A LECTURE ON COWPER AND BURNS, THE TWO EARLIEST GREAT POETS OF THE MODERN SCHOOL.

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YOUNG MEN!—Is it truly said that the age we live in is very unpoetical? I think not. Never was the best poetry better appreciated in this country than at present; for even in the Elizabethan period of our literature, the best poetry was not always best appreciated. Perhaps there is more poetry in the "Bride of Lammermoor," or in the mere conception of the character of the Master of Ravenswood, than in all the poets of the fifty years that immediately preceded the Modern school of poetry. Cowper and Burns were the earliest great poets of that school; and of them I proceed to speak.

Cowper, you are aware, was highly educated; and Burns was better educated than nineteen-twentieths of Englishmen are. But Burns was self-taught, we are told. So was Cowper. So is *every* man of genius. It is in being self-taught, that men of genius differ from other men; or how happened Cowper, in his writings, to oppose totally the approved standards of his day? Perhaps the productions of that power which is called genius, are not results of qualities inherent in their authors, but of fortunate circumstances, or even of disadvantages conquered: for instance, a man may conquer the disadvantages of a good education, as Milton did; or convert a bad one into the best, as Shakspeare did. I know a man who has obtained some literary notoriety in consequence of having a defective memory, which retains nothing but leading facts and principles: like the shark described by Cobbett, which swallowed hundreds of cod fish and millions of keplins, but only felt the cod fish. Now, Burns, when quite a youth, living on six pounds twelve shillings a-year, had the honour, it is said, to establish one of the earliest subscription libraries in Scotland—a glory worth living for. The funds of the subscribers would not allow them to buy many books, but the books they did buy were good ones. Burns, then, could not become an indiscriminate reader, or he might possibly have formed his taste on worse models than the "Letters of Junius." Six pounds twelve shillings a-year, is a small sum for a hungry youth to live upon; but if Burns had not known what poverty is, would he have written his "Cottar's Saturday Night?" And if he had not had the misfortune to be a gauger—too well acquainted with alehouse doings—could he have written his "Tam O' Shanter?" It is more than probable, then, that he owed much of his literary success to misfortunes—vanquished, and converted into their opposites. It is certain that Cowper did: he derived strength from his weakness: he had to fight battles with his miserable constitution, and he gained glorious victories over it. His works are those victories. How good, then, is God, even in what he denies! and how thankless are they who do not use what he gives! The dullest mechanic, by merely reading what is excellent in our language—the masterpieces alone, might, in a few months, become allied to the highest minds—a copartner in excellence; and, if thought is eternal, a shareholder with immortality. Think of this, Young Men! for you cannot win the race of knowledge (which is virtue) by lagging behind the age in which you live; and if you cannot answer Time—the great questioner here—how will you answer God, when he asks you, not if you won the race, but why you stood still?

It is not easy to conceive any two men more unlike each other, than Cowper and Burns were; and yet, in their genius, there is much similarity. Burns, perhaps, was twice as much a man as Cowper, and the tenth part of the tithe as much a poet as Shakspeare or Scott: he was a giant, nevertheless. *His* Muse was manliness: he was honest and fearless. The Muse of Cowper was conscience: *he* was honest but not fearless: he trembled, and a shadow overthrew him—but it was a shadow darker than the shadow of death. He would have been a far greater poet than he was, if disease had not made him a coward. Not that he was insincere: oh no! and yet he dared not whisper to his poor heart that God is merciful. Nor was his despair unpoetical; but the hope of Burns is more poetical than Cowper's despair; and Burns had this further advantage, that he neither despaired of man as he is, nor of his ultimate destiny. How much more respectable human nature appears in our eyes after reading Burns, than after reading Byron!

The language of Burns is frequently as condensed as that of Pope. Some of his lines contain as many thoughts as words. I will quote one of these: "his locked, letter'd, braw brass collar:" here are six thoughts in six words. Never, perhaps, was there a more pregnant style. And he is the most unsophisticated of poets. He is earnest as Milton, earnest as Cromwell, earnest as the Pilgrim Fathers, who, seeking the free worship of God on the shores of America, planted the world's political redemption in a wilderness of wants. His readers never mistrust him. It is not the poetry that we like, but the man. He has stamped his honest, fearless, individuality upon his writings: they are all marked "Robert Burns."

