

MACPHERSON, BURNS, AND SCOTT IN THEIR RELATION
TO THE MODERN REVOLUTION.

When went there by an age since the great flood
But it was famed with more than with one man?

SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Cæsar*.

MACPHERSON, a man of nine-and-forty, had been famous for a quarter of a century, when Burns, at nine-and-twenty, was a lion of the Edinburgh season of 1787, and Scott was a boy of sixteen. The two latter chanced to meet at a party at the Sheens,¹ in the house of Dr. Adam Ferguson,² author of the famous 'Essay on Civil Society' (1767), and 'History of the Roman Republic.' Burns was introduced by Dugald Stewart, and Scott was brought out by the Doctor's son, the future Sir Adam Ferguson. Black, to whom the first great step in the Chemistry of Gases is due; Hutton, the author of the geological theory of Igneous Causation (which was in this country opposed to the theory of the German Werner); and Home, the reverend author of the tragedy of 'Douglas,' and MacPherson's first literary friend, appear also to have been all at this party. I wonder that the meeting has never been commemorated by one of our historical painters. But should it ever be so, I trust that our painter will add MacPherson to the group. He and his two great predecessors never, indeed, met. But it will be quite in accordance with historical probability to represent them as having met at the house of this common friend of all three. And the picture will only gain the higher truth and unity of the idea by the introduction of a person not present in reality. For both the younger had been, in fact, already powerfully influenced by the era-making, though youthful, work of the elder poet, who had now been for long an historical and political writer, agent for the Nabob of Arcot, and M.P. for Camelford. 'My favourite authors,' Burns had written some years before (1783), 'are of the sentimental kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his "Elegies;" . . . Sterne, especially his "Sentimental Journey;" MacPherson's "Ossian," &c.' Nor is anything more certain than that, 'all through his early life . . . the "Voice of Cona," the music of Ossian, full of the melancholy wail of the Western waves, was often in his ears.'³ And 'Ossian and Spenser,' says Scott, in a letter to Miss Seward, 'were two books which the old bard [Dr. Blacklock] put into my hands, and which I

¹ A street so called in the outskirts of Edinburgh, from its proximity to the remains of an ancient monastery dedicated to St. Catherine of Siena.

² Chambers, *Life and Works of Burns*, vol. ii. pp. 55-8.

³ Jack, 'Burns's Unpublished Commonplace Book,' *Macmillan's Magazine*, April 1879, p. 363.

devoured rather than perused. Their tales were for a long time so much my delight, that I could repeat without remorse whole cantos of the one and duans of the other.⁴

A print of Bunbury's on the wall of the room would be the motive giving unity to the composition I would suggest to an historical painter. It represented a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on one side, and on the other his widow with a child in her arms. It arrested the attention of Burns, and he read aloud the lines inscribed under the print:—

Cold on Canadian hills or Minden's plain,
Perhaps that parent wept her soldier slain—
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew,
The big drops mingling with the milk he drew,
Gave the sad presage of his future years,
The child of misery baptised in tears.⁵

Before getting to the end of these lines Burns's voice faltered, and not seeing, for tears, that the name of the author was printed, though in a small character, at the bottom of the lines, he asked if anyone could tell him by whom they were written. Scott modestly whispered to a friend, 'They're written by one Langhorne.' This being mentioned to Burns, he turned his strong and robust figure and massive countenance, and fixing on the pale lame boy the glowing eye of which Scott afterwards said that he 'never saw such another eye in a human head,' said, 'You'll be a man yet, sir.'

And let this picture within the picture be supposed to represent a battle-field either on 'Canadian hills or Minden's plain,' it will be equally significant of the time that gave birth to our three poets. In the years from that both of the battle of Minden and of the conquest of Canada (1759) to the year of their meeting (1787), and onward to the climax of the fame of the youngest of them, Great Britain, with armies on every continent and fleets on every sea, was engaged in the most tremendous struggles of her whole history. And, sons as they were of that revolutionary epoch, our three poets—standing there together, the eldest in his mature, the younger in his youthful, manhood, and the third in his boyhood—were also fathers and initiators of a new epoch no less revolutionary. Only, therefore, in the relation of each to the epoch of which he was the offspring, and to that of which he was the initiator, only, in a word, in relation to the Modern Revolution can MacPherson, or Burns, or Scott be rightly understood, or justly judged, either considered separately or as a group. Hence, to indicate the respective relations of these three Scottish poets to the general movement of the Revolution will be the aim of this essay. From this their relations to one another will be evident. Certain general affinities of thought will

⁴ Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, Abbotsford edition, p. 128.

⁵ *The Country Justice*, a poem in three parts, written at the request of Mr. Burns, the well-known author of the work on the duties of a Justice of the Peace.

be seen to unite them, and to point clearly, if not always consciously, towards the New Epoch.

I. MACPHERSON.

Before pointing out those general historical relations of each of our three great poets which we, looking back, may now see—though they, looking around, could not—it will be both interesting and instructive to note, in each case, the account they give of themselves and their objects in introducing their chief works to the world.

