

CHAPTER V.

SETTLING IN LIFE.

True Genius, mounting on his bright career
 Through the wide regions of the mental sphere,
 And proudly waving in his gifted hand,
 O'er Fancy's worlds, Invention's plastic wand ;
 Fearless and firm, with lightning-eyes surveys
 The clearest heaven of intellectual rays ;
 Yet in his course though loftiest hopes attend,
 And kindling raptures aid him to ascend
 (While in his mind, with high-born grandeur fraught,
 Dilate the noblest energies of thought) ;
 Still, from the bliss, ethereal and refined,
 Which crowns the soarings of triumphant mind,
 At length he flies to that serene retreat
 Where calm and pure the mild affections meet,
 Embosomed there, to feel and to impart
 The softer pleasures of the social heart.

Mrs. HEMANS.

UP to this time, as we have already seen, and for five years subsequently, no doubt occurred to Brewster's mind of what his vocation was to be,—the Church his field of work, and Divinity his principal study. With a sincere attachment to the principles and constitution of the Established Church of Scotland, and a thorough acceptance of her doctrinal standards, he had, nevertheless, a clear sight of her deficiencies of discipline, which in those days were obvious to every observer. He often recalled with horror, in after years, the Socinian doctrines which in the south of Scotland were openly held by ministers high in popular esteem,—while other and

more glaring derelictions were appalling to one whose own character was described at this time by a young Roxburghshire *roué*, who had watched his student career, "as the only virtuous character he had yet met among young men."

Brewster had evidently written complaints of Dumfriesshire upon this topic to his friend of many years, Dr. Andrew Thomson, then minister of Sprouston, who replied by giving painful evidence that the clergy in his district were no better than in Annandale, concluding with this sentence:—"Your clergymen and bailies must be very queer. We have some in this country that are not far behind your Annan parsons in attachment to the bottle. Though I have not yet heard of any getting a *tankard* into the pulpit, yet we have had some instances of its *contents* being carried there in high style. Indeed, this is a singular Synod, and, with reverence be it spoken, is more celebrated for anything, even drunkenness, than for divinity. My friend Mr. G— of L— says that it is the paradise of the Church; and why? because here a clergyman may do whatever he pleases!" All this did not discourage Brewster from entering the Church, but it inclined him to that better side, although a minority, which then received the name of the "Evangelicals," or "wild men," as their Moderate friends termed them. Of this party Dr. Andrew Thomson was long the avowed leader; and although in many cases it was but a name, and politics mixed largely with its profession, yet it certainly comprised most of the godly ministers of the Scotch Church. Dr. Thomson says in another letter to his friend:—"Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see you settled in this neighbourhood. We stand in need

of 'wild men' and men of respectability. The Church is wofully deficient in this quarter of the country."

The erroneous impression that Brewster possessed no pulpit gifts, only preached once, and on that occasion failed, has become very general. The following account will be read with interest. It is taken from the recollections of the Rev. Dr. Paul, now one of the ministers of the West Kirk, who was present as a boy, and on whose mind the whole scene made a deep impression, being a somewhat singular one for a "first sermon:"—

"Having passed through the Hall, and having been licensed by the Presbytery of Edinburgh, Brewster preached his first sermon in St. Cuthbert's, or, as it is familiarly termed, the West Kirk of Edinburgh, one of the largest in Scotland, accommodating 2500 hearers. This spacious church, with its double tier of galleries, was on this occasion unusually crowded, for the reputation he had acquired drew together, not only numbers of his fellow-students, but of literary and scientific men, anxious to hear how he would begin his professional career. The ministers were present, Sir Henry Moncreiff and Dr. Dickson, and the appearance of that vast congregation, which the youthful preacher was to address, was most imposing, and, to a person of his anxious, nervous temperament, must have been most formidable. He ascended the pulpit, and went through the whole service, for a beginner evidently under excitement, most admirably. He had his discourse thoroughly committed to memory, and delivered it with great energy, increasing to the close, which was in these words, 'Let it be our firm resolution, our constant endeavour, our importunate prayer, that so long as we have being and breath, we will serve the Lord.'"