If you doubt the similarity of the minds of these two men, compare any one of the rhymed epistles of Burns, with the rhymed epistle of Cowper to Joseph Hill:—

> "An honest man, close-buttoned to the chin,
> Broad cloth without, and a warm heart within."

Burns, however, had a great advantage over Cowper, in his option of rhyming either in English, or in his sweet native Doric. Burns knew this well. No man ever understood better his powers, or his position. I, therefore, venture to

predict, that the rhymed epistles of Burns will never be excelled; nay, so unsurpassable is their excellence, that (if genius supposes judgment) few men of genius would attempt to imitate them. He was warned, indeed, that his truthfulness (his vulgarity it was called) would be fatal to the longevity of his writings. Wordsworth has had similar warnings; but if *he* fail to become permanently popular, he will not fail because his subjects are mean, but because what is called his simplicity, is that worst of all affectations, the affectation of unaffectedness.

It would be preposterous to class such writers as Cowper, our best ethic poet, and Burns, our best sentimental poet, with such writers (there are none such) as Shakspeare and Scott; but it cannot be denied that they are, though not greatest, great. Cowper, in fourteen of the noblest lines ever written, enumerates some of the qualities which, in his opinion, are requisite to constitute the character of a great poet:—

> "Fervency, freedom, fluency of thought:
> Harmony, strength, words exquisitely sought;
> Fancy, which from the bow that spans the sky
> Brings colours dipp'd in heaven, that never die;
> A soul exalted above earth; a mind
> Skill'd in the characters that form mankind;
> And as the sun, in rising beauty dress'd,
> Looks to the westward from the dappled east,
> And marks, (whatever clouds may interpose,)
> Ere yet his race begins, its glorious close;
> *An eye like his*, to catch the distant goal,
> Or, ere the wheels of verse begin to roll,
> Like his, to shed illuminating rays
> On every scene and subject it surveys."

Both these poets combined, do not possess all the requisites to form a Shakspeare or a Scott; and it s remarkable, that Cowper, in his enumeration, leaves unmentioned the quality in which himself and Burns were most deficient. Montgomery, rich in heavenly thoughts, "and that sweet peace which goodnesss bosoms ever"—Montgomery, who has heen called our second Cowper, and our miniature Milton, unlike them both, abounds in tenderness; but if I have been able to find only one eeply pathetic passage in the writings of Cowper, you will perhaps say the fault is mine. The lines I allude to, are called "The Castaway:" they are a narrative of the death of a sailor who was washed from the wreck of Admiral Anson's ship; and they conclude with this dismal stanza:—

> No voice divine the storm allay'd,
> No light propitious shone,
> When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
> We perished, *each* alone;
> But I beneath a rougher sea,
> And whelm'd in *deeper* gulphs than he.

Few as are the pathetic passages in the works of Burns, they are sufficiently numerous to show, that "the weeping blood of woman's heart" was not unknown to him: how *could* it be unknown to one of the warmest hearts that ever beat? Perhaps he was too manly to weep often; but, if so, his tears are not the less affecting on that account. Is it possible for words to exceed in pathos the apostrophe of the captive Queen of Scots to her absent son?

> God shield thee frae thy mother's foes,
> Or turn their hearts to thee!
> But if thou meet thy mother's *friend*,
> Remember *him* for me!

How plain, how true are these words! Burns was too honest to sacrifice sense to sound: in some of his tenderest verses, he can scarcely be said to rhyme at all. I will try, by a very short extract from one of the finest of his poems, to illustrate the single-heartedness of his character.

> Oh, pale, pale, now those rosy lips
> *I oft hae kiss'd* sae fondly!
> And closed for aye the sparkling glance
> That dwelt on *me* sae kindly!
> And mouldering now in silent dust
> The heart that lo'ed *me* dearly!
> But still, within my bosom's core,
> Shall live my Highland Mary!

Here is *no* sophistication. The pale lips were the lips that he had *kissed;* the closed eyes were the eyes that had looked on *him* with fondness; the mouldering heart was the heart that *loved* him. He was not afraid to be told that his love was selfish; it was enough for him that it was the love that God made.

With similar honesty, and with true piety, he calls the mouse "his fellow-mortal;" for, says Coleridge,

> He prayeth best, who *loveth* best
> All things, both great and small,
> For the dear God who loveth *us*,
> He made, and loveth all.

