

CHAPTER XVI.

THE "FARMER'S INGLE" IN THE OLDEN TIME—PUBLICATION OF "PAUL JONES"—CRITICISMS—REFLECTIONS ON DIBDIN—ROMANCE OF "SIR MICHAEL SCOTT"—CORRESPONDENCE WITH MR. RITCHIE OF THE "SCOTSMAN"—CADETSHIPS FOR HIS TWO SONS OBTAINED—LETTER TO HIS MOTHER.

THE following graphic description of a "Farmer's Ingle," from his Essay on Scottish Songs, is deserving of quotation, not only for its faithfulness of detail, but also because it is among the things connected with the rural population which have passed away, succeeded, shall we say, by a more heartsome and genial fireside? We fear not.

"But I have no need to seek in trysts, or meetings of love, or labour, or merriment, for the sources of song: a farmer or a cottager's winter fireside has often been the theme and always the theatre of lyric verse; and the grey hairs of the old, and the glad looks of the young, may aptly prefigure out the two great divisions of Scottish song—the songs of true love, and those of domestic and humble joy. The character of the people is written in their habitations. Their kitchens, or rather halls, warm, roomy, and well replenished with furniture, fashioned less for show than service, are filled on all sides with the visible materials and tokens of pastoral and agricultural wealth and abundance. The fire is on the floor; and around it, during the winter evenings, the family and dependents are disposed, each in

their own department, one side of the house being occupied by the men, the other resigned to the mistress and her maidens; while beyond the fire, in the space between the hearth-stone and the wall, are placed those travelling mendicants who wander from house to house, and find subsistence as they can, and lodgings where they may. The carved oaken settle, or couch, on which the farmer rests, has descended to him through a number of generations; it is embossed with rude thistles, and rough with family names; and the year in which it was made has been considered an era worthy of the accompaniment of a motto from Scripture. On a shelf above him, and within the reach of his hand, are some of the works of the literary worthies of his country: the history, the romance, the sermon, the poem, and the song, all well used, and bearing token of many hands."

Well, this is very faithful in its descriptiveness, but it is not complete. There is another party in the household that must not be overlooked:—

"Around the farmer's dame the evening has gathered all her maidens whom daylight has scattered about in various employments, and the needle and the wheel are busied alike in the labours required for the barn and the hall. Above and beside them, all that the hand and the wheel have twined from fleece and flax is hung in good order: the wardrobe is filled with barn-bleached linen, the dairy shelves with cheese for daily use, and with some made of a richer curd to grace the table at the harvest-feast. Over all, and among them, the prudent and experienced mistress, while she manages some small personal matter of her own, casts from time to time her eye, and explains or advises, or hearkens to the song, which is not silent amid the lapses of conversation. In

households such as these, which present an image of our more primitive days, all the delights, and joys, and pursuits of our forefathers find refuge ; to them Hallow-eve is welcome with its mysteries, the new-year with its mirth, the summer with its sheep-shearing feast, and the close of harvest with its dancing and its revelry. The increasing refinement and opulence of the community has made this rather a picture of times past than times present ; and the labour of a score of wheels, each with its presiding maiden, is far outdone by a single turn or two of a machine. The once slow and simple process of bleaching, by laving water on the linen as it lay extended on the rivulet bank, is accomplished now by a chemical process ; and the curious art of dyeing wool, and the admixture of various colours to form those parti-coloured garments so much in fashion among us of old, have been entrusted to more scientific hands. Out of these, and many other employments, now disused and formed into separate callings, song extracted its images and illustrations, and caught the hue and the pressure of passing manners, and customs, and pursuits."

Cabinet pictures, like these of the olden times, are like those paintings of the "old masters" which every one admires, and this the more as they recede into the past. Cunningham had an observant eye and a graphic pen ; and one special value of his writings is, that he has preserved from oblivion Scottish habits and manners in which he was a participator, but which have now in great measure passed away.

Encouraged by the success which attended the "Songs of Scotland" he applied the pen with unremitting ardour, and in the following year he brought out three volumes

of a romance, under the title of "Paul Jones," the subject being a sea-tale of the Solway. It had been eagerly waited for after its announcement by the publishers, and when it appeared it was rapidly read. The story is told very much in the Scottish vernacular, the various actors being mostly of the Doric type, and, consequently, using that language. The work, considered from a certain point of view, is exceedingly interesting, and many of its parts are brilliantly captivating; but regarded in another light, it is disappointing as a tale of the sea. The hero is captain of a ship and a pirate, and yet there is an absence of nautical phraseology, even when he is brought prominently forward in his professional capacity. Now, every one knows that of all men sailors in their conversation are the most addicted to the use of terms and phrases connected with their every-day life. Cunningham knew nothing of the sea and the phraseology common among those who live upon it, and yet he produces a story with the natural characteristics wanting, which could not pass without observation.

