

## II.

# RECOLLECTIONS OF BURNS.

### CHAPTER I.

Wear we not graven on our hearts  
The name of Robert Burns?

AMERICAN POET.

THE degrees shorten as we proceed from the lower to the higher latitudes; the years seem to shorten in a much greater ratio as we pass onward through life. We are almost disposed to question whether the brief period of storms and foul weather that floats over us with such dream-like rapidity, and the transient season of flowers and sunshine that seems almost too short for enjoyment, be at all identical with the long summers and still longer winters of our boyhood, when day after day, and week after week, stretched away in dim perspective, till lost in the obscurity of an almost inconceivable distance. Young as I was, I had already passed the period of life when we wonder how it is that the years should be described as short and fleeting; and it seemed as if I had stood but yesterday beside the deathbed of the unfortunate Ferguson, though the flowers of four summers and the snows of four winters had been shed over his grave.

My prospects in life had begun to brighten. I served in the capacity of mate in a large West India trader, the master of which, an elderly man of considerable wealth, was on the eve of quitting the sea; and the owners had already determined that I should succeed him in the charge. But fate had ordered it otherwise. Our seas were infested at this period by American privateers, — prime sailors and strongly armed; and, when homeward bound from Jamaica with a valuable cargo, we were attacked and captured, when within a day's sailing of Ireland, by one of the most formidable of the class. Vain as resistance might have been deemed, — for the force of the American was altogether overpowering, — and though our master, poor old man! and three of the crew, had fallen by the first broadside, we had yet stood stiffly by our guns, and were only overmastered when, after falling foul of the enemy, we were boarded by a party of thrice our strength and number. The Americans, irritated by our resistance, proved on this occasion no generous enemies: we were stripped and heavily ironed, and, two days after, were set ashore on the wild shore of Connaught, without a single change of dress, or a single sixpence to bear us by the way.

I was sitting, on the following night, beside the turf-fire of a hospitable Irish peasant, when a seafaring man, whom I had sailed with about two years before, entered the cabin. The meeting was equally unexpected on either side. My acquaintance was the master of a smuggling lugger then on the coast; and, on acquainting him with the details of my disaster and the state of destitution to which it had reduced me, he kindly proposed that I should accompany him on his voyage to the west coast of Scotland, for which he was then on the eve of sailing.

“You will run some little risk,” he said, “as the companion of a man who has now been thrice outlawed for firing on his Majesty’s flag; but I know your proud heart will prefer the danger of bad company, at its worst, to the alternative of begging your way home.” He judged rightly. Before daybreak we had lost sight of land, and in four days more we could discern the precipitous shores of Carrick, stretching in a dark line along the horizon, and the hills of the interior rising thin and blue behind, like a volume of clouds. A considerable part of our cargo, which consisted mostly of tea and spirits, was consigned to an Ayr trader, who had several agents in the remote parish of Kirkoswald, which at this period afforded more facilities for carrying on the contraband trade than any other on the western coast of Scotland, and in a rocky bay of the parish we proposed unlading on the following night. It was necessary, however, that the several agents, who were yet ignorant of our arrival, should be prepared to meet with us; and, on volunteering my service for the purpose, I was landed near the ruins of the ancient castle of Turnberry, once the seat of Robert the Bruce.

I had accomplished my object. It was evening, and a party of countrymen were sauntering among the cliffs, waiting for nightfall and the appearance of the lugger. There are splendid caverns on the coast of Kirkoswald; and, to while away the time, I had descended to the shore by a broken and precipitous path, with a view of exploring what are termed the Caves of Colzean, by far the finest in this part of Scotland. The evening was of great beauty: the sea spread out from the cliffs to the far horizon like the sea of gold and crystal described by the prophet, and its warm orange hues so harmonized with those of the sky that, passing over the dimly-defined line

of demarcation, the whole upper and nether expanse seemed but one glorious firmament, with the dark Ailsa, like a thunder-cloud, sleeping in the midst. The sun was hastening to his setting, and threw his strong red light on the wall of rock which, loftier and more imposing than the walls of even the mighty Babylon, stretched onward along the beach, headland after headland, till the last sank abruptly in the far distance, and only the wide ocean stretched beyond. I passed along the insulated piles of cliff that rise thick along the bases of the precipices — now in sunshine, now in shadow — till I reached the opening of one of the largest caves. The roof rose more than fifty feet over my head; a broad stream of light, that seemed redder and more fiery from the surrounding gloom, slanted inwards; and, as I paused in the opening, my shadow, lengthened and dark, fell across the floor — a slim and narrow bar of black — till lost in the gloom of the inner recess. There was a wild and uncommon beauty in the scene that powerfully affected the imagination; and I stood admiring it, in that delicious dreamy mood in which one can forget all but the present enjoyment, when I was roused to a recollection of the business of the evening by the sound of a footfall echoing from within. It seemed approaching by a sort of cross passage in the rock; and, in a moment after, a young man — one of the country people whom I had left among the cliffs above — stood before me. He wore a broad Lowland bonnet, and his plain homely suit of coarse russet seemed to bespeak him a peasant of perhaps the poorest class; but as he emerged from the gloom, and the red light fell full on his countenance, I saw an indescribable something in the expression that in an instant awakened my curiosity. He was rather above the middle size, of a

frame the most muscular and compact I have almost ever seen; and there was a blended mixture of elasticity and firmness in his tread that, to one accustomed, as I had been, to estimate the physical capabilities of men, gave evidence of a union of immense personal strength with activity. My first idea regarding the stranger—and I know not how it should have struck me—was that of a very powerful frame, animated by a double portion of vitality. The red light shone full on his face, and gave a ruddy tinge to the complexion, which I afterwards found it wanted, for he was naturally of a darker hue than common; but there was no mistaking the expression of the large flashing eyes, the features that seemed so thoroughly cast in the mould of thought, and the broad, full, perpendicular forehead. Such, at least, was the impression on my mind, that I addressed him with more of the courtesy which my earlier pursuits had rendered familiar to me, than of the bluntness of my adopted profession. “This sweet evening,” I said, “is by far too fine for our lugger; I question whether, in these calms, we need expect her before midnight. But ’tis well, since wait we must, that ’tis in a place where the hours may pass so agreeably.” The stranger good-humoredly acquiesced in the remark; and we sat down together on the dry, water-worn pebbles, mixed with fragments of broken shells and minute pieces of wreck, that strewed the opening of the cave.

“Was there ever a lovelier evening!” he exclaimed. “The waters above the firmament seem all of a piece with the waters below. And never, surely, was there a scene of wilder beauty. Only look inwards, and see how the stream of red light seems bounded by the extreme darkness, like a river by its banks, and how the reflection

of the ripple goes waving in golden curls along the roof!"

"I have been admiring the scene for the last half-hour," I said. "Shakspeare speaks of a music that cannot be heard; and I have not yet seen a place where one might better learn to comment on the passage."

Both the thought and the phrase seemed new to him.

"A music that cannot be heard!" he repeated; and then, after a momentary pause, "You allude to the fact," he continued, "that sweet music, and forms, such as these, of silent beauty and grandeur; awaken in the mind emotions of nearly the same class. There is something truly exquisite in the concert of to-night."

I muttered a simple assent.

"See!" he continued, "how finely these insulated piles of rock, that rise in so many combinations of form along the beach, break and diversify the red light; and how the glossy leaves of the ivy glisten in the hollows of the precipices above! And then, how the sea spreads away to the far horizon,—a glorious pavement of crimson and gold,—and how the dark Ailsa rises in the midst, like the little cloud seen by the prophet! The mind seems to enlarge, the heart to expand, in the contemplation of so much of beauty and grandeur. The soul asserts its due supremacy. And oh, 'tis surely well that we can escape from those little cares of life which fetter down our thoughts, our hopes, our wishes to the wants and the enjoyments of our animal existence, and that, amid the grand and the sublime of nature, we may learn from the spirit within us that we are better than the beasts that perish!"

I looked up to the animated countenance and flashing eyes of my companion, and wondered what sort of a peasant it was I had met with. "Wild and beautiful as the

scene is," I said, "you will find, even among those who arrogate to themselves the praise of wisdom and learning, men who regard such scenes as mere errors of nature. Burnett would have told you that a Dutch landscape, without hill, rock, or valley, must be the perfection of beauty; seeing that Paradise itself could have furnished nothing better."

"I hold Milton as higher authority on the subject," said my companion, "than all the philosophers who ever wrote. Beauty is a tame, unvaried flat, where a man would know his country only by the milestones! A very Dutch paradise, truly!"

"But would not some of your companions above," I asked, "deem the scene as much an error of nature as Burnet himself? They could pass over these stubborn rocks neither plough nor harrow."

"True," he replied; "there is a species of small wisdom in the world that often constitutes the extremest of its folly, — a wisdom that would change the entire nature of *good*, had it but the power, by vainly endeavoring to render that good universal. It would convert the entire earth into one vast corn-field, and then find that it had ruined the species by its improvement."

"We of Scotland can hardly be ruined in that way for an age to come," I said. "But I am not sure that I understand you. Alter the very nature of good in the attempt to render it universal! How?"

"I dare say you have seen a graduated scale," said my companion, "exhibiting the various powers of the different musical instruments, and observed how some of limited scope cross only a few of the divisions, and how others stretch nearly from side to side. 'Tis but a poor truism, perhaps, to say that similar differences in scope and power

obtain among men, — that there are minds who could not join in the concert of to-night, — who could see neither beauty nor grandeur amid these wild cliffs and caverns, or in that glorious expanse of sea and sky; and that, on the other hand, there are minds so finely modulated — minds that sweep so broadly across the scale of nature — that there is no object, however minute, no breath of feeling, however faint, that does not awaken their sweet vibrations: the snow-flake falling in the stream, the daisy of the field, the conies of the rock, the hyssop of the wall. Now, the vast and various frame of nature is adapted, not to the lesser, but to the larger mind. It spreads on and around us in all its rich and magnificent variety, and finds the full portraiture of its Proteus-like beauty in the mirror of genius alone. Evident, however, as this may seem, we find a sort of levelling principle in the inferior order of minds, and which, in fact, constitutes one of their grand characteristics, — a principle that would fain abridge the scale to their own narrow capabilities, that would cut down the vastness of nature to suit the littleness of their own conceptions and desires, and convert it into one tame, uniform *mediocre good*, which would be *good* but to themselves alone, and ultimately not even that.”

