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(First Edition).

EARL RUPERT,

AND OTHER TALES AND POEMS,

BY JAMES NACK.

WITH A

MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR

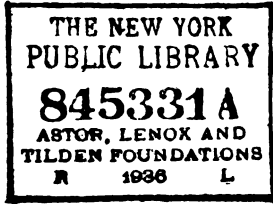
BY P. M. WETMORE.

NEW-YORK :

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MDCCLXXXIX.

Dup. to
Be Kept



Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1839, by

JAMES NACK,

In the Clerk's office of the Southern District of New-York.

G. P. SCOTT, PRINTER.

TO HIM WHOSE GENIUS

IS THE

PRIDE OF HIS COUNTRY

AND

THE ADMIRATION OF THE WORLD,

TO

WASHINGTON IRVING, ESQ.

This Volume

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

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INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR.

IN the subject of this sketch we find verified the remark of Horace, now become almost trite, that poets are born, not made. Had not James Nack been deeply imbued by nature with

“ The vision and the faculty divine ;”

had he not been impelled by an irresistible love and a feeling for his art, he never could have overcome the numerous, and seemingly insurmountable difficulties, which met him at every turn in the opening of his career. It is indeed a mental phenomenon, that one deprived of the sense of hearing, should be able to appreciate correctly the qualities of language, and to hold discourse

“ With all the glorious harmonies of earth.”

Cut off in early youth from that familiar, genial intercourse, which sweetens the days of childhood, and smooths the path to knowledge, his sole reliance was on his own natural resources—an intellect, vigorous and clear; an imagination, vivid and far-reaching; and a resolution, that could meet and subdue the irreparable calamity of his life.

The materials for a memoir of Mr. Nack are necessarily very imperfect. In the life of one isolated from the world, struggling with manly fortitude against an adverse fate, there are few incidents that can be moulded to the purposes of biography; but the history of such a career is not without an interest which enlists the sympathy of the reader, and furnishes an instructive lesson in the philosophy of the human mind.

The remarks of Washington Irving, in reference to the poet Campbell, are so peculiarly applicable to the present case, that their introduction will not be deemed inappropriate:—
“We are as ignorant respecting the biography of most living authors of celebrity, as though they had existed ages before our time; and indeed are better informed concerning the characters and lives of authors who have long since passed away, than of those who are actually adding to the stores of our literature. Few think of writing the anecdotes of a distinguished character while living. His intimates, who of course are most capable, are prevented by their very intimacy, little thinking those domestic habits and peculiarities, which an every-day acquaintance has made so trite and familiar to themselves, can be objects of curiosity to all the world besides.”

James Nack was born in the city of New York. While yet a child, the fortunes of his father who was a merchant, suffered severely by the reverses of trade. This adversity fell heavily upon the subject of these remarks, for it deprived him of many of the advantages of education; indeed the only instruction he received at this period was from a sister, in the few moments of leisure which she could spare from domestic occupations. The native strength of his mind and his ardent longing for know-

ledge, triumphed over all opposing obstacles, and in his fourth year he could read with perfect facility. His powers of versification began to dawn even at this tender age, and before his ninth year, he had acquired some knowledge of rythm, and considerable command of language.

It was about this period that an accident occurred which has thrown a cloud over his whole life, and in a measure shut him out from the intimate communion of his fellow-beings. While descending a flight of stairs, with a little playmate in his arms, his foot slipped ; in his fall he caught at a heavy piece of furniture which fell upon his head, crushing and mangling it so severely, that for several hours no sign of life appeared, and many weeks elapsed before consciousness returned. The tympanum of the ear being injured, his hearing was irrevocably lost, and as a natural consequence, the faculty of speech gradually declined.

When at length his health was sufficiently restored, he was received into that noble and philanthropic establishment, the institution for the instruction of the deaf and dumb, where under the kind and judicious care of the Principal, he made rapid progress in the ordinary branches of education.

On retiring from the institution, he determined upon prosecuting his studies with the aid of such few books as he could obtain. The result may be given in the words of the late Samuel L. Knapp, in his " Sketches of Public Characters : "

" His acquirements at this early age, in the languages and all the branches of knowledge ordinary and extraordinary, are superior to those of any young man of the same age I ever met with.