'Several gentlemen of the Highlands and Isles,' says MacPherson in his preface to 'Fingal,' 'generously gave me all the assistance in their power, and it was by their means I was enabled to complete the Epic Poem. How far it comes up to the rules of the Epopeia is the province of criticism to examine. It is only my business to lay it before the reader as I have found it. . . . A man diffident of his abilities might ascribe his own compositions to a person whose remote antiquity and whose situation when alive might well answer for faults which would be inexcusable in a writer of this age. . . . But of this I am persuaded . . . that some will think, notwithstanding the disadvantages with which the works ascribed to Ossian appear, it would be a very uncommon instance of self-denial in me to disown them, were they really of my composition.'

Thus, as still a translator rather than an original poet, and with no suspicion of the immense European significance of his work, MacPherson followed up his 'Fragments of Ancient Poetry' (1759) with the complete Epic and other Poems, thus modestly prefaced (1760).

Was he, indeed, but a translator, as he professed, or an original poet? This was the question debated in the Ossianic controversy, though it was usually stated in less complimentary terms. Was he an honest man, or a forger and impostor? We can, I think, now pretty confidently answer this question. MacPherson was *both* a translator and an original poet, and he was *not* a forger and impostor. Let me briefly state those results of more than a century of Ossianic controversy, or rather those results of the last decade or two of scientifically conducted research bearing on this controversy,⁶ which form the grounds of this conclusion.

By these researches three great facts have been incontrovertibly established. The first is that, from 1872 back to 1512, transcriptions have been made by various collectors from recitations of Gaelic ballads, immemorially ascribed to Ossian, and of which the subjects are, speaking generally, identical with those of the poems published by MacPherson. But, secondly, if ancient unquestionably is the *substance*, as unquestionably modern would appear to be the *form*, of those so-called poems of Ossian published by MacPherson.

⁶ First and foremost among these researches stand those of Skene and MacLauchlin, *Book of the Dean of Lismore*; Campbell, *Leabhar na Feinne*, or *Heroic Gaelic Ballads*, collected from 1512 to 1872, the most complete and decisive book of all; the same author's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*; Clark, *Poems of Ossian, Gaelic and English, with a Dissertation on their Authenticity*; Blackie, *Language and Literature of the Highlands*; &c.



Though the people still recite, as they have for centuries recited, Ossianic poems, 'no uneducated Highlander,' says Mr. Campbell,⁷ 'has ever recited to me MacPherson's Gaelic.' And to this I have but to add that the first known Scottish collector of Gaelic folk-lore—the Dean of Lismore, nearly four hundred years ago—would, judging from the heroic ballads found in his collection, have declared that such also had been his own experience. Utterly different, then, is the MacPhersonic form from anything found in genuine popular tradition. Conversant as this is with Fion and the Feinne, it knows nothing of a 'Fingal, King of Morven.' But a third fact has been brought to light—namely, that the eighteenth century was a period of remarkable poetical activity in the Highlands,⁸ and that, if not certain, it is at least very highly probable⁹ that already before MacPherson epical poems had been constructed out of the old popular ballads. It was such epical poems that MacPherson probably used. Granted, then, that no such *ancient* epic as *Fingal* ever existed, MacPherson may still have truly represented himself as a translator. Nor is MacPherson's honesty thus saved at the expense of his genius. For it will still remain true that, as Mr. Skene says,¹⁰ 'MacPherson really showed wonderful tact and originality in producing his English version;' and that, as Mr. Burton does not hesitate to pronounce,¹¹ 'he brought to his work the true power of a great poet.'

To pass now to the more special subject of our inquiry—the relation of MacPherson's 'Ossian' to the general movement of the Revolution. How is this movement, in its intellectual and moral aspect, to be most distinctively characterised? As a return to Nature. Thus, at least sufficiently for our present purpose, the intellectual and moral character of the revolutionary movement in the eighteenth century may be generally indicated. England, in her Republic, Restoration, and Revolution, had led the van of political progress in the seventeenth century. Now she had the still greater glory of leading the van of an intellectual, which was to prepare a new political, progress. In Shakespeare, Art, and in Newton, Philosophy, returned to the truth of Nature; and it was now that the influence of these great Englishmen became European. Shakespeare was introduced into Germany and translated by Wieland (1762–66), as afterwards, more adequately, by Tieck and A. W. Schlegel; and, as the result of the visit to England of Voltaire (1728–30), Newton, Hobbes, and Locke were popularised in France. At the same time Wolf's 'Prolegomena' to Homer was a fountain, in Germany, of new historical, religious, and mythological criticism; and 'Rousseau's exaltation of the Greek and Roman types in all their concentration and intensity . . . evoked that virile and patriotic energy which presently saved France from partition, and

⁷ *Leabhar na Feinne*.

⁸ See Blackie, *Language and Literature of the Highlands*.

⁹ Among the more important evidences of this are the testimonies with respect to the contents of the Douay MSS. See Clark's *Poems of Ossian*, Dissertation.

¹⁰ *Book of the Dean of Lismore*, preface.

¹¹ *History of Scotland*, vol. i.