Burns having been called the Camoens of Scotland, I will recite a sonnet of the Portuguese bard, on the death of his mistress:—

> That gentle, bounteous hand; that heart sincere;
> Those locks of light, that shamed the beams of day;
> Those charming eyes, within whose starry sphere
> Love, turned from Heaven, charmed all my cares away;
> Are changed, for ever changed, and turned to clay.
> Death! thou hast torn, in one unpitying hour,
> The plant to which, ere scarce it bore a flower,
> The mellower fruitage of its prime was given;
> Love saw the deed, and as he lingered near,
> Sigh'd o'er the ruin, and return'd to Heav'n.

The author, in every fibre of his frame, felt this to be true poetry; yet it wants the heartiness, the downright sincerity of our northern Camoens. The literature of the last sixty years can boast, at least, two truth-tellers,—Rousseau and Burns; but Rousseau told the truth of himself as a duty, Burns unconsciously, as a flower unfolds its petals, —and the latter revelation is likeliest to be the true one.

There are thoughts which, generally, it would be in the highest degree improper to divulge to others, but which we whisper to our hearts in spite of ourselves. They are often read in us by others, when we would not utter them for worlds. *They are poetry in the highest*, revelations of the past of thought, *warnings*,—sent of God, lest they become the past of action also; and if, after having become the past of action, they should happen to be revealed by accident, or by the agonies of a guilty conscience, they are then terribly sublime. Whoever thou art, Poet of the Future!—if such a being is now addressed by me,—listen, with trembling, to the first warnings of guilty thought; but

if thou shouldst be so unhappy as to seek an excuse for evil thoughts in the evil deeds of Burns, ask thyself—before thou believe all the evil that has been imputed to him—whether he might not possibly have been justified in saying to himself, what few can say with truth, *that he was better than his reputation*? for, in speaking to his own heart, he has laid it, with unexampled manliness, *naked* before thine. Was he not, then, a man and a brother? Compare his revealed secrets with that frightful revelation of Cardinal Beaufort in Shakspeare—that terrible poetry of *silence*—when "he died, and made no sign."

If Cowper had written songs, such was the honesty of his nature, that he would probably have equalled Burns, great as are the disadvantages under which our language would have laid him. For Burns was not the prototype of the truthfulness of Scottish song; the ancient minstrels of Scotland did not forget to avail themselves of the marvellous facilities which the dialect of their country affords to the poet; but Burns has excelled their best productions. See his "Anna," that sweetest of lyrics; or see his "Banks and Braes o' Bonny Doon," the hacknied thought expressed in which is, in other writers, a mere conceit; but in Burns, a sentiment, solemn, mournful, almost sublime. At Doncaster, when I was lecturing there, I met with one of those intimations of a better world, which give us, in this, a presage of Heaven,—a lady, beautiful, good, and all-accomplished, who asked me if I could sing? I answered, "that I was passionately fond of music, but that my wife had been more than thirty years vainly trying to teach me the Hundreth psalm tune,"—there being a note toward the close of the third line which I cannot learn. She then said that, justice, she thought, could not be done to Burns, as a lyric poet, if his songs were divorced from their appropriate tunes. I thought differently; but mentally resolved that I would sing, and also recite, as I have now done, one of his best songs; for I knew that my bad singing would, at least, seem to help my theory,—that good singing is to good recitation what a silver chain is to the lark's wing, or a parrot learning language to the flower whose silence singeth.

Cowper does not, like Burns, write the history of the poor in every page of his works, but his heart was with them; witness his description of the street-imprisoned mechanic, and his miserable attempt at a garden, "A sprig of mint, set in a spoutless teapot." They were both patriots, both honest men; but the expression of their sentiments was remarkably modified by their physical condition. Burns speaks with the animal courage of health,—Cowper, with the faltering of incipient disease, or the energy of fever. "Is there," says Burns,—

> Is there for honest poverty,
> *That hangs his head, and a' that,*—
> The coward loon! we pass *him* by;
> And dare be poor for a' that.

"He," says Cowper, "who finds one drop of heaven's sweet mercy in his cup, can dig, beg, rot, and perish, well content so he may wrap himself in honest rags at his last gasp; but could not, for a world, fish up his dirty and dependent bread from pools and ditches of the commonwealth, sordid and sickening at his own success."

If Cowper had been blessed with the physical strength of Burns, he might have been,—but I don't say he would have been,—at once, one of the greatest of poets and ablest of active men. As it is, I am unable to name a poet whose writings, page for page, can boast an equal amount of original thought and sterling common sense.

