

WILLIAM CAMERON.

WILLIAM CAMERON was born in 1751, and reared, as we learn from one of his early poems, among the mountains and moorlands of eastern Glenmuick. In the quiet routine of pastoral and rural life, at all seasons in the presence of Nature's bolder features, and familiar with the imposing phenomena she periodically displays in such regions, his spirit of contemplation had been fed, his imagination stirred, from earliest infancy, by those forces which always make for poetry. Passing through the usual course of the parish school, he entered a student at Marischal College in 1770, and there met with one whose character did much to make him the man he subsequently was. We have no doubt that Cameron had dabbled in poetry long before he entered college; had even tasted a little of the sweets of being reputed a kind of a poet among the scattered dwellers around Pananich; and we can readily conceive how he felt himself drawn to the poet-professor who had achieved that great desideratum of the poetical aspirant—public recognition. The regard between pupil and master became reciprocal; for of the many students that passed through the formative influence of Dr. Beattie's training, none secured a greater share of his esteem and friendship than William Cameron. He left the University in 1774, and between that and 1776 corresponded with Beattie on literary matters relating to Addison, and on certain objections urged against the "Essay on Truth". He had now entered the Church, and took up, eagerly and in right earnest, a piece of work which had been pressing itself on the attention of the ministers for many years. About the year 1742, owing partly to the influence of the revivals at Cambuslang, Kilsyth, and elsewhere, a desire was expressed to enlarge the metrical psalmody of the Church. For this purpose a committee of the Assembly was appointed to paraphrase a few passages from Scripture, to be added to the metrical version of the Psalms. This committee reported in 1745, but, owing to the unsettled state of the country, nothing was done till 1749, when the Assembly transmitted the collection, amounting to forty-five paraphrases, to the Presbyteries, leaving the use of them to the

option of sessions. This collection was used in the devotions of the people till shortly before 1781, when a feeling of dissatisfaction with the old translations and paraphrases led again to the appointment of a committee to revise them. Cameron, who was at that time in Edinburgh, was appointed to the committee, along with Logan, Blair, and other *literati*. He sent specimens to Beattie, who commended them, approved of the general design, and sent him some hints to work upon. He had by this time, however, made his first venture on the public notice, having issued anonymously a volume of miscellaneous poems, most of which, he said, "were written some years ago without any design of ever being published". The title of this rare little volume runs—"Poems on Various Subjects" [6 lines from Virgil] "Edinburgh, printed for Gordon and Murray; and for Richardson and Urquhart: London, MDCCLXXX". We have reason to think that it did not meet with the success it deserved, for the author, speaking of its contents, says—"They are only a part of a larger collection of poems, which have been lately read by several persons of the most approved taste and judgment, who advised me to give a specimen of them to the public. If the one now offered meet with any indulgence or approbation, considered as the first essays of youth, I shall be encouraged to think that what remains unpublished is entitled to equal honour". No other collection was ever published by him, and thirteen of its best pieces reappear (some of them considerably pared down) in the posthumous volume issued by his family in 1813. The year after the publication of his Poems, the Scriptural paraphrases now in use were issued to the public, Mr. Cameron's share in the execution of that work being very considerable. He wrote those numbered XIV. and XVII., besides adapting thirty-nine of the others. Of the other authors of the paraphrases, Logan took good care to claim all, and perhaps more, than he wrote; but it is not so well known that those numbered VIII. IX., X., XI., XIII., XVIII., XXXI., XLVIII. (altered from the edition of 1745), and LIII. are ascribed on the best authority to Michael Bruce. These venerated paraphrases, we may note, are not so well known in some quarters as they ought to be, for we find that the 42nd is printed in *Notes and Queries*, February 26,

