

Anster Fair and Maggie Lauder.

PROFESSOR WILLIAM TENNANT, from whose works we cull the following story, was born in Anstruther on the 15th of May 1784. From his parents, who seem to have been people of more than ordinary abilities, though of comparatively humble station, he inherited a rare love of knowledge. Concurrent testimony places him side by side with Scotland's master-painter, Wilkie. Both were physically impaired, yet of brilliant talent; each eminent beyond comparison in his own style and above his own countrymen. While Wilkie delineated glorious scenes of country life, Tennant rushed all his genius into his "silent-speaking" pictures, drawn from the broad theatre of nature, and each, too, has bequeathed a name that will be imperishable so long as the populace remains and plebeian tastes and customs and feelings survive. These men need no sculptured marble; their names and lives and works live as evergreens in the minds of the people for whom they laboured, and never shall decay.

As a linguist Tennant has had few equals—Greek and Latin, Hebrew and Syriac, Arabic and Persian were all at his finger-ends, the facility with which he mastered them being something remarkable. Among his literary efforts we may mention "Anster Concert" and "Anster Fair," "The Thane o' Fife," "Papistry Stormed, or the Dingin' Down o' the Cathedral," "Cardinal Beaton: a Tragedy," "John Baliol, a Historical Drama," and "Hebrew Dramas"—all of them, with the exception of "Anster Fair," more or less failures. He also wrote a Syriac and Hebrew Grammar. But, if his prose compositions

lacked energy and elegance, besides being devoid of variety and vigour of thought, his "Anster Fair"—a humorous poetic effusion in the then-forgotten measure of the *ottava rima*—raised him to a unique position among the *littérateurs* of Britain, a position till then unoccupied, and from which there is little likelihood of his ever being ousted.

In "Anster Fair" we have a poem chivalrous in its conception and handling, but with the sword and helmet of chivalry doffed, and the garb of innocent mirth and festivity donned—a poem sparkling with the choicest colours of classic romances, yet minus their prolixity and incredible achievements, nevertheless replete with characters and actions welcome to plebeian hearts—a poem in which gallantry kisses the hand to amorous impetuosity, and in whose every line there breathes the honest joyousness of the Scottish soul. The contests are well imagined and well rhymed, the little dialogues introduced here and there spirited and natural and strongly characteristic. In the first stanza the poet launches straightaway into his subject with all the "frolicsome and unbridled" generosity and perspicuity that pervade the whole play, singing the glories of the Great Fair which at that time was patronised by merchants from every corner of Europe; singing, too, "a theme far livelier, happier, and gladder" than all the rhapsodies of ancient Greece and Rome put together—in fine, how the heart and hand of Bonnie Maggie Lauder were won on Anster Loan.

What time from east, from west, from south, from north,
 From every hamlet, town, and smoky city,
 Laird, clown, and beau, to Anster Fair came forth,
 The young, the gay, the handsome, and the witty,
 To try in various sport and game their worth,
 Whilst prize before them Maggie sat, the pretty,
 And after many a feat, and joke, and banter,
 Fair Maggie's hand was won by mighty Rob the Ranter.

Having invoked the Muses to send but a spark of that immortal flame which inspired the uncontrolled Pindar and the

Chian Homer, the poet is rewarded with a glimpse of Fairyland. Puck is graphically portrayed.

I see the puny, fair-chinn'd goblin rise
 Suddenly glorious from his mustard-pot ;
 I see him wave his hand in seemly wise,
 And button round him tight his fulgent coat ;
 I see him ope his dewy lips ; I hear
 The strange and strict command addressed to Maggie's ear.

It was on a keen and cutting-cold December night that the goblin broke in upon our heroine's soliloquies. Maggie was sitting at supper in her warm chamber, bemoaning her "maidhood's joyless state," weighing the merits of her besieging suitors and a-picking their faults threadbare. Out of the mustard-pot which, on the table, had begun to caper to and fro, he suddenly appeared amidst the smoke—"a fairy of the height of half an ell"—and took his stand upon the table, waving his hand to the amazed and startled damsel—glorious in his garb of golden sheen, by Iris spun in her lofty bower, his eyes sparkling with fiery delight, and his miniature bagpipe hanging gracefully from his shoulder.

