JOHN OGILVIE.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century the literature of our country found a number of able exponents among the ministers of the Church. Not content to drop quietly into the sleepy hollow of a parish pulpit and mumble their crust and creed in ease and peace, they sought out other channels in which to work off that intellectual energy which the traditions of our Sion have ever looked askance at, except when exercised in certain unprofitable ruts of theological exposition. Poetry, the drama, history, philosophy, criticism, in fact every department of literary work, received from them a current of such vigorous and original thought as might have under more congenial circumstances done much to irrigate the desert of speculative theology. But such was not to be the case. Creed-bound to an extent we little dream of nowadays, they were watched as wandering stars by the keen eyes of the bulk of their brethren. Blair's "Grave" could well be tolerated, seeing that it contained in essence all that ever had been, or would ever likely be said on the subject of human mortality; but when his successor in the pulpit of Athelstaneford took to the drama, and actually had one of his plays performed at Edin-

burgh, the burst of Church censure which followed, not only caused him to resign his living, but was a sharp lesson to his literary friends who were given to dallying with such forms of "the mammon of unrighteousness". The ecclesiastical tether at its extreme stretch fell short of the drama, but within its sweep, odes, elegies, epitaphs, and epics lived a life of toleration. Into these, therefore, our cautious parson-poets, less over-mastered by the force of true genius than John Home, poured the inspiration vouchsafed them; and true inspiration it often was, though frequently clogged and cumbered by a dead weight of words.

John Ogilvie, D.D., minister of Midmar, the life-long friend and correspondent of Dr. Beattie, was one of the last of this class, and probably the most prolific poetical writer in his generation. Unfortunately, however, for his reputation, he was one of those who, born with a light to lead men, persistently hid it under each of the many bushels which it was his life's work to construct. Possessing a wealth of imagination and a power of diction which, had they been concentrated on one great work, and shaken clear of his pedagogic tendencies, would have enriched our literature, and placed his name well up in the ranks of his country's celebrities, it was nevertheless his lot to outlive the fame of almost every line he wrote.

He was born in 1733 at Aberdeen, where his father was one of the ministers of St. Nicholas Church; was educated at Marischal College, and, after the usual preparation, was presented to the parish of Midmar while yet in his twenty-sixth year. Amid the quiet seclusion and beautiful scenery of this parish, nestling along the northern slope of the Hill of Fare, our parson-poet began to realise the wish expressed in one of his early poems—

> For me—may passion ne'er my soul invade,
> Nor be the whims of towering frenzy given;
> Let wealth ne'er court me from the peaceful shade,
> Where contemplation wings the soul to heav'n.

Here he lived a very simple and unostentatious life for almost fifty-five years—preached, reflected, wrote, published, and ministered in a kindly, homely way, to the wants of a peasantry who had not yet outlived the primitive, plodding,

and frugal habits of life, bequeathed them by a sturdy ancestry. He occasionally visited London, and was there, in 1763, introduced to Dr. Johnson, and even supped with him and the smaller lions of the time at the Mitre Tavern. When Boswell requested liberty to introduce his countryman, the burly lexicographer assented, but slyly added as a condition that Mr. Ogilvie "must give us none of his poetry!" It was on this occasion that Johnson, irritated by hearing Scotland praised by Ogilvie for its noble prospects, retorted with, "Sir, let me tell you, the noblest prospect a Scotchman ever sees is the high road to England"! Johnson's opinion of Ogilvie's poetical powers was at this time mostly formed by a casual perusal of his first poem, "The Day of Judgment", and the few miscellanies which accompanied it in the second edition; his criticism was harsh and hard, but not altogether unjustified:—"Why, sir, there is in them what *was* imagination, but it is no more imagination in *him* than sound is sound in the echo. And his diction, too, is not his own. We have long ago seen *white-robed innocence and flower-bespangled meads*". It should not be forgotten, however, that "the Day of Judgment", though not published till 1758, had really been composed by him in his sixteenth or seventeenth year, and that any revision it might have received before publication, would not be likely to remove the imperfections of a young mind, who, on such a subject, sought to—

> Mount o'er the skies, unusual heights to soar,
> Where Young and angels only flew before.

