ROSS OF LOCHLEE.

Scotland has produced at least two pastoral poems, which differ in a very marked degree from most specimens of that class of poetry which the world has seen—to wit, Ramsay's "Gentle Shepherd" and "Helenore, the Fortunate Shepherdess", by that "wild warlock" (as Burns calls him) Ross of Lochlee. The poetry of shepherd life—where the only wants men knew were those imposed by nature, and the only gifts they envied were those which she could readily bestow from her inexhaustible store-houses—would at first sight appear to be the earliest form in which poetry would be written. This is, however, not the fact; for the idyllic simplicity, innocence, and naïveté of the shepherd's life did not take poetical form until those periods in a nation's history when social life became corrupted with licentiousness, frivolity, and affectation. At such times the poet, looking back longingly upon the supposed simplicity of a country life, would strike what he considered a pastoral lyre, and produce a picture which was often true to no past time, and impossible in any future. Of course there are many pastorals which, though written under the social conditions noticed above, the world cannot afford to lose. In every case, it was long after men had lost their primitive simplicity that the pastoral poet tuned his lyre. The Greeks were living most artificial lives, when Theocritus, the father of the pastoral, wrote; the Romans, when Virgil's Bucolics were produced; the Italians, when Tasso and Guarini composed their charming idylls; the French, in the time of Vauquelin; and our own countrymen, when Pope and Phillips produced what are perhaps the best pastorals in the English language. The two pieces, which we named at the beginning of this paragraph, differ, as we have hinted, from the usual absurd, unreal, namby-pamby shepherd and shepherdess poems, in that they portray a phase of life which was intimately familiar to their authors, and where the shepherds and peasants are painted with a natural and manly simplicity. With the world-renowned "Gentle Shepherd" we have no concern in this work, but we may well be proud

that a pastoral poem has been produced amid our Northern Grampians, which was considered by Dr. Blacklock to be "equal to the 'Gentle Shepherd'"—which Pinkerton declared to be, in "language and thought, more truly pastoral than any I have yet found in any poet save Theocritus"—and which Burns considered as one of his "precious treasures", which he would not for anything should be lost.

ALEXANDER ROSS, the author of this pastoral, and many other poems and songs, was born at Kincardine O'Neil, in the year 1699. He was in due course sent to the parish school, where, in addition to the usual subjects, he became thoroughly grounded in Latin, and imbibed that love for the classic poets which remained a never-failing source of delight to him till the end of his long life. When his school days were wearing to a close, a bursary, that great object of ambition to many a parish schoolboy, loomed in his imagination as a possibility. This possibility was realised, for he was successful in 1714 at the bursary competition at Marischal College, Aberdeen, which seminary he left in 1718 with the degree of Master of Arts. Shortly after this, we find him domiciled at Fintray House, in the capacity of tutor to the family of Sir William Forbes of Craigievar, where he remained with much satisfaction to his employer for a considerable time. He was advised by Sir William to study for the ministry; and had he done so, his patron, who had no fewer than fourteen benefices in his gift, would have used his interest in procuring him a settlement. But our poet's diffident nature deterred him from taking advantage of the proffered help. When his engagement at Fintray House came to an end, he became teacher successively at Aboyne and Laurencekirk, where he succeeded the celebrated Ruddiman. In Laurencekirk, he formed the acquaintance of the father of Dr. Beattie, an acquaintance which, after many a long year, was to kindle that interest in the heart of the "Minstrel" towards his father's old friend, which eventuated in the publication of the "Fortunate Shepherdess". In 1726, Ross married Jane Catanach, the daughter of a farmer in Logie-Coldstone, and descended on the mother's side from the ancient family of Duguid of Auchinhove. This lady, who was avowedly of the Roman Catholic creed, appears to have

had none of the bigot in her nature, for she not only attended the parish church with her husband, but she readily consented that her children should be educated in the principles of the Established Church. In 1732, through the interest of Garden of Troup, Ross received the appointment of parochial schoolmaster at Lochlee, where, for upwards of fifty-years, he lived a blameless, happy, and contented life, and added a new interest to a country-side already interesting in the local history of Angus, and celebrated for the primitive character of its people and the unsurpassed grandeur of its scenery. The parish of Lochlee is situated at the head of the valley of the North Esk, in the north-west of Angus, and separated from Aberdeenshire by that part of the Grampians called the Binchinnan mountains. To the north-east Mount Battock rears his giant granite crest to an altitude of nearly 4000 feet, while his brother sentinel, Mount Keen, towers to a greater altitude in the north-west. The whole parish is surrounded with hills, a narrow opening at the east end excepted, through which the North Esk finds its way to the low country, while branch ranges nearly intersect it in two or three places. The population of the parish is almost entirely confined to one of the glens formed by these intersecting hills, and this glen, which contains the loch which gives its name to the parish, has become a resort for visitors of all degrees, from royalty downwards, drawn hither partly to feast their eyes on nature in one of her grandest moods, and partly to worship at the shrine of the "warlock of the glen", who expressed the hope that,