He made a bow so dignifiedly flat,
 That Mag was witchèd with his beauish air :
 At last he spoke with voice so soft, so kind,
 So sweet, as if his throat with fiddle-strings were lin'd :

"Lady ! be not offended that I dare,
 Thus forward and impertinently rude,
 Emerge, uncall'd, into the upper air,
 Intruding on a maiden's solitude ;
 Nay, do not be alarm'd, thou lady fair !
 Why startle so ?—I am a fairy good ;
 Not one of those that, envying beauteous maids,
 Speckle their skins with moles, and fill with spleens their heads.

For, as conceal'd in this clayhouse of mine,
 I overheard thee in a lowly voice,
 Weighing thy lovers' merits, with design
 Now on the worthiest lad to fix thy choice.

I have up-bolted from my paltry shrine,
 To give thee, sweet-eyed lass, my best advice ;
 For, by the life of Oberon, my king !
 To pick good husband out—is, sure, a ticklish thing !”

Having apologised for his intrusion, Tommy advises Miss Lauder to select a husband by public competition, and thereby put an end to her spouseless solitude. “And let these,” he said, “be the conditions :—

First, on the Loan shall ride full many an ass,
 With stout whip-wielding rider on his back ;
 Next, o’er the ground the daring men shall pass,
 Half-coffined in their cumbrances of sack ;
 Then shall the pipers groaningly begin
 In squeaking rivalry their merry strain ;
 Last, let each man that hopes thy hand to win
 By witty product of prolific brain,
 Approach, and, confident of Pallas’ aid,
 Claim by an hum’rous tale possession of thy bed.

Such are the wondrous tests by which, my love,
 The merits of thy husband must be tried !
 And he that shall in these superior prove—
 One proper husband shall the Fates provide—
 Shall from the Loan with thee triumphant move
 Homeward, the jolly bridegroom and the bride,
 And at thy house shall eat the marriage feast,
 When I’ll pop up again.” Here Tommy Puck surceast.

Before departing the elfin creature delighted the maiden with a tune upon the pipes, the like of which, so exquisite and sweet, King Midas in all his lifetime never heard from the stone-affecting lyre of Orpheus. Its effect was magical.

Tingle the fire-irons, poker, tongs, and grate,
 Responsive to the blithesome melody !
 The tables and the chairs inanimate
 Wish they had muscles now to trip it high !
 Wave back and forwards at a wondrous rate
 The window curtains, touch’d with sympathy !
 Fork, knife, and trencher almost break their sloth,
 And caper on their ends upon the tablecloth !

And what of Maggie? Could she resist the pipes' awakening air? Sure, no!

From nook to nook through all the room she tript,
And whirl'd like whirligig, and reel'd, and bobb'd, and skipt.

At last the magic piper ceased to play, and, bowing a sweet and soft "Good-night!" to the lady, flitted out of sight. The fairy's advice was immediately acted upon. Messengers, swift of foot and brazen-lunged, were despatched and proclamation made; and Rumour, that gossip whose body is one multitude of open ears, in each an ever-wakeful eye and a babbling tongue, blazened abroad, in Lowland vale and Highland glen, the approaching Fair. The beautiful allegorical rendering with which the minstrel ushers in the spring-time has few parallels in human tongue—simple it is, yet powerful, every word standing on its own feet.

Old Kelly Law, the kindly nurse of sheep,
Puts on her daisy-tissued gown of green;
On all her slopes, so verdurous and steep,
The bleating children of the flock are seen;
And see how Airdrie woods upshoot on high
Their leafy living glories to the day,
As if they long'd t' embrace the vaulty sky
With their long branchy arms so green and gay!
Balcarras Craig, so rough and hard and dry,
Enliven'd into beauty by the ray,
Heaves up, bedecked with flow'rs, his ruffian side,
Like giant hung with gauds, and boasts his tricky pride.

