are melted down and diſſolved by the ardour of thy beams! The man that poſſeſſes thee finds every path level before him, and every creature burning to anticipate his wiſhes! But, if theſe are the advantages that wealth imparts to ſuch as poſſeſs only thoſe ſcanty portions which ſtates and nations allow to the richeſt, how enviable muſt his condition be, whoſe wealth is literally exhauſtleſs and infinite! He poſſeſſes really the bleſſing, which prieſtcraft and ſuperſtition have lyingly pronounced upon the charitable. He may give away the revenues of princes, and not be the poorer. He poſſeſſes the attribute which we are accuſtomed to aſcribe to the Creator of the univerſe. He may ſay to a man, Be rich, and he is rich. He can beſtow with equal facility the ſmalleſt gifts and the greateſt. Palaces, as if they were the native exhalations of the ſoil, riſe out of the earth at his bidding. He holds the fate of nations and of the world in his hand. He can remove foreſts, and level mountains, drain marſhes, extend canals, turn the courſe of rivers, and ſhut up the ſea with doors He can aſſign to every individual in a nation the taſk he pleaſes, can improve agriculture and eſtabliſh manufactures, can found ſchools, and hoſpitals, and infirmaries, and univerſities. He can ſtudy the genius of every man, and enable every man to purſue the bent of his mind. Poets and philoſophers will be foſtered, the ſublimeſt flights of genius be produced, and the moſt admirable diſcoveries effected, under his auſpicious patronage. The whole world are his ſervants, and he, if his temper be noble and upright, will be the ſervant of the whole word. Nay, it cannot happen otherwiſe. He has as few temptations to obliquity as omnipotence itſelf. Weakneſs and want are the parents of vice. But he poſſeſſes every thing; he cannot better his ſituation; no man can come into rivalſhip or competition with him."

'From this part of the legacy of the ſtranger, my mind reverted to the other. I ſurveyed my limbs, all the joints and articulations of my frame with curioſity and aſtoniſhment. "What!" exclaimed I, "theſe limbs, this complicated, but brittle frame, ſhall laſt for ever! No diſeaſe ſhall attack it; no pain ſhall ſeize it; death ſhall with-hold from it for ever his abhorred graſp! Perpetual vigour, perpetual youth, ſhall take up their abode with me! Time ſhall generate in me no decay. ſhall not add a wrinkle to my brow, or convert a hair of my head to grey! This body was formed to die; this edifice to crumble into duſt; the principles of corruption and mortality are mixed up in every atom of my frame. But for me the laws of nature are ſuſpended; the eternal wheels of the univerſe roll backward; I am deſtined to be triumphant over fate and time!"

He at firſt reſolved to make only a moderate change in his mode of living; and he pretended that the ſtranger had enabled him, by a legacy of 3000 crowns, to provide for ſuch an alteration. His wife was ſceptical on the ſubject; and, being ſenſible of her claim to a full confidence, ſhe complained of his reſerve and unkindneſs, and declared that he had inflicted a wound upon her which no ſubſequent change in his behaviour would ever be able to cicatriſe. He endeavoured, but without effect, to allay her uneaſineſs, and recall her affection. He ſoon after amuſed himſelf with a German tour; but during his travels, his ſon, diſguſted at the myſterious manner in which he recruited his finances, and ſuſpecting him of diſhonorable conduct, left him with a determination of never ſeeing him again. This ſeceſſion wounded him to the ſoul; and his grief was redoubled on his return, when he found Marguerite in a ſtate which foreboded that ſhe would not long live. She now concluded that he was in poſſeſſion of the philoſopher's ſtone; and, in the following terms, ſhe reproached him for his meanneſs in accepting ſuch an advantage.

'When I married you, I ſuppoſed myſelf united to a nobleman, a knight and a ſoldier, a man who would have revolted with diſdain from every thing that was poor-ſpirited and baſe. I lived with you long and happily. I ſaw faults; I ſaw imbecilities. I did not ſee them with indifference; but I endeavoured, and with a degree of ſucceſs, to forgive, and to forget them; they did not contaminate and corrupt the vitals of honour. At length you have completely reverſed the ſcene. For a ſoldier, you preſent me with a projector and a chymiſt, a cold blooded mortal, raking in the aſhes of a crucible for a ſelfiſh and ſolitary advantage. Here is an end of all genuine dignity, and the trueſt generoſity of ſoul. You cannot be ingenuous; for all your dealings are in ſecrecy and darkneſs. You cannot have a friend; for the mortal lives not that can ſympathiſe with your thoughts and emotions. A generous ſpirit, Reginald, delights to live upon equal terms with his aſſociates and fellows. He would diſdain, when offered to him, deciſive and clandeſtine advantages. Equality is the ſoul of all real and cordial ſociety. A man of rank indeed does not live upon equal terms with the whole of his ſpecies; but his heart alſo can exult; for he has his equals. How unhappy the wretch, the mo ſ er rather let me ſay, that is without an equal; that looks through the world, and in the world cannot find a brother; that is endowed with attributes which no living being participates with him; and that is therefore cut off for ever from all cordiality and confidence, can never unbend himſelf, but lives the ſolitary joyleſs tenant of a priſon, whoſe materials are rubies and emeralds. How unhappy this wretch; how weak and ignoble the man that voluntarily accepts theſe laws of exiſtence!"