“I think I can now understand you,” I said. “You describe a sort of swinish wisdom, that would convert the world into one vast sty. For my own part, I have travelled far enough to know the value of a blue hill, and would not willingly lose so much as one of these landmarks of our mother land, by which kindly hearts in distant countries love to remember it.”

“I dare say we are getting fanciful,” rejoined my companion; “but certainly, in man’s schemes of improvement, both physical and moral, there is commonly a littleness



and want of adaptation to the general good that almost always defeats his aims. He sees and understands but a minute portion; it is always some partial good he would introduce; and thus he but destroys the just proportions of a nicely-regulated system of things, by exaggerating one of the parts. I passed of late through a richly-cultivated district of country, in which the agricultural improver had done his utmost. Never were there finer fields, more convenient steadings, crops of richer promise, a better regulated system of production. Corn and cattle had mightily improved; but what had man, the lord of the soil, become? Is not the body better than food, and life than raiment? If that decline for which all other things exist, it surely matters little that all these other things prosper. And here, though the corn, the cattle, the fields, the steadings had improved, man had sunk. There are but two classes in the district: a few cold-hearted speculators, who united what is worst in the character of the landed proprietor and the merchant, — these were young gentleman farmers; and a class of degraded helots, little superior to the cattle they tended, — these were your farm-servants. And for two such extreme classes — necessary result of such a state of thing — had this unfortunate though highly eulogized district parted with a moral, intelligent, high-minded peasantry, — the true boast and true riches of their country.”

“I have, I think, observed something like what you describe,” I said.

“I give,” he replied, “but one instance of a thousand. But mark how the sun’s lower disk has just reached the line of the horizon, and how the long level rule of light stretches to the very innermost recess of the cave. It darkens as the orb sinks. And see how the gauze-like

shadows creep on from the sea, film after film; and now they have reached the ivy that mantles round the castle of the Bruce. Are you acquainted with Barbour?"

"Well," I said; — "a spirited, fine old fellow, who loved his country, and did much for it. I could once repeat all his chosen passages. Do you remember how he describes King Robert's rencounter with the English knight?"

My companion sat up erect, and, clenching his fist, began repeating the passage, with a power and animation that seemed to double its inherent energy and force.

"Glorious old Barbour!" ejaculated he, when he had finished the description; "many a heart has beat all the higher, when the bale-fires were blazing, through the tutorage of thy noble verses! Blind Harry, too, — what has not his country owed to him!"

"Ah, they have long since been banished from our popular literature," I said; "and yet Blind Henry's 'Wallace,' as Hailes tells us, was at one time the very Bible of the Scotch. But love of country seems to be old-fashioned among us; and we have become philosophic enough to set up for citizens of the world."

"All cold pretense," rejoined my companion, — "an effect of that small wisdom we have just been decrying. Cosmopolitism, as we are accustomed to define it, can be no virtue of the present age, nor yet of the next, nor perhaps for centuries to come. Even when it shall have attained to its best, and when it may be most safely indulged in, it is according to the nature of man that, instead of running counter to the love of country, it should exist as but a wider diffusion of the feeling, and form, as it were, a wider circle round it. It is absurdity itself to oppose the love of our country to that of our race."

“Do I rightly understand you?” I said. “You look forward to a time when the patriot may safely expand into the citizen of the world; but in the present age he would do well, you think, to confine his energies within the inner circle of the country.”

“Decidedly,” he rejoined. “Man should love his species at all times; but it is ill with him if, in times like the present, he loves not his country more. The spirit of war and aggression is yet abroad; there are laws to be established, rights to be defended, invaders to be repulsed, tyrants to be deposed. And who but the patriot is equal to these things? We are not yet done with the Bruces, the Wallaces, the Tells, the Washingtons,—yes, the Washingtons, whether they fight for or against us,—we are not yet done with them. The cosmopolite is but a puny abortion,—a birth ere the natural time,—that at once endangers the life and betrays the weakness of the country that bears him. Would that he were sleeping in his elements till his proper time! But we are getting ashamed of our country, of our language, our manners, our music, our literature; nor shall we have enough of the old spirit left us to assert our liberties or fight our battles. Oh for some Barbour or Blind Harry of the present day, to make us once more proud of our country!”

I quoted the famous saying of Fletcher of Salton,—“Allow me to make the songs of a country, and I will allow you to make its laws.”

“But here,” I said, “is our lugger stealing round Turnberry Head. We shall soon part, perhaps for ever; and I would fain know with whom I have spent an hour so agreeably, and have some name to remember him by. My own name is Matthew Lindsay. I am a native of Irvine.”

“And I,” said the young man, rising and cordially grasping the proffered hand, “am a native of Ayr. My name is Robert Burnus.”

## CHAPTER II.

If friendless, low, we meet together,  
Then, Sir, your hand, — my friend and brother.

DEDICATION TO G. HAMILTON.

A LIGHT breeze had risen as the sun sank, and our lugger, with all her sails set, came sweeping along the shore. She had nearly gained the little bay in front of the cave, and the countrymen from above, to the number of perhaps twenty, had descended to the beach, when, all of a sudden, after a shrill whistle, and a brief half-minute of commotion among the crew, she wore round and stood out to sea. I turned to the south, and saw a square-rigged vessel shooting out from behind one of the rocky headlands, and then bearing down in a long tack on the smuggler. “The sharks are upon us,” said one of the countrymen, whose eyes had turned in the same direction; “we shall have no sport to-night.” We stood lining the beach in anxious curiosity. The breeze freshened as the evening fell; and the lugger, as she lessened to our sight, went leaning against the foam in a long bright furrow, that, catching the last light of evening, shone like the milky-way amid the blue. Occasionally we could see the flash and hear the booming of a gun from the other vessel; but the night fell thick and dark; the waves, too, began to lash

against the rocks, drowning every feebler sound in a continuous roaring, and every trace of both the chase and the chaser disappeared. The party broke up, and I was left standing alone on the beach, a little nearer home, but in every other respect in quite the same circumstances as when landed by my American friends on the wild coast of Connought. "Another of Fortune's freaks!" I ejaculated; "but 'tis well she can no longer surprise me."

A man stepped out in the darkness, as I spoke, from beside one of the rocks. It was the peasant Burns, my acquaintance of the earlier part of the evening.

"I have waited, Mr. Lindsay," he said, "to see whether some of the country folks here, who have homes of their own to invite you to, might not have brought you along with them. But I am afraid you must just be content to pass the night with me. I can give you a share of my bed and my supper; though both, I am aware, need many apologies." I made a suitable acknowledgment, and we ascended the cliff together. "I live, when at home, with my parents," said my companion, "in the inland parish of Tarbolton; but for the last two months I have attended school here, and lodge with an old widow-woman in the village. To-morrow, as harvest is fast approaching, I return to my father."

"And I," I replied, "shall have the pleasure of accompanying you at least the early part of your journey, on my way to Irvine, where my mother still lives."

We reached the village, and entered a little cottage, that presented its gable to the street and its side to one of the narrower lanes.

"I must introduce you to my landlady," said my companion — "an excellent, kind-hearted old woman, with a fund of honest Scotch pride and shrewd good sense in her

composition, and with the mother as strong in her heart as ever, though she lost the last of her children more than twenty years ago."

We found the good woman sitting beside a small but very cheerful fire. The hearth was newly swept, and the floor newly sanded; and, directly fronting her, there was an empty chair, which seemed to have been drawn to its place in the expectation of some one to fill it.

"You are going to leave me, Robert, my bairn," said the woman, "an' I kenna how I sall ever get on without you. I have almost forgotten, sin' you came to live with me that I have neither children nor husband." On seeing me she stopped short.

"An acquaintance," said my companion, "whom I have made bold to bring with me for the night; but you must not put yourself to any trouble, mother; he is, I dare say, as much accustomed to plain fare as myself. Only, however, we must get an additional pint of *yill* from the *clachan*; you know this is my last evening with you, and was to be a merry one, at any rate." The woman looked me full in the face.

"Matthew Lindsay!" she exclaimed, "can you have forgotten your poor old aunt Margaret!" I grasped her hand.

"Dearest aunt, this is surely most unexpected! How could I have so much as dreamed you were within a hundred miles of me?" Mutual congratulation ensued.

"This," she said, turning to my companion, "is the nephew I have so often told you about, and so often wished to bring you acquainted with. He is, like yourself, a great reader and a great thinker, and there is no need that your proud, kindly heart should be jealous of him; for he has been ever quite as poor, and maybe the poorer

of the two." After still more of greeting and congratulation, the young man rose.

"The night is dark, mother," he said, "and the road to the clachan a rough one. Besides, you and your kinsman will have much to say to one another. I shall just slip out to the clachan for you; and you shall both tell me, on my return, whether I am not a prime judge of ale."

"The kindest heart, Matthew, that ever lived," said my relative, as he left the house. "Ever since he came to Kirkoswald he has been both son and daughter to me, and I shall feel twice a widow when he goes away."

"I am mistaken, aunt," I said, "if he be not the strongest-minded man I ever saw. Be assured he stands high among the aristocracy of nature, whatever may be thought of him in Kirkoswald. There is a robustness of intellect, joined to an overmastering force of character, about him, which I have never yet seen equalled, though I have been intimate with at least one very superior mind, and with hundreds of the class who pass for men of talent. I have been thinking, ever since I met with him, of the William Tells and William Wallaces of history, men who, in those times of trouble which unfix the foundations of society, step out from their obscurity to rule the destiny of nations."

"I was ill about a month ago," said my relative, — "so very ill that I thought I was to have done with the world altogether; and Robert was both nurse and physician to me. He kindled my fire, too, every morning, and sat up beside me sometimes for the greater part of the night. What wonder I should love him as my own child? Had your cousin Henry been spared to me, he would now have been much about Robert's age."

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The conversation passed to other matters; and in about half an hour my new friend entered the room, when we sat down to a homely but cheerful repast.

“I have been engaged in argument for the last twenty minutes with our parish schoolmaster,” he said, — “a shrewd, sensible man, and a prime scholar, but one of the most determined Calvinists I ever knew. Now, there is something, Mr. Lindsay, in abstract Calvinism that dissatisfies and distresses me; and yet, I must confess, there is so much of good in the working of the system, that I would ill like to see it supplanted by any other. I am convinced, for instance, there is nothing so efficient in teaching the bulk of a people to think as a Calvinistic church.”