But, lo! on the crest of the North Sea waves brigs and schooners now appear, bringing with them the stores and wares of France and the Netherlands—lintseed, frieze, and linen from muddy Zuyder-Zee, palate-scorching gin from Flushing, the blood of Bacchus-berry from Bordeaux, to wit, the wines of clear-skied Gaul. And soon Anstruther becomes a scene of the wildest hullabaloo and merriment, for the famous Fair draws

nigh. The hurry and bustle grows apace ; from all parts of Scotland the people flock.

In thousands puffingly to Fife they run,
Gold in their pockets lodg'd, and in their noddles fun.

First and foremost there descend upon the town the high-spirited and mischief-loving students of St Andrews, clad in their academic robes—"a joke-exchanging crew"—and close behind them the learned Professors, radiant in wigs and vestments, bent on seeing the sport.

And such a mob came trampling o'er Kingsmuir,
They raise a cloud of dust that does the sun obscure ;
And from Denino's every house and hut
Her simple guileless people hie away ;
Next, from the well-air'd ancient town of Crail,
Go out her craftsmen with tumultuous din ;
And from Kingsbarns and hamlet clep'd of boars,
Sally the villagers and hinds in scores.
Then, jostling forward on the western road,
Approach the folk of wind-swept Pittenweem ;
St Monance, Elie, and adjacent farms,
Turn their mechanics, fishers, farmers out ;
And from her coal-pits Dysart vomits forth
Her subterranean men of colour dun :
Nor did Pathhead detain her wrangling race
Of weavers, toiling at their looms for bread ;
And long Kirkcaldy, from each dirty street,
Her numerous population eastward throws ;
And from Kinghorn jump hastily along
Her ferrymen and poor inhabitants :
And th' upland hamlet, where, as told in song,
Tam Lutar play'd of yore his lively ranks,
Is left dispeopled of her brose-fed throng,
For eastward scud they now as thick as ants ;
Dunfermline, too, so famed for checks and ticks,
Sends out her loom-bred men, with bags and walking-sticks ;
And from Kinross, whose dusty streets unpaved
Are whirl'd through heav'n on summer's windy day,
Jog her brisk burghers, spruce and cleanly shaved,
Her sullen cutlers and her weavers gay :

Next ride on sleek-maned horses, bay or brown,
 The writers of industrious Cupar town ;
 From all her lanes and alleys, fair Dundee
 Has sent her happy citizens away ;
 From Perth, Dunkeld, from Brechin, Forfar, Glamis,
 Roll down the sweaty crowds, with wearied legs and hams.

In hot haste, too, flock the Highlanders and Islanders, the Lowlanders and Borderers, Danes and Norwegians, rich and poor, all burning to see the Fair. Amid the Homeric throng the poet espies the hero of the story, and gives us such a description of him that few can read it without feeling the depths of its genuine beauty.

He comes apparell'd like a trim bridegroom,
 Fiery and flushed with hope, and like a god in bloom ;
 His waggish face, that speaks a soul jocose,
 Seems cast in very mould of fun and glee,
 And on the bridge of his well-arched nose
 Sits laughter plum'd, and white-wing'd jollity ;
 His manly chest a breadth heroic shows ;
 Bold is his gesture, dignified and free ;
 One born and shap'd to shine and make a figure,
 And blessed with supple limbs to jump with wond'rous vigour.

The merry monarch of the Scots now arrives, and Anster and Anster House on the eve of the market are one wide, wild scene of revelry. Within the mansion lords and ladies whirlingly trip the mazes of the entangled reel ; some—for generous is the host—sharpen their wits with the nectar that sends the loitering blood a-bounding through their veins ; while, amidst the thousands and tens of thousands on the Green, tumblers and merry-Andrews and mountebanks are enacting the best of Davie Lindsay's plays.

And ballad-singing women do not spare
 Their throats to give good utt'rance to their lays ;
 And many a leather-lung'd co-chanting pair
 Of wood-legg'd sailors—children's laugh and gaze,
 Lift to the courts of Jove their voices loud,
 Y-hymning their mishaps, to please the heedless crowd.

In the argent moonlight, too, some pour over the Devil's pictured books—others shift the “inch-tall bishops, kings and queens, and rooks over the chequered board”—some play at Fox and Lamb—and

Others, of travell'd elegance, polite,
With mingling music Maggie's house surround,
And serenade her all the livelong night
With song and lyre, and flute's enchanting sound,
Chiming and hymning into fond delight
The heavy night air that o'ershades the ground ;
While she, right pensive, in her chamber nook
Sits pond'ring on th' advice of little Tommy Puck.

