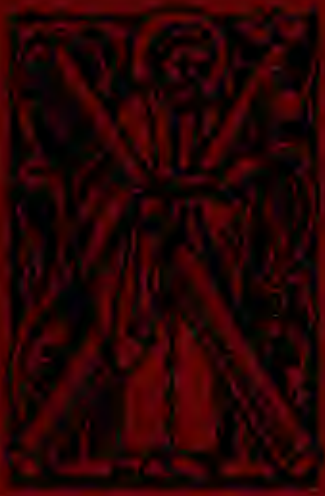
POLLOK & AYTOUN

BY: ROSALINE MASSON



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ROSALINE MASSON :

FAMOUS
·SCOTS·
·SERIES·

PUBLISHED BY
OLIPHANT ANDERSON
& FERRIER·EDINBVRGH
AND LONDON

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TO

A. D.

IN TOKEN OF OUR LIFE-LONG FRIENDSHIP.

PREFACE

At first sight it may seem as if the two men, Pollok and Aytoun, were so widely opposed in all things as not to admit of the inclusion of their biographies within the same cover. Widely opposed they were, in their positions, their ideals, and their teachings; and yet a few points remain in common. Both were Scottish, each being representative of a strongly national type: both were poets: both belonged to the nineteenth century: both were *Blackwood* men, Aytoun being one of the Blackwood coterie, and Pollok one of the writers discovered by Blackwood,—and discovered by the very men, "Christopher North" and "Delta," who were afterwards Aytoun's colleagues and friends. Here the likenesses end; but the diversities between the two poets form a picturesque contrast. One was a rustic, a Calvinist, a Covenanter: the other was of gentle birth, an Episcopalian, a Jacobite. In the one can be seen characteristics familiar and dear to us in our Scottish poor—the clever son of the humble home, working his way up through the Scottish University, to that summit of Scottish student ambition, the Presbyterian pulpit: the other also belongs to Scottish Academic life, but he enters it very differently,—first as the son of the prosperous lawyer, mingling with his fellow-students only

during the hours of lecture, and returning to home life with his family, and then as one of the Senatus of the chief Scottish University, the colleague of other men of name and note.

Pollok rose from obscurity in one flash, and then died, and is now forgotten: Aytoun's life was spread over the first half of the century; he rose to gradual recognition, and his name remains where he left it. Pollok's one poem was an epic, on a religious theme, austere and tragic in its treatment: Aytoun's subjects were all not only of this world, but mostly of that part of this world that the author himself surveyed, and surveyed through kindly eyes that saw and loved the genial and the ludicrous.

November 1898.

ROBERT POLLOK

LIFE OF ROBERT POLLOK

THE name of Pollok now recalls little or nothing to most people: possibly the well-informed have a dim notion that he was a poet—may even know the name of his poem, *Course of Time*, from having seen it in the library shelves;—but who has read it? And yet, Pollok had his day, albeit a short one. His poem ran through edition after edition; twelve thousand copies were sold eighteen months after its publication, 'and it is selling as fast as ever,' wrote the publisher; it was eagerly and enthusiastically read, not only in Scotland and England, but in America; and the young author had died in poverty and loneliness in his twenty-ninth year, six months after his work had been printed, and before he had seen it reach even its second edition.

The life of Pollok is typically Scottish; and it is so sad and barren and prosaic a little romance, that the pathos of it makes one tender towards the humour of it.

Robert Pollok was born a century ago, on October 19th, 1798. His father, John Pollok, was a small farmer in Renfrewshire, as father and grandfather had been before him; and his mother, Margaret Dickie, was also of farmer stock, her ancestors, of the name of Gemmell, having, for several generations, owned a small farm called Horse-hill, in Fenwick in Ayrshire. Robert was the seventh of eight children, and he was born at his father's farm, North Moorhouse, Eaglesham, Renfrewshire. A picture of the

place shows it to have been merely a thatched cottage, with out-buildings, a duck pond, and a cluster of hay stacks; and, as we hear of 'the room' as distinct from 'the kitchen,' the inside evidently consisted of a kitchen, or general living-room, with a parlour behind it.*

Pollok's father and mother had been brought up, in their respective parishes, as Original Seceders from the Church of Scotland; and they in their turn brought up their children strictly in this sect. Little Robert was baptized in the Secession Church at Newton of Mearns. His mother, we are told, was his first teacher. By her he was taught to read the Bible, and "made to commit to memory the Shorter Catechism, with part of the Psalms of David;" and, his brother and biographer adds, "he was 'trained up in the way he should go'; he was brought up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord'; and, like Obadiah, he 'feared the Lord from his youth.'" Nevertheless, the rebellious Adam broke out when he was about four years old. Up to that time he had apparently worn petticoats contentedly, but, having then been promoted to his first suit of boy's clothes, the sturdy little Scot resented having to keep them for highdays and holidays. He came to his mother when she was sewing in the kitchen, and, standing at her side, announced, 'Mother, I should get on my other clothes now'—(he probably pronounced it 'ma ither claes noo')—and his mother replied, 'in a tone of authority, raising her voice as she spoke, without looking at him'—poor little four year old!—'You will get them on when these ones are done.' The small boy trotted off without a word into 'the room,' and emerged presently and walked slowly

* The house is now rebuilt, with an upper storey.

through the kitchen 'with his petticoat torn into a long narrow strip, winding out after him like a serpent.' So he got his new clothes, for there was no doubt about it that the others were 'done.' Whether he got anything else besides, less soothing to his feelings, is not told. His brother cites this story as an example of 'his grand distinguishing characteristic, decision, united with resistless determination to gain his end'—a very fine name for a delicious piece of childish naughtiness.

There was one son younger than Robert, but he died at two years old, when Robert was six; and little Robert, who had been greatly devoted to the baby brother, was so much upset by the death that they thought he would die of grief. But he regained his spirits in a week or two.

In 1805 Pollok's father removed to Mid-Moorhouse.* It was not a very great change, for it was about a quarter of a mile south-east from North Moorhouse. This was the poet's home from the time he was barely seven; and to it, when he was one-and-twenty, he wrote one of his first attempts at verse, *Ode to Moorhouse*, in which he speaks of 'The lofty trees that by thee grow.' There were eight old trees, four of which, three ashes and an elm, were 'tall as well as old.' Poor Pollok had always scanty food for his fancy; but, after all, the wind-swept pines of Hampstead Heath served Keats in like case;—and Pollok had the advantage in the view from his doors, which was one of hills and moors and great wind-swept tracts of undulating Scottish country. When he was a child he would often roam about and climb the neighbouring hills, and look round him, to the east and south, at mountains and moors; to the west, and see the purple outlines of

* Now in ruins.

Arran and Jura; and down into the valley of the Clyde at the smoke of Paisley and of Glasgow rising between him and Ben Cruachan, Ben Lomond, Ben Ledi, Ben Voirlich and the Ochils. These are the advantages the Scottish peasant enjoys, and that sometimes make a poet of him.

Pollok's education, from the time he was eight until he was fourteen, was partly at South Longlee,—a farm-house in the neighbourhood of his father's, which seems to have been some sort of a school,—but chiefly at Mearns Parish School. We are not told in what way the farm-house in South Longlee contributed; but, as the 'three R's' was all that the two schools together accomplished, we may safely fancy it was not overmuch. Even this amount of education was broken into, especially in summer, by his being called off to help in farm work. Pollok was an apt scholar, and very good at field games, and his brother describes him as 'a well-formed, healthy, good-looking boy, of an ordinary size for his age, white and ruddy in complexion, with dark hair, and keen dark eyes; strong and energetic;' and we may further imagine him, what his brother does not tell, as a regular little rough Scotch farm boy, with thick boots and a shock head, speaking broad dialect, and trudging over the muddy fields to the parish school on week days, or walking more sedately with his parents and elder brothers and sisters, clad in his Sunday best, to the Secession Church on Sundays.

It was at school that Pollok injured his health by overrunning. A boy bigger and stronger and older than himself ran after him, and little Pollok raced till he reached a burn, which he had just strength to jump. This run brought on a pain in the chest. Possibly

immediate care and attention might have prevented the increase of the delicacy; but, instead of receiving this, the boy had to work hard in the fields, till he was seventeen. Some real injury must have been done by the overstrain, for the boy, who had hitherto 'been remarkable' for his ruddy colour, lost it, and was pale-faced for the rest of his life.

The only other facts told of Pollok which show his character in boyhood are that he was very sensitive, and disliked being laughed at, and that he was difficult to rouse to anger, but passionate when once roused. The dislike to being laughed at he seems to have retained—unfortunately, for he was destined to provoke much mirth in austere clerical circles,—but his other characteristic, violent temper when roused to passion, he cured suddenly in his fifteenth year, by 'reading the Gospels.'

When he was fourteen he began to use a gun, and he practised this intermittently till he was three-and-twenty. It is not mentioned what he shot. Probably he and his cousin Robert went out after rabbits on the farms of their respective fathers. When he was fifteen he learned shorthand from a copy of Taylor's Stenography which his brother David brought to the house, 'but he did not continue to practise it,'—which seems a pity when we learn the number of folios his college notes filled.

In the spring of 1814 Pollok's youngest sister, Janet, was married to a cabinetmaker, David Young, at Barrhead; and Pollok's brother-in-law, who was fond of the boy and thought him clever, asked him to go to Barrhead and learn his trade. The following spring, therefore, when Pollok was sixteen, he went; but the attempt was a failure. Pollok made four chairs. The making of the first three interested him, as he wanted to know how

chairs were made; but the fourth—oh awful fate for an embryo metaphysician!—he 'made without thinking.' This would never do—it would destroy his individuality. So he left his brother-in-law and the carpenter's shop, and returned to the farm. In the same spring his sister, a week after the birth of a little girl, died. Pollok was present, and nine years later he wrote a poem on the scene, which poem, like all his other materials, written or felt, was afterwards embodied in *Course of Time.*

All these years—till he was seventeen—he had had no education except what he had received at the farm and the parish school,—reading, writing, and arithmetic; and his private reading had consisted of the Bible, the Confession of Faith, Fisher's Catechism, the *Scots Worthies*, Bailey's *Dictionary*, Salmond's *Gazetteer*, the first volumes of the *Spectator*, some of Burns's poems, and Scott's Lessons—just such a motley collection as may be seen in many a Scottish farm kitchen to this day, on a little dark oaken bookshelf, or piled along at the back of the dresser, below the ancestral plates and bowls. His biographer brother, anxious to make the most of Pollok's educational advantages, does not forget to add that, besides hearing the Bible read daily at family prayers and reading it for himself, he attended church regularly and heard 'many instructive sermons.'

When he was seventeen, however, a change took place. In the autumn of 1815 the two brothers, Robert and David, meeting at Moorhouse after a separation of two or three months, 'went out into the fields together,' and there discovered that they had both, for several years, cherished a private ambition to give up farming and study for the ministry of the Secession Church. It is a very

characteristic Scottish trait that these two—hourly companions, bedfellows and playfellows, of whom David Pollok boasts that each loved the other 'as his own soul'—should have been able to meet daily for years without ever revealing this absorbing secret. But the autumn fields did it; and as they returned to the house they agreed to go to Fenwick School to prepare for college, and to stay at Horsehill with their mother's eldest brother, David Dickie, who had inherited those ancestral acres. And no doubt the two lads entered the farm kitchen and sat down to their suppers of porridge that night, feeling that they were men of purpose and importance, and that for them the sun would rise next morning on a new heaven and a new earth.

The approval of the parents having been given, the two brothers carried out their plan to the letter, and at the beginning of December were established at their uncle's farm, studying Latin hard at Fenwick Parish School. It was their first dose of Latin, and in four weeks they 'were through' Mackay's Latin Rudiments, and 'had got' their first lesson 'read out' in Corderius. It seems to have been a red-letter day in their lives, for the exact date is given—New Year's Day 1816,—and David relaxes for a line or two to tell us that he will never forget the bound of joy with which they left school that day with their 'Corderies' in their pockets to go home to Moorhouse and see their 'friends' (*i.e.* relations), nor the look of satisfaction with which their father and mother heard them read together at night the first colloquy in the little book.

The boys remained at Horsehill and attended Fenwick Parish School for about sixteen months, till July 1817, when Robert was nearly nineteen. During that time not

only did he make great progress in Latin, reading such time-honoured school books as Cornelius Nepos, Cæsar's Commentaries and Virgil's Æneid, but he also widened his literary horizon somewhat by finding, first a copy of Pope's *Essay on Man*, and then Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is pitiful to see how the poor boy absorbed each thing that came in his way, as dry earth drinks in water; and how he tried to produce some immediate result from each new bit of reading. That his first productions were only weeds is not wonderful, when we consider how uncultivated was the soil.

After finding Pope's *Essay on Man*, he composed a short poem, in the same metre, one evening as he was walking back to Horsehill from Moorhouse, where he had been a day or two at home helping his father with farm work. The distance was eight miles, 'six of which,' the brother naïvely remarks, 'I walked along with him.' We are left to speculate whether the poetic inspiration came to Pollok after he was released from the necessity for conversation, or whether the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling made the more prosaic David linger behind for the last two miles. If so, he was not to escape, for the verses were 'committed to writing' and read aloud to David next day. The account of their reception is characteristic. "I was struck, whenever he began to read them," says the young Scot, "with their difference from the poems, as they were called, which he and I made together; and, when he had done reading them, I said to him, 'So you can rhyme now.' 'That is not much,' he said, with a look of indifference. 'It would be a pity, at any rate,' said I, 'if the one who can make that did not get a good education:' and from that time, having a new view of him, and

a new feeling towards him altogether, I looked up to him with a sort of prophetic deference." This indeed was true; and 'prophetic deference' best describes the attitude of this faithful worshipper, whose unfailing devotion to his younger brother Robert, whose absolute dog-like confidence in him, and whose ready sympathy and love for him, form the silver lining to the grey cloud of poor Pollok's life. The biography which the elder brother writes is almost too ponderous and exact in detail to find many readers now; but it shows all this devotion without telling of it, and from its unconscious revelations one gets a true picture of the humble and often squalid surroundings which the poet grew up amidst.

As Pollok's first verses were inspired by Pope, so his next were the result of reading *Paradise Lost*; and thus, instead of—

> 'On summer eves, when zephyrs cheer the plain,
> And waft the sailors o'er the flowing main,
> Away strays Philus glad to Phillis' bower
> Who ready waits to meet him at the hour.
> * * * * * *
> No—in their converse no such stuff has place,
> But all their talk's of learning, love, and grace;'

we have—

> 'Too fair, too virtuous, if such things can be,
> Thou art; for thou hast wounded me, who heretofore
> Was wounded never,' &c., &c.

This inspiration is called *Lines to Liza*, and was written in the autumn of 1816, 'when he was at home at Moorhouse mowing hay,' and because 'his brother John asked some poetry from him to insert in a letter to a friend.' John evidently had a great respect for the poetic commodity, and one wonders whether he ordered

it by the bushel, as he did his hay; and what he thought of the specimen when he got it; and, above all, whether he owned to the 'friend' that the verses were not his own.

In July 1817, Pollok left Fenwick Parish School for good, and returned home to Moorhouse from Horsehill. From July till October he worked at the harvest; and this, he owned when he was dying, was the only thing in his life he could not look back on without pain, for, besides hindering his preparation for college and preventing any literary work, it 'permanently aggravated the pains in his side and chest.' 'But,' the brother stoically adds, 'there seemed then no help for it.'

It was after this preparation — sixteen months of cramming at school, followed by three months of overstrain at physical work — that young Robert Pollok, then just nineteen, went to Glasgow to begin his college career. His brother describes him as having then reached his full stature, five feet nine, and says that his walk was erect and graceful, and that 'he had broad shoulders, and a full, roomy chest; and was symmetrical, firm, muscular, and strong for his size; his head was small and well formed, and his brow large in proportion; he had plain brown-black hair, which never changed its colour from his infancy; his eyes were black and remarkably keen, expressive, and commanding; his complexion was pale brown; his features were small and fine, and the expression of his countenance was open, bold, and manly; his look was the look of penetration and intelligence, and his whole appearance indicative of energy and decision.'

Even if we make allowance for the brother's partiality,

the difference between this picture and the little water-colour sketch taken by Sir Daniel Macnee, ten years later, with its hectic cheeks and hollow eyes, is a striking enough example of the effect of ten years of overwork and under-feeding.

For the next four years and a half the brothers were students in Glasgow University. They attended five sessions, from November 1817 to March 1822. During that time they led the life of hundreds of other raw young Scottish lads,—went to town for the winter, lived in cheap lodgings, attended the University classes by day, and at night pored over their note books and burnt the midnight — tallow. In the summer they returned to their farm home and probably assisted with the harvest, till November brought them back to murky Glasgow, with their clothes mended and a fresh supply of meal.

In Pollok's first session he and his brother joined the Senior Latin Class (*senior*, after sixteen months' schooling!) of Professor Walker and the Junior Greek of Professor Young. Pollok worked well for both classes, and, after the manner of Scottish students, took copious notes of the lectures. Here is an incident of his first session :— Pollok had sent in, as prescribed class exercises, some original Latin verses and two translations. It was Professor Walker's habit either himself to read aloud to the class exercises he thought good, or to ask their authors to read them ; but none of Pollok's verses were made public. The first two were returned without comment, but the third had jotted on it by the professorial pencil 'Some of these verses are very spirited.' 'Why, then,' said Robert indignantly to David, the moment he saw the

words, 'why, then, not read them to the class?' The praise seems meagre: one imagines the weary examiner, with piles of MSS. beside him, anxious to say something kind, and pausing for a word, and the happy inspiration that prompted 'spirited.' 'Spirited,'—it pledged him to nothing!—it praised nor method, nor metre, nor metaphor. But the poet was spirited too. Ever since he had sent in the sheets of foolscap, fastened together at the top left-hand corner, had he not imagined himself standing up and reading these opening lines to admiring benches?—

> 'Another counsel now great Jove revolves,
> To send Juturna from the fight resolves.'

But he had to return to his squalid lodging disappointed, and glean sympathy from the faithful David's wonder at the professor's want of discernment. Have patience, Pollok!—your time will come.

During this session Pollok made a friend of a fellow-student who, like the cousin at home, was a namesake of his own—Robert Pollok. Probably the reserved young Scot would have returned from the crowded city as friendless as he had come to it had it not been that, after the confusion caused on roll-days by two voices answering to one name, the Professor had had both Robert Polloks up after the lecture to decide which was major and which minor, and Pollok major and Pollok minor had then walked home together; and after that they worked at Latin exercises with one another at night.

In May 1818 the poet returned to Moorhouse for his first vacation, which he spent in reading Latin, Greek, and English. As no mention is made of farm work, it may be supposed that the translator of Anacreon's Odes was considered exempt from such drudgery. On the 10th of

October he went back to Glasgow, to 'lodge' at 36 Canon Street, through the coming winter, take out the Senior Greek class, and attend an elocution class given by Mr James Sheridan Knowles. This latter, of course, was not an academic subject.

During this second session he again made a friend—another fellow student, whom he invariably calls *Mr* David Marr. Pollok appears not to have been very sociable; but the friends he had, and their adoption tried, he most decidedly grappled to his soul with hooks of steel. It is quaint to hear the young students address one another and speak of each other as 'Mr' Marr and 'Mr' Pollok; and it is also curious that they invariably go 'along with' one another in their incomings and outgoings. It is all very Scotch—the grey city, smoky and crowded, and the friendless and penniless and shabby poet, *Mr* Robert Pollok minor, going home 'along with' the equally friendless and penniless and shabby *Mr* David Marr, and followed by the faithful and slightly jealous brother, walking 'along with' *Mr* Robert Pollok major; all four arriving at No. 36 Canon Street, rather chilled by the evening drizzle that had turned the dirt of the Glasgow streets into sticky mud, and sitting down—still 'along with' one another—to weak tea and bread and butter and Latin exercises.

It was on some such day as this that young Pollok must have felt the pangs of homesickness for the farm in Renfrewshire, for he wrote his *Ode to Moorhouse* about New Year in this session (1819). It was, of course, when the classes had stopt, and he felt dull, but was, apparently, too poor to afford to go home for Christmas holidays:—

'O happy dome! placed far remote
From city broils and treason's plot;
The city smoke ne'er reach'd thy plain,
Which suffocates the motley train;
* * * * * *
Happy the swains who in thee live,
Who read their Bibles and believe,
Who worship God with heart and mind,
And to His will are aye resigned!'

But in the summer he returned to Moorhouse, and studied Latin and Greek, and read English in preparation for the Logic Class next winter; and, towards the end of that summer, kept a note-book with short extracts from all his readings in Hervey, Burns, Beattie, Shakespeare, Ossian, Pope, Milton, Johnson, 'and others.'

He had now finally given up farm work, or, as David Pollok calls it, 'agricultural pursuits,' and so he spent his leisure in sociability and exercise, or, again to quote the verbose David, in 'observing and contemplating the various objects and appearances of nature, which he admired in all its extent and variety.' We hope he got a good substantial farm tea when he returned from his contemplations.

There was an old house about four miles from Moorhouse, called Lochgoin. This was the only house Pollok visited, and he was moved more by the historical interest of the place than by its social charms. It dated from 1178, it was where Howie wrote the *Scots Worthies*, and it had been (what most impressed Pollok) a haunt of the Covenanters after Charles II. was restored to the throne. Pollok got up a yearly summer concourse of all the young people in the neighbourhood of Moorhouse to this place, and it was continued for many years after his death, and always called 'Robert Pollok's Lochgoin Visit.'

During the summer (1819) Pollok gained another friend, a 'strong, dark-brown collie dog' called Juva (no prefix this time). The dog seems to have been gifted with a large fund of common sense; for, 'when he'—(Pollok)—'happened, at any time, to sit writing longer than usual, Juva rose from below the table, where he often lay, and put his foot upon his knee, and pawed it gently, to make him rise and take a walk.' But the sensible beast did not long take care of his master. One day, when Pollok was away, Juva 'followed some of the Moorhouse family to Glasgow, where he was lost.' The busy streets did not suit the strong, dark-brown collie: his woolly head probably got confused. Pollok, in telling his brother of the dog's being lost, did so with tears in his eyes: 'He will be very ill about me, he was so much attached to me; that is the thing that makes me so ill about him,' said the poet of few friends.

In November 1819 Pollok returned to College for his third session, and it is easy to see that during that session he thoroughly overworked himself, and played havoc with his health. He attended the Logic Class, and worked for it, gaining a prize—the first college prize he received—which was awarded, after the fashion at Glasgow University, not at the discretion of the Professor, but by the 'suffrages of his class-fellows.' He also belonged to two Debating Societies, one of which he had helped to organize, was a member of a private Greek Class held by Professor Young, and attended a French Class for an hour every day for two months. His brother quotes in full a 'Descriptive Essay' written by him for the Logic Class. It is a very poor composition, stilted and dry, and with all his meagre stock of experience crammed into it, and his few

treasured poetic pieces inserted by force. The essay might have been awarded sixty per cent. in the estimate of a lenient examiner. When we are told, however, that 'of the essays he wrote for this class, twenty-four remain,' and that they average eight quarto pages apiece, we understand why the poor student returned home to Moorhouse in May 1820 with his health 'rather encroached on by the labours of the preceding session.' Nevertheless he studied hard during this vacation, and had books sent him from the Logic Class library, and his reading became 'more extensive and varied than ever.' His doctor ordered change of air, and suggested Arran, and 'occasional sails.' The advice was not followed; but in the beginning of August 1820 he went, 'along with Mr Andrew Bryson,' for a fortnight to Dublin—a fortnight's holiday, that is to say, spent in a town, and not taken till three months after his college session had ended. As it is immediately after his Dublin visit, of which his brother says that the 'only trace' is four lines of poetry written in the Phœnix Park, that the Amiable Female is first mentioned, we should like very much to fancy that the Scottish student fell a prey in that fortnight to one of Erin's daughters, for to imagine this would add a touch of human colouring to a grey scene. The brother David introduces the Amiable Female very gravely as Pollok's first trial of his talents 'at a description of real character,' and, though acknowledging that it is 'an interesting and rather popular subject,' adds that it 'indicates very distinctly the development of his mind.' The letter on the Amiable Female is written to David, and this is how it begins:—

'Dear friend, one moment quit the classic page,
The modern theorist and the ancient sage,
With all the depth of philosophic lore,
Through which your eye has long been taught to pore.
A higher theme the Muse, devoid of fear,
Presses upon your unaccustomed ear,
The theme's Maria—who will not attend,
When all the Muses, unimplored, descend?
For, when the virtuous fair our theme compose,
The Muses listen though we speak in prose.'

Certainly his breath of Irish air, or the influence of the Amiable Female, has lightened if not improved his style. But the letter goes on to say that it was in the West of Scotland that he 'called at the house of a young lady with whom I have had some little acquaintance since the year 1815.' Since he was seventeen years old! Since he was a lanky farm-lad in hobnailed boots! And 'the West of Scotland'! Alas, it was no grey-eyed daughter of Erin, then: the 'virtuous fair' probably lived in the suburbs of Paisley. 'She is the daughter of a reputable farmer;' Pollok writes, 'and during the five years last past, has been a successful scholar in the various branches of female education, which render the sex more amiable and useful, without making them vain and ostentatious. Disgusted at the inurbanity of manners which prevailed around her, this young lady, whom we shall call Maria, at an early age aspired at a habit of life which might render her more interesting to the polite and intelligent; and what she aspired at she has attained. As I have observed with delight, this tender plant, growing up to maturity in female accomplishments, amidst circumstances rather unfavourable'—(Paisley?)—'. . . permit me to give you a short sketch of her character.' This he does, beginning with a description of blue eyes and black hair,

and a colour that is 'not high' nor 'fashionably pale,' but one 'peculiar to those who are neither exposed to the weather nor engulfed in dissipation'! He ends his rhapsodies by saying: 'Such is a faint description of what must strike everyone when Maria is the object of ocular contemplation.' Having ocularly contemplated Maria, he goes on to dilate on her beauties of mind, and we learn that she is 'irresistibly amiable,' and that he has not found a single fault in her. 'How delightful is it to see youth, and beauty, and goodness, combined in the same female! What an irresistible power over mankind have justice and religion when enforced by so winning an admonisher! Were there sufficient Marias in the world, what respect were due to the female character!' But he warns his brother that this is not the 'hyperbolical ebullition of a blind passion,'—and he adds a postscript to his letter to ask for some good book on Moral Philosophy.