> Hence lang, perhaps, lang hence may quoted be,
> My hamely proverbs lined wi' blythsome glee:
> Some reader then may say, "Far fa' ye, Ross",
> When, aiblins, I'll be lang, lang dead and gane,
> An' few remember there was sik' a ane.

The schoolhouse of Lochlee was situated near the eastern end of the loch, close to the old church and churchyard, and having within view the remains of the old castle of Invermark, a place of retreat built by the "lichtsome Lindsays", when troubles drove them from their Lowland domains in the Howe of the Mearns. At the back of the school a precipitous hill, called the Priest's Craig, rises abruptly, while directly

opposite the mountains tower to such an altitude as to prevent the sun from shining on it for about a month every winter. The present aspect of the schoolhouse—

> A small, dead cottage, all but mouldered quite;
> A vanished human care still shadows it

—is thus described by the painstaking author of "The Land of the Lindsays":—"The place of the poet's residence (which was originally about 30 feet in length by 12 in breadth) is still represented by the rude walls of his cottage and schoolhouse, which are preserved, or at least allowed to remain, with a commendable reverence for genius and worth. They are a narrow park-breadth north of the kirkyard; and in their present roofless condition have more the appearance of "sheep buchts" than of once inhabited tenements. The little west window, from which an excellent view of the loch and its rugged scenery had been obtained, is now built up; but the narrow door by which he passed and repassed times without number, and the hearth of the east or schoolroom end, where he sat so many dreary winters hearing the lessons of his youthful charges, are still in existence, as is also the garden plot behind the house, which, though now uncultivated, still bears a fertile aspect, and had been small like the bard's own residence." Here, then, the poet lived, taught, and sang, for more than fifty years; and although his emoluments were small, judged by present-day teachers' incomes, they compared favourably with most of his class in his own day; and we have the authority of his grandson, the minister of Lintrathen, for saying that no person in his station, or perhaps in any station, enjoyed a greater share of personal and domestic happiness. Although he lived here for thirty-six years before he gave to the world the poem and songs which have made him famous, he long enjoyed a local fame as a poet, and had often the pleasure of hearing his songs sung on the hillside in summer, or at the firesides of the glen folks during the long and dreary winters. In the winter-time, when all out-door work was at a standstill, and the duties of the dominie reduced to a minimum, owing to impassable roads, his literary labours would take up a good part of his time; but how did the other inhabitants of the wild glen pass the dreich time? We are happy to learn,

innocently enough. No doubt some of them would spend more time at "Droustie's" (a busy, and, to the weary traveller between Glenesk and Deeside, a welcome alehouse, which occupied the supposed site of St. Drostan's cell) than was good for them, but we find that their chief winter's amusement was music and dancing. This was encouraged by the periodical visits for more than forty years of John Cameron, a famous fiddler from Crathie, who appears to have been a man of agreeable manners and entertaining conversation, and was a prime favourite with Ross, who was a bit of a violinist himself. No doubt John Cameron would be eagerly looked for when the winter winds began to howl down the glen. We may imagine the schoolmaster on one of these wintry days when the "blin' drift" would be scouring over the Grampians, the wind in tearing gusts roaring down the glen, and the whole scene round the humble schoolhouse the very wildness of desolation, sitting by his favourite corner at the window, gazing on the elemental tumult without, and anon turning his thoughts inward to his own heart, where all was sunshine, peace, and content. No school to-day; the bairns are all comfortably snowed-up at home; we may be sure—for schoolboy nature has been the same in all ages and circumstances—not sorry at the storm which brings them a holiday. He has few books that would seem likely to "wile awa' the time"—he has no cultured companion whose conversation would be solace to him during those dreary days. His "auld wife" is busying herself as well as she can with the duties of her humble fireside, casting a frequent look at the round, fresh, almost youthful-looking face of her "auld man" at the window. At such a time there will not be much crack between the two. The schoolmaster's thoughts are wandering far from Lochlee and the storm without. He is under the sunny Roman skies, with his favourites Virgil or Horace, until some blast of the storm louder than its fellows brings him back to the scenes of his shepherds and the wild ketteren from the hills. He takes his well-worn Greek Testament, and reads of Him who is the Lord of the storms, and who could still them with a word; and then he is led to his loving task of setting down in his own picturesque language a portion of his paraphrase of the