1859, as "a great literary curiosity", by the father of Robertson the historian. Cameron's abilities soon began to attract attention in quarters which bore fruit to his advantage. In February, 1786, he was presented by Francis, Duke of Buccleuch, to the parish of Kirknewton, in Midlothian, and was ordained in the following August. His life henceforward presented few particulars worth recording, beyond the various publications he from time to time sent abroad. He was married to Agnes Montgomery, a native of Irvine, who outlived him twenty-six years; and one of his daughters, Helen, became the wife of Alexander Christison, minister of Foulden. After a ministry of twenty-six years, he died at Kirknewton on 17th November, 1811, aged 60. Besides the two volumes noted above, and the song given below, he wrote an "Ode on Lochiel's Birthday, 1796", and is the reputed author of "Poetical Dialogues on Religion, in the Scottish Dialect, between two Gentlemen and two Ploughmen. Edinburgh, 1788". He also wrote the notice of the parish of Kirknewton for Sir John Sinclair's "Statistical Account", and his "account" evidences a literary faculty and polish somewhat rare in that very useful but very unequal work.

Of the poems in his volume of 1780 not reprinted in 1813, "Panana, a Descriptive Poem in Two Parts", deserves notice, as it relates to the scenery around the mineral wells at Pananich, and is most likely the earliest subject on which he tried his muse's wing. Some time prior to 1770 the medicinal virtues of the water at Pananich began to gain celebrity through the extraordinary cure of an old invalid lady who lived in the locality. The proprietor of the lands, Mr. Farquharson of Monaltrie, with considerable spirit set about improving the locality, erecting some houses, covering the wells, planting the hill-slopes, and getting a bridge erected over the Dec. Our young poet caught the enthusiasm which these movements around his home set abroad, and wrote *Panana* wholly "from love of song, and the love of my subject". It extends in all to 93 stanzas of four lines, and though somewhat turgid and heavy with classical allusions (a fault readily forgivable in a budding student), many of the stanzas have an easy gracefulness and lyrical flow which in his more mature and laboured work he rarely surpassed.

The hoary mountains mingle with the sky,
 Whose bluish tops the spiry pine o'ershades :
 The birch with weeping willow seems to vie,
 In fragrant groves which vest the sloping glades.

From steep to steep, dash'd down the ridgy hills,
 The fierce cascades hoarse lash th' obstructing mass ;
 Till o'er th' enamell'd vales in branching rills
 They wander, oozing thro' the trembling grass.

* * * * *

Still lead me onward, where, in grandeur pil'd,
 Yon towering cliffs frown horrid o'er the dale ;
 And hollow murmurs, echoing from the wild,
 Strike solemn terror thro' the darkening vale.

Here let me climb the promontory's brow,
 Catch inspiration from the lofty view ;
 While, eying sheets of floating clouds below,
 I seem to tread the pure ethereal blue.

* * * * *

Hail, scenes endear'd ! where first I happy trode
 The flowery path of childhood and of youth ;
 Of health and peace the safe, the chief abode—
 Still may your joys this pensive bosom sooth !

* * * * *

All-bounteous Nature, source of prime delight !
 Whose every form has dignity to please,
 Whose only charms to rapture can excite,
 Or lull the mind to harmony and ease !

In Part II. the goddess Hygeia appears, and describes how, long ago, when “ wood-nymphs and naiads”, “ mermaids from the Dee”, and groves “ sacred to Pan” graced the borders of the health-giving spring, Panana was her favourite seat: and the poem ends by her assuming her erstwhile abdicated throne.

“Luxury”, the second lengthy poem in the 1780 volume, appears in the front of the 1813 edition cut down from 52 to 38 stanzas, and containing only 17 stanzas of the old version. This, we think, was wise, as that subject latterly got such a hold of him—was, indeed, the *bête noire* of his speculations on man and society—that he dragged it into every poem of any length he wrote, and however much he varied the phraseology in describing its evil effects, there is a sense of repetition and a recurrence of ideas which tire the reader in their perusal.