During this vacation of 1820 Pollok does not seem to have taken any of the rest he so much needed. He wrote a holiday essay of a hundred and four quarto pages for a competition prize, which he gained, and he studied hard, and produced a good deal of verse. None of his early verse has any literary merit, most of it being very poor, and the best of it being of the sort that any young man with a taste for versification could produce. As to his prose, the extreme pedantry and formality and verbosity of his language are to be accounted for only by the fact that English was to him as a foreign language—he did not *think* in English, but in broad Scots. His own homely Doric was the language he used in thought, in prayer, and in daily talk on familiar subjects; English was put on for polite speech much as his Sunday

clothes were put on for polite occasions; and in either he felt ill at ease. He confesses as much in an essay he wrote which he calls 'Discussion on Compositional Thinking,' in which he naïvely remarks: "Every Scotchman who learns to write good English must first learn, from books, the English language. In this country the English is a 'dead language'; it is never used except in studied orations." And certainly all Pollok's prose writings are 'studied orations.' He goes on to say that of all kinds of composition description of nature and human character seems to him most difficult, because 'these are the objects on which we have been accustomed to gaze from earliest years, and we can easily represent them in a kind of barbarous colloquial jargon. But with the legitimate English words which the survey of variegated scenery, or the observation of an interesting character, should suggest, we are little acquainted;' and he ends by saying, 'I shall stop here,'—and then, evidently hastily noticing that this is 'a kind of barbarous colloquial jargon,' he changes it to, 'or, in my own words, close my discussion.' Well, how can one expect an easy style from a man who thinks that "in this country the English is a 'dead language'?" This is bad reading for our neighbours over the Border, who speak of any north-of-the-Tweed dialect as a 'Scotch accent,' but who yet would look puzzled were anyone to call Tennyson's *Northern Farmer*, or Chevalier's coster-songs, specimens of English accents. But this youth, who learnt English from books laboriously as a dead language, finished by writing *The Course of Time* and being read by thousands in all the English-speaking countries; and instead of smiling at his pedantry we ought to wonder at his power.

November 1820 found Pollok back in Glasgow, compiling four octavo volumes of notes from the lectures in the Moral Philosophy class, composing twenty-three essays for that class, and writing a verse translation of the first chorus of Sophocles's *King Œdipus* for a prize in Professor Young's private Greek class. He did not gain this prize, but he got one in Moral Philosophy, and then returned to Moorhouse for his fourth vacation. During this vacation he wrote his brother a letter describing what he calls his 'Peregrinations,' which seem to have been visits he made to the little farms round about the place, with 'my friend Mr Marr.' The letter gives a vivid and all-unconscious picture of the kind of people with whom he associated, and the primitive ways to which he was accustomed.

Pollok's last college session began in November 1821, and in it he attended Professor Meikleham's Natural Philosophy lectures, and Professor Millar's Mathematical class. He wrote eleven essays of four quartos apiece for the Natural Philosophy Class, and took seventy octavo pages of notes; and he worked for his degree, reading Latin and Greek without intermission from morning till night, —'often urging Mr Marr and me to proceed with him, when we were like to fall off our seats from exhaustion,' says poor David. It was at this time that he took a fancy for blank verse in preference to rhyme, and his first piece in the new form was inspired by the poet's wrath against a critic. He had written an anonymous 'monody' on the death of a fellow-student, and he overheard another student, in the publisher's shop, making what the faithful David calls 'some illiberal and envious remarks concerning it.' "On this," David relates, "he came straight to his lodgings; and, after telling me with some warmth what he

had heard, sat down to table, and gave vent to his feelings in writing a piece in blank verse, 'To Envy,' extending to fifty lines. From the time that he wrote these, which he did without ever stopping the pen, he thought 'blank verse,' as he expressed it, 'the language of his soul.'" The language of his naughty temper is what a less respectful biographer than David might have called it;—but what's in a name? Perhaps had Keats rushed straight home and written fifty lines of blank verse 'To Envy,' he might have lived longer.

In this session Pollok got up a Mutual Improvement Society among the Philosophy students, and then read an essay of about fifty pages to it. The essay shows extensive reading, and is an improvement on his former efforts. In it can be traced a good deal of the metaphorical power and strength of illustration that are noticeable in *The Course of Time*. It was evidently during this session that the idea of earning money by his pen first occurred to Pollok, for he had a vague scheme of starting a literary periodical in Glasgow in order to make money. Fortunately he gave up the notion.

In March 1822 both Robert and David passed their examinations for the degree of M.A., and they were capped in April. Pollok writes a letter to David giving him a long metaphorical account of both ceremonies—a rather laboriously humorous production, the humour evidently inspired by relief from the ordeal being over.

It is a curious and noteworthy fact that, though poor Pollok, during his whole career at college, regularly attended the Secession Church in Duke Street, Glasgow, he actually remained unknown to the pastor—the Rev. Robert Muter, D.D.—and knew not a single member of

the congregation. That a sheep so white and so loving the fold should have remained unmarked by the shepherd and ignored by the flock seems somewhat cruel, more especially as this poor alien 'was acquainted with only one family in Glasgow, and was never in any company but that of students.'

A letter written at this time to his friend David Marr shows the narrowness of Pollok's life and the scantiness of the materials he had to feed his imagination on, and how he made the most of everything and turned all his experiences to account. The letter must have been a formidable budget to receive, for in print it extends to over thirty quarto pages. 'You know, my dear friend,' he tells the absent Marr, 'I never write you the history of those days and nights of my life, which are common to me with the rest of mortals. For why should I tell you that I have read Virgil or Shakespeare all day, when you have, perhaps, done the very same thing yourself? But I invite your attention to all my cometary motions. You may trace me, therefore, if you please, sometimes with your telescope, sometimes with your microscope, round the following parabolic curve.'

The cometary motion was no voyage round the world; it was a day and a night spent in Paisley. But what a day and night of incident does poor Pollok make of it! He arrives in Paisley, on foot, at 10 P.M., and the first thing he does, of course, is to call on the Amiable Female. This call is merely touched off in a poetic fashion, and 'bliss like this,' he says, 'was too kind long to last.' Perhaps the Amiable Female, in spite of her amiability, thought an hour and a half of Pollok's conversation ample; for it was half-past eleven before he sallied forth, intending

to sleep at the house of some other friends. He recollected, however, that he did not know where they lived; and so his night of adventure began. First he met Donald, the Scotch policeman, and talked to him; then he wandered to the wood three miles from town (Gleniffer Wood), and he quotes in full three hundred and forty-one lines of blank verse, *Thoughts on Man*, which he wrote in this wood; then he strayed into 'a golgotha, or place of skulls,'—otherwise a cemetery on the outskirts of Paisley, —and here he mused till the early hours, when his thoughts were turned by a band of noisy and tipsy revellers, whom he accompanied home and gently moralized over; then he walked out of the town again and watched the sun rise and listened to the birds—the blackbird, the mavis and the lark. 'I have never heard the queen of songsters, Philomela,' the poor doomed lad writes, 'but I intend soon to make a journey to the south of England for the sole purpose of hearing her sing. Thomson—all the poets —mention her in rapture.' A gardener at work, who gossips about a minister who was 'terrible lazy,' sets Pollok off moralizing again, and he is deep in the subject of Dissent *versus* Establishment when, between four and five in the morning, he suddenly longs for a smoke. Apparently he was unprovided with the means; so he remembers that 'an old female acquaintance lived in the suburbs, who was also a smoker,' and he goes to her, despite the early hour. 'I got my cutty lighted up, and smoked a full quarter of an hour, talking a commonplace word now and then to the old wife in bed. On the table beside me lay a book: it was a comment on the Revelation of John.' This starts a train of 'sublime thoughts,' but these, alas! are broken into by his sudden

realisation of the dirt which surrounds him in the home of the 'old wife,' and which he describes with appaling vividness. So he leaves the old wife and the dirt and the cutty pipe and the commentary on St John's Revelation, and goes out into the country, where 'Happiness sung from every tree, looked from every flower, and played on every field.' When the bells of the town ring six o'clock he goes again to the Amiable Female, breakfasts with her and her elder sister, and takes a much-needed nap on four chairs in a row. Thus ends Pollok's nearest approach to a *Wanderjahr*.

Pollok now, having taken his M.A. degree, and having passed the examination by the United Associate Presbytery of Glasgow for admission into the Divinity Hall of the United Secession Church, began his studies there in August 1822. This Hall opened annually in August and closed in October, and the prescribed course consisted of five of these three-month sessions, the duties being attendance at the professors' lectures, reading the Bible in the original, and the delivering of one short 'discourse' each session. During the vacations every student was placed under some Secession presbytery, which prescribed other exercises to be done during the vacation. Pollok's first 'discourse,' it seems, met with a reception which must have been very galling to one who had such a dislike to being laughed at. Imagine the good David's feelings when he heard his beloved brother preaching amid audible laughter, 'so that at times he could scarcely be heard'! David ascribes this unseemly merriment to the fact that his brother's language had risen 'a little above the common level of prose.' But Robert went on preaching unconcernedly, 'keeping close to his notes, amid repeated bursts of laughter,

during the delivery of five full pages, or about the fifth part of his discourse.' Then he turned: "Here," his brother relates, "as he was going on, with characteristic self-command, enumerating a series of things which, 'had Adam not disobeyed—had sin not entered our world,' would not have taken place, having come to some things which might be applied to the present manifestation of the students, he stood boldly and determinately forward to make himself be heard, and pronounced with awful firmness, in due course of delivery, these words—raising his chest over the pulpit, clenching his fist, fetching a stroke with his arm, and casting down on the students a look of righteous indignation, as he pronounced them:—'Had sin not entered our world, no idiot-smile would have gathered on the face of folly to put out of countenance the man of worth.'" Well done, Pollok! The students drooped their heads, the laughter was hushed, and from this point to the end—six pages more—he was 'listened to with solemn overawed attention,' and he 'came down from the pulpit with a good-natured smile.' When he had done so, the 'venerable Professor,' whose professorial calmness and dignity had remained undisturbed during the whole excitement, asked the students if they had any remarks to make on the sermon. They had. Half-a-dozen rose together; and one, the oracle, made the rest give way by furiously exclaiming, 'There never was such a piece of absurd bombast nonsense delivered to any audience!' The others also, one and all, denounced sermon and preacher. Then the Professor rose. 'He approved,' he said, 'of the discourse. The introduction, being textual, was appropriate; the division was proper; and the discussion and illustration on the first two heads

were what they should have been. With respect to the third head, some things said under it might have been as well spared. It showed, however, that Mr Pollok possesses a good deal of poetical talent; but he would recommend him to use it more sparingly in sermons. With these remarks, he approved of the discourse.' Certainly the learned and reverend senior in his critique used whatever poetical talent *he* possessed sparingly. But probably it was appropriate, and proper, and what it should have been. At any rate it soothed the faithful David, which was the best thing it could have done.

The Divinity Hall closed in October 1822, and Pollok probably spent the ten months' vacation chiefly at Moorhouse. At any rate it was there, in the beginning of the summer of 1823, that he wrote his first story, *Helen of the Glen.* The tale was what, in journalistic slang, is termed a 'pot boiler', for we are told that Robert left Glasgow one Saturday afternoon for Moorhouse, after having spoken to David of 'writing something for money,' and when David joined him at Moorhouse a week later he was shown the finished MS., which had been both planned and written between Monday and Saturday. In the first edition the story was a hundred and forty pages of small 8vo., and it was published by William Collins, the Glasgow bookseller, to whom the copyright was sold the following autumn for £15.

Robert had a little relaxation this summer. He was on duty for eight days with his brother John in the Renfrewshire Yeomanry Cavalry, which met at Paisley. A dangerous neighbourhood, Paisley!—but we are not told if he called on the Amiable Female: only that James Mather, Esq., who was 'along with him in the

troop,' described him as an excellent horseman, and 'one of the most agreeable companions that ever he was with.' In August 1823 Pollok returned to the Hall in Glasgow; and in October 1823, at the close of the Hall, he and David separated for the first time, Robert remaining in Glasgow, and David going to look after the moral and spiritual welfare of the inhabitants of Auchindinny, a little village seven miles south of Edinburgh. This separation entailed letter-writing, and Robert's letters are, one is sorry to confess, at times a little egotistic: but he probably knew what would please David best. He often gives news of various friends, and he sometimes gives his elder brother a little good advice. 'I hope you are persevering with pleasure in your studies,' he writes; and we fancy poor David, in his Auchindinny parlour, hastily taking down his Cæsar, with its well-thumbed cover, and dusting it. In a postscript to the same letter, Robert tells that 'our brother John is named for an elder of the Church. I do not know yet whether he will take the birth (*sic*). I think he ought, as it will be another motive to him for walking in the paths of righteousness.' This is the same brother John who once 'asked a piece of poetry from him to insert in a letter to a friend.'

But David and Robert could not long be separated, and in the middle of December Robert, 'along with Mr Marr,' went to see David at Auchindinny. During this visit Pollok visited Roslin and the Pentlands, and other places; and, on their way home, he and Mr Marr spent a day and night in Edinburgh, and Robert, doubtless inspired by the £15 he had got for the copyright of *Helen of the Glen*, went back well stocked with fresh materials for two more stories,

Ralph Gemmell and *The Persecuted Family*, which he wrote between October 1823 and February 1824. In March he got suddenly very ill in Glasgow, and did not write home to tell of the illness till he could say he was getting better. He then dictates a letter to his father, and says, "I would be glad to see any of you; but Margaret" (his youngest surviving sister) "will be most useful." In a letter a fortnight later to David, he says, "Margaret came, in the fulness of unwearied attention, ministering to my comfort. Miss Campbell came. . . . My father—O how did his countenance comfort me! John, Mrs Pollok, Miss Janet Pollok, Miss Jean, Robert, all circled round me. And even M., like the star of the morning, lovely, sweet, and glorious, drew near, and threw the gladness of innocence into my heart. My friends in Glasgow were equally attentive. Mr Marr was the stay which God Almighty placed at my right hand. Rejoice with me, my brother. And 'bless the Lord, O my Soul!'"

A few days later he went for a second visit to David at Auchindinny, and in passing through Edinburgh tried to place his two manuscripts, *Ralph Gemmell* and *The Persecuted Family*, but failed. This failure he did not take in a philosophic spirit: it depressed and worried him. He writes several letters to his brother about the unfortunate MSS., once commending the brother's determination to burn the manuscript rather than consent to some proposal from a publisher as 'worthy both of you and me.' Nobody ought to engage in conflict with the world who is not provided with a sense of humour to waft him lightly high over all mischances. Pollok, barely four months after he had finished writing his stories, casts on his brother the whole thankless task of hawking them

about from publisher to publisher, and tells him, 'I expect to hear from you soon; and when you do write, let me have some local news—something about Auchindinny. Be as short as you can on the manuscripts business, as the simple thought of them is very apt to sicken me.' He does not, however, take his own advice, for his whole letter is 'on the manuscripts business,' as is also an extensive postscript,—and David is promised that, 'If Robertson print them, you will perhaps correct the sheets.' David set to work, and Robertson did accept the two stories.*

In August 1824 the brothers met again at the Divinity Hall in Glasgow—their third session; and Robert in November entered as a theological student in the Divinity Hall of Glasgow University, and attended it for two sessions, as much for the admission it gave him to the College Divinity Hall Library as for the sake of the lectures. In the middle of November he went to Edinburgh to settle matters with Robertson, the bookseller, who had taken his two stories, and he paid his brother a third visit at Auchindinny. From Edinburgh, on his way back to Glasgow, he writes to David to tell him that he has completed his bargain, in black and white, and has received five guineas, and is to receive fifteen more before the middle of January (there is no mention of a commission to David), and that 'Mr Robertson is very fond I should write more for him.' Pollok adds that *The Persecuted Family* is 'pretty correct, to have had no corrector but a printer's reader,' and poor David adds a footnote to this statement, 'I

* These stories were afterwards published by William Oliphant, who purchased *Helen of the Glen* from Collins, and brought out the three stories gathered together as "Tales of the Covenanters," in 1833.

had not been asked to "correct the sheets."' Not everyone would be so lugubrious because of this neglect, but David had other things to put up with. It would seem as if he were not the only magnet in the parish of Auchindinny, for about this time there creeps into Robert's letters to David mention of 'Miss ——; I mean the good one.' Whether it is the goodness of the good one, or the badness of the bad one (how negative is her immorality, poor thing!), or whether it is the lingering weakness left by his illness in March, or a mixture of all three, certainly Pollok's letters become very depressed at this time.

In January 1825 he writes from Glasgow to his brother, who had gone back to Auchindinny in October when the Hall closed, wishing him a Happy New Year, and adding, 'and Miss ——, I mean the good one, I wish a Happy New Year.' We hope the loyal David delivered these messages to his fair parishioner, and that Miss —— (the good one), did not ask him, 'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?'

The rest of this letter from Glasgow is about his failing health, and tells the news of his having begun to write what was afterwards to be his great poem, *The Course of Time*. His description of his beginning it is one of his best pieces of prose :—

'Before the New Year I had about three weeks of glorious study. Soaring in the pure ether of eternity, and linking my thoughts to the everlasting throne, I felt the healthy breezes of immortality revive my intellectual nerves, and found a point, unshaken and unthreatened by the rockings and stormings of this world. Blank verse, the language of assembled gods, the language of eternity, was the form into which my thoughts fell. Some of them, I trust, shall outlive me in this world; and nothing, I hope, shall make me ashamed to meet them in the next. Thoughts, acquirements, appendages of any kind, that cannot be carried with us out of time into the help and solace of our eternity, but must be left the unredeemed and unredeemable of

death, are little worth harbouring about us. It is the everlastingness of a thing that gives it weight and importance. And surely it is not impossible, even now, to have thoughts and ideas that may be transported over the vale of death, and not be refused the stamp and signature of the eternal king.'

His next letter, also from Glasgow, written a month later, tells us :—

'The subject of the poem in which I am engaged is the Resurrection—a glorious argument; and if that Divine Spirit, who giveth all thought and all utterance, be not offended with my prayers, it shall not be ungloriously managed.'

So by February 1825 he was well launched in his life-work. This was when he was twenty-six, and still a divinity student in Glasgow. The finding of a subject for his pen seems to have braced him up a little, and he writes cheerfully of all the home news: how he 'had' his father with him in Glasgow 'the other night,' and found him 'hale, fresh and jocund'; how John (the eldest brother) and Mrs Pollok (John's wife?) are quite well; how John's family, who have all had the 'chin cough,' are 'getting well through,' and Janet Young is getting better, although slowly, 'for it is not easy to get out of chin coughs, measles, and the like,'—&c., &c. He also sends David 'some coffee, made of malt.' 'It cost me only fivepence, and it will serve you a long time. . . . I like it well, and so does Mr Marr.' He explains how it is to be used, and how made. As it is to be boiled fifteen minutes in an open pan and put thence into a teapot to separate the grounds, one feels no fear for David's nerves.

Pollok's cheerfulness was short-lived, however. Soon after the date of this letter he was called to Moorhouse to be with his mother, who was dying. He continued com-

posing his poem, literally at his mother's death-bed. In April 1825 he writes to David about the mother's health. He tells how she is unable to read 'the little book that I sent her last'—*The Persecuted Family*,—as the religious sentiments agree so with her own and are so strongly expressed that they agitate her too much. He tells David, 'I am in the very heart of the poem, and greatly upheld.' In May he reports his mother considerably weaker, and that there is little hope of her recovery; and he goes on to say that he has nearly completed a third book of his poem. In the end of May he stopt writing, however; and on July 4th he sends David a short letter to tell of their mother's death the night before, and to bid him come home.

The following August both brothers were back at the Divinity Hall in Glasgow, and towards the end of the session—in October, that is—they went, with their 'relative, Mr Campbell,' and two fellow students, 'Mr' Marr and 'Mr' Borthwick, for a day's excursion to Loch Lomond. This was Pollok's first introduction to the opal wonders of the Western Highlands, and it is strange to hear how he spent the return voyage. They sailed as far as Rob Roy's cave, and he was 'much delighted with the magnificent scenery.' But—

"On returning to the steamboat which was to convey the passengers from Loch Lomond up the Clyde to Glasgow, he said to his four companions, 'there is a snug little place below; let us go down and occupy it, that we may talk together, and turn this day to best account.' We followed him to the apartment, and as soon as we had, with the consent of the steward, secured it to ourselves, he proposed that we should each of us give utterance to our feelings, and tell to what account we might turn that day. This being approved of, it was thought proper to appoint me president on the occasion; and the four rose, in succession, and gave utterance to their feelings, in speeches of considerable length, and, doubtless, with felicity and success."

And, while the five youths were haranguing one another at considerable length in the stuffy cabin, the sun was setting on those far western islands, and the shadows were deepening on the purple sea as the paddles churned it into a line of foam, and brought them every moment nearer to Glasgow.

After this Pollok's letters to his brother begin again, for Robert remained in Glasgow, and David returned to Auchindinny as soon as the Divinity Hall session was over. When the loyal David is absent, the poet always grows depressed; and from November 1825 till July 1826 his letters are full of unhappiness and complaint. His health was now a constant worry to him; and money troubles—if the total want of money can be dignified by this name—weighed on his mind. He spent his time between Moorhouse and Glasgow; and, in the intervals of study, wrote *The Course of Time.* He had left off writing at Moorhouse in the end of May 1825, when three books were written, and when his mother lay dying; and he had begun again in November, in Glasgow, and worked steadily till the following March, when his health broke down and he had again to stop. He writes to his brother on March 3rd 1826, and tells him that he has finished three books of his poem since he began it again in winter, but that his health is 'very much in need of repair;' and then he goes on to say, 'I am dreadfully hunted just now for money, and have been threatened with prosecution from different quarters. And, although my whole debt is not much above £20, and although £12 would free me from present embarrassment, I have not the means of raising even that small sum.' And so the

poet was harassed for lack of twelve pounds. Perhaps some day genius will be as marketable as more concrete goods: but Pollok did not complain. 'My path does, indeed, seem at present to be surrounded with difficulties;' he writes to David, 'but you remember that when the sea was before Moses, and the Egyptians behind, the Lord opened a way for him. Three or four books more will complete my poem.' He never seems to doubt that the poem will be a success, both from a money and from a literary point of view; for in discussing it he says of one passage that it is 'a very important part of my poem—important, both as it concerns myself, the world at large, and theological critics, who will, no doubt, quarrel much at this place.'

In April Robert went to David at Auchindinny, 'for the sake of his health,' stayed ten days at Dunfermline with his 'friend' (*i.e.* relation) 'Mr Campbell,' and then returned to Glasgow. On May 18th he writes a short note from Glasgow to David, telling him he proposes to send the first three books of his poem to Edinburgh, without waiting till he has finished the rest. David answers at once, and is firm in his veto. 'I would rather write the remaining books in a jail, where many a great and good man has written, than publish such a work in parts,' he says, sternly. The disciple has turned judge. Then, out of his own frugal means, he proffers such help as he can. If it is not gracefully expressed, it is well meant: 'Could you not escape away to me, and vigorously prosecute your work to a close? I will get a room for you here, and you can eat with me.' But later in the letter he tells the poet, 'The work will, one day, not only relieve yourself, but enable you to assist your friends;' and

this veiled and gentle comfort shows that honest David was not without a delicacy of perception, possibly wasted on the egotistic poet. But his strong advice was not so wasted: it gave Robert just the bracing up he needed. 'I feel as if I had all your vigour and fortitude added to my own,' he answers by return of post.

He had been, he tells David, before his letter came, in a state of 'doubtful conflict.' In order to gain time to finish his poem—and his heart was bent on this—he would have to postpone being 'licensed.' To do this after so long a probation, to spend money and to gain none, would call down the wrath of those 'who already reproach me with my indolence.' But David's letter and opinion settle the matter: 'I have determined, so far as my health will permit, calmly to pursue my poem; and, in the strength of God, I hope to complete it.' That was written on May 28th, 1826, and on July 7th he writes from Moorhouse: 'It is with much pleasure that I am now able to tell you that I have finished my poem.' Poor Pollok! With what pride he wrote that!—And he had signed his own death warrant. Barely six weeks, and he had written three thousand five hundred verses, and had written his life-blood into them. Let us hear his own description of the time:

'Although some nights I was on the borders of fever, I rose every morning equally fresh, without one twitch of headache; and, with all the impatience of a lover, hasted to my study. Towards the end of the tenth book—for the whole consists of ten books—where the subject was overwhelmingly great, and where I, indeed, seemed to write from immediate inspiration, I felt the body beginning to give way. But now that I have finished, though thin with the great heat, and the almost unintermitted mental exercise, I am by no means languishing and feeble. Since the 1st of June, which was the day I began to write last, we have had a Grecian atmosphere; and I find the serenity of the heavens of incalculable benefit for mental pursuit. . . .

Exalted on my native mountains, and writing often on the top of the very highest of them, I proceeded, from day to day, as if I had been in a world in which there was neither sin, nor sickness, nor poverty. In the four books last written, I have succeeded, in almost every instance, up to my wishes; and, in many places, I have exceeded anything that I had conceived. This is not boasting, remember. I only say that I have exceeded the degree of excellence which I had formerly thought of.'

The Course of Time was written, therefore, between December 1824 and the beginning of July 1826; and, as there had been two breaks in the time when he had laid it aside—one when his mother was dying, *i.e.*, from May to November 1825; and one when both health and spirits gave way, *i.e.*, from March to May 1826—the actual period of writing was only eleven months. The poem was begun when Pollok was a little over twenty-six, and finished when he was within four months of completing his twenty-eighth year,—and within fifteen months of his death.

It is interesting to learn that the title *The Course of Time* was not the poet's own invention, but was suggested to Pollok by the Rev. John Ritchie of Potterrow, a well-known Edinburgh minister of the day. Pollok had already chosen the name *Eternity* for his poem; but when the Rev. Dr Ritchie, after hearing the manuscript read, proposed the change of title, it was at once approved of and adopted.

His brother gives an account, 'taken from his conversation,' of his method of writing:

'During the three periods of writing, he kept a small jot-book beside him, and whenever anything occurred to him which he thought fit for any part of the work, he jotted it down, sometimes with pen and ink, and sometimes with a black lead pencil. Every time that he sat down to write, he looked over these jottings to see if there were any materials among them for his present purpose; and when he had used or rejected anything, he drew his pen through it. Generally, he composed mentally, sometimes a few verses, and sometimes a

paragraph or two, according to circumstances; and he did this at all times and in all places, but chiefly in bed.

'He once remarked to me, "People say a man can do nothing lying in bed; but something may be done in it. The truth is, most of *The Course of Time* was composed in bed." He usually wrote two or three hours at a sitting, and then went out to take the air, or engaged with his friends in lively conversation, to relax his mind; and whenever he felt himself refreshed he resumed his study. He seldom sat later than eleven or twelve o'clock; but he generally lay awake a good part of the night, letting his mind wander over his subject, thinking and composing. When he came to a new paragraph, he concentrated his energies on it, as if it had been the only thing that he had ever written, or that he should ever write; so that, as he said, "every paragraph might stand by itself, without needing support from what went before or came after." He never stopped at a difficult place, but took good care to pause where he knew he could easily go on, so that it might always be pleasant for him to sit down to write. When he wrote at Moorhouse, he read at night to his brother John what he had written in the course of the day, and heard his opinion of it. While composing there the four books last written, though he went every Sabbath to church, he wrote, as he expressed it "Sabbath and Saturday": in going to and from church, on the sublime regions between Moorhouse and Eaglesham, he composed, as he thought he could not be better employed, the usual number of verses; and on returning home, to secure them, he wrote them down. During the whole process he read little English, as it did not sufficiently arrest his attention, or withdraw his thoughts from himself, but he occasionally read Latin and Greek for amusement or relaxation; and he found the most difficult he met with a great recreation compared with the writing of the poem, in which his mind, through vigour of exertion, many a time nearly overpowered his body. He kept the Bible constantly beside him, and read in different places of it, according to the nature of what he was composing; so that his mind, it may be said, was all along regulated by the Bible. Finally, he prayed to God daily, morning and evening, for direction and assistance in the work.'