European civilisation from¹² retrogression and decay. Born towards the beginning of the century (1712), Rousseau had, up to 1758, only published his 'Discourses' and 'Letter to D'Alembert.' But in those wonderful years of entranced mental activity (1759-60-61-62) he completed and published the 'New Heloisa,' 'Social Contract,' and 'Emilius.' And of the pioneers of the New Epoch, Rousseau is the most significant.

Now, it was in these very years that MacPherson published his 'Fragments of Gaelic Poetry' and 'Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem.' And the first condition of understanding the prodigious European success of these works of the Badenoch Highlander and Aberdeen Graduate is to understand the similar success of the simultaneously published work of his great contemporary of the Genevan Lake and Montmorency Woods. Nor is this so surprising as at first it may appear. There is, in fact, in MacPherson and Rousseau, notwithstanding utter difference in form, in many points identity, or at least similarity, in substance. How similar, for instance, is the vague and sentimental Deism of each; and how different the Deism of both from that intellectual Deism of Voltaire and his English masters which is morally, or in its effect on the emotions, hardly distinguishable from Atheism. Again, both in MacPherson and in Rousseau, there are representations of pure family affection, amid scenes of natural beauty or sublimity, which come as a breath of Eden into the century of 'La Pucelle,' and 'Le Chevalier de Faublas.' And how similar, again, is the regretful, wild, and revoltful recalling by each of an ideal Past, and how similar generally the character in both of the revolutionary 'return to Nature.' The limits of space here forbid my developing these suggestions. Yet enough may have been indicated to lead to our understanding how it came about that a similar universality of enthusiasm was excited by MacPherson's 'Ancient Epic' and 'Ossian,' and by Rousseau's 'New Heloisa' and 'Emilius.' Kant, whose daily routine was ordinarily punctual as that of the Cathedral clock, confesses that he had been kept for two or three days from his usual walk by reading 'Emile;' and Schiller speaks of Rousseau as one who 'converted Christians into human beings.' Singular, indeed, it is to find Geneva and Scotland again connected, as formerly through Calvin and Knox, now through Rousseau and MacPherson. And yet we may now see how it was that, such an enthusiasm as the above facts evidence having been excited by the works of Rousseau, an equally boundless enthusiasm was excited by those of MacPherson; nor among the less educated of his own countrymen only, but, with scarce an exception, from Goethe downwards, among all the greatest and most cultivated spirits of the Continent, by whom 'Ossian' was ever placed beside, when not above, Homer.

Nor were the results that ultimately followed incommensurate with the enthusiasm immediately excited by the publication of 'Ossian':—

¹² Morley, *Rousseau*, vol. ii. p. 189.



'Its chord of penetrating passion and melancholy—its "Titanism," as we see it in Byron—what other European poetry,' asks Mr. Matthew Arnold, 'possesses that like the English? and where do we get it from? The Celts . . . are the prime authors of this vein of piercing regret and passion, of this "Titanism" in poetry. A famous book, MacPherson's "Ossian," carried in the last century this vein like a flood of lava through Europe. . . . Make the part of what is forged, modern, tawdry, spurious, in the book as large as you please . . . there will still be left a residue with the very soul of the Celtic genius in it, and which has the proud distinction of having brought this soul of the Celtic genius into contact with the genius of the nations of modern Europe, and enriched all our poetry by it. Woody Morven and echoing Lora and Selma, with its silent halls! we all owe them a debt of gratitude, and when we are unjust enough to forget it, may the Muse forget us!' ¹³

These eloquent words of the no less generous than fastidious Saxon critic must here suffice to indicate the first or purely literary results of the publication of 'Ossian.'

But not into literature only did MacPherson's book pour a new lava-stream, but it initiated, in the domain of Historical Science, the most fruitful new researches. Directly springing from, or indirectly stimulated by, the enthusiasm excited by 'Ossian,' researches were instituted into the antiquities of all the three great races of Europe—not of the Kelts only, but of the Teutons, and of the Slavs—and collections were made, or edited, of their ancient poesies. It is unnecessary to recall the dates of the several publications. Only this general fact we need here note, that if, in very various degrees, *propter* 'Ossian,' in every case *post* 'Ossian,' were such works as the Welsh 'Myvyrian Archæology' and 'Mabinogion;' Müller's 'Collection of German Poems from the 12th, 13th and 14th Centuries,' and Grimm's 'Teutonic Mythology;' and the numberless Slavonic Folk-lore collections which were the antiquarian bases of the great political fact of Pan Slavonic aspirations.

And considering this, we see that by no means was the scope and bearing of the researches springing from, or stimulated by, MacPherson's 'Ossian' confined to the sphere of historical theory, and religious belief. Few things are, in the last hundred years, more remarkable than the direct transformation of historical theories into political forces. Political aspirations of nationalities or races to union or re-union are but the transference into the sphere of practical endeavour of the theories of antiquaries and historians. Yet no forces have in Europe, in this century, shown themselves more powerful. And more particularly events are now indicating, with almost daily increasing clearness, that the Keltic Revival, directly initiated by MacPherson's 'Ossian,' will show itself hardly less important as a political force than the Slavonic Revival, indirectly stimulated by 'Ossian.' And very remarkable, as I have elsewhere pointed out, ¹⁴ is the similarity of the histories, as perhaps also of the characters, of these

¹³ *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, pp. 152-3.