One other quotation we must make from the early collec-

tion before we turn to the more ambitious attempts which appear in the posthumous volume, and no better one could we select than the only sprightly effort of his muse, "Euphrosyne or Joy", in the first part of "Mediocrity, a Poem".

Laughter-loving, ruddy Fair!
 Foe to thought and pining care;
 Let me pass the day with thee,
 All in wit and mirth and glee,
 Festive dance and revelry,
 Wanton jokes and jollity.
 Charm'd by thee I now disdain
 Contemplation's leaden train,
 Solemn, pensive, and severe,
 Dark of mind, of brow austere.
 Hence I leave the hoary sage,
 Moping o'er his peevish page;
 Mammon's drudges, griping, old,
 Digging, starving, still for gold;
 Full of labour, full of care,
 Haply for base, thankless heir.
 Lead me, Goddess! from the cells,
 Where pale Melancholy dwells;
 From her dull, terrific shades,
 Rugged rocks and gloomy glades.
 Lead me to the lillied lawn,
 Where thou lov'st, at early dawn,
 Gladsome to salute the morn,
 Of the ocean newly born:—
 * * * * *
 Glancing through the neighbouring brake,
 Dapper elves their ditties wake;
 Rich in gold and gems array'd,
 Far emblazing all the shade.
 Now they part, and now they join,
 Now they form the starry line,
 Instant in the circle meet,
 Tripping light with flying feet.
 Now in myriads mounting high,
 Quick they sweep the dewy sky,
 Now they seek the haunted stream,
 Sliding down the lunar beam.

When stern winter rules the year,
 Then to cities throug'd we steer,
 Mix among the jovial crew
 Plung'd in pleasures ever new.

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Laughing o'er the flowing bowl,
That revives the sadden'd soul,
Warms the close and cautious heart,
All its secret cares t' impart;
Banishes reflection, sorrow,
And ill presage of to-morrow.

Turning now to the "Poems on Several Occasions" (1813), the first thing that attracts attention is a continuation of "The Minstrel" on the original plan of Dr. Beattie. As we already had occasion to note, while speaking of the various attempts that had been made to complete that masterpiece, this of Cameron's, in spirit and design at least, may be said to be the most successful of any. The tone and colour of thought, which characterised the reflective portions of the original, he had caught from the lips of the master himself, and reproduced in almost every one of his higher attempts at philosophic verse. His mental standpoint was identical with Beattie's, his conservative instincts the same, but he was immensely behind his illustrious forerunner in lyrical faculty and the critical manipulation of phraseology. He had evidently composed his continuation at a time when the public imagination was inflamed with the so-called sceptical and seditious theories which stirred this country after the French Revolution; for the calamities, which Edwin had to meet in his onward career, are made to hinge on the theory of liberty and the adoration of reason said to be born of that social upheaval. Along with the civil distractions and broils which these caused, by an anachronism, allowable only in poetry, the Danes are made to invade the country, but Edwin, through the power of a full-toned harp and marvellous minstrelsy, excited the patriotic enthusiasm of his countrymen to such a height that they carried all before them. Crowned with honours, the Minstrel now seeks out his friend and preceptor, the Hermit, whom he found "in life's extreme decline". He waited on him till death, and then returned to the feudal castle of Earl Ethelwold, where—

lov'd, rever'd, the pride of song, he stood
The friend of sovereign Law, the foe of rebel Feud.

The three introductory stanzas, referring to Beattie, are phrased with much taste and truthfulness:—

Ah! how shall I presume, with trembling hand,
 To touch the tuneful harp which B——e strung,
 Obsequious only to his high command,
 In soul-subduing numbers while he sung,
 While truth and harmony adorn'd his tongue!
 The shepherds, listening to his moral lays,
 Wak'd loud applauses, till, around them rung
 The hoary Grampians, echoing to his praise,
 Louder and louder borne, with growing length of days.