sublime tragedy of "Job". The dim daylight, which has all day been hovering over the glen, begins now to get perceptibly dimmer, when his old fiddle catches his eye, and he is soon filling the small room with the sprightly strathspey or rushing reel music of the country side. An answering echo seems to follow the stopping of his bow-arm, and a smile plays over his face as he rises, wraps himself in a rough plaid, and steps towards the door. Sounds of merriment are borne towards him between the gusts of the wind; so, wrapping his maud tightly round him, he makes his way to a house in the near distance from whence the sound seems to emanate. On opening the door his eye takes in a scene which was not uncommon in the long winter days when all out-door work was at a standstill. The beaming, rubicund face of John Cameron shines benignantly over the breast of his fiddle, illuminated by the blaze of a fir torch that is stuck in a tin sconce beside him. Four couples are footing it merrily to the strains of the Crathie Orpheus. Others are standing round with greedy ears drinking in the sounds of the famous Deeside fiddler's instrument, while in the corners the busy whirr of the spinning-wheel or the scrape of the wool "cards" show that industry can be combined with their merry-making. A murmur of pleasure goes round when the respected face of the dominie is seen, and the dance coming to an end with a long flourish from the musician, one of the spinning maidens strikes up the favourite "Woo'd an' Married an' a'", partly, no doubt, as a delicate compliment to the honoured author who now graces the meeting with his presence. More dancing follows, till the fun gets somewhat boisterous, helped, perhaps, by the advent of one or two of the herds, who had been paying a visit to Droustie's, when Cameron brings the proceedings to a close by producing his baize bag, into which the fiddle is lovingly imbedded; and, with many "gueed nichts" to all and sundry, he accompanies the dominie to his house, where, over something warm and with couthie crack, the night draws on, and bedward thoughts bring the day to a close. We delight to linger over the picture of the loveable old man and his primitive surroundings, but we must proceed to speak of those writings which have endeared him not only to

"ilka Mearns and Angus bairn", but also to all lovers of Scottish poetry.

Although it is evident that a great many, if not the whole, of Ross's writings, had an extensive MS. circulation among his friends and neighbours for a considerable time, it was not till the year 1766, after thirty-four years' residence in the glen, and when he was wearing on to his three score and ten years of earthly pilgrimage, that any step was taken to give them a wider publicity. In that year, having occasion to be in Aberdeen, and, relying on his early friendship with Dr. Beattie's father, he introduced himself to the "Minstrel", who received him in the kindest manner, and immediately interested himself in the aged schoolmaster and his works. The result of the examination of the manuscripts Ross had brought with him was the choice of "The Fortunate Shepherdess", and some songs, among which were "The Rock and the wee Pickle Tow", "To the Begging we will go", and "Woo'd and Married an' a'", for publication. These were published in Aberdeen in 1768, and the success they met with "far exceeded his most sanguine expectations". To promote the sale, Beattie addressed a letter and the well-known verses, which have been prefixed to all the subsequent editions, to the editor of the *Aberdeen Journal*. These verses are curious as being their author's only published attempt in the Scottish dialect. Ross returned to his glen, where he continued his "leal and aefauld life" with the same cheerfulness and simplicity as heretofore, exhibiting a picture of personal and household piety which is singularly affecting, till ten more years had passed over his head, when preparations were made for the publication of another edition. While this was being printed, Dr. Beattie, who was on a visit to Gordon Castle, wrote to Ross acquainting him that the Duchess of Gordon had consented to accept the dedication of his new edition, and had, moreover, invited the author to visit her and present his volume in person. This, in those days, difficult journey was at once undertaken by the old man, who was now entering on his eightieth year, and he safely reached Gordon Castle, where he was received in the kindest manner, and honoured with much attention during his two or three days' stay. On taking leave of the Duchess, she pre-

sented him with an elegant pocket-book, handsomely lined with fifteen guinea notes, expressing how much pleasure she had had in reading his poem, but hinting to him, at the same time, that, "had he married Lindy to Nory the lining of the pocket-book might have been even more substantial". Ross set out in high spirits for his humble home, where he again resumed the usual quiet tenor of his life. Soon after this he lost his life-long companion, who died at the advanced age of eighty-two. This stroke he did not long survive; for, "worn out with age and infirmity, being in his eighty-sixth year, he breathed his last with the composure, resignation, and hope becoming a Christian, 20th May, 1784". So ended this long life of peace and happiness; and, as is remarked by Robert Chambers, "it is gratifying to think that the profits of his publications, trifling as they would now be viewed, afforded him many additional luxuries in his old age, and that the fame which his poems received from the world reached his retired home, and secured to him honour from his neighbours, and marks of attention from the few strangers of rank that found their way to Lochlee".