(To be continued)

In Chancery, March 3, 1801.

ON application to the Chancellor by petition in writing of JOHN CONAWAY of Anne Arrundel County, praying the benefit of the "act for the relief of ſundry inſolvent debtors," paſſed at the laſt ſeſſion on the terms therein mentioned; and a ſchedule of his prop rty and a liſt of his creditors, ſo far as he can aſcertain the ſame on oath, being annexed to his petition, and the chancellor being ſatisfied by competent teſtimony, that the ſaid John Conaway is, and at the time of paſſing the ſaid act was a citizen of this ſtate and of the United States, and the ſaid John Conaway at the time of preſenting his petition having produced to the chancellor the aſſent in writing of ſo many of his creditors as have due to them according to the liſt aforeſaid, the amount of two thirds of the debts due by him at the time of paſſing the ſaid act

It is thereupon adjudged and ordered that the ſaid John Conaway by cauſing a copy of this order to be inſerted once in each of three ſucceſſive weeks in a newſpaper of the City of Waſhington, and by ſerving ſo many of his creditors with a copy of this order as can be conveniently ſerved therewith before the twenty ninth day of March Inſt. give notice to his creditors to appear at the Chancery office on the Eighth day of April next for the purpoſe of recommending ſome perſon to be truſtee for their benefit on the ſaid John Conaway's then and there taking the oath preſcribed for delivering up his property.

Teſt.

SAML. H. HOWARD, Reg. Cur. Can.

SAMUEL BOOTS an Inſolvent debtor of Prince George's County, makes application as a trader by petition to the Chancellor in writing, praying the benefit of " an act for the relief of ſundry inſolvent debtors," there is annexed to his petition, a ſchedule of his property and a liſt of his creditors, on oath as by the ſaid act is required; and the Chancellor being ſatisfied by competent teſtimony that the ſaid Samuel Boots is, and at the time of paſſing the ſaid act was a Citizen of this State and of the United States.

It is therefore adjudged and ordered that he appear before the Chancellor, in the Chancery office on the firſt day of October next, for the purpoſe of taking the oath by the ſaid act required in preſence of his creditors; and that by cauſing a copy of this order to be inſerted in a Waſhington paper, once in each of three ſucceſſive weeks, and by ſerving to many of his creditors with a copy thereof as can be conveniently ſerved therewith before the firſt day of April next, he give notice to his creditors to attend on the ſaid firſt day of October, for the purpoſe of recommending a truſtee for their benefit, and to lodge with the Chancellor within ſix months from the time of the laſt publication (if they ſhall think fit) their diſſent to his being admitted to the benefit of the ſaid act.

Teſt.

SAMUEL H. HOWARD, Reg. Cur. Can.

March 13, 1801. 3t1w.

FOR SALE,

A Valuable Tract of

LAND,

LYING in part on the main Richmond road, a mile from the Rappahanock River, four Miles below Fredericksburg, (in a healthy and moſt agreeable neighbourhood,) containing about five hundred and thirty three ACRES well watered, upon the ſaid Tract there are about two hundred and fifty acres of Wood Land, the greater part of which is equal if not ſuperior in quality to any high lands, yet uncleared in Spottyivania. There are upon it a dwelling houſe, neceſſary out houſes, a very large barn, and a moſt valuable Mill ſeat, with a mill houſe already built, capable of Manufacturing Twenty thouſand buſhels of wheat annually, after being put in perfect repair. There is alſo upon it about ſixty Acres of firſt rate meadow land, part of which is already reclaimed and has produced very heavy crops of Timothy Hay. The above Land is bounded by the lands of Gen. A. Spottwood, Meſſrs Wm Herndon, Mann Page, Francis Taliaferro, and the Tract the ſubſcriber at preſent lives on. Any further diſcription I deem unneceſſary as thoſe who may be diſpoſed to purchaſe will of courſe view the land. Upon ſaid tract there are about one hundred and thirty Buſhels of Wheat ſown, the greater part of which look well and promiſing.

The ſaid tract of land will be ſold by the ſubſcriber at private or public ſale, three fourths of the purchaſe money to be paid on the day of ſale, and the ballance in twelve months, bearing intereſt from the date, the purchaſer giving bond with approved ſecurity. If not ſold by private ſale, by the firſt Monday in May next, it will then be ſold on the premiſes on that day if fair, if not the next day to the higheſt bidder. The land in the mean time will be ſhewn to any perſon who may wiſh to purchaſe by Meſſrs Francis Taliaferro, James Tutt, Wm. Darnaby and the ſubſcriber.

LAWRENCE BROOKE.

March 18, 1801. tt4