“Ah, Robert,” said my aunt, “it does meikle mair nor that. Look round you, my bairn, an’ see if there be a kirk in which pair sinful creatures have mair comfort in their sufferings, or mair hope in their deaths.”

“Dear mother,” said my companion, “I like well enough to dispute with the schoolmaster, but I must have no dispute with you. I know the heart is everything in these matters, and yours is much wiser than mine.”

“There is something in abstract Calvinism,” he continued, “that distresses me. In almost all our researches, we arrive at an ultimate barrier which interposes its wall of darkness between us and the last grand truth in the series, which we had trusted was to prove a master-key to the whole. We dwell in a sort of Goshen: there is light in our immediate neighborhood, and a more than Egyptian darkness all around; and as every Hebrew must have known that the hedge of cloud which he saw resting on the landscape was a boundary, not to things themselves, but merely to his view of things, — for beyond there



were cities and plains and oceans and continents, — so we in like manner must know that the barriers of which I speak exist only in relation to the faculties which we employ, not to the objects on which we employ them. And yet, notwithstanding this consciousness that we are necessarily and irremediably the bound prisoners of ignorance, and that all the great truths lie outside our prison, we can almost be content that in most cases it should be so; not, however, with regard to those great unattainable truths which lie in the track of Calvinism. They seem too important to be wanted, and yet want them we must; and we beat our very heads against the cruel barrier which separates us from them.”

“I am afraid I hardly understand you,” I said. “Do assist me by some instance or illustration.”

“You are acquainted,” he replied, “with the Scripture doctrine of predestination; and, in thinking over it in connection with the destinies of man, it must have struck you that, however much it may interfere with our fixed notions of the goodness of Deity, it is thoroughly in accordance with the actual condition of our race. As far as we can know of ourselves and the things around us, there seems, through the will of Deity, — for to what else can we refer it? — a fixed, invariable connection between what we term cause and effect. Nor do we demand of any class of mere effects, in the inanimate or irrational world, that they should regulate themselves otherwise than the causes which produce them have determined. The roe and the tiger pursue, unquestioned, the instincts of their several natures; the cork rises, and the stone sinks; and no one thinks of calling either to account for movements so opposite. But it is not so with the family of man; and yet our minds, our bodies, our

circumstances are but combinations of effects, over the causes of which we have no control. We did not choose a country for ourselves, nor yet a condition in life; nor did we determine our modicum of intellect, or our amount of passion; we did not impart its gravity to the weightier part of our nature, or give expansion to the lighter; nor are our instincts of our own planting. How, then, being thus as much the creatures of necessity as the denizens of the wild and forest,—as thoroughly under the agency of fixed, unalterable causes as the dead matter around us,—why are we yet the subjects of a retributive system, and accountable for all our actions?"

"You quarrel with Calvinism," I said; "and seem one of the most thoroughgoing necessitarians I ever knew."

"Not so," he replied. "Though my judgment cannot disprove these conclusions, my heart cannot acquiesce in them; though I see that I am as certainly the subject of laws that exist and operate independent of my will as the dead matter around me, I feel, with a certainty quite as great, that I am a free, accountable creature. It is according to the scope of my entire reason that I should deem myself bound; it is according to the constitution of my whole nature that I should feel myself free. And in this consists the great, the fearful problem,—a problem which both reason and revelation propound; but the truths which can alone solve it seem to lie beyond the horizon of darkness, and we vex ourselves in vain. 'Tis a sort of moral asymptote; but its lines, instead of approaching through all space without meeting, seem receding through all space and yet meet."

"Robert, my bairn," said my aunt, "I fear you are wasting your strength on these mysteries, to your ain hurt. Did ye no see, in the last storm, when ye staid

out among the caves till cock-crow, that the bigger and stronger the wave, the mair was it broken against the rocks? It's just thus wi' the pride o' man's understanding, when he measures it against the dark things o' God. An' yet, it's sae ordered that the same wonderful truths which perplex an' cast down the proud reason, should delight an' comfort the humble heart. I am a lone, puir woman, Robert. Bairns and husband have gone down to the grave, one by one; an' now, for twenty weary years, I have been childless an' a widow. But trow ye that the puir lone woman wanted a guard, an' a comforter, an' a provider, through a' the lang mirk nichts and a' the cauld scarce winters o' these twenty years? No, my bairn; I kent that Himsel' was wi' me. I kent it by the provision He made, an' the care He took, an' the joy He gave. An' how, think you, did He comfort me maist? Just by the blessed assurance that a' my trials an' a' my sorrows were nae hasty chance matters, but dispensations for my gude and the gude o' those He took to Himsel'; that, in the perfect love and wisdom o' his nature, He had ordained frae the beginning."

"Ah, mother," said my friend, after a pause, "you understand the doctrine far better than I do. There are, I find, no contradictions in the Calvinism of the heart."

## CHAPTER III.

Ayr, gurgling, kissed his pebbled shore,  
 O'erhung with wild woods thiek'ning green ;  
 The fragrant birch and hawthorn hoar  
 Twined, amorous, round the raptured scene ;  
 The flowers sprang wanton to be prest,  
 The birds sang love on every spray,  
 Till too, too soon, the glowing west  
 Proclaimed the speed of wingéd day.

TO MARY IN HEAVEN.

WE were early on the road together. The day, though somewhat gloomy, was mild and pleasant; and we walked slowly onward, neither of us in the least disposed to hasten our parting by hastening our journey. We had discussed fifty different topics, and were prepared to enter on fifty more, when we reached the ancient burgh of Ayr, where our roads separated.

“I have taken an immense liking to you, Mr. Lindsay,” said my companion, as he seated himself on the parapet of the old bridge, “and have just bethought me of a scheme through which I may enjoy your company for at least one night more. The Ayr is a lovely river, and you tell me you have never explored it. We shall explore it together this evening for about ten miles, when we shall find ourselves at the farm-house of Lochlea. You may depend on a hearty welcome from my father, whom, by the way, I wish much to introduce to you, as a man worth your knowing; and as I have set my heart on the scheme,

you are surely too good-natured to disappoint me." Little risk of that, I thought. I had, in fact, become thoroughly enamored of the warm-hearted benevolence and fascinating conversation of my companion, and acquiesced with the best good-will in the world.

We had threaded the course of the river for several miles. It runs through a wild pastoral valley, roughened by thickets of copsewood, and bounded on either hand by a line of swelling, moory hills, with here and there a few irregular patches of corn, and here and there some little nest-like cottage peeping out from among the wood. The clouds, which during the morning had obscured the entire face of the heavens, were breaking up their array, and the sun was looking down in twenty different places through the openings, checkering the landscape with a fantastic though lovely carpeting of light and shadow. Before us there rose a thick wood, on a jutting promontory, that looked blue and dark in the shade, as if it wore mourning; while the sunlit stream beyond shone through the trunks and branches like a river of fire. At length the clouds seemed to have melted in the blue, — for there was not a breath of wind to speed them away, — and the sun, now hastening to the west, shone in unbroken effulgence over the wide extent of the dell, lighting up stream and wood and field and cottage in one continuous blaze of glory. We had walked on in silence for the last half-hour; but I could sometimes hear my companion muttering as he went; and when, in passing through a thicket of hawthorn and honeysuckle, we started from its perch a linnet that had been filling the air with its melody, I could hear him exclaim, in a subdued tone of voice, "Bonny, bonny birdie! why hasten frae me? I wadna skaith a feather

o' yer wing." He turned round to me, and I could see that his eyes were swimming in moisture.

"Can he be other," he said, "than a good and benevolent God who gives us moments like these to enjoy? O, my friend! without these sabbaths of the soul, that come to refresh and invigorate it, it would dry up within us! How exquisite," he continued, "how entire, the sympathy which exists between all that is good and fair in external nature and all of good and fair that dwells in our own! And oh, how the heart expands and lightens! The world is as a grave to it, a closely-covered grave; and it shrinks and deadens and contracts all its holier and more joyous feelings under the cold, earth-like pressure. But amid the grand and lovely of nature, — amid these forms and colors of richest beauty, — there is a disinterment, a resurrection, of sentiment; the pressure of our earthly part seems removed; and those senses of the mind, if I may so speak, which serve to connect our spirits with the invisible world around us, recover their proper tone, and perform their proper office."

"Senses of the mind!" I said, repeating the phrase; "the idea is new to me; but I think I can catch your meaning."

"Yes; there are, there must be such," he continued, with growing enthusiasm. "Man is essentially a religious creature, a looker beyond the grave, from the very constitution of his mind; and the sceptic who denies it is untrue not merely to the Being who has made and who preserves him, but to the entire scope and bent of his own nature besides. Wherever man is, — whether he be a wanderer of the wild forest or still wilder desert, — a dweller in some lone isle of the sea, or the tutored and full-minded denizen of some blessed land like our own; —

wherever man is, there is religion ; hopes that look forward and upward ; the belief in an unending existence and a land of separate souls.”

I was carried away by the enthusiasm of my companion, and felt for the time as if my mind had become the mirror of his. There seems to obtain among men a species of moral gravitation, analogous in its principles to that which regulates and controls the movements of the planetary system. The larger and more ponderous any body, the greater its attractive force, and the more overpowering its influence over the lesser bodies which surround it. The earth we inhabit carries the moon along with it in its course, and is itself subject to the immensely more powerful influence of the sun. And it is thus with character. It is a law of our nature, as certainly as of the system we inhabit, that the inferior should yield to the superior, and the lesser owe its guidance to the greater. I had hitherto wandered on through life almost unconscious of the existence of this law ; or, if occasionally rendered half aware of it, it was only through a feeling that some secret influence was operating favorably in my behalf on the common minds around me. I now felt, however, for the first time, that I had come in contact with a mind immeasurably more powerful than my own. My thoughts seemed to cast themselves into the very mould, my sentiments to modulate themselves by the very tone, of his. And yet he was but a russet-clad peasant, — my junior by at least eight years, — who was returning from school to assist his father, an humble tacksman, in the labors of the approaching harvest. But the law of circumstance, so arbitrary in ruling the destinies of common men, exerts but feeble control over the children of genius.

The prophet went forth commissioned by heaven to anoint a king over Israel; and the choice fell on a shepherd-boy, who was tending his father's flocks in the field.

We had reached a lovely bend of the stream. There was a semicircular inflection in the steep bank, which waved over us, from base to summit, with hawthorn and hazel; and while one half looked blue and dark in the shade, the other was lighted up with gorgeous and fiery splendor by the sun, now fast sinking in the west. The effect seemed magical. A little glassy platform, that stretched between the hanging wood and the stream, was whitened over with clothes, that looked like snow-wreaths in the hollow; and a young and beautiful girl watched beside them.