Night runs her course, and morning comes. Up the blue pathway of heaven shines the glorious dawn. Earth laughs, and to Anster Loan haste the admiring crowds—“each brick and pavement-stone wished it had feet that day !”—to pay homage to Bonnie Maggie Lauder who rode at the Red Tod's right hand to the scene of the sports. And as the maiden's trampling palfrey prances tardily through the throng, a shout enough “to split the roundness of the granite-ribbed globe” broke from ten thousand throats. The sky did rattle with the noise !

The very waving of her arm
Had power a brutish lout t' unbrutify and charm !

Her face was as the summer cloud, whereon
The dawning sun delights to rest his rays ;
Compar'd with it, old Sharon's vale, o'ergrown
With flaunting roses, had resign'd its praise :
For why ? Her face with Heaven's own roses shone,
Mocking the morn and witching men to gaze ;
And he that gaz'd with cold unsmitten soul—
That blockhead's heart was ice hewn out beneath the Pole.

Her locks, apparent tufts of wiry gold,
Lay on her lily temples, fairly dangling,
And on each hair, so harmless to behold,
A lover's soul hung mercilessly strangling ;

The piping silly zephyrs vied t' enfold
 The tresses in their arms so slim and tangling,
 And thrud in sport those lover-noosing snares,
 Playing at hide-and-seek amid the golden hairs.

Her eye was as an honour'd palace, where
 A choir of lightsome Graces frisk and dance ;
 What object drew her grace, how mean soe'er,
 Got dignity and honour from the glance ;
 Woe to the man on whom she, unaware,
 Did the dear witch'ry of her eye elance !
 'Twas such a thrilling, killing, keen regard—
 May heav'n from such a look preserve each tender bard !

So on she rode in virgin majesty,
 Charming the thin dead air to kiss her lips,
 And with the light and grandeur of her eye
 Shaming the proud sun into dim eclipse ;
 While round her presence, clust'ring far and nigh,
 On horseback some, with silver spurs and whips,
 And some afoot with shoes of dazzling buckles,
 Attended knights, and lairds, and clowns with horny knuckles.

Soon the Loan was reached, and Anster's beauteous dame
 took her place beside the king, amid the flower and chivalry of
 Scotland. There, amid a silence "silent as summer sky," the
 herald proclaimed the contest and its conditions—the prize fair
 Maggie's hand and two hundred acres of land, a present from
 the king. The ass race was first on the programme. One by one
 the suitors enter the lists, and the virgin's eyes at once single
 out the manly form of the Borderer—her destined spouse, "the
 seemliest, stateliest wight" in the arena. She sighs to herself :

"I could—La ! what a grace of form divine !—
 I could, in sooth, submit to lose my name in thine !"

But the sound of the brass-toned clarion breaks short her
 reverie, and in a moment the competitors bound away. "They
 shoot—they fly—they spur—they whip—they crack—they
 bawl—they curse—they cry !"—such is the bold spirited
 description of the author. While asses are backing and
 thwarting, as asses always do ; while cuddies jostle and rebel,

the ass of Rob the Ranter is speeding straight as an arrow in his ostrich-like flight, half-riding, half-flying on the wings of the wind towards the turning-post. And now he is careering on the homeward track.

Speed, cuddie, speed—one short, short minute more,
And finish'd is thy toil, and won the race !
Now, one half-minute, and thy toils are o'er—
His toils are o'er, and he has gain'd the base !
He shakes his tail, the conscious conqueror,—
Joy peeps through his stupidity of face ;
He seems to wait the monarch's approbation,
As quiver his long ears with self-congratulation.

Next follows the sack race. Hundreds of candidates turn out to win honour in the contest, forming what the poet calls an awkward and ridiculous show. One after another falls boisterously to the ground, flouncing and weltering in his sack, until only two of the frog-like crew remain—Rob the Ranter and an Edinburgh wag of advocate renown, who had provided himself with

A sack, whose bottom was with damp impair'd,
Fusty, half-rotten, mouldy, frail, and thin,
That he, unseen, might in the race's pother
Thrust out one helpful leg, and keep incag'd its brother.

