WILLIAM MESTON.

SOMETIME during that memorable year, 1688, when bigoted James, with the culminated fatuity of his race, revenged himself on an unappreciating country by throwing the Great Seal into the Thames, and betaking himself to the Stuart's house of refuge at St. Germains—when Dutch William, with the phlegmatic coolness of his race, came over and proceeded to appropriate the country as a fee-simple estate, to be administered primarily for his own, and secondarily for his friends' benefit—hearty though homely rejoicings were taking place at a smithy lying within the northern shadow of the Hill of Fare. These rejoicings had nothing to do with the great events that were happening in the south; they were merely called forth by the not uncommon event of the birth of a son. This son we mean to notice, not because he was born in stirring times, and lived a most varied and adventurous life, but because he became one of our local "bards", whose name, at least, is known far beyond the bounds of Bon-Accord. And if he be to a great extent forgotten, or, when brought under notice, spoken of in a flippant, disparaging manner, there is all the more reason why we should attempt to present him in what we consider a true and just light. Of William Meston's boyhood we know nothing; but we may surmise, from what we know of his maturer years, that he was a youth of bright if not of brilliant parts, thoroughly "up" in all the rich legendary lore of his district, apt to look at the grotesque or humorous side of things, and generally inclined to consider "life worth living"—and that sufficient for the day was the evil thereof. When and where Meston inspired the germs of the Jacobite fever, which moulded to a very great extent his somewhat varied career, must be a matter of mere conjecture. Born and brought up in a lowly sphere of life, it is but natural to suppose that he was somewhat glamoured by his great friends, and that their political opinions would be kindly received by one, whom we can scarcely imagine to have had much innate inclination for political speculations. At a comparatively early age he found himself in an ultra-Jacobite atmosphere, and, perhaps, adopted the opinions of his patrons ready-made. We have proof,

however, that, when these opinions took root, he stuck to them with as much bull-dog courage as if they were the outcome of his own thoroughly threshed-out reasonings.

Meston's father, the Midmar blacksmith, appears to have been a specimen of that typical Scotsman of whom we are all so proud, for he had determined that his children should enjoy the benefits of a thoroughly good education. We accordingly hear of William as a brilliant student, "making great proficiency in every branch of learning" at Marischal College and University, Aberdeen. In course of time he leaves college with the reputation of being "one of the best classical scholars of his time, and no contemptible philosopher and mathematician", and with the academic imprimatur of *Magister Artium*. Dame Fortune favours our successful student; for we find him, soon after, appointed one of the masters of the Grammar School, a position he held for several years until he was induced by the Countess Marischal, who remained his staunch friend till her death, to undertake the educational supervision of her two sons, the youthful Earl, and his more celebrated brother James, the future Prussian Field-Marshal. His relations with the Keith family seem to have been of the most cordial and agreeable character; for, a vacancy having occurred in the professorship of philosophy in Marischal College, about the year 1714, the Countess, the patroness of the college, saw no one fitter to fill the vacant chair than the preceptor of her children. He was accordingly duly installed into his new office, for the discharge of the duties of which, we are assured, "he was every way qualified". But, alas! all our professor's philosophy was unable to open his eyes to the madness of those who dreamed of restoring the Stuarts to the throne they had disgraced, and to the hearts of a people over whose liberties they had ridden red-shod so long. On the 6th September, 1715, John Erskine, Earl of Mar, raised the standard of the Pretender, James VII.'s worthy son, on the Braes o' Mar, and on the 20th of the same month, the youthful Earl Marischal entered Aberdeen with a numerous following, who rode to the Cross with drawn swords, where the Sheriff proclaimed the Chevalier de St. George king of these realms. Among those present on this occasion were—Barclay of Johnston, Irvine of Kingcaussie, the Laird of Inver-

cauld, Erskine of Pitoddrie, the Lairds of Whytriggs, Stoniewood, Scotstown, Kinaldie, Brucklaw, Pitullie, and, strange to say, our professor of philosophy from Marischal College and University. Though the magistrates of the town were at the time staunch supporters of the reigning king, the friends of the exiled prince were many and courageous. A great jubilation took place—the health of the prince was drank with enthusiasm, the bells were rung, the town illuminated, and the lawless mob found vent to their feelings by breaking the windows of the supporters of the House of Hanover. Such a scene as this may have inspired the following lines, which give a very good idea of Meston in his more serious and earnest moods :—