"Mary Campbell!" exclaimed my companion; and in a moment he was at her side, and had grasped both her hands in his. "How fortunate, how very fortunate I am!" he said; "I could not have so much as hoped to have seen you to-night, and yet here you are! This, Mr. Lindsay, is a loved friend of mine, whom I have known and valued for years, — ever, indeed, since we herded our sheep together under the cover of one plaid. Dearest Mary, I have had sad forebodings regarding you for the whole last month I was in Kirkoswald; and yet, after all my foolish fears, here you are, ruddier and bonnier than ever."

She was, in truth, a beautiful, sylph-like young woman, — one whom I would have looked at with complacency in any circumstances; for who that admires the fair and lovely in nature, whether it be the wide-spread beauty of sky and earth, or beauty in its minuter modifications, as we see in the flowers that spring up at our feet, or the



butterfly that flutters over them, — who, I say, that admires the fair and lovely in nature, can be indifferent to the fairest and loveliest of all her productions? As the mistress, however, of by far the strongest-minded man I ever knew, there was more of scrutiny in my glance than usual, and I felt a deeper interest in her than mere beauty could have awakened. She was perhaps rather below than above the middle size, but formed in such admirable proportion that it seemed out of place to think of size in reference to her at all. Who, in looking at the Venus de Medicis, asks whether she be tall or short? The bust and neck were so exquisitely moulded that they reminded me of Burke's fanciful remark, viz. that our ideas of beauty originate in our love of the sex, and that we deem every object beautiful which is described by soft waving lines, resembling those of the female neck and bosom. Her feet and arms, which were both bare, had a statue-like symmetry and marble-like whiteness. But it was on her expressive and lovely countenance, now lighted up by the glow of joyous feeling, that nature seemed to have exhausted her utmost skill. There was a fascinating mixture in the expression of superior intelligence and child-like simplicity; a soft, modest light dwelt in the blue eye; and in the entire contour and general form of the features there was a nearer approach to that union of the straight and the rounded — which is found in its perfection in only the Grecian face — than is at all common, in our northern latitudes, among the descendants of either the Celt or the Saxon. I felt, however, as I gazed, that, when lovers meet, the presence of a third person, however much the friend of either, must always be less than agreeable.

“Mr. Burns,” I said, “there is a beautiful eminence a few hundred yards to the right, from which I am desirous

to overlook the windings of the stream. Do permit me to leave you for a short half-hour, when I shall return; or, lest I weary you by my stay, 'twere better, perhaps, you should join me there." My companion greeted the proposal with a good-humored smile of intelligence; and, plunging into the wood, I left him with his Mary. The sun had just set as he joined me.

"Have you ever been in love, Mr. Lindsay?" he said.

"No, never seriously," I replied. "I am perhaps not naturally of the coolest temperament imaginable, but the same fortune that has improved my mind in some little degree, and given me high notions of the sex, has hitherto thrown me among only its less superior specimens. I am now in my eight-and-twentieth year, and I have not yet met with a woman whom I could love."

"Then you are yet a stranger," he rejoined, "to the greatest happiness of which our nature is capable. I have enjoyed more heartfelt pleasure in the company of the young woman I have just left, than from every other source that has been opened to me from my childhood till now. Love, my friend, is the fulfilling of the whole law."

"Mary Campbell, did you not call her?" I said. "She is, I think, the loveliest creature I have ever seen; and I am much mistaken in the expression of her beauty if her mind be not as lovely as her person."

"It is, it is!" he exclaimed,—"the intelligence of an angel, with the simplicity of a child. Oh, the delight of being thoroughly trusted, thoroughly beloved, by one of the loveliest, best, purest-minded of all God's good creatures! to feel that heart beating against my own, and to know that it beats for me only! Never have I passed an evening with my Mary without returning to the world a

better, gentler, wiser man. Love, my friend, is the fulfilling of the whole law. What are we without it? — poor, vile, selfish animals; our very virtues themselves so exclusively virtues on our own behalf as to be well-nigh as hateful as our vices. Nothing so opens and improves the heart; nothing so widens the grasp of the affections; nothing half so effectually brings us out of our crust of self, as a happy, well-regulated love for a pure-minded, affectionate-hearted woman!”

“There is another kind of love of which we sailors see somewhat,” I said, “which is not so easily associated with good.”

“Love!” he replied. “No, Mr. Lindsay, that is not the name. Kind associates with kind in all nature; and love — humanizing, heart-softening love — cannot be the companion of whatever is low, mean, worthless, degrading, — the associate of ruthless dishonor, cunning, treachery, and violent death. Even independent of its amount of evil as a crime, or the evils still greater than itself which necessarily accompany it, there is nothing that so petrifies the feeling as illicit connection.”

“Do you seriously think so?” I asked.

“Yes; and I see clearly how it should be so. Neither sex is complete of itself; each was made for the other, that, like the two halves of a hinge, they may become an entire whole when united. Only think of the Scriptural phrase, “*one flesh*”: it is of itself a system of philosophy. Refinement and tenderness are of the woman; strength and dignity of the man. Only observe the effects of a thorough separation, whether originating in accident or caprice. You will find the stronger sex lost in the rudenesses of partial barbarism; the gentler wrapt up in some pitiful round of trivial and unmeaning occupation, — dry-

nursing puppies, or making pin-cushions for posterity. But how much more pitiful are the effects when they meet amiss; when the humanizing friend and companion of the man is converted into the light, degraded toy of an idle hour, the object of a sordid appetite that lives but for a moment, and then expires in loathing and disgust! The better feelings are iced over at their source, chilled by the freezing and deadening contact, where there is nothing to inspire confidence or solicit esteem; and if these pass not through the first, the inner circle, that circle within which the social affections are formed, and from whence they emanate,—how can they possibly flow through the circles which lie beyond? But here, Mr. Lindsay, is the farm of Lochlea; and yonder brown cottage, beside the three elms, is the dwelling of my parents.”

#### CHAPTER IV.

From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,  
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad.

COTTER'S SATURDAY NIGHT.

THERE WAS a wide and cheerful circle this evening round the hospitable hearth of Lochlea. The father of my friend — a patriarchal-looking old man, with a countenance the most expressive I have almost ever seen — sat beside the wall, on a large oaken settle, which also served to accommodate a young man, an occasional visitor of the family, dressed in rather shabby black, whom I at once set down as a probationer of divinity. I had my

own seat beside him. The brother of my friend — a lad cast in nearly the same mould of form and feature, except perhaps that his frame, though muscular and strongly set, seemed in the main less formidably robust, and his countenance, though expressive, less decidedly intellectual — sat at my side. My friend had drawn in his seat beside his mother, — a well-formed, comely brunette, of about thirty-eight, whom I might almost have mistaken for his older sister, — and two or three younger members of the family were grouped behind her. The fire blazed cheerily within the wide and open chimney, and, throwing its strong light on the faces and limbs of the circle, sent our shadows flickering across the rafters and the wall behind. The conversation was animated and rational, and every one contributed his share. But I was chiefly interested in the remarks of the old man, for whom I already felt a growing veneration, and in those of his wonderfully gifted son.

“Unquestionably, Mr. Burns,” said the man in black, addressing the farmer, “politeness is but a very shadow, as the poet hath it, if the heart be wanting. I saw to-night, in a strictly polite family, so marked a presumption of the lack of that natural affection of which politeness is but the portraiture and semblance, that, truly, I have been grieved in my heart ever since.”

“Ah, Mr. Murdoch,” said the farmer, “there is ever more hypocrisy in the world than in the church, and that, too, among the class of fine gentlemen and fine ladies who deny it most. But the instance” —

“You know the family, my worthy friend,” continued Mr. Murdoch; “it is a very pretty one, as we say vernacularly, being numerous, and the sons highly genteel young men — the daughters not less so. A neighbor of the same very polite character, coming on a visit when I was

among them, asked the father, in the course of the conversation to which I was privy, how he meant to dispose of his sons; when the father replied that he had not yet determined. The visitor said that, were he in his place, seeing they were all well-educated young men, he would send them abroad; to which the father objected the indubitable fact that many young men lost their health in foreign countries, and very many their lives. 'True,' did the visitor rejoin; 'but, as you have a number of sons, it will be strange if some one of them does not live and make a fortune.' Now, Mr. Burns, what will you, who know the feelings of paternity, and the incalculable, and assuredly I may say invaluable value of human souls, think when I add, that the father commended the hint, as showing the wisdom of a shrewd man of the world!"

"Even the chief priests," said the old man, "pronounced it unlawful to cast into the treasury the thirty pieces of silver, seeing it was the price of blood; but the gentility of the present day is less scrupulous. There is a laxity of principle among us, Mr. Murdoch, that, if God restore us not, must end in the ruin of our country. I say laxity of principle; for there have ever been evil manners among us, and waifs in no inconsiderable number broken loose from the decencies of society, — more, perhaps, in my early days than there are now. But our principles, at least, were sound; and not only was there thus a restorative and conservative spirit among us, but, what was of not less importance, there was a broad gulf, like that in the parable, between the two grand classes, the good and the evil, — a gulf which, when it secured the better class from contamination, interposed no barrier to the reformation and return of even the most vile and profligate, if repentant. But this gulf has disappeared,

and we are standing unconcernedly over it, on a hollow and dangerous marsh of neutral ground, which, in the end, if God open not our eyes, must assuredly give way under our feet."

"To what, father," inquired my friend, who sat listening with the deepest and most respectful attention, "do you attribute the change?"

"Undoubtedly," replied the old man, "there have been many causes at work; and though not impossible, it would certainly be no easy task to trace them all to their several effects, and give to each its due place and importance. But there is a deadly evil among us, though you will hear of it from neither press nor pulpit, which I am disposed to rank first in the number, — the affectation of gentility. It has a threefold influence among us: it confounds the grand, eternal distinctions of right and wrong, by erecting into a standard of conduct and opinion that heterogeneous and artificial whole which constitutes the manners and morals of the upper classes; it severs those ties of affection and good-will which should bind the middle to the lower orders, by disposing the one to regard whatever is below them with a too contemptuous indifference, and by provoking a bitter and indignant, though natural jealousy in the other, for being so regarded; and, finally, by leading those who most entertain it into habits of expense, — torturing their means, if I may so speak, on the rack of false opinion, disposing them to think, in their blindness, that to be genteel is a first consideration, and to be honest merely a secondary one, — it has the effect of so hardening their hearts that, like those Carthagenians of whom we have been lately reading in the volume Mr. Murdoch lent us, they offer up their very children, souls

and bodies, to the unreal, phantom-like necessities of their circumstances."