Both combatants reached the winning line at the same moment, but the Ranter, being the honest competitor, was pronounced victorious.

And now the sun “towers on the summit of the lucid sky,” and the mighty crowd, obeying the ravenous cravings of nature, begin to “eat and nibble, one and all.” Luncheon over, there came an item for the suitor pipers, and here the poet's pictures are distinguished by originality as well as beauty, by brilliancy as well as graphicness, the destruction of the instruments of the jealous musicians being told with a rare amount of spirit and faithfulness.

Then rose, in burst of hideous symphony,
Of pibrochs and of tunes one mingled roar ;

Discordantly the pipes squeal'd sharp and high,
The drones alone in solemn concord anore :
Five hundred fingers, twinkling funnily,
Play twiddling up and down on hole and bore,
Now passage to the shrilly wind denying,
And now a little rais'd to let it out a-sighing.

Then rung the rocks and caves of Billowness,
Reverberating back that concert's sound,
And half the lurking echoes that possess
The glens and hollows of the Fifan ground ;
Their shadowy voices strained into excess
Of outcry, loud huzzaing round and round,
To all the Dryads of Pitkirie Wood,
That now, around their trees, they dance in frisky mood.

As when the sportsman, with report of gun,
Alarms the sea-fowls of the Isle of May,
Ten thousand mews and gulls that shade the sun,
Come flapping down in terrible dismay,
And with a wild and barb'rous concert stun
His ears, and scream, and shriek, and wheel away ;
Scarce can the boatman hear his splashing oar ;
Yell caves and eyries all, and rings each Maian shore.

But suddenly, amid the "tumultuous and unlicensed din,"
there burst from the spotless blue of the heavens a globe of
fire which, alighting on the ring of pipers,

Set their pipes, and drones, and chanters in a flame.

The affronted and disheartened minstrels made from the
tragic scene, leaving their black and ashy remnants behind
them.

And scarce they off had slunk, when with a bound
Great Robert Scott sprang forth before the King ;

and he played ; the birds came hovering over his head ; the
night-roaming bats essayed to leave their darksome clefts ; the
mermaids splashed exultingly in the Firth ; the sea-mews
forsook their rocky homes ; the Royal James gave his hand to
Maggie Lauder, and they danced to the magic strains ; the

infection spread to the lords and ladies, and like wildfire took hold of the excited multitude, which swayed and rocked to the unwonted music.

So on they trip, King, Maggie, Knight, and Earl,
Green-coated courtier, satin-snooded dame,
Old men and maidens, man, wife, boy, and girl,
The stiff, the supple, bandy-legg'd, and lame ;—
All suck'd and wrapt into the dance's whirl,
Inevitably witch'd within the same ;
Whilst Rob, far-seen, o'erlooks the huddling Loan,
Rejoices in his pipes, and squeals serenely on.

And much was Mag astonished, when she thought
(As sure it was an odd, perplexing thing)
That Robert's tune was to her ear the same
As that which Puck had play'd, when from her pot he came.

A victor thrice over, Rob the Ranter is now at liberty to claim the guerdon of his toils, the hand of Anster's winsome lady ; but, to cap his achievements, he asks King James's permission to ope his budget and tell his witty tale, for he, too, has "tapped Apollo's rhyme-o'erflowing cask." The narrative occupies nearly the whole of the fifth canto. It is the love-tale of Susan Scott, "a lady young and fair, and beauteous as the budding spring," and Charlie Melville, the squire of Carnbee, her accepted wooer, whose sorrows begin one evening when the two are out walking. With love's wordy power the youth essays, as he has often done before, to impress his suit ; in courtship's frivolous way he calls his loved one "angel, sweeting, fondling, dove," and Susan is just on the point of naming the fateful day,

When lo ! out springs, in maddest pitch of wrath,
Pitcorthie's biggest bull upon their peaceful path.