The following extract gives his own brief and modest account of this crowded church and favourable commencement. Writing to Mr. Veitch, March 16, 1804, he says :—" I wish you would give me a description and figure of your instrument for finding the stars in the day-time, and I will take notice of it in my paper on the Progress of the Arts and Sciences. I am at present writing notes and an appendix to a new edition of Ferguson's Lectures. If any remarks have occurred to you when reading the mechanical part, I wish you would mention them in your next. As I am now licensed, I have not so much time to spare for philosophical studies as formerly, and anything new which I meet with is generally in my paper in the *Edinburgh Magazine*. I preached my first sermon on Sunday last, in the West Kirk here."

After this period he preached frequently in Edinburgh, Leith, and elsewhere; and his ministrations, judging from various independent testimonies, seem always to have been most acceptable from the beauty and earnestness of his style, and his well-known gift of creating interest out of the driest subjects. But if pleasant and profitable to others, these ministrations became more and more the source of great pain and discomfort to himself. Even before his first appearance at St. Cuthbert's, he must have suspected his own nervous infirmity, for he is recorded to have expressed himself "as resolved to try the worst at first," and he never forgot the intense, though suppressed, suffering of the effort. Success did not make matters easier, for he never preached without severe nervous restraint. A delicacy of health—owing, there is little doubt, to his early and constant application to study, although it

quite left him in later years—showed itself at this time in nervous faintness, only occurring when making any public appearance. Consciousness of this weakness and fear of failure made him also somewhat sensitive as to the opinion of others. Thus a friend writes:—“ I have a vivid recollection of Rev. Dr. Thomas Brown of St. John’s, Glasgow, telling me that three or four students, your father, himself, Dr. A. Thomson, and others, got the West Church for private practice in preaching. Your father’s turn came. Dr. Brown took his place in the area, another in one gallery, and so on. Your father began to deliver (no reading allowed) his discourse—but after a sentence or two stopped, and said, ‘Brown, you are laughing.’ Then he commenced again, stopped, and said, ‘ I say, Thomson, you are making faces,’ and so forth, till at last they could not go on at all. Dr. Brown had a number of stories of your father’s college days, which all showed his kindness and infinite sense of the ludicrous, but I cannot recall them with distinctness.”¹ The Rev. Mr. Ramsay tells the following anecdotes:—being together at a large dinner-party, “when we met in the dining-room Mr. Brewster was asked to say grace. He began, but as he went on the words choked in his mouth, and he sat down in a faint. He was taken out of the room, and I went along with him. By proper attention he soon recovered, but we both lost our dinner with the party; and I said to him, ‘Catch me, Brewster, if I’ll ever dine with you again.’ On another occasion, when he was engaged to preach in St. Andrew’s Church, Edinburgh, I was present, and met him when the sermon was over. He asked what the people were

¹ The Rev. William Grant of Ayr.

saying of him. I told him, by way of derision, that the people said that they never heard such a bore in the pulpit; upon which he said that the people knew nothing about preaching, and declared that he would never preach there again."

In 1804 Mr. Brewster entered the family of General Dirom, of Mount Annan, in Dumfriesshire, with whom he remained as tutor till 1807. Part of each year they resided at Murrayfield, probably in the old mansion which now contrasts with the beautiful new villas and gardens which nestle at the foot of the finely wooded hill of Corstorphine, in the immediate neighbourhood of Edinburgh. His work of tuition does not appear to have interfered with his own studies and literary and scientific pursuits, and yet that he performed it in no perfunctory manner may be gathered from the warm and long-continued esteem with which he was regarded by General Dirom and his family; his scientific and general correspondence with the former was continued for many years. While at Murrayfield, ghost-stories got afloat, from the singular fact of a figure in flowing robes being repeatedly seen dealing with invisible and warlock powers,—Brewster, in his dressing-gown, observing the moon and planets, being too commonplace a solution of the mystery to be acceptable to the superstitious!