"Have I not heard you remark, father," said Gilbert, "that the change you describe has been very marked among the ministers of our church?"

"Too marked and too striking," replied the old man; "and, in affecting the respectability and usefulness of so important a class, it has educed a cause of deterioration distinct from itself, and hardly less formidable. There is an old proverb of our country, 'Better the head of the commonalty than the tail of the gentry.' I have heard you quote it, Robert, oftener than once, and admire its homely wisdom. Now, it bears directly on what I have to remark: the ministers of our church have moved but one step during the last sixty years; but that step has been an all-important one. It has been from the best place in relation to the people, to the worst in relation to the aristocracy."

"Undoubtedly, worthy Mr. Burns," said Mr. Murdoch. "There is great truth, according to mine own experience, in that which you affirm. I may state, I trust without over-boasting or conceit, my respected friend, that my learning is not inferior to that of our neighbor the clergyman;—it is not inferior in Latin, nor in Greek, nor yet in French literature, Mr. Burns, and probable it is he would not much court a competition; and yet, when I last waited at the Manse regarding a necessary and essential certificate, Mr. Burns, he did not as much as ask me to sit down."

"Ah," said Gilbert, who seemed the wit of the family, "he is a highly respectable man, Mr. Murdoch. He has a fine house, fine furniture, fine carpets,—all that constitutes respectability, you know; and his family is on visit-



ing terms with that of the Laird. But his credit is not so respectable, I hear."

"Gilbert," said the old man, with much seriousness, "it is ill with a people when they can speak lightly of their clergymen. There is still much of sterling worth and serious piety in the Church of Scotland; and if the influence of its ministers be unfortunately less than it was once, we must not cast the blame too exclusively on themselves. Other causes have been in operation. The church eighty years ago was the sole guide of opinion, and the only source of thought among us. There was, indeed, but one way in which a man could learn to think. His mind became the subject of some serious impression; he applied to his Bible; and, in the contemplation of the most important of all concerns, his newly-awakened faculties received their first exercise. All of intelligence, all of moral good in him, all that rendered him worthy of the name of man, he owed to the ennobling influence of his church; and is it wonder that that influence should be all-powerful from this circumstance alone? But a thorough change has taken place;—new sources of intelligence have been opened up; we have our newspapers and our magazines, and our volumes of miscellaneous reading; and it is now possible enough for the most cultivated mind in a parish to be the least moral and the least religious; and hence, necessarily, a diminished influence in the church, independent of the character of its ministers."

I have dwelt too long, perhaps, on the conversation of the elder Burns; but I feel much pleasure in thus developing, as it were, my recollections of one whom his powerful-minded son has described—and this after an acquaintance with our Henry M'Kenzies, Adam Smiths, and Dugald Stewarts—as the man most thoroughly acquainted

with the world he ever knew. Never, at least, have I met with any one who exerted a more wholesome influence, through the force of moral character, on those around him. We sat down to a plain and homely supper. The slave question had about this time begun to draw the attention of a few of the more excellent and intelligent among the people, and the elder Burns seemed deeply interested in it.

“This is but homely fare, Mr. Lindsay,” he said, pointing to the simple viands before us, “and the apologists of slavery among us would tell you how inferior we are to the poor negroes, who fare so much better. But surely ‘man does not live by bread alone!’ Our fathers who died for Christ on the hill-side and the scaffold were noble men, and never, never shall slavery produce such; and yet they toiled as hard, and fared as meanly, as we their children.”

I could feel, in the cottage of such a peasant, and seated beside such men as his two sons, the full force of the remark. And yet I have heard the miserable sophism of unprincipled power against which it is directed — a sophism so insulting to the dignity of honest poverty — a thousand times repeated.

Supper over, the family circle widened round the hearth; and the old man, taking down a large clasped Bible, seated himself beside the iron lamp which now lighted the apartment. There was deep silence among us as he turned over the leaves. Never shall I forget his appearance. He was tall and thin, and, though his frame was still vigorous, considerably bent. His features were high and massy; the complexion still retained much of the freshness of youth, and the eye all its intelligence; but his locks were waxing thin and gray round his high,

thoughtful forehead, and the upper part of the head, which was elevated to an unusual height, was bald. There was an expression of the deepest seriousness on the countenance which the strong umbrary shadows of the apartment served to heighten; and when, laying his hand on the page, he half-turned his face to the circle, and said, "Let us worship God," I was impressed by a feeling of awe and reverence to which I had, alas! been a stranger for years. I was affected, too, almost to tears, as I joined in the psalm; for a thousand half-forgotten associations came rushing upon me; and my heart seemed to swell and expand as, kneeling beside him when he prayed, I listened to his solemn and fervent petition that God might make manifest his power and goodness in the salvation of man. Nor was the poor solitary wanderer of the deep forgotten.

On rising from our devotions, the old man grasped me by the hand. "I am happy," he said, "that we should have met, Mr. Lindsay. I feel an interest in you, and must take the friend and the old man's privilege of giving you an advice. The sailor, of all men, stands most in need of religion. His life is one of continued vicissitude, of unexpected success or unlooked-for misfortune; he is ever passing from danger to safety, and from safety to danger; his dependence is on the ever-varying winds, his abode on the unstable waters. And the mind takes a peculiar tone from what is peculiar in the circumstances. With nothing stable in the real world around it on which it may rest, it forms a resting-place for itself in some wild code of belief. It peoples the elements with strange occult powers of good and evil, and does them homage, — addressing its prayers to the genius of the winds and the spirits of the waters. And thus it begets a religion for itself; for what else is the professional

superstition of the sailor? Substitute, my friend, for this — shall I call it unavoidable superstition? — this natural religion of the sea, the religion of the Bible. Since you must be a believer in the supernatural, let your belief be true; let your trust be on Him who faileth not, your anchor within the veil; and all shall be well, be your destiny for this world what it may.”

We parted for the night, and I saw him no more.

Next morning Robert accompanied me for several miles on my way. I saw, for the last half-hour, that he had something to communicate, and yet knew not how to set about it; and so I made a full stop.

“You have something to tell me, Mr. Burns,” I said. “Need I assure you I am one you are in no danger from trusting?” He blushed deeply, and I saw him, for the first time, hesitate and falter in his address.

“Forgive me,” he at length said; “believe me, Mr. Lindsay, I would be the last in the world to hurt the feelings of a friend, — a — a — but you have been left among us penniless, and I have a very little money which I have no use for, none in the least. Will you not favor me by accepting it as a loan?”

I felt the full and generous delicacy of the proposal, and, with moistened eyes and a swelling heart, availed myself of his kindness. The sum he tendered did not much exceed a guinea; but the yearly earnings of the peasant Burns fell, at this period of his life, rather below eight pounds.

## CHAPTER V.

Corbies an' clergy are a shot right kittle.

BRIGS OF AYR.

THE years passed, and I was again a dweller on the sea; but the ill-fortune which had hitherto tracked me like a bloodhound, seemed at length as if tired in the pursuit, and I was now the master of a West India trader, and had begun to lay the foundation of that competency which has secured to my declining years the quiet and comfort which, for the latter part of my life, it has been my happiness to enjoy. My vessel had arrived at Liverpool in the latter part of the year 1784; and I had taken coach for Irvine, to visit my mother, whom I had not seen for several years. There was a change of passengers at every stage; but I saw little in any of them to interest me till within about a score of miles of my destination, when I met with an old respectable townsman, a friend of my father's. There was but another passenger in the coach, a north-country gentleman from the West Indies. I had many questions to ask my townsman, and many to answer, and the time passed lightly away.

“Can you tell me aught of the Burnses of Lochlea?” I inquired, after learning that my mother and my other relatives were well. “I met with the young man Robert about five years ago, and have often since asked myself what special end Providence could have in view in making such a man.”

“I was acquainted with old William Burns,” said my companion, “when he was gardener at Denholm, an’ got intimate wi’ his son Robert when he lived wi’ us at Irvine a twalmonth syne. The faither died shortly ago, sairly straitened in his means, I’m fear’d, an’ no very square wi’ the laird; an’ ill wad he hae liked that, for an honest man never breathed. Robert, puir chield, is no’ very easy either.”

“In his circumstances?” I said.

“Ay, an waur. He gat entangled wi’ the kirk on an unlucky sculdudderly business, an’ has been writing bitter wicked ballads on a’ the gude ministers in the country ever sinsyne. I’m vexed it’s on them he suld hae fallen; an’ yet they hae been to blame too.”

“Robert Burns so entangled, so occupied!” I exclaimed; “you grieve and astonish me.”

“We are puir creatures, Matthew,” said the old man; “strength an’ weakness are often next-door neighbors in the best o’ us; nay, what is our vera strength ta’en on the a’e side, may be our vera weakness ta’en on the ither. Never was there a stancher, firmer fallow than Robert Burns; an’, now that he has ta’en a wrang step, puir chield, that vera stanchness seems just a weak want o’ ability to yield. He has planted his foot where it lighted by mishanter, and a’ the gude an’ ill in Scotland wadna budge him frae the spot.”

“Dear me! that so powerful a mind should be so frivolously engaged! Making ballads, you say? With what success?”

“Ah, Matthew, lad, when the strong man puts out his strength,” said my companion, “there’s naething frivolous in the matter, be his object what it may. Robert’s ballads are far, far aboon the best things ever seen in Scotland

afore. We auld folk dinna ken whether maist to blame or praise them ; but they keep the young people laughing frae the a'e nuik o' the shire till the ither."

"But how," I inquired, "have the better clergy rendered themselves obnoxious to Burns? The laws he has violated, if I rightly understand you, are indeed severe, and somewhat questionable in their tendencies ; and even good men often press them too far."

"And in the case of Robert," said the old man, "our clergy have been strict to the very letter. They're gude men, an' faithfu' ministers ; but ane o' them at least, an' he a leader, has a harsh, ill temper, an' mistakes sometimes the corruption o' the auld man in him for the proper zeal o' the new ane. Nor is there ony o' the ithers wha kent what they had to deal wi' when Robert cam' afore them. They saw but a proud, thrawart ploughman, that stood uncow'ring under the glunsh o' a hail session ; and so they opened on him the artillery o' the kirk, to bear down his pride. Wha could hae tauld them that they were but frushing their straw an' rotten wood against the iron scales o' Leviathan? An' now that they hae dunc their maist, the record o' Robert's mishanter is lying in whity-brown ink yonder in a page o' the session-buik ; while the ballads hae sunk deep, deep intil the very mind o' the country, and may live there for hunders and hunders o' years."