A month after the poem was finished, Pollok returned to Glasgow for his last session at the Divinity Hall. In his letters to his brother announcing the finishing of the poem he had spoken of the impossibility of his being able

to afford to do this—'If some person do not do something for me, it is plain I cannot get to the Hall,' he stated; but apparently 'some person' did 'do something.' The fact that there is no mention of it in David's biography points to David as the person.

Pollok seems always to have preferred Glasgow to Moorhouse, and to have been troubled by depression when obliged to remain long in the country. Once, in January 1826, he tells how his father 'noticed the fearful and dangerous state of my mind, and insisted that I should go to Glasgow, hoping that company and better lodging might recover me'; and again, in May 1826, in the letter promising his brother that he will take his advice and finish the poem, he says: 'As the weather is extremely fine, I shall just remain at Moorhouse; and as I am in perfect good spirits, I have no doubt that I shall manage well enough.' It is self-evidently for the sake of economy that he was so condescending, and it is to be hoped that the kindly old widower farmer enjoyed his poet son's company, as well as he did that of the elder brother John, the interrupter. We imagine the lowered voices in the kitchen, and the guilty air with which the discussion of pigs and turnips ceased when Robert entered, flushed and fervid, with his roll of manuscript, to read to John what had been written during the day. Ah, John, you brought it on yourself! For was it not you who, in the far-off days, 'asked a piece of poetry to insert in a letter to a friend,' and thus established for ever the reputation of being a nice critic? Spread your red handkerchief over your sunburnt visage, John, and compose yourself to listen!

In spite of the poor father's belief in the 'company' at Glasgow, there was but little social brilliance there for

Robert Pollok; for, just as during his five sessions at college he had attended regularly the Secession Church in Duke Street and yet remained unknown to the minister and to all the congregation, so, during the five autumn sessions he studied at the Hall and the four winters he spent in Glasgow studying theology, he had attended Greyfriars Church, and was yet known to but one member of the congregation—an elder. Besides this elder, who was 'a wealthy and influential citizen,' he knew only two or three families in the whole city.

Thus ended Pollok's connection with Glasgow; and in October 1826, at the end of his last Hall session, he went to Dunfermline, where lived his relative, John Campbell, to copy out *The Course of Time* and to be near Edinburgh. He meant to go to Edinburgh in winter to arrange about the publication of his poem, and to 'take license to preach the Gospel.' He left Glasgow for Dunfermline by coach at six in the morning on October 2nd, and David tells us: 'His friend Mr Marr and I carried his trunk from his lodgings at the head of Crown Street, Hutchesontown, to the coach office in Trongate.' But the trunk, Pollok found, could not go 'along' with him, but must wait and follow next day; so he gave it into the care of a clerk, making him promise 'to come good for it,' whatever that may mean. 'He then made a momentary pause, and hastily taking the key of the trunk from his pocket, opened it, took out the manuscript of his poem, rolled it up into a scroll, and put it into his great-coat pocket, saying to Mr Marr and me, with a look of satisfaction, 'A man is just as well to have the hank in his own hand.

He settled down in lodgings at a bookseller's shop in Dunfermline High Street, and began to copy out *The Course of Time*. It took him about seven weeks, and he was helped in the 'wearisome process,' as he calls it in a letter to his father, by Miss Jessie Swan, the daughter of a merchant, 'in whose family Robert was treated as a son and a brother.' Pollok copied the first six books, and Miss Swan the last four. He makes the best of his health in this same letter to his father, telling him, 'I have reason to thank God that it is very good,' but Dr Moir ('Delta'), speaking afterwards of the MS., says it was given to the press with a dying hand, and that he remembered that several of the books were copied in a female hand 'on account of his increased debility.'

On November 3rd, 1826, before the copying was quite complete, Pollok had paid a visit to Edinburgh, 'to be in readiness for the Presbytery.' He had then taken the opportunity, bold youth! of calling, without introduction, on Mr William Blackwood and telling him about his poem; and that eminent and wary publisher had promised, it seems, that, if the MS. were sent to him in a finished state, he would 'look into it.'

On the 7th of November Pollok, 'having undergone the usual examination,' was taken by the United Associate Presbytery of Edinburgh, 'on trials for license to preach the Gospel; and had subjects for trial-discourses assigned him.' These 'trial-discourses' consisted of (1) a homily, (2) a lecture, (3) a critical exercise on a given text, (4) a sermon on a given text, (5) a Latin exegesis, (6) the exposition of a Hebrew Psalm, and (7) the revision of a century or two of Church History.

Having passed his examination Pollok returned to Dunfermline to prepare his first 'trial discourse'—the homily—but, first of all, to complete the copying out of *The Course of Time* for Mr Blackwood. The copying out was done first, and on November 22nd the poem was sent to Mr Blackwood, with a long letter: 'It,' he says, in the letter, 'is, as far as I know, new; the sentiments which I have expressed of religion, which is especially treated of in the second book, are such as seemed to me agreeable to the Word of God; and in few instances, I believe, will they be found differing from the approved creed of our country. . . . If the work take at all, it must take extensively, as all mankind are alike interested in the subject of it.' In these words Pollok gives the key to the secret of his immediate popularity. The poem could claim its public: in the words of commerce, it met a demand. This may be acknowledged as at any rate a 'secondary cause' of the success of *The Course of Time*.

After the treasured MS. had been parted with, Pollok set to work at his homily. It took him a fortnight. On the 5th December 1826 he went back to Edinburgh, read it to the learned divines, and then again presented himself at the publishing office of Mr Blackwood in George Street, to learn the fate of his poem. This time the shabbily dressed, worn-out poet was met with respect. His poem had been submitted to two of Mr Blackwood's associates,—men who were to help to make the name of Blackwood famous,—Professor Wilson ('Christopher North') and Dr Moir ('Delta'). Their judgments had been highly favourable. Robert Pollok, sitting, no doubt, in Mr Blackwood's own cosy sanctum upstairs, was given the letters of Professor Wilson and Dr Moir to read. Mr Blackwood was

willing to publish a small edition on the half-profit system. Pollok agreed, and passed out, an accepted author, through the big saloon, the lounging-place of many a litterateur, and into the broad grey stone street and the bitter cold of an Edinburgh December. Under Providence, publishers are powerful. Pollok, too dignified in his Scotch reserve to acknowledge elation, returned to Dunfermline to prepare his lecture—the second of his 'trial discourses.'

There was no delay in the publication of the poem, for it went to press at the end of December, and the 30th of that month found its author lodged at 3 Davie Street, in the Old Town of Edinburgh. 'Here,' writes David, 'in the end of 1826, an utter stranger, without introduction and without money, he took up his residence, to correct the proof-sheets of *The Course of Time* as they passed through the press, and to prosecute his trials for license.'

He had a temporary respite from the latter duties, for, when he went to a meeting of the Presbytery on the 2nd of January 1827, he had to put off the delivery of his lecture for a month. This was probably due to the great number of young divinity students that, Pollok reports, were 'on their trials.' But Pollok was not now entirely without introductions. On the 3rd of January (by the way, what must the young Seceder have thought of the drunken revelry round the Tron Church, close to his lodgings, on Old Year's night, the very night after his arrival?) Mr Blackwood introduced him to Professor Wilson. Pollok writes a most characteristic letter to his father about this. Having first told his father that his poem had been accepted by Mr Blackwood, 'the only publisher in Scotland to whom I would have given it,'

and having added 'I have reserved the copyright in my own hand, and, of course, have secured the profits for twenty-eight years—if there be any profits,' he goes on to tell the Renfrewshire farmer of Professor Wilson, and "that he is one of the greatest literary men of the age, . . . but, better than this, his opinion of my work is extremely high—as high as my own; and, you know, that is high enough. I had a conversation with him to-day, and he has no doubt that, whatever may be the reception of the work at first, it will ultimately take a high and lasting place among the English poetry. He was pleased, indeed, to compliment me very highly, and expressed great happiness that I came from Renfrewshire, which is his native shire also. But, what is of more advantage to me than this, he has kindly offered to assist with all his might in revising and correcting the sheets as they come through the press. It will gratify John a little to tell him that Mr Wilson pointed out the character of Lord Byron as 'a very extraordinary piece of writing': he will remember that he thought it the best of the whole." (Afterwards Professor Wilson confessed that in deciding on the merits of the work he read only the passage referred to, and the description of the Millennium, but felt sure that the writer of these two passages 'would not let anything out of his hands that was not good.') They had something to talk of round the kitchen fire at Moorhouse the night after they received this letter. But they do not seem to have been over prompt in their congratulations and sympathy, for Pollok writes about a fortnight later complaining of having had no answer to all this glowing news. However, David is evidently with him, for 'David sends his compliments.'

But the family silence has made the poet sore, as well it might, for he ends the letter, 'We expect Margaret to write; and I think Mrs Gilmour, who has nothing to do, might send a line.' 'Mrs Gilmour' was his eldest sister; but to a young man who was called his chief friend 'Mr Marr,' a sister might evidently exist as 'Mrs Gilmour.'

In February Pollok delivered his postponed lecture at a meeting of Presbytery, and at the end of the same month, whilst immersed in proofs, he began his third 'trial,'—a critical exercise on a text out of Hebrews. His health was by this time utterly wrecked. Instead of drudging at all this work in a garret in the unwholesome air of the Old Town of Edinburgh and the cold of an Edinburgh winter, he ought to have been carefully nursed and well fed in warmth and country quiet. 'At that time,' says his brother, 'he was so much exhausted and was so weak that he could not sit at table to write his exercise,' and he speaks of the 'irritating mental and bodily excitement that entirely took away his sleep,' so that, to use his own words, he 'lay every night broad awake, engaged in thought.'

In the beginning of March 1827 Pollok gave in the exercise to the Presbytery; and the printing of the poem, which had met with some delay, was then nearly finished, which calmed him a little. But the young man's mind was evidently wrought up to a great pitch of excitement. His head was full of his work and of new ambition; and the wondering ears of David thrilled with the intimation of a great prose work that he meant to write—'a survey of literature by the light of Divine Revelation, or a review in which the literature of all ages would be brought to the test and standard of Christianity.' He intended to take five or six

years to this work, and that it should extend to five or six octavo volumes—one a year, in fact. He had the whole scheme prepared—the authors were to be classified, and a general view of their writings given; then one from each class was to be selected, reviewed more thoroughly, and brought to the test of Christianity. Homer was to be the scapegoat for the 'heathen poets,' and in reviewing him and the pre-Christian authors Pollok designed to show how far they differed from, and how far they agreed with, Christianity: 'and it would seem that they were opposed to it in almost everything.' He meant 'to have a volume of splendid writing at the introduction of Christianity,' and "'this volume,' he said, with great enthusiasm, 'will be, in many places, more poetical than anything in *The Course of Time*.'" In reviewing post-Christian authors he intended to show how far they had been influenced by 'heathen literature'; and he held 'that they had been much influenced by it all along, even to the present day.' 'Among the modern poets he meant to review Milton, Shakespeare, and Byron'; and 'Milton was to be the first poet that would stand the test.' Addison's and Johnson's morality were to be strictly examined: novels of all kinds were to be condemned utterly, and Sir Walter Scott was to be submitted to a thorough scrutiny. A Daniel come to judgment! The ghosts of Homer, of Shakespeare, of all the poets of all the ages—a long procession—might well turn out of their graves and take counsel. The sprightly spectre of Byron; the dignified, kindly, weary Sir Walter; the substantial wraith of Johnson—none were to be spared by this enthusiastic divinity student in Davie Street: only Milton might smile superior and cross to the other side, for Pollok approved.

It is an insoluble problem whether, had Robert Pollok lived to complete this prose work, it would have met with the same storm of popularity that *The Course of Time* evoked, and have extended the fame of its author, or whether it would have been found to be *The Course of Time* over again in prose form, and have fallen dead on the market after having been scathingly criticised, and bringing its author only disappointment and bitterness. Taking into consideration the poverty of experience from which all Pollok's work must have been drawn, and the fact that everything that he had known or thought or seen or heard or read in a book, had gone into *The Course of Time*, one cannot but fear that the latter would have been the fate of any work undertaken before he had replenished his stock, or in any way extended or enriched his experiences; especially as he himself confesses that the prose work 'had arisen from the rejected matter of *The Course of Time*.' If this were to have been the case, it was a merciful Providence that cut the young man off just at the height of his fame, and left the honest heart of David to mourn him as a genius second to none in the world. Not that David would ever have wavered in his allegiance; but it would have been a sorry day for him had the great prose work fallen clattering round Robert Pollok, and the public and the publishers turned their backs.

But no one can tell what might have happened. The intended prose work, ambitious though it was, might have found eager readers, and the breath of their adulation might have wafted Pollok up high into the Temple of Fame to a place among the mighty whom he had criticized. That matter is hidden in the grave. All the youth's enthusiasm, energy and enterprise was linked to a

weak and phthisical body, ill fed, ill housed and overused from the beginning, and the rules of physiology are not respectful to persons and are very vindictive. Pollok died; and a thin little volume—'*Pollok's Course of Time*'—moulders in the upper shelves of some libraries.

When Pollok had finished correcting his proofs he wrote his fourth 'trial discourse' from a given text, and it was while he was still writing this that *The Course of Time* was published, on March 24th, 1827. On the 22nd he wrote to his father:

'EDINBURGH, *March 22nd*, 1827.

'DEAR FATHER,—You will receive, along with this, a parcel of my poem. I would have sent more copies of it, but it is expensive. You can lend your copy to Jean,—Margaret, of course, will see it. The others you will send to the persons to whom they are addressed.

'David has got your letter. It is well that you are in good health; and I hope we shall soon get out of our difficulties.

'It will be the 1st of May before the students be licensed in this Presbytery. We will likely be in the west country towards the end of May. We are both well, only I am a little worn with the application of the last two months.—Yours affectionately, R. POLLOK.'

'Let us hear from you soon. I expect to hear from John.'

Not much exuberance of affection: but that is characteristically Scotch. 'Dear Father' and 'Dear Mother' is all the weight of endearment that the Scotch postman has usually to carry in his local mail-bag.

Pollok sent about a dozen copies to his relations, and about a dozen to friends and acquaintance — one of these to Dr Ferrier of Paisley, who had criticised favourably one of his student sermons, written for the Divinity Hall; and another to Dr Dick, his professor, whose church he had attended in Glasgow. These men used almost the same words in their acknowledgment,

but Professor Dick failed to acknowledge his copy till after the author's death, and Dr Ferrier's praise was conveyed through 'Mr Marr.'

Immediately Pollok's poem was published it made a sensation, and within a week it was much talked of in Edinburgh. Mr Blackwood, writing in June 1827, about three months later, says 'Pollok's *Course of Time* and Aird's *Characteristics* are two extraordinary books.' In January 1828, four months after the author's death, he wrote, 'I published about a fortnight ago a second edition of the poem, and have already sold off the whole impression, consisting of 1500 copies. I have a third edition in press.' Five months later, nine months after the author's death, he wrote, 'Poor Pollok's poem, *The Course of Time*, has had a most extraordinary sale. I have disposed of four editions, making altogether nearly 6000 copies, and I am now printing another edition of 3000 copies. I have large orders already for copies, so that I expect to sell all these very soon.' Again in December 1828, fifteen months after Pollok's death, Mr Blackwood says: 'Of Pollok's *Course of Time* 12,000 copies have been sold, and it is selling as fast as ever.' In 1857, an edition was issued with illustrations by Birket Foster and Mr J. Tenniel; and in 1868 the seventy-eighth thousand appeared in Edinburgh, after the author had been dead over forty years. Mrs Oliphant tells us that the book passed 'through edition after edition, until it reached that desirable phase of becoming a prize book for the diligent scholars of Sunday and other schools—than which nothing could be more advantageous, from a material point of view.' Further, she speaks of it as 'that curiously popular poem, which sold edition after edition, both in England and Scotland, and was one

of the surest of literary possessions, though it had not been many years before the public, was one of the books chosen for illustration, and committed to the hands of Mr Robert Lauder for that purpose, who was wildly enthusiastic about it, knew half the poem by heart, and threw his whole soul into the drawings which were to embellish it.'

And how was it that Robert Pollok, only twenty-eight years of age, of meagre experience and stinted opportunity, could write such a poem? It seems a very case of inspiration. It was the outcome of his own humble and steadfast piety, and the strong sincerity of that piety commended it to the hearts of thousands. Nowadays, it is true, *The Course of Time*—that poem in blank verse, divided into ten books, and relating the history of the human race from the days when the earth was in her primeval state to the eternity beyond the Judgment Day, —has gone into almost total oblivion. But it has ardent admirers among critics whose praises ought yet to count for something.

'Delta' called it an 'extraordinary poem, vast in its conception, vast in its plan, vast in its materials, and vast, if very far from perfect, in its achievement.' The author, he adds, had 'approached his work on his knees by prayer; he addressed himself to it as an exercise of devotion. Nor was the product unworthy . . . his muse strove with unwearied wing to attain the high, scvere, serene region of Milton.' Christopher North* wrote of it: '*The Course of Time*, for so young a man, was a vast achievement. The book he loved best was the Bible, and his style is often Scriptural. . . . He had much to learn in composition; and, had he lived,

* *Recreations of Christopher North.*

he would have looked almost with humiliation on much that is at present eulogized by his devoted admirers. But the soul of poetry is there, though often dimly developed, and many passages there are, and long ones too, that heave, and hurry, and flow along in a divine enthusiasm.'

Here is part of one of the finest passages in *The Course of Time*. It is Pollok's description of Byron:

'And first in rambling schoolboy days
Britannia's mountain-walks, and heath-girt lakes,
And story-telling glens, and founts, and brooks,
And maids, as dewdrops pure and fair, his soul
With grandeur filled, and melody and love.
Then travel came, and took him where he wished.
He cities saw, and courts, and princely pomp,
And mused alone on ancient mountain brows;
And mused on battle-fields, where valour fought
In other days; and mused on ruins gray
With years; and drank from old and fabulous wells;
And plucked the vine that first-born prophets plucked;
And mused on famous tombs, and on the wave
Of ocean mused, and on the desert waste:
The heavens and earth of every country saw.
Where'er the old inspiring Genii dwelt,
Aught that could rouse, expand, refine the soul,
Thither he went, and meditated there.
He touched his harp, and nations heard, entranced.
As some vast river of unfailing source,
Rapid, exhaustless, deep, his numbers flowed,
And opened new fountains in the human heart.
Where fancy halted, weary in her flight,
In other men, his, fresh as morning, rose,
And soared untrodden heights, and seemed at home
Where angels bashful looked. Others, though great,
Beneath their argument seemed struggling whiles;
He, from above descending, stooped to touch
The loftiest thought; and proudly stooped as though
It scarce deserved his verse. With Nature's self
He seemed an old acquaintance, free to jest

At will with all her glorious majesty.
He laid his hand upon the "Ocean's mane,"
And played familiar with his hoary locks;
Stood on the Alps, stood on the Apennines,
And with the thunder talked, as friend to friend;
And wove his garland of the lightning's wing,
Which, as the footsteps of the dreadful God,
Marching upon the storm in vengeance, seemed;
Then turned, and with the grasshopper, who sang
His evening song beneath his feet, conversed.
* * * * * * *
Great man! the nations gazed, and wondered much,
And praised; and many called his evil good.
Wits wrote in favour of his wickedness;
And kings to do him honour took delight.
Thus, full of titles, flattery, honour, fame,
Beyond desire, beyond ambition, full,
He died—he died of what?—of wretchedness;
Drank every cup of joy, heard every trump
Of fame, drank early, deeply drank, drank draughts
That common millions might have quenched; then died
Of thirst, because there was no more to drink.'

Here we see Pollok at perhaps his finest. The impetus to write so well may have been imparted by reading the poet whom he was describing. There is a fuller flow of words, a richer cadence, a sweeter melody than usual, and there is a strength even to uncouthness, with here and there the ring, the throb, the swell of music, and here and there the glinting of the imaginative power that reveals the poet as distinct from the thinker. These qualities appear—though intermittently—throughout the poem, and show the possibility of development, and a real and enduring power that may account for his own faith in himself, and may explain the sympathy and generous appreciation which his little book earned for him. And how young he was! How unjust to judge him by anything *but* the very best he could do!

Moreover, the humble Scottish poet was quite right in realizing, as this passage on Byron shows pitifully that he *did* realise, the difference between the splendour of circumstance amid which Byron's genius had its upbringing and the inferior means of success allotted by Destiny to himself. But he neither complained nor despaired.

Having delivered his fourth 'trial discourse,' on the 4th of April 1827, Pollok sat on through the rest of that month in his lodging in Davie Street, Edinburgh, busy with his Latin exegesis, the prescribed Hebrew psalm, and his revision of a century or two of Church History. He wrote moreover an article on 'Serious Thought' for a new periodical, *The Esk*. While he was thus employed he received a liberal offer from Robertson, the bookseller who had published his *Ralph Gemmell* and his *Persecuted Family*, to allow them to publish them with his name. Pollok refused the offer. For 'How could I acknowledge them?' he says; 'I do not know but I may yet publish a work condemning all such writings.' The stories are now published, with his name, in collective form, under the title, *Tales of the Covenanters*, and the Rev. Andrew Thomson, D.D., in his biographical sketch of Pollok attached to the latest addition of the stories, says of them: 'In their pervading piety, in their fine moral tendency, in the generous sympathy with suffering and love of liberty which they express and excite, they go to enhance our estimate of Pollok.'

At the end of April Pollok received a letter from Mr Blackwood telling him of the signal success of the poem. On the 1st of May he read his Latin exegesis, and on the 2nd of May (1827) Robert and David

Pollok were amongst eleven students who were 'licensed to preach the Gospel.' Immediately after receiving license Robert was engaged by no less a person than Dr John Brown, (the father of the Dr John Brown, author of *Rab and his Friends*, and himself one of the most notable men in Edinburgh,) to preach next day—a 'Fast Day'—for him in his church in Rose Street.

Pollok went straight home from the Presbytery to his lodgings to learn a sermon off by heart; and he preached it at eleven the following morning. 'He came into the church preceded by Dr Brown; and on his entrance the congregation looked at him with great eagerness. He had on a gown and cassock; was pale, thin, and study-worn, and never had so interesting an appearance; indeed, there seemed something angelic or heavenly in his look.' He began his sermon with perfect composure, went on with it fluently till the 'second head,' but then he stumbled and came to a full stop. 'For a moment,' says David, telling of the incident, 'he looked expressively to me, seated directly before him in the back seat below, and I can never forget his look. He tried once more to go on, and again stopped. He then made a decided stand in an attitude of determined recollection, as if he had been thinking over the discourse entirely alone; and thus, after a short pause, during which he retained perfect self-possession, so that the audience never seemed to lose confidence in him, nor to be in the least distress, he recalled the sentence which had escaped him, and went on, from that to the end, calmly and collectively as before.' It must have been an awful moment!—most terrible, perhaps, to poor sympathetic David, 'seated directly before him in the back seat below.' How

David's heart must have been beating! How his blood must have surged to his head! Did he smile and nod encouragingly at the preacher, or did his eye meet Robert's with the fixed glare of agony? And then, when the sermon went on again, did David hear the rest, or did he hear only the thuds of his own heart? He remained, as well he might, prouder than ever of his brilliant young brother after what was really a great feat of self-possession. For, David reminds his readers, it was the first time Robert had preached in public, and the sermon was 'old-written and hastily committed to memory,' the audience was large and intelligent, the preacher's strength was exhausted, and he had just been through all the excitement of publishing his poem and hearing of its success.

Among the large and intelligent audience was Dr Belfrage, a kindly old minister from Slateford, who was to conduct the afternoon service. Dr Belfrage went after service to Dr Brown's house, and David also followed afar off, to see how Robert 'felt himself after preaching.' Dr Brown introduced the young probationer and poet to Dr Belfrage, who was a medical man as well as a minister. The introduction was a happy one for Robert Pollok; and, had he met this good friend a little earlier, it might have saved his life. 'This benevolent gentleman and skilful physician, after conversing with him for some time, told him kindly that, from what he had seen of him in the pulpit, and from what he saw of him in conversation, he was weaker and in a worse state of health than he himself seemed to be aware, and invited him to go and stay at his house a week or two for the benefit of his health.' This invitation Pollok accepted gratefully, and accom-

panied Dr Belfrage to Slateford. It is a little village about three miles west of Edinburgh, lying in the hollow between Corstorphine Hill and the Pentlands, and now with a line of railway running through it, but then with no other means of communication with Edinburgh than the canal and the very bad road that connects it with the fringes of the town. 'While there,' we are told, 'he was carefully directed by Dr Belfrage in regard to diet, exercise, and medicine proper for the recovery of his health and strength; but, alas! as will be seen, without success.' He preached for Dr Belfrage the first two Sundays of his visit, twice on Sunday, 6th May, using for his morning's sermon the same sermon that he had preached on the Fast Day the previous Thursday at Dr Brown's church in town, and in the afternoon another old sermon, and on Sunday, May 13th, the sermon that had been his fourth 'trial discourse.' He never preached again. All his preparation had led only to this — all his sessions at Glasgow University, his portfolios of essays and note-books, all his work at the Divinity Hall, all his 'trial discourses,' his Latin exegesis, his Hebrew Psalm, his century or two of Church history — how useless!

He had gone to Slateford for 'a week or two,' but he remained from the 4th or 5th of May till the middle of July. Four letters written to his father from Slateford tell of Dr Belfrage's wonderful kindness to him. 'With the worldly anxieties and fatigues of the winter,' he writes on May 8th, after he had been at Slateford for about five days, 'I am considerably exhausted, but I have here everything that can conduce to re-invigoration—a most delightful house, surrounded with the most exquisite

scenery; Dr Belfrage the kindest man in the world, and a most enlightened spirit; his son, a fine clever young fellow; and a horse to ride on as much as I please every day.' He was expected home in the end of May, but on the 27th he writes to his father: 'I am still at Slateford; my health is improving; but Dr Belfrage insists that two or three weeks more of medical treatment are necessary, and he refuses to let me leave him. I am, therefore, a prisoner, but it is in a paradise, for everything here looks as if our world had never fallen.' The whole tone of this letter is much more cheerful and natural: he tells that his poem is being well reviewed; 'Blackwood's face is shining considerably'; and 'solely on the work's account' he has been 'invited by some individuals of high standing in society.' He seems to long for letters, for he complains that he knows nothing of David, and he twice urges his father 'as a particular favour' to write to him the day he receives his letter. 'Now be sure you write directly—do not put off a day. I am extremely anxious to hear from you.' So all seemed to be going well, and in the beginning of June, when he received 'preaching appointments' for five months in the Presbyteries of Edinburgh and of Glasgow, and also Blackwood's first payment of £20, which 'relieved his mind from present anxiety,' he no doubt felt that a prosperous career was opening out before him, and, as he rode Dr Belfrage's horse in and out of Edinburgh, along the hopelessly muddy and ill-kept road, he planned the future,—the glowing sermons, the church crowded with eager listeners, the new editions of his poem, the four volumes of his great unwritten prose work, the manse study—and who knows what beside? And all the time

the Fates were laughing, and the thread of his life lay in their shears.

