

ONE of the unfortunate sons of genius, who found a temporary shelter with William Thom at Charlotte Square, London, and who, in spite of the mildew with which adversity had bespotted his youthful heart, appeared more than a match for adverse fate through the exuberance of a jovial nature, was TOM DENHAM, bootmaker and poet, erstwhile mine host of "The Royal Oak", Huxter Row, Aberdeen. Tom, though, as far as we can learn, a native of Edinburgh, was reared in Aberdeen, his father, a shoemaker, having settled down there after the disbanding of the old militia in which he had served, and lived and died in Gordon Street. His son Tom, after being initiated into St. Crispin's craft in Aberdeen, went south, and in Edinburgh acquired such superior skill in the higher class of bootwork as brought him considerable reputation among fellow-workmen. While yet a young man, he opened shop as a master bootmaker in St. Nicholas Street, and sometime after removed to Union Street, where he went into partnership with a friend, Frank Harper; and very likely, had he stuck to his last, would have succeeded in a business in which he so much excelled. But the so-called socialities of life were too attractive to be withstood. He was known to all the young bloods of the city as an excellent singer, especially of Irish songs—a rollicking blade, whose irrepressible joviality was always ready for "one bottle more". His company was much sought after, and as he was ever ready to spend and be spent in the service of jolly good fellowship, it was not long ere he ran the length of his tether. He gave up the boot-making—opened a tap-room under the name of "The Royal

Oak", and gathered round his tables all the literary, dramatic, and musical aspirants of the town, who, along with their aspirations in these departments, had a fair drouth, and the wherewithal to command its slaking. We fear that in most cases the usual course, even to the sapient members of "The Acorn Club", was much after the Falstaffian manner—a minimum of solid washed down by a maximum of liquid. It was to this snuggerly that, time after time, Thom, on his business visits to Aberdeen, was waylaid, yea, sometimes carried, for with such a second as Denham, Willie was sure to shine with far more than his wonted splendour at the head of the table. "The Royal Oak", with its evening socialities, under the management of Denham, had a very brief existence, however. About 1844 the affair collapsed, and its luckless host, with a big burden of debt, and a spirit too proud to cry for mercy, was practically on the causeway, and at his wits' end where to turn. He gathered together a number of the poetical trifles which, from time to time, had appeared from his pen in the local newspapers, submitted them to Professor Wilson for opinion as to the advisability of printing them, with the result that they were sent to press. Some of his verses, such as "The Cuddy" and "The Cook of the Royal", had before this obtained somewhat of favour, and were very popular through his and William Carnie's singing of them. Both these pieces are of the kind which singers like Denham and Carnie, who had a considerable share of histrionic talent, could make tell, but which would fall as flat as ditch-water from the lips of an ordinary vocalist, who lacked the manner of putting into their commonplace matter the humour which made them popular. His volume—"Poems and Snatches of Prose. By T. Denham. 1845"—was seen through the press by his friend, Mr. J. Forbes-Robertson, and through the influence of Thom was published by Smith, Elder, & Co., London. The "Snatches of Prose" killed it. The poems, as a whole, are fairish, but the notes he prefixed and affixed to them are such evident apeings of William Thom, and want so completely the rare charm which made Thom's prose as desirable as his poetry that, coming alongside the "Rhymes and Recollections", the book could do little other than fall dead, as it did. Be-

sides, the sketch entitled "The Nose", a melange of prose and verse after the manner (a very long way) of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, was from its exuberant vulgarity enough to damn in the eyes of the general public a book of far more sterling merit than Tom Denham could ever have hoped to write. To local readers, who knew the characters introduced in its pages, the affair had a realistic flavour which compensated in some degree for its gross dialogue—but to the general public no such vantage ground was possible—and it was simply voted "nauseous!" When word came to town from Thom that Denham's volume had stuck in the market, nobody was astonished. Even after a very favourable notice of it had appeared in one of the local papers, the publishers, writing to Peter Still, assured him that "Denham's Nose" was no go in London, they had "scarcely sold a copy".