Thou chastest Minstrel of the Scottish grove,
 My friend, instructor, and my dearest pride:
 The tribute due of gratitude and love,
 Permit me here to pay: while I abide,
 Still, in this bleak sojourn, reft of my guide,
 Lonely and sad, without thy wonted smile,
 In every wo that solace kind supplied;
 Beset with snares of Selfishness and Guile,
 Extending now so wide their domination vile.

To thee I owe whate'er this heart can boast,
 Of pious, just, benevolent or true;
 When, in the Sophist's thorny labyrinth lost,
 With nought but Desperation dark in view;
 Thy energetic voice of Truth I knew,
 Warning the wanderer of Confusion's fate,
 The gathering storm of Anarchy, t' eschew,
 By pride engender'd, and profane debate,
 Threatening each holy fane, each hoary tower of State.

Not to provoke, too directly, a comparison with the original poem which Cameron here attempted to complete—for it is the misfortune of all such works that they too readily challenge what is fatal to them—we will take as an example of his skill, the speech of the Sceptic, belief in the doctrines of which is supposed to bring about the anarchy that Edwin, by force of a different philosophical faith, had to fight his way through. There is a considerable vein of sarcasm underneath the whole passage, but yet, we have lived to see that “the lore so flattering” which it contains, has on many points approved itself to men not necessarily “rebellious” or “obstreperous”, and that to-day its deliverances have received an amount of assent, which is likely to lead to strange issues, and is already disturbing a wider circle of thinkers than was represented by the ecclesiastical Tory of last century:—

Arise, ye gods of earth, resume your pride,
 Your native pride, disdainful of control:
 ('Twas thus the Sceptic to the nations cried,)
 To you the page of Science I unroll,
 Assert the rights of every free-born soul.
 Shake off, at length the tyrant's galling chain,
 Your reverence blind of sacerdotal stole;
 Your independence strenuously maintain,
 And reinless roam at will thro' Liberty's domain.

Shall mighty man still drudge a menial slave,
 In these auspicious and enlighten'd days!—
 Man! destin'd to command of wind and wave;
 When pure Philosophy wide spreads her rays,
 Illuminating earth with fervid blaze;
 When priestcraft, prejudice, and vulgar dreams
 Of Superstition conn'd in canting phrase,
 Are sinking fast in dark Lethean streams,
 Like goblins grim of night before the morning beams.

Reason adore, ye sons of new-born light,
 Omnipotent director of the mind.
 'Tis she alone can lead her votary right,
 Thro' many a labyrinth long, the truth to find.
 Remove each scruple of the bigot-blind,
 Attach'd to antiquated creeds and modes
 Of Faith and Polity, contriv'd to bind
 In durance dark, by legislative codes,
 The human race, thro' all throned Tyranny's abodes.

To Reason only, your devotion pay,
 From her decision, mark the good from ill.
 No more shall phantoms, then, your heart dismay,
 Of future fate, with fearful presage, fill;
 But, free t' obey your own almighty will,
 Thus wisely regulated, then, with scorn
 Of rule superior, proud ye shall fulfil
 The end of men, all great and equal born,
 Their dignity maintain, their nature bright adorn.

"The Poets' Manual, or a view of the Poetical Character",
 is a longish poem in two parts. It consists of a series of
 unmethodic sketches, roughly summarising the work and
 character of the more prominent of the world's sons of song,
 written in the heroic couplet, but nowhere rising above the
 level of pleasant, readable verse. Keeping mostly in company

with Lucian, Horace, Shakespeare, Milton, and others of the higher genius, he sometimes, however, descends to lesser bards, such as his friends Beattie and Logan; his reference to the latter is curious:—

Alas, my early friend! I mark thy shade
 Moving majestic thro' the glimmering glade:
 I view thee L——n vulgar concourse fly,
 And darting back a stern, contemptuous eye.
 I mark the emotions of his towering mind
 By Learning, Genius, Harmony refin'd;
 In converse close with B——e he hies away
 To opening regions of unsetting day.