His inventive genius was not idle at this busy time. He writes to Mr. Veitch:—

“MURRAYFIELD, Dec. 9, 1805.

“MY DEAR SIR,—I am so much ashamed of my delay in writing you that I will not attempt to make the least apology. I may assure you, however, that my mind has been so much occupied, and even distracted,

by a variety of almost opposite pursuits, that I have corresponded only with my father and brothers for these two years past. You will probably have seen that I noticed your new plough in one of the late numbers of the *Edinburgh Magazine*. . . . From the little knowledge which I have of the construction of a plough, I cannot form an opinion of the merit of your improvement without seeing the models, but I have not the least doubt that ploughs of your construction will greatly excel those of the common form. . . . I have lately invented two new micrometers, the one for terrestrial, the other for celestial purposes. The first consists of a circular piece of mother-of-pearl, placed in the focus of the eye-glass of a telescope, and forming the field-bar. The mother-of-pearl is divided at its circumference into 360 equal parts, each part in the one which I got made being only $\frac{1}{360}$ of an inch. After finding by experiment the angle subtended by the whole breadth of the micrometer, it is easy to compute a table by trigonometry, which will show the value of any number of degrees. This micrometer is vastly superior to Cavallo's: it does not obstruct the field of view; it does not require to be turned in the focus of the eye-glass; and it has the advantage of a larger [word wanting]. It may be used also for celestial purposes, and particularly for making a map of the moon and measuring the spots of the sun. The other micrometer, for celestial purposes, is more complicated, and would require a figure for its explanation. It might be made for a few shillings by any workman, whereas micrometers of the common kind, though less accurate, cost about thirty guineas. . . .

“By the bye, the last star but one in the tail of the

Great Bear, which has the little one beside it, is a fine double star, which any of your glasses will discover. The first star of Aries is also double. I discovered them lately, but found to my mortification that they had been observed long before.—I am, dear Sir, yours sincerely,
DAVID BREWSTER.”

About the same time we find in contemporary letters that he was spoken of as a candidate for the Chair of Mathematics in the University of Edinburgh, vacant by the resignation of Professor Playfair. He received warm good wishes from many zealous friends, amongst others from Sir William (then Dr.) Herschel, with whom he had by this time, as with many other learned men, commenced correspondence,—Dr. Herschel, from the great similarity of tastes and pursuits, having long been a great object of interest to the Inchbonny friends. Brewster's name does not appear in any document as a candidate, and it is probable that he did not come forward when he found that so eminent a man as John Leslie appeared upon the scene. That he should even have been spoken of for such an important position at so early an age is a proof of the standing which he had already acquired.

The year 1805, owing to this academical contest, was one of great interest and excitement in Edinburgh, one of those storms of controversy taking place, which it is hoped do good by clearing the mental atmosphere, although the noise and the heat at the time seem but to injure and scathe. Mr. (afterwards Sir John) Leslie was apparently the most natural candidate, from his acknowledged position, not only as a mathematician, but as a practical philosopher and scientific author.

A minister of the Established Church, Dr. Macknight, son of Dr. Macknight, the well-known harmonist of the Gospels and commentator on the Epistles, and himself, it is said, an accomplished man and able mathematician, but little known to fame, came forward to contest the chair. His cause was warmly espoused by the Moderate party of the Scottish Church, and the "ministers of Edinburgh" became pitted against the men of science. According to the ancient constitution of the University, of which they were chiefly the founders, they had a right to advise the Town-Council in the appointment of professors, and this right they now attempted to revive, two of their number, supported by the rest, formally declaring that they would use all legal means to prevent the appointment of Mr. Leslie. Falling back upon the well-known standards of their Church, and ignoring the notorious breaches of orthodox doctrine hitherto winked at in Scotch pulpits, a cry of "Heresy" was raised against Mr. Leslie and his party. Some incautious statements which Mr. Leslie had made as to Cause and Effect, in his work entitled *An Experimental Inquiry concerning the Nature and Propagation of Heat*, were attacked bitterly by the newly-constituted censors of doctrine, which were on the other side explained and defended with philosophical ingenuity. Many of the Evangelical party took the side of the philosophers, on the ground that pastors of the Church ought to find sufficient occupation in the care of their flocks, without striving either for the honours or the emoluments of secular professorships. So the war raged, one of the principal weapons on both sides being, as is usual in such cases, a series of the most acrimonious pamphlets. During the hottest of