Besides the two editions of "Helenore" which appeared in the author's life-time, we may notice, among the numerous reprints, many of which, printed on coarse paper, were sold at a low price by pedlars through the whole of the north of Scotland, an edition published in Aberdeen in 1787, another at Edinburgh in 1804, and the pretentious edition, published by the grandson of the author—the Rev. Alexander Thomson, of Lintrathen—at Dundee in 1812. This edition is most unsatisfactory on account of the great liberties taken with the text,—such as the attempts to translate the more obsolete words into English, the frequent omission of couplets, &c., and the leaving out of the preface, songs, and glossary. The only thing valuable about it is the "Life", which, though a poor bit of biographical work, preserves what would otherwise have been lost. By far the best edition is that edited by the late Dr. Longmuir, who has done his work in a loving spirit and with his usual accuracy.

"Helenore" is a piece of incongruity—a strange mixture of delicacy and coarseness, of beauty and deformity. In this, however, lies the charm of the poem; the author's eye was

bounded in its range by the surrounding hills of his loved Lochlee, and he painted the manners, and selected his language, from no purer or more poetic source than the rustics who surrounded him. As Allan Cunningham says, "he copied nature as he found it around him, with all her warts and moles, and was rude and unseemly, not from negligence, but from principle". The story is no golden age narrative—that imaginary age which never existed and never could exist—but a story of real men and women, imperfect characters all of them, yet such as the author found himself surrounded with. The nomenclature of the characters is extremely absurd, and the *denouement* of the story has been generally condemned. Ross appears to have been perfectly well aware that this objection would arise, and he takes occasion in his "advertisement" to the first edition to put himself right:—"With regard to the conduct of the story in general, the author will possibly be blamed for throwing so many rubs in the way of the young couple he makes so fond of one another from their infancy, and much more for disappointing their hopes in the conclusion. To obviate this in part, he shall only observe that the incidents which bring all this about, to him seem possible and natural, . . . and, besides, though they are disappointed, they are not unhappy, for all things are settled to their mutual satisfaction". Notwithstanding the many faults that may be found with the poem, its fine descriptions of scenery, of natural phenomena, and of the habits of a rude and pastoral life, are more than sufficient to outbalance them all, and make the book always a favourite with lovers of the native muse. The poem also is of great value as a specimen of that broad Scottish dialect which approaches nearer to the language which was once common to both the Scottish Lowlands and to England than does either what may be called the "classic" Scotch of Ramsay, Ferguson, and Burns, or the broader Buchan dialect of Aberdeenshire, though it is far more closely allied to the latter than to the former. Many words are found in it which may be met with in Barbour, Gavin Douglas, or even Chaucer; and the peculiarity of language has no doubt prevented the poem from attaining the same popularity in southern Scotland as it has enjoyed in Angus, the Mearns, and Aberdeenshire. We may

here call the attention of our readers to two facts, the first of which may interest, the second amuse them. The first is, that Burns acknowledges that the immortal "Coila" was suggested to him by the muse "Scota" whom Ross invokes; the second, which shows the ingenuity of the professional "critic", is the discovery made by a writer in the *North British Review*, to the effect that the whole poem is a mythical and fancy portrait—*Nory*, personifying Britain; *Lindy*, the Pretender; *the Squire*, the Prince of Orange; and *Bydby*, the Popish Church, that seduces *Lindy* from his first love! Verily, 'tis a pity that Ross did not live long enough to learn what he had been writing about.

The story of "Lindy and Nory" must be so familiar to our readers that it is quite unnecessary to give any outline of the plot; we will therefore content ourselves with calling attention to a few of the more remarkable passages, and then pass on to notice some of the unpublished writings of our author, the original MSS. of which are preserved in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, and in all probability will never reach the higher life of "print".