In nothing did Cowper and Burns resemble each other more than in their power of comic delineation: had they written for the stage, we should have had three Sheridans—alike, yet how different!

Here is one of Cowper's pictures, finished with minute touches of the pencil:—

> Yon ancient prude, whose withered features show
> She might be young some forty years ago,
> Her elbows pinioned close upon her hips,
> Her head erect, her fan upon her lips,
> Her eye-brows arched, her eyes both gone astray
> To watch yon amorous couple in their play,
> With bony and unkerchief'd neck, defies
> The rude inclemency of wintry skies,
> And sails, with lappet head and mincing airs,
> Duly, at clink of bell, to morning prayers.
> To thrift and parsimony much inclined,
> She yet allows herself that boy behind.
> The shivering urchin, bending as he goes,
> With slip-shod heels, and dewdrop at his nose;
> His predecessor's coat advanced to wear,
> Which future pages yet are doomed to share;
> Carries her Bible, tucked beneath his arm,
> And hides his hands to keep his fingers warm.
> She, half an angel in her own account,
> Doubts not hereafter with the saints to mount,
> Though not a grace appears, on strictest search,
> But that she fasts, and, *item*, goes to church.

But Burns could dash off a character with a stroke of his pen. Premising that my ignorance of the Scottish dialect will prevent me from doing him anything like justice, I will prove both these assertions by reading a few lines from a poem, which he alone of all mankind could have written. Study it, young men, if you would know what a power language is:—

TAM O' SHANTER.

> When chapman billies leave the street,
> And drouthy neebors neebors meet,
> As market-days are wearing late,
> And folk begin to tak' the gate;
> While we sit bousing at the nappy,
> And getting fou and unco' happy,
> We think na' on the lang Scots miles,
> The mosses, waters, slaps, an stiles,
> That lie between us and our hame,
> Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,
> Gathering her brows, like gathering storm,
> Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.
>
> This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
> As he frae Ayr ae night did canter.
>
> Oh, Tam, hadst thou but been sae wise
> As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
> She tauld thee weel thou wast a skellum,
> A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
> That frae *November* till *October*,
> Ae market-day thou wasna sober;
> That *ilka* melder wi' the miller
> Thou sate as lang as thou had siller;
> That *every* naig was ca'd a shoe on,
> The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;

That at the Lord's house ev'n on Sunday
Thou drank wi' Kirton Jean till Monday.
She prophesied, that late or soon,
Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon;
Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
To think how mony counsels-sweet—
How mony prudent sage advices
The husband frae the wife despises!

But to our tale. Ae market-night
Tam had got planted unco right,
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow Souter Johnny,
His ancient, trusty, *drouthy* crony:
Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither,
They had been fou for *weeks* thegither.
The night *drave* on wi' sangs an' clatter,
And aye the ale was growing better;
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus;
The storm without might rain and rustle,
Tam didna mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd *himsel'* amang the nappy;
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
The minutes *wing'd* their way wi' pleasure;
Kings may be *bless'd*, but Tam was *glorious*,
O'er a' the cares o' life victorious.

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
We seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow-falls in the river,
A moment white—then gone for ever.

I hold in my hand some verses which have not appeared in any collection of the works of Burns. They want his terseness and condensation; but may be his notwithstanding;—if they are—and I do not know who else could have written them,—they show that he, too, could, when he chose, finish a portrait with minute touches of the comic pencil.

THE MINISTER.

Our gudewife she keeps beef and ale,
And tea, to treat the Minister,
While I, if hungry, sup the kale;
The beef is for the Minister:
Besides, a bottle she keeps by,
To warm his heart when he's no dry,
While I the water-pail maun try;
May the deil burst the Minister!

Our Minister he has nae pride,
Not a bit the Minister;
He just sits down by our fireside
As he were no' our Minister;
He taks our gudewife by the hand,
Says, John, man, sit, what maks ye stand?
He has the bairns a' at command:
They a' ken the Minister.

But still he's useful in his place,
He's a braw man the Minister;
At ilka feast he says the grace,
Nane fitter than the Minister;
And when the glasses come in view,
He says, We'll drink, but na' get fou
Sic things the Lord doth not allow:
Yet fou gets the Minister.

Our Minister he's now fall'n sick,
Waes me, the Minister;
Wha' now shall keep us frae auld Nick,
If the Lord tak our Minister?
Left to oursels, he kens fu' weel,
The brent up stairs we canna spiel.
We maun ev'n turn back and face the deil,
If the Lord tak our Minister.