the fray, an anonymous pamphlet appeared, so different from all the others that it took both parties by surprise; it was entitled *An Examination of the Letter addressed to Principal Hill in the case of Mr. Leslie, in a Letter to its Anonymous Author, with Remarks on Mr. Stewart's Postscript and Mr. Playfair's Pamphlet*,—By a CALM OBSERVER; and it professed to adopt "a mode of discussion remote from personal invective." This pamphlet was by David Brewster; it is one of his ablest productions, and has indeed been called "one of the finest pieces of satire ever written." It professed to take the part of "the ministers of Edinburgh," looking at the subject from their own point of view, and fighting them with their own weapons so skilfully, that at first they believed that it was written by one of their own party. Dr. Andrew Thomson, himself one of the Lesleian pamphleteers, thus writes to Brewster:—

"I received the parcel containing your letter and the two pamphlets. I was delighted with the *Calm Observer*, and indeed laughed with him for a whole night. Whoever he be, I rejoice that he has thought proper to publish his lucubrations on the Leslie controversy. He does not stick very close to his text, but he wanders with a good grace, and is always the more entertaining the further he is from the subject. I understand (and this circumstance gives me most pleasure of all) that Leslie's opponents have been completely taken in. They were full of expectation, and—oh, glorious change!—are now full of disappointment and mortification. I perceive that the *Calm Observer* has read Junius with advantage. His transition from the humorous to the serious is happier than I should have looked for. The

poetical patches are exquisitely appropriate. The irony, especially to a Lesleian, will be irresistible."

It is difficult to extract what would be intelligible from such a work of local satire, but the following short quotation may give some idea of it. Professor Playfair had published a pamphlet in which he took the practical view of the subject held by those who thought that clergymen should have no time for secular callings:—

"Mr. Playfair's reasoning is at best an *argumentum ad hominem*, which can never be extended to the polite metropolis of Scotland. Here there are no sick to visit, no dying to pray for, no children to examine, no ignorant to instruct, no sinners to convert; and if Mr. Playfair was so old-fashioned as to revive the antiquated usages of our well-meaning forefathers, let him not imagine that gentlemen of liberal education and polished manners will stoop to the pious drudgery of a country curate. . . . If the Moderate party in our Church have hitherto been indifferent to the great interests of religion, if they have neglected the spiritual concerns of those whom Providence has placed under their eye,—it is surely high time that their zeal should begin to burn. If the dying have died without consolation, the ignorant without instruction, and the guilty without alarm, it is surely time that a sense of duty should animate their exertions. You will tell us that the Moderate clergy attack, both from the pulpit and the press, the doctrines of that Confession which they have sworn to defend; and yet you ridicule the expressions of zeal when conscience has begun to mutiny and sting. You will tell us that they countenance the profane indecencies of theatrical exhibitions; that they

have devoted themselves with more assiduity to the injunctions of Lord Melville than to the service of their Saviour; and that they have polluted the Assembly with a shoal of young elders, notorious for their infidelity and dissipation; and yet, by a strange inconsistency, you rail at the very first symptoms of dawning reformation. If the Moderate party have really been callous to religious impressions, let their zeal against Mr. Leslie now hallow them in our eyes. . . . It may be said, indeed, by some, that the sudden conversion of individuals is always liable to suspicion, and others may imagine that the instantaneous conversion is more suspicious still, but I would entreat such persons to consider, that though vice only has been regarded as infectious, there is a contagion in virtue which often spreads with irresistible rapidity, and regenerates and reforms wherever its influence extends."