Some report of the true state of matters seems to have reached the old father at home, and to have alarmed him, not sufficiently, indeed, to make any of the family go to see the invalid for themselves, but enough to produce a letter, which Robert answered soothingly. He says in this answer that he ought to have written sooner to the father, but that neither he nor his medical friends had ever considered that his life was in danger. It was impossible, he says, to give in a single letter any account of how his illness began, or of what has been done for it; but it had been totally misunderstood by 'the medical friends in the west country,' on whom he had been 'accustomed to rely somewhat,' and also by a surgeon whom he had consulted in Dunfermline. He could not afford to consult 'more skilful men,' and neither could he afford the comforts he needed, nor stop work and take care of himself. His only hope of being able to do these things had lain in his 'finishing his publication and taking license.' Since coming to Slateford he has been well taken care of,—Dr Belfrage has had Dr Abercrombie, 'the first physician in Edinburgh,' to see him, and other medical men besides. Dr Belfrage and his son have nursed him themselves, given him all his medicine with their own hands, and noted all his symptoms; all this care has revived him, and he is better, and able to ride for two hours a day.

'I have not time to tell you of all the numerous attentions which I have received from literary men,' he goes on to tell his father. 'What has gratified me most is the very striking attention which I have lately received from the venerable Mr Mackenzie, aged eighty-four, author of *The Man of Feeling*. I felt his attention to be as if

some literary patriarch had risen from the grave, to bless me and do me honour.

'Now, my dear father, I know Mrs —— and other women will have strange sentimental forebodings about my health, and they will whisper, and peep, and mutter; but give no heed to them. I have strong faith that God will yet add many years to my life. What! did he not create me?—and can he not now, as he has begun to do, make me well, and keep me well? . . . And be assured that all such groundless prophesyings and whisperings come from the devil, and they often effect what he intends, by affecting the spirit of the patient; and thus one is cut off that might have been hurtful to his kingdom. As for myself, any whispering of that kind reaching my ear would greatly strengthen the principle of life within me. I should cry to God that I might live for the very purpose of proving Satan once more to be, what he has always been, the father of lies. . . . Take no notice, therefore, of whatever you may see of this kind. I am too well acquainted with Satan to be so wheedled out of my life.'

Apparently these protestations satisfied the father; and David, who paid him several visits at Slateford during the latter part of June and the beginning of July, must have also been blinded by Robert's temporary recovery. Dr Belfrage may have formed a truer estimate, for he proposed that young Pollok should go to Italy for the winter, obtained decisive opinions that this would be the best thing for him, and then, with the co-operation of Sir John Sinclair and others, got up a fund to defray the necessary expenses of the scheme. It is possible that, had Pollok gone off at once to Italy, buoyed up with the temporary strength gained by all Dr Belfrage's care of him, and with the glow of all the kindness and flattery that he had received, and the stimulation of success, of letters of congratulation, and the glamour of the visit from the 'Man of Feeling,' he might have cheated Death, whose attentions he had wooed so long in his hours of work and poverty. But the Italian project flagged. First he went to Aberdeen, 'as a voyage

of experiment, to try his ability for going to the Continent.' Now, with all due reverence for the Granite City, it may be hinted that, regarded as a health resort for a broken-down poet, Italy may have points of advantage. Had Dr Belfrage's common sense suddenly deserted him? Pollok started alone, on the 18th of July, by boat for Aberdeen. He intended to remain there a few days, then to coast round to Dundee, sail up the Tay to Perth, make some stay there, then return to Edinburgh and Dr Belfrage, and after that 'take the Lanark coach, see the Falls of Clyde, come to Glasgow, and thence to Moorhouse, whose very name sounds sacredly in my ear.' He would, he hinted, have preferred the Western Highlands, 'but I am not known in these quarters; whereas, over all the district which I have mentioned, I have numerous invitations from gentlemen of most substantial standing, so that I shall be at little expense, except for boats and coaches.' He is still in a ferment of excitement with all the letters of congratulations and the reviews that come pouring in upon him. He has been, because of the former, 'for many weeks five shillings a-week at an average for postages,' and, as his entire capital must have consisted of the £20 from Blackwood, no wonder he adds thankfully, 'but I shall now be delivered.' The reviews are exciting. The writer of a critique in a London *Review* is 'deficient in one or two of the great powers of mind':—he has accused Pollok of borrowing! But, Pollok complacently adds, 'soon after Milton published his immortal work, a critic wrote a long book, in which he undertook to prove that every fine passage in Milton was borrowed.'

And so he went to Aberdeen, arrived about half-past six in the evening, saw it was 'a town of some miles

in circumference,' had tea and an hour and a half's sleep at the 'New Inn;' by which time 'the evening had become damp.' Of course it had! — and the whole town, of some miles in circumference, smelt of wet stone, and the grey smoke rose into the grey clouds that hung low over the grey streets, and the people were hurrying along under umbrellas; and Pollok, sustained by a tea meal, made one of their number and went back chilled and damp to the New Inn, where, because it was nominally July, there were of course no fires!—and oh, Dr Belfrage, why did you ever let him out of your ken?

He stayed a little over a fortnight in Aberdeen, and wrote once or twice to Dr Belfrage. In the first letter he complains that Aberdeen is no place for an invalid; it has no shore he can reach, for the banks of the Dee and of the Don necessitate a drive of a mile and a half of town first. 'I have determined, if it be the will of Providence, to leave this lean, barren country on Wednesday first, at six in the morning.' His heart yearns to accept some invitations 'from gentlemen in Perthshire,' but his conscience points to taking his passage to Edinburgh and thence returning to the 'western coasts, where I have lived before, and where I could still live comfortably, and spend less money in a week than I do in a day here. I am, however, very fond to accept of my invitations in Perthshire.' It is not until quite the end of the letter that he remembers to make some slight allusions to Slateford; and a letter, a fortnight later, is again full of his own health, his appetite, his diet, his doings, and his new friends. It may be only lack of manners, and not

want of heart; but the one often is as bad as the other. Whether the kind-hearted Dr Belfrage was chagrined or not does not appear, but all that he does is to write to Pollok urging his immediate return to Edinburgh, 'as he had, with the co-operation of Sir John Sinclair, and other gentlemen, completed arrangements for my going to Florence or Pisa during the winter.' These 'arrangements' were a fund to defray all expenses. Sir John Sinclair had 'by mere chance' heard of *The Course of Time*, had bought and read it, had been much struck by its 'great marks of original genius,' and had been 'thence induced to enquire into Mr Pollok's history.' The result of this enquiry was that he had issued a printed circular among his friends, and gathered the funds for the winter in Italy. So, on the 7th August, Pollok, a great deal worse on his return from Aberdeen than when he went thither from Slateford, was again at the Rev. John Brown's, in Rose Street, Edinburgh; and two days later he went by coach to Glasgow, stayed overnight at an inn, and started next morning in a post-chaise for Moorhouse, to say good-bye to those at home. He had been absent for ten months—longer than he had ever been away from them before—and during that time much had happened. He had 'received license to preach the Gospel,' and, having gone away a student, now returned a minister; he had published his poem, and it had brought him sudden fame and honour, and had caused him to be written and talked about; and the quiet farm in Renfrewshire must have heard of all this notoriety; lastly, he had been very ill—more ill than his family seem to have known.

From the hour that his letter came telling his father that he would be at home on Friday or Saturday at latest, the whole family anxiously awaited the hero's arrival. What a scrubbing of floors and baking of scones!—and then, at mid-day on Friday, "someone, more watchful than the rest, said, 'There is a chaise: that will be Robert now'; and, almost as soon as the words were uttered, the chaise came up with him to the door, all in the house, old and young, running out, and gathering about it, eager to see him."

But who was this who got out of the chaise? Pale, bent, emaciated, hollow-eyed and sunken-cheeked, almost too weak to crawl into the house! Little wonder the family were stricken with a sudden pang of fear, and that the joy of arrival was quickly quelled. 'After asking for us all in the usual way, he walked into the room, and sat down beside the old table at which he used to write; and, oh! how affecting it was to see the man who had, in his ordinary health, only thirteen months before, finished there *The Course of Time*, return so weak in little more than five months after its publication.' The next day, Saturday, his elder sister, Mrs Gilmour, came to see Pollok, and he told her he wanted her to go with him to Italy. She consented, but tried to persuade him not to go. For some not very clearly explained reason all the Pollok connexion seem to have been much averse to the invalid's going to Italy; and the next day, Sunday, when all the family had gone to church, the old farmer, who alone had remained at home with his invalid son, also tried to dissuade him from going, and asked him 'just to stay at Moorhouse.' But Robert 'grew vexed,' and asked him, plaintively, 'Would you not

like to see me well?' and 'after that, no more was said on the subject.'

During the five days of Pollok's farewell visit at home, he wrote what David calls 'a curious document,' which he heads, 'Trust-deed to be held in the hands of David Pollok, preacher of the gospel, for and on account of Robert Pollok, also preacher of the gospel.—Aug. 13, 1827.' This leaves the sum of five pounds sterling to his father, 'to be appropriated for the sole and only purpose of procuring you a man-servant from the above date till Martinmas coming next.' There are various conditions that must be fulfilled: 'The servant shall be of such ability of body, and of such activity and trustworthiness of soul, as shall qualify him for taking your butter and milk to Glasgow,' and moreover, 'the servant shall not be of Highland descent.' The last clause runs, 'I hereby appoint the above-mentioned David Pollok, my most affectionate brother and friend—to whom I could entrust a world if I had it—to hold this trust-deed;' and the deed is formally signed and attested by two witnesses. Besides leaving David the care of this somewhat touching little bequest, he tells him he intends to appoint him to superintend the second edition of *The Course of Time*, and he authorises him to make a selection of all his manuscripts, should he not return from Italy, and to burn the rest.

On Wednesday the 15th of August, at about mid-day, a chaise stood before the gate at Moorhouse to take Pollok on the first stage of his journey to Italy. David was to accompany him in the chaise as far as Clarkston, where the unwilling Mrs Gilmour, with all her luggage and her scruples, was to be picked up. When Pollok

went out, "he said to his father, in a low tone of voice, 'Father, come forward a short way with me: I will not shake hands with any of them but you.' He then looked round with deep affection on the rest of his relations, standing in sadness about him, and said, 'Farewell with you all.'" The old father went on with him about a quarter of a mile, but Pollok stopt the chaise before a steep place in the road called Topped Hill's Brae, to save his father the climb back again; and they parted there. A very characteristic British parting it was, from David's account: "He then shook hands with him, gazing on him with great filial affection, as he said, 'Farewell, father!' and parted with him for the last time." The parting with David occurred five miles further on. During the five miles he had chatted cheerfully about his Italian journey, and of how he intended to work up the materials for his *Review of Literature* whilst he was there, and then 'to come home to write it.' At Clarkston, five miles from Glasgow, David got out of the chaise, and Mrs Gilmour got in—a bad exchange. David's good-bye is pathetic. He tells that he stooped into the chaise, "looking in his face, and said with unutterable sorrow, 'We never had a parting like this before!' To which he answered, with a soothing, affectionate smile, 'No; but we will meet again.' He then shook hands with me, and then he bade me farewell in his usual easy, brotherly way, and we parted—parted at one o'clock in the afternoon of the 15th of August, after having been little separated from each other for nearly twenty-nine years, never to meet again in this world." Then the chaise rattled on to Glasgow, and Mrs Gilmour arranged her various bundles about her, and thought in an agitated way of what she had left behind,

At Glasgow the brother and sister went to an inn, and, after tea there at five o'clock, Pollok was tired and went to bed, —but not to sleep, for in the evening a deputation of the students of the United Secession Divinity Hall waited on him, with 'a letter of congratulation, condolence and sympathy, written by appointment the day before.' If Mrs Gilmour had had any sense, she would have received this deputation herself, and explained that her gifted brother had gone to bed, tired by the fatigues and emotions of the day, and that, as he was somewhat seriously ill, she must forbid his being disturbed. Instead of which, Pollok received the deputation in his bedroom, and was congratulated, and condoled, and sympathised with, and had his mind very much agitated as a preparation for sleep. He left very early next morning 'in a noddy,' and one of his fellow-students saw him off in the Canal boat for Edinburgh, which left Port Dundas at seven in the morning. By one o'clock in the afternoon he was so exhausted by the bad air of the Canal boat, and its shocks against the banks of the Canal, that, instead of going all the way on to Edinburgh, as he had meant, he landed at Port Downie, near Falkirk, and stopt there for the night. Next day he travelled by stage-coach to Edinburgh, and went to the Rev. John Brown's in Rose Street, so worn out that he had to go straight to bed. The next day, Saturday, at Dr Brown's request, he sat for his portrait to Sir Daniel (then Mr) Macnee. This little water-colour sketch, finished in two or three short sittings, is now hung in the National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh. It is the face of a much older man, and is gaunt and haggard; but it must be remembered that poor Pollok, though only twenty-eight when it was painted, was in

reality a dying man. After sitting for the portrait, Pollok drove to Slateford in a post-chaise, and stayed with Dr Belfrage there till Tuesday. Mrs Gilmour was evidently not included in the invitation, for she remained behind in Rose Street. Sunday at Slateford was no doubt passed quietly; but Monday was a tiring day. In the morning Mrs Gilmour arrived, 'to pass the day with him,' and she says she found him 'still weak and restless, and not able to be out of bed or off the sofa for half an hour at a time.' His next visitor was the 'Man of Feeling,' Henry Mackenzie. What a picture this meeting makes!—the venerable old poet, then over eighty-four, and hale and vigorous, gazing with compassionate curiosity on the dying boy. The old man must have ridden or driven out to Slateford and back, to pay this visit as a token of respect, and Pollok, flushed and restless on his sofa, was 'much gratified' by it. But the day was not ended: in the evening 'his two most intimate friends, the Rev. Robert Pollok and Mr David Marr,' came to say good-bye. Pollok had gone to bed by this time, and Dr Belfrage told them that their visit was to be short, and that they were 'to qualify' their conversation. This they did, and, realising the truth about their friend, walked back to Edinburgh in the darkening evening, with a chilly mist off the sea and the east wind in their faces, depressed and gloomy, and doubtless thinking of all those past Glasgow days, and wondering at the inexplicable workings of fate.

On Tuesday morning Pollok left Slateford, drove with Mrs Gilmour and Dr Belfrage to Dr Brown's, in Rose Street, Edinburgh, where he was to stay for the night *en route*, and had a busy day in town. Sir John Sinclair,

who had got up the fund to take him abroad, sent him some writing materials and a 'muffler' for the voyage, with a formal little note, couched in the third person, telling Pollok that he had written to get letters in his favour to the British Consuls at Leghorn, Genoa, Pisa, and Naples, and also advising him to try and get the assistance of the Literary Fund to help with his expenses. Pollok then went with his host, Dr Brown, and called on Sir John Sinclair to thank him. During the day he also made his will (he had nothing but MSS. to leave!) and received 'upwards of twenty gentlemen and ladies' who called to make his acquaintance, or to say good-bye, or to give him letters of introduction. In the evening 'Mr Marr' came, and Pollok produced a whole trunkful of letters, and the two young men burnt them together—'unfolding them, and laying them on the fire, one after another, in close succession, for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes.' Anyone who has ever for his sins had to burn old letters will know how tedious and wearying a task it is, and how spitefully the faded handwritings stand out in sudden vividness on the blackening paper, a word here and there, trivial or tender, and then a shower of sparks and flakey ashes. And what an untidy fireplace it makes! It may have been to escape the sight of the fender of charred papers, or it may have been that Pollok was over-excited and could not keep still, that at a late hour he proposed that he and Marr should go for a drive, and so the two set out in a 'hackney-coach;' and when they returned at midnight they told Mrs Gilmour that 'they had taken a circuit of several miles, partly about town, and partly into the country.' Poor Mrs Gilmour, one imagines, held up her hands in holy

horror at the mad freak, and probably responded dourly, 'And weren't you wise? It's time you were both in your beds; but, of course, no one ever pays any heed to what *I* say.' And Marr hurried away, promising to return at six next morning to see Robert off. Indeed, poor Mrs Gilmour may well have felt her authority slighted, for she had tried all her powers of persuasion in vain on Dr Belfrage the previous day, to induce him to prevent Pollok from going away at all. Dr Belfrage had owned that Pollok was perhaps unfit for the journey to Italy, but had told the sister it would be best to let him go to London, and that he, Dr Belfrage, and the other Edinburgh doctors, would write to some London physicians to send him to the south of England, as this would be the best hope for his recovery. But Dr Belfrage impressed upon the sister that she was not to tell him this, but to act as if they were going to the Continent as arranged. Mrs Gilmour then 'remonstrated against letting Robert proceed to the south of England,' and gave in only when Dr Belfrage answered, 'It would be a pity not to let him go there: it would be like taking the last plank from a drowning man.' It was a pity Dr Belfrage did not take Mrs Gilmour off the plank.

At six o'clock in the morning, on Wednesday, August 24th, Pollok left Dr Brown's house, and drove in a chaise to Newhaven, whence he was to sail by steamboat to London. But a tragic thing had happened: 'Mr Marr' had failed him, and, contrary to his promise the night before, had not come, nor did he appear at Newhaven. Pollok waited as long as he could before going out to the steamer that lay some way out from shore; but no Marr. At the last moment he had to go on board, 'a good deal

disappointed.' So he stood on deck, looking disconsolately towards the pier. But what is this making for the vessel?—'a small boat, rowed by two men, with a gentleman sitting astern.' No sooner had Pollok descried it than he "instantly said to Mrs Gilmour, with great joy, 'Yon will be Mr Marr!'"—and 'yon' *was* Mr Marr. And Mr Marr, who had been distinctly told to stay overnight at an inn near Rose Street so as to be ready for the early start, had disobeyed orders and gone to a friend's house for the night, and had overslept himself. However, this was not the time for recriminations; and, 'after talking together a few minutes, Robert and he shook hands, and bade one another farewell. Mr Marr then left the steam-vessel in the small boat, and all the way, as he was going ashore, waved his hat to Robert, who stood on deck, waving his handkerchief to him in return, till he disappeared among the people at the end of the pier.'

Pollok had a wretched passage. He was a good sailor; but the vessel rolled and pitched, the engines beat and quivered, on deck it was windy and smoky, and below it was airless. 'Soon after sailing he became so weak and feverish that he needed one to attend him almost constantly; but Mrs Gilmour was so sea-sick, especially the first day of the passage, that she rather needed his attention than was able to give him any.' On Friday the 24th they reached London, and landed at Blackwall, Pollok so exhausted that he went to bed for an hour at an inn before going on to Camberwell, where he and Mrs Gilmour were to stay with a certain John Pirie, Esq. The next day, through the help of Mr Pirie, whom Mrs Gilmour describes as a 'sea merchant,' he secured accom-

modation for himself and his sister on board a trading ship which was to sail in about three days for Leghorn. So he had short time to prepare for his voyage and to consult the doctors to whom he had brought letters of introduction, and to see the sights of London. He flew about, 'in a state of bodily and mental excitement bordering on fever,' shopping and calling and visiting places of interest—St Paul's and Westminster Abbey amongst others; but at the Abbey 'he went no further than Poet's Corner.' The sailing of the vessel was postponed for two days, and Pollok spent the time in writing a letter to the students of the United Secession Divinity Hall in Glasgow, and Mrs Gilmour also had recourse to the ink-pot. Her letter, to her father, is worth quoting:

'LONDON, *Aug.* 30, 1827.

'DEAR FATHER,—On Friday (the 24th) we passed through London to Camberwell, where we have remained since in John Pirie's, Esq., sea merchant, whose house and equipage remind me of ancient Tyre, "whose merchants were princes."

'Robert has not been dissuaded from going to Italy, and our passage is taken in the trading ship *Amy*, which is to sail this evening or to-morrow morning. The captain's name is Bloomfield, an honest respectable character, and we are to have the best accommodation in the vessel.

'This going to Italy is quite different from my intention when I left Clarkston, but I have been urged by some, and applauded by others, and particularly I have been induced by the state of Robert's health, which requires some friend to go with him; otherwise I would not go for the world to the land of graven images, to a people whose language we know not, and whose manners are so different from our own. But the thing that encouraged me most was what Dr Belfrage told me, namely, that we were not to go to Italy, but to the South of England, as the only means that could save Robert; and, of course, it was natural to try it.

'Robert is scarcely ever displeased with me except when I show reluctance to go to Italy, which henceforth I intend not to do. I leave a little room for him, and remain, yours, &c., &c.,

'JEAN POLLOK.' *

To this letter Robert adds a few lines:

'DEAR FATHER,—We arrived safe in London on Friday at midday, and, notwithstanding the roughness of the passage, which was the roughest the captain made this season, I sustained it well. I have seen much of London. We have fine accommodations for Italy, and intend to sail to-morrow. I have had some work to keep Mrs Gilmour to the point. We shall likely be four or five weeks at sea: ship's name *Amy*, Captain Bloomfield, for Genoa and Leghorn. We shall write as soon as we land. Have you got a man?—see to that.'

[No Signature.]

But Mrs Gilmour was not destined to be dragged to the land of graven images. Pollok had posted his various introductions to London doctors, and thought no more about them. Three of these doctors had called at Mr Pirie's to see him, but none of these had found him in. On the very day he was to sail, it struck him he ought to see one doctor, and he sent for Dr Gordon, 'a London physician to whom he had been particularly remembered.' Dr Gordon came within an hour: he had had insufficient address in the letter of introduction, had spent two days in trying to find Pollok, and had written to Edinburgh for a more definite address. Dr Gordon told him gently and plainly that he was not able to go to Italy, and advised him to go to some quiet retired place a few miles from town. Pollok was concerned about the passage money, but Mr Pirie, the 'sea merchant,' promised to get at least one half refunded. And so ended the dream of Italy.

* In Scotland a married woman legally retains her maiden name, and it is quite usual among the poorer classes for this to be done. This may be seen in death-notices in newspapers.

Instead of somewhere 'a few miles from town,' it was arranged that he should go to Southampton, which entailed a drive of seventy-six miles. He started the day after Dr Gordon's veto had been given, on a Friday—an unlucky day on which to begin a journey—the 31st of August. He travelled fifty miles the first day, 'though he was so weak he could not sit up in the carriage without Mrs Gilmour's support,' and, after spending the night at an inn, but having had no sleep all night, he went on after breakfast next day, and arrived at Southampton about twelve o'clock. And 'this journey from London to Southampton,' his brother says, 'which was the last he undertook, and which was accomplished in a day and a half, seemed to exhaust any little strength that was left to him.'

Lodgings at Shirley Common, taken at the recommendation of the coachman, proved comfortable, clean, well aired, and with a pleasant garden. The day—the 1st of September—was beautiful and unclouded. Pollok, utterly fatigued, went straight to bed, but was both sleepless and restless. Next day, Sunday, was again fine, and Pollok went out for a walk on Shirley Common, 'to feel the fresh breezes of Heaven.' Mrs Gilmour, with a cushion in one hand and a Bible in the other, went with him, and when he rested she read aloud to him. That was his last walk. For the next two days he was able only to crawl down to the garden; after that, from about the 5th or 6th of September, he was too ill to leave his bed. Mrs Gilmour had a bed in his room, and nursed him night and day. He asked his landlady's advice regarding the doctors in Southampton, and sent for a 'young Irish surgeon,' who came daily. The young

surgeon's partner also called once or twice, and he had two visits from a Dr Denholm, 'one of the most experienced physicians' in Southampton, and one from 'a young Scotch surgeon.' Besides this concourse of doctors, he had other visitors. The Rector of the parish, having heard of the dying author in his district, called at once, though Pollok was not of his flock, and brought him grapes and delicate fruits. Another caller was a certain Owen Lloyd, Esq., who had come from Dublin for his wife's health, and who had heard of Pollok from the Irish surgeon. Mr Lloyd came frequently to visit Pollok, 'and by his many kind attentions, his Christian conversation, and his prayers, greatly contributed to his comfort and consolation.' He also concocted all sorts of cordials for him, and administered them personally.

On the 10th of September the young Irishman, Dr Stewart, took Mrs Gilmour out of the room and broke to her the news that there was no hope. When she returned, Pollok saw by her face that something had been said, and questioned her, and she told him. He took the news quietly; but, remembering that Dr Belfrage and the Edinburgh doctors had held that with proper treatment he would get well, he wanted Mrs Gilmour to send to London for Dr Gordon. 'But Mrs Gilmour, thinking it her duty to undeceive him with respect to this hope, and thus dissuade him from his purpose,' told him what Dr Belfrage had said with regard to Italy. So Pollok reflected deeply, laid himself in an easy position in the bed, and—asked for David.

Mrs Gilmour wrote next day, not direct to David, but to her father, to whom they had not as yet written again, as they had waited for the better news that never came.

After telling him, without much circumlocution, what the doctor had pronounced, she tells that the lodgings are comfortable and the landlady kind. Then she adds: 'He has a great desire to see our brother David here; and, if you could get notice to him soon, he could come by the mail straight through to London, and from thence in a few hours to Southampton.' 'I am quite well myself,' she goes on, 'and feel more comfortable now since Robert seems sensible of his frail state, and is so resigned, and I hope prepared for whatever may be the consequences.' She seems pessimistically certain of what may be the consequences, for she finishes the letter with a laconic paragraph: 'Tell my husband I expect to be home soon.' To this epistle Pollok added the last words he ever wrote:—

'DEAR FATHER,—It is with difficulty that I can repeat what my sister has written above, that I wish David to come off immediately. Whatever my gracious and merciful God and Saviour has in design with me at this time, David's presence will be equally useful. Let nothing delay his immediate coming. Wherever he is, the Presbytery will at once set him at liberty in a case of this kind. My sister is often much distressed; but we pray for one another, and take comfort in the gracious promises of God. I hope I am prepared for the issue of this trouble, whether life or death. Pray for me. R. POLLOK.'

And so the days passed, Pollok sinking rapidly, and submissive and peaceful. He kept the Bible by his bedside, and made the sister read to him passages he chose, chiefly from the Psalms and St John's Gospel. Mr Lloyd came daily and sometimes twice in the day, and continued to give him cordials of his own manufacture. 'He often prayed himself,' David tells us, 'and once bade his sister pray. Once also having requested Mr Lloyd to do so, he said he was but a layman, and not used to pray before clergymen,

but would pray as he could. Mr Lloyd then prayed, and Robert said he was greatly refreshed with his prayer.'

The only thing that troubled his deathbed was his hunger for David. "When his sister saw this desire very strong, she said to him, if he wanted anything very particular with me, if he would mention what it was, she would tell me. But he only answered, 'I would like to see David himself.'"