Though Johnson could not stand Ogilvie's poetry, it is gratifying to find it recorded that he was one of the very few Scotsmen that the bearish doctor personally esteemed. The fascination which abstruse and solemn subjects exercised over Ogilvie, at an early age, was to remain the stumbling-block to his genius all through life. No one knew better, or expressed more clearly, than he did the conditions of success in such undertakings—"Philosophical dissertations lose their effect on the bulk of mankind when not enlivened with those graces which contribute to amuse the imagination. . . . So much stronger is the impulse which leads us to search for *pleasure* than that which prompts us to desire *instruction*". (Preface to "Providence".) Yet with almost every subject he took in hand, it no sooner entered upon

the poetical process with him than, all this seemed forgotten; for his poetic mill had a strong preceptorial regulator. From youth to old age his pen was never idle. "Providence, an Allegorical Poem in Three Books", appeared in 1763; "Solitude, or the Elysium of the Poets", in 1765; "Paradise, and other Poems", in 1769; "Rona, a Poem", in 1777 (this is an outrageous and improbable tale of the Hebrides, told in turgid language, and as void of poetical feeling as it is of poetical treatment); "Britannia, an Epic", in 1801; and "Human Life", in 1806. To these must be added many collected editions, besides a number of prose works, critical and theological, before one has a full view of the contributions given to the reading world by this last survivor of the Scotch literary clergymen of last century. A short time before his death, which took place on 17th December, 1813, he wrote an "Elegy on the late Professor Scott"—very likely the last effort of his muse.

Among all these, the one that may be said to be most truly characteristic of the peculiar genius of the author is undoubtedly "Providence". None of the others reach the same level of thought and expression, or contain such a proportion of fairly good poetical passages. Viewed as a whole, it is an attempt to produce a poetical piece of philosophical argumentation, embellished by the graces which allegory and description can weave round it; and the first thing that strikes one after its perusal is the breadth of view, the intellectual grasp which the author had over such a wide subject; the comprehensiveness displayed being lost to many a reader through the multiplicity of details which is made to pass before his vision. It is full of ripe scholarship, wide reading, and wise meditation. If its reasonings are found in many cases to be not so convincing as its author anticipated or desired, the fault lies less with the man than with his method, which, in common with the almost universal practice of his generation, was made to turn mostly on the argument from final causes. His purpose being to vindicate the ways of Providence from the objections which scepticism had drawn from the evils seemingly ingrained in the nature of things, he divides his subject into three parts:—1st, Providence discoverable in the general disposition of the works of nature; 2nd, in the time when revealed religion was given to man;

and, 3rd, in the vicissitudes of human life. Little purpose would be served in canvassing the lines of argument by which, under these three aspects, he sought to support the general conclusion aimed at. He is neither weaker nor stronger than the average philosophical theologian of his time in reasoning out such matters, and he has this advantage over most of them that he frequently deviates into poetry, and thus brings us back, if not to the world of rationality, at least to the world of enjoyment.

The following fine personification of the spirit of Contemplation occurs at the opening of the poem:—

Advancing slow
From this dark cell of solitary thought,
I mark'd a venerable Sage; his cheek
Furrow'd by Time, and o'er his hoary head
The cold white hand of slowly-stealing Age
Had shower'd its lucid silver; sweetly mild
His looks, his mein, and raised to Heav'n, his eyes
Beam'd like fair Evening's dewy star, that shines
With placid radiance; graceful was his form,
And simple his attire. His bending hand
Lean'd on an ivory staff, the prop of Age;
Yet firm his step, as one whose youthful blood
Warm'd, not inflamed by Reason's temperate cheer,
Had tinged the florid cheek, nor felt the blast
Of cold Consumption. With slow step he scaled
The cliff, and walking to the shade, on me
Bent a soft look that pitied, while it awed.

In the second and third books he is at his best, and from these we glean the following:—

TEMPTATION.

A form appeared,
Divinely-beauteous, whose rich plumage gleam'd
Gay to the dazzling sun: beyond the race
Of mortals fair, beyond the human size
Raised, with superior dignity she trod;
And seem'd a Goddess from celestial climes
To man descending, that her lenient hand
Might point the path to Happiness. Her head
A crown encircled; o'er her limbs a robe
Floated in easy majesty; a star
Beam'd from her brow; and on her arm she bore

A polish'd mirror, where the forms of things
Reflected, with transcendent lustre flamed.
Age in the glass beheld its wrinkled front,
Smooth as the cheek of Hebe. Beauty shone
With angel radiance; and Deformity,
(Had shrunk Deformity been there) had vied
With Helen struggling in the arms of love,
Sweetly reluctant. Such the Goddess shone.