On the 12th of March 1805 the Town-Council unanimously elected Mr. Leslie as Joint-Professor of Mathematics with Dr. Ferguson, who had before been the senior colleague of Professor Playfair. The Council apparently had carried matters with a high hand, for there was no competition, and Dr. Macknight's name is not mentioned in the minutes. An attempt was made, however, to set this election aside, an overture being sent by the indefatigable "ministers of Edinburgh" to have the subject discussed at the General Assembly of that year; but sensible and eloquent speeches by Sir Harry Moncreiff and other members of Assembly turned the tide of clerical opinion. The overture was dismissed, and the Lesleians left in peace.

It is supposed that Brewster regretted his anonymous publication, notwithstanding its flattering reception, and

I never heard him refer to it. A gentleman¹ who saw much of him during the very last years of his life, thus writes :—" I am pretty sure that during the visit to which I have referred I spoke to Sir David of the celebrated Leslie controversy, being well aware of the distinguished part he had taken in it. Neither on this occasion, however, nor on any other, did he seem inclined to speak of this matter, but left me under the impression that he did not desire to be recognised as the 'Calm Observer.' Of course I did not attempt such recognition, but I am convinced that he regretted the personalities in the pamphlet, especially those affecting Dr. Brunton, whom he once rather *sought* an opportunity of describing to me in complimentary terms."

In 1807, Brewster became a candidate for the Chair of Mathematics in St. Andrews, but did not succeed. In the same year scientific honours began to pour in; he was made LL.D. of the University of Aberdeen, and M.A. of Cambridge, and in January of the following year he received an intimation from Professor Playfair that he was elected a non-resident member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. This was also a memorable time in his literary history. One day he was walking in Princes Street with the Rev. Mr. Stuart of Bolton and the Rev. Mr. Ramsay of Gladsmuir, when the latter, he tells us, knowing Brewster's literary taste, dropped a casual hint how much a good and thorough Encyclopædia was needed. One can imagine how this spark would kindle up the remaining energy of which so much was already in daily, hourly operation. In the same year he commenced this great undertaking,

¹ The Rev. Dr. Phin of Galashiels, a member of the University Court of Edinburgh.

and soon after he wrote to Veitch, to whom, in his happy retreat at Inchbonny, the heart of his early friend seems ever to have turned :—

“EDINBURGH, 9 NORTH ST. DAVID STREET,
May 17, 1808.

“DEAR SIR,—You will probably have heard that I have been lately engaged in a new Encyclopædia, of which the first two numbers have just been published. We are now at the article AGRICULTURE, and are about to send the drawings of the ploughs to the engraver. It occurred to me, however, that it might be of use to you to have a drawing and description of your new plough inserted in our work, particularly as the article Agriculture is written by Mr. Brown of Markle, the editor of the *Farmer's Magazine*, and one of the most experienced agriculturists in the kingdom, and his recommendation would be very powerful among farmers. If, therefore, you could send me by post, as soon as possible, a drawing and description of your plough, I shall with pleasure publish them in our Encyclopædia. I intend also to publish in the same article a curious paper by Mr. Jefferson, President of the United States, on a plough-ear, which offers the least possible resistance. General Dirom mentioned to me a few days ago that Lord Cathcart was speaking to him about your plough. Both he and the General are anxious to get something done for you by laying the invention before the Highland Society. The drawing which you sent to me, if it is agreeable to you, may also be used for this purpose. I have been lately attending much to optics, and have invented several new instruments, which I hope to have an opportunity of describing to you, as I

intend to be in Roxburghshire in the course of the summer. Excuse this scrawl, and believe me, dear sir, most sincerely yours,
DAVID BREWSTER."