Oh ! Where's the ancient Briton's genius fled ?
Are justice, honour, virtue, bravery, dead?
Shall tyrants revel upon British store,
Whilst rightful Princes beg from door to door ?
Shall the sole Prince left of the Royal blood
Be forc'd from court to court to sue for food,
Whilst the usurper, impiously great,
Plumes with the pompous ornaments of state,
And lavishes away the Heir's estate ?
Britons, for shame! behold the wondrous youth,
With how much care he forms himself to truth!
How just, how brave, how generous, how wise,
How good he is, without the least disguise!
Nor all the Ills that cover can obscure
The rising glory of the royal power;
With radiant force, it breaks throu' clouds of night,
And blazes more illustriously bright.
Such is your Prince; how can you then be slaves
To madmen, fools, whores, foreigners, and knaves ?
Rise, Britain, rise! your King demands your aid,
God and St. George, can Britain be affraid ?
In such a cause break throu' the thick array
Of the usurping guard, and force your way;
Some lucky hand, more favour'd than the rest,
May charge him home, and reach th' usurper's breast.
Th' attempt is worthy of the noblest hand,
Th' attempt may every British heart command.
Improve the lucky hour, assert your laws,
Nor fear to die in such a glorious cause:

Having now openly identified himself with the rebels, and elected to forward the cause he had at heart otherwise than

from the quiet of his professorial office, Meston appears in a new and singular change of profession—to wit, governor of Dunnottar Castle by appointment of the Earl Marischal. Meantime events hasten on: Sheriffmuir is fought, and won by both sides. The Jacobites' victory, however, has an unusual result. They seemed utterly broken and cowed. The Chevalier, having landed at Peterhead, managed to slink as far south as Perth, which had been fortified by cannon from Dunnottar, and where a mimic court was set up, to be quickly dispersed at the approach of Argyll. The rebels fled to Dundee, and thence to Montrose, whence the Chevalier escaped to France. Argyll, in pursuit of the insurgents, pounced down upon our ex-professor, reduced Dunnottar, but spared the vanquished. Meston, with others of his party, betook themselves to the hills, where they remained in hiding till the Act of Indemnity allowed them to return to their homes. During this trying time, when the party must have suffered many hardships, it shows the poet in a rather pleasing light to find that, instead of being desponding and querulous, as one of his biographers, more intent on effective than true statements, alleges, he composed, for the amusement of his companions, several of those humorous poetical effusions, which were afterwards published in Edinburgh, under the title of "Mother Grim's Tales".

When the Act of Indemnity permitted Meston to emerge into the light of day, he might, had he been a man of less staunch honesty of principle, have been restored to his former appointment in the college. But he steadily refused to yield obedience to the Hanoverian régime, and in consequence cut himself completely off from every chance of reinstatement. The house of the Countess Marischal was open to him, however, and there he found an asylum till the death of the Countess threw him destitute on the world. During his residence with the Marischal family, his gay and witty disposition was a great attraction to the guests who frequented that hospitable house, and we may be sure the ex-professor's jokes were not the least appreciated item that appeared at her ladyship's dinner-table. We are told that "he had an uncommon fund of wit and humour, in the timing of which he had a peculiar art. He shone at his fullest lustre when over his bottle,

to which he seldom had any reluctance. On these occasions, it was impossible for one of the most phlegmatic disposition to continue five minutes in company with him without being ready to split his sides. His jokes were always *apropos*, and he had a singular knack in telling a story". Though it is very likely that at times he played the rather undignified part of an anvil to try the wits of her ladyship's guests upon, yet, in general, we doubt not the anvil proved a harder metal than the hammers that beat it. When the Countess died, our poet was cast adrift, and had to brace himself up for a new start in life. At this time he seems to have been in very straightened circumstances; but at length he turned up at Elgin, where he opened an academy in conjunction with his brother Samuel, who has the reputation of having been an accomplished classical scholar. Here things went on thrivingly for some years, till the thoughtless, careless, dominie allowed his convivial tastes to interfere with his scholastic business. In fact, his devotion to his bottle and his friends ruined the academy. Under the patronage of a sincere admirer of his talents, the Countess of Errol, he next opened an academy at Turriff. Here also his sterling abilities as a teacher commanded success. The academy was well patronised, and the bounties of the Countess were unbounded. Here one would have thought the poet's vicissitudes were at an end, and that he had now a comfortable settlement for life. But, alas! a simple game of shuttlecock was fated to put an end to this comfortable state of matters, and throw Meston once more on the world. During this unlucky game two of Meston's pupils quarrelled, when one of them, a son of Grant of Denlugas, who afterwards rose to be a major-general in the Prussian service under Marshal Keith, stabbed his companion in the breast. The wound was not fatal to the youth, but it was fatal to the academy; for, notwithstanding Meston's innocence in the matter, parents became alarmed for the safety of their children, they were withdrawn from the school, and the poor dominie was left without a pupil. A change of quarters was now imperative; so, turning his face southward, an attempt was made to establish a school at Montrose. This scheme failed. A similar attempt was made at Perth, which appears to have failed also. Here another

helping hand was stretched out to him, and he was received into the family of the Oliphants of Gask in the capacity of private tutor.