¹⁴ *Europe and Asia*, pp. 170-2.

two races, the Kelts and the Slavs. The Kelts, as the earlier of the new Asiatic hordes of Aryan race that re-peopled Europe, could hardly between the new-coming horde of Teutons and the sea, escape subjugation. Nor, later, could the Slavs escape a like fate between the Teutons, solidly established in Central Europe, and the flood of Turanian barbarism issuing from the primeval deluge-bed of Central Asia. But, for both Kelt and Slav, the legendary prophecies of the awakening of their national heroes from their enchanted sleep are now being found but symbolic expressions of very real facts actually being accomplished. And MacPherson it was who sounded the first notes, at least, on the magic Horn of Resurrection.

II. BURNS.

Passing now to Burns, let us first note, in his case also, his own account of the beginning of his poetic career, given in the preface to the first edition of his poems in 1782 :—

‘To amuse himself with the little creations of his own fancy, amid the evils and fatigues of a laborious life; to transcribe the various feelings, the loves, the griefs, the hopes, the fears, in his own breast; to find some kind of counterpoise to the struggles of a world always an alien scene, a task uncouth, to the poetical mind—these were his motives for courting the Muses, and in these he found poetry to be its own reward.’

In reading this modest statement of his aims after having read his works, and endeavoured to form a scientific estimate of their historical relations, one is struck with the unconsciousness of genius, in its earlier years at least, and reminded of that famous story of the young Arthur, unaware that he is doing anything great, or what others had, with all their force, attempted in vain—pulling, without effort, the magic Sword out of the great Anvil.

I would classify the poems of Burns as (1) Love Songs, (2) Songs of the Revolution, and (3) Occasional Pieces. Those poems which I would group together under the general title of ‘Songs of the Revolution’ I would subdivide as Songs of (1) Scepticism, (2) of Humour, (3) of Sympathy, (4) of Independence, and (5) of Nationality. And just as the central and most living part of his poems seems to be what I have distinguished as ‘Songs of the Revolution,’ with ‘Love Songs’ on one side and ‘Occasional Pieces’ on the other, so, as the centre of this central part, and heart of hearts of the whole, I would consider what I class as ‘Songs of Sympathy.’ Nor, I would submit, is such an arrangement merely artificial, but natural, in the sense of representing actual psychological relations. In such a classification we see, on one side, Songs of Humour, and of Scepticism, and on the other, Songs of Independence, and of Nationality, raying-forth, as it were, from Songs of Sympathy. And the fact is that, with Burns, these various classes of songs are really but

expressions of ideas that are deductions from, and applications of, that wide and passionate sympathy that is but more directly expressed in the songs grouped under that title.

Now, the great European movement which we call the Modern Revolution is only fully understood when we recognise at the heart of it a new development of sympathy. Undoubtedly it may be defined as a change in our notions of the Causes of Change; or, less abstractly, as an extension of the knowledge, and better conception of the idea, of Law. But we thus state the nature of the Revolution only in its scientific and philosophic aspect. And it is, in fact, more than a broadthening of our conception of Law; it is a broadthening also of our capability of Love. Nor can I look on either of these characteristics as derived from the other, but regard them as elements which are mutually dependent in their development. If, however, such is the nature of the Revolution; and if Burns's songs are truly to be classified as just stated, then his relation to the Revolution will be at once defined. We shall see it to be that of one who expressed the very heart of the Revolution; of one who was, indeed, the first to give, though in fragmentary form, full, forceful, and poetic expression to all the moods of what we distinguish as the Modern Spirit. The drawing of the magic Sword out of the great Anvil gained Arthur his election as King. And if we find that Burns's poems are really composed of such more steel-like stuff than the mere 'scenery and sentiment' of which they are ordinarily imagined to be chiefly made up; if we find that, from the hard lot from which others could nothing obtain, he did, in fact, draw the very Sword of the Revolution—we shall not refuse him his place on the kingly dais on which his great predecessor, Voltaire,¹⁵ and greater successor, Goethe, are enthroned.

Let us consider, then, in relation to the claim thus made for Burns, these various divisions, above distinguished, of his Songs of the Revolution. The other two classes of his poems, his Love Songs and Occasional Pieces, require from us here but passing mention. Note, then, first, how accordant is the scepticism of Burns, as expressed in the songs classed under that title, with what is best in the scepticism of the Revolution. It doubts, and gives the most trenchant expression to its doubts, but it is *not* irreligious. There is in it, indeed, an earnestness of feeling which cannot be otherwise rightly qualified than as religious. The most truly characteristic scepticism of the Revolution is scepticism as to priestly dogma, not scepticism as to noble conduct. The arch-sceptic himself, Voltaire, was the most self-devoted of men in his labours to redress injustice done to others. And the scathing satirist of 'Holy Willie's Prayer' and the 'Holy Fair' was, at the same time, the author of the 'Cotter's Saturday Night.' This poem not only shows us, in Burns, that appreciation of

¹⁵ I trust I am not wrong in assuming that, name of horror as Voltaire's long was, his character and work are now, even by the 'general reader,' more rationally appreciated. See *Fraser's Magazine*, November 1867, 'Voltaire as a Theologian, Moralist, and Metaphysician.'

all the fairer aspects of a discarded creed, which, however common it may be in the higher criticism of our day, was very rare in his, but gives us the key to the true interpretation of his Songs of Scepticism.