Mr Lloyd was with him till nine on Monday night, the 17th of September, and helped Mrs Gilmour to make the bed comfortable. After that, Mrs Gilmour read to him from the Bible, and then he sat up in bed and prayed aloud, and Mrs Gilmour chronicles that 'he put up an exceedingly sensible prayer.' Mrs Hyde, the landlady, came in to hear him, and knelt down by his bedside, and he noticed her, and prayed for her and her husband, as well as for all his own relations and friends. After that he slept, and the young Irish surgeon, Mr Stewart, with Dr Denholm, called later, but could do no more for him. At eleven o'clock Mrs Gilmour lay down on her bed to rest, but was wakened in an hour by 'a strange moan.' She went to him, and found him 'still in life, but near his end,' and she said to him, 'You are going to leave us now, Robert,' and, after a pause, he said, 'Ay.' It was his last word. Mrs Gilmour then called the landlady, 'who had expressed a wish to be brought in to see him die,' and the two women stood watching him together. He died quietly in his sleep, at one o'clock on the morning of Tuesday, the 18th of September.

Thus closed a dull, a pitiful little life: dull but for the stimulus and hope born of an eager intellect; pitiful but

for the dignity and sacredness of the poor Scottish peasant's deep and sincere piety. A short life lived among shadows, with one flash of achievement, and then —death. But 'in that sleep of death what dreams may come?' He was buried two days later, on Thursday, 20th. Mr Pirie, his London host, came to attend the funeral, and he and Mrs Gilmour were the chief mourners. The service was that of the Church of England.

And where was David all this time?

The letter, written by Mrs Gilmour to her father on the 11th, the father had sent on at once by post to David, who was living at Bathgate, between Edinburgh and Glasgow. It reached David's hands on the 19th, eight days after it was written, 'when it happened that Mr David Marr and I were sitting together waiting in great anxiety to hear from Robert.' Alas, Robert had died the day before, and no presentiment had told the faithful brother. In half an hour David was on the road to Edinburgh, which he left next morning at six o'clock for London. He reached London at 6 P.M. on the 22nd, started next morning for Southampton, and arrived at the lodgings at five in the afternoon, after three and a half days' travel. He knocked at the door, 'both eager and afraid to knock.' The door was opened by Mrs Hyde, the landlady. 'They *were* here,' she said, in answer to his question, 'but they are not here now: they are both gone. Mr Pollok is no more, and his sister has gone to London.' The faithful David was too late.

The funds that had been raised to send Pollok to Italy were used to erect a monument on his grave; and there, in the churchyard of Millbrook, near the sea-shore, two miles out of the quaint old English seaport of Southamp-

ton, is the grave of the Scottish poet, marked by an obelisk of Peterhead granite with the dates of his birth and death, and this inscription:

THE GRAVE OF
ROBERT POLLOK, A.M.,
Author of *The Course of Time:*
His immortal poem
is his
Monument.

ERECTED BY ADMIRERS OF HIS GENIUS.

And is it immortal? Have you read it, reader?

WILLIAM EDMONDSTOUNE AYTOUN

LIFE OF AYTOUN

On the 1st of October 1824 Sir Walter Scott came to Edinburgh from Abbotsford to preside at the opening of a new school, the 'Edinburgh Academy,' in the establishment of which he had taken an active part, and of which he was one of the directors. Sir Walter was then a man of fifty-three, with eight years yet to live. He was at the height of his prosperity and popularity—a dignified, kindly figure, well known and well loved in the city of celebrities. His novels were coming out at the rate of two a year, and the secret of the authorship, though not publicly divulged till three years later, was beginning to be whispered. Such was the man at whom the rows of new scholars gazed, as he sat facing them, surrounded by the eminent citizens of the Edinburgh of that day—Henry Mackenzie, the 'Man of Feeling,' Jeffrey, Cockburn, Horner, and others whose names were and are locally famous. And Scott, looking down at the rows of shining boy faces turned eagerly to him, must no doubt have wondered what the future had in store for all these youths in their blue cloth Eton jackets and their glossy white 'Russia Duck' trousers, and whether among them there sat any embryo geniuses who would astonish the world. None of the boys present on the opening day of the Academy were destined to set the Thames on fire; but one or two of them were to make a very respectable conflagration on the Water of Leith.

Among the rows of scholars was one somewhat ugly little man of eleven, whose face may have been familiar to Scott as that of the son of one of his fellow-directors and of a lady who had been a friend of his youth. And so Sir Walter's eye may have rested kindly on him, and he may even have patted his shoulder in the playground afterwards. This boy was William Edmondstoune Aytoun, whose torch, had Sir Walter known it, was to be one of true Scottish fir, kindled at the great light of Scott's own genius, and to be borne till forty years from that day as an 'after-glow from the spirit of Scott.'

William Edmondstoune Aytoun was born on the 21st of June 1813, at 21 Abercromby Place, Edinburgh. He came of good Scottish descent on either side. His father, Roger Aytoun, of the firm of Youngs, Aytoun & Rutherford, W.S., was the son of William, second son of the seventh laird of Inchdairnie in Fifeshire, and of Isobel, only child of Lieut.-Col. Patrick Edmondstoune of the Coldstream Guards. The Aytoun descent is interesting, for the family is among the oldest in Scotland, dating from the twelfth century. The Aytons of Ayton in Berwickshire were one of the Scottish families who held land under the Priory of Coldingham. In 1500 the lands of Dunmuir in Fifeshire were granted by James IV. to Andrew Ayton (Captain of Stirling Castle, Sheriff of Elgin and Forres, and Master of Works from 1500 to 1509) for 'good and faithful service.' 'A century later,' writes Lieut.-Col. A. Aytoun, in *The Aytons of Ayton*, 'his descendant, Ayton of Dunmuir, in the reign of James VI., resigned his lands into the hands of the Crown, and obtained a new charter from the King, still

extant, erecting them into a barony, to be called in all time coming Ayton, and the family to be designated Ayton of that Ilk, as the male representatives of the Aytons of that Ilk in Berwickshire.' This was after the estate in Berwickshire had passed to the Homes. The Aytoun arms are 'argent a cross engrailed, cantoned with four roses gules,' and their crest is a hand pulling a rose, with the motto, *Decerptae dabunt odorem.* 'The only Aytouns who can be traced continuously,' says the same authority, 'are the Aytons of Ayton in Berwickshire, and the three families in Fifeshire descended from the three sons of Andrew Ayton, Governor of Stirling Castle in 1500, *viz.*, the Aytouns of Aytoun in Fife, the Aytouns of Inchdairnie, and the Aytouns of Kinaldie. The first and third of these families became extinct in the male line in the last century.' William Edmondstoune Aytoun was a cadet of the line that descended from the second of those three sons—Robert Aytoun of Inchdairnie. This house, according to Hannay, produced Covenanters in the seventeenth century and Jacobites in the eighteenth. The poet of the Court of James I. and VI., Sir Robert Ayton (born in 1570), was a lineal descendant of the youngest son, Ayton of Kinaldie; of him Aubrey says 'He was acquainted with all the wits of his time in England; he was a great acquaintance of Mr Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, whom Hobbes told me he made use of, together with Ben Jonson, for an Aristarchus, when he made his epistle dedicatory for his translation of Thucydides.' And Ben Jonson told Drummond of Hawthornden that 'Sir Robert Ayton loved him (Jonson) dearly.' Sir Robert Ayton is buried in Westminster Abbey, between Poets' Corner and the entrance to Henry VII.'s Chapel. It is, as Sir Theodore

Martin points out at the beginning of his life of Aytoun, curious to note that 'William Edmondstoune Aytoun was not the first poet of his race.' But his kinsman was by no means so patriotic a singer, for he wrote in English and on English themes, and chiefly laudatory verses on his fellow-courtiers. His only connexions with the literature of Scotland are that Burns, who had evidently read him, turned one of his poems, *Inconstancy Reproved*, into the Scottish dialect—('I do confess that thou art fair')—and was also inspired by another of his poems, beginning:—

> 'Should old acquaintance be forgot,
> And never thought upon?'

to write that most popular of all Scottish songs, sung wherever Scotsmen meet together—

> 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
> And never brought to mind?'

Through his grandmother, Isobel Edmondstoune, Aytoun represented the eldest branch of the Edmondstounes, and was heir of line to the estate of Corehouse, one of whose features is the famous Falls of Clyde; but the last Miss Edmondstoune of Ednam, when nearly one hundred years of age, willed it away. It was doubtless in view of this inheritance that the little son, coming after two sisters, was given, after the Christian name of his paternal grandfather, the maiden name of his paternal grandmother—Edmondstoune.

The poet's mother was Joan Keir, the youngest daughter of James Francis Edward Keir of Kinmonth and West Rhynd, Perthshire, and of Margaret Orme of Balvaird, Fifeshire. Left an orphan when a

child, Joan Keir had been adopted and brought up by her granduncle, Mr Alexander Keith of Ravelston, whose wife, Mrs Keith, was the grand-aunt of Sir Walter Scott. When a boy, Walter Scott was often at Ravelston, and the place was, we are told, so 'dear and familiar' to him that it 'became the suggestion of his castle of Tullyveolan in *Waverley*.' Scott's sister Anne and Joan Keir were intimate girl friends; and, when Lockhart was writing his life of Sir Walter, Mrs Aytoun, who had known the great man in his boyhood, was able to supply anecdotes of him.

Mrs Aytoun's influence on her son's character must have been very great, and is easily traced. She was steeped in Scottish lore, knew by heart all the old Scottish romances and ballads, and was a staunch Jacobite. Some of her line had fought for the Stuart cause both in 1715 and in 1745, and 'from old aunts and other relatives who had been involved in the troubles of the latter period' she had gleaned many a story which she told to her little son in the nursery at Abercromby Place, and so stirred his spirit, awoke his patriotism, and quickened his poetic instinct. She was, we are told, a very handsome woman; and, moreover, she must have been a woman of strong emotional force, cultured and well read, having been trained by Keith of Ravelston to read aloud to him what Sir Theodore Martin calls 'works of a kind far beyond the usual range of a young girl's studies.' 'Mrs Aytoun, the mother, was a remarkable person,' writes Mrs David Ogilvy, who was a personal friend of the family for many years, 'full of ability, somewhat masterful to her children, but worshipping her only son, the youngest of the three, and whose tastes for poetry and legendary lore already rivalled her own.'

This was the mother who surrounded her son with the thrilling atmosphere of romance and chivalry, with the spirit of piety and of loyalty, and with the love of Scotland. So she trained him: and the Edinburgh Academy and Edinburgh University did the rest.

The poet in his boyhood had two homes—the town house in Abercromby Place, and his father's country estate, Murieston, fourteen miles west of Edinburgh, between West Calder and Kirknewton. Abercromby Place is a stone crescent in the north of Edinburgh, very open in outlook, sunny and windy, and facing the south, with its back turned to the land that sweeps northward from the City to the Forth—now covered with streets, but then open fields. The houses at that part of the town were then all new, and a great deal of building must have been going on. Lord Cockburn, in his *Memorials*, writing of a few years later than the date of Aytoun's birth, regrets the building then beginning at the north of the town, and speaks enthusiastically of the time when he and Rutherford and Richardson and Jeffrey were wont to stand on 'still nights' in Queen Street and enjoy the 'gorgeous sunsets,' and listen to 'the ceaseless rural corncraiks, nestling happily in the dewy grass.' It is quite possible that Aytoun's father may have built 21 Abercromby Place—a large corner house—or that, at any rate, he was the first occupier. He must have moved thither shortly before Aytoun's birth, for the Edinburgh Directories of 1800-1804 show him as living at 47 Princes Street, and that of 1806 at 37 Queen Street. By the year 1811, however, his address is 21 Abercromby Place, and this was the poet's home till the father's death, thirty years later. Of the look of the neighbourhood one gets a very clear picture in *The Memoirs*

of a Highland Lady. Writing of Heriot Row (a continuation of Abercromby Place) Mrs Smith says that in 1814 (when Aytoun was a year old baby) 'the situation was pleasant, though not at all what it is now. There were no prettily laid out gardens then between Heriot Row and Queen Street, only a long strip of unsightly grass, a green, fenced by an untidy wall and abandoned to the use of the washerwomen. It was an ugly prospect, and we were daily indulged with it, the cleanliness of the inhabitants being so excessive that, except on Sundays and 'Saturdays at e'en,' squares of bleaching linens and lines of drying ditto were ever before our eyes.'

Murieston, Aytoun's country home in boyhood, was a property of 200 acres, where the small boy must have had many a holiday, fishing in the burn for minnows, getting wet and muddy, driving his nurse distracted, and learning to love the country, and all that the country means to a poet who is also a sportsman, and a sportsman who is also a poet.

Two excitements occurred in Edinburgh during Aytoun's boyhood. In August 1822, when Aytoun was nine years old, the city's loyalty was stirred by George IV.'s visit; and, unless Aytoun's Jacobitism was already too pronounced to allow him to welcome one of the House of Hanover, he may be pictured as standing in the streets with boy companions, and cheering the pageant. Again, in June 1824, the city was disturbed by what are known as 'the great fires,' and it is more than likely that Aytoun, then just eleven, raced up to the Old Town to see, night after night, the great buildings in flames, and the crowds assembled to watch.

During those years, from about 1821 to 1824, Aytoun

had a private tutor, evidently to coach him in preparation for the Academy. From the fact that the name of Roger Aytoun, W.S., heads the share list for the projected school, dated November 28th, 1823, and that he is among the fifteen directors who sign the explanatory statement regarding the school, printed in December 1823, we can see that Aytoun senior was planning beforehand for the education of his little only son. The fifteen directors were all men with locally known names, and it is interesting to see, in the old reports, that the signature of Roger Aytoun always occurs next to that of Sir Walter Scott. And so, in due course, Aytoun was sent to the Academy when it opened two years later, the first rector being Archdeacon Williams; and, considering the position of the father in connection with the school, we may be allowed to suppose that both he and his son *were* present as we have fancied at that opening ceremony, though no exact record exists to prove it, and that the future author and professor of *Belles Lettres* heard that speech of Scott's, in which he told his 'young friends around him' that there was

'a class in this institution which was not to be found in any similar academy—a class for the study of English literature. It had been justly remarked that the study of classics had sometimes led to the neglect of our own language, and that some scholars could express themselves better in Latin than in English. To avoid this error, a teacher was added to the institution, who was to instruct the boys in the principles of English composition, and to connect with this a knowledge of the history of their own country. He would have the youths taught to venerate the patriots and heroes of our own country, along with those of Greece and Rome; to know the histories of Wallace and Bruce, as well as those of Themistocles and of Cæsar; and that the recollection of the fields of Flodden and Bannockburn should not be lost in those of Platæa and Marathon. . . . And when you are come to manhood, . . . happy will it be for you if you can say, "I have followed that which I heard." May you do so and live!'

So Scott's speech ended, and the boys clapped their gloved hands; and one among them, at least, when he came to manhood, could say he had 'done so, and lived.'

The Academy buildings are in the north of the town, close to Abercromby Place, and so the boy had not far to go along the grey streets in the morning, with his strap of lesson books and his 'clacken,' or rough wooden bat, the badge of the 'geit,' as the small Academy boy is called.

In his first year Aytoun was under W. H. Marriot, B.A., in the fourth class, of which the average age of the pupils was thirteen. In his strap he must have carried Virgil's Æneid (books 1, 2, and 3), the Charterhouse Rudiments of Greek, Professor Sandford's Greek Extracts, the Greek Testament, the Odes of Anacreon, and Murray's English Reader; and at the first public examination, on Saturday, 23rd of July 1825, he stood sixth in the class, though his name does not appear among those of the winners of prizes for 'particular merits.' At the next public examination, held on 1st August 1826, Aytoun was fifth in the junior division of the sixth class, taught by the Rector, and he received a prize for the 'particular merit' of being 'best reciter.' The following year, at the public examination of July 30th, 1827, Aytoun seems to have sunk in his place in the class, for he does not figure among the ten of the prize list of the sixth; but his prize for 'particular merit' this year was given for the 'Best English Verses,' which verses were of his own composition. Reference to the Rector's report for the year 1826 shows that during it the sixth English class had read the first nine books of *Paradise Lost*, and it is not difficult to discern young Aytoun's model for his first poetical piece, entitled 'Moses bringing water from the rock':—

'O Thou! to whom celestial strains belong,
Divine Urania! fraught with heavenly song,
Deign, though enshrined above the heavenly sky,
To view my labour with approving eye.
For thine the power, by God peculiar given,
To raise the soul, to lift the thoughts to heaven.
Assist and guide me from the realms of day,
And cast around me one propitious ray.'

The next year the Public Exhibition Day (Wednesday, 30th July 1828) finds Aytoun eighth in the seventh class (out of twenty pupils), under the Rector and his assistant Mr Cumming; and he again takes the special prize for 'Best English Verses,' and is also 'Best Latin Reciter.' The English verses are on *The Battle of Salamis*, and the seventh class has evidently been hard at work at Greek:—

'There is a land where spring eternal reigns,
And sweetest flow'rets deck the verdant plains—
Where through pure fields of light the zephyrs rove,
Charged with the fragrance of the spicy grove—
Where smiles the sun with pure attempered ray,
As once he beamed on Eden's earliest day:
That land is Greece—once at that magic sound
Would thousand glorious heroes rise around,
Wave their bright falchions o'er their heads, and cry,
"That is my native land, a Grecian I."'

Sir Theodore Martin, in a footnote, states that Aytoun was a favourite with the Rector, who often in the spring holidays 'accompanied him to Murieston, where the distinction of master and pupil was laid aside, and they became rivals in the art of angling.' It is quite possible, however, that the visits to Murieston were as much to Aytoun senior as to Aytoun the pupil, for Aytoun senior must have had some voice in the

appointment of the Archdeacon, and was probably, as was Scott, his personal friend.

During Aytoun's last year at the Academy he seems to have attended a class at the University, for he is entered in the University books as having matriculated, at the age of fourteen, and taken out one class in the session 1827-8. But his University life proper must have begun in 1828.

At Edinburgh University he attended the Latin Class (Professor Pillans), Greek (Professor Dunbar), Moral Philosophy (Professor Wilson, with whom he was afterwards to become so intimate), History (Sir William Hamilton), Logic and Metaphysics (Dr Ritchie), Natural History (Professor Jameson), and Chemistry (Dr Hope). Of his professors—some of whom were afterwards his colleagues—he spoke thus in an address at the Graduation of 1863:—

'. . . Those were famous days in our University, and great men dwelt among us. There was Wilson, whose magnificent eloquence, passionate and thrilling as the utterances of the Æolian harp, entranced the listener. There was Hamilton, the subtle metaphysician; Leslie, the deep philosopher; Hope, the accomplished chemist; and others of mark and eminence, instructors and almost idols of the rising generation.'

'Instructors and almost idols': the expression shows what was the spirit of Aytoun in his student days, though perhaps the back benches then as now let their idolatry be heard rather than felt. Metaphysics and mathematics Aytoun cordially disliked; but in the Latin class Professor Pillans roused his ready enthusiasm, though the Greek class failed to do so.

Aytoun became a member of the Speculative Society,

where, doubtless, he first learnt the art of speaking. Of this society Lord Cockburn says in his *Life of Jeffrey*:—'On the 11th of December 1792, Jeffrey entered the Speculative Society. Insignificant as this may seem, it did more for him than any other event in the whole course of his education . . . It still flourishes* and can never expire now, except by the unworthiness of the youths in whose days it shall sink.' Aytoun himself treats it with less reverence, speaking of 'the doubtful arena of the Speculative Society.' Perhaps it was of one evening after an 'obstruction' night at the Speculative that the following story is told:—'The poet in his youth was, at times, somewhat irregular in his hours, and upon one occasion, when his return was more than usually delayed, his father determined to sit up for him, and give him a warm reception. About two or three o'clock in the morning the senior heard a latch key, which someone, in a faltering and hesitating manner, was endeavouring to thrust into the lock of the outer door. At once, he strode into the lobby, flung wide the door, and proceeded heartily to pummel the figure standing upon the step. At last, something in the attire of his victim, and the sound of the words of protest which he raised, made him desist.' He then, to his horror, discovered that his onslaught had been made upon the person of a respected judge whose house was in the immediate vicinity, and who had mistaken Mr Aytoun's door for his own.

The active form the correction took suggests that Aytoun must have been very young at the time: never-

* This was written in 1850, but it can still be said.

theless he was soon to attain the dignity of authorship. In 1830 appeared his first publication—*Poland, Homer, and other Poems*—of both the poetry and the political sentiments of which he afterwards spoke very shamefacedly.

In the spring of 1833 Aytoun went to London, where he spent one session in the chambers of Mr M'Dougall, 'a solicitor and Parliamentary agent in large practice,' making himself familiar with Parliamentary business and procedure in Scotch appeal cases, and we are told that 'in regard to various public measures relating to Scotland' the 'local knowledge and business tact' of this mere boy of nineteen 'were found to be of considerable service.' He frequented the gallery of the House of Commons, and had some thoughts of entering the diplomatic service, but gave it up because he had not influence enough to obtain a good position; and for the same reason he eschewed the English Bar. He proposed to his father that, before deciding on a profession, he should be allowed to spend a winter in Germany, studying its language and literature. This the father assented to, though with a strong wish and hope that his son would choose the profession that lay at his feet, his own profession—that of a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh. In all this we seem to see Aytoun as the hero of his own novel *Norman Sinclair*. With the refinement natural to him, he has not introduced the hero's father into the book, whose character must of necessity, since the son is almost unmistakably Aytoun, have borne some resemblance to that of his own father. Norman Sinclair is represented as an orphan; but he is articled to a firm of Writers to the Signet in Edinburgh, and he dislikes law, and it is to the friendly partner in the firm,—who takes a kindly interest in 'the only steady clerk I ever had,'—that Norman

Sinclair confides his desire to travel before settling down to a profession. All this part is so distinctly descriptive of Aytoun's own feelings and experiences and occupations, besides being a characteristic bit of prose, that it may be quoted. Mr Shearaway, of the firm of Meiklecry, Littlewoo, & Shearaway, W.S., is represented as advising Norman Sinclair :—

'"If I were sure that you intended to enter the profession I would tell you at once to stick to the desk, and attend to nothing else; but I have a kind of notion—for I've watched you, my lad, more closely than you think—that such is not your destiny. Norman Sinclair—tell me truly; have you any deliberate plan for the future?"

'"As yet, none, Mr Shearaway."

'Shearaway had recourse to his snuff-box. "No plan for the future, Norman? Well—that puzzles me more and more. I know that you have poetry notions; though, to do you justice, you don't bring them forward, and talk nonsense about the claims of genius, like so many young jackasses, who think, because they can make two words clink together at the end of lines, that they are heaven-born poets. Poetry, when it pays, is no doubt a most excellent thing; for that is the true test of every kind of manufactures. There is no mark of merit so sure as a steady demand, let the article be what it may. Walter Scott might have written off his fingers at law papers before he would have made half as much as he cleared by the *Lady of the Lake*; and, questionless, the world has been the gainer thereby. But, Norman, more than half the brains of the nation were stowed in that grand auld head of his! We may have to wait a long while before we look on his like again."

'I assured Mr Shearaway, most emphatically, that I had not the slightest intention of cultivating poetry, or indeed any kind of literature, as a profession, and that my only object was to acquire information on certain subjects of which I was at present profoundly ignorant. I ventured to think, I said, that, whatever might be my ultimate destination, such studies could hardly fail to be of advantage.

'"Right, Norman, right!" said Mr Shearaway; "it's a true proverb that a man is never too old to learn. And you need not mind about attending the office so closely as you used to do; for, between you and me, this Reform Bill has made a sad hole in our business. We could

make easy shift with half the staff of clerks we used to employ, if it were not that the poor lads might be difficulted to find meal for their porridge. Heigho! I suppose the next thing they will do will be to cut down the forms of process."

'Profiting by this permission, I attended during two winter sessions the lectures of some of the most renowned professors in the University of Edinburgh, a high privilege which, by the Scottish system, is open to everyone who chooses to avail himself of it, without the necessity of entering into an exclusively academic career, as is the case of the great English Universities. And when summer came—for in Scotland, alas! there is no spring, winter rolling itself remorselessly, like a huge polar bear, over what should be the beds of the early flowers, and crushing them ere they are developed—when summer came, and the trees put on their pale-green liveries, and the brakes were blue with the wood hyacinth, and the ferns unfolded their curl, what ecstasy it was to steal an occasional holiday, and wander, rod in hand, by some quiet stream up the moorlands, inhaling health from every breeze, nor seeking shelter from the gentle shower as it dropped its manna from the heavens! And then the long holidays, when the town was utterly deserted, and but one or two of those singularly stolid beings, whom nature seems to have endowed with such dense organs of locality that it is a positive pain to them to wander a mile beyond their home, remain as recipients of the post—how did I enjoy these, as they can only be enjoyed by the possessors of the double talisman of strength and youth! No more care—no more trouble—no more task-work—no thought even of the graver themes suggested by my later studies! Look—standing on the Calton Hill, behold yon blue range of mountains to the west—cannot you name each far pinnacle from its form? Benledi, Benvoirlich, Benlomond! O the beautiful land, the elysium that lies round the base of those great giants! The forest of Glenfinlas, Loch Achray and its weeping birches, the grand defiles of the Trossachs, and Ellen's Isle, the pearl of the one lake that genius has for ever hallowed! Up, sluggard! Place your knapsack on your back; but stow it not with unnecessary gear, for you have still further to go, and your rod also must be your companion if you mean to penetrate the region beyond.'

All this reads almost as autobiography. The young Edinburgh lawyer with 'poetry notions,' attending the University classes, or wandering in ecstasy, knapsack on

back and rod in hand, among the weeping birches by Loch Achray,—who is this but the author himself? And how must Aytoun, the busy, successful professor, forty-six years old, have enjoyed writing his novel, and looking back with kindly interest and describing his own boyish days! Norman Sinclair went wandering on the Continent for several years before he settled in London to journalism; but Aytoun spent only six months abroad, studying at Aschaffenburg. During that time, in spite of the fact that his mind was worried about his future career, and that he was constantly writing to his father about it, and urging his reluctance and unfitness to be an Edinburgh W.S., or to study for the Bar, yet he seems to have worked hard, under Professor Joseph E. Merkel, whom he had chosen as his tutor. 'I lead a lonely and philosophic life, doing little else than reading German. I have been chiefly occupied with translating Goethe's *Faust* into English verse, which is a difficult task; but Merkel vows the translation is excellent,' he tells his mother in a letter of the 15th December 1833. He was then only twenty. The translation was finished the following March. Aytoun had at first meant to publish it in Germany, but afterwards changed this plan, for reasons which he gives in a letter to his father—a letter specially interesting because it mentions his ambition to fit himself for the chair which he afterwards held.

'I wish to publish it, even though I should rather lose than gain by it, for the following reasons: In the first place, I am not afraid of any great superiority of Blackie's translation, or at least that his can be so good as to throw mine altogether into the background. In the second—although it is now, I suppose, settled that I am to betake myself for a time to the law—I am very anxious to increase, if I can, any little literary reputation I may have acquired, which you are

sensible is not to be done by keeping my hands in my pockets. You, perhaps unwillingly, touched in your last letter upon a subject which I have for some time contemplated—viz., a Chair in the University. The Chair of *Belles Lettres*, which, in the time of Blair, was the best attended in the College, must, in the common course of events, be vacant in the course of a few years. In its present state, it is not likely that any very distinguished name will be found among the candidates, and if such should be the case I will make a push for it. I mention this chiefly to show you that I have some ultimate objects in view in pursuing my literary studies, and as a reason why I wish this translation published.'