In the family circle at Gask, Meston must have found himself in a very congenial atmosphere. Routh of good fellowship and good cheer, of course strongly impregnated with the ultra-Jacobitism of Gask and his friends, was just the sort of life to please the poet. At the same time his tutorial duties seem to have been performed in a conscientious and thorough manner, as the future scholarly character of young Oliphant sufficiently shows. The following reference to Meston appears in Oliphant's "Lairds of Gask", published by the Grampian Club:—"About this time (1736) Gask's dining-room must often have rung with the mirth of Meston, the Jacobite bard. . . . . He was lucky in having a patron who could relish his Latin verses; his muse was a rollicking lass; rather too fond of the gutter. Meston is said to have been the best of boon companions. . . . His Jacobitism breaks out, whether he bewails the death of Charles XII., or sings the praises of the horse that threw the 'Hogan Mogan King'. Gask must often have heard his friend storm at Gilligapous (George II.), and the minister 'Jockey Bob', who between them had gotten the British mare into their clutches, and had tricked its rightful owner". After several years' residence with the Oliphants, his health broke, and he was forced to resign. Careless, thoughtless, and, we are afraid, improvident, no provision had been made for the proverbial "rainy day" which will overtake poets and philosophers, as well as other less gifted mortals, and Meston is again thoroughly "on the rocks". With an empty purse, a debilitated frame, and a failing constitution, he managed to reach Peterhead in hopes of some benefit to be derived from its then celebrated "mineral waters". Here his old benefactress, the Countess of Errol, comes once more to his rescue, but human aid is unavailing; the "mineral waters" can afford the broken-down frame no benefit; he removes to Aberdeen, where, in 1745, the grim messenger meets him, and he is buried privately in the Spital cemetery, where his remains lie unmonumented and unepitaphed.

It will not be difficult for any one who peruses the slight

sketch given, to come to a just reading of Meston's character. Joseph Robertson sums up his character, in the pages of the *Aberdeen Magazine*, as "a gay, thoughtless, clever, extravagant, restless, indolent, careless, unsteady, witty, dissipated dog"—and really this is not very far from the truth; but we are inclined to think, with a writer in the old "Statistical Account", that Meston would have shown in another light, and left something more worthy of his genius and learning than he has done, were it not for those two great foes of every nobler effort of human genius—indigence and dependence.

All that Meston has left behind him lies before us in a small, smoke-dried volume, printed by Walter Ruddiman, Edinburgh, in 1767. It contains "The Knight of the Kirk, or the Ecclesiastical Adventures of Sir John Presbyter"; "Old Mother Grim's Tales", a series of ten humorous burlesque stories, to which reference has been made above; "Jodoci Grimmi Poemata", a series of miscellaneous poems, partly in Latin, partly in English; and "Mob Contra Mob, or the Rabblers Rabbled". It is a matter of some regret that subjects of vulgar and party humour obtruded themselves so much on the satiric propensities of Meston. As a poet we cannot give him a high rank. A zealous and fearless partisan of the Stuarts and the Episcopalians, he added to his rancorous partisanship plenty of vivacity and animal spirits, but there is an almost total absence of anything like the romantic. He drops at times a philosophical truth as carelessly as one would drop a pin, without caring whether anybody picked it up or not. We also find occasional but not very frequent antithetical and paradoxical turns of thought and expression, but we look in vain for melody of numbers. His lines have no music—they sound as bells of lead. His rhymes are droll and ingenious, though very irregular; his rhythm is faulty, and he is guilty of the frequent use of a word or an image not now to be mentioned to ears polite. He is also utterly unscrupulous, as we shall hint at further on, about adopting ideas and even passages from others, when they seem to suit his purpose.

In reading "The Knight", it is impossible to help thinking of, and comparing it with, Butler's "Hudibras", a great English classic poem, which has long shared the fate of all

political and controversial satire. For great, "Hudibras" undoubtedly is; its couplets form apophthegms which are even yet in everybody's mouth, though life is too short now-a-days for any one to take much interest in the adventures of the doughty knight and his lanky squire. Brilliant, witty, and learned, and at one time one of the most popular books in the language, it is now allowed sweetly to slumber on the book-shelf, only to be taken up in deference to the arbiters of literary excellence, and because no man of any pretensions to a knowledge of his country's literature must be entirely ignorant of "Hudibras". This neglect is not to be wondered at; to understand Butler thoroughly requires more previous knowledge of the most discursive kind than men usually possess, and the burning questions which agitated people's minds in the days of the Merry Monarch, look so dim in the distance that now-a-days we wonder if the game be actually worth the candle in trying to understand them. If this be true of "Hudibras", it tells two-edgedly of "Sir John Presbyter", which from the first was acknowledged to have been moulded upon, if not closely imitated, from Butler's hero. Truth, however, compels us to confess that, in "The Knight", imitation is carried to such an extent that it merges into the appropriation not only of manner and ideas, but the complete conveying of whole couplets in their *ipsissima verba*. "The Knight" is a somewhat incoherent, fragmentary *mélange*, without apparent plan or story: a string of jerky, flippant, witty abuse, directed at the head of Presbyterianism as seen through the distorted optics of the ultra-Tory and Jacobite poet. Throughout the poem there are numerous sharp, satiric strokes, and happy epigrammatic points; but, unfortunately, they are often expressed with a coarseness which is to be deplored, not only because pure wit or humour does not require the aid of a pen dipped in indelicate ink, but also because whatever breadth of language or allusion might be innocently indulged in early in the eighteenth century, such latitude precludes quotation in the latter part of the nineteenth. It opens with the usual invocation to a muse—not one of the immortal nine, but rather one who seems to have taken the bodily shape of the mellow, full-ripened butler, with rubicund face, who assiduously looked after the poet's creature comforts