Then kneeling down to heaven's Eternal King,
The saint, the father, and the husband prays.

Compared with this, how poor religion's pride,
In all the pomp of method and of art,
When men display to congregations wide
Devotion's ev'ry grace, except the heart !
The Power, incens'd, the pageant will desert,
The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole ;
But haply, in some cottage far apart,
May hear, well pleased, the language of the soul,
And in His Book of Life the inmates poor enrol.

Then, in his Songs of Humour, such as, for instance, 'Halloween,' the 'Jolly Beggars,' 'Death and Dr. Hornbook,' and 'Tam o' Shanter,' we again see two prominent characteristics of the new line of thought. For here we find expressed the most genial interest in the poorer classes of society, and in popular superstitions. The most humorous descriptions are given of the one, and the most picturesque use is made of the other.

But it is to his Songs of Sympathy that we must look for the heart of Burns's poetry, and the chief significance of his poetic life. His claim to represent the Modern Movement rests especially on that inner core of love and tenderness which burns as a central fire through all his higher poems, and from which all the varied expressions of his muse might be more or less deduced. It is not Man only that calls forth the poetic expression of his passionate sympathy, as in, for instance, the 'Cotter's Saturday Night,' 'Man was made to Mourn,' 'A Winter Night,' and his 'Address to the Unco' Guid or Rigidly Righteous.' But with him the enthusiasm of humanity embraced the lower animals also, as witness the 'Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie' (an old sheep), the 'Twa Dogs,' the 'Farmer's New Year's Salutation to his Auld Mare Maggie,' 'Verses to a Mouse,' 'On Seeing a Wounded Hare,' 'On Scaring some Waterfowl,' &c. Nay, beneath the earth, sacred with the beloved woods, for the planting of which he presented the 'Humble Petition of Bruar Water,' and for the destruction of which he bewailed 'Drumlanrig ;' beneath the earth, made sacred by the 'Mountain Daisy' alone, his love descended even to hell, and with a humour full of the yearning and pathos of tears he cries—

But fare ye weel, auld Nickie-ben !
O wad you tak a thocht an' men' !
Ye aiblins nicht—I dinna ken—
Still hae a speke.
I'm wae to think upo' yon den
Even for your sake!

Among the Songs of Scepticism the 'Address to the Deil,' from which these lines are taken, is to be ranked. And of all forms of sceptical assault the most deadly is that which lays bare, as this poem does, the pernicious follies of superstition with the light of humour and love, rather than with the lightnings of satire and mockery.

As from the Songs of Sympathy there ray-out, on one side, Songs of Humour, and of Scepticism, there ray-out on the other, those Songs of Independence and of Nationality which give expression to all his warm indignation against whatever cramps the free play of human capacities, and cheats achievement of its crown. But there is more than this in the notion of independence as it is found in Burns, as in the whole strain of revolutionary thought. It means, not only the claim of a fair field as against privilege, and the assertion of moral dignity as against caste, as in the song 'For a' that and a' that'—

For a' that and a' that,
Our toils obscure and a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that—

but it means also, and chiefly, that the only true basis of moral dignity is moral conduct, independent of mere supernatural penalties.

The fear o' hell's the hangman's whip
To haud the wretch in order ;
But when ye feel your honour grip,
Let that be aye your border :
Its slightest touches instant pause—
Debar a' side pretences—
And resolutely keep its laws,
Uncaring consequences.

Thus he writes in an 'Epistle to a Young Friend,' and in many other pieces. And nothing could more decisively mark in him the higher spirit of moral law working in his inner life, whatever may have been his own personal aberrations from that law.

Lastly, as to the poems which I would group together as Songs of Nationality, such as the 'Vision.' We see everywhere the same noble aspiration, the same modest yet self-sustained consciousness of doing something for his Country, and for Humanity. His Jacobite songs are not to be taken as expressive of regret that the Stuarts were unable to maintain their despotic sway; but really cover a higher feeling of Nationality, of which Jacobitism in its end became the symbol. And in his 'Tree of Liberty,' his 'Stanzas on Liberty,' his 'Vision of Liberty,' and in that grandest lyric of all 'Bruce to his Men at Bannockburn,' he rises to a still grander strain of Nationality. Composed in '93, it was our antistrophe to the strophe of the 'Marseillaise.'