There is a strength and maturity about his mind rarely to be found in those who have experienced no such deprivation as he has been visited with. His criticisms have a sagacity and shrewdness unequalled by those who were critics before he was born. He acquires a language with the most astonishing facility. No one I ever knew could do it with the same readiness except the late learned orientalist, George Bethune English. Nack unites, in a degree truly astonishing, those two seemingly inconsistent qualities, *restlessness* and *perseverance*. He reads and writes, and does all things as though he had just breathed the Delphic vapour, and perseveres as though he was chained to the spot by some talismanic power. He is a bunch of delicate fibres, too susceptible for composure; or rather of nerves, jarred to agony if struck by a rude hand. Poetical beings are often too sensitive when in possession of every natural property and gift, but in a situation like Nack's, the pulses of the heart seem to beat in our sight, without even the thinnest skin to hide them, open to every blast of a cold and cruel world. But in a few years our gifted author will find things changing around him; and his youthful labours will become the foundation-stones of a goodly edifice, in the fashioning of which he has learned the skill of a literary architect, and acquired the strength to raise a temple of imperishable fame for his own and his country's glory."

Until his fifteenth year, the effusions of the young poet had attracted little notice. From his retiring and solitary habits, he had formed few acquaintances, and among them, none capable of appreciating his powers, or encouraging their development. It was the little poem of the *Blue-Eyed Maid*,

written in his fourteenth year, that opened his career to fame. He had given a copy to a young friend who showed it to his father, Mr. Abraham Asten, a gentleman of cultivated mind and correct taste. The favourable opinion of the poet's talents thus formed, being fully sustained by an examination of his other productions, this gentleman introduced him to several distinguished literary characters, by whose advice a volume of poems was published, selected from productions written between his fourteenth and seventeenth years. This volume was received with great favour by the public. Of one of these pieces, Colonel Knapp observes—“In his sixteenth year he wrote, with many other poems, that beautiful effort of genius, *the Minstrel Boy*. This came from his heart, and it reaches the heart of every reader. It has a deep tone of feeling, a sweetness of language and an ease of versification, that will secure its immortality.”

In alluding to this volume, the *New England Magazine*, a work of high character for its critical acumen, remarks:—“For precocity of talent and attainment under circumstances peculiarly unpropitious, James Nack, the deaf and dumb poet of New-York, is an intellectual wonder. As far as known, Christendom contains nothing comparable to him. All things considered, Chatterton did not equal him. He has not yet attained his twentieth year. He has known none of the advantages of a liberal education, has never had until recently free access to books, and has felt through life the unsparring hand of poverty and misfortune: and yet he has written much, and many of his productions are of a high order; all of them are marked with the rich and fervid outpourings of genius. For intensity,

and all that gives to poetry its highest character, they are certainly not surpassed, we think not equalled, by any of the early productions of Lord Byron ; and those juvenile offerings of the noble bard have never received the commendations they merit. It is not too much to say of this gifted young American, that when matured by time and finished by labour, some of his future efforts in song may equal the happiest of those that have immortalized the author of *Childe Harold*."

Among others whose notice was attracted by the writings of Nack, was an eminent member of the bar in this city, who employed him in his office, and gave him the use of an extensive and well selected library. "This situation," says Colonel Knapp, "opened a new world to him. He revelled in fresh delights ; devoured books upon poetry, history, philosophy, fiction, mathematics, politics, ethicks, criticism, and theology. He wrote as well as read on all these subjects ; formed a thousand theories, and tore them up root and branch for new creations."

On the departure of his employer for Europe, Nack was engaged by Mr. Asten, at that period Clerk of the city and county, as an assistant in his office. From this gentleman, and his official successors, as well as from Colonel Warner, under whose able and efficient supervision, the active duties of the office have been conducted for many years, he has received the strongest proofs of friendship, esteem and confidence. The dry details of legal papers, the monotonous toil of searching the musty records of the courts, however uncongenial to the poetical temperament, have no power to turn him from the path

of duty. He enters thoroughly into the spirit of his various labours, and discharges them with a zeal and ability which probably few could equal, and which has secured for him not only the confidence of his employers, but the warm regard and esteem of the members of the bar. In the early part of the year 1838, Mr. Nack married an amiable young lady, to whom he had been attached almost from her childhood; and who, it is to be hoped, realizes the beautiful delineation of a wife, which will be found in this volume.