Notwithstanding the magnitude of this enterprise, and the pressure of his other literary and scientific pursuits, Brewster's firm intention still was to keep them subservient to the other and greater work to which his life had been destined, and he laboured patiently and bravely against his severe nervous trial. In 1808 he applied for the living of Sprouston, vacant by the removal of his friend Dr. Thomson to Perth, and it was presented to him in the September or October of that year by Sir James Innes Ker. At this time, however, the Dukedom of Roxburghshire was under litigation, and a competing presentation was made by the Duchess of Roxburgh and General Ker in favour of the Rev. Ninian Trotter, who ultimately became minister of the parish. Brewster withdrew his claim the following year, on account of the anxiety and expense of asserting his rights, and the pain and discomfort of keeping the parish so long unsupplied. It was not, therefore, till 1809 that he felt himself free to follow the career so manifestly opening before him. Many said, however, that by so doing he was "blasting his prospects for life."

I have not found a record of his first visit to London, but long afterwards he told Sir James Simpson that he had been in the metropolis in 1802 or 1803, when he had seen much of Cavendish at the Royal Society Club; he mentioned also having dined with that somewhat eccentric philosopher; a rare event, if we may judge from a story my father also told Sir James. Cavendish

invariably had a leg of mutton for his solitary dinner; on one occasion he announced to his servant that six gentlemen were to dine with him that day. "What am I to give them for dinner?" ejaculated the factotum in dismay; "one leg of mutton won't do for six gentlemen!" "Then give them SIX legs of mutton!" was the philosophical reply.

In 1809, however, we have interesting though brief records of a visit to London, and a short tour in England, as well as of his Edinburgh life, in a small volume for that year of *Kearsley's Pocket Ledger*, in which he jotted down a curious medley of household expenses, social engagements, and scientific discoveries. Leaving Edinburgh on January 10th, he made the journey in easy stages, "examining," as was always his wont, everything of interest. Thus we find that at Chester he "dined with Mr. Fletcher, and examined the shot-manufactory, and that of white and red lead;" that between Chester and Wrexham he met "a Welsh hearse, painted blue," which seems to have made a lively impression on his mind, though the remarks are illegible; that he "examined Wrexham Cathedral," and "the locks of the Ellesmere Canal," and "invented the reflecting goniometer," followed by an entry of travelling expenses. His first visit to Oxford is dismissed with very brief record, and his London life left little time for more than entries such as these:—"Dine at Salopian. Drury Lane Theatre,—Man and Wife,—Bluebeard." "Saw two Russians and Colonel Waxall." "Masquerade in the Opera-house." "Colonel Waxall and two Russians dine with us." "Dine with Lord Selkirk." "House of Lords. Dine at home with Thomas Campbell. Sup with Archdeacon Corbett." "Saw

Drury Lane burned to the ground." "Went to Woolwich. Captain Pasley dines with us." "Discovered demonstration of lever." "Dined at Blackheath with Mr. Groombridge and Mr. Troughton." At the end of the Diary there are longer abstracts of what he heard and learned at different places of interest, some being headed "Memoranda for Scotland." As a specimen of these I give one jotting, evidently put down after this visit to Blackheath:—"Mr. Troughton informs me that the spider's web is the best substitute for wires. It is perfectly round and elastic, and may be easily fixed with lacquer varnish. The kind to be used is the stretcher by which the spider fixes her web in a given position. This is to be taken off with a pair of stretched compasses, and wound round their legs. One of the filaments is then held above the field-bar, where it is to be fixed, and by pressing it against the groove where the lacquer is placed, and holding it there for a short time, the operation is completed." Judging from the number of social invitations, his circle of acquaintance in London, even at this time, must have been very large. He left its attractions, however, on Monday, March 21, arriving at Cambridge the same day "through Epping Forest. Invented between Woodford and Epping the Katadioptric telescope." The next day he "dined and supped with Dr. Clarke, Mr. Walpole, and Mr. Woodhouse. Thought of the telescope with two semi-lenses of different foci. Wrote paper on Borekhard's telescope for the *Phil. Mag.*" At Manchester, among other engagements, he "supped at Dr. Mitchell's with Dr. Henry; examined case of conical cornea; examined Dr. Henry's Laboratory, and Mr. Lea's house lighted with gas." "Examined Carlisle Cathedral, April 29th,"