at my ladyship's table, where he shone with a sparkle and vivacity bred, to be sure, of his native humour, but quickened with bumpers of his favourite "forty-nine". Or, for the nonce, it may have been some pothouse Hebe who supplied the inspiration, as he addresses one evidently of the softer sex:—

> . . . . thou Muse, who only dwells,
> In heads where there are empty cells, . . .
> Thou rattling, rhiming, raving gypsie,
> Inspire me now till I be tipsie,
> Not with thy *Heliconian* water,
> But liquor that will make me clatter:
> For all our nicest criticks think,
> Good rhime's the product of good drink.
> Nor can the water of *Parnassus*
> With wit enliven stupid asses,
> Like a full glass of forty-nine,
> Which clears the wit and makes it shine,
> And is found better ten to one,
> Then all the springs of *Helicon*
> To warm the brain and clear the head,
> And make a Poem run with speed.

We are then introduced to the knight, Sir John Presbyter, who is dubbed "the Souterkin of Reformation", at whose birth

> It is believ'd the fatal sisters,
> Who of the threed of life are twisters,
> Gave him this weird, that he should be
> A constant foe to *Monarchie*,
> And should engage the stubborn saints,
> By solemn Leagues and Covenants,
> To carry on their reformation
> With fire, and sword, and desolation;—

He then goes on to sketch the personal appearance, mental endowments, linguistic skill, and universal knowledge of his unheroic hero, at considerable length. Among the characters introduced, neck and crop, is one M'Gregor:—

> A certain wight and witty robber,
> Some think he was a true stock-jobber,
> Who made a shift to make a living
> By what some men accounted thieving;
> 'Tho', honest man! he'd have it known,
> He took not all that was his own.

This worthy is so much struck by the knight's arguments in favour of equal rights, that he is led to the conclusion that the pelf of Presbyter is as much his as the other's:—

I understand you, quoth *M'Gregor;*
But I shall prove by mode and figure
(Snatching his purse) that it is mine,
And that by providence divine;
And if you offer once to grumble,
I'll make you topsy-turvy tumble:
For when you come to reason thus,
Know, *Major vis est majus jus.*

A long discussion between the knight and his ruling-elder Roger, on, among other things, the proposal to take the power of voting from the lay-elders and deacons, and give an absolute negative to the minister, in which our hero comes off second best, brings the first canto to a close, and we are not altogether sorry that the second canto was never written. One or two extracts will best suffice to show the strong and weak points of our author's Hudibrastic humour:—

THE HERO.

A warrior he was, full wight,
A rambling, randy, errant Knight,
Inur'd to tumults, mobs, and maulings,
To fighting, blood, and wounds, and brawlings,
Which pleas'd him, so his very life
And health depended upon strife.
As bravest soldiers are seen,
In time of war to look most keen,
Who hang their head and droop their snout
When peace comes in, and war goes out;
Or as some herbs that love the shade,
But in the sun-shine die or fade;
Or as the owl that hates the light,
And only seems to live in night,
Just so, Sir *John*, in time of war,
Appeared like a blazing star,
But languished with sore disease
And droop'd in times of peace and ease.
No wonder, then, if still he hates
All peaceful and well ordered States;
For to his glory, or his shame,
He cannot live but in a flame.

He's still resolv'd, whate'er betide him,
That none shall live in peace beside him.
To fighting being so inclin'd,
Ere we descend to view his mind,
'Tis not amiss that first we scan
The scabbard of his outward man,
And briefly let our reader see
How he was armed *cap-a-pie*.
He had no head-piece, this I grant,
But his thick skull supplied the want;
So fortified in every part,
I mean by nature, not by art,
It would have cost a world of pains,
For any man to reach his brains:
On it you might thresh wheat or barley,
Or tread the grape ere he cry'd parley,
Or *Culross* girdles on it hammer,
Before you made him reel or stammer.
Yet had it crevises and chinks,
As wisest of our criticks thinks,
Occasion'd by the heat within,
Which almost rent the outward skin;
Upon the sides of it he bears
Two centry boxes called ears,
Which furnish'd him with information
Of scandals, plots and fornication;
Beneath the frontispiece there lies,
A pair of very watchful spies,
Who can discover at a distance,
When subjects ought to make resistance
Against their princes, and foretel
The proper minute to rebel.
When Presbyter should sound th' alarm,
Against the church and state to arm;
And watch-word give with sough and tone,
The sword of the Lord and Gideon.