There is much of beauty and the true pastoral aroma in the opening part of the poem, before the kettrins play havoc with the peace and prosperity of the "leal and ae-fauld" shepherds of the Scottish Arcadia, which Ross has called Flaviana. The following description of that country shows the power of our author in landscape painting. He touches the canvas with the hand of a master, and a few strokes of his brush are sufficient to produce a sharply-defined cabinet picture. Scott introduced part of this passage in his description of "Knocktarlitie" in the "Heart of Midlothian":—

> Now Flaviana was the country's name,
> That aye that bonny water-side did claim,
> Frae yellow sands that trindled down the same.
> The fouks were wealthy, store was a' their stock;
> Wi' this, but little cunzie, did they trock;
> Frae' mang the beasts his honour got his fa',
> And got but little siller, or nane awa'.
> The water feckly on a level sled,
> Wi' little dinn, but couthy what it made,

On ilka side the trees grew thick and strang,
And wi' the birds they a' were in a sang:
On ev'ry side, a full bow-shot and mair,
The green was even, gowany, and fair;
With easy sklent, on ev'ry hand the braes,
To right well up, wi' scatter'd busses raise:
Wi' goats and sheep aboon, and ky below,
The bonny braes a' in a swarm did go.
Nae property these honest shepherds pled,
All kept alike, and all in common fed.

Our first introduction to the young shepherd and shepherdess affords a glimpse of childhood's innocence, which dwellers in crowded cities are almost inclined to think is almost as extinct as the dodo. Nature is true to herself, however, in all ages; so we find Daphnis and Chloe reproduced in a Scottish glen after fourteen hundred years, and we would earnestly hope that over-refinement may not utterly destroy youthful ingenuousness and innocence, but leave us with the cheering thought that even in this artificial age, "Heaven lies about us in our infancy":—

Fan Nory now a gangrel trig was grown,
And had begun to toddle about the town,
An honest neiper man, Ralph was his name,
That lived on the same tenement with them,
A dainty stirrah had, twa years out-gane,
And he was now well ta'en the road him-lane.
The callan's name was Rosalind, and they
Yeed hand in hand together at the play,
And as the billy had the start of eild,
To Nory he was aye a tenty bield;
Wad help her up, whan she wad chance to fa',
Wad gather gowans, and string them on a straw,
And knit about her bonny neck and arms;
And be as tenty to bear off all harms,
As ever hen upo' the midden-head
Wad tent her chuckins frae the greedy glaid.
'Twas then blind Cupid did lat gae a shaft,
And stung the weans, strangers to his craft,
That baith their hearties fand the common stound,
But had no pain but pleasure o' the wound.
As they grew up, as fast their likings grew,
As haining water'd with the morning dew:
Like was their pleasure, and alike their pain,
And baith alike were sorry or were fain.

When they were able now to herd the ewes,
They yeed together through the heights and hows,
Whileoms they tented, and sometimes they play'd,
And sometimes rashen hoods and buckies made:
And ilka night, as boughting time drew near,
Norry yeed foremost, Lindy in the rear.

The incursion of the Highland kettrin, which is the immediate cause of the lovers' lives deploying in separate paths, never to come together again, is no figment of the author's imagination. Such occurrences were at one time not unfrequent in Glenesk, as may well be supposed from its vicinity to the wild Deeside Highlands. As late as the end of the 17th century, it was quite common with the shepherds of the quarter to go armed for the defence of their flocks, and Dr. Longmuir was informed by one of the inhabitants of the glen that the last incursion was made from the very quarter that Ross has so clearly indicated. On that occasion "the robbers were followed and attacked by the glensmen, but with loss both of cattle and men. One of those who bravely fell in the contest was a bridegroom, whose marriage feast was interrupted by the clamour of the invasion, and who, gallantly buckling on his sword, set out with his neighbours, never to return". In the poem, the incursion of the kettrin, the unsuccessful resistance of the "sakeless shepherds", the capture of Lindy, the consternation among the home-dwellers of the glen, and Nory's distracted search for her lover, whose fate leaves no room in her thoughts for loss of flocks and neighbours' welfare, are depicted with graphic power. The scene where the squire finds Nory asleep beneath the tree by the burnside, after her fearful night's wandering, has been much admired; while, in Bydby's encounter with the two men on the hills, whom she mistakes at first for Lindy and Colin, we have an admirable specimen of rustic banter, which will be at once recognised as true to nature. Though these scenes cannot be dignified with the name of what is usually called poetry, yet, if we consider the poet to be as much a seer and translator of the realities which lie around him as he is a miner in the dark deeps of his own personality, we must give Ross credit for possessing one poetic side at anyrate. The use made by Bydby and the ruffians of current sayings or maxims, which are actually pro-

verbs in their caterpillar state, will be readily recognised as a characteristic of the northern rustic even at the present day. These maxims or sayings are so freely introduced throughout the poem that a pretty extensive list of them might be made out:—

