By The Editor.

No. I.

PROFESSOR BLACKIE, POET.

"Poetry is itself a thing of God;
He made His Prophets Poets."—*Bailey.*

PROFESSOR BLACKIE is perhaps the best known, and also one of the best loved, men in Scotland. Men of all Churches, and of all shades of political opinion, have a kind feeling for, and a good word to say, of the genial Professor of Greek.

His benevolence is so great, his shrewd common-sense remarks so pungent, his love for the whole human family so undoubted, that every one who knows the Professor, as Lecturer, Poet, and Scottish Home Ruler, is bound to love and admire the boisterous, breezy genius of this young man of eighty-five. No! he will never grow old; his mind is as fresh, and young, and buoyant, as it was forty years ago.

He cannot be called a typical Scotsman: he is a citizen of the world—variable as a Frenchman, metaphysical as a German, and musical as an Italian. Fergus Mackenzie said truly of him the other day, when speaking of him in the class-room:—"Imagination

and fancy, enthusiasm for great ideals, pathos, humour, fine insight into men and books, far-seeing knowledge of life, scorn, indignation, tenderness, came in flashes from the old man eloquent in the course of one brief hour. A heroic note from Plutarch, a deep thought of Plato, a happy character of Sir Walter's, some sturdy deed of Knox's, filled up the time delightfully to some students, foolishly to others, and it was only in after years that they began to reap the harvest of these desultory conversations. Then they recognised they had been getting wisdom instead of Greek." And, more than all, what makes the name of Professor Blackie so dear to every Scotsman, is the fact that his patriotism knows no limit—sometimes expressed in fervid prose, sometimes gushing forth in tuneful numbers. In a recent contribution to "Old Ebony," this patriotism finds vent in verse that rolls like the torrent that dashes from the rocks of our native mountains:—

"Praised be God! no race of crouching
Slaves is bred on Highland hills,
'Neath the sweep of snow-capped mountains,
Gusty glens, and tumbling rills.
Not a race of foundled children,
Basking 'neath a southern sun,
Sleeping half the day, and thankful
When their span of work is done,

But a race of men, strong-hearted,
Deedful, daring, fearless men;
Finding dear delight in wrestling
With the storms that shake the Ben—
Men for every chance well bucklered
That man may meet beneath the sky;
And for every prize the noblest,
Bravely sworn to do or die.

Such were they who made proud Edward
Pay presumption's lawful meed,
When he marched with bristling legions
To enslave the Scottish Tweed.
Many wives and many mothers
Then his folly taught to mourn,
When, like dust, his thousands fled
From kilted Scots at Bannockburn."

John Stuart Blackie was born on the 28th July, 1809, in the city of Glasgow. His father was a Border man, belonging to the little town of Kelso. When the subject of our sketch was about

three years of age the family removed from Glasgow to Aberdeen, where his father acted as the first agent of the Commercial Bank of Scotland. So we find that the Granite City of the north had the honour of teaching young Blackie his letters. At the age of twelve he was sent to the Aberdeen University. Here he had the best grounding in Latin that Scotland of that day could give. He came to the College of Edinburgh when he was fifteen, and was fortunate in having as his Professor the great "Christopher North," poet, philosopher, and humorist, perhaps the greatest man Scotland has produced since Burns. After five years' study in Edinburgh, chiefly literature and divinity, Blackie went to Germany to study languages. He told Arthur Warren the other day, in a few sentences, the history of this time:—

"There was Niebuhr, the biggest man Germany has produced; and there was Bunsen, the greatest man I ever knew for all-round culture. Bunsen looked like Goethe. I told him so, and I found that others thought so. But Bunsen had a sweeter mouth than Goethe. My father's teaching, the nature God gave me, and Bunsen's influence, have been the great shaping forces of my life. Goethe I never saw, but I studied him, and I knew him. In that German town I saw and heard many of the greatest thinkers. The recommendations of those learned German ones procured my appointment as Professor of Latin Literature at Aberdeen University. I was "called" at the age of twenty-five, but I was not meant for a lawyer, and I abandoned my briefless career at the age of thirty. I taught at Aberdeen till 1852, when I was appointed Professor of Greek at the University of Edinburgh. Thirty years later I retired from the Professorship. That is the story of my life."

