

WEBSTER'S LINES.

Oh, how could I venture to love one like thee,
And you not despise a poor conquest like me,
On lords, thy admirers, could look wi' disdain,
And knew I was naething, yet pitied my pain ?
You said, while they teased you with nonsense and dress,
When real the passion, the vanity's less ;
You saw through that silence which others despise,
And, while beaux were a-talking, read love in my eyes.

Oh, how shall I fault thee, and kiss a' thy charms,
Till, fainting wi' pleasure, I die in your arms ;
Through all the wild transports of ecstasy tost,
Till, sinking together, together we're lost !
Oh, where is the maid that like thee ne'er can cloy,
Whose wit can enliven each dull pause of joy ;
And when the short raptures are all at an end,
From beautiful mistress turn sensible friend ?

In vain do I praise thee, or strive to reveal
(Too nice for expression), what only we feel :
In a' that ye do, in each look and each mien,
The graces in waiting adorn you unseen.
When I see you I love you, when hearing adore ;
I wonder and think you a woman no more :
Till, mad wi' admiring, I canna contain,
And, kissing your lips, you turn woman again.

With thee in my bosom, how can I despair ?
I'll gaze on thy beauties, and look awa' care ;
I'll ask thy advice, when with troubles opprest,
Which never displeases, but always is best.

In all that I write I'll thy judgment require ;
 Thy wit shall correct what thy charms did inspire.
 I'll kiss thee and press thee till youth is all o'er,
 And then live in friendship, when passion's no more.

What appears as the first draught of this amatory lyric was printed in the *Scots Magazine* for November 1747, and subsequently in the *Charmer*, 1751, with the signature 'A. W—r.' The person here hinted at was a notable evangelical divine and leader in the church-courts through all the middle years of the last century, the Rev. Alexander Webster. Previous to his death in 1784, he had been for the greater part of his life minister of the Tolbooth Church, Edinburgh, where he gathered about him a congregation of special zeal and faithfulness in Calvinistic convictions, who came to be commonly recognised as the *Tolbooth Whigs*. The great fact of his life was his organisation of the scheme of a Fund for the Widows of Ministers of the Scotch Kirk—a most beneficial institution. One of inferior moment, but still remarkable, was his leading the persecution against those of his brethren who had been concerned in bringing forward the tragedy of *Douglas*. Powerful evangelical preaching, immense capacity for claret, strong head for calculations, opposition to theatricals, good-fellowship over corporation and presbyterial dinners, were the somewhat incongruous characteristics of Alexander Webster. It is but another oddity in so strange a composition, that he should have written so erotic an effusion as his *Lines*. The legend on that subject is that, acting as *black-foot* for a friend who was in love with a lady of rank, he unexpectedly made a favourable impression on the fair one himself, and was consequently inspired with this song breathing gratitude as well as love. The lady, who became Dr Webster's wife, was Mary Erskine, daughter of Colonel John Erskine (brother of Alva) by Eupheme, sister of Thomas, eighth Earl of Dundonald. She was born in 1715, and died in 1766.