

The Absent Man

WITH the character of Bruyere's Absent Man the reader is well acquainted. It is translated in the Spectator, and it has been exhibited on the theatre. The general opinion runs that it is a fictitious character, or at least one the author has too highly coloured. It was well known, however, to his contemporaries to be the Count De Brancas. The present anecdotes concerning the same person have been unknown to, or forgotten by, Bruyere; and are to the full as extraordinary as those which characterize *Menalcas*, or the Absent Man.

The count was reading by the fireside (but Heaven knows with what degree of attention), when the nurse brought him his infant child. He throws down the book; he takes the child in his arms. He was playing with her, when an important visitor was announced. Having forgot he had quitted his book, and that it was his child he held in his hands, he hastily flung the squalling innocent on the table.

The count was walking in the street, and the Duke de la Rochefoucault crossed the way to speak to him.—“God bless thee, poor man!” exclaimed the count. Rochefoucault smiled, and was beginning to address him:—“Is it not enough,” cried the count, interrupting him, and somewhat in a passion; “is it not enough that

I have said, at first, I have nothing for you? Such lazy beggars as you hinder a gentleman from walking the streets.” Rochefoucault burst into a loud laugh, and awakening the Absent Man from his lethargy, he was not a little surprised, himself, that he should have taken his friend for an importunate mendicant! La Fontaine is recorded to have been one of the most absent men; and Furetiere relates a circumstance which, if true, is one of the most singular distractions possible. La Fontaine attended the burial of one of his friends, and some time afterwards he called to visit him. At first he was shocked at the information of his death, but recovering from his surprise, observed—“True! True! I recollect I went to his funeral.”