And so the boy who had gone to the University at fourteen years old was now, before he was one and twenty, before he had any profession, or any qualifications except an MS. translation of *Faust*, planning to become one of its professors! But it must be remembered that the Chair was a very different thing then from what it has since become. The subject was not a compulsory one for any of the professions, and in 1833, when Aytoun wrote, Andrew Brown, the third occupant of the Chair, was lecturing to a class averaging from twenty-seven to thirty-seven students, and 'never ventured on examination or any attempt to secure regular attendance.' So Aytoun's hopes were not very lofty, after all.

In the midst of mastering the German language and translating *Faust*, under the superintendence of the learned Dr Merkel, Aytoun seems to have occasionally remembered that he was only twenty. In a statement of his expenses for a month, the last item mentioned is twenty-four tickets for the theatre. Twenty-four evenings out of thirty seems a pretty fair average, even in a country where the theatre is still dignified by being regarded as educational; but, as he tells us 'The only recreations which the good people of Aschaffenburg seem to court

are Rhine wine and ninepins, a game which the whole city are engaged in from four to eight every evening,' we can scarcely grudge him his theatres. He also went to some balls, two of them masked. These masked balls were held on Sunday, but young Aytoun was true to the traditions of his country. 'Now, how do you think I saved my conscience?' he says in a letter home. 'By not consulting it at all? No such thing. Guess again. Why, by staying at home till twelve chappit! There's both piety and ingenuity for you.' Besides being a canny Scot, 'Der Engländer,' as Aytoun was called by the good people of the little town on the Maine, was evidently a youth with opinions, and critically nice. He is not very gallant in his impressions of German women. 'Its ladies,' he writes of Aschaffenburg, 'as indeed throughout Germany, are chiefly distinguished for their enormous mouths and feet'; and later, in describing a ball given in the Casino in honour of the King's birthday, he states that he had 'counted four gentlemen who wore gloves.' This little touch reminds one of the description afterwards given by his close personal friend Professor Lorimer; which description reads like a living portrait of the man:—

'Scrupulously courteous and considerate in his own intercourse with mankind, nothing in others was so offensive to him as rudeness. Rusticity and *gaucherie*, if explained by the antecedents of the individual, and not too flagrantly at variance with his position, he would do his best to endure. But if any man forgot his position, whether that position was acquired or inherited, whether it was above his own position or below it, his endurance was at an end. Other faults of conduct he viewed like other honest men,—but faults of this class—impudence, insolence, want of self-respect and respect for others, were faults which subtended, so to speak, a larger angle of moral vision with him than with other people. It was not so much that disorderly conduct of this kind displeased him and made him angry,

as that it disgusted him; it seemed to offend his very bodily organs, and, far from reciprocating it, or responding to it in mind, he fled from it or thrust it from him as if it had been an outrage on his person.'

This description of Aytoun gives the key-note to his character; and this character—intense refinement, and intense enthusiasm for all that appealed to this refinement, and a keen sense of humour that never failed him,—had already begun to show itself in the youth of twenty who stood at the door of the ball-room surveying the gloveless Bavarians.

In April 1834 Aytoun returned to Edinburgh, and, finding fate too strong for him, succumbed to his father's wishes and went back to the office of Youngs, Aytoun, & Rutherford, W.S.; and, during the sessions 1831-33, he attended law classes at the University. Although his profession gave him no satisfaction, his home-life must have been a happy and cheerful one.

Mrs David Ogilvy (*née* Dick), who was an intimate friend of the Aytoun family, and has very kindly supplied many personal recollections, tells of her first introduction to them: 'On New Year's Day, 1834, we were dining with a Mrs Keith of Ravelston, when a tall and beautiful young lady of about twenty-three came in and was given the seat next to me at table. Her kindly notice of a mere child of twelve won my heart at once. She was Margaret Aytoun, eldest sister of William Edmondstoune Aytoun. We had many friends in common, and after that first meeting, my sister and I were made welcome at most of the pleasant gatherings at 21 Abercromby Place.' The same lady, Mrs David Ogilvy, writes the following fresh and delightful account of the home life of the Aytouns at this period:—

'The house at Abercromby Place was small, and scant room had the drawing-room for dancing, but what a deal of fun went on in it! William was one of a knot of clever youths:—Joseph Bell, son of Professor George Joseph Bell of Edinburgh University; Bassett Tytler, one of a brilliant family; and some others less noteworthy. They would get up dramatic scenes in the corner of the drawing-room, with as little help from accessories as Bottom and Co. themselves in the Athenian wood glades:—a few stools made a dais for Queen Victoria, in the shape of William Aytoun wrapped in his mother's fur cloak, and a gilt paper diadem surmounting his plump young face. It was the first year of her Majesty's reign, and Court gossip made many jokes which the audacious youths seized on, and Henry Jardine, as the Duchess of Kent, was well snubbed by the royal maiden. Another time, George Joseph Bell played Juliet in the balcony scene, mounted on an elbow chair, over whose back she leant as over the famous balcony. Juliet's whiskers and fuzzy hair were framed in a huge 'calash' or hood worn by old ladies going out at night, to protect their voluminous cap frills. A big rose was kept in place by Juliet's whiskers, and her airs of mock modesty were capital. Below her, on the carpet, Romeo ranted, in shape of William Aytoun, drest in a costume of odds and ends that would have astonished Verona 'good society.' He declaimed the Balcony Scene with great spirit, and just without extravagance. Another time he played alone *The Dumb Boy of Manchester*, a play then in vogue, showing how a deaf and dumb boy, the only witness of a murder, brought the guilty person to justice by an eloquent pantomime acting of the whole scene. This involved such violent contortions and efforts, that the sisters began to fear a rending of raiment; but happily buttons and braces held firm to the final scene of exhaustion, when 'the murder was out.' All that gay group are dead. Henry Jardine died early of decline; George Joseph Bell went to Asia, medically attached to the British Embassy, and died there of fever; Bassett Tytler was drowned; William himself, the longest lived of all, did not reach fifty-three years. His mother lived to ninety-four, and his sisters to eighty-seven and eighty-five. It was not till 1838 that he began to make friends with me. He gave me his poem *Homer*, and told me much of his literary work in *Blackwood*.'

The firm of Youngs, Aytoun, & Rutherford, W.S., became less prosperous than formerly, and young Aytoun did what is by no means usual. Having been admitted a

Writer to the Signet in 1835, when he was twenty-two years of age, he subsequently, while still working at his father's office, studied for the Bar, and was called in 1840.*

By the year 1841 Aytoun's father was slowly dying, and his affairs were in disorder. 'William must have had many anxious hours about his mother and sisters,' says Mrs Ogilvy? She also speaks of his reading at that time:—

'He was as keen as ever in literary tastes, and lent me Carlyle's *French Revolution*; the lurid fire of that strange book had fascinated him. He was delighted too with Carlyle's essay on his favourite Goethe. In the autumn [1841] he came to see us in Athole. Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* was just published, and William recited nearly the whole of it to me one morning on a hillside, which is for ever in my memory vivid with his voice and presence as he rolled out the sonorous trochaics. He was also very full just then of legendary lore, and the magical superstitions of the ancients. He had a most catholic taste at that time; it had not yet crystallized itself as afterwards into his Jacobite fervour. My brother had offered to beat up a roe-deer for him to stalk, but I don't think he was much of a sportsman. He preferred tracking a bison on the upland moors to a rocky waterfall.'

The Bar proved little more successful than the office. Aytoun discovered that life at Parliament House (as the Courts of Law have been called since the days of Scotland's independence) meant 'talking scandal with my brethren (when we could get it) and inventing execrable jokes, lounging at stove and library, and writing lampoons against

* This was the year that Lord Glenlee resigned, at the age of eighty-four. He was the last judge who added to the picturesqueness of Edinburgh streets by walking from his house in Brown Square up to the Courts in his judicial wig and long cravat, his silk stockings and silver buckles, and his cocked hat in his hand. When he grew aged and feeble he put the finishing touch to this by going about in a Sedan chair.

the seniors,' and he had recourse, like many others of his kind, to the pen—always so fatally near at hand. Aytoun already had a reputation for writing—he was recognised as a man with 'poetry notions.' This was by no means a help to him in his profession, for solicitors regard the muses as dangerously alluring rivals, and are apt to shun their known votaries. As yet, however, Aytoun's publications were few and far between. He had printed his *Poland, Homer, and other Poems* when he was a boy of seventeen; six years later, translations by him of several of Uhland's poems had appeared in the March and May *Blackwoods;* and three years after that the same magazine had published in May the twenty-second book of the *Iliad* translated into English trochaic verse, and in November his poem *Hermotimus.* These contributions were the beginnings of his connection with the house of Blackwood, which connection lasted all his subsequent life.

Sir Theodore Martin protests that Aytoun was not entirely briefless, and says 'He was a favourite upon the Western Circuit, where he took a good deal of criminal business. His skill in picking flaws in an indictment, in cross-examining witnesses, and conciliating juries, procured him many briefs.' Mr William Blackwood also, in his memoir of Aytoun, tells us that he 'practised some time with some success, particularly in criminal causes, and regularly attended the Western Circuit.' But this success in Glasgow and elsewhere did not bring briefs to what Sir Theodore insists on calling his 'chambers' in Edinburgh. The truth is, he was forced into a profession he had no taste for, and he never really conquered his antipathy, or had any heart in his work—otherwise he must have

succeeded. What he really cared for was writing, and to it he devoted all that was best in himself.

In 1840, the very year he was called to the Bar, he brought out *The Life and Times of Richard I.*, which was published by John Murray, and formed number seventy-two of his *Family Library* series. This book, characterised by Martin as 'a careful and agreeably-written compilation by Aytoun from the best authorities,' is not considered worthy of mention by the *Dictionary of National Biography;* and the *Scotsman*, at the date of Aytoun's death, says that 'scarcely anybody has ever heard' of it. It is now entirely out of print, and was perhaps undertaken for the sake of funds, which were not more plentiful with young Aytoun than with any other son of a professional man, dependent on his father. In May of the same year, Blackwood brought out some translations from the Romaic, afterwards included in *Lays of the Cavaliers*, and in December of the next year, 1841, the poem *Blind Old Milton.*

'It was at this time that I made Aytoun's acquaintance,' writes Sir Theodore Martin, 'through the introduction of Edward Forbes, the great naturalist, then a leading spirit among the students of the Edinburgh University, beloved and honoured by all who came within the sphere of his influence. Our acquaintance soon ripened into intimacy, an intimacy cemented by a community of tastes and pursuits, and only interrupted by my removal from Edinburgh in 1846.' It was during the early years of their friendship that they wrote together, in what Martin calls 'a kind of Beaumont-and-Fletcher partnership,' a series of humorous papers and ballads, which came out in Tait's and Fraser's magazines

during the years 1842, 1843 and 1844. The papers were all squibs against 'such of the tastes and follies of the day as presented an opening for ridicule or mirth, at the same time that we did not altogether lose sight of a purpose higher than mere amusement;' and the ballads included among them, mostly parodies of well-known styles, were subsequently published by Blackwood as the *Bon Gaultier Ballads*, and attained great popularity, thirteen large editions being issued between the years 1855 and 1877. Of these ballads, one, which Sir Theodore states was exclusively Aytoun's, is the famous *Massacre of the M'Pherson :—*

THE MASSACRE OF THE MACPHERSON.

(*From the Gaelic.*)

'Fhairshon swore a fend
Against the clan M'Tavish;
Marched into their land
To murder and to rafish;
For he did resolve
To extirpate the vipers
With four-and-twenty men
And five-and-thirty pipers.

But when he had gone
Half-way down Strath Canaan,
Of his fighting tail
Just three were remainin'.
They were all he had,
To back him in ta battle;
All the rest had gone
Off, to drive ta cattle.

"Ferry coot!" cried Fhairshon,
"So my clan disgraced is;
Lads, we'll need to fight,
Pefore we touch the peasties.

"Here's Mhic-Mac-Methusaleh
Coming wi' his fassals,
Gillies seventy-three
And sixty Dhuinéwassails!"
"Coot tay to you, sir;
Are you not ta Fhairshon?
Was you coming here
To fisit any pairson?"
"You're a plackguard, sir!
It is now six hundred
Coot long years, and more,
Since my glen was plundered."
"Fat is tat you say?
Dare you cock your peaver?
I will teach you, sir,
Fat is coot pehaviour!
You shall not exist
For another day more;
I will shoot you, sir,
Or stap you with my claymore!"
"I am fery glad
To learn what you mention,
Since I can prevent
Any such intention."
So Mhic-Mac-Methusaleh
Gave some warlike howls,
Trew his skhian-dhu
And stuck it in his powels.
In this fery way
Tied ta faliant Fhairshon,
Who was always thought
A superior person.
Fhairshon had a son
Who married Noah's daughter,
And nearly spoiled ta Flood
By trinking up ta water:
Which he would have done,
I at least believe it,
Had ta mixture peen
Only half Glenlivet.

This is all my tale,
Sirs, I hope 'tis new t' ye!
Here's your fery coot healths,
And tamn ta whusky duty!'

Here is certainly 'an opening for ridicule or mirth,' but that Aytoun 'did not altogether lose sight of a purpose higher than mere amusement' is not so clear. Aytoun, however, would have been the first to claim for 'mere amusement' a very high purpose indeed.

In March, 1843, Aytoun's father died, and Aytoun, with his mother and two sisters, removed to 11 Fettes Row, a small house, near to the former one in Abercromby Place. The father's death forced Aytoun to consider his professional position, for he had now to earn his own living, and could no longer afford to ignore the law and dally with literature: one or other must be adopted seriously. Till now he seems to have been much under the dominion of his father, for, just as his adoption of a profession was entirely contrary to his own wishes and dictated by those of the elder man, so also his political leanings, always strongly Conservative, had been kept well in the background during his father's lifetime 'from regard to his father's feelings.' Yet Aytoun was thirty at the date of his father's death, and by no means of a passive temperament. Enthusiastic, patriotic, an intense Jacobite, and with a keen sense of the ridiculous, an inborn love of poetry, and his conservatism more an emotional sense than a commonplace party creed, it must often have gone hard with such a man to have to subjugate his own personality to that of the sober Edinburgh Whig lawyer, who had apparently asked nothing more of life than a judicious admixture of punctually-attended office hours and respect-

able leisure in Abercromby Place. One wonders whether Aytoun's early triumphs were confided to his father; whether, when Aytoun glowed and thrilled at hearing one of his own ballads sung to a street crowd, it was to the father or to the mother he went to tell the tale — the mother who had taught him ballad lore in his nursery days. "Seldom have we experienced a keener sense of our true greatness as a poet," he says in an article on *Ancient and Modern Ballad Poetry*, "than when we encountered, on one occasion, a peripatetic minstrel deafening the Canongate with the notes of our particular music, and surrounded by an eager crowd demanding the halfpenny broad-sheet. 'This is fame!' we exclaimed to a legal friend who was beside us; and with a glow of triumph on our countenance, we descended the North Bridge to indite another of the same." The triumph is undeniable, in spite of the half-humorous touch in the 'true greatness as a poet,' and in the dignified adoption of the editorial 'we.' But would the Whig father have stopped to share the triumph? Or would he have taken a 'minibus' home? One wonders.

After his father's death, Aytoun's conservatism became more public: he showed his colours, and he wrote a good deal on political themes. The Conservative was not then the popular party, and by attaching himself to it Aytoun was not improving his worldly prospects; and moreover he brought on himself the accusation of being a turn-coat from those who remembered his association with Whiggery in the times when he was attached to his father's firm, who were the Duke of Hamilton's agents, and whose dealings were all with the Whigs.

Although all Aytoun's biographers unite in denying this

charge, it is to the late Professor Lorimer, who knew Aytoun so intimately and appreciated him so fully, that we must go for the most sympathetic and discerning explanation why his political feelings were part of his character, and how this apparent change from Whiggism to Toryism came about.

'From his abhorrence for rudeness and all that was disorderly and anarchic in social intercourse,' said Professor Lorimer,* 'it naturally followed that he attached a very high value to social organisation, to the existence, I mean, of the various classes into which society is arranged in old historical countries, and to the traditional rules by which these distinctions are maintained. It is possible that, to some extent, this feeling may have been strengthened by the accident of birth, for, though he owed his fortunes entirely to his own exertions as a lawyer and a man of letters, he was descended from an old family of country gentlefolks. . . . Though he was far from making light of the advantages of hereditary cultivation and refinement as claims to the respect of others, he valued them much more for what they enabled their possessor to confer on society than for anything they could possibly entitle him to exact from it. *Noblesse oblige* he understood, as it should always be understood, as indicating duties, not rights; . . . Now the watchword of conservatism, as Professor Aytoun understood it, and as all sensible men understand it, its distinctive badge, and symbol, was *order;*—not social exclusiveness, not political finality, but order, social and political; organic existence in the State, as opposed to that inorganic, anarchic, chaotic scramble for existence in which everybody would be uppermost, and where there is no King in Israel, towards which he thought, or felt, that the other political parties were drifting. Just as liberty is the guiding star of one class of minds, order is that which attracts another, necessarily and inevitably; and Professor Aytoun's mind was of the latter class. Born amidst Whig traditions, his congenital instincts were Conservative, and his instincts finally prevailed over his traditions.'

But it was not till his father was beyond caring that Aytoun allowed his 'congenital instincts' to affect his

* Introductory Lecture to his class on 2nd November 1865 (reprinted in *Studies National and International*).

public work. Political feeling ran high at the time. Not many years before this, the Lord Provost, walking down the High Street after an unpopular election of a city member who had opposed Jeffrey, had been mobbed and driven to take refuge in a shop, and rioting and stone-throwing had continued all day and night, and the soldiery had had to be sent for. It was a time when men had to walk warily, and it was remembered in the drawing-room as well as on the hustings whether a man was a Whig or a Tory. It is noticeable, for instance, that throughout Cockburn's *Memorials* Aytoun's name is not mentioned. Cockburn, who notes every new election to a University Chair, and who had attended the introductory lecture of Aytoun's predecessor, Moir, who was also an advocate, takes no notice of Aytoun's election. Moreover Cockburn, who discusses all men and all matters of Edinburgh interest throughout all the years when Aytoun must have been often before his eyes both in Parliament House and in society, never once speaks of him. It may be a mere accident, but it is significant. There are even one or two places in the *Memorials* where the omission of Aytoun's name is marked. One of these is when Lord Cockburn writes fully about the great Burns Festival in 1844.

'Of course it was a bad day,' he writes, 'which half spoiled the procession; but there was a wooden building which sheltered about 2000 people during a collation and much eloquence. Lord Eglinton, an able man and not at all a bad speaker, was in the president's chair, and Professor Wilson in the croupier's. But on the whole, candid minds (for I was not there) make it rather a heavy affair. The great defect was in the absence of eminent men. Wilson was the highest in literature, Eglinton the only one of high rank.'

Now, one of the chief speeches was young Aytoun's in

proposing 'The memory of the Ettrick Shepherd and Allan Cunningham,' and it was afterwards published, with an account of the Festival, in the September *Blackwood*. As Aytoun, though not then an 'eminent man,' was a decidedly rising one, and must have been known to Cockburn as a younger member of his own profession, it would have seemed very natural for Cockburn to have a word to say about his contribution to the 'eloquence.'

It was in May 1843, just two months after the death of Aytoun's father, that a great historical event in Scotland took place, affecting thousands of people—the Disruption of the Church of Scotland. For ten years an agitation had been going on in the Church; but the original *casus belli*, the question of patronage, had become merged in a wider controversy regarding the relative positions of Church and State; and Dr Chalmers was the leader of the party that contended for new reforms. All hope of legislative settlement having failed, the 'Disruption' took place at the General Assembly, held in S. Andrew's Church in George Street, Edinburgh, on the 18th of May 1843. Of the scene, Lord Cockburn gives a graphic account in his *Memorials*. After having told that about 123 of the ministers and 70 of the elders who were members of the Assembly followed Dr Welsh, the Moderator, out of the building (thus separating themselves from the Established Church of Scotland) he goes on:—

'As soon as Welsh, who wore his Moderator's dress, appeared on the street, and people saw that principle had really triumphed over interest, he and his followers were received with the loudest acclamations. They walked in procession down Hanover Street to Canonmills, where they had secured an excellent hall, through an unbroken mass of cheering people, and beneath innumerable handkerchiefs waving from the windows. But amidst this exultation there was

much sadness and many a tear, many a grave face and fearful thought; for no one could doubt that it was with sore hearts that these ministers left the Church, and no thinking man could look on the unexampled scene and behold that the temple was rent without pain and sad forebodings. No spectacle since the Revolution reminded one so forcibly of the Covenanters.'

Aytoun was within a few hundred yards of this scene, but he was outside the enthusiasm and the deep feeling displayed, for he was a member of the Scottish Episcopal Church. This Church is the survival of the times when Scotland was Episcopal, and to it still belong many of the old Scottish families who have always been Episcopal. According to Dr Carlyle of Inveresk, 'When Presbytery was re-established in Scotland at the Revolution, after the reign of Episcopacy for twenty-nine years, more than two-thirds of the people of the country, and most of the gentry, were Episcopals.' Of Aytoun it is testified by Mr Blackwood, in his *Appreciation*, published in the Magazine after Aytoun's death, that he 'was a sincere and humble Christian,' never irreverent in speech or writing, and that he was 'always a devoted and exemplary, though never a bigoted, adherent' of the Scottish Episcopal Church.*

With Aytoun his religious creed was no outward protestation; it affected his whole character and disposition, and many of his noblest feelings were the direct outcome of it. His Jacobitism, for example, was strongly in keeping with the traditions of his Church, which had remained staunch to the Stuart cause to the very last.

* It is worth noting that Aytoun attended the Church of S. John the Evangelist (at the south-west corner of Princes Street) during his entire life, from the days when he was taken to it as a boy by his parents till his death.

All this makes it understandable why young Aytoun, though he had taken a lively interest in the struggle which attracted so much attention in Scotland at the time, yet did so as merely a spectator, and why his sympathies were all with the Conservative party in the Church—the upholders of patronage and of state government. During the agitation preceding the Disruption he had published a strong pamphlet, called *Our Zion, or Presbyterian Popery, by Ane of that Ilk*, against the strife in the Church; and later on a ballad of his was printed as a broadside, and sung about in the streets, where its somewhat flippant wit had won for it a ready audience. As usual, Aytoun had seen the humorous side :—

THE ELDER'S WARNING.

A Lay of the Convocation.

'Noo, John Makgill, my elder, come listen to my word,
It's time to leave the harrows, it's time to draw the sword;
The sheep may wander on the hill, the stots rout in the byre—
But another path is ours, John, through danger and through fire.
The cloud of tribulation that we hae lang foreseen
Has gathered ower the land, John, like mists that rise at e'en;
The palings o' oor vineyard are gey near broken doun,
An' the bits o' vines are trampled by greedy laird and loon.
The auld Erastian lords have put their feet upon oor necks,
And oor chalders they have dwindled to little mair than pecks;
Thae weary interlocutors come pelting every day,
And the bills and the expenses are mair than we can pay.
But, what is waur nor a', John, while thus distressed we stand,
Black Prelacy is crawling like pushion through the land—
The Scarlet Woman will be here to sit within oor ha',
For when ye see a Bishop, John, the Paip's no far awa'.
They'll soon be here to tithe ye—they'll tithe both stot and stirk;
O I waes me for the Covenant, and waes me for the Kirk!
They're ettling for the manses, John—they're ettling fast and fain,
And they'll be bringing Tam Dalyell and Claverse back again.

But we'll meet them on the ground, John, whaur we met them ance afore,
And pay thae weary Moderates a black and bitter score.
Sae lang's we're a' united, it winna do to bow
To the cankered Lords o' Session, and their wigs o' plastered tow.
We'll gather on the hills, John,—we'll gather far and near—
And Candlish he will lead the van, and Cunningham the rear;
We'll think o' Bothwell Brig, John, and the raid o' Rullion Green;
We'll show them that we loe the Kirk far better nor the Queen.
Our Zion is in danger, sae tak' your auld claymore;
And tak ye doun the ranchan that hangs ahint the door,
And put your braid blue bonnet on, an' we'll daunder up the glen,
And meet the bauld Conventicle, as our fathers did, ye ken'.

Auld John Makgill he listened, and whiles he wat his thumb,
And whiles took up the cutty-pipe that lay beside the lum;
And whiles he keekit in the pat that held the simmering kail;
But ne'er a bit he lifted his ranchan frae the nail.
"Nae doot, nae doot! an awfu' case! The times are unco hard,
And sae you're thinking, minister, to leave your ain kail-yard,
And the bonny manse and stipend, that was worth twa hundred pund—
And the Netherbaugh glebe-acres—it's grand potato-grund!
An awfu' dispensation! I canna say ye're wrang,
For gin ye think ye shu'dna stop, ye're very right to gang.
And sae the Lords have beat the Kirk? that's waefu' news to tell;
Ye'se hae my blessing, minister, but I canna gae mysel'.
My auld claymore's just useless; it's rusted fu' o' holes—
Indeed, the bairns have broke it wi' hacking at the coals.
The rheumatiz is in my back—I canna tell how sair—
An' I got my death wi' driving the beasts to Hallow Fair.
I'm no the body that I was—ye ken I'm getting auld;
And as for lying out o' doors, the nights are dismal cauld!
Ye'll need a gude thick greatcoat gin ye're ganging up to sleep
In the bare and broken heather, 'mang the moorcocks and the sheep.
Ye'll find it's warmer lying, gin ye lie down heads and thraws
Wi' the ither noble gentlemen that winna thole the laws.
I'm verra laith to lose ye, and so is Jenny here—
There's no a better likit man in ony pairish near;
But gin the case is pressing, I wadna dare to say
Ye'd better take a thought on't, and bide anither day.

'Twill be an unco comfort, when the nights are cold and mirk,
To think that ye are chosen to suffer for the Kirk.
For me it's clean impossible—ye ken I'm auld and frail;
But surely, sir, afore ye gang, ye'll stop and taste our kail."

Now glad should he our minister that he called at John Makgill's,
For cosily he kept the manse, and never took the hills.'

When the prophecy in Aytoun's ballad was proved wrong, and both minister and elder *did* take to the hills, Aytoun was not in a mood to heed public events, for his kindly genial soul was sad and his humour was silenced, and he was in the first grief at the loss of his father.

The two years from his father's death till he was appointed to the Chair must have been a trying time to Aytoun. His tastes and his character suited neither poverty nor the atmosphere of the law; and yet the only way to avoid the one seemed to be through the other. It was during those years, however, that he wrote some of his best and most famed pieces, both of prose and verse. Shortly after his father's death, when he must have been in great depression, he wrote *The Burial-March of Dundee*, and *Charles Edward at Versailles*: these were both published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and were the first things, writes Mr William Blackwood, that 'made him known as a true poet.' In 1844 he became one of the staff of *Blackwood*, and thus a colleague of Professor Wilson ('Christopher North') and Dr Moir ('Delta'), and other kindred spirits. In September 1844 Blackwood published his speech delivered at the Burns Festival, and in May and October 1845 he printed two squibs on the Railway Speculation mania, then rife in Britain, *My First Spec in the Biggleswades*, and *How we*

got up the Glenmutchkin Railway. If *The Burial March of Dundee* and *Charles Edward at Versailles* made him known as a poet, these two squibs stamped him as a humourist, and it is as that rare blend—a poet and a humourist,—that Aytoun remains famous.