He preaches loud, does saftly pray—
Thus says our Minister,
"Ye will be sure to find the way,
If ye are like your Minister;
Ye'll get a place, ye needna fear;
Be sure that after him ye spier."
But faith, I doubt, when we get there,
We'll no see the Minister.

I must now conclude, with a few observations on the lives and characters of the two great founders of the Modern School of Poetry. Perhaps no falsehood has been more frequently repeated than that men of genius are less fortunate and less virtuous than other men; but the obvious truth that they who attempt little are less liable to failure than they who attempt much, will account for the proverbial good luck of fools. In our estimate of the sorrows and failings of literary men, we forget that sorrow is the common lot; we forget, too, that the misfortunes and the errors of men of genius are recorded; and that, although their virtues may be utterly forgotten, their minutest faults will be sure to find zealous historians. And this is as it should be. Let the dead instruct us. But slanderers blame, in individuals, what belongs to the species. "We women," says Clytemnestra in Eschylus, when meditating the murder of her husband, and in reply to an attendant who was praising the gentleness of the sex, "We women are—what we are." So is it with us all. Then, let every fault of men of genius be known; but let not hypocrisy come with a sponge, and wipe away their virtues.

Of the misfortunes of Cowper, we have all heard, and certainly he was unfortunate, for he was liable to fits of insanity. But it might be said of him, that he was tended through life by weeping angels. Warm-hearted friends watched and guarded him with intense and unwearied solicitude; the kindest hearted of the softer sex, the best of the best, seem to have been born only to anticipate his wants. A glance at the world, will show us that his fate, though sad, was not saddest: for how many madmen are there, and how many men still more unfortunate than madmen, who have no living creature to aid, or soothe, or pity them! Think of Milton—"blind among enemies!"

But the saddest incident in the life of Cowper remains to be told. In his latter days, he was pensioned by the crown—a misfortune which I can forgive to him, but not to destiny. It is consoling to think, that he was not long conscious of his degradation after the cruel kindness was inflicted on him. But why did not his friends—if weary of sustaining their kinsman stricken by the arrows of the Almighty, suffer him to perish in a *beggars'* madhouse? Would he had died in a ditch, rather than this shadow had darkened over his grave! Burns was more fortunate in his death than Cowper: he lived self-supported to the end. Glorious hearted Burns! Noble, but unfortunate *Cowper!*

Burns was one of the few poets fit to be seen. It has been asserted that genius is a disease,—the malady of physical inferiority. It is certain, that we have heard of Pope, the hunchback: of Scott and Byron, the cripples: of the epileptic *Julius* Cæsar, who, it is said, never planned a great battle

without going into fits; and of Napoleon, whom a few years of trouble killed: where Cobbett (a man of talent, not of genius) would have melted St. Helena, rather than have given up the ghost with a full belly. If Pope could have leaped over five-barred gates, he probably would not have written his inimitable sofa-and-lap-dog poetry; but it does not follow, that he would not have written the "Essay on Man;" and they who assert that genius is a physical disease, should remember that, as true critics are more rare than true poets, we having only one in our language, William Hazlitt—so, very tall and complete men are as rare as genius itself, a fact well known to persons who have the appointment of constables. And if it is undeniable that God wastes nothing, and that we, therefore, perhaps seldom find a gigantic body combined with a soul of Æolian tones: it is equally undeniable, that Burns was an exception to the rule—a man of genius, tall, strong, and handsome, as any man that could be picked out of a thousand at a country fair.

But he was unfortunate, we are told. Unfortunate! He was a tow-heckler who cleared six hundred pounds by the sale of his poems: of which sum he left two hundred pounds behind him, in the hands of his brother Gilbert: two facts which prove that he could neither be so unfortunate, nor so imprudent, as we are told he was. If he had been a mere tow-heckler, I suspect he would never have possessed six hundred shillings.

But he *was* imprudent it is said. Now, he is a wise man who has done one act that influences beneficially his whole life. Burns did three such acts—he wrote poetry—he published it; and, despairing of his farm, he became an exciseman. It is true he did one imprudent act; and, I hope, the young persons around me will be warned by it: he took a farm, without thoroughly understanding the business of farming. It does not appear that he wasted or lost any capital, except what he threw away in his farm. He was unlucky, but not imprudent in giving it up when he did. Had he held it a little longer, the Bank Restriction Act would have enriched him at the expense of his landlord; but Burns was an honest man, and, therefore, alike incapable of desiring and foreseeing that enormous villany.