VOTARIES OF PLEASURE.

One mid the circling throng superior trod,
And claim'd their homage ; yet his cheek retain'd
The fading rose of youth, that ere its prime
Disease had wither'd, as th' expanding bud,
Smit by pale Lightning's beauty-blasting wing,
Untimely droops, and quivering threats a fall,
Ere Autumn's rude breath bare the leafy bough.
Yet reeling from the feast, his eyes announced
Intemperate joy, though slow-corroding Care
Sat on his front. Behind him crawl'd the step
Of feeble Age; a Sire, whose ragged brow,
Time's gradual plough-share deepening as it roll'd
Had mark'd with furrows; and his palsied limbs
Bent, as he totter'd o'er the rustling lawn.
The rest laugh'd loud, Mirth with frolic sport
Danced on their dimpling cheek: light to the voice
Of the soft lute, all-loose they roved along,
Where young-eyed Pleasure led their step, elate,
And heedless of the road.

A SHEPHERD'S WIFE.

His wife,
Fair as the rose, when first the blushing Spring
Sprinkles its balmy leaf with moist'ning dew;
Sat near him, decent in the rural robe
Of native Elegance; no floating lawn,
Refined by study, and the ceaseless care
Of Luxury high-pamper'd, o'er her form
Wanton'd in aery folds: her simple dress,
By artless modesty design'd, improved
The gifts of Nature. Careless on her knee
An infant play'd, and, wondering eyed with smiles
The strangers warbling from th' aereal bough,
And eager join'd responsive. To her breast
She clasp'd the boy in extasy of thought,
And kiss'd his little cheek.

SOCRATES.

One Sage alone, with philosophic eye,
Look'd thro' the gloom, and spied the ruling hand
Of Wisdom in her works; but from his sight
The Vision vanish'd; to his lips divine,
By Superstition held, the poison'd draught
Crack'd Life's weak strings, and sent th' unprisoned mind,
Half-clear'd, to know the truth his mind explored.

One might easily supplement the above with other excerpts of equal worth which occur in the progress of this bulky poem, such as the description of Arcadia—the rise of science and learning in Egypt—the learning and elegance of the Athenians—but we must forbear, and pass on to view the second main pillar on which his poetical reputation is based. This poem, generally acknowledged as next in point of merit to the above, but inheriting the same defects and blemishes which mar all his longer poems, was written "to give the English reader an idea, in as short a compass as possible, of the character, merit, and discriminating excellencies of the most eminent British poets". He entitles it "Solitude, or the Elysium of the Poets". In bringing the various poets before his readers the author sought to exhibit them "with a variety of diction, imagery, and sentiment corresponding in some degree to the manner of each". It was not a success; though it contains many just and beautiful stanzas, the opening is sufficiently dreary to repel most readers. After passing through some fifty verses (a solitude indeed) we come on his description of Chaucer:—

Just where the hill (these happy mansions shown)
  O'erlook'd the pendent trees that waved between;
On the fair borders of that temperate zone,
  Tho' rude, yet graceful, smiled a rustic scene.

Rich, yet confused, the intermingling sprays,
  Uncouthly gay, their simple flowers displayed;
Nor here had fashion plann'd the wildering maze,
  Nor Art's soft touch th' entangling shrubs obey'd.

But o'er the whole majestic Nature strode,
  Her form disdainful of the mimic hand;
The brightening Wilderness before her glow'd,
  Behind gay plenty clothed the broider'd land.

A little hamlet in the midst appear'd,
Where antique figures stood exposed to view;
Of rough materials was the structure rear'd,
And round its walls the clasping ivy grew.

* * * * * * *

Much sung the swain of love, and much of care,
Much of th' imperious Wife, the man forsworn;
Much of the Dotard tame, th' insidious Fair,
The plan projected, and the gilded horn.

How oft the Nymph her ancient mate beguiles;
Soothes when he storms, or chuckles as he leers;
When roused eludes him with superior wiles,
Or jealous,—bursts in thunder on his ears.

Spenser sits

Where Art with Nature's rich luxuriance strove,
Half-pruned, half-rambling rose the leafy sprays;
A Shepherd Swain, amid the gloomy grove,
Play'd wildly-sweet his simple roundelays.