Melville heroically defends the lady, but in the struggle loses his nasal organ, which is wrenched from his face by the animal's horns. Six weeks he remains within doors, "waiting his nose's re-establishment," but gone, alas ! for ever, was the good old

nose. When next he presents his defeated visage at Thirdpart he is scouted by Miss Sue, who meantime has bestowed her hand on another admirer, and rudely beaten and kicked discourteously by her guardian, Sir Michael Scott, "the sorcerer stout and dire." As Charlie turns home disconsolate, Tommy Puck appears and unfolds to him "a scheme of nice revenge," for the elfin fay is the injured lover's knight. On Miss Sue's wedding day he is to burst into the dining-hall when the company are feasting ; and, said the goblin :—

"Thou in a corner of the room shall see
Sir Michael's magic staff, the same that basted thee.
Snatch up that magic, energetic stick,
And in thy clench'd hand wielding it with might,
On Michael's white, bald pate discharge thou quick
A pelt enough to stun the wizard wight :
Strange consequence shall follow from that lick ;
Yet be not thou amazed or struck with fright,
But, springing to the table's upper end,
Let on his niece's nose an easier pat descend."

And to show the knight that he is not fooling him, Tommy

From a vial silver-bright
Pour'd out upon his palm a powder soft and white ;
And to his mouth uplifting it, he blows
The magic dust on Melville's blemished face,
When—such its power !—behold, another nose
Sprouts out upon the scarr'd and skinless place.

Charlie obeys the goblin's behests ; Michael is metamorphosed into a hare, and scampers out at the open door ; Miss Sue's nose sprouts and sprouts to a prodigious length, her back grows "most mountainous and high," while every squire ha-ha's and every dame te-he's as each droll excrescence rises ; and Melville, his resentment appeased, goes home to Carnbee, blessing Tom Puck and the whole fairy fraternity. On the completion of the tale, and after the deafening acclamations had subsided, the herald blew the signal for dispersing.

Then came the dénouement. King and courtiers attend Maggie to her house—

For be it known

In th' East Green's best house fair Maggie staid,
Near where St Ayle's small lodge in modern day
Admits to mystic rites her tippling masons gay.

There supper is prepared, and joke and jest go merrily round. Scott attributes his conquests that day to neither fortune nor chance, but tells them how Dame Puck had commanded him to seek renown at Anster Fair, and promised him assistance, saying—

“ And know, when at the Loan is tried thy skill,
Thy ass I'll nettle on with spur unseen ;
Into thy bones and sinews I'll instil
Great vigour to o'erjump the quaking green ;
Thy bagpipe's pouch with tempest I will fill,
Lending thy tune a witchery not mean ;
And from thy study-rack'd perplexed brains,
A merry tale I'll squeeze, the helpmate of thy pains.”

Later on Mr and Mrs Puck make their appearance upon the table, and explain how they aided Rob the Ranter in his achievements at the Fair, in order to pay off an old-standing grudge against Sir Michael Scott, who had consigned them to their ignoble tombs, and forbidden them to meet

Until the fairest maid of Scottish land
Should to the supplest of all Scotland's men,
Charmed by his jumping, give her bed and hand.

This was the outcome of helping Charlie Melville to wreak his vengeance upon the Scotts. But now the fays are happy in their united liberty once more ; their penance is completed.

“ The work is done—the supplest man is found ;
He sits the Bridegroom and the Landlord there ;
The fairest maid of all the realm around
Sits yonder, star-like shining in her chair.
Farewell ! may joys be rained on each of you ;
Adieu, thou Bridegroom sweet ! thou bonny Bride, adieu ! ”

Such is the story of Anster Fair, and now we bid farewell to Tennant. What think you of him? A great man truly, in whom, though the poetic passion was well-nigh wanting, there was a keen sense of the ludicrous in all things. He is the great meridian luminary of the *ottavan* measure, of which Boccaccio was the morning star. A great man truly, with all his learning; accomplished, yet generous; simple and unaffected; earnest and energetic in his labours; a man in whom there was no vanity, no insincerity; a man affectionate and unselfish, who had been tried in the furnace; such a man as one meets but once in a lifetime; one of those who make others' bliss their own,

And walk among the sons of men,
Rejoicing as a child.