But he was neglected, we are told. Neglected? No strong man, in good health, *can* be neglected, if he is true to himself. For the benefit of the young, I wish we had a correct account of the number of persons who fail of success, in a thousand that resolutely strive to do well. I do not think it exceeds one per cent. By whom was Burns neglected? Certainly not by the people of Scotland: for they paid him the highest compliment that can be paid to an author: they bought his book! Oh, but he ought to have been pensioned. Pensioned? Cannot we think of poets without thinking of pensions? *Are* they such poor creatures, that they cannot earn an honest living? Let us hear no more of such degrading and insolent nonsense.

But he was a drunkard, it is said. I do not mean to exculpate him, when I say, that he was, probably, no worse in that respect than his neighbours; for he *was* worse if he was not better than they, the balance being against him; and his Almighty Father would not fail to say to him, "What didst thou with the lent talent?" But drunkenness, in his time, was the vice of his country—it is so still; and if the traditions of Dumfries are to be depended on, there are allurements which Burns was much less able to resist than those of the bottle; and the supposition of his frequent indulgence in the crimes to which those allurements lead, is incompatible with that of his habitual drunkenness.

When I was a lad, one of my father's workmen sometimes sent me early in the morning with a quart pot to a neighbouring alehouse, for a jack of what he called "purl;" and later in the forenoon, for a pint of ale. Finding, by dipping my finger into it, that the "purl" had a bitter taste, and nasty yellow shake-up, I never tolled it; and I observed that my employer drank it without raising his eyes; but always, before he drank his ale, *he looked at me*, suspecting that I had some of it in me. The Corn Law Rhymer, then, was a rogue from the beginning? Yes. But the Corn Law Rhymer is not a poet; and if the slanderers of genius would consider, that, although they can place no Hamlets or Tam o' Shanters to the credit of their account, they certainly share with Shakspeare and Burns their full proportion of the faults and failings of our common humanity, we should hear less about the Dumfries Exciseman's drunkenness, and the wrongs of the dowered Ann Hathaway.

But Burns, it is said, was ungrateful to his patrons. Who were they? The Tories of his time, the fathers of men who must be clever, for, in our days, they have invented a new name for rascality, calling themselves Conservatives. But what did those lords and squires for him? They gave him a job, a nasty one; he did the work, and got the wages—with an early grave in at the bargain. No, no! He and they understood each other right well. *He* knew, and *they* knew, that men like them are as fond of men like him, as robbers are of the hangman.

But he was *politically* imprudent, we are told. Now, I do not think that any man ought to become a martyr, unless he likes martyrdom for its own sake; but they who accuse Burns of political imprudence, take a bat's view of his case—*he* took an eagle's. What should we now care for Burns, the honest, fearless exciseman, had he been a rhyming sycophant? His family, I suspect, are at this moment more prosperous, in the worldly sense of the term, than if he had died a collector; and it is plain he could not have become one, without forfeiting that independence which binds our hearts to him.

But I shall not do justice to him, if I do not give you his picture of himself, from his letter to J. F. Erskine, Esq., written 13th April, 1793, just after he had narrowly escaped being ruined, by the arbitrary wantonness of power; especially as it has been blamed as mere bravado on the part of Burns,

by a patrician critic, who having found himself mistaken and ridiculous in his infallible decisions on modern poetry, determined to try his hand on a poet's prose. "Burns," says the bard of himself, "was a poor man from birth, and an exciseman from necessity; but the sterling ore of his worth no poverty could debase; and his independent mind oppression might bend, but could not subdue. Have not I, in my children, a more precious stake in my country's welfare, than the richest dukedom in it? Can I look tamely on, and see any machination wrest from my boys their birthright? Does any man tell me, that my efforts can be of no service? I tell him, that it is on men like me that a nation has to rest—men who are elevated enough to reason and reflect, yet low enough to keep clear of venal contagion. I have now drawn Burns as he is; but should any of the persons in whose hands is the bread he eats get the least knowledge of the picture, it would ruin the poor bard for ever."