Of hardy Knight he told, and Fairy Queen,
Of Lover wan by weeping brook reclined,
Of Wizard old that spread his nets unseen,
Of Damsel fair to wicked wight resign'd.

Milton, in an Eden of his own, holds "converse high" with many angelic guests; while Shakespeare, on a "beetling cliff", sits in his regal glory, drinking "the music of the lawns below". Ossian, equally exalted but isolated in his sublime melancholy, strikes

. . . the Caledonian lyre:
Slow, wild, and solemn, wail'd the melting lays:
Of dying groans it sung, of combats dire,
And told the mournful tales of ancient days;

Of Ghosts dim-gliding on the Moon's wan beam,
Of feeble sounds that tell the Hero's doom,
Of Chiefs once famed, that o'er his midnight dream
Lower dark, and point him to the lonely tomb.

He sung the narrow house with grass o'ergrown,
Where oft as Night involves the dusky sphere,
The Spirit hovering o'er the moss-clad stone
Shrieks to the Hunter's pierced and startled ear.

The poem runs on with more or less elaborate wordiness for about a hundred stanzas more, Pope, Thomson, and others,

coming in for treatment, each delineation being given with about the same amount of success as those exhibited above.

Less pretentious than the greater works they were usually attached to, his smaller poems, consisting of odes, eclogues, fables, and elegaic pieces, show a more equal level of workmanship, if a lower level of thought. Indeed, had they not been obscured by the claims of their bulkier and more imposing brethren, their merits might have helped considerably to float his name down to a posterity that may be said to know him not. In his "Ode to Sleep" the apt selection of language and imagery strikes one at once. Here are a couple of stanzas:—

Sweet God of ease, whose opiate breath
Pour'd gently o'er the heaving breast;
Steals like the solemn hand of Death;
And sheds the balm of visionary rest;
Come with ev'ry pow'rful spell
From the hermit's gloomy cell,
From the swallow's mossy bed,
When bleak Winter blasts the mead;
Come with Night's cold, cloudy brow,
With sky-rob'd Thought, demure and slow,
With Rest that charms the drowsy air,
And folds the wakeful eyes of melancholy Care.

O by thy robe of purest white,
Thy tresses bound with fun'ral yew,
Thy voice that soothes the ear of night,
Thine ebon' rod that sweeps the pearly dew;
By the pale moon's trembling beam,
By the ghosts on Lethe's stream;
By the silent solemn gloom,
By the beetle's drousy hum,
By the zephir's dying breath,
When sleeps the ruffled wave beneath;
By the long voice of murm'ring seas,
Lull each reposing sense in calm oblivious ease.

In the odes "To Melancholy" and "To the Genius of Shakespeare", the author is equally successful in the adaptation of thought and expression to the character of his subjects. From the former we glean:—

O lead my steps beneath the Moon's dim ray,
Where Tadmor stands all desert and alone!
While from her time-shook tow'rs, the bird of prey
Sounds thro' the night her long-resounding moan.

* * * * * * *

Then let thy pencil mark the traits of Man ;
Full in the draught be keen-eyed Hope pourtray'd ;
Let fluttering Cupids crowd the growing plan ;
Then give one touch, and dash it deep with shade.

* * * * * * *

Let Love's gay sons, a smiling train, appear,
With Beauty pierc'd,—yet heedless of the dart ;
While closely couch'd pale, sickening Envy near
Whets her fell sting, and points it at the heart.

But we must draw to a close. The above are fully sufficient to show the nature and extent of Ogilvie's poetical genius—a genius which by no stretch of imagination could ever be said to have "o'er informed his tenement of clay". As he began, so he ended, a victim to big subjects, which his intellect readily grasped, but his muse had not the wing to cover—subjects which in his treatment gave ample field to the dialectitian, but far too few inspiring draughts to lovers of the pure Pierian spring.

As a man, in all the relationships of life, his character and conduct was of the most exemplary kind. Bland and unassuming in his manners, he was one of the few who passed through a long life without creating an enemy. His study in the quiet old manse of Midmar was his world—his chief companions were the wise of all ages stored on his bookshelves. There, and with these, he found that peace and contentment seldom found in the bustle and conflict of city life ; and when he passed away, on the 17th November, 1813, at the ripe old age of 81, it was truly said of him that, "though a man of genius and learning, his character had all the simplicity of a child".