Logan in the higher spheres in close converse with Bruce! Doesn't that sound strange to ears accustomed as ours are to the charges which the Rev. A. B. Grosart, the Rev. William Mackelvie, and Professor Shairp have promulgated anent Logan stealing the poems which his youthful friend's father had entrusted to him for publication? Cameron, who knew Logan well, could never have written these lines had he believed the statements, which for the first time, in 1795, Dr. Anderson (then publishing his series of "The British Poets") had received from the friends of Bruce. But we must not enter on that vexed question, though the above opened it all up fresh again in our mind.

Along with the above noted poems, the posthumous volume contains a number of psalms and hymns of considerable excellence, but, strange to say, does not contain what is, by a long way, the best bit of lyrical verse he ever wrote, viz., his song "On the Restoration of the Forfeited Estates, 1784", which appeared in the *Scots Musical Museum*. We had occasion to remark in a former chapter on the bitter feelings engendered in the Scottish heart by the action of the Commissioners who came down to Edinburgh to dispose of the forfeited estates, and who sold some of them to adventurers, alien in tastes and sympathies with the great body of the people. Many of the estates secured by these were in after years bought back by the heirs of the original proprietors, but it was not until Scottish affairs came under the direction of Lord Dundas that an attempt was made to heal a sore which the course of generations still left open and tender in the national mind. In

1784 a measure passed both Houses of Parliament restoring the heirs of the rebellious Jacobites to their ancient patrimonies, subject to the debts due at forfeiture. This was the final tie which gave to the political history of Scotland and England that unity so long striven after by the best friends of both nations. Cameron's congratulatory song on this important measure pulses in every stanza with true Scottish *verve*, and will live longer than any lines he ever wrote. It is sung to the fine old air of "The Haughs of Cromdale":—

As o'er the Highland hills I hied,
 The Camerons in array I spied,
 Lochiel's proud standard waving wide,
 In all its ancient glory.
 The martial pipe loud pierc'd the sky,
 The bard arose resounding high
 Their valour, faith, and loyalty,
 That shone in Scottish story.

No more the trumpet calls to arms,
 Awaking battle's fierce alarms,
 But every hero's bosom warms,
 With songs of exultation ;
 While brave Lochiel at length regains,
 Thro' toil of war his native plains,
 And won by glorious wounds, attains
 His high paternal station.

Let now the voice of joy prevail,
 And echo wide from hill to vale ;
 Ye warlike clans arise and hail
 Your laurell'd chiefs returning ;
 O'er every mountain, every isle,
 Let peace in all her lustre smile,
 And discord ne'er her day defile
 With sullen shades of mourning.

Macleod, Macdonald join the strain,
 Macpherson, Fraser, and Maclean,
 Thro' all your bounds let gladness reign,
 Both prince and patriot praising.
 Whose generous bounty richly pours
 The streams of plenty round your shores,
 To Scotia's hills their pride restores,
 Her faded honours raising.

ANDREW SHIRREFS AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

ONE of the most interesting figures, among the many men of genius and character which marked Aberdeen society towards the close of last century, is the man whom Burns described as "a little decrepid body with some abilities"—Andrew Shirrefs. For a number of years this "cripple votary of Parnassus" sat in the very focus of poetical fame in Aberdeen; gathered round him as friends and correspondents a number of poetical adepts and aspirants, who in many cases far eclipsed him in genius, and not unfrequently outstepped him in what is called success in life. The traditional respect which on all sides clusters round the cheery, genial, and unfortunate Andy, speaks well of his heart and head, though we are afraid he wore the former rather too much on his sleeve. He belonged to a family that made considerable headway in the world, in so far as securing good positions and gathering gear is doing so; and yet to-day, such is the irony of fate, Andrew, who secured neither of these, is the best remembered man of his race. His father, David Shirrefs, was a wright or builder in the Gallowgate of Aberdeen, a deacon of the Incorporated