"You seem to contrast, in this business," I said, "our better with what you must deem our inferior clergy. You mean, do you not, the higher and lower parties in our church? How are they getting on now?"

"Never worse," replied the old man ; "an' oh, it's surely ill when the ministers o' peace become the very leaders o' contention ! But let the blame rest in the right place.

Peace is surely a blessing frae heaven, — no a gude wark demanded frae man ; an' when it grows our duty to be in war, it's an ill thing to be in peace. Our Evangelicals are stan'in', puir folk, whar their faithers stood ; an' if they maun either fight or be beaten frae their post, why, it's just their duty to fight. But the Moderates are rinnin' mad a'thegither amang us ; signing our auld Confession just that they may get intil the kirk to preach against it ; paring the New Testament down to the vera standard o' heathen Plawto ; and sinking a'e doctrine after anither, till they leave ahint naething but Deism that might scunner an infidel. Deed, Matthew, if there comena a change amang them, an' that sune, they'll swamp the puir kirk a'thegither. The cauld morality, that never made ony ane mair moral, tak's nae haud o' the people ; an' patronage, as meikle's they roose it, winna keep up either kirk or manse o' itsel'. Sorry I am, sin' Robert has entered on the quarrel at a', it suld hae been on the wrang side."

"One of my chief objections," I said, "to the religion of the Moderate party, is, that it is of no use."

"A gey serious ane," rejoined the old man ; "but maybe there's a waur still. I'm unco vexed for Robert, baith on his worthy faither's account and his ain. He's a fearsome fellow when ance angered, but an honest, warm-hearted chield for a' that ; an' there's mair sense in yon big head o' his than in ony ither twa in the country."

"Can you tell me aught," said the north-country gentleman, addressing my companion, "of Mr. R——, the chapel minister in K——? I was once one of his pupils in the far north ; but I have heard nothing of him since he left Cromarty."

"Why," rejoined the old man, "he's just the man that,



mair nor a' the rest, has borne the brunt o' Robert's fearsome waggery. Did ye ken him in Cromarty, say ye?"

"He was parish schoolmaster there," said the gentleman, "for twelve years; and for six of these I attended his school. I cannot help respecting him; but no one ever loved him. Never, surely, was there a man at once so unequivocally honest and so thoroughly unamiable."

"You must have found him a rigid disciplinarian," I said.

"He was the most so," he replied, "from the days of Dionysius at least, that ever taught a school. I remember there was a poor fisher-boy among us, named Skinner, who, as is customary in Scottish schools, as you must know, blew the horn for gathering the scholars, and kept the catalogue and the key; and who, in return, was educated by the master, and received some little gratuity from the scholars besides. On one occasion the key dropped out of his pocket; and when the school-time came, the irascible dominie had to burst open the door with his foot. He raged at the boy with a fury so insane, and beat him so unmercifully, that the other boys, gathering heart in the extremity of the case, had to rise *en masse* and tear him out of his hands. But the curious part of the story is yet to come. Skinner has been a fisherman for the last twelve years; but never has he been seen disengaged for a moment, from that time to this, without mechanically thrusting his hand into the key-pocket.

Our companion furnished us with two or three other anecdotes of Mr. R ——. He told us of a lady who was so overcome by sudden terror on unexpectedly seeing him, many years after she had quitted his school, in one of the pulpits of the south, that she fainted away; and of another of his scholars, named M'Glashan, a robust, daring fellow of six feet, who, when returning to Cromarty from

some of the colonies, solaced himself by the way with thoughts of the hearty drubbing with which he was to clear off all his old scores with the dominie.

“Ere his return, however,” continued the gentleman, “Mr. R—— had quitted the parish; and, had it chanced otherwise, it is questionable whether M’Glashan, with all his strength and courage, would have gained anything in an encounter with one of the boldest and most powerful men in the country.”

Such were some of the chance glimpses which I gained at this time of by far the most powerful of the opponents of Burns. He was a good, conscientious man, but unfortunate in a harsh, violent temper, and in sometimes mistaking, as my old townsman remarked, the dictates of that temper for those of duty.

## CHAPTER VI.

It’s hardly in a body’s pow’r  
 To keep at times frae being sour,  
     To see how things are shared;—  
 How best ’o chiefls are whiles in want,  
 While coofs on countless thousands rant,  
     And kenna how to wair’t.

EPISTLE TO DAVIE.

I VISITED my friend, a few days after my arrival in Irvine, at the farm-house of Mossgiel, to which, on the death of his father, he had removed, with his brother Gilbert and his mother. I could not avoid observing that his manners were considerably changed. My welcome seemed less kind and hearty than I could have anticipated

from the warm-hearted peasant of five years ago; and there was a stern and almost supercilious elevation in his bearing, which at first pained and offended me. I had met with him as he was returning from the fields after the labors of the day. The dusk of twilight had fallen; and, though I had calculated on passing the evening with him at the farm-house of Mossiel, so displeased was I that after our first greeting I had more than half changed my mind. The recollection of his former kindness to me, however, suspended the feeling, and I resolved on throwing myself on his hospitality for the night, however cold the welcome.

“I have come all the way from Irvine to see you, Mr. Burns,” I said. “For the last five years I have thought more of my mother and you than of any other two persons in the country. May I not calculate, as of old, on my supper and a bed?”

There was an instantaneous change in his expression.

“Pardon me, my friend,” he said, grasping my hand; “I have, unwittingly, been doing you wrong. One may surely be the master of an Indiaman, and in possession of a heart too honest to be spoiled by prosperity!”

The remark served to explain the haughty coolness of his manner which had so displeased me, and which was but the unwillingly assumed armor of a defensive pride.

“There, brother,” he said, throwing down some plough-irons which he carried; “send *vee Davoc* with these to the smithy, and bid him tell Rankin I won’t be there to-night. The moon is rising, Mr. Lindsay; shall we not have a stroll together through the coppice?”

“That of all things,” I replied; and, parting from Gilbert, we struck into the wood.

The evening, considering the lateness of the season, for winter had set in, was mild and pleasant. The moon

at full was rising over the Cumnock hills, and casting its faint light on the trees that rose around us, in their winding-sheets of brown and yellow, like so many spectres, or that, in the more exposed glades and openings of the wood, stretched their long naked arms to the sky. A light breeze went rustling through the withered grass; and I could see the faint twinkling of the falling leaves, as they came showering down on every side of us.

“We meet in the midst of death and desolation,” said my companion; “we parted when all around us was fresh and beautiful. My father was with me then, and — and Mary Campbell; and now” —

“Mary! your Mary!” I exclaimed, “the young, the beautiful, — alas! is she also gone?”

“She has left me,” he said, — “left me. Mary is in her grave!”

I felt my heart swell as the image of that loveliest of creatures came rising to my view in all her beauty, as I had seen her by the river-side, and I knew not what to reply.

“Yes,” continued my friend, “she is in her grave. We parted for a few days, to reunite, as we hoped, for ever; and ere those few days had passed she was in her grave. But I was unworthy of her, — unworthy even then; and now — But she is in her grave!”

I grasped his hand. “It is difficult,” I said, “to bid the heart submit to these dispensations; and oh, how utterly impossible to bring it to listen! But life — your life, my friend — must not be passed in useless sorrow. I am convinced — and often have I thought of it since our last meeting — that yours is no vulgar destiny, though I know not to what it tends.”

“Downwards!” he exclaimed, “it tends downwards! I

see, I feel it. The anchor of my affection is gone, and I drift shoreward on the rocks."

"'Twere ruin," I exclaimed, "to think so!"

"Not half an hour ere my father died," he continued, "he expressed a wish to rise and sit once more in his chair; and we indulged him. But, alas! the same feeling of uneasiness which had prompted the wish remained with him still, and he sought to return again to his bed. 'It is not by quitting the bed or the chair,' he said, 'that I need seek for ease; it is by quitting the body.' I am oppressed, Mr. Lindsay, by a somewhat similar feeling of uneasiness, and at times would fain cast the blame on the circumstances in which I am placed. But I may be as far mistaken as my poor father. I would fain live at peace with all mankind; nay, more, I would fain love and do good to them all; but the villain and the oppressor come to set their feet on my very neck and crush me into the mire, and must I not resist? And when, in some luckless hour, I yield to my passions, — to those fearful passions that must one day overwhelm me, — when I yield, and my whole mind is darkened by remorse, and I groan under the discipline of conscience, then comes the odious, abominable hypocrite, the devourer of widows' houses and the substance of the orphan, and demands that my repentance be as public as his own detestable prayers! And can I do other than resist and expose him? My heart tells me it was formed to bestow; why else does every misery that I cannot relieve render me wretched? It tells me, too, it was formed not to receive; why else does the proffered assistance of even a friend fill my whole soul with indignation? But ill do my circumstances agree with my feelings. I feel as if I were totally misplaced in some frolic of Nature, and wander onwards, in gloom and unhappiness, for my proper

sphere. But, alas! these efforts of uneasy misery are but the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave."

I again began to experience, as on a former occasion, the o'ermastering power of a mind larger beyond comparison than my own; but I felt it my duty to resist the influence. "Yes, you are misplaced, my friend," I said, — "perhaps more decidedly so than any other man I ever knew; but is not this characteristic, in some measure, of the whole species? We are all misplaced; and it seems a part of the scheme of Deity that we should work ourselves up to our proper sphere. In what other respect does man so differ from the inferior animals as in those aspirations which lead him through all the progressions of improvement, from the lowest to the highest level of his nature?"