Denham, however, possessed a fine ear, and had an excellent taste in regard to the kind of thing that would sing well, and we consequently find in his volume many graceful lyrics, which, had they not been weighted by the "Prose" and "Nose", would have kept his name afloat more effectually than it has been. Such songs as "'Twas not, 'twas not her beauty", "Blue-bell Braes", and "Jeanie Græme" deserved a better fate than they met, wedded as they were to excellent tunes. We quote the latter:—

When the day was lang, and the gownie's head
 Gemm'd bonnie through the flow'r'y mead,
 A lassie made our glen her hame,
 An' a winsome thing was Jeanie Græme.
 Dark brown her hair, dark blue her e'e,
 Wi' hinnied lip e'en kings nicht pree,
 An' skin like drifted snaw on lea,
 Had bonnie Jeanie Græme.
 An' a' the lads cam' woin',
 Cam' woin', cam' woin',
 An' a' the lads cam' woin',
 Our peerless Jeanie Græme.

Sweet, kindly-hearted, sportive thing,
 Her laugh—like winter chased by spring—
 Turn'd grief aye by whare'er she came,
 For auld and young lo'ed Jeanie Græme.

Now autumn's gane, and winter fast,
Kill'd gowan and birdie wi' its blast;
But the silv'ry rills hae fan' a hame—
Their founts, the een o' Jeanie Græme.

Nae mair the lads cam' woin',
Cam' woin', cam' woin',
Nae mair the lads cam' woin',
Puir Jeanie's heart is *gane*.

Now, meikle grief is in our vale,
Our bonnie rose-bud's droopin' pale,
And monie a pray'r, in monie a frame,
Gie auld and sick for Jeanie Græme.
Oh, gowd! how aft a curse thou art,
Tell man's crush'd hopes, and widow's heart;
Death-stricken laird, how sweet a dame
Your heir would hae in Jeanie Græme.

Puir blichtit thing, nae gleam o' licht,
To dry those tears so pearly bricht;
Hope cheerless flees, an' a' is nicht
To bonnie Jeanie Græme.

Sweet pinin' thing, nae Henry near,
Wha'd gi'en his blood t' stay'd ae tear;
Auld ruthless man, ye're sair to blame—
What's walth compar'd wi' Jeanie Græme?
But every thing maun hae its fa',
Sae winter's ta'en the laird awa';
And gladly Henry's gi'en his name
Wi' heart an' han', to Jeanie Græme.

Now banefires lichten ilka knowe,
Till a' the glen seems in a lowe,
An' gladsome young an' wither'd pow,
Drink "Leddy Jeanie Græme".

His strength, however, or as some would put it, his weakness, lay in the direction of low comedy, and there are many yet remaining who remember well the go and gusto he could put into "The Cook of the Royal", "Widow Brown", and other songs of a like stamp. He occasionally tried the ballad form of versification, but he was not particularly happy in it; his best effort in that direction being probably "Auntie Annie", Indeed, while he could throw off things like "Pat Docher" and "Paddy Croker" with great readiness, and sing them with a success much out of proportion to their real merit, at hand-

ling anything which involved the truly pathetic, he for the most part had a kind of left-handed awkwardness which his well known imitation of Thom's manner was too thin to hide.

After the bitter experiences of failure as a tradesman, and failure as a poet (for as we have said, his book would not sell), he now bethought him of the stage, as a means of living. He had long been known in Aberdeen as an amateur actor of no small promise, and had now and again good opportunities of showing his powers on the old Marischal Street boards, where, in some musical Irish farces, his pleasant natural singing was much and justly appreciated. In 1847, he left Aberdeen, and appears to have been one of "the hospital" guests at William Thom's, just towards the wind-up of that much abused institution. He finally left for America, where he took to the stage, but with what degree of success, we never could learn, for none of his old friends and bosom cronies ever heard what fate overtook the cheery, good-hearted, sadly-misfortunate Tom Denham.