HIS LINGUISTIC SKILL, AND A HIT AT THE CRITICS.

For languages, it is well known,
That if you but except his own,
All others equally he knew,
As well the antient as the new,
And could with as great promptness speak
The *Hebrew* as the vulgar *Greek*,
The *Syriac* and the *Chaldaic*,
And all that's spoke by priest or laick;

Chinese, *Arabick*, and *Scalvonick*,
And dialects of the *Teutonick;*
The *Hieroglyphicks* and the *Gothick*,
The *Czar* of *Musco's* Bibliotheck,
He could explain with as great ease
And promptness as the *Japanese*,
And all the others tongues of *Babel*
With equal knowledge he could gabble.
To *Latin* he bore no good will,
And therefore had of it small skill;
Latin, the language of the *beast*,
That's mumbl'd o'er by *popish* priest,
When he's intent upon his masses,
And which is taught by pedant asses,
Who tie our tongues to rule and sense,
And with syntax will not dispense,
Which none can know unless he study
The *classick* authors which are muddy,
These corrupt, *Heath'nish*, *Pagan* fountains,
That run among the rugged mountains,
Where learning lies in drumbled water,
So deep, our Knight could ne'er come at her.
Tho' drumbled water's best to fish in,
Yet since these streams are kept by *Priscian*,
To whom he is a spiteful foe,
He scorns in them to dip his toe;
In these our *Hero* only looks
For *Latin* names to *English* books.
An enemy he is to *Grammar*,
The forge in which our speech we hammer,
And dress and furbish up our words,
And polish them like blades of *swords*,
In which the critics blow the bellows,
A set of supercilious fellows,
Whose only talent lies in prying,
And every little blemish spying,
In finding fault with that or this,
And something that is still amiss.
Tho' these ill-natur'd fairy elves
Have never made a line themselves,
Yet they drive on a scurvy trade,
Of censuring what others made:
They love to snarl, and bite and worry,
And authors hides like tanners curry,
And then expect they should be thanked
For picking holes in every blanket.

These men were hated by the *Knight;*
Some think that he was in the right.

HIS ETHICS.

In *Ethicks* he had so great skill,
He prov'd no action good nor ill
In its own nature ; but because
It jumps or jumps not with his laws,
Self-love and profit he foresaw,
Was *prima morum regula ;*
And therefore, that was always best,
Which most advanc'd his interest.
* * * * *
Nor thinks he drinking a great evil,
Because it comes not from the devil.
For you will grant this is a truth,
The devil drinks not to his drouth:
He ne'er was drunk in all his life,
'Bout this there's no debate nor strife ;
Conform to best *divines* opinions,
Liquor is scarce in his dominions.

EXTRA ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

And in the *Rosicrucian* trade
He knew all has been writ or said,
And might for an *adeptus* pass,
As most men think indeed he was.
Well versed he was in all the fancies
Of *hydro-pyro-geo-mancies.*
And many learned things could tell
Of knots and charms, and the night spell,
Which makes the devil stand as warden
To watch a deer-park or a garden.
He could find out who stole his gear,
By turning of the sieve and sheer;
And could teach browster-wives a charm,
Which they might use without all harm,
To make their drink go off the better,
To put more malt in, and less water.
A charm for masons and for slaters,
That should be writ in golden letters,
He had, which, when they us'd their calling,
Would keep them from all harm by falling:
In coming down make no more haste
Than going up, probatum est.
He made a sympathetic plaister,
Which (if you meet with a disaster),
Rightly applied to the blade,
Will surely cure the wound it made.

The above extracts will suffice to give some idea of the wit and wisdom of the "Knight". Amid all the scurillity and special pleading of the poem, there is such an amount of good humour in it, that any one who could take offence at his sallies must be somewhat akin to the anomalous, impossible hero himself. In the last extract, along with the comical recipes for the "browster-wives" and the "masons and slaters" we have references to some curious old "frets". The "turning of the sieve and sheer" is a mode of divination, accounts of which have come down to us from very early times. Theocritus, the Greek pastoral poet, who flourished in the third century B.C., and Lucian, who lived during the reign of Trajan, both mention it as a common practice in their times. As practised in Scotland, a sieve or riddle was set on its edge, the separated points of a pair of shears or scissors being so fixed in it that the sieve might be suspended by the hold taken of it by the shears. The sieve was suspended by two persons holding each a bowl of the shears, and after some cabalistic formula the question to be resolved was answered by the mysterious turning of the sieve. Modern table-turning itself has to submit to the indignity of an evolution theory. The "sympathetic plaister" was an alcoholic preparation, said to be composed of calcined sulphate of iron, prepared with many an uncanny rite, which had the wonderful property of curing a wound if applied to the weapon that inflicted it, or even to a cloth dipped in the blood which flowed from it, the presence or absence of the patient making no difference. Before passing to the other works of our author, we cannot resist giving a short episode of the Knight's, as posture in worship is still of great moment in some quarters. Of course kneeling at prayer standing up at praise or when asking a blessing at table, were abominable in the eyes of our hero:—