Let us now compare Burns and his prose, with Dante's prose, and the writer of it. Dante—some of you know—a senator of Florence, corruptly driven from his country, and robbed of his ample possessions, lived long in banishment, and died in exile. About the year 1316, his friends obtained his restoration to his country and his possessions, on condition that he should pay a sum of money, avow himself guilty, and ask pardon of his oppressors. This is his answer on the occasion, to an aged kinsman whom he calls "Father." "From your letter I observe how much you have at heart my welfare, and I am bound to you the more, because an exile rarely finds a friend. But I must, by my answer, disappoint some little minds. Your nephew has written to me, that I am allowed to return to Florence on certain conditions; wherein, my Father, I see two conditions that are ridiculous and impertinent. I speak of the impertinence of those who mention such conditions to me; for in *your* letter there is no such thing. Is such an invitation glorious for Dante, after suffering in exile almost fifteen years? Is it thus, then, they would recompense innocence, labour, and unremitting study? Far from me be the senseless baseness of a beast of earth, that could offer himself up, as it were, in chains. Far from the man who cries aloud for justice, this compromise with his persecutors. No, my Father, this is not the way that shall lead me back to my country. But I shall return with hasty steps, if you can open to me a way that shall not derogate from the fame and honour of Dante; but if by no such way Florence can be entered, then shall I never enter Florence. What! can I not everywhere enjoy the sight of the sun and stars? Can I not contemplate, in any corner of the earth under the canopy of heaven, consoling and delightful truths, without rendering myself infamous? Bread, I hope, will not fail me." But bread *did* fail him. Every reader of his works must know, by heart, the prediction addressed to him by the shade of his ancestors:—"Thou shalt prove how bitter is the taste of the bread of others, how hard the road up and down strangers' stairs." But there is another passage in which he makes his readers shudder, discovering an exact portrait of himself in a man, "who, stripping himself of all shame, and trembling in his very vitals, places himself in the public way, and stretches out his hand for charity." "By such sacrifices," says the reviewer, "he preserved his principles, and sustained the magnanimity of his character;" and such are the rewards which, in all ages, have been paid to them "who are not of the wretches who may be said never to have lived, whom God's justice disdains to punish, and his mercy to pardon." Such, perhaps, will *ever* be the reward of the prophetic honesty of genius. *Why* were Dante and Burns persecuted? Because they saw farther than others; and what avails it to them, if the sons of their persecutors are instructed by their graves?

It is melancholy to reflect, that Burns died *just in time* to prevent the blackness of darkness from receiving its foulest blot—he did not live to be fed on alms, or stamped into a dungeon for the crime of honesty. But the rules of this Institution prevent me from saying more, than that he was one of the first victims of the English reign of terror. *Merciful death* would not allow the merciless to persecute him actually into the workhouse; but they applied to him an epithet *fatal* in those days, and not safe in these—they proclaimed him an honest man! They forbade him to *hope*. They appointed despair and wounded pride his Ganymede and Hebe; and when a man has *such* cupbearers, we need not ask if the liquor they fill is poison.

But was there no meanness in the pride of Burns? "Give me wit," said he, "and I am contented." The boon was his in superabundance, and he was *not* contented. "Had I but hearkened to good advice," said he, "I might by this time have led a market." I doubt whether the advice was good, but if it was, why *did* he not lead a market? They who lead markets, take the means. Instead, then, of striking dewdrops from the daisies, he should have covered himself with rust and dust, as they do. But why could he not be satisfied with the Muse, and poverty, her dower? True, he did not turn his back on the angel of his life; but he repined because she had not brought with her from heaven—a clod of clay. Out of more than two hundred thousand millions of human beings, he was an individual of the few hundreds who have won for themselves an earthly immortality—and he was dissatisfied! Surely, then, his light was not *all* "light from heaven." I can imagine the Father of Mercies looking down on him in stern pity.

Whatever his faults might be, *he* paid the penalty of them, and left the benefit to us. The most valuable bequest which a man of genius can leave to posterity, is the legacy of his faults. God, I have said, wastes nothing—no, not even the evil that men do. His eternal finger writes their lives in their deeds, that we may emulate the good, and be instructed by the evil. Burns was a poet, and a man. "The poet"—if I may use the words of Madame de Staël, the greatest *man* that ever wore petticoats—"the poet lives in his works;" but

where, in this world, is the *man* to be found, if not in our affectionate remembrance, or in our just and benevolent appreciation? Is he not defenceless? Hath he not said to us, "Forget me not?" If the life of the slandered, like Religion itself, is a poem which prosers have covered with blots—let us not forget that the blots are no part of the poem. Whoever thou art, then, that in thy *purity* judgest thy brother, reflect that all other virtues in thee are worthless, if thou hast not charity. Burns lies before thee—helpless and *self-condemned*. With the manliness which was the corner-stone of his character, he wrote a true inscription for his own grave:—

> The poor inhabitant below,
> Was quick to learn, and wise to know,
> And keenly felt the friendly glow,
> And softer flame;
> But thoughtless folly laid him low,
> And *stained* his name.