"That may be philosophy, my friend," he replied, "but a heart ill at ease finds little of comfort in it. You knew my father, — need I say he was one of the excellent of the earth, a man who held directly from God Almighty the patent of his honors? I saw that father sink broken-hearted into the grave, the victim of legalized oppression: yes, saw him overborne in the long contest which his high spirit and his indomitable love of the right had incited him to maintain, — overborne by a mean, despicable scoundrel, one of the creeping things of the earth. Heaven knows I did my utmost to assist in the struggle. In my fifteenth year, Mr. Lindsay, when a thin, loose-jointed boy, I did the work of a man, and strained my unknit and overtoiled sinews as if life and death depended on the issue, till oft, in the middle of the night, I have had to fling myself from my bed to avoid instant suffocation, — an effect of exertion so prolonged and so premature. Nor

has the man exerted himself less heartily than the boy. In the roughest, severest labors of the field I have never yet met a competitor. But my labors have been all in vain. I have seen the evil bewailed by Solomon, the righteous man falling down before the wicked." I could answer only with a sigh. "You are in the right," he continued, after a pause, and in a more subdued tone: "man is certainly misplaced; the present scene of things is below the dignity of both his moral and intellectual nature. Look around you" (we had reached the summit of a grassy eminence, which rose over the wood and commanded a pretty extensive view of the surrounding country); "see yonder scattered cottages, that in the faint light rise dim and black amid the stubble-fields. My heart warms as I look on them, for I know how much of honest worth, and sound, generous feeling shelters under these roof-trees. But why so much of moral excellence united to a mere machinery for ministering to the ease and luxury of a few of perhaps the least worthy of our species — creatures so spoiled by prosperity that the claim of a common nature has no force to move them, and who seem as miserably misplaced as the myriads whom they oppress?

If I'm designed yon lordling's slave, —  
 By nature's law designed, —  
 Why was an independent wish  
 E'er planted in my mind?  
 If not, why am I subject to  
 His cruelty and scorn?  
 Or why has man the will and power  
 To make his fellow mourn?

"I would hardly know what to say in return, my friend," I rejoined, "did not you yourself furnish me with the reply. You are groping on in darkness, and, it may

be, unhappiness, for your proper sphere; but it is in obedience to a great though occult law of our nature, — a law general, as it affects the species, in its course of onward progression; particular, and infinitely more irresistible, as it operates on every truly superior intellect. There are men born to wield the destinies of nations; nay, more, to stamp the impression of their thoughts and feelings on the mind of the whole civilized world. And by what means do we often find them roused to accomplish their appointed work? At times hounded on by sorrow and suffering, and this, in the design of Providence, that there may be less of sorrow and suffering in the world ever after; at times roused by cruel and maddening oppression, that the oppressor may perish in his guilt, and a whole country enjoy the blessings of freedom. If Wallace had not suffered from tyranny, Scotland would not have been free.”

“But how apply the remark?” said my companion.

“Robert Burns,” I replied, again grasping his hand, “yours, I am convinced, is no vulgar destiny. Your griefs, your sufferings, your errors even, the oppressions you have seen and felt, the thoughts which have arisen in your mind, the feelings and sentiments of which it has been the subject, are, I am convinced, of infinitely more importance in their relation to your country than to yourself. You are, wisely and benevolently, placed far below your level, that thousands and ten thousands of your countrymen may be the better enabled to attain to theirs. Assert the dignity of manhood and of genius, and there will be less of wrong and oppression in the world ever after.”

I spent the remainder of the evening in the farm-house of Mossiel, and took the coach next morning for Liverpool.



## CHAPTER VII.

His is that language of the heart  
In which the answering heart would speak, —  
Thought, word, that bids the warm tear start,  
Or the smile light up the cheek;  
And his that music to whose tone  
The common pulse of man keeps time,  
In cot or castle's mirth or moan,  
In cold or sunny clime.

AMERICAN POET.

THE love of literature, when once thoroughly awakened in a reflective mind, can never after cease to influence it. It first assimilates our intellectual part to those fine intellects which live in the world of books, and then renders our connection with them indispensable by laying hold of that social principle of our nature which ever leads us to the society of our fellows as our proper sphere of enjoyment. My early habits, by heightening my tone of thought and feeling, had tended considerably to narrow my circle of companionship. My profession, too, had led me to be much alone; and now that I had been several years the master of an Indiaman, I was quite as fond of reading, and felt as deep an interest in whatever took place in the literary world, as when a student at St. Andrews. There was much in the literature of the period to gratify my pride as a Scotchman. The despotism, both political and religious, which had overlaid the energies of our country for more than a century, had long been removed; and the national mind had swelled and expanded

under a better system of things till its influence had become coëxtensive with civilized man. Hume had produced his inimitable history, and Adam Smith his wonderful work which was to revolutionize and new-model the economy of all the governments of the earth. And there in my little library were the histories of Henry and Robertson, the philosophy of Kames and Reid, the novels of Smollett and M'Kenzie, and the poetry of Beattie and Home. But if there was no lack of Scottish intellect in the literature of the time, there was a decided lack of Scottish manners; and I knew too much of my humble countrymen not to regret it. True, I had before me the writings of Ramsay and my unfortunate friend Ferguson; but there was a radical meanness in the first that lowered the tone of his coloring far beneath the freshness of truth; and the second, whom I had seen perish, — too soon, alas! for literature and his country, — had given us but a few specimens of his power when his hand was arrested for ever.

My vessel, after a profitable though somewhat tedious voyage, had again arrived at Liverpool. It was late in December, 1786; and I was passing the long evening in my cabin, engaged with a whole sheaf of pamphlets and magazines which had been sent me from the shore. "The Lounger" was at this time in course of publication. I had ever been an admirer of the quiet elegance and exquisite tenderness of M'Kenzie; and though I might not be quite disposed to think, with Johnson, that "the chief glory of every people arises from its authors," I certainly felt all the prouder of my country from the circumstance that so accomplished a writer was one of my countrymen. I had read this evening some of the more recent numbers, — half-disposed to regret, however, amid all the pleasure they af-

forded me, that the Addison of Scotland had not done for the manners of his country what his illustrious prototype had done for those of England, — when my eye fell on the ninety-seventh number. I read the introductory sentences, and admired their truth and elegance. I had felt, in the contemplation of supereminent genius, the pleasure which the writer describes, and my thoughts reverted to my two friends, — the dead and the living. “In the view of highly superior talents, as in that of great and stupendous objects,” says the essayist, “there is a sublimity which fills the soul with wonder and delight, — which expands it, as it were, beyond its usual bounds, — and which, investing our nature with extraordinary powers and extraordinary honors, interests our curiosity and flatters our pride.”

I read on with increasing interest. It was evident, from the tone of the introduction, that some new luminary had arisen in the literary horizon; and I felt something like a schoolboy when, at his first play, he waits for the drawing up of the curtain. And the curtain at length rose. “The person,” continues the essayist, “to whom I allude” — and he alludes to him as a genius of no ordinary class — “is Robert Burns, an Ayrshire ploughman.” The effect on my nerves seemed electrical. I clapped my hands and sprung from my seat. “Was I not certain of it! Did I not foresee it!” I exclaimed. “My noble-minded friend, Robert Burns!” I ran hastily over the warm-hearted and generous critique, — so unlike the cold, timid, equivocal notices with which the professional critic has greeted, on their first appearance, so many works destined to immortality. It was M<sup>r</sup>Kenzie, the discriminating, the classical, the elegant, who assured me that the productions of this “heaven-taught ploughman were

fraught with the high-toned feeling and the power and energy of expression characteristic of the mind and voice of a poet," with the solemn, the tender, the sublime; that they contained images of pastoral beauty which no other writer had ever surpassed, and strains of wild humor which only the higher masters of the lyre had ever equalled; and that the genius displayed in them seemed not less admirable in tracing the manners, than in painting the passions, or in drawing the scenery of nature. I flung down the essay, ascended to the deck in three huge strides, leaped ashore, and reached my bookseller's as he was shutting up for the night.

"Can you furnish me with a copy of 'Burns's Poems,'" I said, "either for love or money?"

"I have but one copy left," replied the man, "and here it is."

I flung down a guinea. "The change," I said, "I shall get when I am less in a hurry."

'Twas late that evening ere I remembered that 'tis customary to spend at least part of the night in bed. I read on and on with a still increasing astonishment and delight, laughing and crying by turns. I was quite in a new world. All was fresh and unsoiled, — the thoughts, the descriptions, the images, — as if the volume I read were the first that had ever been written; and yet all was easy and natural, and appealed with a truth and force irresistible to the recollections I cherished most fondly. Nature and Scotland met me at every turn. I had admired the polished compositions of Pope and Grey and Collins; though I could not sometimes help feeling that, with all the exquisite art they displayed, there was a little additional art wanting still. In most cases the scaffolding seemed incorporated with the structure which it had

served to rear; and though certainly no scaffolding could be raised on surer principles, I could have wished that the ingenuity which had been tasked to erect it had been exerted a little further in taking it down. But the work before me was evidently the production of a greater artist. Not a fragment of the scaffolding remained, — not so much as a mark to show how it had been constructed. The whole seemed to have risen like an exhalation, and in this respect reminded me of the structures of Shakspeare alone. I read the inimitable “Twa Dogs.” Here, I said, is the full and perfect realization of what Swift and Dryden were hardy enough to attempt, but lacked genius to accomplish. Here are dogs — *bona fide* dogs — endowed, indeed, with more than human sense and observation, but true to character, as the most honest and attached of quadrupeds, in every line. And then those exquisite touches which the poor man, inured to a life of toil and poverty, can alone rightly understand; and those deeply-based remarks on character which only the philosopher can justly appreciate! This is the true catholic poetry, which addresses itself, not to any little circle, walled in from the rest of the species by some peculiarity of thought, prejudice, or condition, but to the whole human family. I read on. “The Holy Fair,” “Hallowe’en,” “The Vision,” the “Address to the Deil,” engaged me by turns; and then the strange, uproarious, unequalled “Death and Doctor Hornbook.” This, I said, is something new in the literature of the world. Shakspeare possessed above all men the power of instant and yet natural transition, — from the lightly gay to the deeply pathetic, from the wild to the humorous, — but the opposite states of feeling which he induces, however close the neighborhood, are ever distinct and separate: the oil and the water, though contained in the

same vessel, remain apart. Here, however, for the first time, they mix and incorporate, and yet each retains its whole nature and full effect. I need hardly remind the reader that the feat has been repeated, and with even more completeness, in the wonderful "Tam o' Shanter." I read on. "The Cotter's Saturday Night" filled my whole soul: my heart throbbed, and my eyes moistened; and never before did I feel half so proud of my country, or know half so well on what score it was I did best in feeling proud. I had perused the entire volume, from beginning to end, ere I remembered I had not taken supper, and that it was more than time to go to bed.