"THE OGILVIAD".

As an addendum to the foregoing sketch we may here notice a clever little brochure which Dr. Ogilvie's son, James, while a student at King's College, had the repute of being at once hero and part author. This poetical discharge, a small octavo of 16 pages, is one of those rarities which collectors of

local literature prize so much but find so seldom. It had its origin, we believe, in a love affair, but all that comes to the front in its pages is the resentment of the initial insult, a bit of fracas which afforded a deal of mirth to their fellow-students. Who was the insulter or the insulted we cannot tell, both writers claimed being the one and denied being the other, but some one (probably Mr. Grant) having satirised his adversary (Mr. Ogilvie) in some verses entitled "The Ogilviad", the latter replied at once. Attack and reply, probably in MS., went on until the poem, as it now stands, was completed, when Mr. Ogilvie, whose powers as a writer of satirical verse were considerably beyond those of his opponent, collected the whole, and dedicating it to his fellow-students, issued it as "*The Ogilviad, a heroic poem, with its Answers; being a dispute between two gentlemen at King's College. Aberdeen,* 1789". Like every production of the kind, there is an abundance of hard hitting in it; but Mr. Ogilvie's antagonist having to descend to personalities, the conflict soon closed by the more honourable foe declining the contest unless the person who opposed him made himself known. The "Answers", to be written by a young lad in his teens, show a considerable share of literary faculty and rhyming power. To those who are curious over such matters we give the following extracts, the first by Mr. Ogilvie, the other by his rival:—

From the Answer to part I.—

Ignoble coward, I've read thy jingling verse,
Which vainly strives a combat to rehearse;
Yourself, ev'n conscious of inferior fame,
Sent forth your empty rhymes without a name,
Attack'd your foe beneath the gloom of night,
And show'd yourself unequal for the fight.
As when a robber, searching for his prey,
Waits with impatient haste the closing day,
Then when black shades involve the dreary sky,
When night's dim curtain bounds the wilder'd eye,
Creeps slow and silent near the peaceful bed,
Where some great mortal lays his weary head,
Slow draws the dagger, all is calm around,
He gives the stroke but fails t' inflict the wound.
Rous'd from his slumbers then his mighty foe
Stretches his arms to find whence came the blow;

But ah! the cowardly hated wretch is fled,
Black night conceals him in a friendly shade.
Thus you a nerveless satire strive to write,
Like one who shows his teeth, but cannot bite,
Willing to aim, you raise the bended bow,
The arrow flies, but fails to strike the foe.
Forbear, ah! hapless youth, ere 'tis too late,
Mourn for the past, and think of Cibber's fate.

From "Ogilviad", part 3.—

A poet has of late begun to sing,
Who has drunk deep of the Pierian spring,
Ogilvie the man, a name to none unknown,
Even from the meanest subject to the Throne,
Mov'd with a share of that poetic fire
Which animates the bosom of his sire,
He now in numbers does begin to flutter,
And with his verses all around besputter.
Vain is the fool who would with him contend,
Or who would dare the poet to offend?
A poet who alike is bold
A sword to brandish, or a pen to hold.
For he the muses constant fav'rite is,
Who pour out verses on his godlike phiz.

* * * * *

Reader, I pray thee, cease from this to think
That I intend great Ogilvy to pink,
For should I once but fight with such a sot
I'd lose, I fear, more glory than I got.
Still let him live, and still let him amuse
His fellow-students when they lack of news.
The hero's dress I'll now describe,
But not by any means deride;
With sky-blue ribbons decking both his knees,
He proudly struts with unaffected ease.
The tiny buttons his green coat adorn
That by his sires in former times were worn.
The coat itself was bought at second hand,
And half a crown was the immense demand;
The boots, an ornament to him not mean,
Their fiftieth year, I'm confident, have seen;
From sire to son preserv'd with reverend care,
They now adorn great Ogilvy the bear.

We have seen a copy of the above with a MS. note, in which Robert Alves, an Aberdeen student, and a versifier of

some note in his day, is said to be the author of the "Ogilviad". This can scarcely be correct, for Alves graduated in 1766, was successively schoolmaster at Deskford and Banff, and went to Edinburgh in 1779, where he remained till his death, in 1791.