

suffered so much that he was advised to go abroad to recruit his failing strength. In 1841 he visited different parts of Europe, and spent some time also in Africa, and the change of scene and the repose from labor contributed greatly to his relief. Since his return, though his health is not yet re-established, he has resumed his duties as editor, and has likewise written for the principal magazines several exquisite essays, which have commanded just applause. Should his strength continue to improve, we have reason to know that he will soon realize the expectations of his friends, and present himself in a shape calculated to increase his well-founded reputation.

We have said above that want of room prevents us from entering upon any elaborate examination of Mr. Neal's merits as a writer. We may take occasion to remark, however, that these merits are emphatically his own. He owes whatever he possesses to no one but himself. His productions all bear the stamp of vigorous originality. He imitates no one; and least of all Mr. Dickens, to whom he has sometimes been compared. Mr. Neal's "Charcoal Sketches" were collected and published before "Boz" was known on this side of the Atlantic, and if between these papers and portions of Boz's writings there is any resemblance, it is certainly not chargeable to Mr. Neal. For ourselves, we do not perceive any very marked resemblance. Mr. Neal and Mr. Dickens are both entertaining writers: both have selected many of their subjects from the lower classes of society; both mingle gayeties and gravities in their descriptions, and in so far as these circumstances induce a resemblance it probably exists. But beyond these accidents of coincidence they differ widely. Mr. Dickens is always diffuse—he spreads himself over the largest possible surface, and writes as if determined to make the most of what he has in hand. Mr. Neal is just the reverse of this. He concentrates too much. There is material enough in almost every sketch he has ever

made for the construction of a clever book; and he crowds into a single page as many good things as, with more economy of wit and humor, might sufficiently intersperse a volume. From this fact it happens that Mr. Dickens sometimes caricatures, Mr. Neal always paints. The former exhibits on his canvas parti-colored groups, fanciful, grotesque or brutal, as the case may be, but always exaggerated; the latter exhibits a single portrait, but a portrait so marked, so stamped, as it were, with life-likeness, that you cannot help but pause to admire it. We grant readily that Mr. Dickens has earned deservedly an ample fame, and that Mr. Neal is comparatively but little known; but it is an opinion, which fire cannot burn out of us, that, in their own order, the "Charcoal Sketches" are superior to any thing of a similar kind which Mr. Dickens has attempted; and we do not fear that the partiality inspired by long-cherished friendship misleads us, when we predict, as we now do, that if Mr. Neal lives and thrives—as Heaven grant he may—he will ultimately occupy a high rank not only among American, but all living writers. No man looks into character with a keener vision—no man notes peculiarities with broader humor—no man philosophizes with more truth and less obtrusiveness—and no man is more thoroughly master of the language in which he writes. In this last respect he far excels most of those who have entered the same walk of literature. He is never turgid and never weak—never above comprehension nor down to the level of common-place—but preserving always the golden mean, he writes in a style so pure, so terse, so sparklingly clear, that those who love good old English, find new motives for admiration as they read his essays.

In his habits Neal, like all men of his temperament, is somewhat retired, but with one or two choice friends, he is just such a companion as one would choose to spend a month with, if doomed to confinement in the country during the rainy season.

THE SOUL'S IDEAL.

BY ERNEST HELFENSTEIN.

THERE was a dream, a dream of life and youth,

That came to me, I know not when the time;

A creature made of loveliness and truth,

With form and feature tranquil yet sublime:

No angel was it, but a thing half real,

And soon I loved her, as my soul's ideal.

She dwelt amid the household gods with me,

To give all genial promptings truth and grace,

The real in their earnestness to see,

Touched with the halo beaming from her face;

All shapes that weak, fond fancy might beguile,

Abashed were withered by her placid smile.

She led me where all shapes of beauty dwell;

She gave to sense a something more than earth,

And when my soul its strange unquiet felt,

She whispered promise of a higher birth:

She gave me strength the inner life to trace,

And thus more real grew her own fair face.

She changeth not, this creature of the soul,

Save that more earnest, tender is her guise;

In every mood I feel her calm control,

And own the pleading of her heavenward eyes;

A gentle sadness blendeth with the smile

That thoughtfulness or joy may well beguile.

She keepeth yet her fresh and buoyant grace,

But when intent I look within her eyes,

A something nobler day by day I trace,

Like blue that deepeneth in the evening skies;

And thus rewarding worthier love of mine

Each day her face is growing more divine.

She taught me faith and constancy to know,

To meekly wait for the appointed one,

Despite the yearning felt for evermore

While dwells the soul companionless and lone.

And when at length content upon me came,

Love and the Soul's Ideal were the same.