Therefore, it was no great wonder
That his host fell into a blunder.
For chancing with a Lord to dine,
Who ate good meat, and drank good wine;
When *Jack* had fully cram'd his *paunches*,
With *muir-foul*, *partridge*, and fat *haunches*
Of *venison*, and *pyes*, and *custard*,
After good powd'red *beef* and *mustard*,

And *hen* and *capon* and good *mutton*,
Which he had ate up like a *glutton*
(For good fare with his heart he lov'd),
How soon the table was removed,
Sitting on bum he made a face,
And thus began to say his grace.
"O! thou'rt a good and gracious Lord,
"Who does to us such store afford,
"With bounteous liberalitie,
"What thanks shall we return to thee?"
Meantime this *Lord* who did mistake him,
And for a complementer take him,
Thinking that all these thanks were given
To his good *Lordship*, not to *Heaven*,
Said, "Let your complements alone;
"You're kindly welcome, Master *John*!"

We have already indicated the circumstances under which several, at least, of Old Mother Grim's tales were composed. They are introduced by a burlesque dedication to the "Man of the Moon," which is a very happy caricature of the fulsome style of dedication so fashionable with authors of the time. Goody Grim

Was great grandchild of Father Him;
And Him, so all accounts agree,
Was great grandchild to Father He.
This He, as all our authors tell us,
Kept company with the best of fellows,
Of heath'nish Gods, and Whigs, and Tories,
And learned many witty stories,
Which, handed down from He to Him,
Came all, at last, to Goody Grim.

These tales, which are smart, witty, piquant, and coarse, hold up to ridicule the author's pet aversions—the Whigs, the Prince and Princess of Orange, and the Hanoverian, under a multitude of disguises, ancient and modern. The best of them are, perhaps, a burlesque on the fable of Phaeton, from Ovid's Metamorphoses and "The Man and his Mare". The following passage, a version of Solomon's judgment, is worth noting on account of its chastely-sustained tone, and its unlikeness to Meston's usual style:—

The preaching Monarch, the sweet singer's son,
The peaceful King of Jewry fill'd the throne,

When two pretending mothers did contend,
And for a living child a suit intend;
The doubtful plea before the throne they bring,
To be decided by the wisest King;
Both claim a right, and both their claims assert,
The last by nature taught, the first by art:
The prudent judge observ'd the artful tale,
And well he knew that nature wou'd prevail;
Reach me, said he, a sword, I'll soon decide
The cause, and 'twixt you both the child divide.
The rightful mother cry'd, Oh! rather spare
The living child, and I will yield my share,
With pity mov'd, Oh! spare the child, she cry'd:
Not so, said the pretender, but divide.
The rightful parent is for mercy still,
The base pretender cries, divide and kill.

The following historical tale is perhaps as quotable a specimen of the budget as we could give; the personifications will be at once patent:—

The gen'rous Lion long the sceptre sway'd,
And all the beasts most cheerfully obey'd;
No crafty fox, nor any hard-skull'd brute,
Their rightful sovereign's title durst dispute;
His rage made stubborn haughty rebels bow,
And gen'rously he pardon'd them when low.
The flock secure in fertile pastures fed,
By careful guides to pleasant meadows led,
Where christal streams allay'd their heat and thirst,
Cool shades and groves affording room for rest,
To all the flock, with peace and plenty blest.
If fault he had (for who from fault is free?),
'Twas too much goodness, too much clemency.
At last a factious crew of grunting hogs,
With hissing serpents, and with croaking frogs,
Conspir'd their lawful Liege-lord to dethrone,
And to set up a Monarch of their own.
From foreign shores an ugly beast they bring,
This they anoint, and then proclaim it King;
Half hog, half frog, amphibious and odd,
Some viper's spawn, none of the works of God.
This monster, after he had got the crown,
Did tyrannize in country and in town,
Attended with a crew of vermin vile,
Which ate the fruits, and razed the very soil;