and arrived in Edinburgh the following day. The Edinburgh jottings contain very brief records of engagements at dinner, supper, and "chess" with the literary and scientific circles of Edinburgh, of which he was now an acknowledged member, with occasional returns of the same festivities "at home." On one of these last occasions he notes—"When in company with Mr. Anderson and Mr. Campbell, invented Thermometrical Pendulum for mean temperatures." On August 18th he again started on a little tour, going to Dumfriesshire to pay some visits, amongst other places to Mount Annan, and with General Dirom he proceeds by Kendal, Penrith, Ambleside, and Manchester to Buxton. From thence "go to Castletown,—visit Peak and Speedwell Mine with General Dirom, General Stuart, and Dr. Hutton," and on another day "the Dean coal-pit." On September 9th, "breakfast at Warrington and visit plate-glass manufactory," returned to Edinburgh on the 12th, and on the 18th "invented another new goniometer."

Two very brief records are entered about this time, which nevertheless proved the commencement of a new and happy era in Brewster's life. On September 27th he writes—"Dine at Mr. Prentice's at Portobello, with Mr., Mrs., and the Misses Macpherson;" and on October 3d, "Dine at Mr. Macpherson's, Portobello." Mr. and Mrs. Macpherson were on their way to a lengthened tour on the Continent, and the two sisters, whose home was with their brother in Inverness-shire, were to spend the winter with Miss Playfair, sister of the learned and popular Professor Playfair, Brewster's former Professor, and now intimate associate. Juliet, the youngest sister—five years younger than David—was beautiful, and of true and sterling character. From that time, in the

midst of such entries as "Thought of new theory of the sun," "Invented new method of measuring crystals by laying a small reflector on their surface," "Read paper before the Royal Society," "Proposed new theory of meteoric stones to the Club," we find suspiciously increased and very frequent references to dining, supping, and drinking tea at "Miss Playfair's." The diary for 1810, indeed, contains very few other records except this frequently reiterated one, till at last the briefly told conclusion comes, "July 31st, 1810—MARRIED. Set off to the Trosachs" with Anne Macpherson, the bride's-maid, and Dr. Andrew Thomson, who performed the ceremony,—such social travelling after weddings being the custom of the day; and in more formal documents it is recorded that on that day he married Juliet, youngest daughter of James Macpherson, Esq., M.P., of Belleville, better known as "Ossian Macpherson." By this marriage, as his wife was very young at the time of her father's death, he was curiously linked, as has been recently remarked, "to the past, now more than a hundred years ago, when Johnson, Hume, Blair, and others, disputed so acrimoniously whether Ossian's poems were true or false, ancient or modern." As there is at present a revival of this long-mooted subject, it may not be out of place to give a brief answer to the often-asked question of what the private belief was of Brewster and the Macphersons. They never had a moment's doubt as to the complete and entire authenticity of the poems. The originals, they were fully persuaded, had been received by Mr. Macpherson in most cases by oral recitation, and in others from MSS. which had been written down two or three centuries before from the old Highland bards, whose predecessors had

sung them long before such innovations as pen, ink, and paper were known amongst the Celts. This was earlier, however, than many "Sassenachs," with Dr. Johnson at their head, believed possible. Sir James Foulis, in an interesting letter to Mr. Macpherson, dated "Colinton, May 22, 1784," says, "It cannot be disagreeable to you to learn that there is extant a book in Gaelic, printed in 1567. I presume it is the first book in that language that ever was printed. I have now before me a folio of nearly seven hundred pages translated from Latin into Gaelic, about two hundred years ago. It treats of Medicine, and the transcriber got sixty cows for his pains—a proof that the art of writing was then rare in the Isle of Skye, but not unknown."¹

Though Mr. Macpherson was a good prose-writer and historian, his published attempts at versification were not considered sufficiently successful to give any promise of originating such noble poetical imagery as is to be found in the ancient bard, although his genius might be quite able to do justice to a translation—which in some instances might be a tolerably free one. Mr. Macpherson never sought to deny this for a moment. In a letter to Mr. M'Lagan, he writes:—"I have met with a number of old manuscripts in my travels; the poetical part of them I have endeavoured to secure." Mr. Macpherson was so far from improving upon Ossian, however, that the very imperfections of his translation are the strongest proofs of their authenticity; in an old newspaper of nearly fifty years ago, which I have before me, I find it stated, "that Macpherson was not able to give the fire of the original, and fell into grievous faults." The faults were principally from his imperfect knowledge

