

Review of *The Mummy*

THE GARDENER'S MAGAZINE March 1828 pp 478-9

Part III Miscellaneous Intelligence

Art. III Hints for Improvements

*New Ideas*—In *The Mummy*, a tale of the twenty-second century, an attempt is made to predestinate the application of steam, and other modern improvements, which, whether intended in the way of ridicule or effect, it may not be altogether useless to notice. A patent steam mowing apparatus is set to work in a hay field, and the weather being foggy the hay is dried with the use of a burning glass! A field of barley, in a very dry state, is watered by the farmer, who seeing “a nice black heavy-looking cloud sailing by”, gets out his electrical machine, and draws it down in five minutes. Communications are held with every part of the world by means of telegraphs, and a private gentleman, whose son is engaged in battle in Germany, hears the result of an engagement a few minutes after it happens. A steam gigging machine is mentioned, cooking is effected by a chemical preparation, without the use of fire; it is the fashion for great people to have only one dish, and fricasees and ragouts are only devoured by the *canaille*; beds are inflated with air instead of feathers; house servants, of every description, are poets, artists and philosophers; water is turned into ice by mechanical pressure; fog and vapours is turned into snow or rain at pleasure, by withdrawing electricity; all travelling is performed in balloons; the tour of the whole world can be made in six weeks; and great people, finding it so very easy to be transported from one place to another, have left off travelling, and seldom leave their country seats. In a grand procession and ovation celebrated in Black heath Square, said to be the largest and finest square in the world, the air was thronged with balloons, and with a variety of aërial horses, bestrode by city dandies, whilst others floated upon wings, or glided along on aërial sledges. “The throng of the balloons was very dense. Some young city apprentices, having hired each a pair of wings for the day, and not exactly knowing how to manage them, a dreadful tumults ensued, and the balloons became entangled with the winged heroes and each other in inextricable confusion. The noise now became tremendous, the conductors of the balloons swearing at each other the most refined oaths, and the ladies screaming in concert. Several balloons were rent in the scuffle, and fell with tremendous force upon the earth, while some cars were torn from the supporting ropes, and others roughly upset. Luckily, however, the whole of England was at this time so completely excavated, that falling upon the surface of the earth was like tumbling upon the parchment of an immense drum, and, consequently, only a deep hollow sound was returned as cargo after cargo of the demolished balloons struck upon it; some of them, indeed, rebounded several yards with the violence of the shock.”

The country is governed by an absolute queen, who is “full of wild-goose schemes” – “only imagine, Sir Ambrose, she showed me this morning a plan for making aërial barges to convey heavy weights from one steeple to another; a machine for stamping shoes and boots at one blow out of a sold piece of leather; a steam-engine for milking cows; and an elastic summer-house, that might be folded up so as to be put in a man’s pocket!”

Coal and other fuel having been long in disuse, smoke is unknown in London, and the English are the first sculptors in the world. The gardens of the nobility, who have town-houses, extend from the Strand to the Thames, and all of them are open to the public. Nothing in summer can be more enchanting than these gardens, filled with statues and beautiful originals; in winter the Thames “was frozen, and persons glided along it in glittering *traineaux*, or skated gracefully; whilst, every now and then, a steam-percussion-moveable bridge shot across the stream, loaded with goods and passengers, collapsing again the instant its burthen was safely landed on the other side.”

There is a patent steam book manufactory in Hatton Garden, where also quotations are cut, dried and made up into pills for the use of authors. Every regiment, ship, and private family has its philosopher as well as its chaplain and surgeon. The government of England is an absolute monarchy, Ireland and Scotland are separate kingdoms, the Catholic religion is everywhere established; the most enlightened part of society believe in ghosts and goblins, and the reason given is “because the extremes of ignorance and civilisation tend alike to produce credulity.”

The most extravagant and impracticable ideas will sometimes aid in forming new and useful combinations; and it is good to see the subject of scientific invention, and intellectual improvement, pushed to the extreme point, in order to show the absurdities to which every thing human is liable to give rise.