It has been the fashion—the prudent fashion—to refer to the poems of Burns as poems of mere 'scenery and sentiment;' to ignore the fact, that the bulk of his poems, and true body of his work

consists of songs inspired by the contemporary Revolution in every one of its noblest moods ; and to palliate, or even to apologise for what alone gives him a place, not merely among National, but among European poets. I am not aware that any one of the innumerable editors of his poems has sifted-out from the ruck of the rest, and directed especial attention to, those Songs of Scepticism, and of Humour, of Sympathy, of Independence, and of Nationality, which we have just been considering ; nor do I know of any biographer, or essayist, who has made an adequate attempt to assign him his place as a voice of the Revolution. Perhaps, indeed, prejudice may even still be too strong to get such a claim for him listened to. And yet, is it not well founded ? What contemporary poet gave such powerful and varied expression to all the moods of the Revolution as he ? Compared with that, what is the writing of mere love-songs ? And, like every truly inspired singer, as well as great thinker, was he not also a prophet ? Have not his Songs of Scepticism, and of Humour, of Independence, and of Nationality, shown themselves to be prophecies, already so far fulfilled that yet larger fulfilment we may confidently expect ? The logic of Thought, whether in inspired poet, or great thinker, is the logic of History, the interpreter of the Past, and the prophet of the Future.

III. SCOTT.

We come now to consider the relation of the youngest of the three great Scottish poets to the general movement of the Revolution ; and, as with his predecessors, with him also let us begin by noting the account he gives of his objects in introducing his works to the world. 'The poem now offered to the public,' says Sir Walter Scott in his preface to the first of his poetical romances, 'is intended to illustrate the manners and customs which anciently prevailed on the borders of England and Scotland.' Again, in the preface to the third of his prose romances, he says, 'The present work completes a series of fictitious narratives intended to illustrate the manners of Scotland at three different periods. "Waverley" embraces the age of our fathers, "Guy Mannering" that of our own youth, and the "Antiquary" refers to the last ten years of the eighteenth century.' And in the 'General Preface' of 1829 he says, 'I felt that something might be attempted for my own country of the same kind which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland, something which might introduce her natives to those of the sister kingdom in a more favourable light than they had been placed hitherto, and tend to procure sympathy for their virtues and indulgence for their foibles.' At length 'the author felt that, in confining himself to subjects purely Scottish, he was not only likely to weary out the indulgence of his readers, but also greatly to limit his own power of affording them amusement.' Hence it was that 'the author of the Scottish novels, as they were then exclusively termed,' extended the area of his historical representations, and through the success of 'Ivanhoe' 'procured himself the freedom of the rules.'

Beginning in attempts to illustrate Scottish manners at more or less remote periods, he finally embraced as a romancer the whole age of European History and every leading country in Europe.¹⁶

The day Balzac was struck with the idea of the 'Comedy of Human Life,' as that by which all his romances might be united to form a single great whole, he ran to his sister's house in the Rue Poissonnière, and entering with the gestures of a drum major and imitating the *boum-boum* of military music, he exclaimed gaily, 'Salute me, for I am quite certainly *en train* to become a great genius.' The manner of the thing was French, but the thing itself was fine; for there is nothing more characteristic of the aspirations of genius than the passion, nor anything more characteristic of the works of genius than the fact, of unity of idea; and this last, however varied these works may be, and however dimly this unity may have risen to self-unconsciousness. Adam Smith never put forward his 'Wealth of Nations' and theory of 'Moral Sentiments' as complementary parts of a single great work; yet no less truly were they so, as Mr. Buckle has well shown. And no less fitly than the novels of Balzac may be considered as parts of a single great whole, the 'Comedy of Human Life,' may the romances of Scott be regarded as a single great whole, which I would venture to designate the 'Romance of European History.' And its general and tolerably equal divisions might be named (1) 'Romances of the Feudal Period,' (2) 'Romances of the Reformation,' and (3) 'Romances of the Eighteenth Century.'

Scott's work, then, comprehensively viewed, is really one great

¹⁶ The following table, which arranges Scott's Historical Romances in chronological order, illustrates the statement in the text:—

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 'Count Robert of Paris,' 1090. | 'Old Mortality,' 1679-90. |
| 'The Betrothed,' 1187. | 'The Pirate,' 1700. |
| 'The Talisman,' 1193. | 'My Aunt Margaret's Mirror,' 1700. |
| 'Ivanhoe,' 1194. | 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' 1700. |
| 'Castle Dangerous,' 1306-7. | 'The Black Dwarf,' 1708. |
| 'The Fair Maid of Perth,' 1402. | 'Rob Roy,' 1715. |
| 'Quentin Durward,' 1470. | 'The Heart of Midlothian,' 1736-51. |
| 'Anne of Geierstein,' 1474-7. | 'Waverley,' 1745. |
| 'The Monastery,' 1559, &c. | 'The Highland Widow,' 1755. |
| 'The Abbot,' 1568, &c. | 'The Surgeon's Daughter,' 1750-70. |
| 'Kenilworth,' 1575. | 'Guy Mannering,' 1750-70. |
| 'The Laird's Jock,' 1600. | 'The Two Drovers,' 1765. |
| 'The Fortunes of Nigel,' 1620. | 'Red Gauntlet,' 1770. |
| 'A Legend of Montrose,' 1645-6. | 'The Tapestry Chamber,' 1780. |
| 'Woodstock,' 1652. | 'The Antiquary,' 1798. |
| 'Peveril of the Peak,' 1660, &c. | 'St. Ronan's Well,' 1800. |