> Whan she them saw, she fand she was mistane:
> They speer'd fat was she seeking there her lane?
> Sae far frae towns, it could na be for gueed,
> That she was wand'ring there in sic a meed.
> 'Tis for nae ill, she says, that I am here,
> Nor errandless, tho' ye be free to speer.
> Twa men I seek, and thought ye had been they.
> Twa men ye've got, say they, then come away.
> Na, na, she says, I'm nae of men so scant,
> And tho' I'm seeking, ye're no wha I want.
> But tell me gin ye saw twa men the-day—
> The ane with yellow hair, the ither gray?
> I'll wad, say they, the yellow-hair'd's your jo;
> 'Tis may be so, she says, and may be no.
> Is that his coat ye carry on your back?
> 'Tis e'en the same, and been a heavy wrack.
> He maun be little worth that left you sae;
> He may be is, young man, and may be nae.
> Ye're unco short, my lass, to be so lang;
> But we maun ken ye better ere ye gang.
> I think it best ye gie that coat to me;
> I think not sae, and so we disagree.
> It is na yours, and fat wad ye do wi't?
> As little can ye think that I would gee't;
> 'Twas never made for me, ye may well ken,
> And fouk are free to gee but what's their ain.
> Ye may be stown't awa frae side some lad,
> That's faen asleep at wauking o' the fau'd.
> 'Tis nae sic thing, and ye're but scant of grace,
> To tell sic baddords till a bodie's face.
> Ah, bonny lass, says he, ye'll gie's a kiss,
> And I sall set ye right on, hit or miss.
> A hit or miss, I'll get, but help of you,
> Kiss ye sklate-stanes, they winna weet your mou';
> And aff she gaes; the fallow loot a rin,
> As gin he ween'd with speed to tak her in;
> But as luck was, a knibblach took his tae,
> And o'er fa's he, and tumbled down the brae.
> His neiper leugh, and said it was well wair'd,
> Let never jamphers yet be better saird.

The ever-changing aspects of nature would necessarily attract much more attention and notice in a wild region like Lochlee than in towns, or even in ordinary rural districts. With every change of season, nay, even with the ever-varying atmospheric conditions, the whole aspect of the mountain scenery would present a series of never-ending alternations. In one part of the day bathed in light, and displaying a thousand different tints—at another, enshrouded in cloudland gloom, which would visibly roll down the mountain sides, till it enveloped the whole glen in a mantle of darkness. Sudden storms would frequently sweep down the glen, swelling the tiny streams to roaring torrents, and culminating in thunder-storms, such as are unknown to those " in populous cities pent ". These, again, would pass as suddenly away and leave the now unclouded sun to transform mountain and valley into a very fairyland of form and colour. Either from dimness of sight or film of familiarity, it is not given to very many to notice these changes in Nature's life further than they affect personal comfort, and to fewer still to paint them in words that will bring the picture vividly to the mind's eye. This latter faculty was one which Ross possessed in a very marked degree. In a few rugged lines, and in his own unpolished language, he could reproduce Nature's doings with photographic fidelity. What could be more complete and concise than his description of " a gloaming " in one line :—

Hill heads were red, and hows were eery grown.

His picture of a mountain thunder-storm, when Bydby and Nory are making their way to Flaviana, and Nory (sly puss !), though she begins to recognise her bearings, pretends to be as strange to the road as Bydby is, will be recognised as wonderfully realistic by any one who has had the privilege of witnessing the sublime sight.

'Tis now about th' eleventh hour o' the day,
And they are posting on whate'er they may:
Baith het and meeth, till they are hailing down;
The sun he dips, and clouds grow thick around ;
All in a clap, the fire-flaught blinds their eyn,
The thunder rattles at an unco tune,
Hurl upon hurl, and just aboon their head,
They on their faces fell as they were dead.

And just with this the bowden clouds they brak,
And pour as out of buckets on their back.
Now they conclude, that here their turf maun be,
And lay stane-still, not moving eye nor bree:
And for misluck, they just were on the height,
Aye thinking whan the bowt on them wad light.
For twa lang hours in this sad plight they lay,
At last the sun shoots out a couthy ray;
Sae piece and piece they peep up, as they dow,
And see main ocean down into the how.
Fan up they stood, naething but burns they spy'd,
Tumbling and roaring down on ilka side,
Wi' sic a fearsome hurl, and reefu' rair,
The neist thing to the thunder in the air.
What can they do? downwith they darena budge,
Their safest course seems in the height to lodge.
At last and lang the burns began to fa',
And down the hill they scour'd, what they could ca';
Sometimes they wade, sometimes the burns they lap,
And sometimes through on feet and hands they crap:
And by the time they reach'd anither height,
The sun falls doun, and now 'tis hard on night.