If, then, his failings are recorded for eternity, while those of other men are written in water—if to err is human—if the angels fell—"speak of him as he was, set down nought in malice;" "and let him who is without sin among you, cast the first stone" at the grave of ROBERT BURNS.

A VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1841.*

THIS new work of the philanthropic Quaker comes before the public with the special recommendation that, in advocating the emancipation of the blacks, its author, as is now well known, does not overlook the rights of the whites; that he contends for universal suffrage, for equality of civil rights, as well as the abolition of slavery. This is only consistency; yet in a member of his quiet sect, it is a great step in advance; for we would fain hope that the decided line of conduct taken by Joseph Sturge is an augury of the opinions of nearly the whole body of the Friends, and that his next work may be a report of the progress of Associations formed in Great Britain for obtaining the suffrage.

With Mr. Sturge's Visit to the West Indies many of our readers must be familiar. His recent visit to the United States had the same object, "*the universal abolition of slavery;*" and one scarcely less important to mankind, "*the promotion of permanent international Peace.*" The second object, though never lost sight of, was kept subordinate to the abolition mission.

Arguments against the principle, and expositions of the moral and even economical ill consequences of slavery, are no longer needed in Great Britain; and even in the United States, slavery is rarely now defended on other than narrow, selfish, and passionate grounds, save as a necessary evil; which, like lesser abuses in this country, has grown to such a magnitude, and has so intertwined itself with all institutions and interests, that it is dangerous to touch it or tamper with it. Mr. Sturge's work, therefore, is necessarily rather an account of the present state of opinion in America regarding slavery, and of the leading abolitionists and the prospects of their great labour, than an argument against slavery or an illustration of its horrible tendencies, which has surely become superfluous.

Mr. Sturge sailed in the *British Queen* in March 1841. He is a Tee-totaller, as well as an abolitionist and advocate of the suffrage; and he notices with approbation a useful change in the economy of the steamers, by which passengers need not pay for more wine and spirits than they choose to drink; instead of being tempted to drink to excess, because the liquor costs nothing, its price being included in the passage money. One of the passengers, who was the reverse of a Teetotaller, addressed the intelligent black steward of the vessel as "Blacky." "My name is Robert," replied the man. "And when you want anything from me, please to address me by name: we are all the same flesh and blood; I did not make myself; God made me." The rebuke was felt by all present. Mr. Sturge found native American slaveholders less bigoted and benighted than those Europeans who had been inured to slavery by participating in its gains, or by a residence in the slave States. A French merchant of New Orleans, a passenger in the steamer, said, "It would be as reasonable to class negroes with monkeys as to place them on an equality with whites."

Landing at New York, the missionary proceeded from town to town, indefatigably pursuing the objects which had taken him from home. He went as far south as Washington, and, in the other direction, he visited the Falls of Niagara; sometimes returning to places he had already visited, and often addressing public meetings. Among the first persons he saw on landing were ARTHUR TAPPAN and his brother LEWIS; the former said to be the most obnoxious individual to the pro-slavery party throughout the union. By this party he is regarded as ABOLITION personified. And never did goodness take a more attractive form, if he merits the character here given of him. These noble brothers have lavished their ample resources in promoting the cause of Abolition, with a munificence which, when the ends in view are compared, may well put the vulgar magnificence of the princes and magnates of Europe to shame. And their personal labours seem to have been as freely given as their money. Some years since, Lewis Tappan had the ear of a negro sent him by the post, in an insulting anonymous letter. Now, in the words of a countryman and fellow-labourer, "Lewis Tappan has made the whole nation look the captives in the face."

Mr. Sturge, besides giving the individuals whom he saw face to face the praise which is their due, adverts affectionately to the old abolitionists; to JOHN WOOLMAN and ANTHONY BENEZET, those early labourers who broke up the fallow-ground, and bore the burthen in the heat of the day.

* By Joseph Sturge. 1 vol. 8vo. pp. 215. Hamilton and Adams.