The lab'ring ox no grass nor fodder had,
The harmless sheep were fleec'd, yea, almost flea'd;
The streams condemn'd, the springs were all lock'd up,
Of which the beasts were scarce allow'd one cup;
Such desolation did attend his reign,
As brought a scarcity of every thing.
At last a horse did kick him from the throne,
And by the fall he broke his collar bone;
The subjects then he summon'd to appear,
That they his last and best advice might hear.
Take care, said he, when I am dead and gone,
No Lion ever sit upon the throne;
Now promise this, and then, to make it sure,
The Lion's race straight you must all abjure.
It grieves me that one Lioness remains;
But shou'd I live I'd drive her from these plains:
Yet sure I am the serpents soon would kill
This Lioness, with poison, sting, or pill.
Men easily may prophesy and know
What they have plotted and resolv'd to do.
Are not the bulls the glory of the field?
Why shou'd the bulls then to the Lion yield?
Or thick-skull'd beasts be subject to the laws
Establish'd by a tawny Lion's paws?
Behold, in yonder field, a stately bull,
Two mighty horns do fortify his skull!
How big his neck appears! how thick his skin!
How large a dewlap hangs below his chin!

This bull (the Hanoverian) has a heifer which proves unfaithful to him, but he speedily makes short work with his rival, and drives—

. . . the frighted heifer from the plain,
To which she never would return again.
For which rare feat, it clearly does appear,
That he deserves a diadem to wear.
With him there comes along a calf of note,
It matters not by whom he was begot;
Just such a thing as, in the days of yore,
Poor foolish men did for a God adore;
For still when men do make their Gods or Kings,
Then out come calves, or some such brutish things;
If calves by men for Gods have been ador'd,
Why should not beasts have such a sovereign lord?
He said, the list'ning crowd, all in a ring
Cry'd with one voice, Long live our new horn'd King!

The frogs and toads with hoarser voice did croak;
The grunting hogs submitted to his yoke,
And all the vipers with their hissing tone,
Congratulate his access to the throne.
The bull-dogs were a very trusty crew,
Who to their lawful Liege-lord still prov'd true;
They lov'd the Lion, and his gen'rous race,
For which they all were treated with disgrace;
Expell'd the court, and driven from the throne,
And forc'd, for want of food, to gnaw a bone;
Which very much rous'd their antipathy
Against the bulls, and all their progeny;
And made them long to have a merry meeting,
And fairly once to try a sound bull-baiting.

The easy consciences possessed by many of the ministers of the time, which enabled them to change their religious cloak with every change of the political weather-glass, is a sad sight, and to a mind constituted like Meston's was sure to present a ludicrous aspect. As he says himself, "If men will be ridiculous, why should they deny the world the freedom of laughing at them? And, if deaf to reason, what other method remains but ridicule?" The following lines are, in their way, excellent:—

Let others boast of antiquate tradition,
I'm for religion of the last edition;
I ne'er examine if it be the best,
But if it may advance my interest,
I make no scruple on't; let others stray
In the strait passage of the thorny way,
I will not on my liberty incroach,
For I'm resolved to go to Heav'n in coach:
He is a fool who cannot temporize
Friend, from my heart, I wish you may be wise.
May he be worried on a dish of broath
Who has not conscience to digest an oath,
I've sworn already, God be prais'd! the Test,
The new Assurance also, and the rest
Of these sweet Oaths, of which our land hath plenty,
And ere I lose my place I'll yet swear twenty.
I'll stretch my conscience to receive all Oaths,
And change religion as I do my cloaths.
In fine, before I forfeit my estate,
I'll swear Allegiance to great *Mahomet.*

In "Mob Contra Mob: or, The Rabblers Rabbled", Meston treats in a burlesque-epic style an episode which took place at Old Deer in 1711, and which is still locally known as the "Rabbling o' Deer". This incident, which raised no small stir at the time, and is understood to have led to the passing of the Acts of Parliament regarding Toleration and Patronage in the same year, was occasioned by the attempt to settle a Presbyterian minister in the church of Deer. The district of Buchan was the great stronghold of Episcopacy in the north, and the local Presbytery at length determined to assert their rights by attacking the headquarters. Mr. John Gordon, son of Provost Gordon, of Aberdeen, was called by the Presbytery, *jure devoluto*, 20th February, 1711, to the church and parish of Deer. That the settlement would be against the wishes of the majority of the people was known, and Mr. Livingston, the incumbent, having declared that he would neither forsake his church nor his people except compelled by physical force, the local Presbytery thought it necessary to obtain assistance from Aberdeen. Accordingly, a body of about 70 horse, or thereby, assembled to secure an entrance into the church, so that Gordon might be duly ordained. Such an occurence could not escape Meston, who tells us :—