On the above ground the critics were not satisfied, and some of them did not hesitate to express an adverse opinion, though still attributing the fire of genius to the author. Professor Wilson, one of Cunningham's best friends and warmest admirers, declared it "a failure." In one of his *Noctes* he thus freely gives his criticism in an imaginary conversation with the Ettrick Shepherd:—
" 'Paul Jones', James, is an amusing, an interesting tale, and will, on the whole, raise Allan's reputation. It is full of talent. . . There are many bold and striking incidents and situations; many picturesque and

poetical descriptions; many reflections that prove Allan to be a man of an original, vigorous, and sagacious mind. . . The character of Paul Jones is, I think, well conceived. . . Much may be forgiven in imperfect execution to good conception. In bringing out his *idea* of Paul Jones, Allan has not always been successful. The delineation wants light and shade; there is frequent daubing—great—or rather gross exaggeration, and continual effort after effort, that sometimes totally defeats its purpose. On the whole, the interest we take in the pirate is but languid. But the worst part of the book is that it smells not of the ocean. There are waves—waves—waves—but never a sea,—battle on battle, but as of ships in a painted panorama, where we feel all is the mockery of imitation—and almost grudge our half-crown at each new ineffectual broadside and crash of music from a band borrowed from a caravan of wild beasts. . . It is evident that Allan never made a cruise in a frigate or line-of-battle ship. He dares not venture on nautical terms—and the land-lubber is in every line. Paul Jones's face is perpetually painted with blood and gunpowder, and his person spattered with brains. . . A most decided failure. Still a bright genius like Allan's will show itself through darkest ignorance—and there are occasional flashes of war poetry in 'Paul Jones.' But he manœuvres a ship as if she were on wheels, and on dry land. All the glory of the power of sail and helm is gone. . . But I shall probably review Allan's book. You will see my opinion of its beauties and its deformities at great length in an early number. The article shall be a good one, depend

on't—perhaps a leading one; for it is delightful to have to do with a man of genius." This is a wonderful criticism, being a pull with the one hand and a push with the other, but yet it was entirely friendly and candid, and as the Ettrick Shepherd interjected, its chief merits and its chief defects were "geyan equally balanced."

However strongly severe some of the above criticism might be, Cunningham took no umbrage at the writer of it, as we shall afterwards see, but addressed him in the most respectful and grateful terms for kind counsel and assistance. He knew the fault-finding was sincere, and was as much addressed to the author for his benefit, as to the general readers of a distinguished magazine, who looked to him for a candid review of the literature of the day. We might have now passed on sufficiently satisfied with the foregoing from such a master of criticism, but we wish to be *honest* in our remarks with regard to "Honest Allan." All the critics were not of the Professor Wilson type, though with less ability for making a judicious use of the pen. Cunningham, when writing his discursive and eloquent essay on Scottish Song, had, in a moment of forgetfulness, come into collision with Dibdin and his Sea-Songs. Dibdin was not a sailor, any more than was Cunningham, and knew little, if anything, of the sea—yet he produced sea-songs which were universally hailed with applause, and which continue to be appreciated at the present day.

A reviewer in *Blackwood*, a year before Wilson's criticism appeared, falls terribly foul of "Paul Jones," and the famous song by the same author which

every one admired, "A wet sheet and a flowing sea," and gave vent to a little venom in his remarks, but followed it up by saying:—"Allan Cunningham knows our admiration of his genius, and our affection for himself; but the above diatribe dribbled from our pen, as we thought of the most absurd contempt with which in his 'Scottish Songs,' he chooses to treat Dibdin. Dibdin knew nothing, forsooth, of ships, or sailors' souls, or sailors' slang! Thank you for that, Allan—we owe you one. Why the devil, then, are his thousand and one songs the delight of the whole British navy, and constantly heard below decks in every man-of-war afloat. The shepherds of the sea must be allowed to understand their own pastoral doric, and Charles Dibdin is their Allan Ramsay." It was unfortunate that Cunningham laid himself open to such reprehension. But whatever the critics might say in their high ideal of what was right and proper to have been written on the subject, the general public, of course those who were not sea-faring, hailed the work with gratulation from the variety of topics introduced, the graphic descriptions of its interesting scenes, the pathetic passages with which it abounded, the humour with which it sparkled, the legendary lore which assumed form and substance, and the weird narrations introduced from time to time. Author and publisher had good reason to be satisfied with the general reception which "Paul Jones" received, notwithstanding the severity of some of the criticisms, as it enhanced the fame of the one, and the pecuniary profits of both. As a

