

GIEKIE'S ETCHINGS.*

THE opinion seems to have been current, even among the well-educated of our southern friends, down to so late an era as Goldsmith, that no Scotsman could possibly possess either wit or humour. What was thought of the author of "Roderick Random" and "Humphrey Clinker" it is difficult to conjecture. He might be set down as one of those rare exceptions which prove a rule. And of the elder Scottish poets, whose works abound in rich and genuine humour, the English, from the dialect, knew little more than of their own Chaucer or Piers Plowman. The works of Burns, and of Scott and Galt, are certainly beginning to shake the opinion of Scottish gravity and dulness; and though brilliant wit may still be denied to the nation, some superficial vein of humour is now generally conceded to it. The genuine humour which has always distinguished the popular literature of Scotland, is however only beginning to be manifested in Art, which is itself still comparatively new in Scotland. A few of the artists of the past generation, and especially Allan in his illustrations of comic poetry, displayed, if not much fertility of invention, yet considerable appreciation of the humour and character fairly placed before them, and some power of expressing humorous ideas in a pictorial form. The monstrosities perpetrated by Kay, though they possess considerable merit as coarse local satires, it is not easy to regard seriously as works of Art; unless the symbolical rude scratchings of barbarous nations made upon rocks and caves in commemoration of memorable events, are to be classed with the historical paintings of a civilized people. Geikie is, therefore, to be considered as almost the first Scottish etcher who, with quick penetration of character, possessed a rich, quiet humour, held in strict subordination to the truth of nature, and never once allowed to diverge into caricature. He has been named the Scottish Hogarth; and it may be allowed that no native artist has hitherto established a better claim to that distinction. Yet his genius is more akin to the masters of the Dutch School than to that of the great moral and also imaginative painter of England.

The history of this artist, who died in the prime of life, a few years since, is, independently of his talents, both touching and instructive. When only two years of age, Geikie was seized with a severe fever, from which he recovered, but with the total obliteration of the sense of hearing. From this period he remained deaf and dumb. He was a native of Edinburgh; and had the happiness of being the child of worthy and pious, and we should imagine, intelligent parents. By unremitting care of his education, his father did all that was possible to mitigate the consequences of the great calamity which had befallen his son. At the Institution for the instruction of deaf mutes, he received the

elements of a useful education, though his father had previously taught him to read. He was always fond of books; but his strongest childish inclination was to imitative art: and after having been well instructed in drawing, he was, at the age of fourteen, placed under the care of Mr. Graham, the first Master of the School of Design, which has done so much for Art in Scotland. That he was received among the students of that Academy, presupposes considerable proficiency in drawing. The gallery of the Institution had not, at that period, been enriched by the collection of casts from antique statues, busts, friezes, &c., &c., which it now exhibits; but Geikie found his subjects in nature, and profited so well by the instructions of an excellent master, and a sound system of tuition, that he soon acquired remarkable dexterity in the use of the crayon. His sense of hearing seems to have been absorbed in that of sight; the power concentrated in the eye, of which the ear was deprived.

From a Biographical Introduction to the Etchings, written in the kindest spirit, by Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, we learn that, while a student in the Institution, Geikie's perseverance was indefatigable; and that he was continually on the watch out of doors for characteristic subjects for his pencil;—so that all figures or groups which pleased his fancy were immediately transferred, with unerring accuracy, to his portfolio. So great was the rapidity and facility with which he used his crayon, that it was not uncommon for him to catch the contour of odd figures, or remarkable faces, together with their racy peculiarities, as he walked by the side of the originals in the streets. Some amusing anecdotes are related of his adventures in pursuit of odd subjects that tickled his fancy.

Independently of his finished works, his paintings, and etchings, Geikie's collection of these odd scrap figures, groups, and scenes, became immense. In landscape he did not excel; his colouring was very faulty; and to what are considered the higher departments of Art—the Historical or the *Ideal*, he never seems to have directed his attention; or, at all events, he did not succeed. This partial failure, and the natural bent of his genius, confirmed his vocation as an etcher; and this pursuit led to his highest excellencies in Art, and to the successful display of his varied resources. His broad humour, lively fancy, and insight into nature, especially as it is manifested in what is called *low life*, rank him as the George Cruikshank, if not the Hogarth, of the Scottish School. A critic of Geikie's works, who, though partial, does not want either taste or discrimination, having pronounced him the Hogarth of Scotland, says, with perfect truth:—"In his etchings you find the same attention to minutiae—the same completeness in the keeping of the whole subject. . . . As a proof of this, let us look for a moment at his plate entitled, in good broad Doric, '*Haud your tas still, man,*' in which a worthy follower of the plough, tormented

* Etching's illustrative of Scottish Character, Scenery, and Manners, executed after his own Designs, by the late Walter Geikie, R. S. A. Quarto, with sixty-three plates. Edinburgh: John Stewart.

