

STUDIES IN JOCLAR LITERATURE.

by

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The joke has proved in all ages a factor of manifold power and usage. It has ridiculed and exposed corruptions in the body politic and in the social machinery. It has laughed at some things because they were new, and at others because they were old. It has preserved records of persons and ideas, and traits of ancient bygone manners, which must otherwise have perished; and it frequently stands before us with its esoteric moral hidden not much below its ostensible and immediate purport.

Jests present humanity to our observation in its holiday attire, its Sunday best, or at least under some exceptional and temporary aspect. Quin and Foote, Matthews and Sydney Smith, Frank Talfourd and Henry Byron, had their grave, and very grave, intervals. Hood himself said that he had to be a lively Hood for a livelihood; and it was mournfully true, as the records of his every-day life, chastened by illness and sorrow, only too well establish. The pleasant or comic episodes may be an occasional incidence of the least happy existence or the least fortunate career; and the anecdotes, humorous or otherwise, of celebrated men and women are receivable with allowance as traits of character and conduct, for which some special circumstances, or a union of circumstances, is answerable. In the general tenor of the most favoured experiences the serious element is apt to preponderate; the heyday of our years is like short, intermittent sunshine; and we ought to come to the study of ANA, if we wish to judge them correctly, with a recollection of what they are, and also what they are not. They who have enjoyed the privilege of a personal acquaintance with the gayest of our modern humourists - and there are many such (including the present writer) among us still - are best qualified to pronounce an opinion upon this point; and they know how much of darkness and anguish often there is behind the scenes or off the boards. The jokes by or about any given individual do not, after all, amount to a great deal, when they are spread



over thirty or forty years: all the genuine sayings of Theodore Hook or Douglas Jerrold would not fill more than a few octavo pages; and these things are to be taken, not as indices to the habitual unbroken mood of the man, but rather as samples of felicity of phrase or thought to be gotten, like mineral ore, under auspicious conditions from a wealthy soil.