About the ports of *Aberdeen*
The *Hotch-potch Rabble* did conveen.
Of different *Names* and different *Natures*,
Complexions, *Principles*, and *Features;*
Some *Hectors*, *Tories*, *Bullies*, *Ranters*,
Some *True-blue Saints* and *Covenanters*,
Old *Consuls*, and old *Fornicators*,
Were now become new *Reformators*,
Both *Messengers* of *God* and *Sathan*,
And many of the tribe of *Dathan*,
Some *Pharisees* and *Hypocrites*,
Consultors, *Scribes*, and *Parasites*,
Mechanicks some, and *Aqueductors*,
And *Proppers* of old ruin'd structures,
Some who lived as my author tells,
Not by the *kirk* but by the *bells*.
Malignants too did help afford
To fight the battles of the Lord,
Which was the cause (as say the *Godly*)
That they came off so very oddly;

Some of the *Mob*, spurred on with *Conscience*,
And some with *Maggot*, some with *Nonsense*,
But most of all, as wise men think,
Went not so much to *fight* as *drink*.
Thus fifty *Troopers* and some more,
Armed, as we have said before,
With *Infantry* which made a force
Equal in number to the *Horse*,
Set forward all with one accord,
Leaving the city *Bon-Accord*,
Inspir'd with mighty *Resolution*,
Because they fear'd no opposition;
Some were for this *Kirk*, some for that *Kirk*,
And some no mortal knows for what *Kirk*,
Yet all of them their course did steer
To storm and take the *Kirk* of *Deer*.

On approaching the church, Gordon and his friends found the passages to the churchyard barricaded, but, having a justice of the peace with them, they proceeded towards the gate to force a passage, when they were attacked, by the people showering stones at them from the house-tops which commanded the passage. Many were hurt, and the people were fired at before Gordon and his friends retired. Blood was up, however, and the houses of the parishioners who were friendly to Mr. Gordon were ransacked; the refreshments intended for the Presbytery were seized, and the health of the Pretender was drunk enthusiastically in the streets. Criminal letters were raised against the chief parties concerned, and the case was referred to the Lord Justice-Clerk (Erskine) as arbitrator, who decided that Mr. Gordon should have peaceable access to the church on 13th May; that the offenders should appear before the congregation, be rebuked, and acknowledge their fault, repaying all expenses incurred, and binding themselves and their tenants not to countenance or hear any other person. Mr. Gordon did not enjoy a long incumbency, for he died in 1718. It may well be imagined how a scene like this would give plenty of scope for the gambols of Meston's peculiar hobby-horse. The characters are painted with his broadest brush, the skirmish is racily described, as is also the defeat, when the—

Kink-knight-errants ran with speed,
And every one got on his *Steed*;

Nor needs the *Reader* long demur,
To know if then they us'd the *Spur;*
Whatever use they made of *Bridle*,
The *Spur* and *Whip* were never idle;
Which makes the thing to be admired,
That men with *Zeal* so much inspir'd,
Rode faster home, spurr'd on with fear,
Than they advanced to *Old Deer*.

Of his songs proper, only one example to which his name is attached has come down to us. It was evidently written about the time he was lurking among the hills, after his flight from Dunnottar, and is fully charged with the spirit that possessed him through life, being more marked by strength of diction than the lyrical graces which characterise most of our Jacobite songs. It is not very generally known, however, and has found a place in few of our favourite collections.

HOW LANG SHALL OUR LAND.

How lang shall our land thus suffer distresses,
Whilst traitors, and strangers, and tyrants oppress us?
How lang shall our old, and once brave warlike nation,
Thus tamely submit to a base usurpation?
Thus must we be sad, whilst the traitors are vaudie,
Till we get a sight of our ain bonnie laddie.

Thus must we be sad, &c.

How lang shall we lurk, how lang shall we languish,
With faces dejected, and hearts full of anguish?
How lang shall the Whigs, perverting all reason,
Call honest men knaves, and loyalty treason?
Thus must we be sad, whilst the traitors are vaudie,
Till we get a sight of our ain bonnie laddie.

Thus must we be sad, &c.

O, heavens have pity! with favour present us;
Rescue us from strangers that sadly torment us,
From Atheists, and Deists, and Whiggish opinions;
Our King return back to his rightful dominions;
Then rogues shall be sad, and honest men vaudie,
When the throne is possessed by our ain bonnie laddie.

Then rogues shall be sad, &c.

Our vales shall rejoice, our mountains shall flourish;
Our Church that's oppressed, our monarch will nourish;
Our land shall be glad, but the Whigs shall be sorry,
When the King gets his own, and Heaven the glory.
Then rogues shall be sad, but the honest men vaudie,
When the throne is possessed by our ain bonnie laddie.

Then rogues shall be sad, &c.

We will now bid farewell to Meston, a poet, it has been said, "with more of the habits of one than was fortunate for his fame; a man of genius, who, to have lived happy, should have been born with the fortune of a fool of quality." His muse was a drabbled jade, but we occasionally get glimpses of that deep religious feeling which underlies the superficial character of most men. This will be seen by any one who cares to peruse his "Hymn on the Approach of the 29th of May" and his "Holy Ode from Mount Alexander".