specimen of the style of the work, we may extract the following, a duel scene:—

“While Cargill spoke, Lord Thomas retired a little way, and Paul, freeing himself from the impediment which the Cameronian had placed between them, confronted him at some six paces distance. They looked at each other—they raised their right hands at once, and the double flash and knell made the horses rear and the riders start. Down sprang Cargill, with all the alacrity of youth, and threw himself in between them. They both stood—their pistols reeking at touch-hole and muzzle. When the smoke flew up, Dalveen dashed his pistol on the ground, and exclaimed, ‘Eternal God! have I missed him?’ He pulled another pistol from his pocket, another was ready cocked in the hand of Paul; but Cargill exclaimed, ‘Ye shall find each other’s hearts through me; and seizing the right hand of the young nobleman, held him with as sure a grip as an iron manacle.

“All the castle windows flew open, and down the stair came Lady Phemie; while, with her antique silks rustling like frozen sails in a stiff gale, Lady Emeline tottered after her, crying, ‘Oh! run between them!—hold them!—bind them!—are they hurt? ‘Oh that I have lived to see this!’ And, with eyes glistening with tears, she threw herself on the neck of her grandson, and said, ‘This pride, this unhappy pride of thine will be the ruin of thy house.’ She grew deadly pale as she spoke, and added faintly, ‘He’s wounded, mortally wounded!—there’s blood flowing down his neck. All gathered round, while Lord Thomas smiled, and said, ‘A drop, a mere drop—a touch, only a touch;’ and putting his hand to the place, he drew it back covered with blood. His colour changed when he looked on it. ‘Stand back, madam,’ he said, ‘and keep back your devout asses; this

blood must be atoned for;—back, I say, else by the fiends I'll fire my pistol upon you.' He cocked a pistol as he spoke, and, stepping up to Paul, said, 'Back to back—step two paces away—wheel round and fire—that's the Dalveen distance.' And each of them had taken a step, when Lady Phemie caught her cousin in her arms, and sought to master his right hand;—he snatched the pistol with his left, and held it out. His better nature overcame him—he flung the weapon from his hand with such velocity that it sung through the air, and went off as it struck the bough of a large chestnut tree."

So industrious was he with the pen during the hours of evening, or rather we should say of night, after the labours of the studio were over, that, in addition to several magazine articles, towards the end of the following year he produced, in three volumes, the mythical romance of "Sir Michael Scott." This work was not so successful as the preceding ones, the public mind not being disposed to follow him into the region of the supernatural. Still it had a satisfactory run. A writer in the *Edinburgh Review* noticing it, along with some of the other works by the author, says:—"In 'Paul Jones' alone there is ten times as much glittering description, ingenious metaphor, and emphatic dialogue, as would enliven and embellish a work of twice the size; while, from the extravagance of the fictions, and the utter want of coherence in the events, or human interest in the characters, it becomes tedious by the very redundancy of its stimulating qualities. 'Sir Michael Scott,' again—being all magic, witchcraft, and mystery—is absolutely illegible; and much excellent invention and powerful

fancy is thrown away on delineations which revolt by their monstrous exaggerations, and tire out by their long-continued soaring above the region of human sympathy. Mr. Cunningham is, beyond all question, a man of genius, taste, and feeling." Now, we do not object to the character of this criticism, for, though somewhat adverse, it appears to be candid, and we insert it with the same candid intent.

The publication of the romance of "Sir Michael Scott" brought the author into contact and friendship with a very excellent and distinguished man, Mr. Ritchie of the *Scotsman* newspaper, Edinburgh. Mr. Ritchie had very kindly noticed "Paul Jones" in one of his reviews, and Cunningham addressed to him the following letter, with a copy of his new work:—

27 Lower Belgrave Place, November, 1827.

"Dear Sir,—In laying on your table my romance of 'Sir Michael Scott,' I beg you will feel that I do so with no levity of nature like an author of full-grown reputation, who can cry to a critic, 'There, do your worst!' On the contrary, I feel that my works must be read with much indulgence, and even sympathy. In the present instance, I may fairly claim the protection of all true Scotsmen, because my romance is the offspring of the poetic beliefs and popular superstitions of *our* native land; and though I may not have made out my conception of the work to my full satisfaction, I may, nevertheless, expect some approbation, from the attempt to gather into one narrative, some of the marvellous legends and romantic beliefs of our Border.

"My chief object was to write a kind of Gothic Romance—a sort of British Arabian Nights, in which I could let loose

my imagination among the mythological beings of fireside tales and old superstitions. As a work of imagination, therefore, it ought to be examined; and as the narrative, marvellous though it be, is guided by the visible landmarks of legendary belief, I hope it will be found to be in its nature as true to national lore as shadow is to substance.