Of the contents of the present work, it may be proper to observe, that the *Romance of the Ring*, and several of the minor pieces, were written in the author's seventeenth year. The specimens of translations exhibit a remarkable facility in entering into the spirit of foreign writers, and equal skill in clothing their ideas in well chosen language. The author's power in this respect is most conspicuous in the poem of *Leonora*, which, as a German critic has observed, "is remarkable in every point of view. Taylor, Scott, and others of less note, have attempted this singular ballad, but have effected no more than to give the reader an outline of the story, and even that unnecessarily altered. Mr. Nack has given us a translation almost literal in words, and identical in spirit. His success in conveying to an English ear the imitation of sounds which the original conveys to the German, is truly wonderful, considering his own deprivation of the faculty of hearing. In reading the night-ride, we forget that we are perusing a narrative; we seem to be ourselves upon the road; we rise and fall with the bound of the panting steed; the bridges thunder beneath us; hills, woods and vales fly past us right and left; and "the heavens

with every star" disappear in the rapidity of the flight. In his *Bell-Song*, so far as he adheres to Schiller, he walks side by side with the original; and where he departs from the German author, it is certainly not to fall behind him. The battle-piece, of which there is no trace in Schiller, may rank with the finest passages in the poem."

Mr. Nack has long had it in contemplation to undertake a free translation of *Goethe's Faust*; and after reading the preceding remarks of a competent judge, upon a kindred work of our author, we are induced to hope that the opportunity may yet present itself for the accomplishment of his object, than which none could be found more worthy of his intellectual power and poetic genius. To read and appreciate justly the glorious creations of the German poet, is a privilege accorded to few English students; but to ascend with him in the high heaven of invention, when his "garland and singing robes" are about him, and bring thence the rapt minstrelsy of the mighty bard, is a consummation of poetical dignity and renown, that may well excite the ambition of one emulous of a name which the world would not willingly let die.

The productions of Nack were noticed in a spirit of enlightened criticism in one of the earlier numbers of the *Critic*, a periodical published in this city about ten years since, and edited with signal ability and independence by one who, while the pen is tracing these lines, has gone to a premature grave. In that notice, Mr. Leggett thus eloquently alludes to the subject of these remarks:—"One of the distinguishing characteristics of Nack's poetry is the smoothness of its versification; and we cannot but look upon it as a matter of surprise that he, over

whose head the crashing thunder rolls unheard, and who is locked up in perpetual silence, as unbroken as that of death, should yet be able to give to thought such euphonious language, and arrange it with such invariable regard to rhythm."

"Another circumstance that we were not prepared to find in the poetry of our young minstrel, is that a large proportion of his illustrations are drawn—and, in many instances, with singular aptness and propriety—from sources which we should suppose totally inaccessible to him. The breeze *whispers*, the foliage *rustles*, the streams *murmur* and *gurgle*, and the birds *carol* "their native wood-notes wild," in his stanzas, blending their various sounds into the same delicious harmony, which, in nature, so often creates delight in the breasts of those who have ears to hear."

The variety indicated in the contents of the present volume, exhibits a versatility of talents in our author, which would appear still more extraordinary if a list were given of his unpublished writings and anonymous contributions to various periodicals. Among his manuscripts are moral and religious essays, novels, dramatic pieces, and poems upon a variety of subjects, none of which he considers worthy of publication, but upon which others might place a very different estimate. He has now reached the period of manhood; and his maturer efforts, the productions of the little leisure allowed by the active duties of his station, afford abundant evidence of intellectual culture, and fully sustain the brilliant promises of his youth. The copiousness of diction, the general precision of language, as well as correctness of rhythm and rhyme, are indeed remarkable in one who was deprived, at so early a period of life, of the principal avenue

by which to arrive at a correct knowledge of the meaning and melody of words.

Mr. Nack's habits are regular and retired. The domestic attractions of home have a greater charm for him than the allurements of the world. The amusements and excitements of society can rarely win him from his books or his desk. He is averse to mixed company, reserved in the presence of strangers, but familiar and playful in the circle of his select friends; of strong passions, quick to resent, but quicker to forgive; prone to act upon the impulse of the moment; of a disposition gentle, generous, and sincere. He is fond of children, and successful in engaging their affections. With such qualities of mind and heart, it is not surprising that he secures the warm regard of those who have the happiness of his acquaintance, nor that he is most esteemed by those who know him best.

NEW-YORK, *July 1, 1839.*

LEONORA.

A BALLAD, FROM THE GERMAN OF BURGER.

Up starts she from a dream of dread
At blush of dawning day ;
“ Art faithless, William ! art thou dead !
How long wilt thou delay ? ”

Her lover went with Frederick's might
Upon the fields of Prague to fight,
And still no tidings came to tell,
Or were he ill, or were he well.

Weary, at last, of war's debate,
The sovereigns bade it cease,
To milder moods subdued their hate,
And swore to lasting peace.