Of the two poems mentioned, *Charles Edward at Versailles* may be chosen as perhaps the most thoroughly characteristic for quotation.

CHARLES EDWARD AT VERSAILLES.

'Take away that star and garter—
Hide them from my aching sight!
Neither king nor prince shall tempt me
From my lonely room this night.
Fitting for the throneless exile
Is the atmosphere of pall,
And the gusty winds that shiver
'Neath the tapestry on the wall;
When the taper faintly dwindles
Like the pulse within the vein,
That to gay and merry measure
Ne'er may hope to bound again.
* * * * *
Fatal day! whereon the latest
Die was cast for me and mine—
Cruel day, that quelled the fortunes
Of the hapless Stuart line!
Phantom-like, as in a mirror,
Rise the grisly scenes of Death—
There before me, in its wildness,
Stretches bare Culloden's heath:
There the broken clans are scattered,
Gaunt as wolves, and famine-eyed,
Hunger gnawing at their vitals,
Hope abandoned, all but pride—
Pride—and that supreme devotion
Which the Southron never knew,
And the hatred, deeply rankling,
'Gainst the Hanoverian crew.

Oh, my God! are these the remnants,
These the wrecks of the array
That around the royal standard
Gathered on the glorious day
When, in deep Glenfinnan's valley,
Thousands on their bended knees
Saw once more that stately ensign
Waving in the northern breeze!

* * * * *

Let me feel the breezes blowing
Fresh along the mountain side!
Let me see the purple heather,
Let me hear the thundering tide,
Be it hoarse as Corrievreckan,
Spouting when the storm is high—
Give me but one hour of Scotland—
Let me see it ere I die!
Oh! my heart is sick and heavy—
Southern gales are not for me;
Though the glens are white with winter,
Place me there and set me free.
Give me back my trusty comrades—
Give me back my Highland maid—
Nowhere beats the heart so kindly
As beneath the tartan plaid!
Flora! when thou wert beside me,
In the wilds of far Kintail—
When the cavern gave us shelter
From the blinding sleet and hail—
When we lurked within the thicket,
And, beneath the waning moon,
Saw the sentry's bayonet glimmer,
Heard him chant his listless tune—
When the howling storm o'ertook us,
Drifting down the island's lee,
And our crazy bark was whirling
Like a nutshell on the sea—
When the nights were dark and dreary,
And amidst the fern we lay,
Faint and foodless, sore with travel,
Waiting for the streaks of day;

When thou wert an angel to me,
Watching my exhausted sleep—
Never didst thou hear me murmur—
Could'st thou see how now I weep!
Bitter tears and sobs of anguish
Unavailing though they be,
Oh! the brave—the brave and noble—
That have died in vain for me!

In 1845, two years after his father's death, and when Aytoun was thirty-two years of age, the Chair of Rhetoric and *Belles Lettres* in the University of Edinburgh fell vacant by Professor Spalding's resignation. This was the opportunity that Aytoun had foreseen twelve years previously, when he was translating *Faust* at Aschaffenburg. There does not seem to have been any keen competition for the post, for we hear nothing about rival candidates nor printed testimonials, but merely that he 'received' the Chair from the Crown.

This Chair was instituted in 1762, and the first professor was Hugh Blair, who held it for twenty-two years, till 1784. After him came William Greenfield (1784-1801), then Andrew Brown (1801-1835), then George Moir, advocate, a contemporary of Aytoun's, who held the Chair for five years only, from 1835-1840, and was succeeded by William Spalding, who again kept it for only five years, leaving it for the English Chair in St Andrews University. This was then the better post financially, for in 1845 the salary attached to the Chair in Edinburgh was only £100 a year, to which the average fees added about £130.

Aytoun was inducted to the Chair on Saturday, October 25th, 1845, the same day on which the late Professor Balfour was inducted into the Chair of Botany. There were present eight members of the Town Council, then

the patrons of the University, and Professors Brunton, Monro, Jameson, More, Lowe, Christison, Simpson, Robertson, Syme, Swinton, Dunbar, Thomson, and Henderson, also in their robes; and, in the absence of Principal Lee, Dr Brunton officiated as chairman of the Senatus Academicus. The 'College Bailie,' Bailie Duncan, introduced Aytoun to the Senatus, and his speech, as reported in the *Scotsman* of the next day, cannot have been gratifying to the new Professor, for the worthy Bailie takes half a column to lament that the King is dead, and barely two lines to cry, 'Long live the King.' He rates the University soundly because it has allowed Professor Spalding to seek fresh woods and pastures new. Several of the chairs, he tells the listening Senatus, are so inadequately endowed that professorships in other colleges are objects of preference if not of desire, and it is far from right that the University of Edinburgh, after having secured the service of eminent men, should be deprived of their services by reason of the superior inducements held out by other colleges in Scotland, and he would be glad should the matter receive the attention of Government. 'With respect to Mr Aytoun,' he concludes, he has 'every confidence that that gentleman will satisfactorily discharge the duties of his new office.' Dr Brunton replied; Professor Aytoun was robed and took his place, and the Bailie's confidence was not misplaced.

On Wednesday, 3rd of December 1845, at three o'clock in the afternoon, 'Professor Aytoun' (reports the *Scotsman* of Saturday, December 6th, 1845)

'delivered his introductory lecture on Rhetoric and *Belles Lettres* in the University to an overflowing audience, so that it was found necessary to occupy the Materia Medica large class-room. The prelection displayed great talent, and was listened to with deep interest. Among the audience were many of the professors, Lord Robertson, and a great number of gentlemen connected with the Bar.'

A glance at the column headed 'Amusements' in the same *Scotsman* shows that the 'benefit' of Miss Faucit (afterwards Lady Theodore Martin) took place that night at the Theatre Royal; and it is within probability that Aytoun went to the theatre in the evening, to calm his nerves after the fatigue and excitement of his triumph in the afternoon, accompanied by his friend Theodore Martin, who was at that time also resident in Edinburgh.

The Bailie was right in what he had said about the Chair, for so poor a thing was the post in those days that wise heads were shaken over the rash young man who had preferred it to waiting on the chance of succeeding at the Bar. But Aytoun knew himself best, and in what direction his capabilities lay; and, writing to Sir Theodore Martin in after years, he said of the Chair, 'It was the making of me.' In those days degrees were not taken by Arts students, and so the class was not a compulsory one; but the students who attended it were then, as now, destined for the Church, or for the Law, or were to become teachers or writers for the press. Most of the previous professors of English had merely lectured to them; but Aytoun had the spirit and love of teaching, and he made the students do practical work in the class, and prescribed exercises to them which he corrected and returned. His lectures were brilliant and inspiring, and he himself became deservedly popular with the students, combining, as he did, a genial charm and kindliness of manner with a dignity which was natural to him, and which assisted him in keeping good order. The late Sir Alexander Grant, in *The Story of the University of Edinburgh*, says of Professor Aytoun that 'he became very popular, and the Rhetoric class, which had hitherto been regarded as hopeless, steadily increased

in numbers under Aytoun from 30 to 150. This success struck the University Commissioners of 1858-1862; they commented on it in their Report, and, instead of abolishing the Chair, as the Commission of 1826 had recommended, they consolidated it. They changed its name to that of the Chair of 'Rhetoric and English Literature'; they made English literature a necessary subject for graduation in Arts; and they added £100 a year from the money voted by Parliament to the salary of £100 formerly granted by the Crown.'

This, then, was Aytoun's work at the University; but a six-month session of four lectures a week to thirty students (all that the class numbered in Aytoun's earlier sessions) did not entirely fill up the Professor's time, nor did an income of two hundred and thirty pounds a year entirely content his purse; therefore Aytoun continued to practise at the Bar, and to write regularly for *Blackwood's Magazine*, of which he had become one of the staff a year previous to his professorial appointment, and to which he now contributed something nearly every month. The Magazine was then under the editorship of the late Mr Alexander Blackwood and the late Mr Robert Blackwood. Professor Aytoun had known both of them since he was a boy, and the connection, Sir Theodore Martin says,

'was not that of author and publisher merely, but of friend and friend. Aytoun was proud of being a writer for Maga; but, far more than any feeling of this sort, his personal regard for the Blackwoods attached him to their literary staff. Whatever attraction the wider field which London offers to literary ambition might otherwise have had for him disappeared after his agreeable relations towards them were established. He delighted in working for them, and they on the other hand treated him with entire confidence. The result was equally satisfactory on both sides. He gave the Blackwoods his

very best work, and in doing so he made for himself a more prominent and influential reputation than without their assistance he could have hoped to attain.'

From the year 1845, then, Aytoun's life had begun to run on the lines that it was to continue on. And, whilst he was going backwards and forwards to the University, lecturing to his students, writing articles for *Blackwood* and haunting the Blackwood salon in George Street, and at times toiling up the Mound and chatting with his legal brethren at Parliament House,—who were the other leading citizens, academic, literary, and legal, that trod the streets of Edinburgh with him?

Among Aytoun's colleagues in the Senatus at the time when he was appointed were these:—Professor Pillans (Humanity: Succeeded two years before Aytoun's death by Professor Sellar), Professor Kelland (Mathematics), Professor Dunbar (Greek: Succeeded seven years later by Professor Blackie), Sir William Hamilton (Logic: Succeeded eleven years later by Professor Campbell Fraser), Professor Wilson (Moral Philosophy: Succeeded eight years after by Professor Macdougall), Professor Forbes (Natural Philosophy: Succeeded five years before Aytoun's death by Professor Tait), Professors Brunton (Hebrew), Robertson (Church History), Campbell Swinton (Civil Law), Allan Menzies (Conveyancing), Allen Thomson (Institutes of Medicine), Alison (Practice of Physic), Monro *Tertius* (Anatomy: Succeeded a year after Aytoun's appointment by John Goodsir), Sir James Y. Simpson (Midwifery), Gregory (Chemistry: Succeeded thirteen years later by Lyon Playfair), Sir Robert Christison (Materia Medica), Professor Syme (Clinical Surgery).

In the Blackwood salon Aytoun came constantly across Dr Moir ('Delta') and Professor Wilson ('Christopher North'), with both of whom he was very intimate. Among the more occasional visitors to the salon was De Quincey, whose weird and quaint little personality must have often roused Aytoun's kindly but ever-present sense of humour. 'The thunders and lightnings of the great Chalmers' were not silenced nor darkened till two years after Aytoun was a professor, but Chalmers had quitted the Chair of Divinity in 1843, two years before. Aytoun therefore did not know him as a colleague; but only by fame and chance meetings. He must also have met those eminent citizens, the brothers William and Robert Chambers, who were both resident in Edinburgh in those days (though Robert Chambers left it afterwards for a few years' residence in London), and who were prominent figures in the Scottish capital. *Chambers's Journal*, begun in the year of Scott's death (1832), when Aytoun was a young law student, was by this time a periodical of some dozen years' standing. Besides these Edinburgh residents, Alison from Glasgow and Ferrier from St Andrews were occasional visitors.

Dr John Brown was in Edinburgh, and writing for the *North British Review* (edited by Hanna), though he did not openly assume the character of an author till about 1858, when he published the volume including *Rab and his Friends*. Hugh Miller was editor of the Free Church newspaper called *The Witness*, but Aytoun cannot have had much in common either with him or with George Combe, who was also in Edinburgh till 1858, though he may have known both, at any

rate by sight. Baroness Nairne died in the year that Aytoun was appointed to the Chair; but it is more than probable that during her last visit to Edinburgh, in 1844, when she visited her younger sister, Mrs Keith of Ravelston, Aytoun and his mother and sisters must have met her either at Ravelston, the home of Mrs Aytoun's girlhood, or elsewhere; and that after her death, when her sister published the poems and revealed the authorship, Aytoun remembered the meeting and wished he had known at the time that he was speaking to a kindred spirit.

Among the judges at that time were Lord Jeffrey, Lord Cockburn, and Lord Neaves. Lord Jeffrey must certainly have known Aytoun, in society and at the Parliament House; but the entire difference of their views seems, so far as can be ascertained, to have kept them apart, as was also the case between Lord Cockburn and Aytoun. Lord Neaves, however, was a staunch Conservative, and he and Aytoun were intimate friends, met often, and had many interests in common.

Another well-known person in Edinburgh was Dean Ramsay, who was the officiating clergyman at the Church of S. John the Evangelist in Princes Street, to which Aytoun belonged. He was throughout Aytoun's life one of his personal friends.

These then were the names and faces in daily familiarity with Professor Aytoun at the beginning of his career; and in the year 1849, after he had been for four years a professor and for five years on the Blackwood staff, he became closely connected with one of the most notable of them, for in that year he married Jane Emily, the youngest daughter of Professor Wilson, who was doubly his colleague—as Pro-

fessor Wilson in the University, and as 'Christopher North' in the Blackwood coterie. A pretty story is told of how, when Aytoun called on Professor Wilson to ask his consent to the marriage, the older professor, after the interview was over, sent his unconscious daughter into the room to Professor Aytoun, with a sheet of paper pinned to her dress and the familiar inscription on it: 'With the author's compliments.'

The marriage took place on Wednesday, 11th of April (just after the College session was over), and it was celebrated at 'St John's Episcopal Chapel,' as it is phrased in the announcement in the *Scotsman*, 'by the Very Rev. E. B. Ramsay, Dean of the Diocese.'

On the 26th of November in the same year Edinburgh University conferred the honorary degree of A.M. on Professor Aytoun. This was in all probability because the arts degree had begun to be taken by art students, though by no means habitually, and therefore it struck the Dean of the Arts Faculty that it would be fitting were the professor of *Belles Lettres* able to add a degree to his name.

After their marriage Professor and Mrs Aytoun lived for four years at 1 Inverleith Terrace. The year after his marriage Aytoun wrote a good many political papers for *Blackwood*, upholding the Protection policy, and very often an issue of the magazine had in it more than one article from his pen.

In 1852 Aytoun was appointed Sheriff of Orkney and Shetland. This Sheriffship was given him by Lord Derby in recognition of his services to the party, and was a most congenial post to him, for it necessitated his spending a good deal of each summer in Orkney, and Aytoun from his boyhood had loved country life and sport.

His political services having thus been rewarded, the following year his literary merits were noted by the authorities of Oxford, who made him a D.C.L. in June 1853.*

At the beginning of 1853 Aytoun bought a new house, 16 Great Stuart Street. This change of residence he attributes, in a humorous letter written to his intimate friend and Sheriff-Substitute, Mr James Robertson, and quoted at length by Sir Theodore Martin, to the dampness of the house in Inverleith Terrace and its distance from both Parliament House and College. He describes the Inverleith Terrace house as 'a small one, and very ill furnished,' and adds 'There was a certain white silk dress, which recalls indistinct reminiscences of the altar, hanging peacefully on a peg. Blight and mildew! It was spotted like a leopard's skin.' The purchase of the Great Stuart Street house, 'big enough to lodge a patriarch,' and in the best part of the town, may however have had some connexion with the fact that the post of Sheriff must have added considerably to Professor Aytoun's income. "I am not frightened at what I have done; I am simply stupefied,' the letter to Mr Robertson continues. "There will be the plumber, and the gasfitter, and the painters; hum of upholstery work, and the slave that vendeth carpets, with all manner of minor harpies, upon me at once. They will snap up the whole of my corn, and fatten upon the fruits of my intellectual labour for years. I have just been walking about the house, after the manner of Solomon Eagle, with a brazier upon my head, exclaiming, 'Woe! woe!' to the infinite terror of the housemaid."

* This is the date given in Sir Theodore Martin's *Life*, but the *Dictionary of National Biography* gives the year as 1846. It is more likely that the later date (1853) is the correct one.

After the plumber and the gasfitter and the painters and the upholsterers had done their havoc, Aytoun was left in peace in the house that was to be his home for the rest of his days. But the work of the 'flitting,' as a house-removal is called in Scotland, must have devolved a good deal on Mrs Aytoun, for Professor Aytoun, in the spring of 1853, was busily engaged with some lectures on Ballad Poetry, which he delivered in Edinburgh in April, and which were so successful there that he gave them afterwards in London, where they were somewhat of a failure. In the autumn he was much taken up with an agitation, got up by himself, Lord Eglinton, and others, for redress of certain political grievances in Scotland, *i.e.* to have a Secretary of State appointed and more parliamentary representation secured for Scotland, and other matters seen to. In December he has 'a great class,' and 'as much MS. in the shape of exercises as would roast an ox to correct next week.' So the first winter in the new house passed by busily, saddened only by the failing health of Professor Wilson.

On Friday, March 31st, 1854, Professor Wilson was struck down by paralysis; and after three days of unconsciousness, 'life,' as Professor Aytoun writes to a friend, 'surging all the while in his gigantic frame,' he died at midnight on Monday, the 3rd of April. Three weeks later, Lord Cockburn died at Bonaly, at the age of seventy-four; and Edinburgh had lost two of the citizens of whom she was proudest.

The next five years (1853-1859) were for Aytoun years of great prosperity, of social popularity, and much congenial society. They were busy and active years, and yet, during them, his health failed a little, probably because of con-

stant overwork; and Mrs Aytoun's increasing delicacy must have been a source of grief and of anxiety.

Aytoun was writing monthly for *Blackwood* on themes literary and political—sometimes several articles in one issue; his University class was flourishing; each summer found him in Orkney, administering law and fishing and grouse shooting; and during those five years he published four books. He is described by his friend, Colonel Hannay, in 1855, as having lost 'a good deal of the robust health and the elasticity of spirits of his earlier days,' but as not looking more than his age (forty-two), and 'his colour was still fresh, and his brown hair was neither thinned nor silvered.' Colonel Hannay gives an excellent picture of Aytoun's daily life at the time:—

'While in Edinburgh he could rarely be induced to extend his day's exercise beyond the walk home from the University to his house in Great Stuart Street. He made constant use of his brougham for going short distances, a habit only very recently assumed, and one in which his friends did their best to discourage him, believing that he was thus sacrificing his best chance of health. His journey home on foot was almost invariably broken by a halt at the saloon at 45 George Street, a room in Mr Blackwood's establishment, hung with portraits of contributors to the magazine. . . . Nothing could be easier than his existence. His excellent wife, herself of a disposition and qualities to illuminate any household, whose kind, bright, genial face was the faithful index of her heart, took care that his home should always be of the cosiest and pleasantest, and made his friends her own. Among other comfortable circumstances, he was treated by his lady friends with a pleasant deference; his graceful poetry, the nature of its subjects, picturesque and chivalrous, and his Jacobitism, all appealed to their imaginations, and his soft and gentle manners confirmed the spell. In the careless ease of his household life, he rarely made his appearance early in the morning, and on coming downstairs proceeded to his study, where he passed most of the day, until it was time to start for his lecture at four o'clock.'

And he generally spent the evening, or, at any

rate, the latter part of it in his study, reading and writing.

Among the most intimate frequenters of 16 Great Stuart Street in those days was Mr Peter Fraser, "whose visits," Sir Theodore Martin reports, "were generally celebrated by a lapse into what Mrs Aytoun termed their 'high jinks.'" One of Peter Fraser's 'high jinks' Sir Theodore relates in his *Life of Aytoun*. When Thackeray was lecturing in Edinburgh, and was staying at Mr Blackwood's, the butler came in one evening to the dining-room, after the ladies had gone upstairs, and announced that the Provost of Peterhead wanted to see Mr Thackeray. After some demur on Thackeray's part, and persistent messages on the Provost's, Thackeray went out, and his voice was immediately heard raised indignantly, and the sounds of a scuffle brought the gentlemen out into the hall to his assistance, and the ladies in great alarm to lean over the banisters and see what was the matter. The Provost of Peterhead was 'the mad wag Peter, with whom, at the termination of the conflict, we returned in triumph to our claret.' Sir Theodore also tells of extempore dramas 'when Peter came to Aytoun's of an evening,' and of mock combats conducted with paper knives.

Each autumn Aytoun went to Orkney, and spent delightful holiday months with his rod, his gun, and his dog 'Captain,' 'whose traditionary reputation for powers of scent and staunchness stood high, but whose nose, in these his declining years, frequently led him into unaccountable errors, while his deafness rendered all attempts on our part to correct them unavailing, though his master's steady affection and confidence, of long growth, were not to be shaken by a few mistakes, over

which, whenever possible, he threw a decent veil.' One of these 'mistakes' Sir Theodore relates. Captain 'became transfixed, in a model attitude,' with his nose pointing to a tuft the size of a man's fist. Aytoun was full of faith and stood ready to shoot—a field mouse. 'The Professor's smile was very faint,' Sir Theodore adds.

Aytoun, according to his friend's account, was a good shot, but had lost keenness and was slow in taking aim, 'and at the same time would not fire at long range, so that a good many birds got away from him without any attempt on their lives.' As Sir Theodore ingenuously confesses that he was thereby enabled to take some shots that 'perhaps strictly belonged' to Aytoun, and omits to say that he had his host's leave to do so, one is scarcely surprised to hear that after a time Aytoun ceased shooting with his friend, and sat on a bank of heather with his gun across his knees, lost in contemplation.

The four books brought out during this period were these: *Firmilian*, published in 1854; *Bothwell*, published in London in 1856; two volumes of the *Ballads of Scotland*, published in London in 1858; and *Poems and Ballads of Goethe* (in conjunction with Sir Theodore Martin), published in London in 1858. *Firmilian* was a curious production. It began life in the form of a literary hoax. In May 1854 Aytoun brought out in *Blackwood* a bogus review of an imaginary unpublished tragedy *Firmilian*, supposed to have been written by one 'Percy Jones,' and in the review quoted copious extracts. It was written, after his old style in the *Bon Gaultier* papers, as a parody of, and a satire on, certain poets of the day—chiefly Sydney Dobell, Baily, and Alexander Smith — all members of what was then known as 'The

Spasmodic School.' The reviews of his article, however, took the burlesque quite seriously, most of them upholding Percy Jones against his severe reviewer, and beseeching the poet to publish his fine tragedy and shame his unfair critic. A writer in the *University Magazine* was one of the few that saw through the thing; for, after reviewing the paper and the extracts given in it seriously enough, he hinted that perhaps 'Percy Jones' and his reviewer were identical.

Aytoun was delighted at the success of his hoax, and, promptly taking the general advice, wrote the tragedy,—incorporating all the extracts he had quoted in his mock review,—and published it in a few months. Again the poem was seriously treated by reviewers, and abused for the very faults it was written in ridicule of and as a satire against. Other critics, recognising that it was a satire, abused it as an attack on Baily, Smith, and Dobell. But 'Aytoun's poem was worthy of a much wider popularity than the poems it was meant to ridicule,' says Sir Theodore Martin, for, as Aytoun had modestly phrased it, 'It is very curious, when you sit down to write this kind of thing, to find how very closely some of the passages approximate to good poetry.'

Aytoun may certainly be accused of having made his poetic faculty the hand-maid of his love of humour in the production of *Firmilian;* but the burlesque of the 'Spasmodic School' did, according to Sir Theodore Martin, clear the poetic atmosphere and bring about good practical results, especially in the case of Alexander Smith, whose style considerably altered after the publication of *Firmilian.* Afterwards, when Alexander Smith occupied the position of secretary to the Edinburgh University, he

became personally known to Aytoun, and was much liked by him. Alexander Smith married one of the Macdonalds of Skye, who may have ministered to Aytoun's Jacobitism.

Bothwell was begun in 1855, and published in the summer of 1856. Aytoun had been less than a year in writing it, in spite of constant work for *Blackwood*, and what he calls the 'necessary duty of correcting class exercises'—he had no university assistant—and 'the more righteous one of advising processes; add to which dinners, more than half of which it is impossible to refuse.' The publication of *Bothwell* brought him a pleasant reminder of old days, in the shape of a letter from his former teacher, Professor Merkel, still a professor in Aschaffenburg, addressing Aytoun as 'mein unvergessner Freund' and 'mein lieber geistiger Pflegesohn.'

Bothwell is written in the form of a soliloquy. This form Aytoun confesses to having 'deliberately adopted,' but he found the composition of a volume of monologue in verse very laborious work. Had he chosen the more natural form that Swinburne adopted, and introduced the various other characters — the Queen and her Maries, Darnley, Rizzio,—the poem would have given him wider scope, and have been less strain in the writing, and less unreal in the reading. He felt this himself, but too late to alter it.

When *Bothwell* first came out it met with both praise and condemnation. Among those who praised was Lord Lytton, who highly commended it in a letter to Aytoun; but, as the book was dedicated to him, he could hardly have done less. Aytoun himself found cause for congratulation in the fact that the critics differed in their

selections of the passages they considered best; and he told Mr Blackwood, 'I now hope and think that the poem will take a permanent place, though it may never be so popular as the *Lays*.'

His edition of Scottish Ballads was begun in the summer of 1857, after he had written eleven articles for *Blackwood* in the first six months of the year, and was published (in two volumes, with preface and notes) the following summer. This book he dedicated to his mother, who had been of constant help to him in the preparation of it, for to her he had gone when a word or a line failed him, and her memory had usually been able to supply it. Mrs Aytoun was at this time in her eighty-eighth year, and was living with her two daughters at 28 Inverleith Row.

The next book Aytoun brought out was a reprint of the translations of Goethe's poems that, done in conjunction with Sir Theodore Martin, had appeared in *Blackwood* in 1843-4. This reprint was begun in 1858, immediately after the publication of the ballads, and it was published the same year.

In October 1858 Aytoun was one of the speakers at a gathering at the Manchester Athenæum, the others being Lord Stanley of Alderley, Lord John Russell, Lord Houghton, Judge Haliburton, and George Cruickshank. Aytoun spoke directly after Lord John Russell, and reports in a letter to his Sheriff-Substitute, Mr Robertson: "After I had listened to Lord John for five minutes—'Is that your style?' thought I. 'Oh, hang it, it is no credit whatever to trump you.' So I gave them about half-an-hour of it with as little trepidation as if I had been lecturing to my class." He enclosed in this letter a cutting from

a paper with 'a somewhat high-flown account of the meeting,' and asked Mr Robertson to return it, 'for I have not yet shown it to my dear old mother, whose over-fondness for her son is now a source of absolute pleasure to her.'

In the following winter Aytoun presided at the Burns Centenary Festival at Ayr, only fifteen years since he had been there at a previous Burns meeting, and had listened reverently to the speeches of Lord Eglinton and Christopher North, and, feeling himself an unknown youth, had made what might be called his 'maiden speech.' Only fifteen years — it must have seemed to Aytoun like yesterday!—and now he stood before the Ayr audience a popular professor, a prosperous lawyer, and a celebrated man of letters, and addressed them with ease and authority, and without a note in his hand. Doubtless he remembered that former meeting, and thought of Professor Wilson, and of all that had happened since. Doubtless, in talking over the meeting afterwards with Mrs Aytoun, the talk turned on that former time, and he spoke to her of her father. That was in February. Mrs Aytoun had for some years been in failing health; but at the beginning of this winter had so far improved that the doctors had held out hopes that she would in time get perfectly strong again. But it was not to be. On the 15th of April 1859—just four days after the tenth anniversary of their wedding-day—Mrs Aytoun died at their home at 16 Great Stuart Street, 'and Aytoun was left,' writes his friend Sir Theodore Martin, 'a childless, lonely, and shattered man.'