Scott's chief poetical, like his chief prose, works are, as he himself says, nothing else than Historical Romances in verse. These also, chronologically arranged, stand thus:—

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 'The Vision of Don Roderick,' 714. | 'Marmion,' 1513. |
| 'Harold the Dauntless,' 790 (?). | 'The Lady of the Lake,' 1530. |
| 'Thomas the Rhymer,' 1250. | 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel,' 1550. |
| 'The Bridal of Triermain,' 1300. | 'Rokeby,' 1644. |
| 'The Lord of the Isles,' 1307. | 'The Field of Waterloo,' 1815. |

Historical Romance of the most unparalleled vastness, variety, and magnificence. And the question now arises, What is the relation of this 'Romance of European History' to the general movement of the Revolution? In above endeavouring to answer a similar inquiry with respect to MacPherson's 'Ossian,' I pointed out that this movement, in its intellectual and moral aspect, might be most distinctively characterised as a return to Nature; and then I endeavoured to explain the boundless enthusiasm with which every rank of society and grade of culture hailed the works of MacPherson by the similar enthusiasm with which the works of Rousseau were in the same years hailed; and, nothing but mere suggestions being possible within my present limits, I would similarly endeavour to indicate the general relations of the great work of Scott. Now, if the revolutionary movement, in its intellectual and moral aspect, may be generally characterised as a return to Nature, the aim of its intellectual activity may be more particularly distinguished as a New Philosophy of History. And it is with reference to the works which were the result of this activity that we must consider the work of Scott, if we would either understand the enthusiasm with which volume after volume of it was welcomed, or see its true place in the development of the Revolution.

One of the chief results of the publication of MacPherson's 'Ossian' was, as we saw, the initiation, in the domain of historical science, of the most fruitful new researches. The modern intellectual movement presents itself to us broadly, first, as a continuous speculative effort at a new conception of History, and then, as a continuous antiquarian effort at a new knowledge of History. The highest expressions of the New Philosophy of History are the results of the interaction of these two great efforts of speculation and research. Now, it is in relation to these that Scott's position to the general movement is to be determined. In him we see a third and completing effort, viz. the application of the new historical idea in Art. And such movements will always be found to have these three sides: philosophic speculation, scientific research, and artistic representation. It is this fact that explains at once the welcome Scott's work received, its excellences, and its defects. Novelty, and yet, at the same time, intimate relation with the main current of intellectual activity, is the secret of literary success. Circumstances may, indeed, prevent these conditions having their natural result; but there is certainly never such success when these conditions of it are wanting. But artistic representation is seldom in advance, much oftener considerably in arrear, of philosophic conception. Scott's 'Romance of European History' has, therefore, all the more general excellences of the contemporary strain of thought with respect to History, but is in no way in advance of it. There is a largeness of view which takes in the whole course of European History, from the last Gothic King of Spain, and first Danish invaders of England, to the battle of Waterloo; a variety of subject which embraces every one of the great events



of European history since the fall of ancient Rome—the Mohammedan invasions of Europe, the avenging Christian invasions of Asia, Feudalism in all its picturesque splendour as a new social organisation, the Reformation, both religious and political, and the eighteenth-century scene of British preparation for resistance to the French Revolution—and with this largeness of view, and variety of subject, there is a many-sidedness of sympathy that can see and represent not only Mohammedan and Christian, but even Protestant and Catholic, Republican and Royalist, King and Commoner, Law-maker and Law-breaker, with an almost equal impartiality. So far Scott is in the fore-front of contemporary thought with respect to History. And if his vast ‘Romance of European History’ presents us with but the successive historical conditions and costumes of human passion, and possesses no organic unity through the suggestion, at least, of the great forces which are the causes of this succession of historic scenes, all that can be said is, that to have given it such unity he would have had to be not only in the fore-front, but very greatly in advance, of contemporary thought.

While MacPherson introduced a new feeling, Scott introduced a new fact, into Art. To speak accurately, indeed, both the feeling and the fact were rather reintroductions, but they were reintroductions of which the forms were entirely new. Shakespeare had already introduced history into Art in his historical dramas. But Scott reintroduced it in yet a new form. In the Historical Novel, he laid the foundation of a new artistic representation of Human History, destined, as I believe, to be developed in an Historical Music-Drama.

Scott's work extended far beyond MacPherson's. It not only stimulated a new series of researches in the domain of historical science; it originated a new school of historical writing. The philosophers had pointed out that an account of kings' reigns, battles, and treaties was really not History at all—not History, at least, that had any scientific value. For the aim of Science is the discovery of Law. But to discover law in history one must acquaint one's self not with kings, but with peoples; not with characters, but with customs; and not with the succession of dynasties, but with the development of religions and of laws. It was one thing, however, to indicate the desirableness of, quite another, and far more effective, thing to create the desire for, histories of Peoples, rather than of Kings—histories of Popular Developments, rather than of Royal Successions. It was this that Scott did. The former was a philosopher's, the latter a poet's work, and work achievable only by a poet of the very first rank—if, that is, poets are to be ranked not merely by music of verse, or subtlety of thought, but by grandeur and breadth of creative imagination. Thus did Scott contribute to the most important scientific development of the present century—that of the New Philosophy of History. And without a due consideration of the influence of his ‘Romance of European History,’ the development of the Philosophy of it cannot be understood.