With song and shout the soldiers come,
With clash and clang, and roll of drum,
Bedeck'd with garlands green and gay,
Rejoicing on their homeward way.

And everywhere, and everywhere,
With shouts of jubilee,
Both old and young, in throngs repair,
Their coming friends to see.

“ Now God be praised ! ” said wife and child,
And many a bride her “ welcome ! ” smiled ;
But Leonor no friend is meeting ;
No kiss for her, for her no greeting !

From rank to rank she wander'd fast,
And question'd all that came ;
In vain she question'd all that past,
And named her lover's name.

All—all past on—she gazed around—
She dash'd herself upon the ground ;
She wept—she tore her raven hair,
And tost her arms in mad despair !

Now hastes to her the mother mild :
“ Oh ! why art thou distrest ?
God's pity on my darling child ! ”
She clasped her to her breast.

“ Oh, mother ! mother ! gone is gone !
Away with all beneath the sun !
In God no mercy can I see !
Ah ! wo is me ! ah ! wo is me ! ”

“ Oh, help her, Lord ! with gracious eye
Look down. My child to prayer apply—
All—all is well that God may do—
Oh, God ! my child with pity view !”

“ Oh, mother ! mother ! dreams of air !
God deals not well with me.
What help have I—what help is prayer ?
No good to come can be.”

“ Help, Lord ! a father is above,
Who helps the children of his love—
The holy sacrament, my child,
Will make thy sharpest sorrow mild.”

“ Oh, mother ! mother ! how I burn !
All sacraments were vain ;
No sacrament that can return
The dead to life again !”

“ Nay, child, what if the faithless youth
In stranger lands forgets his truth,
And careless of his plighted band,
On other maid bestows his hand ;

‘ Why, let it go—his worthless heart—
And small his gain shall be :
His soul, when soul and body part,
Shall rue its perjury.”

“ Oh, mother! mother! gone is gone!
Forever must I mourn!
Death! death I seek! and death alone!
Would I had ne'er been born!

“ Go out—forever out—my light!
In horror vanish, and in night!
In God no mercy can I see!
Ah! wo is me! ah! wo is me!”

“ Help, Lord! nor with my hapless child
Thy judgment enter in;
She knows not what she utters wild;
Oh count it not her sin.

“ Ah, child! forget thy earthly rod,
And think of heaven, and think of God;
So shall thy soul through all prevail,
Nor of its heavenly bridegroom fail.”

“ Oh, mother! mother! what is heaven!
Oh, mother, what is hell?
With him alone, with him, is heaven—
Without my William, hell!

“ Go out—forever out—my light!
In darkness vanish, and in night—
Without his sight—without his love—
No joy is here—no joy above!”

Thus raved the madness of despair
That burn'd through brain and vein,
And rashly God's foreseeing care
She blamed with thoughts profane.

She wrung her hands—she beat her breast,
Until the sun had gone to rest,
Until the golden stars about
The heavenly arch came dancing out.

And hark! without, a tramp, tramp, tramp!
Some steed is trampling by;
And clattering up the stairs, the stamp
Of knightly feet is nigh.

And hark! a tinkle, tinkling ring;
Loose swings the bell's vibrating string;
Then comes a voice, and every word
Distinctly through the door is heard.

“Hollo! hollo! my child arise!
My love, dost wake or sleep?
Was I before thy fancy's eyes?
And dost thou laugh or weep?”

“Ah! William! thou! I have not slept
Nor smiled, but I have watch'd and wept,
And sorely sorrow'd for thy sight—
Whence ridest thou so late at night?”

“ At midnight we prepare the steed,
 And from Bohemia ride.
 I mounted late—but good my speed ;
 I come for thee, my bride !”

“ Ah William, here awhile repose ;
 The wind is whistling as it blows ;
 My heart’s beloved, my own, my best,
 Come to my arms for warmth and rest.”

“ And let it whistle—let it blow—
 Yes, let it blow, my dear !
 Steed stamps—spur clinks—’tis time to go—
 I may not house me here.

“ Come, gird thyself, and spring and swing
 Upon my steed, behind me cling ;
 To-night, before I wed my bride,
 We have a hundred miles to ride.”

“ A hundred miles ere morning’s light,
 To seek the bridal bower !
 And hark ! the clock ! ’tis late at night—
 ’Tis the eleventh hour.”

“ Look there ! look here ! the moon shines clear !
 How swift the dead and we career !
 Come, come, my love, to-night we wed ;
 To-night we reach the bridal bed !”