¹ Unpublished letter.

of the intricacies of his native language, having turned his attention at a very early age principally to classical studies. We are told that his translation of a passage in Fingal, "spirited so far as it goes, falls so far short of the original in the picture it exhibits of Cuchullin's horses and car, their harness, trappings, etc., that in none of his translations is the inequality of Macpherson's genius to that of Ossian so very conspicuous."¹ One whole passage of one of the original poems, in which Ossian gives a noble description of Fingal's ships, of nautical feats, and terrific sea-storms, Macpherson omitted altogether; which omission is thus commented upon:—"I can account for it in no other way than his having been born in Badenoch, one of the most inland parts of this kingdom, where, not having access to, he was unacquainted with, that kind of imagery; he did not therefore perhaps understand the original passage."¹

Although Macpherson had to bear the brunt of accusations of forgery and imposture, he by no means stood alone in his attempts to introduce the beautiful poetry of the North to the ungrateful public of the South. The Dean of Lismore collected and translated, between 1512 and 1529, upwards of 2500 lines of Ossianic poetry, taken principally from recitations. Mr. Jerome Stone, a schoolmaster at Dunkeld, commenced a collection of ancient Gaelic poetry, but died before his collection was finished; he published, however, a translation of poems in 1756. Mr. Duncan Kennedy completed a collection, in 1785, of twenty pieces, giving the names of the reciters. The Rev. Dr. John Smith published, in 1780,

¹ Quoted in a book entitled *Notes on the Authenticity of Ossian's Poems*, printed, but not published, in Edinburgh, 1868, by a member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

the translations of fourteen Gaelic poems collected by him, which it is said are "all remarkable not only for the same strain of high and impassioned poetry, but also the same delicacy and refinement of sentiment, which form so remarkable a feature in the poems translated by Macpherson." It is remarkable how many clergymen interested themselves in this national subject. The Rev. Alexander Irvine of Little Dunkeld, when a Gaelic missionary, made a collection of Ossianic poems from recitation, which are, many of them, the same as those published by Macpherson, with only the variations of having been given by different reciters. The Eastern habit of recitation, which long prevailed in the Highlands, even up to a recent date, was little known or done justice to by those who came

"To fight Macpherson in his native north."

The following is part of an unpublished letter from Mr. Alexander Small to Mr. Macpherson :—

"No. 120 HIGH HOLBORN, Oct. 11, 1781.

"DEAR SIR,—On Shaw's joining in Johnson's continued and obstinate abuse of Ossian, I wrote to a relative of mine who preaches in the Earse language, expecting that he would give me some account of Shaw, and of the authenticity of Ossian's poems. He excuses himself as not a sufficient judge, but refers to a friend of his, Mr. Maclagan, minister of Blair-Atholl. Mr. Maclagan writes as follows :—'That Oisein and Fionn were often in Ireland no one denies, but that no more makes them Irishmen than your humble servant. I have a copy of *Murbhadh Chonnlaich le Cuthulluim* that I got in Ireland, and (it) mentions both these men as strangers from the East. The copy is much inferior to

and different from the Scotch copy got in the parish of Mullin. That Oisein's poems constituted great part of the Highlanders' usual entertainment over-night is a thing well known to every one that knows anything about the Highlanders at all, and the further back he goes, it seems the more so. Mr. Macpherson has translated several passages of poems I sent him myself, and Cargon More almost entire. I have several more of them. There are still here men who repeat part of them. Had A. S. come to Scotland last summer, as I hear he intended, he might have heard part of them repeated, and seen them written and translated upon the spot. He may come next summer, and if these men and I live, he may have the testimony of his eyes and ears."