One of his sisters offered to come and live with him, but he would not allow either of them to leave the mother. His friends gathered about him. Mr John Blackwood

was especially faithful, visited him 'night after night,' and found 'our old bright companion sitting with his head leaning on his hands, cheerless and helpless.' Still the lonely man remained in the big silent house, where 'he could not bear to hear his own footfall,' and where his desolation must have been mocked at by the echoes of cheerful voices and the ghosts of the happy past.

From this time Professor Aytoun's health gave way: he became susceptible to the weather, and disinclined for general society. In his first loneliness his mind seems to have gone back to the past, and he must often have sat and thought over all his past life—his school days, his childish hours with the minnows in the burn at Murieston, and of the time when he was a struggling youth without a profession, forced to study law, and composing poems sitting on his high stool in the dingy office. Someone—was it Mr Blackwood during one of those kindly evening visits? —may have suggested to him to write a novel; or Aytoun may have caught the idea himself, turning to his writing table to try and gain respite from depression. Sometime between his wife's death and the following Christmas, *Norman Sinclair*, a semi-autobiographic novel, was begun, and the first chapters of it appeared in *Blackwood* for January 1860, before the novel was finished in MS.

At the end of 1860 Aytoun was elected Honorary President of the Associated Societies of Edinburgh University. Some of the chief societies in the University, such as the Dialectic and the Diagnostic, are in the habit of meeting occasionally, and having an inter-society debate, and these Associated Societies every three years elect a President. This was begun in the days when there was no Lord Rector of the University, and the post made good the deficiency.

The three Honorary Presidents previous to Professor Aytoun were Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, Sir John M'Neill, and Lord Brougham; and those since him have included Ruskin and Robert Browning. At the time of Aytoun's election, Thackeray was the other candidate proposed, and 'I should not like to have been beaten on Scottish ground by Thackeray, or any other literary man ranking nearly as my contemporary,' Aytoun confesses.

Next summer found Aytoun, only forty-eight years of age, drinking the waters of Homburg, a martyr to dyspepsia—unable to take food, unable to sleep, and unable to exert himself either physically or mentally. Homburg did him temporary good, and he returned home, went straight to Orkney, and supplied *Blackwood* with packets of MS. on the subject of dyspepsia. Everything appealed to his humour, and the disease that usually renders a man either morbid and miserable or crabbed and irritable merely supplied Aytoun with an endlessly humorous subject for his pen. 'A mutton-chop,' he tells his readers, 'becomes a fiery crab, rending the interior with its claws; and even rice-pudding has the intolerable effrontery to become revivified as a hedgehog.'

The winter of 1861-2 brought Aytoun back to Edinburgh for his second winter of loneliness in the big house, and even more than his usual burden of work. His class this session numbered about 140, and his novel, *Norman Sinclair*, the final chapters of which had appeared in the August number of *Blackwood*, went to press in early winter.

On the 7th of November 1861 Professor Aytoun's mother died, at the age of ninety. 'Her life was extended far beyond the usual period,' her son writes, 'with no

decay of her mental faculties, and little diminution of her bodily strength, and her end was calm and peaceful.' As long as Mrs Aytoun was alive, with her 'over-fondness for her son' a 'source of absolute pleasure to her,' Aytoun must have felt himself a young man; but, when she was gone, and with her that ready sympathy for all his fondest themes—his love of chivalry and romance, his patriotism, and his Jacobite enthusiasm—he must have felt that the chain that bound him to the past was severed, and that he was drifting on alone, with the shadows of a solitary old age gathering towards him.

In the February of this winter the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales occurred, and Aytoun's loyalty found expression in a *Nuptial Ode*, written on the model of Spenser's *Epithalamium*. This was almost his last poetical publication. The following summer he went back to Homburg, which had done him so much good the year before, and Sir Theodore Martin joined him after he had been there about six weeks. He told Sir Theodore he felt 'greatly set up in health,' but Sir Theodore adds that 'there were few outward signs of this: he had grown much thinner; there was a hectic flush in his cheek; his face had lost its bright expression; and a beard which he had grown, and which he ever afterwards wore, had lengthened the lines of his face in a way which increased the appearance of feeble health. . . . The languor of feeble health still hung about him. Flashes of the old bright humour broke through it upon occasion, but never in that rich unintermitted stream with which I had been in former days so familiar. He was no longer equal to walks of mile on mile which we used to enjoy together but a few years before.'

Even in this low state of health Aytoun did not stop work. Being 'deeply interested in the state of Germany,' he wrote a paper on *Germany and her Prospects*, which came out in the October *Blackwood*. And in July he writes to Mr Blackwood to say he 'has not been altogether idle,' adding 'Though the dull weather has been rather against work, I have nearly finished an article on the *Rights of Women*, taking my text from the demand made at the Social Science Meeting that the professions should be opened to the fair sex. I think you will like it, for it seems to me rollicking and lively.'

During this summer, while he was abroad, Professor Aytoun visited Professor Merkel, his old teacher. It was nearly thirty years since they had bent together over the pages of Goethe's *Faust*—Aytoun then an enthusiastic boy of twenty. The meeting must have saddened both, though it gave them pleasure.

The winter of 1862-3 was passed in Edinburgh, and the following summer partly abroad and partly in Orkney in attendance on his duties there. It was probably during this summer—the summer of 1863—that he became engaged to the lady who was afterwards his second wife; but it was not till December 17th, 1863, a week before the wedding, that he wrote to Sir Theodore Martin to tell him of the event. The lady was Miss Fearne Jemima Kinnear, 'second daughter of the late James Kinnear, Writer to the Signet,' and nearly related to the Balfours of Trenabie in Orkney, who were friends of Aytoun's, and at whose house he had probably met her. The marriage took place on Christmas Eve, 1863—the very day that Thackeray died. The ceremony was performed at S. John's Church, where Aytoun's first

marriage had been solemnized, and it was performed by the same clergyman, Aytoun's old friend, Dean Ramsay. 'Inspired as she was by a generous sympathy with the undimmed devotion with which he cherished the memory of his former wife, and endeared to him by her own attractive qualities, this union,' writes Sir Theodore, 'was one of unbroken happiness.'

The happiness, however, was of short duration. Aytoun, who in the first brightness of his change of fortunes had grown 'once more like his former self,' so that 'his friends began to hope he had taken a renewed lease of life,' broke down again in the winter after his marriage. The following summer, 1865, instead of going abroad, as he had done each summer since his first wife's death, he took a lease of Blackhills, a property of Lord Fife's, near Elgin, where he looked forward to plenty of shooting and fishing, and to having his intimate friends come and stay with him. He and Mrs Aytoun went there on the 31st of May 1865. Two days later Aytoun, writing to his Sheriff-Substitute, Mr Robertson, tells him, 'I have been ill, and was quite unable to do anything for nearly six weeks. It was a sort of low intermittent fever, not perilous, but very debilitating; and, though I am now much better, I am not yet a Samson in body, nor a Machiavelli in intellect. However, I hope to receive much benefit from the northern air, which, though somewhat sharp, is in fresh contrast to the reek of Edinburgh.' He describes the house and garden and view, with all of which he seems well pleased, and adds: 'There are also good shootings attached which will furnish occupation and amusement for the winter months.'

But Aytoun was not able to rest. On the 28th of June

he writes to tell Mr Blackwood that he has been better for two or three days, adding, 'Health and sickness are from God's hands, and I ought to be thankful that I am not worse, and am well tended.' The temporary strength he has given to a political article for *Blackwood*—his last. In a few days Mrs Aytoun writes for him, cancelling an engagement to be present at the nomination of the member for Orkney, and on one of the last days of June he fainted from exhaustion, and an Elgin doctor, Dr Ross, was sent for. This doctor immediately forbade any brain work; and, telling Professor Aytoun, who acknowledges that 'during last winter I was as abstemious as an anchorite,' that he had tried his constitution by 'living greatly too low,' he promptly insisted on animal food, wine and brandy,—arrowroot and brandy in the middle of the night, and general 'feeding up.' 'The improvement' says poor Aytoun, who seems assured all this time that his illness is not the result of any organic mischief,—'is almost magical. . . . So much for over abstinence, which in certain cases I take to be an abominable mistake. . . . My requirements were lunch and liquor.'

After a fortnight he writes cheerfully and hopefully to Mr Blackwood, saying that he looks forward to being able 'to take the hill on the 12th of August,' and that he will be seriously grieved if prevented, for the keeper has been over part of the ground and has given him an excellent account of the young broods. He has bought a "steady white pony — *nomine* Missy, which name I have elevated into that of 'The Muse'—well adapted for trotting through the heather." He warmly urges Mr Blackwood to come and share the sport. 'I can assure you that there are few prettier or more enjoyable

places to be found in the north of Scotland than this same residence of Blackhills. The range of grouse-ground is very fair, but the extent of the low-country shooting is immense; and, though partridges have not been *very* plentiful in the district for some years, there are hares enough to excite to frenzy the scalping instincts of a Choctaw. Think of this; for I certainly shall not migrate southwards this year until summoned by the approaching exigencies of the session.'

Three weeks after he had written this letter, Professor Aytoun answered another summons. He died at Blackhills, at one in the morning, on August 4th, 1865, when he was fifty-two years old. Death came suddenly at the last. His sisters were telegraphed for from Edinburgh, and the doctor broke it to him that he had but a few hours yet to live. Holy Communion was administered to him by a pastor of the Episcopal Church, and he died calm and steadfast, perfectly conscious and sensible to the end, 'expressing his firm trust in his Saviour.' Some hours afterwards his sisters arrived, and went straight to his room. 'It did not look like death,' one of them wrote; 'and they had laid him out with bunches of his favourite white roses on his breast.'

Professor Aytoun's death was deeply regretted by all who had known him. His was a character which made few enemies and many friends, and for those who had been drawn to him in the intimacy of friendship his death left an irrevocable blank. Mr Blackwood wrote in *Blackwood's Magazine*: 'It is to ourselves a source of great though melancholy pleasure to look back on our long intercourse with him, which was never interrupted by any differences of opinion or estrangement of feeling. It is rare, indeed,

that the relations of business become a source of so much heart-felt pleasure and familiar intimacy; and we cannot think without painful emotion that all this happiness is at an end.' Sir Theodore Martin, at the close of his *Life of Aytoun*, says: 'He was the warmest and most loyal of friends, and, because he was so, he was most happy in his friendships. . . . His duties, public and private, he discharged with conscientious zeal, and with the chivalrous courtesies of a true-hearted gentleman. Therefore he died honoured by his fellow-citizens, and deeply mourned by those who had the happiness to know him as a friend.' Professor Sir Robert Christison says in a letter: 'We have sustained a great loss in the University by the death of Professor Aytoun—a loss which cannot well be supplied. He raised the class from next to nothing to one of 150 students, and was greatly liked by them. He was a most delightful and amusing friend.' *

All who knew Aytoun seem to have liked and felt kindly towards him, and to have remembered him as a pleasant, genial, courteous man, refined and cultured, tolerant, warm-hearted and sympathetic, and bringing sunshine wherever he went by his vivacity and good temper. The stories of his ready wit are numerous: none more characteristic perhaps than the following, told by one who chanced to meet Aytoun, somewhere about the year 1846, at an evening party at Sir William Allan's. Among the guests was Miss Faucit (afterwards Lady Theodore Martin). She had been taking part in a Greek play at Dublin, and had been presented with an ornament with a Greek inscription on it as a souvenir of the performance. This Greek inscription was under inspection during the even-

* *Life of Sir Robert Christison.*

ing, and a translation was in request. Theodore Martin hailed Professor Aytoun, and consigned the task to him. Aytoun took the trinket and examined it carefully for some moments. 'I should be very glad,' he replied, in answer to a jesting enquiry whether he could translate it, handing it gravely back as he spoke, 'were there not ladies present!'

During his later life-time, Professor Aytoun ranked as one of the leading literary men in Scotland, especially after Professor Wilson's death, when the mantle of Christopher North had fallen on his shoulders. It is true that there were not many to shred the mantle with him; and he himself modestly attributed his fame and popularity entirely to this state of matters. It is perhaps a pity that, after having established his reputation and influence, Aytoun continued to spend so much of his time on clever little squibs and satires, whose themes were absolutely of the place and moment, instead of concentrating himself on some greater work that would to this day have been associated with his name. Much of his writing was on current politics, and writing of this sort is apt to share the fate of yesterday's newspaper. His *Bothwell* failed to be a masterpiece, and, owing perhaps mainly to the clumsy form of a prolonged monologue into which he cast it, reads very heavily. His only novel, though full of beautiful descriptive writing, hung fire, and has never become popular. Yet it should be remembered that both of them were written towards the end of his life, after trouble and ill-health had deadened his spirit. His most successful and popular writings are the *Lays of the Cavaliers*, which appeared first in *Blackwood*, and has run through thirty editions; the *Bon Gaultier Ballads*,

of which he was joint author, and which Professor Saintsbury, in his *History of English Literature*, characterizes as 'that admirable book of light verse, the equal of anything earlier and certainly not surpassed since'; and some of his short humorous prose pieces, of which *How we got up the Glenmutchkin Railway* is no doubt the best known. This is what amused people before the days of Rudyard Kipling and Barrie: —

'But, heaven bless you, Bob, there's a great deal to be thought of first. Who are we to get for a Provisional Committee?'

'That's very true,' said Bob, musingly. 'We *must* treat them to some respectable names, that is, good sounding ones. I'm afraid there is little chance of our producing a Peer to begin with?'

'None whatever—unless we could invent one, and that's hardly safe—*Burke's Peerage* has gone through too many editions. Couldn't we try the Dormants?'

'That would be rather dangerous in the teeth of the standing orders. But what say you to a baronet? There's Sir Polloxfen Tremens. He got himself served the other day to a Nova Scotia baronetcy, with just as much title as you or I have; and he has sported the riband, and dined out on the strength of it ever since. He'll join us at once, for he has not a sixpence to lose.'

'Down with him, then,' and we headed the Provisional list with the pseudo Orange-tawny.

'Now,' said Bob, 'it's quite indispensable, as this is a Highland line, that we should put forward a chief or two. That has always a great effect upon the English, whose feudal notions are rather of the mistiest, and principally derived from Waverley.'

'Why not write yourself down as the Laird of M'Corkindale?' said I. 'I daresay you would not be negatived by a counter-claim.'

'That would hardly do,' replied Bob, 'as I intend to be Secretary. After all, what's the use of thinking about it? Here goes for an extempore Chief'; and the villain wrote down the name of Tavish M'Tavish of Invertavish.

'I say, though,' said I, 'we must have a real Highlander on the list. If we go on this way, it will become a Justiciary matter.'

'You're devilish scrupulous, Gus,' said Bob, who, if left to himself, would have stuck in the names of the heathen gods and goddesses, or

borrowed his directors from the Ossianic chronicles, rather than have delayed the prospectus. 'Where the mischief are we to find the men? I can think of no others likely to go the whole hog; can you?'

'I don't know a single Celt in Glasgow except old M'Closkie, the drunken porter at the corner of Jamaica Street.'

'He's the very man! I suppose, after the manner of his tribe, he will do anything for a pint of whisky. But what shall we call him? Jamaica Street, I fear, will hardly do for a designation.'

'Call him The M'Closkie. It will be sonorous in the ears of the Saxon!'

'Bravo!' and another Chief was added to the roll of the clans.

But perhaps, of all Aytoun's Works, the one that is, to the general reader, the most associated with the name 'Aytoun' to-day is the *Lays of the Cavaliers*. *Edinburgh after Flodden*, included among them, was published in the year 1848, three years after he became professor; and, as it is one of the jewels of the collection, a passage from it may serve to show his literary art at the time when he was at his very best:—

EDINBURGH AFTER FLODDEN

Right bitter was the agony
  That wrung that soldier proud:
Thrice did he strive to answer,
  And thrice he groaned aloud.
Then he gave the riven banner
  To the old man's shaking hand,
Saying—"That is all I bring ye
  From the bravest of the land!
Ay! ye may look upon it—
  It was guarded well and long,
By your brothers and your children,
  By the valiant and the strong.
One by one they fell around it,
  As the archers laid them low,

Grimly dying, still unconquered,
With their faces to the foe.
Ay! ye may well look upon it—
There is more than honour there,
Else, be sure, I had not brought it
From the field of dark despair.
Never yet was royal banner
Steeped in such a costly dye;
It hath lain upon a bosom
Where no other shroud shall lie.
Sirs! I charge you, keep it holy;
Keep it as a sacred thing,
For the stain ye see upon it
Was the life-blood of your King!"

VIII.

Woe, and woe, and lamentation!
What a piteous cry was there!
Widows, maidens, mothers, children,
Shrieking, sobbing in despair!
Through the streets the death-word rushes,
Spreading terror, sweeping on—
"Jesu Christ! our King has fallen—
O Great God, King James is gone!
Holy Mother Mary, shield us,
Thou who erst did lose thy son!
O the blackest day for Scotland
That she ever knew before!
O our King—the good, the noble,
Shall we see him never more?
Woe to us, and woe to Scotland!
O our sons, our sons and men!
Surely some have 'scaped the Southron,
Surely some will come again!"
Till the oak that fell last winter
Shall uprear its shattered stem—
Wives and mothers of Dunedin—
Ye may look in vain for them!

* * * * *

XIII.

No! not yet, thou high Dunedin!
Shalt thou totter to thy fall;
Though thy bravest and thy strongest
Are not there to man the wall.
No, not yet! the ancient spirit
Of our fathers hath not gone;
Take it to thee as a buckler
Better far than steel or stone.
Oh, remember those who perished
For thy birthright at the time
When to be a Scot was treason,
And to side with Wallace crime!
Have they not a voice among us,
Whilst their hallowed dust is here?
Hear ye not a summons sounding
From each buried warrior's bier?
Up!—they say—and keep the freedom
Which we won you long ago:
Up! and keep our graves unsullied
From the insults of the foe!
Up! and if ye cannot save them,
Come to us in blood and fire:
'Midst the crash of falling turrets
Let the last of Scots expire!

William Edmondstoune Aytoun is buried in the Dean Cemetery, Edinburgh, in the grave of his first wife, and amid the shadows and the sounds of the beautiful city in which he spent his life.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS ON THE "FAMOUS SCOTS" SERIES.

Of THOMAS CARLYLE, by H. C. MACPHERSON,

The *Literary World* says :—

"One of the very best little books on Carlyle yet written, far out-weighing in value some more pretentious works with which we are familiar."

Of ALLAN RAMSAY, by OLIPHANT SMEATON,

The *Scotsman* says :—

"It is not a patchwork picture, but one in which the writer, taking genuine interest in his subject, and bestowing conscientious pains on his task, has his materials well in hand, and has used them to produce a portrait that is both life-like and well balanced."

Of HUGH MILLER, by W. KEITH LEASK,

The *Expository Times* says :—

"It is a right good book and a right true biography. . . . There is a very fine sense of Hugh Miller's greatness as a man and a Scotsman; there is also a fine choice of language in making it ours."

Of JOHN KNOX, by A. TAYLOR INNES,

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"A masterly delineation of those stirring times in Scotland, and of that famous Scot who helped so much to shape them."

Of ROBERT BURNS, by GABRIEL SETOUN,

The *New Age* says :—

"It is the best thing on Burns we have yet had, almost as good as Carlyle's Essay and the pamphlet published by Dr Nichol of Glasgow."

Of THE BALLADISTS, by JOHN GEDDIE,

The *Spectator* says :—

"The author has certainly made a contribution of remarkable value to the literary history of Scotland. We do not know of a book in which the subject has been treated with deeper sympathy or out of a fuller knowledge."

Of RICHARD CAMERON, by Professor HERKLESS,

The *Dundee Courier* says :—

"In selecting Professor Herkless to prepare this addition to the 'Famous Scots Series' of books, the publishers have made an excellent choice. The vigorous, manly style adopted is exactly suited to the subject, and Richard Cameron is presented to the reader in a manner as interesting as it is impressive. . . . Professor Herkless has done remarkably well, and the portrait he has so cleverly delineated of one of Scotland's most cherished heroes is one that will never fade."

Of SIR JAMES YOUNG SIMPSON, by EVE BLANTYRE SIMPSON,

The *Daily Chronicle* says :—

"It is indeed long since we have read such a charmingly-written biography as this little Life of the most typical and 'Famous Scot' that his countrymen have been proud of since the time of Sir Walter. . . . There is not a dull, irrelevant, or superfluous page in all Miss Simpson's booklet, and she has performed the biographer's chief duty—that of selection—with consummate skill and judgment."

Of THOMAS CHALMERS, by W. GARDEN BLAIKIE,

The *Spectator* says :—

"The most notable feature of Professor Blaikie's book—and none could be more commendable—is its perfect balance and proportion. In other words, justice is done equally to the private and to the public life of Chalmers, if possible greater justice than has been done by Mrs Oliphant."

Of JAMES BOSWELL, by W. KEITH LEASK,

The *Morning Leader* says :—

"Mr W. K. Leask has approached the biographer of Johnson in the only possible way by which a really interesting book could have been arrived at—by way of the open mind. . . . The defence of Boswell in the concluding chapter of his delightful study is one of the finest and most convincing passages that have recently appeared in the field of British biography."

Of TOBIAS SMOLLETT, by OLIPHANT SMEATON,

The *Weekly Scotsman* says :—

"The book is written in a crisp and lively style. . . . The picture of the great novelist is complete and lifelike. Not only does Mr Smeaton give a scholarly sketch and estimate of Smollett's literary career, he constantly keeps the reader in conscious touch and sympathy with his personality, and produces a portrait of the man as a man which is not likely to be readily forgotten."

Of FLETCHER OF SALTOUN, by W. G. T. OMOND,

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Of THE BLACKWOOD GROUP, by Sir GEORGE DOUGLAS,

The *Weekly Citizen* says :—

"It need not be said that to everyone interested in the literature of the first half of the century, and especially to every Scotsman so interested, 'The Blackwood Group' is a phrase abounding in promise. And really Sir George Douglas fulfils the promise he tacitly makes in his title. He is intimately acquainted not only with the books of the different members of the 'group,' but also with their environment, social and otherwise. Besides, he writes with sympathy as well as knowledge."

Of NORMAN MACLEOD, by JOHN WELLWOOD,

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"A worthy addition to the 'Famous Scots Series' is that of Norman Macleod, the renowned minister of the Barony in Glasgow, and a man as typical of everything generous and broadminded in the State Church in Scotland as Thomas Guthrie was in the Free Churches. The biography is the work of John Wellwood, who has approached it with proper appreciation of the robustness of the subject."

Of SIR WALTER SCOTT, by GEORGE SAINTSBURY,

The *Pall Mall Gazette* says :—

"Mr Saintsbury's miniature is a gem of its kind. . . . Mr Saintsbury's critique of the Waverley Novels will, I venture to think, despite all that has been written upon them, discover fresh beauties for their admirers."

Of KIRKCALDY OF GRANGE, by LOUIS A. BARBÉ.

The *Scotsman* says :—

"Mr Barbé's sketch sticks close to the facts of his life, and these are sought out from the best sources and are arranged with much judgment, and on the whole with an impartial mind."

Of ROBERT FERGUSSON, by Dr A. B. GROSART,

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"One of the most interesting of the Famous Scots Series is devoted to 'Robert Fergusson' the poet, to whom 'the greater Robert,' as he freely acknowledged, was under so many obligations. Dr Grosart is perhaps the best living authority on all that relates to the bard of 'The Farmer's Ingle,' and he gives many new facts and corrects a number of erroneous statements that have hitherto obtained currency respecting him. We have read it with genuine pleasure."

Of JAMES THOMSON, by WILLIAM BAYNE,

The *Daily News* says :—

"A just appreciation of Thomson as poet and dramatist, and an interesting record of the conditions under which he rose to fame, as also of his friendships with the great ones of the eighteenth century."

Of MUNGO PARK, by T. BANKS MACLACHLAN,

The *Leeds Mercury* says :—

"We owe to Mr Maclachlan not only a charming life-story, if at times a pathetic one, but a vivid chapter in the romance of Africa. Geography has no more wonderful tale than that dealing with the unravelling of the mystery of the Niger."

The *Speaker* says :—

"Mr Maclachlan recounts with incisive vigour the story of Mungo Park's heroic wanderings and the services which he rendered to geographical research."

Of DAVID HUME, by HENRY CALDERWOOD,

The *Speaker* says :—

"The little book is a virile recruit of the 'Famous Scots Series.'"

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The *New Age* says :—

"To the many students of philosophy in Scotland a special interest will attach to Professor Calderwood's sketch of David Hume from the fact that it is the last piece of work done by its lamented author; and very pleasing it is to note the fairness and charity of the judgment passed by the most evangelical of philosophers upon the man who used to be denounced as the prophet of infidelity."

Of WILLIAM DUNBAR, by OLIPHANT SMEATON,

The *Speaker* says :—

"Mr Smeaton looks narrowly into the characteristics of Dunbar's genius, and does well to insist on the almost Shakespearian range of his gifts. He contends that in elegy, as well as in satire and allegory, Dunbar's place in English literature is amongst the great masters of the craft of letters."

The *Glasgow Herald* says :—

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Of SIR WILLIAM WALLACE, by Professor MURISON,

The *Speaker* says :—

"Mr Murison is to be congratulated on this little book. After much hard and discriminative labour he has pieced together by far the best, one might say the only rational and coherent, account of Wallace that exists."

Mr William Wallace in the *Academy* says :—

"Professor Murison has acquitted himself of his task like a patriot."

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The *Daily News* says :—

"A scholarly and impartial little volume, one of the best yet published in the 'Famous Scots Series.'"

The *Pall Mall Gazette* says :—

"Another of this admirable collection of biographical studies has appeared. It is a well written narrative of the few authenticated facts known about the popular hero of Scotland, Sir William Wallace, its production having been preceded by a diligent study of such documents as have been rendered procurable by text clubs and historical societies in the north. So far the book would be acceptable to all. It, however, contains something else. History is dumb about many of the years of the hero's life; but legend and romance have found utterance in minstrelsy, and with Blind Harry's epic to draw upon, what more could perfervid Scots wish for? Professor Murison has incorporated such a quantity of the minstrel's incredible tales in his book that it is scarcely likely to prove delectable fare for any but his compatriots. It is a bright little book which will be much relished north of the Tweed and also among those Scottish exiles who are supposed to be pining away their lives south of it."

The *New Age* says :—

"Anyhow, here at least, we have his life-story—a most difficult tale to tell—recorded with a painstaking research and in a spirit of appreciative candour which leave almost nothing to be desired."

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The *Outlook* says :—

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The *Daily Free Press* says :—

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Of THOMAS REID, by Professor CAMPBELL FRASER,

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"Professor Campbell Fraser's volume on Thomas Reid is one of the most able and valuable of an able and valuable series. He supplies what must be allowed to be a distinct want in our literature, in the shape of a brief, popular, and accessible biography of the founder of the so-called Scottish School of Philosophy, written with notable perspicuity and sympathy by one who has made a special study of the problems that engaged the mind of Reid."

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