with that most intolerable of all petty plagues—corns—has delayed and delayed getting them extirpated until they have at last fairly overcome him by the sharpness and constancy of their attacks. In agony he has applied to the chiropedal skill of his better-half for relief; and she, ever ready to prove a help-meet, and moreover anxious to display her manual dexterity, has mounted the suffering limb on her lap, and peers into the *tas* through her spectacles with a mixture of self-complaisance, tenderness, and sturdy resolution to operate, which the artist has most felicitously exhibited. Her subject, too, though now falling into the sear, is evidently a strong man; one, moreover, who cares more for personal comfort than outward show; not a puny dandy, who has all his life suffered voluntary martyrdom in vain attempts to force his tortured extremities into a better shape than that originally given them; nevertheless he is bowed down with the poignancy of the petty pain. Was there ever a better representation of poor time-tried humanity in distress—with his one hand raised to soothe his throbbing temples, and the other placed instinctively on the suffering member, to show its lord's sympathy with its sorrows? How strong is the contrast with the deportment of the operator! No feelings of commiseration can possibly be given way to, until she has succeeded in extirpating the cause of suffering. Let her subject wince under the knife as he may, her labours must be ended before he is released; she knows the value of decision, and is determined to act on that knowledge now."

This is but one of Geikie's numerous and admirable etchings; many of which, besides their overflowing broad and rich humour, and perfect local truth, possess, like *the tas*, the moral charm of social kindness, and are full of ideas of homely enjoyment. What an admirable picture and enviable person is Geikie's *Musical Souter*! There is much of quiet beauty in *Apples, five a ha'penny!* and of tender repose in *An auld Couple, and a grand-child reading*. All the subjects of these etchings are as distinctively Scottish as the pictures of Teniers are Dutch. Some of them embody noble street views in the Old Town of Edinburgh, antique

architectural subjects which can henceforth have no existence, save in the etchings of Geikie. The principal plates are separately illustrated, and often with much graphic humour and felicity by the letter-press sketches of the literary friends and admirers of the deceased artist. Among the literary contributors to the completeness of the volume are Mr. Thomas Smibert, Mr. James Ballantine (the *Gaberlunzie*), and Mr. David Vedder.

Cut off or limited in his intercourse with the external world, Geikie, whose religious feelings had been carefully cultivated, at a very early period of his life became a serious character; and it is not a little interesting to learn, as we do from one of his most intimate friends, that when a young man he established a religious meeting among the deaf and dumb—"and often," says our informant, "have we seen him, his soul fired, his eye beaming with the eloquence which his tongue could not utter—his whole energies wrapt in that noblest of all duties the proclaiming of man's sin and a Saviour's love. His knowledge of Scripture was great, and his expositions of it particularly lucid; while the breathless attention of his mute audience showed the interest they all felt in his teaching."

Geikie, who had through life enjoyed good health died rather suddenly of fever, at the age of forty-one. He had been, for several years, a Fellow of the Scottish Royal Academy of Painting. A few of his best paintings are in the gallery of the Earl of Hopeton. Many of his sketches were disposed of after his death; and some of the best of them are now in the possession of Sir James Gibson Craik and Mr. Bindon Blood. During his life, his success, so far as relates to *solid* reward, was far from being commensurate with his merits, though these were taken at the lowest estimate. But he lived in the confidence that his hour would come. No can we doubt, that his Works, in the complete and handsome form, in which they have now come before the public, will be warmly appreciated, especially in Scotland, and also by Scotsmen all over the world. They are admirable as mere works of Art; but, to the Scottish people, not less valuable as records of national character,—as living transcripts of Scottish scenes and manners.

INSCRIPTIVE SONNETS.

WRITTEN ON A FLY-LEAF OF HOWITT'S "BOOK OF THE SEASONS."

I go with you, dear friends, through branchy ways,
And sunniest nooks of pleasant English dales,
Where winning wild-flowers scent the fresh'ning
gales;

To where the twining honeysuckle strays
Through rustic lattices. There childhood plays
Its merriest pranks; and hark! the birds are
singing,

In love's sweet rivalry their notes up-flinging,
'Mongst oaks impervious to the sun's hot rays.
Thy rhyme smells of the country air: its tone,
Bird-caught, is odorous as summer flowers:
Thus, when the wearing care of life o'erpowers,
And tears unbidden flow—then am I prone,
Seeking the forest-shade, 'neath beechen tree,
To con dear Nature's book interpreted by thee!

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

To poets all things minister!—a choir
Of seraphs singing 'neath a quiet sky,
With bated breath, some master-melody:
Or the mysterious Æolian lyre
At twilight quivering with its tremulous fire:
Or the pulsation of the tireless ocean
Moving at will with world-embracing motion:—
Poets an atmosphere like this respire.
Of such thou sang'st, great Coleridge!—a vision
Was in thy soul: hence when thy lyre was strung,
Forth from its spiritual chords was warmly flung
Music that rock'd the air with tone Elysian;
And thoughts of living beauty were embalm'd
In accents soft as those by which sick child is calm'd!

J. E. H.