His real life is to be found in his books—in his "Self-Culture," where he teaches that "the great art of the teacher is to teach people to teach themselves;" in his "Life of Burns," which is free from the cant which so disfigures all biographic sketches of the Ayrshire ploughman; in his metrical translation of Goethe's "Faust," where we have one genius putting the thoughts of another into another language—never well done unless, but seldom to be found; in his "Homer and the Iliad," a grand work at which he laboured for ten years. He also lives in his lectures—"Bonnie Prince Charlie," "Scotch Songs," "The Philosophy of Love," "Scottish Nationality," &c., &c.

I had the pleasure of hearing him deliver the two first-named, and a finer intellectual treat I never had before nor since. It was not so much the lectures themselves, but the unique digressions he treated his audience to every five minutes or so, on nearly every topic under the sun. And then there was the sterling, earnest enthusiasm of the old man, with his utter abhorrence of all cant and humbug, his bitter contempt for what he called gentility. And then, in the middle of a period of fervid eloquence, he would burst into song, waving his arms and stamping his feet like a boy of sixteen. For the time one forgot he was listening to a man upwards of eighty.

Some years ago, while lecturing in Glasgow on a Sunday, his subject being, if I remember aright, "The Philosophy of Love," he was extolling the great excellence of the love songs of Scotland, when, in his fervour, he burst out singing, "Let us haste to Kelvin Grove, bonnie lassie, O!" His audience applauded him to the echo; but what a terrible shock the "unco guid" got when the fact was recorded in the newspapers next day. The due observance of our Scottish Sabbath is strict, very strict; but Professor Blackie doubtless is of the opinion that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

His lecture on "Scottish Nationality," which he delivered to the Perth Gaelic Society, in the year 1891, is brimful of common-sense, perhaps sometimes somewhat grotesquely expressed. The subject matter is so well suited for the pages of our magazine, that I will take the liberty of summarising what he said.

Their national character was their noblest inheritance, and if they began not to respect themselves they would be despised by the whole world. He said to them, as an old man of eighty-one years and seven months, to beware and preserve their nationality—always to keep themselves out and out, through and through, thoroughly Scottish. There was little or nothing of the Scottish element in Scottish education. Not a single lecture on Scottish history was given in Edinburgh. He maintained that national music was the proper nourishment of national character. The root of all nationality was the mother tongue. The real language that nourished characters like Burns or Scott, or the men who fought at Waterloo, was the national poetry and the mother tongue. He had seen many who could not, and would not, sing a Scottish song—they said they were too high set. It was said it was vulgar to use

the Scottish tongue. He told them that the Scottish dialect was the musical dialect of the English language. He knew half-a-dozen languages scientifically, and the English was the most barbarous, hotch-potch, mixty-maxty of all. Then the English were so conceited. There was no more pretentious beast than John Bull. Gaelic, they said, was hoarse and guttural. They did not know the beautiful Greek language, the most musical of all languages, was full of the guttural "ch." The mother tongue was the key to the hearts of the people. They were, he said, in great danger of losing their nationality, because Scotsmen going to London flunkified to John Bull. London was a monstrosity. Let Scottish business be transacted in Edinburgh, and Imperial business be done in London. If they did not make a bold stand as a nation they would become a mere province of England; they would be swept out of the memory of Europe.

There are many amusing anecdotes told of the Professor, his high spirits, and his kind, laughing, buoyant nature. Everybody has heard the good story told by Dr. Stodart Walker, but it is so good and characteristic that it will bear another telling. One day Professor Blackie caused a notice to be written on the blackboard of the class-room, stating that "Professor Blackie will not meet his classes to-day." The story continues that a wag of a student, entering the room after, very unkindly rubbed out the letter *C*. Still, furthermore, so runs the anecdote, the Professor himself enters, and, seeing the obliteration of the *C*, immediately proceeded to wipe out the *L*.

This wonderfully versatile old man, who is now in his eighty-fifth year, has in his time done much good work for the world. He has written, if we count pamphlets, between thirty and forty volumes, on a great variety of subjects—all bright and good and healthy reading. By his voice and pen he obtained the sum of £10,000, with which he founded the Celtic Chair in Edinburgh University. He has trained many men to be ornaments to society, and useful to mankind. Now, when he has become aged, he has troops of friends, and a host of devoted, grateful followers. Truly, truly, a fitting reward for a well spent-life.