Again, like, but in a more definite if not larger way than, MacPherson's, Scott's work had great political results. 'Ossian,' I have above pointed out, directly initiated the Keltic Revival, and indirectly influenced the Slavonic Resurrection—movements in which the two great conquered races of Europe, the Kelts of the West and Slavs of the East, are now rising again to independence and power—movements of which it would be difficult, I think, to exaggerate the consequences, not political only, but economic. More definite than a mere impulse to such large movements was the political result of Scott's work. In no less definite a way than, in the tenth century, Firdausi, by his 'Shah Nameh,' new-created the Persian Nationality, and blent into one people conquerors and conquered, did Scott, by his 'Romance of European History,' new-create the Scottish Nationality. Such a happy work of reconciliation and new-creation was, indeed, as we have seen, the express object of all his earlier romances both in verse and prose. And if these directly accomplished this noble object, all the others indirectly contributed to its accomplishment. Divided, at the period chosen by Scott for what is, perhaps, artistically the greatest of his romances, into two peoples—Lowlanders, mainly Teutonic, and Highlanders, mainly Keltic—nor differing thus in race only, but in religion and economic organisation, and separated besides by bitter memories of mutual injuries, 'Tis Sixty Years Since' became, as it were, the watchword with which Highlander and Lowlander sank their animosities for ever; the barriers, not of hills only, but of hatreds being levelled, Highlands and Lowlands became almost equally Teuto-Keltic in race; and, more completely and permanently than by the great War of Independence under Wallace and Bruce, the various elements of the Scottish people were blended into one Nationality by their common glory—that vast and varied, yet single, work of Walter Scott, which not only new-created Scotland, but gave it once more a distinctive place and power in the great movement of the European Revolution.

Such, then, only indicated with very unsatisfactory brevity, would appear to be the respective relations of MacPherson, Burns, and Scott to the general movement of the Modern Revolution. MacPherson publishing his 'Ossian' in the very years in which Rousseau published his great works, it was greeted with an enthusiasm all over Europe equal to that with which the 'New Heloisa,' 'Social Contract,' and 'Emilius' were hailed; and not only did it contribute a new and most powerful current of revolutionary sentiment to the main tide, but gave an impulse to a whole series of historical researches, of which the Keltic Revival and Slavonic Resurrection have been the more revolutionary results. Less general and diffused was the work of Burns. But the main category of his songs can be no otherwise truly distinguished than as 'Songs of the Revolution,' and the very heart of it he expressed in these songs with a vigour and comprehensiveness of lyrical utterance unrivalled. And as to Scott, Tory Baronet



though he was, he contributed even more than each of his great predecessors to the main current of revolutionary European thought. For, beginning in a vague and indefinite form, which, with corresponding vagueness and indefiniteness, may be characterised as a 'return to Nature,' revolutionary European thought must, in its later development, be distinguished as a New Historical Idea. And to the varied development of this Idea Scott's works, as one single great 'Romance of European History,' not only already have immensely contributed, but are certainly destined still further to contribute. For true it is, as Schiller sings :—

Mit dem Genius steht die Natur in ewigem Bunde,
Was der Eine verspricht leistet die Andre gewiss.

Nature with Genius is ever in accord,
What promises the one, the other will afford.

And equally true is it that with the deeper forces of his Time and the progressive forces of Humanity, every great genius is consciously or unconsciously in accord ; and that, though he himself may be nominally conservative, and these manifestly revolutionary.

Let us now recall the picture with which I introduced this essay. There we see standing together MacPherson at forty-nine, Burns at nine-and-twenty, and Scott at sixteen ; their attention is attracted by Burns to a print of Bunbury's hanging on the wall of the room ; and there are present, filling up the background, men no less distinguished in European literature than the host, Dr. Ferguson, the friend and correspondent of Gibbon, of Hume, and of Adam Smith, and his guests, Dugald Stewart, Black, Hutton, and Home. I said, in my introductory remarks, that it was only in the respective relations of the three Scottish poets, who form the centre of this picture, to the general movement of the Revolution that their true relations to each other are clearly to be seen. And now, may we not see all this symbolised in the picture ? Could any background better indicate the intellectual conditions according to which our three poets must, by a scientific criticism, be mainly judged ?

I trust, at least, that this essay, brief and inadequate as it is, may suggest reasons for placing all three together on the same pedestal ; not only as Scottish Brethren, the work of each of whom—typically different as it was in character—had the closest relation to that of each of the two others ; but as—what no other English-writing poet save Byron has yet been—European Poets, who can be truly judged only in their relation to that Modern Revolution of which they were, at once, offspring and leaders.

J. S. STUART-GLENNIE.