In all ages, and in all stages of civilisation we find a kind of secondary religion—a certain half-credulity in the supernatural, and a negative reverence paid to those imaginary beings who are supposed to have an influence on the fates of helpless humanity. This feeling is particularly strong among a primitive people inhabiting a mountainous district, and we therefore have numerous references to things and beings uncanny throughout the poem. The frets observed at Nory's birth are not yet entirely obsolete, but the finest bit of the supernatural in the poem is undoubtedly the dream of Bydby when she falls asleep, worn out with hunger and fatigue, "aneth a birken shade".

As she hauf-sleeping, and hauf-waking lay,
An unco din she hears of fouk and play.
The sough they made gar'd her lift her eyn,
And, oh, the gathering that was on the green
Of little foukies, clad in green and blue!
Kneefer and trigger never trade the dew;
In many a reel they scamper'd here and there,
Whiles in the yerd, and whiles up in the air.

The pipers play'd like ony touting horn,
Sic sight she never saw since she was born.
As she's behadding all this mirthful glee,
Or e'er she wist, they're dancing in the tree
Aboon her head, as nimble as the bees,
That swarm in search of honey round the trees.
Fear's like to fell her, reed that they should fa'
And smore her dead, afore she wan awa';
Syne in a clap, as thick's the motty sin,
They hamphis'd her with unco fike and din,
Some cry'd, Tak' ye the heid, I'se tak' a foot,
We'll lear her upon this tree-head to sit,
And spy about her. Others said, Out fy,
Let be, she'll keep the King of Elfin's ky.
Another said, oh, gin she had but milk,
Then should she gae frae head to foot in silk,
With castings rare, and a gueed nourice-fee,
To nurse the King of Elfin's heir, Fizzee.
Syne ere she wist, like house aboon her head,
Great candles burning, and braw tables spread;
Braw dishes reeking, and just at her hand,
Trig green coats sairing, a' upon command.
To cut they fa', and she among the lave;
The sight was bonny, and her mou' did crave:
The mair she ate, the mair her hunger grew,
Eat what she like, and she could ne'er be fu';
The knible Elves about her ate ding-dang,
Syne to the play they up, and danc'd and flang;
Drink in braw cups was caw'd about gelore;
Some fell asleep, and loud began to snore.
Syne in a clap, the Fairies a' sat down,
And fell to crack about the table round.

* * * * * * *

As she's behadding ilka thing that past,
With a loud crack the house fell down at last;
The reemish put a knell unto her heart,
And frae her dream she waken'd wi' a start.

Ross's songs which have been preserved to us are few, and in one form or other are to be found in most collections of Scottish songs. As Ross wrote them, however, they are not so well known, having suffered many indignities in their various reproductions. The "Rock and the Wee Pickle Tow" is a most racy production, and in days when drapers' establishments were not, and clothing had to be manufactured at home—the processes

of which are described in the song—it must have been immensely popular. The mishanter to the "auld wife's" rock is characteristically set down to poor Maggy Grim rather than to her own carelessness, and the means adopted to circumvent the cantrips of the unchancy body is another proof of the efficacy of the rowan-tree in such cases :—

> I'll gar my ain Tammie gae down to the how,
> And cut me a rock of a widdershins grow,
> Of good rantry-tree for to carry my tow,
> And a spindle o' same for the twinin' o't.
>
> For, now, when I mind me, I met Maggy Grim,
> That morning, just at the beginning o't;
> She was never ca'd chancy, but canny and slim,
> And sae it has fared with my spinning o't.

David Herd, who was a native of St. Cyrus, included this song in his valuable collection; and it is very likely he was well acquainted with it before he left the Mearns for "Auld Reekie". "To the Begging we will go", descriptive of the tricks of the wandering beggars who infested Scotland in those days to an extent hardly realisable now, is a localised amplification of an old song, said to have been written by Richard Brome the dramatist, and some time servant to Ben Jonson. Three songs, all in the same measure, are in existence, with the title and refrain "Woo'd, and Married and a'"; the version which is commonly heard now-a-days appeared first in Herd's collection; another, by a Mrs. Scott of Dumbarton, was printed by Cromek in 1810; and Ross's version, which compares favourably with any of the others. It is curious to note that in one edition of Ross, the editor inserted one of the first two mentioned versions instead of Ross's own. "What Ails the Lasses at Me"? and "Jeany Gradden's Reply" are full of pawkie humour, but perhaps his best song is "The Bridal o't", the last stanza of which is delightful:—

> Fan they hae done wi' eating o't,
> Fan they hae done wi' eating o't,
> For dancing they gae to the green,
> And aiblins to the beating o't:
> He dances best that dances fast,
> And loups at ilka reesing o't,
> And claps his hands frae hough to hough,
> And furls aboot the feezings o't.