“Your kind and liberal notice of my ‘Paul Jones’ I ascribed in some measure to your sympathy for my lot in life, and to your feeling that one who contested the matter so long and so hardly with fortune, deserved some little indulgence. My whole life has hitherto been spent in working for my daily bread, and my pen ekes out what the day fails to provide. My education, too, is such as I have gathered from books and from mankind, and I am consequently without the advantages of learning which embellishes genius by refining the taste and informing the judgment. I mention these things from no desire to soften the justice of criticism, but I own with some hope of awakening its mercy. I am sensible that, in general, my works, hasty and imperfect as they are, have met with some attention and much indulgence, and through them I have obtained some of the best friendships of my life. The editor of the *Scotsman* I consider as one of the number, and have much pleasure in saying I am his faithful friend and admirer,

“ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

“To the Editor of the *Scotsman*.”

His two eldest sons were now growing up towards manhood's estate, and he was naturally anxious to place them in positions where they might creditably discharge their portion of duty in the administration of affairs in the great and busy world. They were already

good scholars, being, as we were told, great in the mysteries of Latin, Grammar, and Geography, and even Mathematics, if we remember aright; and, like every aspiring father, he wished them to aspire also, and gain for themselves a name among their fellow-men. For this purpose they had received a superior education—for this purpose he had toiled early and late, by chisel and pen, but, like Job of old, his way sometimes seemed “hedged in.” However, he trusted to Providence, and worked and wrote with all his might, in the confidence that something suitable would arise, and that a rift in the sky would show the blue beyond. He believed firmly in the maxim, and strenuously acted upon it, that “Heaven helps those who help themselves,” and he was not disappointed, as the following extract from Lockhart’s “Life of Sir Walter Scott” will show:—

“Breakfasting one morning with Allan Cunningham, and commending one of his publications, Scott looked round the table, and said, ‘What are you going to make of all these boys, Allan?’ ‘I ask that question often at my own heart,’ said Allan, ‘and I cannot answer it.’ ‘What does the eldest point to?’ ‘The callant would fain be a soldier, Sir Walter, and I have a half promise of a commission in the king’s army for him, but I wish rather he could go to India, for there the pay is a maintenance, and one does not need interest at every step to get on.’ Scott dropped the subject, but went an hour afterwards to Lord Melville (who was then President of the Board of Control), and begged a cadetship for young Cunningham. Lord Melville promised to inquire if he had one at his disposal, in which case he would gladly serve the son of honest Allan; but the point being

thus left doubtful, Scott, meeting Mr. John Loch, one of the East India Directors, at dinner the same evening at Lord Stafford's, applied to him, and received an immediate assent. On reaching home at night, he found a note from Lord Melville intimating that he had inquired, and was happy in complying with his request. Next morning Sir Walter appeared at Sir Francis Chantrey's breakfast table, and greeted the sculptor (who is a brother of the angle) with, 'I suppose it has sometimes happened to you to catch one trout (which was all you thought of) with the fly and another with the bobber. I have done so, and I think I shall land them both. Don't you think Cunningham would like very well to have cadetships for two of those fine lads?' 'To be sure he would,' said Chantrey, 'and if you'll secure the commissions, I'll make the outfit easy.' Great was the joy in Allan's household on this double good news; but I should add that, before the thing was done, he had to thank another benefactor. Lord Melville, after all, went out of the Board of Control before he had been able to fulfil his promise. But his successor, Lord Ellenborough, on hearing the circumstances of the case, desired Cunningham to set his mind at rest; and both his young men are now prospering in the Indian service."

One may well conceive the flood of sunshine which irradiated 27 Belgrave Place, sending a thrill of joy through the heart of father and mother, when the glad-some appointment of the cadetships was intimated, and the outfits promised to be "made easy" by the great sculptor. Of course, such an affectionate son as Cunningham was not long in informing his mother of the happy tidings, desiring her blessing on his boys:—

“27 Belgrave Place, 16th August, 1828.

“My beloved Mother,—We were all much affected by your very kind and touching letter. We are now all well in health, and sad at heart at times, but the duties of the world must be done, and I have my share. You know that we have got cadetships for your two grandsons, and that they are preparing themselves for their situations. They will both go and receive your blessing before they sail. I hope you are well in health, and comfortable in all respects. Mina, I know and feel, will love and reverence you, and Jean, I am sure, will leave nothing deficient.

“I am very busy with my pen just now, making a little book, the most beautiful thing outwardly you ever saw. I hope it will also be good inwardly, for I have ministers of the gospel, and ministers of state, and poets, and lords, and ladies of high degree, among my contributors. I am a person of some importance, you observe, my dear mother. My wife joins me in love. I remain your ever affectionate son,

“ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

“Mrs. Cunningham.”