But it is no part of my plan to furnish a critique on the poems of my friend. I merely strive to recall the thoughts and feelings which my first perusal of them awakened, and this only as a piece of mental history. Several months elapsed from this evening ere I could hold them out from me sufficiently at arms' length, as it were, to judge of their more striking characteristics. At times the amazing amount of thought, feeling, and imagery which they contained,—their wonderful continuity of idea, without gap or interstice,—seemed to me most to distinguish them. At times they reminded me, compared with the writings of smoother poets, of a collection of medals, which, unlike the thin polished coin of the kingdom, retained all the significant and pictorial roughnesses of the original die. But when, after the lapse of weeks, months, years, I found them rising up in my heart on every occasion, as naturally as if they had been the original language of all my feelings and emotions; when I felt that, instead of remaining outside my mind, as it were, like the writings of other poets, they had so amalgamated themselves with my passions, my sentiments, my ideas that they seemed to have become portions of my

very self, I was led to a final conclusion regarding them. Their grand distinguishing characteristic is their unswerving and perfect truth. The poetry of Shakspeare is the mirror of life; that of Burns the expressive and richly-modulated voice of human nature.

### CHAPTER VIII.

Burns was a poor man from his birth, and an exciseman from necessity; but — I *will say* it! — the sterling of his honest worth poverty could not debase; and his independent British spirit oppression might bend, but could not subdue. — LETTER TO MR. GRAHAM.

I HAVE been listening for the last half-hour to the wild music of an Æolian harp. How exquisitely the tones rise and fall! now sad, now solemn; now near, now distant. The nerves thrill, the heart softens, the imagination awakes as we listen. What if that delightful instrument be animated by a living soul, and these finely-modulated tones be but the expression of its feelings! What if these dying, melancholy cadences, which so melt and sink into the heart, be — what we may so naturally interpret them — the melodious sinkings of a deep-seated and hopeless unhappiness! Nay, the fancy is too wild for even a dream. But are there none of those fine analogies which run through the whole of nature and the whole of art to sublime it into truth? Yes, there have been such living harps among us, — beings the tones of whose sentiments, the melody of whose emotions, the cadences of whose sorrows, remain to thrill and delight and humanize our souls.

They seem<sup>d</sup> born for others, not for themselves. Alas for the hapless companion of my early youth! Alas for him, the pride of his country, the friend of my maturer manhood! But my narrative lags in its progress.

My vessel lay in the Clyde for several weeks during the summer of 1794, and I found time to indulge myself in a brief tour along the western coasts of the kingdom from Glasgow to the borders. I entered Dumfries in a calm, lovely evening, and passed along one of the principal streets. The shadows of the houses on the western side were stretched half-way across the pavement, while on the side opposite the bright sunshine seemed sleeping on the jutting irregular fronts and high antique gables. There seemed a world of well-dressed company this evening in town; and I learned, on inquiry, that all the aristocracy of the adjacent country, for twenty miles round, had come in to attend a country ball. They went fluttering along the sunny side of the street, gay as butterflies, group succeeding group. On the opposite side, in the shade, a solitary individual was passing slowly along the pavement. I knew him at a glance. It was the first poet, perhaps the greatest man, of his age and country. But why so solitary? It had been told me that he ranked among his friends and associates many of the highest names in the kingdom, and yet to-night not one of the hundreds who fluttered past appeared inclined to recognize him. He seemed, too,—but perhaps fancy misled me,—as if care-worn and dejected,—pained, perhaps, that not one among so many of the great should have humility enough to notice a poor exciseman. I stole up to him unobserved, and tapped him on the shoulder. There was a decided fierceness in his manner as he turned abruptly round; but, as he recognized me, his expressive countenance lighted up in a moment,



and I shall never forget the heartiness with which he grasped my hand.

We quitted the streets together for the neighboring fields, and, after the natural interchange of mutual congratulations, "How is it," I inquired, "that you do not seem to have a single acquaintance among all the gay and great of the country?"

"I lie under quarantine," he replied, "tainted by the plague of Liberalism. There is not one of the hundreds we passed to-night whom I could not once reckon among my intimates."

The intelligence stunned and irritated me. "How infinitely absurd!" I said. "Do they dream of sinking you into a common man?"

"Even so," he rejoined. "Do they not all know I have been a gauger for the last five years?"

The fact had both grieved and incensed me long before. I knew, too, that Pye enjoyed his salary as poet laureate of the time, and Dibdin, the song writer, his pension of two hundred a year; and I blushed for my country.

"Yes," he continued, — the ill-assumed coolness of his manner giving way before his highly-excited feelings, — "they have assigned me my place among the mean and the degraded, as their best patronage; and only yesterday, after an official threat of instant dismissal, I was told that it was my business to act, not to think. God help me! what have I done to provoke such bitter insult? I have ever discharged my miserable duty, — discharged it, Mr. Lindsay, however repugnant to my feelings, as an honest man; and though there awaited me no promotion, I was silent. The wives or sisters of those whom they advanced over me had bastards to some of the — family, and so their influence was necessarily greater than mine. But

now they crush me into the very dust. I take an interest in the struggles of the slave for his freedom; I express my opinions as if I myself were a free man; and they threaten to starve me and my children if I dare so much as speak or think."

I expressed my indignant sympathy in a few broken sentences, and he went on with kindling animation.

"Yes, they would fain crush me into the very dust! They cannot forgive me, that, being born a man, I should walk erect according to my nature. Mean-spirited and despicable themselves, they can tolerate only the mean-spirited and despicable; and were I not so entirely in their power, Mr. Lindsay, I could regard them with the proper contempt. But the wretches can starve me and my children, and they *know* it; nor does it mend the matter that I *know*, in turn, what pitiful, miserable little creatures they are. What care I for the butterflies of to-night? They passed me without the honor of their notice; and I, in turn, suffered them to pass without the honor of mine, and I am more than quits. Do I not know that they and I are going on to the fulfilment of our several destinies, — they to sleep in the obscurity of their native insignificance, with the pismires and grasshoppers of all the past; and I to be whatever the millions of my unborn countrymen shall yet decide? Pitiful little insects of an hour! What is their notice to me! But I bear a heart, Mr. Lindsay, that can feel the pain of treatment so unworthy; and, I must confess, it moves me. One cannot always live upon the future, divorced from the sympathies of the present. One cannot always solace one's self, under the grinding despotism that would fetter one's very thoughts, with the conviction, however assured, that posterity will do justice both to the oppressor and the oppressed. I am sick at heart; and, were

it not for the poor little things that depend so entirely on my exertions, I could as cheerfully lay me down in the grave as I ever did in bed after the fatigues of a long day's labor. Heaven help me! I am miserably unfitted to struggle with even the natural evils of existence; how much more so when these are multiplied and exaggerated by the proud, capricious inhumanity of man!"

"There is a miserable lack of right principle and right feeling," I said, "among our upper classes in the present day; but, alas for poor human nature! it has ever been so, and, I am afraid, ever will. And there is quite as much of it in savage as in civilized life. I have seen the exclusive aristocratic spirit, with its one-sided injustice, as rampant in a wild isle of the Pacific as I ever saw it among ourselves."

"'Tis slight comfort," said my friend, with a melancholy smile, "to be assured, when one's heart bleeds from the cruelty or injustice of our fellows, that man is naturally cruel and unjust, and not less so as a savage than when better taught. I knew you, Mr. Lindsay, when you were younger and less fortunate; but you have now reached that middle term of life when man naturally takes up the Tory, and lays down the Whig; nor has there been aught in your improving circumstances to retard the change; and so you rest in the conclusion that, if the weak among us suffer from the tyranny of the strong, 'tis because human nature is so constituted; and the case therefore cannot be helped."

"Pardon me, Mr. Burns," I said; "I am not quite so finished a Tory as that amounts to."

"I am not one of those fanciful declaimers," he continued, "who set out on the assumption that man is free-born. I am too well assured of the contrary. Man is not free-

born. The earlier period of his existence, whether as a puny child or the miserable denizen of an uninformed and barbarous state, is one of vassalage and subserviency. He is not born free; he is not born rational; he is not born virtuous; he is born to *become* all these. And woe to the sophist who, with arguments drawn from the unconfirmed constitution of his childhood, would strive to render his imperfect because immature state of pupilage a permanent one! We are yet far below the level of which our nature is capable, and possess, in consequence, but a small portion of the liberty which it is the destiny of our species to enjoy. And 'tis time our masters should be taught so. You will deem me a wild Jacobin, Mr. Lindsay; but persecution has the effect of making a man extreme in these matters. Do help me to curse the scoundrels! My business to act, not to think!"

We were silent for several minutes.

"I have not yet thanked you, Mr. Burns," I at length said, "for the most exquisite pleasure I ever enjoyed. You have been my companion for the last eight years."

His countenance brightened.

"Ah, here I am, boring you with my miseries and my ill-nature," he replied; "but you must come along with me, and see the bairns and Jean, and some of the best songs I ever wrote. It will go hard if we hold not care at the staff's end for at least one evening. You have not yet seen my stone punch-bowl, nor my Tam o' Shanter, nor a hundred other fine things besides. And yet, vile wretch that I am, I am sometimes so unconscionable as to be unhappy with them all. But come along."

We spent this evening together with as much of happiness as it has ever been my lot to enjoy. Never was there a fonder father than Burns, a more attached husband, or a

warmer friend. There was an exuberance of love in his large heart that encircled in its flow relatives, friends, associates, his country, the world; and, in his kindlier moods, the sympathetic influence which he exerted over the hearts of others seemed magical. I laughed and cried this evening by turns. I was conscious of a wider and a warmer expansion of feeling than I had ever experienced before. My very imagination seemed invigorated, by breathing, as it were, in the same atmosphere with his. We parted early next morning; and when I again visited Dumfries, I went and wept over his grave. Forty years have now passed since his death; and in that time, many poets have arisen to achieve a rapid and brilliant celebrity; but they seem the meteors of a lower sky; the flash passes hastily from the expanse, and we see but one great light looking steadily upon us from above. It is Burns who is exclusively the poet of his country. Other writers inscribe their names on the plaster which covers for the time the outside structure of society; his is engraved, like that of the Egyptian architect, on the ever-during granite within. The fame of the others rises and falls with the uncertain undulations of the mode on which they have reared it; his remains fixed and permanent as the human nature on which it is based. Or, to borrow the figure Johnson employs in illustrating the unfluctuating celebrity of a scarcely greater poet, "The sand heaped by one flood is scattered by another, but the rock always continues in its place; the stream of time which is continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of other poets passes by, without injury, the adamant of Shakspeare."