PREFATORY DEDICATION.

Sir Peter Plastic, knight of the order of the Tower and Sword, deputy sub-armourer at the Tower of London, in which situation he is recognized in these honorary times by the aforesaid title, presents his compliments to the world in general, and begs to inform them, that, in pursuing his professional duties, he lately discovered the manuscript he now takes the liberty of sending to the press. Whether the author was really the Absent Man he delineated himself, and through inattention dropped the precious narrative unknowingly from his pocket, or whether it was designed as a burlesque upon the pleonasms so justly censurable in the fictitious publications of the present day, it is impossible for Sir P. P. to determine. His style of reading being altogether restricted to the origin and history of armorial ensigns, he is precluded from forming any opinion upon
this head; but the slight texture of the manuscript, the improbability of the situations it exhibits, and the disappointment in the catastrophe, are, as he supposes, intended to ridicule the "baseless fabric" of a modern novel; and to show with how much pretension, and how little reason, an expletive may be swelled into the accomplishment of a well rounded period: but as this is a conjectural thesis, Sir F. P. will leave it to the public, upon an investigation into its different bearings, to decide the point, merely observing in conclusion, that, after making the most laborious inquiry of which he was capable, no one could be found to own the lost narrative.

Tower of London,

Jan. 1817.
NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

Sir Peter Plastic begs to inform the world, that, at this interesting period of the Absent Man's narrative, the manuscript is so much injured, as to have become perfectly illegible. Many sheets are totally spoiled apparently by the operation of fire upon the paper. The whole bears evident marks of it's having been written in haste; and for the sake of expedition, it is supposed that the "Absent Man" held the manuscript to the grate, and that, while he might have been thinking of some indifferent affair, it's scorching heat had parched the paper, and extinguished every vestige of the subject matter that before occupied it.

There are, indeed, scarcely two lines of the remaining composition discernible in the same page. In a sheet at a distant part from the one in which the apparent character of the writing closes, may be read the following quotation from Dryden, a little burnt, but tolerably perspicuous.

"• • • rors like straws upon the • • • • • flow,
He who would search for pearls, must dive below."
The Absent Man's errors are, luckily for him, half obliterated; and the surface of the paper being smoked, this word is consequently extinct.

The next discoverable passage commences with "Fatima Neverspar;" and as the name follows close upon the above verses, it may be inferred, that they were intended to relate to some compliment previously paid to her.

The eye now wanders over many pages of chaos, till these broken sentences appear:

"Oh! gentle Reader? * * * * * * the anguish of my * * * * * * as the solemn procession * * * * * * along the avenue of elms * * * * * * to the wicket gate of the church yard" * * * * * * "It was the last earthly * * * * * * to my Uncle's obsequies. He was a man, take * * * * * * Job wept bitterly" * * * * * *

A perplexed and perplexing story closes the manuscript relating to the marriage of some happy pair or other—the names are unfortunately effaced; but a circumstance attending the ceremony seems to have been a good joke: the indistinct fractions, as far as they are capable of construction, refer to the loss, as it appears, of the bridegroom's recollection at a very critical moment; and the word "ring" being written with several notes of exclamation, or
interrogation, it is impossible to detect which expression was intended, leads to the natural conclusion, that it was forgotten on the bridal morning.

Sir Peter Plastic cannot dismiss the subject without expressing his regret, that his numerous professional avocations will not admit of his endeavouring to discover any chemical preparation, by the application of which some of the damaged letters might possibly reassume their original form, and give a better finish to the narrative.

He, however, cannot overcome his original opinion, that the manuscript was intended as a burlesque; and that the abrupt close of it was chosen to ridicule the unsatisfactory finis of a modern novel: though, as the scorched paper must certainly have been accidental, and again warrants the supposition of it's having been the act of an "Absent Man," he leaves the world to decide the point.

P. P.

Tower of London,
Jan. 1817.