It remains for us briefly to notice those writings by Ross which remain—and, on the whole, justly—in manuscript. For certainly, though they exhibit much industry, learning, goodness of heart, and true piety, their publication would have added nothing to his fame, which must rest solely on his "Helenore" and his songs. The only piece besides "Helenore", which is written in "braid Scotch", is entitled the "Fortunate Shepherd", which seems to have been suggested by the success of the former, and the objections that had been taken to the conduct of that story. The plot, on the whole, is good, but othewise it is poor stuff. The hero, Kenneth, a young Highland boy from "some island or far northern nook", is stolen by a female beggar. He is thus described—

> A blooming boy was he, round-fac'd an' fair,
> And like the threeds o' goud his yellow hair;
> Stout limbs and round, an' firm as ony tree,
> Were his, an' of a' seeming eelist free.
> No linen kind had ever touch'd his skin,
> As few thir days had can that claith to spin.
> A linder coarse, cut out of hodin gray,
> Neist to his skin, as white as paper, lay;
> A blanket of the same his shoulders clad,
> A spacious brutch before its fastening made.
> On shoon or hose for him was waird no cost,
> To save his youthful limbs from snow or frost,
> Through which with all indifference he wade,
> Nor of his road the least distinction made.

The stolen child wanders through the country with the "beggar woman", till

> Sair spent wi' faut, wi' hardly pith to stand
> When they fell in at last wi' Murray land—
> Upon some gentle place, the wand'ring twa,
> Baith weet and weary, on a nicht did fa'.

Here the boy is taken ill, and is deserted by his companion, but is finding favour with the lady of the house, he "very soon became a household bairn". After a variety of adventures, Kenneth, while a shepherd boy, falls in love with the daughter of his protectress, and is betrayed into some extravagances which force him into the army, where he distinguishes himself, rises to be captain, comes home and marries his faithful sweetheart. The "beggar woman" turns up again in the end, and

proves him to be the cousin of his colonel, and the owner of property "on Pomona's bonny braes". The "Dream", in imitation of "The Cherry and the Slae", is an unfinished production, the first part of which is in the stanza of Montgomery's poem, and the second in heroic couplets. Longmuir characterises the introductory stanzas as the "most imaginative of any of Ross's productions"; we would be inclined to call them the most extravagant. The poet falls asleep, and in his dream he visits the bowers of several Scotch poets, when he falls in with his "dear Montgomery", who takes him to see Parnassus. They are provided with wings with which they mount until "they had got above the wind", when Montgomery gives him a kind of magic telescope through which he looks, and proceeds to describe the reformation from Popery, the various discussions to which it gave rise, and the sects which it occasioned, through upwards of 400 lines! A paraphrase of the book of Job is a somewhat unequal, but, on the whole, tame production, extending to upwards of three thousand lines, and evidently finished in 1761. In his 82nd year Ross had still vigour enough to write a translation of Ramsay's "Poemata Sacra", which extended to upwards of two thousand lines of blank verse. The other remains of our author, which call for no particular remark, consist of a series of religious dialogues written about 1754, and extending to upwards of sixteen hundred lines, heroic verse; a metrical version of the "Song of Solomon", extending to about a thousand lines; "A view of King David's Affliction", about the same length, and several smaller pieces, chiefly Scripture paraphrases. In prose, we have a translation of Buchanan's dialogue, "De Jure Regni apud Scotos". He is said also to have written a dramatic piece called "The Shaver", founded on the following incident:—A young man named Jamieson, a barber in Montrose, managed to impose on his master and others by concocting a story that his uncle in Ayrshire had died and left him sole heir to considerable property. The fraud was not discovered until after he had succeeded in securing the hand of a young lady in marriage, who probably was dazzled with his estate in Ayr.

In taking leave of our present subject, we are far from claiming for Ross a distinguished place in literature, as the term is commonly defined. We, however, would submit that, if to

write a poem which has already delighted thousands in spite of all its faults; if to have lived a long blameless life, full of piety and good works, holding daily communion with the pure loveliness and solemn grandeur of his surroundings, and lighting up those lives with which he came in contact with the modest torch of his hillside muse, be worthy of worldly fame, no man deserves to be remembered with more loving thoughts than Alexander Ross, the Poet of Lochlee.