

The Student in the Metropolis

A MAN of letters, who is more intent on the acquisitions of literature than on the plots of politics, or the speculations of commerce, will find a deeper solitude in a populous metropolis than in the seclusion of the country.

The student, who is no flatterer of the little passions of men, will not be much incommoded by their presence. Gibbon paints his own situation in the heart of the fashionable world:—"I had not been endowed by art or nature with those happy gifts of confidence and address which unlock every door and every bosom. While coaches were rattling through Bond-street, I have passed many a solitary evening in my lodging with my books. I withdrew without reluctance from the noisy and extensive scene of crowds without company, and dissipation without pleasure." And even after he had published the first volume of his History, he observes that in London his confinement was solitary and sad; "the many forgot my existence when they saw me no longer at Brookes's; and the few who sometimes had a thought on their friend were detained by business or pleasure, and I was proud and happy if I could prevail on my bookseller Elmsly to enliven the dulness of the evening."

ISAAC D'ISRAELI

A situation, very elegantly described in the beautifully-polished verses of Mr. Rogers, in his "Epistle to a Friend:"

When from his classic dreams the student steals
Amid the buzz of crowds, the whirl of wheels,
To muse unnoticed, while around him press
The meteor-forms of equipage and dress;
Alone in wonder lost, he seems to stand
A very stranger in his native land.

He compares the student to one of the seven sleepers in the ancient legend.

Descartes residing in the commercial city of Amsterdam, writing to Balzac, illustrates these descriptions with great force and vivacity.

"You wish to retire; and your intention is to seek the solitude of the Chartreux, or, possibly, some of the most beautiful provinces of France and Italy. I would rather advise you, if you wish to observe mankind, and at the same time to lose yourself in the deepest solitude, to join me in Amsterdam. I prefer this situation to that even of your delicious villa, where I spent so great a part of the last year; for however agreeable a country-house may be, a thousand little conveniences are wanted, which can only be found in a city. One

CURIOSITIES OF LITERATURE

is not alone so frequently in the country as one could wish: a number of impertinent visitors are continually besieging you. Here, as all the world, except myself, is occupied in commerce, it depends merely on myself to live unknown to the world. I walk every day amongst immense ranks of people, with as much tranquillity as you do in your green alleys. The men I meet with make the same impression on my mind as would the trees of your forests, or the flocks of sheep grazing on your common. The busy hum, too, of these merchants does not disturb one more than the purling of your brooks. If sometimes I amuse myself in contemplating their anxious motions, I receive the same pleasure which you do in observing those men who cultivate your land; for I reflect that the end of all their labours is to embellish the city which I inhabit, and to anticipate all my wants. If you contemplate with delight the fruits of your orchards, with all the rich promises of abundance, do you think I feel less in observing so many fleets that convey to me the productions of either India? What spot on earth could you find, which, like this, can so interest your vanity and gratify your taste?"