“ But where the bridal chamber, say ?
 What bed doth it contain ? ”

“ Small, cool, and quiet—far away ;
 Six planks, and shingles twain.”

“ Hast room for me ? ” “ For me and thee ;
 Come, gird thyself, and mount with me ;
 Spring, cling behind—the guests await,
 And open stands the bridal gate.”

She girt herself—she sprung—she swung
 Upon the steed in haste ;
 Her lily hands were clasp'd and clung
 Around the rider's waist.

And hurra ! hurra ! patter patter !
 On—on—like whistling winds they clatter ;
 The steed and rider panting bound,
 And sparks and pebbles flash around.

Swift on the left—swift on the right—
 Sweeps every scene asunder !
 Heaths, meadows, fields—how swift their flight !
 And how the bridges thunder !

“ Love, dost thou fear ? the moon shines clear ;
 Hurrah ! how swift the dead career !

“ Love, dost thou fear ? and dost thou dread
 The dead ? ” “ Ah ! no—but leave the dead ! ”

Hark ! hark ! the raven flaps his wing ;
What songs and sounds of gloom !
The knell they ring—the dirge they sing—
“ Let us the dead entomb !”

And now, with coffin and with bier,
A funeral train approaches near :
The gurgled song was like the sound
Of croaking frogs in marshy ground.

“ With clang and cry the dead entomb
When midnight hour has ceast ;
But now I take my young wife home ;
Come to the marriage feast.

“ Come—with the chorus, come along,
Sacristan—croak the bridal song ;
Come, priest, and be thy blessing said
Before we seek the bridal bed.”

The bier is gone, and hushed the song,
The train behind him steals,
And hurry-scurry scuds along
Hard at his courser's heels.

And faster faster, patter patter,
On—on—like whistling winds they clatter ;
The steed and rider panting bound,
And sparks and pebbles flash around.

How swift on right, how swift on left,
Hills, woods and vales sweep by!
How swift on left, and right, and left,
The towns and hamlets fly!

“ Love, dost thou fear? the moon shines clear;
Hurrah! how swift the dead career!
Love, dost thou fear? and dost thou dread
The dead?” “ Oh! let them rest, the dead!”

Behold! a gibbet! phantoms dance
Around the gory wheel;
Half visible by moonlight's glance
An airy rabble reel.

“ Ho! ho! come, rabble, hasten here,
Come, rabble, after me career;
For ye the bridal dance must tread
When we repair to bridal bed.”

He spoke! the rabble, hush, hush, hush!
Behind him rustling throng,
As whirlwinds through the forest rush,
And brush its leaves along.

And faster faster, patter patter,
On—on—like whistling winds they clatter;
The steed and rider panting bound,
And sparks and pebbles flash around.

How flies whate'er the moon benolds !

How swift it flies—how far !

How flies whate'er the sky enfolds,

The heavens with every star !

“ Love, dost thou fear ? the moon shines clear !

Hurrah ! how swift the dead career !

Love, dost thou fear ? and dost thou dread

The dead ?” “ Ah, wo ! why name the dead ?”

“ On—on—my steed—the cock will crow—

The sand will soon be run—

The morning air begins to blow—

Ho ! ho ! the goal is won !

“ Our race is run—prepare—prepare ;

The bridal bed awaits us there ;

Ho ! ho ! how swift the dead career !

Be welcome, love, our home is here !”

And instant to an iron gate,

With loosened rein they speed ;

With slender rod he smites the grate,

And bolt and bar recede.

The gate flies back with clashing crash,

And onward over graves they dash,

Where in the moon's uncertain light,

The grave-stones gleam in ghastly white.

Lo! in the twinkling of an eye—
Hush! hush! a fearful wonder!
The rider's vestments piecemeal fly,
Like tinder drop asunder!

His head a ghastly skull has grown,
For flesh, and hair, and eyes have flown;
His form a skeleton unfolds,
An hour-glass and a scythe he holds.

The courser snorts and wildly rears,
And scatters fire around;
And, lo! at once he disappears
Beneath the yawning ground.

And howls and howls are heard on high,
And from the graves a mournful cry;
How beats her heart—how heaves her breath
Tost to and fro by life and death!

Now hand in hand, by moonlight's glance,
Appear the spectral crowd,
In circling measures weave the dance,
And howl these words aloud:

“Be patient—patient—break thy heart,
But blame not God's control!
Thy time has come with life to part;
God's mercy on thy soul!”